

# TENSIONS BETWEEN RESEARCH AND TEACHING IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

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# TENSIONS BETWEEN RESEARCH AND TEACHING IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

- Traditionally, two key functions of a University are to carry out research and teaching.
- However these traditional functions of Universities have had to change dramatically over recent years to accommodate significant policy changes.
- These changes have moved the former harmonious balance of research and teaching to a position of conflict caused by the physical, financial, and contractual separation of these two key functions, with research perceived and rewarded as the dominant function.

# STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

- This 'domination' of research over teaching is contrary to the expectations of undergraduate students who see teaching and learning as the primary function of a University and do not consider the research profile of an institution as a dominant criteria for choice.

# Increasing Tension between Teaching and Research

- This paper illustrates that such a separation has taken place and argues that this separation of research and teaching has created an environment in Higher Education which has tension, uncertainty and lack of clear direction. This environment is interfering with the desirable balance between research and teaching to the detriment of research, teaching and student learning.

# SOME REASONS FOR THE TENSION

- Recent massive increase in student numbers
- Move from élite system to mass system, towards universal system
- Competition amongst institutions for funding
- Imposition on institutions of maximum student numbers, by which 'teaching' funding is fixed.
- The other main source of income is through research funding.
- More institutions competing for research funding

## SOME MORE REASONS FOR THE TENSION

- The Research Assessment Exercises (RAE's), formerly termed Research Selectivity Exercises, which have been used for research funding since 1986 have caused institutions to focus on the requirements of the RAE in the conduct of their research and to move resources into those areas which produce the optimal results for the RAE.
- This has evoked criticism. Elton [1] quotes, in his abstract, the phrase, '*competitive, adversarial and punitive spirit evoked by the RAE*' to describe unintended consequences of the RAE.

## SOME MORE REASONS FOR THE TENSION: ACADEMIC CAREERS

- Research undertaken by Court [6] to investigate academics' opinions on the prominence of research, teaching and administration in determining career progression concluded that
- there is consensus that the emphasis on research in determining careers has gone too far. Teaching, administration and other tasks are regarded as 'second-class'.
- Court concludes by saying: *'It is up to institutions to provide opportunities across the range of professional academic tasks which avoid a permanently two-tiered career structure developing in higher education'* .



# Research Versus Teaching

- McNay [3, para 154] concluded in relation to the effects of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) on teaching, that:
- *'there is undoubtedly a general concern that the RAE has had a detrimental effect on teaching activity ....The concern revolves around the relative increase in attention to research, reflecting a relative neglect of teaching ...'*

# Research Versus Teaching

- Barnett concludes that *'... if we are seriously interested in promoting the quality of higher education, of improving the effectiveness by which teachers teach and students learn, it is to the teaching process that we must look. In short if we are concerned about higher education, it is to higher education that we must turn, rather than research'*.

# UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:

- Account for about 75% - 85% of students in UK Higher Education.
- The funding by government for undergraduate students accounts for about 70% of university funding.
- The views of undergraduate students are, therefore, important in the debate of research versus teaching.

# THE VIEWS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ON RESEARCH

- The sample of students was discipline-based, using students from the Built Environment discipline.
- In order to make an institutional comparison and to determine any institutional differences, the sample was taken from two institutions; an 'old' university with a long established research tradition and a 'new' (twenty-year old) university, formerly a polytechnic which had an emphasis on vocational teaching.

# THE VIEWS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ON RESEARCH

- Five questions were prepared to elicit these views.
- The number in the sample of students was 100: 50 from each university.
- The students in the sample were not selected completely at random but were selected in two groups in an attempt to offset any potential bias and also to determine any significant difference of opinion between first year and final year students.

## **THE VIEWS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ON RESEARCH: Findings:**

- Undergraduate students have clear requirements and expectations from their university education
- Overall, the results of the questionnaire suggest, very strongly, that research plays an unimportant rôle in the opinion of undergraduate students in the Built Environment discipline.
- (However, the results need to be tempered with the assertion that universities are better placed than undergraduate students to assess the value and utility of research in education.)

# CONCLUSION

- The two functions of teaching and research are different and require different resourcing and different expertise.
- One is not dependent upon the other; one should not be more dominant than the other.
- The university 'teacher' must undertake a certain amount of research to keep up with developments in his/her subject. This is clear. However, such research is of secondary character and, in many cases, may be better derived from practice by consultancy. It is not research for pushing boundaries.

# CONCLUSION

- On the other hand, innovation and technology transfer on a level which will have economic impact on a nation's wealth and well-being can only be achieved by dedicated research using resources which are specifically for that task.

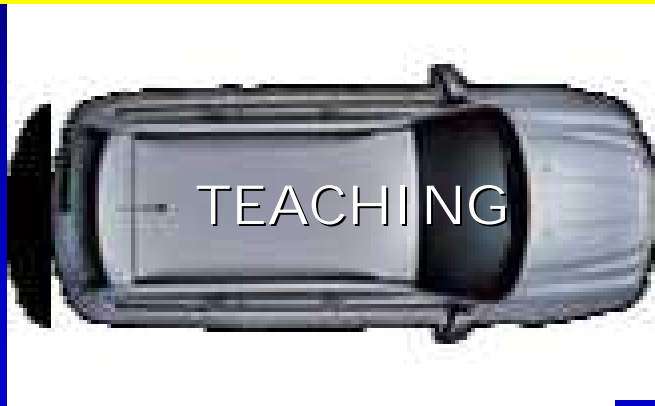
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Research



# KNOWLEDGE – The Ideal?



Sharing  
Learning  
Developing

Separate Functions  
Advancing Together



Creating  
Developing  
Understanding