

Tackling Wicked Issues: Prestige and Employment Outcomes in the Teaching Excellence Framework

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Occasional Paper 14

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Why research trumps teaching and what can be done about it

Paul Blackmore

Executive summary

Research has higher status than teaching in academic life despite many attempts to achieve change. Research has grown in importance over thirty years and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) continues to drive priorities in research-intensive institutions and many teaching-led ones too. Current Government proposals to recognise and reward teaching excellence are well intentioned but not likely to be as successful as hoped. Emphasising differences between teaching and research and pitting them against each other means that teaching will lose.

The problem is deep-seated and related to prestige, defined here as being:

- relatively scarce;
- hard to measure;
- slow to gain or lose; and
- often decided on by insiders.

Excellence in research attracts prestige, but excellence in teaching does not. Prestige economies are groups that have key values in common. They can occur at all organisational levels. Disciplines can be prestige economies too, transcending

institutions. Individuals know what is valued in their peer group for a successful career. The success of research excellence competitions shows that prestige engineering works.

Providing more money for excellent teaching is not the answer. This will not change many underlying values. Much of the new funding will not benefit students but will support research, just as much teaching funding does now.

The Government proposes an even stronger separation between research and teaching, through an Office for Students (OfS) and a UK Council for Research and Innovation, with a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) sitting alongside the REF. Each 'side' will proceed with scant reference to the other.

Rewarding excellent teaching requires metrics but prestige prevents metrics working, for technical and cultural reasons. Measuring learning gain across institutions cannot be done meaningfully. Other proxies are too conjectural to be reliable. In any case, the idea rests on a human capital view about the value of skills and return on a degree. We often assume that higher earnings come from increased skills. However, social and cultural value is signalled by a degree and where it comes from. Parents and students understand how prestige works.

Claims that better and faster information will drive out prestige are optimistic. Positional goods have existed for centuries and will continue to do so. Without reliable and objective measures, prestige always wins. Even with such measures, signalling continues. There is a relationship between prestige and reputation, but not a strong one. Over a long period, prolonged bad reputational news may dent prestige, but it does take a

long time. An institution may be criticised for practices that have no impact, or a reverse impact, on prestige. For example, not being inclusive leads to exclusiveness, which can be a prestige factor.

Prestigious research-intensive institutions will be less affected by the new current proposals and will do just enough to trigger increased funding, if it is worth having. Teaching-led institutions, with private provider competition, may find their reputation harder to protect.

A more differentiated higher education system tends to be more expensive because it encourages prestige seeking through spending on attention-grabbing projects, as can be seen in the US higher education system and the UK independent school sector. So quality-related funding will not have the desired effect, unless extra funding can be ring-fenced for teaching, which is in practice close to impossible.

An alternative way forward is to link research and teaching closely together at all levels. The linkage may look very different because institutions are so varied in their missions. A simplistic opposition between 'blue skies' research and teaching as transmission must be set aside, with research and teaching recognised as forms of complex learning. This requires students to take a more active and engaged part in their learning. Such an approach is a more constructive response to recent changes than complaining about consumerisation.

Impact offers another place for connection. The REF emphasises a requirement for impact, as does the employability agenda for teaching. A broader view could be taken, with universities

demonstrating their research informs their teaching and that both have a positive effect beyond the university. The inevitable conflict with concerns for knowledge 'for its own sake' can be met by emphasising the social and intellectual as well as economic impact, thereby dealing with a long-standing, unhelpful and prestige-related tension in universities.

What might this mean in practice? Public funding for research should require an explanation of the teaching benefit. Funding for higher education teaching should require evidence of students learning in research-like ways. At an individual level, recognition and reward could be centred on a view of all academic work being about complex learning. This would enable everyone to make connections between teaching and research, not just active researchers. Probation and promotion should be designed in ways that pay attention to how prestige works. Teaching-only roles, reconfigured more broadly, could stay in a single academic structure but the greatest reward would go to those who show they unite teaching and research in their work.

Teaching must be evaluated differently. The National Student Survey (NSS) treats students as customers and implies teaching is telling. Engagement-focused surveys instead ask what students do and can reveal whether they are learning in research-like ways.

It cannot all be done at an institutional level. Disciplinary and professional groups are important parts of the way prestige operates and should be encouraged to explore ways in which the climate can be changed.

The importance attached to global rankings, success in which increasingly requires a strong presence in both research and teaching, presents an opportunity for institutions to ensure that teaching and research are treated and projected as part of the same enterprise.

Recent changes to the UK Government mean that responsibility for higher education policymaking is once more in the Department for Education (DfE), while responsibility for research sits in the new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Even though the two areas have a shared Government Minister, it is now doubly important to ensure teaching and research are not driven apart further.

Why research trumps teaching and what can be done about it

Paul Blackmore

The problem

Research dominates academic life at the expense of teaching. There have been many attempts to achieve a better balance. The proposal for a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in the white paper *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (BIS, 2016) is the current example. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) and its predecessor the Institute for Learning and Teaching have aimed to raise the status of teaching. So have many funding initiatives, particularly the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund, which from 1999 gave universities additional money in return for teaching improvements. The publication of comparative data about perceptions of teaching quality, through for example the National Student Survey (NSS), is a spur to competition in teaching at a national level. Many universities have changed promotion criteria to recognise teaching excellence and introduced new categorisations of staff, with the aim of providing parallel career routes with parity of esteem.

While some may argue the problem has been solved, a look across the sector confirms this is still an important issue, and clearly the Government believes a problem remains. In the light of earlier initiatives, one must ask whether current policy proposals are likely to do a better job of raising the status of teaching or whether they will go the same way. This paper argues that some fundamental aspects of the problem have

not been fully recognised and the proposals may inadvertently make things worse.

At the heart of the tension between teaching and research is the influence of prestige seeking in universities. A series of Research Assessment Exercises (RAEs) has helped research gain dominance over thirty years, by publicly valuing excellence in research, in ways that have powerfully shaped universities. So research-intensive institutions have become even more focused on their research ambitions. Even teaching-led institutions are strongly influenced by a cultural bias within higher education to value research more highly. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) remains, for at least another round, with the Government keen to introduce more metrics if it can (Grant, 2016). Thus the REF will continue to be a powerful motivator in academic life. Global league tables that principally measure research prestige accentuate the problem.

A TEF may seem an obvious counterbalance to the REF, bringing metrics to bear to encourage excellent teaching. It remains unclear whether a TEF can or will achieve its aim of raising the status of teaching. The task is more difficult and deep-seated than it at first appears, as the last thirty years of efforts to value teaching have shown (Gibbs, 2016).

I argue here that the Government's proposals have not grasped the size of the problem and have not proposed solutions that are likely to work. Indeed the white paper proposal to reduce the ten 'arms-length' teaching and research bodies to two emphasises the separation further, despite the intentions shown in the brief mentions of the ways research can enhance teaching (paragraph 44). Excellence in research attracts

prestige, but excellence in teaching does not. The more we see research and teaching as separate, the more teaching will lose out in an almost universal desire to achieve prestige. The impact of global rankings makes it more important than ever to change attitudes and behaviours.

How prestige and reputation are different

Recent work on academic motivation (Blackmore, 2016) has focused on two key ideas. Firstly, the generation of prestige and reputation are two different aims, with differing motivational consequences. Prestige is relatively scarce:

- not all can have it;
- it is hard to measure;
- it is slow to gain and to lose; and
- it is often decided by those within a group.

The award of a Nobel Prize to a staff member confers prestige on an institution: there are few such prizes; its financial value is not possible to measure; and it is an academically-driven award. Yet the prestige is immense. Reputation on the other hand can be held by all, provided all are proficient. It is measurable, may be gained and lost more quickly and is often confirmed by external stakeholders (Brewer, Gates and Goldman, 2002). So, for example, returning students' assignments in a short time can add to a university's reputation; however, every institution is able to do that if it tries hard enough and it need not take a long time to achieve it.

Secondly, prestige occurs among groups with key values in common that lead them to accord prestige to particular phenomena. Anthropologists label this a 'prestige economy'. An academic department might be a prestige economy, and so might a faculty, or an institution or a national system. So too might a discipline, transcending institutional boundaries.

The 'script' that an individual may hold is a powerful shaper of motivation, listing the achievements that he or she believes are needed to advance in a career. There is evidence that these scripts tend to vary by academic discipline and that they typically focus on research rather than teaching achievements (Blackmore and Kandiko, 2011). This is consistent with the idea that prestige trumps reputation. **Unless teaching can come to be seen as prestigious, it will always be of secondary importance, irrespective of financial incentives.**

The idea of prestige economies at different organisational levels explains why many institutions appear to be unresponsive to strategic steering and why many innovations fail. There may be a mismatch between what is valued within prestige economies. Although universities can send strong signals about what is valued at an institutional level, academic identity tends to draw its strength elsewhere, often through disciplinary or professional affiliation. Inspection and funding changes that occur at an institutional level may not be noticed much lower down within the organisation, unless the change is so extreme as to cause major discomfort. Any change in the respective valuations of activities has to be owned at a local level.

Anyone who doubts the need to pay attention to patterns of prestige might consider the powerful effects of the RAE / REF

since 1986 in the UK. This mechanism has provided a way in which scarce academic prestige can be generated, recognised and rewarded. It has been outstandingly successful in confirming the importance of research, often at the expense of the status of other activities, principally teaching. It has reinforced the prestigious position of research-intensive institutions in relation to others and has spurred on ever greater concentration of research. It has influenced behaviours in institutions across the whole sector, even those whose main activity is teaching. Prestige engineering works.

How government can make it worse

In a competition for academic attention, research will generally beat teaching. Two widely advocated remedies do not work. Firstly, tinkering with financial incentives leads to game playing and does not change underlying values. Secondly, treating research and teaching separately and then trying to boost the status of teaching sets up a contest in which teaching loses.

A financial incentive assumes that the difference between the motivation to research and to teach is largely one of resources. At present, money follows excellence in research, through the allocation process of the REF and Research Councils' grant awards, but excellence in teaching is not so rewarded. This lies behind the white paper's proposals to incentivise universities to provide better teaching by enabling them to charge higher fees, in return for demonstrating excellence. This may encourage institutions to pay extra attention to teaching quality to trigger the increased payment, which would be an advance.

However, such behavioural changes, if they happen, are part of

a larger picture. In many institutions it is arguable whether an increase in teaching income will have much impact on what is valued and given most attention at departmental and individual level. Since institutions can do as they wish with their income, it is plausible that much of the extra funding will not directly benefit students, as Graham Gibbs has also suggested (2016). Any new funding could be diverted into support for research. This is happening already. Current expansion in student numbers among Russell Group institutions is not driven solely by a philanthropic wish to educate more people or a progressive desire to improve social mobility but instead aims to generate income to spend on other activities, principally research. So although money is an extrinsic motivator in academic life as elsewhere, finance is not the principal answer.

The strength of the underlying value system can be judged by the way that many universities choose to spend their income. Cross-subsidy of research by teaching happens widely in the UK and elsewhere, with little transparency in the use of resources by universities or accountability for it. Under the UK's system of dual funding for research, many institutions receive a block grant for research, its size depending on the quality of the university's submission to the REF. Once awarded, the block grant is set for the period. Other funding comes through winning research grants and contracts. However, many funders do not pay the full economic cost of research. The more research of this kind that universities do, the more the deficit grows. Thus institutions undertaking research below its real cost often subsidise their overall research effort from teaching funds. Additional teaching funding could enable further below-cost research to be undertaken, generating more prestige.

A study of the Australian system (Norton and Cherastidtham, 2015) suggests A\$2 billion of research is funded by teaching, 20 per cent of the total, with one dollar in five coming from the teaching surplus. The study suggests that activity-based costing is required, citing the UK Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) system's ability to separate teaching and research activities, while noting the difficulties in doing so.

Cross-subsidy of research by teaching is vulnerable to criticism, especially where one discipline's teaching subsidises another discipline's research. It is remarkable that the practice has not attracted more attention in the UK. A recent survey of student opinion (Neves and Hillman, 2016) finds that student perceptions of value for money have fallen, especially in England with its £9,000 fees, and that 86 per cent of students do not want fee increases to be allowed in return for excellent teaching, while only 18 per cent of students feel they have enough information about how fee income is spent. The survey also offers evidence about what many students might think if they were better informed about how their fees are used. Only 26 per cent of students consider it very important that teachers should be currently active researchers. Even where being an active researcher was most often demonstrated, particularly in Russell Group institutions, students did not think it any more important. Many more students felt improving subject knowledge regularly and receiving training in how to teach are very important. The student view of the world is very different from that of many academic staff.

In summary, the financial relationship between teaching and research is complex and increasing the return on teaching will not necessarily have the effect that the Government might

desire. It may instead increase the amount spent on research and further expose universities to criticism of the ways they use teaching resources. It may be that prestige factors provide some insulation, with students recognising that high-profile research raises the status of an institution and therefore increases the value of the degrees it awards. However, this attitude cannot be relied on to continue and is in any case not ethically desirable. Nor is it an efficient way of funding, from the point of view of teaching. There are more direct ways of supporting teaching improvement than by subsidising research which may or may not make a difference to teaching. Universities wishing to spend money on research would be wise in future to be able to show its teaching benefit, or risk severe criticism from more discerning and better informed students.

Turning to the second problem, both central government and sometimes even universities set research against teaching. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is involved in the funding of both teaching and research, but in all other respects they tend to be conceived of as largely separate enterprises that happen to be carried out in the same institutions. An absolute division is routinely assumed, quite understandably in that each is a complex activity in its own right. The white paper has proposed to increase this divide. The Office for Students (OfS) and the UK Council for Research and Innovation will be separate, engaging with institutions independently of each other. The TEF will stand on one side and the REF on the other. The white paper's description of the role of UK Research and Innovation contains no reference to teaching (box 3.3).

The Government has recently returned higher education to the Department for Education (DfE), while research resides in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. For now, there is a shared minister, but it nonetheless means teaching and research are divided in Whitehall too.

Unless the case for research improving students' learning is pressed with vigour, we will miss an opportunity to connect research and teaching, despite this being the only basis on which the status of teaching can be improved.

What won't work

Proposals to reward excellent teaching will be frustrated by the working of prestige, partly because awarding more money for better teaching requires a robust means of measuring teaching quality. However, metrics cannot contend with prestige, for both technical and cultural reasons. Prestige will always be present, filling much of the inevitable gap between what is valued and what can be measured.

The Government's wish to achieve an objective measure of teaching quality may not succeed because it is not possible to do in a meaningful and workable way. The 'Holy Grail' is a means of showing how students have progressed from their level at entry. There are major difficulties in deciding what to measure, and in undertaking the measurement, especially in ways that have some meaning across the broad range of disciplinary and professional curricula. Rhetoric is running ahead of the capacity to deliver. Schleicher (2016) lists many of the major difficulties in achieving a measure, which he believes must deal with individuals' learning gains, taking into account student

and institutional contexts in order to compare like-for-like. His assertion that it can be done, with the aid of technology and through co-operation, seems optimistic and at odds with the substantial methodological challenges he notes.

Because of these difficulties, some argue the environment provided for learning should be measured because particular features of a student's experience are likely to lead to effective learning (Gibbs, 2016). However, this may not measure the learning itself. It is simplistic in its assumptions about the relationship between students' knowledge and abilities at the start and end of university and of the impact of the experiences in between. It is assumed, for example, that it is the institutions' actions that make the difference. Genuinely robust measures of this kind, that could justify differential funding, are unlikely to be found. Paying attention to processes of learning may reduce the tension between teaching and research, but it is problematic to rest funding decisions on this highly context-specific field.

Cultural aspects of the use of metrics are even more difficult. This is a complex and politically-loaded field. Prestige is central to the problem. Two kinds of return on higher education are often cited. A human capital view focuses on the value of increased skills and the economic return on a degree. A signalling explanation refers to the social and cultural value of having a degree from a particular kind of institution. The latter is not much affected by evidence about teaching quality. Students and parents know about signalling and understand how prestige works just as much as universities do.

Some argue that prestigious institutions will in future have a harder time because better and faster information will drive prestige-based decision making out. A recent *Washington Post* article (Kinsley, 2016) claims that the internet is disrupting the prestige of higher education. It draws an analogy with the newspaper industry, which became a global market and had its business model radically affected by the internet. The article suggests that as free lectures become more widely available and interactive, it will be more obvious that parents and students pay over the odds for an Ivy League education, the price of which is kept high by its scarcity. So research-intensive institutions will stand exposed as profiting from having the ability to give out scarce positional goods and to charge handsomely for it.

However, we have long known this happens. The complaint was made by Adam Smith almost 250 years ago about the University of Oxford (Smith, 2014), and has been used against prestigious US institutions in more recent times (Boyer Commission, 1998; Archibald and Feldman, 2011). It applies not only to universities but to luxury goods that are bought and valued because they are scarce and exclusive. Parents and students will stop paying inflated degree prices only if the signalling effect decreases to the extent that it is not worth paying the money. However, the way prestige works means this is unlikely to happen. We know the extent to which a good is desired is often related to its scarcity. Scarce goods are always in demand if they are associated with status, and this will remain so for as long as status is sought in a society. Only when many people have something does interest move to another place where there can be differentiation.

We often ignore the effects of signalling. A study sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2013) suggests the Department routinely assumed that the higher earnings of graduates are explained by the skills they gain during their degree, ignoring signalling effects. It is not surprising that this assumption is made. Equally, therefore, the signalling effect of degrees from particular institutions is likely to be overlooked. Although the basis on which graduates and employers make decisions is a complex one, some institutions clearly have more powerful signalling effects than others. Many of the existing and easy to administer measures, such as the job destinations of graduates, may to some extent reflect the signalling value of particular institutions. They are prestige rather than reputation measures.

So in the absence of reliable objective measures, prestige will continue to influence decisions of many kinds. This may seem to be a spur to devise ever better metrics, to squeeze irrational prestige-related beliefs out of the system, but this is to attempt the impossible. Even if feasible measures could be devised, they would not necessarily guide many students' choices. It is often supposed that potential students make institution choices on the basis of data provided for the purpose. However, many make an all-round judgement irrespective of what statistics might say, about what would be their kind of university (Ball et al, 2002; Croxford and Raffe, 2014), and the signalling benefit that would result. For such students, a degree from a particular kind of university is a positional good.

While the internet certainly does overturn business models, and can do so with remarkable speed by providing comparative data

worldwide, prestige is a powerful countervailing force. Indeed, slowness to change in the face of current conditions can itself lend prestige by signalling institutional self-confidence and the taking of a long-term view.

There is a relationship between prestige and reputation but it is indirect. For example, statistics can harm prestige. No institution can be unaffected by a large number of bad ratings in league tables. However, if a prestigious institution does less well in one indicator and suffers an immediate reputational hit in that area, its prestige may not be much affected, at least in the short-term. Prestige tends to rise and fall relatively slowly, unlike reputation which is measured against more concrete items.

The extent to which an adverse indicator will eventually feed through into loss of prestige probably has to do with the indicator itself – whether it is one that is valued within the prestige economy in question. Thus, a metric that shows that a research-intensive institution is not inclusive in its intake may have little impact on the prestige of the institution, especially if its prestige rests partly on its exclusivity. If a research-intensive institution is shown to be less successful in terms of its graduates gaining high-status jobs, that may well erode prestige more quickly, since it damages the interests of parents and students who buy into the institution's prestige with the expectation of that benefit. However, signalling effects ensure this never happens.

Whether or not the current quest for robust measures of teaching excellence is successful, the signalling element will

remain and institutions of different kinds will therefore face increasingly divergent environments. Current proposals mean the more prestigious institutions may be able to increase their fees without paying much attention to the quality of their teaching, as has been suggested happens in the US system (Gibbs, 2016). Research-intensive institutions, with their many inbuilt advantages, will continue to score well, as they did when Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) was introduced in 1993 to evaluate teaching at a discipline level. When they do not score well it will not matter much, provided they reach the threshold for enhanced funding. The entry of more private providers will provide competition for reputation-led institutions, but those universities that are prestige-based, buttressed by the advantages of positioning and pre-eminence through time, will be largely protected. Indeed, they may prefer to concentrate on increasing their income through further recruitment of high fee-paying and prestige-motivated overseas students, than to jump through yet more UK government hoops for what look at present to be rather modest returns.

A more differentiated higher education system offers more room for prestige to work. Prestige is expensive for a system. An unwelcome consequence of a differentiated system for government, parents and students is that the cost of higher education in the top institutions tends to increase rapidly, as has been the case in US higher education and in the UK's independent school sector. A higher education arms race in the US has been described (Archibald and Feldman, 2011), adding to other cost inflation pressures. Thus experience in a system which resembles England, suggests that the increased income from teaching may be used for another purpose

besides subsidising research. Iconic and attention-grabbing developments will be funded to generate prestige.

In summary, it is doubtful that the UK Government will drive improvements in the quality of teaching by making quality-related funding available, even if a defensible system can be devised. Beyond what needs to be done to secure funding, teaching will not receive the benefit of extra income, unless it is ring-fenced so that it has to be spent on the support of teaching, as was the practice in Germany before fees were abolished (Hillman, 2015). This requirement would be difficult to implement in practice as it would require the specification of what counts. Moreover, it could be argued that research informs teaching, so money spent on the former boosts the latter.

Possible ways forward

If prestige engineering works for research, helping to elevate its importance through successive rounds of research assessment, then presumably it can help with teaching too, although the task is much harder. If one makes use of the distinction between prestige and reputation and works with the idea of a prestige economy, some possible ways forward can be identified.

Government should plan for research and teaching together

Higher education policymaking has bounced around Whitehall and been subject to rapid changes in personnel, as Nick Hillman (2016) has noted. Darian (2016) points to the need for organisational stability when administering ratings systems. Yet central government is largely responsible for pitting teaching against research at a policy level and for ensuring that teaching loses the unnecessary battle.

While there is recognition of the need to enhance the status of teaching, some of the government's actions work against this. The *Fulfilling Our Potential* green paper (BIS, 2015) mentioned research only to say what it would not be discussing. It ignored research-teaching links and the impact on teaching of increased efforts in research (Bekhradnia, 2016). Research was left for Paul Nurse to consider (2015), but the Nurse report ignored teaching.

The subsequent white paper notes that 'the value of research-led teaching' is one of the areas in which an institution can claim credit, through the qualitative aspect of the TEF (paragraph 44), but this will not affect specific funding. While recognising the link between research and teaching is welcome, it is insufficient, when government systems for managing and evaluating research and teaching are to be entirely separate and dealt with by unconnected bodies.

The situation will improve if research and teaching are purposely linked at all levels, from macro-policy through to individual members of staff. This is an immensely difficult and long-term task, but will be easier to tackle if the working of prestige is taken into account rather than ignored. Such a linkage will look different from one institution to another because the UK higher education sector is diverse, and increasingly so. The amount of basic research and undergraduate teaching undertaken will continue to vary.

Uniting research and teaching

Teaching will gain if it is believed that it shares characteristics with research. Redefinition may help to emphasise what

teaching and research share rather than what apparently separates them. To achieve this, it is necessary to broaden the ways in which research and teaching are often defined. Blue-skies discovery research is traditionally contrasted with teaching as the transmission of information, but this is crude and unhelpful. Ernest Boyer (1990) described four scholarships: of discovery; integration; application; and teaching. In this way, the middle ground of bringing research together and applying it comes into play. What unites all of these is that they are forms of complex learning. There is of course nothing at all new in such thinking. What would be novel would be if it informed UK national policy.

To move forward requires two changes. Again, neither of these is new, but both need to be worked on to bring teaching and research together. The first requires a shift from a transmissive form of teaching that emphasises the lecturer as the giver of information and the learner as the passive recipient of it. Instead, students must be encouraged to take a more active and engaged part in their learning. Staff and students are all researchers, with a recognition that the skills of learning are much the same at all levels in a university. There is a large literature on this and a vast number of case studies. Undergraduate research is growing in UK universities, with a British Conference of Undergraduate Research (www.bcur.org) and *Reinvention*, an international journal.

The second area for action is also signalled by Boyer, in his inclusion of the scholarship of application. Impact is a current concern in both research and teaching. The REF has aimed to reward evidence of impact as well as excellence in research, partially redefining excellence to include impact. Teaching

has its impact agenda too, which is currently expressed in the employability agenda of universities, explored in the accompanying paper. The two could be linked in imaginative ways, if universities were to show their research expertise flowed into their teaching and if both together could be shown to have a positive effect beyond the university. Such an approach would engage with one of the most entrenched aspects of prestige in universities: that of knowledge for its own sake. In teaching, skills gained that can be transferred to the workplace have for many years, and with many variations in terminology, been presented as if they were entirely antithetical to the learning of subject knowledge for its own sake. What has to be achieved is the imaginative reworking of this largely false opposition, across all programmes in all institutions (Phoenix, 2016). At present, active learning and capability-focused curricula exist despite rather than because of the ways in which prestige works. In the longer term, the consistent support for and recognition of curricula of this kind could reshape perceptions about the nature of teaching and research, for the good of both.

A major prestige problem that can be predicted in such a change is that it could be seen as acting in opposition to the idea of learning for its own sake. If it is emphasised that impact could refer to economic, social and intellectual impact, and if these terms are interpreted with imagination, there would be less ground for such objections. Indeed, it is hard to argue for either teaching or research that makes no difference to anybody. Significant resistance to moves of this kind will be generated if government neglects this aspect in favour of an exclusive emphasis on employability, narrowly defined.

A member of academic staff whose self-perception is of being principally a researcher will be unlikely to engage with employment-focused curricula unless attracting connections can be made. Prestige engineering has to start from where people are and what they value, and then connect it to other desired ends.

The benefits of research-rich teaching have been argued for many years, famously by Wilhelm von Humboldt who on founding the University of Berlin in 1810 argued that higher learning united student and teacher in scholarship. The link between research and teaching quality is not automatic (Hattie and Marsh, 1996) but there are major benefits if it is designed into systems (Jenkins and Healey, 2005). These are mere pedagogic pipe dreams, as they have often been for many years, unless they are backed up by concrete action. This requires government and universities to think afresh about funding, quality assurance and management of both research and teaching in higher education institutions. **Public funding for research should require an explanation of the pedagogic benefit of the research. Public funding for teaching should require evidence that students are learning in research-like ways and are benefiting from research funding.** In these ways the interconnection of research and teaching would be reinforced in institutions. If additional funding is to be given, then it would be on the basis of a proven interconnection.

Roles, recognition and reward

The nature of the connection between research and teaching is a political issue. If it is seen as requiring a member of faculty to pass on the fruits of his or her own research, this model

will only work, and then patchily, in some research-intensive institutions. Such a model risks seeming out of touch, in an era where many academic roles are rapidly becoming unbundled and many university teachers are not active cutting-edge researchers. If, however, the link is one where both research and teaching are seen as similar processes of learning, then all institutions and members of faculty can participate. Being an academic then means being an expert in complex learning, not just in what is to be learnt. This implies a high level of scholarship from those who teach, both in terms of their own relationship with what they teach and their ability to enable students to learn in research-like ways. Such a requirement across a rapidly diversifying sector would be a helpful and timely quality safeguard.

Since teaching is an activity that when done well tends to generate reputation rather than prestige, institutions must have strong procedures in place to deal with probation and promotion, to overcome the bias towards research attainment that has existed for so long. Recognition of social realities would be helpful. Entirely separate teaching-only roles will never gain parity of esteem with research-led ones. That is not to argue against rewards for those who are excellent in teaching and its leadership, for they are very helpful signals. However, all forms of academic work should remain within the main academic structure. It should be possible for the constituent parts of an academic role to vary through a career with the least possible loss of esteem. This requires a unified system and not one of academic apartheid. In any case, this need not be set out as teaching versus research. The greatest recognition and reward could be reserved for those that demonstrate that in their

practice there is a seamless union. If the nexus is conceived as one largely around learning as a research-like process, all those who teach can be considered, whether they are active researchers or not.

Changes in how teaching is evaluated

Just as the inclusion of impact in the REF has led to a greater focus on what difference research makes, so the way teaching is thought of will be influenced by the way it is evaluated. The National Student Survey is central to Government plans to evaluate teaching. For some years, the NSS, open to every student completing an undergraduate degree, has attempted to measure student satisfaction. Unfortunately, it is not at the moment in a form that is helpful for linking research and teaching. It has been criticised for encouraging a consumer culture, by focusing on what universities provide more than on what students actually do and learn. The implied model of teaching is that it is largely a matter of telling things to students. It asks whether staff are enthusiastic, are good at explaining and have made the subject interesting. If instead students' perceptions of the pedagogic quality of what they are experiencing were evaluated, based on a reputable model of higher-level learning, then academic's attention would be drawn to think more fundamentally about what and how they teach.

Signs of improvement can be seen in the UK HEA's piloting of an alternative survey focusing on students' engagement in learning rather than on their satisfaction with what has been provided by the institution (HEA, 2015). It asks whether students have: learnt about methods of analysis and research

in their subject; learnt about the outcomes of current research; formulated and explored their own questions; and worked on a research project. Reform would introduce a full student engagement survey, along the lines of the USA's National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) or Australia's Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE).

The role of disciplines and professions

Claims about the benefits of links between research and teaching are often made at an institutional level, and are frequently hubris. A local sense of identity remains a highly significant socio-cultural aspect of higher education institutions. Both teaching and research practices vary significantly across disciplines in an institution. Shifting the relative importance of research and teaching in universities will require sustained attention to what it is that academic staff value, in the communities holding those values.

Reconstructing relationships between research and teaching has to be done at a disciplinary and professional level, partly because practice in both teaching and research varies locally, reflecting the disparate forms of knowledge that are involved. So, as an example, many members of faculty in the sciences would argue that their own research is so focused and abstract that it cannot be usefully taught at undergraduate level, while humanities and social science members of faculty frequently thank their students for helping to provide new insights. An activity such as enquiry-based learning may look rather different from one discipline to another, a fact hidden by the use of such a generic term. The quality assurance changes suggested above would require institutions to show the nature

of their teaching in those terms at a disciplinary level.

An appreciation of the socialisation of academic staff is a helpful starting point for trying to alter behaviour by changing patterns of motivation. It has often been said that academic staff have a greater allegiance to their discipline than to their institution (Jenkins, 1996). While such allegiances are lessening, including with the growth of interdisciplinary working and centralised student admissions, they remain important features of higher education. The relative success of the HEA's former discipline-based subject centres in communicating with academic staff about teaching, in comparison with more generic approaches, shows disciplines matter. Messages from within a discipline receive a more positive reception than those set at system or institutional levels.

Existing disciplinary and professional associations could be encouraged to come together to work on some of these identity and motivational issues, so that these universal themes can be tackled locally.

Conclusion

Re-engineering prestige by emphasising that research and teaching are two sides of the same coin offers a better approach than attempting to buttress teaching so that it can stand against research. In such a contest, teaching will always lose. Change needs to be underpinned by a national level policy framework that regards research and teaching as being closely connected, for government too often sends two sets of conflicting instructions to the same institutions and implies that it values some institutions more than others. The challenge has become

greater as a result of the latest machinery of government changes. Changing attitudes to teaching is very difficult. A rationalist approach, that assumes top-down structural changes and financial mechanisms will produce improved practice, is unlikely to be successful. Alterations in policy and practice both nationally and locally require attention to be paid to the motivational consequences of the changes. There needs to be an analysis of the likely impact on what is valued and how that will affect roles, relationships and behaviours.

In summary, at a national level we might consider:

- whether a single funding body for teaching and research might be a better option than the proposals in the Higher Education and Research Bill – alternatively, ensure in terms of reference and elsewhere that each funding body proceeds with full reference to the other;
- whether institutions should be asked to provide a research and teaching strategy for quality-related funding, showing how each informs and supports the other;
- the inclusion of a teaching impact statement as part of all research applications; and
- reflecting a research-related conception of teaching in the NSS.

In universities we might consider:

- strongly favouring promotion on basis of proven links between research and teaching;

- the development of flexible career paths that encourage a creative blend of research and teaching, imaginatively defined; and
- encouraging discipline-led discussions of what research and teaching might mean and how it can be supported.

The growth of global rankings presents a threat and an opportunity. A drive to gain and retain places in the world's top 100 universities can be seen in many countries, fuelling Germany's Excellence Initiative, Russia's Project 5-100, and similar ambitions across the world. While this competition directly involves only a handful of institutions, many more are influenced, as a particular type of university is constantly celebrated. We may argue that league tables reward the wrong things and prefer to generate league tables with different values, a motivation behind the EU's sponsorship of the U-Multirank initiative. However, rankings are also subject to being valued by their prestige. The iron law of prestige means that those rankings that reward the best-funded and most selective research-intensive institutions are the ones that really count. Again, teaching suffers.

If the grip of a particular kind of ranking cannot be broken, it can be used to help resolve one of the major tensions that such rankings make worse. The rules of the game mean that the winners must be excellent in research, but they must teach as well, in order to be included. Countries such as Germany, that fund much of their research in non-teaching institutions, are disadvantaged. At a time when research and teaching are in many ways being forced apart, at the prestigious and influential end of the institutional spectrum it is the age of the

university that both researches and teaches. But they must do both on a large scale in order to have enough resources to compete. There are two possible responses. This could be very bad for teaching, which might easily be shouldered out of the way and starved of resources by prestige-seeking research, and increasingly assigned to teaching-only staff employed on short-term contracts. This seems the likeliest outcome without intervention. However, we might achieve a step change in the quality of teaching in universities if this moment is to be seized, to ensure that research and teaching are treated as part of the same enterprise. Universities cannot control global league tables; however, they can make an intelligent response to them, in the ways proposed here, to ensure that teaching gains the status that it deserves and needs.

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Why employment outcomes are important and how they should be measured in future

Richard Blackwell and Martin Edmondson

Executive Summary

Employment outcomes are important to stakeholders in higher education and feature prominently in plans for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The Government has proposed developing a long-term earnings metric drawing on tax data and is consulting on additional employment and occupational measures, drawing upon existing sources of data. The main source of current data is a destination survey of all graduates six months after graduation, the *Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)* survey, which is complemented by a follow up survey three-and-a-half years after graduation, known as longitudinal DLHE. These surveys are currently under review by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

DLHE is unpopular in higher education. This paper discusses the key criticisms of the main DLHE survey – timing, methodology, definition of graduate jobs and cost – as well as of the longitudinal survey, which lacks influence, and identifies balancing arguments. DLHE surveys have strengths and there are opportunities to mitigate the main weaknesses.

The main survey itself is the envy of other countries and provides a great deal of authoritative data about employment outcomes down to occupations attained at subject level. The first destination focus of the main survey and its closeness to graduation ensure a high response rate and in-depth data, but

is unrepresentative of graduates' early career progress in some subjects.

Longitudinal DLHE, which occurs only once every two years and based on a sample survey, is a pragmatic response. It provides aggregate-level corrective data, but is largely unknown outside the higher education sector. Longitudinal DLHE could be enhanced to provide better, annual data to sit alongside short-term first destination data, giving a clearer indication of early career paths. Despite the criticism, a suitably reformed DLHE should have a continuing and important role.

The first major publication that utilises Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) earnings data provided new information, but it took a long time to produce, is at an aggregate level and covers 10 years before the present fees regime was introduced. It may be four years or more before such data are available at subject level and are therefore potentially useful to prospective students making choices now. This earnings data will get better and more useful over time but will continue to have limitations as a metric.

For example, earnings vary considerably by industry and region. Higher education institutions in modestly-performing local economies may anchor economic and social activity. Such institutions face perverse incentives to ship their graduates out to higher-paying industries and regions, notably London, in order to improve their employment outcomes to the detriment of the local economy. This suggests an element of assessment of institutions' progress against their own targets – reflecting their context, mission and priorities for graduate employment – should be included.

One intention of the TEF is to link the ability to raise fees (by inflation) to teaching excellence outcomes. In a recent large-scale survey conducted by HEPI and the HEA, existing students expressed decreasing confidence in the value for money of university education and strong rejection of the linking of TEF outcomes to the ability to raise fees.

There is rising student interest in employment outcomes, and an indication from a small-scale survey that a link to a guaranteed graduate-level job might be one condition under which students would contemplate higher fees. A guarantee is unrealistic but it may be an important pointer to emerging student sentiment. This finding needs to be further investigated before any shift away from first destinations in the DLHE main survey is contemplated as a result of the HESA review.

A major concern is that employment outcomes largely reflect non-educational variables, such as entry standards, socio-economic background and subject studied. Although these factors are influential, with good data statisticians can and do control for these variables to enable performance to be benchmarked. When they do, educational variables that make a difference, at least to early careers, emerge. Work experience integrated into the curriculum stands out, especially sandwich years and placements, alongside obtaining a good degree (first-class or upper second-class honours). Welcome proposals to collect more data on placements and work-based learning are made in the HESA review of DLHE.

The TEF will need to take care that it reflects educational variables in any judgements about teaching excellence. In this respect, the proposals in the TEF technical consultation and its

general tone are encouraging, although there is a long way to go in constructing an authoritative TEF.

1. Both earnings and occupational data are required to assess the labour market progress of graduates in the round.
2. The main DLHE survey should be reformed to mitigate weaknesses but retained, as should its focus on first destinations and occupations.
3. Longitudinal DLHE should be enhanced with a view to providing annual data and in sufficient quantity to enable subject-based analysis at institutional level.
4. Statistical controls and benchmarking should be applied to all TEF data to ensure that it reflects educational variables and educational excellence.
5. There should be an element of assessment against declared institutional targets to reflect the very diverse economic and social contexts, missions and priorities of institutions.
6. Some current plans, such as the proposal to collect more data on work experience and placements, are welcome, but others run the risk of distracting attention from labour market outcomes.

Why employment outcomes are important and how they should be measured in future

Richard Blackwell and Martin Edmondson

Introduction

The Government plans to include employment metrics in the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). This is a reasonable desire, reflecting the needs of prospective students, employers and the national economy. The Government's white paper, *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*, focuses on the development of a Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset built around newly available tax data on earnings. The wording, however, covers broader possibilities through the phrase 'employment and earnings', which recurs in the text (BIS, 2016a). An accompanying technical consultation sought views on some options for including occupational measures alongside earnings data, including a 'highly skilled employment' metric based on graduate-level occupations (BIS, 2016b).

This paper argues that it is possible to construct a TEF metric based on employment outcomes by combining the new earnings data beginning to emerge with reform of existing surveys focused on destinations and occupational progress. It would not be a perfect solution, which is anyway unattainable, but it would provide the basis for the development of a robust and educationally-focused assessment.

In the face of continuing scepticism, this paper:

- considers why outcome measures are important;
- discusses the two main sources of data, which are existing destination surveys and HMRC earnings data;
- suggests how these sources may be used together to provide a system focused on the difference that education makes to outcomes; and
- urges the current official review of destination surveys to ensure a continued focus on first destinations alongside other information.

Context

The Government's focus on employment metrics is nothing new, even if the specific proposals are.

Newspaper league tables (published annually by *Times Higher Education*, *Guardian*, *The Sunday Times* and others) have included employment metrics for years, all slightly different, but derived from the same source, the annual Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey of recent graduates.

DLHE has been the subject of considerable criticism and is not popular in the higher education sector.

Destination of Leavers from Higher Education annual survey

DLHE was largely designed by university career services to provide feedback on their activities. Over the years, the main survey has morphed from developmental feedback for a professional service into a high-stakes institutional performance measure used in newspaper league tables. All graduates are surveyed six months after leaving and a high response rate is achieved. The survey provides substantial anonymised data about the jobs obtained by leavers, down to job title, as well as recording subject studied and institution attended. Pay data is collected but via questions which achieve low response rates of around 20 per cent. Since 2006 this main survey (frequently referred to simply as 'DLHE') has been complemented by a longitudinal survey of leavers.

DLHE is being reviewed by its owner, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2016). This sets the high-level objectives of:

- **future proofing the system**, particularly changing labour markets and demands for richer data on graduate outcomes;
- **efficiency**, particularly enhanced use of technology to access and link existing data sets currently held separately;
- **fitness for purpose**, ensuring the data is usable in new and emerging contexts; and
- **supporting legislation**.

The review floats a number of new areas for graduate self-evaluation, addresses information gaps and raises questions

about survey design. It suggests four new measures of graduate outcomes that could be alternatives to destinations. They are:

- student engagement with employability provision;
- net promoter scores, which refers to whether respondents would recommend their course or institution;
- questions on subjective well-being; and
- measures of attributes and skills for life.

It also suggests expanding the range of employment data, notably to include more information on work and placement experience. The consultation document issued as part of the review included a comprehensive list of 128 questions. This paper focuses on the strategic issues which need to inform the redesign of the system rather than the details.

The final point of the high-level principles informing HESA's review, supporting legislation, refers back to the Government's plans. The Small Business Act (2015) has a section on graduate destinations that enables the 'Secretary of State to provide destinations information to the governing body of an institution' and permits the use of official earnings records. In 2016, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) published the first substantial attempt to make use of such data (Britton et al, 2016). It is tempting to believe that earnings data made available from this legislative change can replace other forms of analysis of graduate destinations, including that previously supplied by DLHE surveys.

Earnings are a well-understood common currency, key to graduates' life chances and can be obtained from an official source, HMRC. Indeed, the Government proposed in its 2016 higher education white paper to build a new Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset on these foundations (BIS, 2016a). The supporting technical consultation on the TEF suggested two further measures:

1. Use of the 'UK PI employment indicator', one of a set of longstanding UK performance indicators published by HESA. It is derived from DLHE data and measures the proportion of UK-domiciled graduates that are in employment, work or further study. This is of limited value since it is really just a measure of whether graduates are employed or not. It says nothing about the quality of employment obtained and so it is generally supplemented by other more in-depth measures.
2. An occupationally-based 'highly skilled employment' metric (BIS, 2016b), which also can be derived from annual DLHE survey data, although the proposal would involve a grouping and relabelling of existing occupational analysis. These proposals have allayed concerns that a crude income metric might dominate the TEF.

The main concern about an income metric is illustrated by the IFS study. Although it provides a mass of new description and original analysis, its main conclusions are in line with what we already know. Indeed the major issue discussed in its conclusion, the continuing advantage of having a wealthy family background in attaining high earnings, lies behind scepticism over whether the TEF can find an employment

metric that reflects educational excellence rather than socio-economic and other non-educational factors.

Why employment outcome data is important

It is important to develop good outcome data because:

- outcome measures matter to students;
- there are academic staff in higher education that reject employment outcome measures; and
- the very wide-ranging HESA review of DLHE risks distracting attention from outcomes in favour of less salient but currently in-vogue context data.

There are a number of inter-related reasons why employment outcomes matter. The first is that in the shift from elite to mass higher education, the easy assumption that graduates could step straight into a professional job, prevalent up to the 1980s, has come under challenge. While the 'graduate premium' remains impressive on average (Walker & Zhu, 2013), averages can disguise a wide spread of outcomes (Britton et al, 2016). **Most graduates do well in the labour market but it cannot be assumed that all will walk straight into a good job.** Each year, about 65 per cent of graduates are in graduate-level managerial and professional jobs after six months, rising to about 80 per cent after 40 months (Zuccollo, 2015), so a significant minority of graduates are not in 'good jobs' at these points.

Secondly, **the desire of higher education entrants to have**

better life chances is clear. Central to this is obtaining a good, reasonably well-paid job. When asked to identify the most important measures of teaching quality, students put outcome measures in first and second place (securing a 'good' degree and 'graduate employment statistics' respectively) (Hillman, 2016).

Thirdly, **higher education has been actively sold to first-generation student entrants as a path to the good life through widening access and participation policies.** Many are from modest means and increasingly take on substantial debts expecting to acquire first-rate employment. It is open to institutions to declare that they are focused on transformative education within campus boundaries and are not seeking to prepare their students for labour market success. Few transparently do. So, unless widening access and participation policies are to be cynical recruitment exercises, there is an ethical dimension to caring about employment outcomes.

Fourthly, pursuing social mobility is an implicit aim of widening access and participation and a central policy objective of the TEF. Social mobility often tends to be treated as synonymous with entry to university, yet there is evidence that disadvantage can carry through university life into the labour market, including for graduates from 'top' universities (Bathmaker et al, 2013). Indeed disadvantage can become further entrenched during study, for example among relatively disadvantaged students who live at home for economic reasons and are unable to develop their wider social and cultural capital (Purcell et al, 2013). There is disturbing data on the gap between disadvantaged and the most advantaged graduates'

acquisition of graduate-level employment of about seven per cent at six months continuing at the same level through to 40 months when most other gaps close (Zuccollo, 2015). **The implicit equation that 'access equals social mobility' is not tenable at least in its simple form.** We need labour market data, among other things, to assess progress and help devise strategies that impact positively upon social mobility.

Fifthly, there is **the desire to link TEF assessment to the ability to raise fees** at least to ensure that the real income to institutions is not eroded. The *2016 HEPI / HEA Student Academic Experience Survey* shows rising concerns about value for money and direct rejection by an overwhelming 86 per cent of respondents of the proposition that 'fee rises for excellent teaching are a good idea' (Neves and Hillman, 2016). On the other hand, a recent small-scale survey of applicants and students by UPP found that nearly three-quarters would be prepared to pay higher fees if the course to which they were applying gave a guarantee of a graduate-level job at the end (UPP, 2016). Employment outcome data, and specifically first destination data, might have a significant role to play in making a case for increased fees.

Sixthly, there is scepticism that outcomes do any more than reflect entry standards, subject studied and reputation-based institutional hierarchies unrelated to teaching excellence (Gibbs, 2015). **Entry standards matter, performance between subjects varies significantly and there are a number of important social variables too, including socio-economic background, gender and some aspects of ethnicity.** Institutional-level comparisons need to take account of these factors. However statisticians are quite capable of controlling

for these variables, providing they have the data, and do so routinely (see Zuccollo, 2015; Britton et al, 2016). Moreover, research that applies such statistical controls has identified important educational variables that have an independent impact on outcomes. These are degree class obtained (Walker and Zhu, 2013) and work experience embedded in and surrounding the curriculum – especially four-year degrees containing a sandwich year placement (Purcell et al, 2013; Sanahuja Velez and Ribes Giner, 2015), but also including shorter placements embedded in standard three-year undergraduate degrees (Thompson, 2016).

One of the proposals to enhance employment data in the HESA review of DLHE is to close an information gap by investigating in some depth graduates' experience of placements and work-based learning. This is a welcome development, which may show change is underway, albeit with a time lag before it begins to impact destination data.

Employment outcomes are only one important lens for looking at the impact of undergraduate education. It should not be seen as exclusive or competing with the need for enhanced process data, including from 'learning gain' initiatives (see Millward, 2015; Schleicher, 2016). The alternatives to destinations floated in the HESA review all have their merits, provided that the focus on destinations is not simultaneously lost.

It would, of course, be quite possible to have a process-only system for 'teaching excellence' that ignores labour market outcomes, but it would be a partial account of the impact and importance of undergraduate education and fail to meet the needs of key stakeholders.

Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education

Although DLHE is frequently referred to as a single survey, there are in fact two surveys: the main annual survey and a newer longitudinal survey. It is the main DLHE survey that is used in league tables. Although it has been the focus of criticism, it has important strengths.

1. **It surveys all leavers (300,000+ each year) and attains a high response rate (around 80 per cent).** There is a large bank of reasonably consistent data going back many years, on which other countries look enviously.
2. **It provides a great deal of detail on occupational destinations to higher education institutions and other users.** DLHE gathers occupational data, including whether graduates are in work or not, in graduate-level managerial and professional employment (equivalent to the highly-skilled employment metric proposed in the technical consultation about TEF), or travelling. Analysis is presented for a number of different populations annually and although anonymised, a large amount of data are available on job titles, ethnicity, gender and so on for institutions (and others) to access and interrogate. Many higher education institutions do just that. It is possible to identify all the job titles attained by students from particular courses and therefore whether there is a good match between course aims and actual performance in the near term. This is powerful information which at present does not appear to be available from other sources.

- 3. The detail and granularity of the data enable benchmarking.** For a few hundred pounds benchmark data can be purchased from HESA at subject level, enabling performance to be compared with similar courses with similar intakes elsewhere. This transparent performance data enables both awards for top performers and a focus on improvement where it is required.
- 4. It has provided evidence for innovation in employability provision** in higher education institutions in recent years, an area in which the UK can claim to be a leading international player (Pegg et al, 2012; University of Huddersfield, 2014).

However, DLHE has also been the subject of criticism. The main problems are discussed below.

- 1. The six-month survey point:** The early survey point was originally intended to reflect the first destinations of leavers with the thought that this was an outcome higher education could influence and support. But it has become clear that the data are not always a good guide to early career paths and a longitudinal survey was added to supplement them. Recent evidence from this longitudinal work shows a general convergence at 40 months between subject outcomes that diverge at six months (Zuccollo, 2015).

There is a case for retaining first destination data and accompanying it with longitudinal data to reflect early career trajectories beyond first destinations, both to inform student choice and because it provides a more balanced measure of subject and institutional performance. There is, however, no agreement on the best measurement point and the

further from graduation one assesses graduates' progress in the labour market, the more problematic it becomes to ascribe that to their degree studies alone. Moreover, the less it tells us about the current state of the course. Graduates' career progress will be affected by additional skills, qualities and connections acquired at work after graduation and independent changes in labour markets, especially in flexible labour markets, unrelated to their degree. First destination data may have its imperfections and limitations but so does long-run data and a sensible balance needs to be struck.

2. **Longitudinal DLHE:** This second survey was introduced in 2006 to supplement the annual survey six months after graduation. The main criticisms are that it lacks salience and has no impact. Based upon biennial sample data gathered by external collectors for HESA, rather than higher education institutions, it surveys graduates three-and-a-half years after exit. Response rates are typically in the 20 to 30 per cent range (27.6 per cent in 2014 – the fifth such survey) and numbers are too small to allow drilling down below institutional level to subject level within institutions in the way that the annual DLHE survey does. The longitudinal survey does, however, allow aggregate cross-sector analysis, for example on the progress of students with particular characteristics (Zuccollo, 2015). Owing to its limitations, the longitudinal DLHE survey data are not included in the Key Information Set (KIS) data published on university web sites or in newspaper league tables and therefore do not have great prominence. These factors may lie beneath footnote 17 in the TEF technical consultation which states that 'We are not proposing to use the longer term DLHE measure,

taken at 40 months, as it is a relatively small sample reported at national level and not designed to be representative of any specific provider' (BIS, 2016b).

Whether to continue with two surveys or not is one of the main issues raised in the HESA review. Options are presented for a single survey or two surveys at various intervals from six months to 48 months. The questions are framed in the context of a desire for more longitudinal data, and by implication, whether there is a better solution to the current two surveys.

The main risks in moving away from a six-month survey are to the first destination focus and the response rate. The first is of interest to students and the second enables detailed benchmarking at subject and course level. At the same time it clearly requires at least complementary longitudinal data. Experience of longitudinal research is that response rates tend to drop off substantially over time as the sample-based longitudinal DLHE itself illustrates. In time it may be that LEO will provide most of the longitudinal data required, albeit limited to earnings, but in the short-to-medium term that seems unlikely. Longitudinal DLHE would be much more influential and useful if it could be reformed to provide annual data, and in sufficient volume to allow institutions and users to drill down to subject level.

- 3. Methodology and allegations of gaming:** The origins of the main DLHE survey explain its in-house methodology, in which the survey of graduates and coding of responses is conducted by universities themselves. This has given rise to questions of consistency and suspicions of gaming. Some

institutions, for example, have switched their graduation ceremonies to coincide with the DLHE survey collection period in order to achieve high returns in an environment of excitement and celebration. Whether this affords any real advantage is debatable. Some institutions contract out DLHE data collection (for example, in London) and central data collection is floated in the HESA consultation. Caveats include: the scale and timeline of the national exercise (300,000 students annually within three months); the cost (although current cost is already being covered somewhere in the system); and the potentially negative impact on response rates that some fear external data collection might have. These risks need further assessment, but if they prove too great then existing controls could be strengthened to maintain confidence in the system. In particular, the audit function presently located in HEFCE but presumably to be transferred into the Office for Students (OfS) in future could establish a regular cycle of formal activity, perhaps auditing a sample of returns each year. It could also enhance its capacity to receive and follow up complaints.

4. **Defining graduate jobs:** DLHE uses the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). It is a standard way of classifying jobs that produces a hierarchy of levels or tiers and enables a boundary between graduate and non-graduate jobs to be identified. It is independent of DLHE and higher education, although the initial coding of graduate responses is done within institutions. The boundary between graduate and non-graduate jobs is open to argument. However, most of the criticisms levelled at DLHE are actually SOC coding issues (Peck, 2015). Occupational boundaries change over

time and some time lags are inevitable in any classification that is not conducted in real time. For example, at the time of writing, the police service is debating whether to become a graduate-only entry profession. The review of SOC by the Office for National Statistics will no doubt produce some updates and improvements. In that vein, ensuring frequent updating of SOC would help mitigate one of the main criticisms of its use although at the expense of some loss of comparability across years.

A crucial point overlooked by some critics of DLHE (who focus on narrow boundary issues) is that although the SOC may not be perfect, this feature of DLHE is actually one of its strengths in the present context. It enables occupational analysis of graduate success that both provides an alternative to earnings analysis and a relatively simple control for some of the distorting factors in earnings data.

The HESA consultation floats the idea of detailed skills analysis by combining HESA desk analysis of course and subject claims with a new 'battery' of questions. Its reduced list amounts to 12 new questions for graduates (HESA, 2016). It is left open whether this is intended to be a supplement or replacement for occupational analysis. As a supplement the idea has merit, but as a replacement it could be complex and confusing. A particular caveat is that experience suggests some questionnaire fatigue among students. Proposals for additional or substantially expanded student surveys, which this idea would require, should be tested with students before implementation.

In contrast, the technical consultation on TEF proposed a simple solution that kept the focus on outcomes. It proposed a 'highly skilled employment' metric based on jobs classified in SOC groups one to three, roughly equivalent to the current graduate-level 'managerial and professional' job label used to distinguish graduate and non-graduate jobs. The intention of the TEF consultation proposal is presumably to simplify the identification of 'good jobs' and destinations in the interests of clarity for users. It involves a pragmatic approach and a judgement that puts simplicity for users above sophistication of analysis. In the absence of evidence of student appetite for more surveys and/or contextual data, it seems reasonable, especially as there is scope for improving the responsiveness of the SOC system to changes in the labour market.

5. **Cost:** The annual six-month DLHE survey involves a considerable commitment of resources by higher education institutions, as the high response rate is achieved largely from labour-intensive telephoning of graduates and not from the online version of the survey. Many institutions employ temporary staff, often students, to undertake this telephoning. At the present time, the overall cost of the exercise is not known but the HESA consultation intends to address this and gather data on cost. Abandoning labour-intensive telephoning could be attractive from a cost perspective, but may have a big impact on the response rate and hence usefulness of the data. The main potential of data linking, identified in the HESA consultation as having potential to improve efficiency and quality, seems to be around earnings and benefits received by graduates, so at

the moment cost savings from this source could be limited. Most of the options for change are likely to involve additional costs at least in the transitional phase.

Changing DLHE

DLHE has strengths that are worth retaining and weaknesses that need to be addressed. Some of the ideas floated in the HESA consultation, if adopted at the expense of destination and occupational data, could leave DLHE providing nuanced and complex reflective data from graduates that are simply overpowered by earnings data in assessments and league tables. DLHE destination data provide an alternative and complementary basis to LEO's focus on earnings for evaluating graduate destinations that should be retained.

A reformed DLHE should keep a focus on destinations and occupational analysis utilising the SOC. The current two-survey format should be retained, at least in the short-term, as the risks of doing otherwise are too high. An early survey to capture first destinations and ensure a high response rate, at six months or a similar period, has value for prospective students. New questions on whether students have received placements or other forms of work-based learning as suggested in the HESA consultation, are supported by labour market research as a key educational variable and could usefully be included. Other ideas for student self-assessment floated in the HESA consultation should be treated with caution unless they can show equivalent labour market salience. Existing longitudinal DLHE should be improved to provide annual data, preferably at subject level, to sit alongside short-term first destination data. If it can be developed sufficiently, over time, to provide course

level occupational data, that would be highly desirable and should be an aim of the longitudinal survey.

There is a pragmatic case for continuing to utilise the SOC classification of jobs in the absence of a clear alternative, although ideally with frequent updating to more quickly reflect changes in the jobs market. The early destination survey could be centralised or contracted out. If, after receiving consultation responses from institutions, centralising and contracting out appear prohibitively expensive or likely to significantly reduce response rates, the current system could be enhanced by substantially augmenting the role of audit to protect and give confidence in data integrity.

Earnings and pay

The main DLHE survey has always included income data but those data derive from survey questions that are disliked by graduates and often produce much lower response rates than other questions. It is an acknowledged area of weakness. The HMRC data now emerging should be a substantial improvement on DLHE pay data, although there are important reasons for not relying on earnings as the sole basis for assessing graduates' progress in employment.

Jobs should not only be judged on the basis of financial rewards. For example, cultural and creative industries are an important sector of the economy and fulfil functions that are central to both human society and broader creative innovation but where earnings are typically relatively low. A different but similar case can be made for some health and caring professions where roles may have value to users and society not captured

by pay alone. Earnings are not the only, some might even say main, criterion by which such roles should be evaluated and are rarely what attract people to work in such sectors. Indeed it is noticeable that in the recent poll for HEPI quoted earlier, 'Salaries for new graduates' features well down the list of suggested measures of the quality of teaching, unlike 'graduate employment statistics', suggesting that students make quite nuanced choices, favouring more rounded 'statistics' over pay (Hillman, 2016).

There are some practical objections to earnings as the dominant metric for employment outcomes too. Firstly, whether earnings data will provide the granularity and transparency to enable meaningful comparison below institutional level is still unknown. Tax data is understandably well protected, and may not be released to universities with the freedom that exists on data from DLHE. The white paper promises pilots involving earnings data at subject level in autumn 2016 (BIS, 2016a) and it appears that detailed subject level data will not be available for about four years. This will severely limit LEO's short-term usefulness and it is as yet unclear how good the longer term data will be.

Secondly, there is the issue of relevance for prospective students and parents. The IFS study mentioned above took years to emerge, involves a sample of only 10 per cent of data and covers a period of 10 years before the current fees regime had been introduced (Britton et al, 2016). In that time, some courses will have disappeared, completely new ones begun and others changed beyond recognition. If the LEO earnings metric is very long-term some nearer-term outcome data reflecting degree courses on offer to current prospective students will be required.

Thirdly, earnings as a sole or dominant metric may create perverse incentives for some higher education institutions. There are marked imbalances in pay by occupation, industry and region. Average salaries vary significantly across the UK and tend to be lower outside London, in some cases vastly lower. In April 2015, the Office for National Statistics reported that by local authority the City of London had the highest median gross weekly pay of £921 and North East Derbyshire the lowest at £389 (ONS, 2015). It will be important for any credible exercise to be able to recognise and control for this variability when comparing institutional and subject outcomes from institutions in different parts of the country. One way of doing this is to compare occupational outcomes within subjects, independently of the pay that they attract.

An income metric crudely applied would suggest that in order to maximise their employability outcomes, institutions should seek to export as many of their graduates as possible into high-paid industries (stereotypically financial services), located in London. An example of the potentially negative impact of such incentives is where higher education institutions play a lead or 'anchor' role in a relatively modest regional economy:

- in developing the skills agenda with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and business partners;
- as a major source of innovation through spin-out companies and graduate business start-ups;
- in supporting local schools through partnership and sponsorship (and thus development of the skills pipeline and school improvement strategies);

- by promoting social enterprise through work with local communities and third-sector organisations, strengthening community resilience; and
- by working with local partners on economic and social development to attract inward investment and forestall the flight of business elsewhere (Allan, 2015).

Incentivising such institutions to export their graduates elsewhere would strip the local labour market of the very talent most likely to lead economic renewal. It also sits uneasily with other policy objectives designed to rebalance the national economy, for example devolution.

One approach to mitigating the risk of perverse incentives might be to encourage an element of assessment around institutions' own targets. In the main, this would involve bringing into the foreground and making more transparent existing institutional goals. Institutions could be encouraged to declare their own indicators or targets for employment outcomes, based on their mission and strategic priorities, against which their performance could then be assessed by stakeholders.

In this context, prospective students, parents, employers, careers advisers, teachers and other stakeholders could make their own judgements about the adequacy of the institution's employability ambition and its performance against the targets it has declared. For example, some might openly aim to fill the City of London with stockbrokers, others to increase the pool of graduates recruited and retained within local and regional labour markets, perhaps as an integral part of plans with an LEP to attract inward investment. Recruiting and retaining

high proportions of graduates locally, even if earnings levels compare unfavourably with London or other regions, might be an explicit target and, if attained, judged an excellent outcome.

Conclusion

Good HMRC earnings data will be an improvement on DLHE pay data. For reasons of principle and practice, earnings data are likely to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for assessing employment outcomes in the round. A reformed DLHE system, including an enhanced, annual longitudinal survey, can offer occupational data to sit alongside pay data, providing a wider view of labour market performance and the jobs attained by graduates. Occupational and earnings data can and should be subject to statistical controls to identify educational variables and excellence rather than the impact of socio-economic, subject and other non-educational variables.

Both occupational and earnings data should be available with sufficient granularity to enable enhancement action at institutional and subject levels, designed to improve relative performance and hence overall student experience and outcomes. Unless or until there is an alternative way of delivering good occupational data, a reformed DLHE system should be retained.

At some point the erosion of the unit of resource (per-student funding) will have to be broached in ways that are persuasive to existing and prospective students. The UPP survey quoted earlier suggests that first destination outcomes may be important for persuading students that in some cases at least, there is a good case for raising fees following TEF assessment.

Although the UPP findings can only be regarded as indicative, it is not a propitious time to contemplate a move away from the first destination focus that the DLHE main survey currently provides.

This analysis therefore suggests that the TEF should contain a small basket of measures built on existing foundations and LEO data. These are:

- **an enhanced destination-focused DLHE main survey, including new information on whether students have experienced a placement or other form of work-based learning;**
- **an enhanced, annual longitudinal DLHE;**
- **use of the SOC classification to identify advanced or ‘highly skilled’ graduate outcomes;**
- **HMRC earnings data;**
- **and an institution-specific element in which performance is measured against declared targets.**

This data can then be incorporated into the UNISTATS website, which the Government wishes to develop, and/or a revised KIS already embedded in universities websites. The current review by HESA would be well advised to focus on the scope for enhancement, and avoid throwing the baby out with the bath water.

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September 2016 ISBN: 978-1-908240-17-0

Higher Education Policy Institute
99 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6JX
Tel: 01865 284450 www.hepi.ac.uk

Printed in the UK by Oxuniprint, Oxford

Typesetting: Steve Billington, www.jarmanassociates.co.uk