The State of UK Higher Education

Managing Change and Diversity

Edited by
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David Caldwell is the recently appointed Director of the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals (COSHEP). After his education in Scotland, David originally joined the University of Warwick as a lecturer in Politics, but then moved to the Registry in 1976. In 1984 he was appointed Secretary of the then Robert Gordon’s Institute of Technology (now Robert Gordon University).
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John Gledhill is Academic Registrar at the University of Coventry. He joined the Registry at the University of Warwick, after gaining a PhD on Dutch spelling at the University of London and working for a couple of years at the then Hatfield Polytechnic (now University of Hertfordshire). After 18 years at Warwick, John moved to Coventry in 1992. He is the author of Managing Students in the Open University Press’s ‘Managing Universities and Colleges’ series.

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David Holmes is Registrar of the University of Oxford, a Professorial Fellow of St John’s College and an Honorary Fellow of Merton College. He joined the Registry of the University of Warwick in 1970, leaving 12 years later to go to the University of Liverpool where he held a series of posts culminating in that of Deputy Registrar. In 1988, David was appointed as the first unitary Registrar of the University of Birmingham before moving to Oxford.

Anthony McLaren is Deputy Chief Executive of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). He began his career at the University of Warwick in 1985, where he held a variety of posts including that of Admissions Officer in the Registry. In 1992 Anthony moved to the University of Hull as Academic Registrar and was then appointed Acting Registrar and Secretary immediately prior to his departure to UCAS.

Russell Moseley is Director of Open Studies at the University of Warwick having previously worked in the Registry. Before joining Warwick he worked for the Council for National Academic Awards and, prior to that, was Lecturer and Research Fellow at the Universities of Aston and Sussex respectively. Russell has served as the Administrative Secretary, Editor and as a
member of the Executive Committee of the Universities Association for Continuing Education.

Jonathan Nicholls, who contributed the bibliography, succeeded Michael Shattock as Registrar of the University of Warwick in October 1999 having previously been the University’s Academic Registrar. He was educated at the University of Bristol and at Emmanuel College, Cambridge where he studied for a PhD on medieval courtesy books. Immediately prior to joining the Registry at Warwick in 1982, Jonathan spent a year at Harvard on a Fellowship and has also had a period of exchange at the University of Sydney.

David Palfreyman is the Bursar and a Fellow of New College, Oxford. After a brief period writing a company centennial history, David joined the University of Liverpool in 1976. He then moved to the Registry of the University of Warwick and was one of the first HE administrators in the UK to gain an MBA. This resulted in him moving to Warwick’s Finance Department and thence to Oxford. David teaches and writes widely on higher education management issues including with David Warner being the General Editor of the Open University Press series ‘Managing Universities and Colleges’. David is the Director of the Oxford Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (OxCHEPS), of which David Warner is the Deputy Director.

Tony Rich is Registrar and Secretary at the University of Essex. He joined the Registry of the University of Warwick in 1984 after gaining a PhD and having worked as a writer and researcher for the Longman Group. At Warwick, Tony helped launch the part-time degrees programme and the flourishing student recruitment operation in Kenya. He left Warwick in 1989 to work at the University of Sheffield, before moving to the post of Academic Registrar at the University of East Anglia.

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Rosemary Stamp is Riley’s National Director for Education and Marketing and the Director of Riley Consultancy, the company’s consultancy and strategic marketing division. Prior to joining Riley, she was responsible for student recruitment marketing, communications and research in the Registry at the University of Warwick. Rosemary is a governor of a Further Education college in the Midlands. She is a graduate of the Universities of Birmingham and York and the Nottingham Business School, and is a member of the Institute of Public Relations and the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

David Warner is the Principal and Chief Executive of Swansea Institute of Higher Education. After studying at the University of Warwick, both as a mature undergraduate and a postgraduate, he joined the Registry in 1971. A couple of years later, David moved to the University of East Anglia and then returned to the Warwick Registry for a further period. During the spells at Warwick he also taught in the Politics Department and on extra-mural programmes. In 1985, David moved to the then Birmingham Polytechnic (now University of Central England in Birmingham) to a post which finally metamorphosed into that of Professor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor. He writes and edits extensively on higher education management, primarily for Open University Press.
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Introduction: Setting the Scene

David Warner and David Palfreyman

Genesis of the book

It will not be long before observant readers spot that all but one of the chapters in this book have been written by people who have spent some part of their career at the University of Warwick. Furthermore, all but one of these Warwick people, including the joint editors, have worked, or are still working, in the Registry at that institution. Why is this? The phenomenon could, of course, be attributed to sloth in ‘networking’ on the part of the joint editors. In fact, the real answer is rather more interesting.

From time to time in almost every discipline taught, or area of activity practised, in higher education there coalesces a grouping which proceeds to have a significant influence on its domain. Sometimes this group, which may be focused upon a methodological approach, a philosophical position, an individual, an institution or, more likely, a combination of two or three of these, becomes completely dominant. It may then start to function rather like a Kuhnian paradigm. Sometimes two or more groupings compete on more or less equal terms and so the domain may become bitterly divided. One of the joint editors has, himself, experienced the situation where, until quite recently, philosophy in United Kingdom (UK) departments was in thrall to the analytical tradition of Austin and Ayer and continental system building was eschewed. Similarly, some politics departments displayed allegiance to the rationalism of Oakeshott, while others (including that of Warwick) were permeated by the Manchester tendency. Readers will speedily provide other examples.

UK higher education (HE) administration or management also displays this phenomenon intermittently. During the 1960s, when the profession was relatively young, the Northern universities, bound by the Joint Matriculation Board, seemed to provide every new Registrar. Manchester alone was the early home of such legendary names as Currie, Lockwood, Bosworth, Walsh and, of course, the then doyen of the business - Knowles. Burchnall, as Registrar of Liverpool in the 1970s and early 1980s, next provided a
generation of new Registrars at Newcastle, Sheffield, Brunel... During the last decade or so, Warwick has gradually moved to assume the position of spider at the centre of a similar powerful web of influence. The biographies of our current contributors are impressive, but even so there are other former Warwick colleagues holding senior positions who could have contributed. These include the Academic Registrar at Aberdeen University, the Secretary and Registrar of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST), the new Director of Finance at the University of Cambridge and the Assistant President of the University of Science and Technology in Hong Kong. This international perspective provides another dimension of Warwick influence because, since the early 1980s, the Warwick Registry team has run an annual development programme for senior staff from overseas higher education institutions (HEIs) and the total of its graduates, who are distributed throughout the world, now exceed some 350. If you add to this the fact that the editors are also the joint directors of the Annual Management Development programme for HE Administrators run by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), then the earlier claim about Warwick’s influence on UK HE management gains some credence – a claim reinforced by the editors’ book Higher Education Management: The Key Elements which has now spawned the first seven of a projected 20-volume ‘good practice’ series, ‘Managing Universities and Colleges’ (Open University Press, 1999 onwards).

All of this must be attributed to one man – Michael Shattock, the former Registrar of Warwick, and the only person whom anyone in the profession has ever met who, it is anecdotally said, has always wanted to be a university manager from early childhood. Later chapters in this book will refer in more depth to the precise nature of his contribution on the local, national and international stages, both as a practitioner and a thinker about HE management. Suffice it to say that it is his appointees from the 1970s onwards who form what we jokingly call the ‘Warwick Mafia’! It therefore seemed fitting that when Mike announced his retirement in order to take up a Visiting Professorship at the Institute of Education in London (and, no doubt, to do lots of other things as well because it is hard to imagine him staying at home tending his roses or keeping bees!) that we should mark the occasion with a personal tribute. And what more appropriate, given Mike’s own considerable writings, than a book?

The scope and use of the book

This book is not intended, however, as merely a festschrift. Rather it collects together a series of essays written by senior managers who share a common work experience and have reacted to that experience in differing ways. The common thread is the belief in the dynamism of HE and the role of managers in helping to achieve the continuous improvement, relevance and development of the system.
Introduction: Setting the Scene

The essays as a whole provide almost, but not quite, comprehensive coverage of the state of UK HE. The first and largest section covers the various categories of institutions which have evolved during the last 50 years. The only major omissions are perhaps those of the technological universities which derived in the 1960s from the colleges of advanced technology (CATs), and a reference to the federal University of London. However, it should be remembered that not all of the ‘CATs’ (colleges of advanced technology) became universities directly and one of the authors works at an HEI (Coventry University) which followed the less favoured polytechnic/modern university route. Moreover, it is particularly pleasing to have chapters on both Scotland and Wales, thereby avoiding the common fault of complete Anglocentrism. The exclusion of Northern Ireland is only excused by the fact that the Vice-Chancellor of Queen’s University is a former Warwick academic and his spouse worked in the Warwick Registry, so even the most distant parts of the UK are not beyond Warwick influence.

The second section is an eclectic pot-pourri of perspectives from those who sit around the edge of the HE lake or occupy somewhat beleaguered islands in its midst. This extended simile may not be a particularly good description of Suzanne Alexander’s contribution, but what she has to say needs to be said and it could be argued that there are significant parallels between the alienation felt by business schools, continuing education departments and women in HE, at least from time to time. It was the original intention of the joint editors to include a view of UK HE from overseas in this section, but this proved so difficult to confine and so challenging in content that it may now form the core of another book.

The third section attempts to distil the essence, effect and impact of the Warwick way of doing things. Inevitably, the descriptors ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘innovative’ spring to mind, but there is far more to it than just those epithets. The conclusion comprises an urbane, overarching essay by Peter Scott whose work needs no ‘puffing’ here. He is the sole contributor not to have faced the Warwick experience first hand and, as such, provides a counterweight of objectivity.

Along the way (as illustrated by the wide scope of the index) the contributors have managed to flag up the essential themes of UK HE over the past 25 years, and to identify the likely key issues with which the system will need to grapple over the next 25. The territory covered includes the following, in no special order of priority:

- ‘massification’, accountability and audit: the Research Assessment Exercise and quality assurance
- access and social equity
- collegiality versus managerialism
- academic autonomy and financial autonomy
- income generation
- ‘elites’ and an emerging ‘Ivy League’
- ‘top-up’ academic fees
• the costing and pricing of HE courses
• globalization and ‘e-degrees’
• HE as a ‘lifestyle’ product
• strategic positioning and niching
• HE as ‘the last of the nationalized industries’
• performance indicators and the teaching ‘black box’
• ‘spin-off’ companies and ‘the entrepreneurial university’
• ‘dumbing-down’ and standards
• caring for the alumni: ‘lifelong learning’ as ‘after-sales service’
• ‘regionalization’ and serving the local economy (recalling the circumstances of the creation of the big civics in the late nineteenth century)
• the ‘casualization’ of the academic labour force
• the student as client/customer/consumer
• the retreat of the taxpayer from HE funding combined (paradoxically) with an enhanced state inspection regime
• quality control of ‘the learning experience’
• the use of information technology (IT) in teaching
• the refinement of ‘student satisfaction’ surveys
• the increased incidence of student complaints and the related threat of litigation
• the search for a credible internal procedure for handling student grievances
• the recruitment and promotion of female academics
• universities as administered or managed institutions
• the crumbling physical plant and infrastructure of HEIs (back to being ‘the last of the nationalized industries!’)
• the recent emphasis on staff development and training
• the role and effectiveness of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP)
• benchmarking
• collaboration: partnership and franchising
• mergers and, especially within the big conurbations where several HEIs nestle cheek by jowl, the potential revival of the live-at-home-and-commute students (so prevalent in other national HE systems, and once common in the UK)
• the drivers of and the management of change
• the role of HEIs in society and their function within the economy
• the relationship between HE and further education (FE)
• the creation of new HEIs
• the community university
• the niche-marketing of HEIs: ‘brand value’ and ‘corporate personality’
• the setting of HEI entry requirements . . .

This very long list has somewhat surprised the editors because in essence the book has begun to nibble away at such key questions as ‘What is higher education?’, ‘What is a university?’, ‘How is the concept of higher education and the nature of higher education institutions changing?’ and ‘What might they become by 2025?’
Yet, in identifying this breadth of issues within the complex world of HE management, our group of contributors also demonstrate the diversity of approaches shown by the wide range of institutions of which they have experience. Such diversity can only be organizationally healthy in ensuring that there is steady innovation within and across UK HE, in establishing a creative tension among the many HEIs, and in allowing individuals to maximize their personal contributions to the various institutions in which they will work over a career of three decades or so. Perhaps, above all, the chapters indicate the rich diversity of the responses within differing institutions to similar drivers of change, the management of the change process varying according to the organizational culture and history of the HEI. The chapters also illustrate the key role played by university administrators (or rather managers) such as Mike Shattock in formulating and implementing these institutional responses.

The brief for each author was very simple: write a little bit about the past of your chosen topic, show how the current situation has derived from it, and then speculate about the near future. Each author has treated this brief idiosyncratically and the editors have not attempted to harmonize the chapters. Some contributors have attempted to provide readers with a panoramic snapshot including all of the key features, while others have concentrated on a definite and partial angle. The most notable exemplar of this latter approach is John Hogan who, perhaps stung by an early editorial exchange which described Durham University as ‘old and sleepy’, has written a powerful piece about the success of the new campus at Stockton. Similarly, Phil Harvey was probably not overly happy with the description of Exeter University as ‘nice’ and has responded with a chapter emphasizing the regional role of the university and the probable development of a ‘University of/in Cornwall’. Needless to say, each contributor is writing in a personal capacity and is not expressing views which can in any way be construed as belonging to those of the organization for which he or she works.

The book is consequently of value at a variety of levels. It can be read straight through and the chapters will form an intriguing and rich mosaic of the current state of UK HE. Alternatively, individual chapters can be selected and each will provide an excellent starting point for the topic under consideration. Finally, the forward-looking elements of the book can be combined to create a view of the future. A view which, in due course, may become the present and then the past . . . and then it may not.

Final thoughts or a word of advice

The birth of this book was trailed in the house journal of the Association of University Administrators. In that article, it was argued that HEI managers have nothing to fear in putting pen to paper as they have much of import to say. The actual production of this book has done nothing to blunt those views. However, it has reinforced the previous experience of the editors
that in general it is easier to write a book oneself than to edit one. In particular, it is very unwise to work primarily with colleagues and friends. Keeping these (admittedly busy) people to deadlines has been a nightmare and the excuses they use for failing to deliver on time are always imaginative and at times eccentric, but on occasion they have tended to be expressed in a way that could be said to lack subtlety! One nameless and shameless contributor actually blamed the editors because he had thrown away the letter which prescribed the referencing system which we had decided to use; illnesses increased in proportion to the proximity of deadlines; but the most common line was, ‘You know me, I never write anything until after the last minute’ (so much for the myth of the cool university administrator always thoroughly prepared well in advance . . . ). Budding editors: you have been warned.

Notes and References

3. Again, several books and essays formed this position, but see particularly M.J. Oakeshott (originally published 1962) *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. London: Methuen.