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# WHAT DOES GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION MEAN FOR UNIVERSITY LEADERS?

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## Introduction

The world is changing, and fast. The “widening, deepening and speeding up of connections across national borders” is transforming the way we live and work (OECD, 2016). The growing demand to participate in higher education and to leverage its benefits for individuals and society is changing what, where, when and how we learn. The impacts of societal challenges, previously easily ignored, now flow easily and quickly between and across boundaries with positive and negative effects. Whether we recognise it or not, we are all global citizens, moving across countries and borders, and connected to each other through trade and technology.

However, at a time when we are more interconnected and interdependent than ever, a rift appears to be opening between higher education and society. Recent developments around the world appear to be putting higher education at odds with emergent nationalist, xenophobic and intolerant thinking and policies in many countries. Universities and colleges which have prided themselves on working across borders of country and culture now find themselves dealing with governments and publics who are questioning the values of multiculturalism, international collaboration, free flow of people and ideas, and broadly liberal social values.

While the higher education environment has been challenging for many years, the future is increasingly uncertain. The relationship between university and society is not new. But, as universities and colleges collaborate with peers internationally and pursue international reputation and status, are they leaving their communities behind? To what extent is the academy itself complicit as it disengages locally to pursue global and reputational advantage? Are recent developments challenging us to rethink the public good role of universities, and the role of internationalisation? What are the implications for universities, and university leadership? This paper will seek to address these issues, raise some provocations, and rethink the narrative on the public good and engagement. Finally, some actions are suggested for consideration.

## Changing Context for Higher Education

Three significant and overlapping mega-trends have been impacting on and transforming higher education, setting down challenges for policymakers and educational leaders. They are massification, globalisation, and internationalisation.

### *Massification*

Over the past decades, governments have sought to expand access and participation in (higher) education. Today, this is both a societal and personal necessity because graduates have better outcomes. This goes beyond participation in the labour force. Graduates are more likely to lead more successful, satisfying and active lives, throughout their life, as individuals and as citizens. As our economies become more knowledge-intensive, graduate attributes - being able to access, structure and use information which is associated with critical thinking skills – come to the fore.

The world’s population is expected to increase by 2.5bn, reaching 9.7bn by 2050 (United Nations, 2015). Significantly, demographics are quickly approaching a tipping point whereby soon, for the first time ever, a majority of the global population will be middle class, for whom higher education will be of central importance (Kharas, 2017). As a consequence, the number of students enrolled in higher education is forecast to rise from 4% of the world’s population (aged 15–79 years) in 2012 to 10% by 2040 (Calderon, 2012). However, the population of the more developed regions is expected to remain largely unchanged, and would decline if not for net migration from developing to developed countries.

The US had the first mass system of higher education. Beginning in the post-World War 2 era, driven by a combination of economic, labour market and demographic factors, and aided by “ambitious social policies, themselves seen as a realisation of a democratic entitlement” (Scott, 1995), participation rates began to climb. In 1949, only 15% of 18-24 year olds were enrolled in higher education; by 2015, 69.2% of high school graduates were enrolled in colleges or universities (Synder, 1993; US Department of Labor, 2016).

The UK has a similar profile. In 1950, just 3.4% of young people attended university (Anon, 2013). Today, participation rates are closer to 49%, with students attending universities over two thirds of which have been established since 1950 (Department for Education, 2016). The population is expected to rise steadily to 2026. However, the proportion of 'traditional working age' 16 to 64 year olds, which has remained relatively stable over the last 40 years, is projected to decline (Office for National Statistics, 2017). Like other developed countries, as the UK becomes more dependent upon talent, it will come under increasing demographic pressure.

To date, we have focused primarily on widening participation in our own countries. In the future the inflow of highly skilled migrants will become necessary to sustain our knowledge-intensive economies. As a consequence of greater mobility, our societies and workplaces will become more diverse, with a greater range of ages, more women and more ethnic diversity. This will contribute to the on-going "shift away from the white middle-aged alpha male culture that has dominated," and alter the historic link between culture, ethnicity and territorially-defined nations, thus, changing our societies forever (Watson, 2010).

Our cities and countryside will be shaped by these demographic and cultural changes. By 2050, around 70% of the world's population is expected to be living in cities, but this trend will be greatest in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. In the UK, while there has been some increase in the rural population, the urban population is increasing at a faster rate. Today 83% of people live in towns and cities (Defra, 2016).

No longer simply part of national systems, these global cities will play an increasingly strategic role internationally, attracting students and professionals as well as mobile businesses and capital (Sassen, 2001; Florida, 2002). Universities, as well as other "institutions for teaching and research across the sciences, the technologies and the arts" (Hall, 2006), have been part of this process.

Meeting these growing and changing demands into the future will determine and affect educational requirements and provision as the economy and labour market changes, life expectancy improves, and people seek and require continual education and retraining opportunities.

**Provocation 1: as the system expands and pressure arises for 'more and better' higher education, it gives rise to different types of universities and colleges fulfilling differentiated roles. How well positioned is your institution? Are you doing anything significantly different from your peers? What needs to change? What are the opportunities and risks?**

### *Globalisation*

Increases in the movement and integration of trade, capital and people across borders have personified the process of globalisation over the centuries. Often considered purely in economic terms, globalisation also shapes the social, cultural and political, thereby affecting the way people think and identify themselves, and perceive and pursue their interests (Woods, 2000). Whereas activities, such as knowledge creation, might have been confined (if not restricted) within national borders, these borders are now permeable.

In parallel, technology has been a significant driver of innovation, competitiveness and growth. It has contributed hugely to greater connectivity. But its disruptive influence is also having a transformative effect. It will continue to change and challenge how we live, work and interact with people and things now and forever (OECD, 2014).

These developments have impacted on and transformed education, research and innovation. As the distribution of economic activity goes global, higher education is no longer just part of national systems. True, universities still rely on their locales and nation states for most of their funding and for students, but they play an increasingly important role in the global economic architecture and knowledge value chain.

Higher education's transformation from being a local institution to one of geopolitical significance has been one of the most prominent features of the last decades. Universities act as key magnets for mobile capital and talent, graduates work in an increasingly global labour market, and academics and researchers collaborate across institutional and national boundaries. At the same time, universities have themselves become global actors, forming partnerships, recruiting students and actively maximising their own comparative and competitive advantages.

The interconnectedness of the global economy and labour markets has necessitated greater oversight and regulation in terms of: quality assurance and mutual recognition of academic qualifications and credentials; student, graduate and professional mobility; transnational education and cross-border providers; and knowledge partnerships and research collaboration. These developments have been mutually beneficial for government and for higher education, which helps explain why global rankings have assumed such significance, at a geopolitical level.

Research excellence continues to be concentrated in the US and Europe, but the changing geopolitical dynamics foreshadows a growing multi-polarity beginning to be evidenced in global rankings (Soete et al, 2015; Witze, 2016). In 2005, China had only one university in the top-200 in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) compared with 18 for the UK. Today, China has 12 universities in the top-200 compared with the UK's 21 (Academic Rankings of World Universities, 2016, 2004).

Developed countries are finding it difficult to maintain their competitive position in the face of significant increases in investment, performance and productivity in neighbouring and emerging economies. Rankings are a lag-indicator, reflecting changes which have already occurred. The ability vs. inability to compete at this level is likely to amplify global divisions between economic regions, and between universities, while shaping future strategies.

Global rankings are an inevitable product of a globalised world economy and internationalised higher education. No doubt, their methodology and choice of indicators is controversial, and the data used is often unreliable.

However, they have successfully placed educational quality, performance and productivity within a wider comparative and international framework. By challenging many traditional assumptions of excellence, rankings have raised fundamental questions about the role, impact and contribution of higher education. In the process, they have had significant influence on governments, universities, and stakeholders around the world.

While the UK is changing, the world in which it is situated is also changing and in very significant ways. In the future, universities will be competing with other universities and educational providers which most of us probably never heard of a few decades previously.

**Provocation 2: let's not let criticism of rankings fool us. Universities have used rankings to strengthen their reputation, at home and around the world. To what extent has your university used rankings to heighten its 'elite' status by restricting access, raising tuition fee levels or making strategic or organisational changes? Have you costed what these changes would mean for your budget in the medium term, and your mission and sustainability in the longer term?**

### *Internationalisation*

The process of increasing the interconnectedness of peoples, cultures and economies is a fact of history (de Wit et al, 2015). The earliest universities in Europe, dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, encouraged scholars to come and give lectures and share ideas, laying down one of the key foundation stones for today's universities. As knowledge and innovation processes have become more dispersed and openly accessible, cross-

border movement of people and ideas have contributed to the surge in involvement in collaborative educational programmes and global research networks. Engaging with the world is an essential characteristic of quality education and research.

Today, higher education and research are among the most internationalised sectors of our societies. More than 4.5m students are enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship. The number of students studying abroad is estimated to rise to 8m by 2025 (Maslen, 2012; Calderon, 2015).

As “the balance of world economic and political power shifts, so do patterns of mobility” (ICEF, 2015). Governments around the world, especially in Asia, are investing to improve the quality and overall educational standard of their universities. Most of this growth will be in emerging economies, with more than half in China and India. China will become both the largest student host and sender country.

The importance of mobility stems not just from its contribution to the production and dissemination of codified or formal systematic knowledge but also transmitting tacit or experiential knowledge in the broadest sense. The Bologna Process was an early mover, recognising the significance of student and academic mobility across boundaries, facilitated by trustworthy information and with the assurance that their performance will be recognised in other parts of Europe. Nationalistic policies being pursued by some countries today is having a chilling effect, but this is likely to only change destination choices rather than affect the overall movement of people.

The lucrative international student market has raised the global competitive stakes. Once seen as cultural exchange, internationalisation is now a necessary mechanism to increase the number of international students, especially graduate research students, as well as increase funding to the university. Countries with high levels of international students benefit from the contribution they make to domestic research and development while those with low numbers find it “more difficult . . . to capitalize on this external contribution to domestic human capital production” (OECD, 2007). Knowing that people with higher levels of education are more mobile, governments have introduced policies to retain and attract “the most talented migrants who have the most to contribute

economically” (Rüdiger, 2008), especially in science and technology. There are benefits for both sending and receiving countries (not just brain drain but brain circulation).

Rising demand around the world has also stimulated extraordinary growth in, and opportunities for, cross-border or trans-national education. Defined as “award or credit bearing learning undertaken by students who are based in a different country from that of the awarding institution” (O’Mahony, 2014), many universities and other educational providers are delivering and developing programmes for a diverse and technologically-connected cohort of students. Branch campuses, franchise operations, articulation arrangements, education hubs and virtual learning environments are the current phase in the globalisation of higher education, leading to profound changes in the educational landscape, at home and abroad.

Today, approximately 50% of European universities have an internationalisation strategy (Sursock, 2015), similar to the figure worldwide (Egron-Polak and Hudson, 2014). However, only a small percentage of students will ever be mobile due to personal or financial circumstances. This makes integrating international and intercultural learning outcomes into the curriculum for all students (de Wit et al, 2015), otherwise known as internationalisation at home (IA), more important than ever.

**Provocation 3: as universities seek increasing global recognition, how should they balance competing demands and priorities of massification, globalisation and internationalisation? Can or should all universities pursue the same strategy? What is the balance of priorities between massification, globalisation and internationalisation within your institutional strategy? What are the opportunities and consequences of getting that balance wrong?**

## Challenging Times

The global economic and political environment is transforming our world, and the policy imperatives and choices around higher education and research. As societal challenges become more complex and transcend borders and fields of study, collaboration with people with different perspectives, values and capabilities is vital. Yet, over recent years, there has been less public tolerance of experts, and a decline in public trust. There is evidence of increasing stratification between elite and non-elite institutions and their students, and a widening gap between universities and the regions in which they are located.

The public is asking whether higher education is serving its interests (BSA, 2013; Hefce, 2010; Immerwahr and Johnson, 2010; Ipsos MORI, 2010; Lederman and Jaschik, 2017). Those interests inevitably vary depending upon who is speaking – students, parents, employers, politicians, etc. Higher education is arguably seen as too self-serving rather than focused on providing a quality education. While there is a consistent view that a college education is important and highly valued, surveys show concerns about the cost and relevance of higher education on the part of many people who are unaware of the sector's diverse functions and contributions to society. Instead, there is a war of words about graduate attributes and career readiness. Even when universities engage in extensive research, development and innovation (RDI), the agglomeration effects do not provide sufficient spill-over impact and benefit for surrounding communities to counter other drivers of inequality (Fischer, 2017).

Thus, commentators note growing tensions between “mono-culturalism over multiculturalism, national self-interest over international cooperation and development aid, closed borders over the free flow of peoples, ideas, labour and capital, and traditionalism over progressive and liberal social values” (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). Others have spoken of a “disconnect between academe and much of American society” (Lederman and Jaschik, 2017) and an “insulated political culture” on university campuses (Camosy, 2016).

Notwithstanding increased participation rates and considerable support initiatives, stratification of access

and opportunity remains. Only 33% of Americans have a bachelors or higher degree (Ryan and Bauman, 2016). In the UK, only 34.4% have achieved degree-level or an equivalent qualification or above (Ball, 2013). Internationally, only 2% of students worldwide study abroad, compared with fewer than 4% of UK students (Bøe and Hurley, 2015) and 2% of US students (Farmer, 2014-15). Despite the fascination of public intellectuals, higher education commentators, and the media with world-class universities, fewer than 1% of US students attend highly selective universities such as Harvard and Yale (Casselmann, 2016). Only 9% of UK students attend Oxbridge or Russell Group universities (Department for Education, 2012).

Given these statistics, maybe it's not surprising that education and geographic mobility, even within a country, have appeared as fault lines in voting behaviour in the UK, US, France and elsewhere (Le Corre, 2017; Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Taub, 2016). Being and/or feeling left behind, along with a deepening cultural cleavage, may help explain the rise of populist social-political reaction which is likely to continue to disrupt many Western societies despite economic recovery and growth.

It is true that societal problems are not the sole result nor responsibility of higher education, but higher education's hands are not clean. Disturbingly, many universities have become civically disengaged, to use Putnam's term (Putnam, 2001). They have transformed themselves into self-serving private entities less engaged or committed to their nation or region as they eagerly pursue their world-class position and shout about the public good. Claims to be serving the public's interest have become confused with private academic self-interest.

Thus, as the focus and orientation of the university has shifted towards achieving greater global recognition and reputation, a schism has opened between local, national and global responsibilities and priorities. What have we done wrong in not convincing our societies of the values of evidence vs. 'alternative facts', and inter-culturalism and internationalisation? To paraphrase *Nature*, have faculty, researchers and students who have benefitted from many opportunities, turned their backs on the cities and regions in which they reside? (Nature, 2010).

**Provocation 4: while we pursue the ambition of ensuring our students and graduates are 'global citizens' able to live and work successfully in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have they become citizens of 'nowhere' rather than citizens of 'somewhere' (Goodhart, 2017)? Is higher education's global focus crowding out the fact that our students and institutions all have local roots?**

## Rethinking the 'public good' role of higher education

The role and responsibility of the university to society is not new, but today's challenges mean the university cannot sit on the side-lines, and nor can its students. While civic engagement may be in vogue there is no single blueprint.

There are three broad approaches, each of which has implications for university organisation and leadership (Goddard et al, 2016a):

- The *social justice* model focuses on students, curriculum and pedagogy. There is a strong emphasis on community and democratic society, and education's responsibility and societal duties. It espouses 'engaged scholarship'. In this model, engagement is primarily seen as a key responsibility for the student or access office, or within teaching and learning or continuing education functions.
- The *economic* development model focuses on the commercialisation of research through intellectual property deals, technology transfer, etc. It emphasises higher education's role as a driver of social and

economic growth, and creating competitive advantage for knowledge-intensive economies. In this model, engagement is primarily seen as the key responsibility of the technology transfer office (TTO) or associated business liaison functions.

In these two models, civic engagement is assigned to a parallel or 'third stream' set of activities or viewed as a 'service' model. By establishing a separate category of 'third mission', the status of authentic engagement is lowered (De Rassenfosse and Williams, 2015).

- In contrast, the *public good* model sees engagement as wholly embedded within and across all functions and units of the college or university, creating a strong 'sense of place' with its city and nation. It acts as a bridge linking teaching and research rather than a parallel set of activities. Not just for the students or for commercialised research, but for the entire institution (students, academic staff, researchers, administrators), in partnership with the university's many publics. In this model, engagement is considered a holistic priority of the university as a whole, led by the vice-chancellor (Goddard et al, 2016b).

The agenda is bigger than simply pushing out knowledge – grandstanding about what the university does for society. It requires higher education to be a genuine *anchor institution*, with its public good role strengthened through widened access and diversity so the 'experts' are not by definition 'elite' (Hazelkorn and Gibson, 2017). It necessitates universities engaging "in learning beyond the campus walls, discovery which is useful beyond the academic community, and service that directly benefits the public" (Hazelkorn, 2010).

There are no simple answers, but there is a necessity for universities to use all their resources – people and capital – to re-articulate its commitment to the public good, and to reach beyond its campus and work with its many publics. In other words, it's not just about what happens on campus, but bringing it back home and making it meaningful for society more broadly. Failure to treat this agenda seriously creates a problem for everyone.

**Provocation 5: rather than grandstanding about what higher education does for society, how should colleges and universities, of all missions, rethink and reshape their relationships with their publics and the state? What can *your* university do to re-orient itself, and play a genuine role as an anchor institution and intellectual force, alongside your students, staff and graduates, and the wider community, to bridge the gap between local, national and global?**

## Actions to Consider

- Develop and embed a comprehensive 'engagement agenda' to broaden and re-position and re-assert the university's 'public good' role:
  - Integrate engagement comprehensively and holistically into the undergraduate education programmes, setting up 'engagement awards' within universities and colleges, and funding these accordingly;
  - Establish a matrix system within the university to reinforce and embed engagement into the fabric of collective responsibility and overcome traditional university silos;
  - Build and establish authentic links between the university and its publics;
  - Bridge the gap between local and global, making internationalisation real and meaningful for the university's publics.
- Enhance and leverage the university's role as an 'anchor institution', building upon and exploiting local knowledge and expertise to build international reputation, and

responding to local needs, so that the benefits of internationalisation are harvested throughout the wider community (GUNi, 2017).

- Cultivate authentic 'global citizenship', stressing social responsibility, global competitiveness and civic engagement as core education and research principles, as a fundamental part of Internationalisation at Home (IaH), in order to better equip all students to meet the challenges of living and working in a globalised society and world economy.
- Use and integrate real-life problems to fuel learning, and develop students by putting them up against problems and challenges that necessitate drawing on many disciplines, working in teams, and collaborating with students and organisations around the world, in order to solve them.
- Develop a benchmarking and evaluation framework and define a wider range of instruments to assess the level of engagement and measure its impacts and benefits on learning, the university and its publics.

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