

**Eddie Blass, Anne Jasman, Steve Shelley**

University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom

**Scenarios for the future of the HE sector: where will be in 25 years time? (0116)**

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This paper is based on a range of scenarios developed in a HEFCE funded project contributing to the development of a framework for the future of Higher Education (HE) in the UK. In considering the policy implications of the scenarios, five quite different futures for HE in the UK are presented. The paper challenges the current discourse of HE, offering alternatives on a continuum from the 'elitist' provision that history maps, to a 'populist' corporate provision that contradicts the very 'idea' of a university itself. All the scenarios are possible and indeed probable according to policy decisions made by governments now. By exploring the implications of key policy decisions now, this paper outlines issues for sectoral lobbying, and identifies areas that individual institutions may want to consider with regard to a longer term view.

Scenarios for the future of the HE sector: where will be in 25 years time?

The aim of this paper is to provide insight into the future of the UK higher education (HE) sector. By adopting a futures methodology stemming from a broad ranging literature review and scenario planning activity, five scenarios for the future of the HE sector have been developed, each drawing on different drivers and assumptive circumstances.

The scenarios present the 'extreme' positions that would arise if certain drivers dominate the future direction of the sector, and are written in deliberately provocative language to evoke an emotional response. The scenarios can then be used to help senior managers, policy-makers and strategists 'experience' what the sector would 'feel' and 'look' like in 25 years time, to allow them to generate ideas, actions and strategies to either ensure or prevent any particular scenario from occurring.

The five scenarios presented are:

1. 'Leading knowledge creation' in which the credit crunch results in societal paradigm shift to debt aversion in future generations. The full-time undergraduate market diminishes in favour of part-time offerings in Further Education, and Higher Education focuses on post-graduate offerings only. The sector shrinks back to 'Ancients' and 'Red-Bricks'. A new 'professional' academic role develops alongside 'traditional' academic role to manage knowledge transfer interface and secure funding. The sector is concerned with leading innovation and contribution to policy, offering high level, conceptual development in an increasingly specialised manner.
2. 'Responsive knowledge creation' in which disciplines divide as corporate sector development leads to a funding stream for professional activity and the sector divides. 'Pure' providers funded by research

councils, Mode 1, 'just in case' knowledge production amounts to 20% of sector workforce and 10% of students; and 'Applied' providers have strong links with industry and engage in practice based research and qualifications, Mode 2, 'just in time' knowledge production. Differential contracts and terms between pure and applied providers develop and there is some movement of staff within the sector from pure to applied but not the other way round.

3. 'Regional conglomerates' in which funding cuts necessitate savings in core services as 55% of the current workforce in the HE sector are not academics. Regional universities exist, dispersed across a range of campuses, providing education at all levels to anyone who is beyond school age. Institutions are mutually dependent, and movement is between teams and institutions within the region. The role of the academic is lower status and less specialist than is currently the case. Harmonisation of terms and conditions exist across the sector. Competition in the labour market only occurs inter-regionally, not intra-regionally.
4. 'No government funding' in which we see the economy continuing in recession to the point that government funding of students in HE sector is withdrawn and students are expected to fund themselves. A small, privatised sector remains solvent in a highly competitive market place. Academics expected to generate enough income to sustain their position in order to remain in employment and a 'celebrity' culture develops. The student body and workforce are both largely part-time and institutions are internally competitive. Networking is key. Personalised contracts based on minimum required to secure services/employment.
5. 'Full government funding' in which societal unrest arises in response to the decline of the education system, and this results in a 2% National Education Tax (as an alternative to a VAT rise) which gives everyone an entitlement to free undergraduate education. The sector expands, is largely modularised and is the envy of other nations. The concepts of quality and student satisfaction converge. National bargaining equalises employment around the country. Competition ceases and collaborative working dominates, but the sector is not homogenous. Long term career structures develop with a multitude of opportunities in lifelong learning and wider curriculum activities.

A number of issues arise from the scenarios, including the obvious issues around funding, governance, leadership, the nature of the academic career, the nature of the professional career, and the nature of the future student. Other less obvious issues are also identified, including the nature of the psychological contract, the development of intellectual capital, the role of HE in society and the socio-political agenda, and the philosophical undermining of the 'idea' of the University.

This paper is based on a range of scenarios developed in a HEFCE funded project contributing to the development of a framework for the future of HE in Britain. In considering the policy implications of the scenarios, this paper draws out five quite different futures for HE in the UK, offering a stepping stone indicator at the 10 year point. The paper challenges the current discourse of HE, offering alternatives that place us somewhere on a continuum from the 'elitist' provision that history maps, to a 'populist' corporate provision that contradicts the very 'idea' of a university itself. All of the

scenarios are possible and indeed probable depending on the policy decisions made by government now. By exploring the implications of key policy decisions now, this paper outlines areas that the sector may wish to consider for lobbying for action, and identifies areas that individual institutions may want to consider with regard to a longer term view than a five year plan.