



SRHE News

Issue 32–April 2018



SRHE

Society for Research into Higher Education
Advancing knowledge Informing policy Enhancing practice

73 Collier Street
London N1 9BE
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)20 7427 2350
F +44 (0)20 7278 1135
E srheoffice@srhe.ac.uk

www.srhe.ac.uk

Director: Helen Perkins
Registered Charity No. 313850
Company No. 00868820
Limited by Guarantee
Registered office as above

Editorial: The Toby Young saga and what it tells us about the blunders of our governments

Once upon a time some politicians used to take the blame for their departments, even when civil servants were perhaps more at fault (famously, in the [Crichel Down](#) affair). And once upon a time the integrity of the civil service could be relied on, even or especially amid government mistakes. Things have moved on, even in the five years since the magnificent *Blunders of our governments* (King and Crewe, 2013) appeared. A review of that book by the First Civil Service Commissioner (and former DfE permanent secretary) Sir David Normington [on the Civil Service Quarterly blog](#) said:

“A common feature of the “blunders” is the extent to which policy development gets separated from the realities of the world ... small groups of like-minded people in Whitehall ... share the same set of assumptions and fail to test those assumptions outside the group. The group often assumes that there is only one way of doing things: a common example until recently was the assumption that the private sector is always superior in know-how and efficiency. They often have little understanding of how people on the receiving end of the policy will behave or react – what the authors call, “cultural disconnect” ... this is frequently made worse by “operational disconnect” ... the divorce between those who make policies and those charged with implementing them...” ... since the days of Margaret Thatcher, Ministers have been judged by how active they are: by their ability to get things done, to set short deadlines, to drive things forward. This can sometimes make it difficult for civil servants to get their concerns and reservations heard. Those who have expressed doubts or argued for slower implementation, say the authors, have increasingly seen their careers blighted and been characterised as the blockers of change.”

Normington was defending the civil service, but in the Toby Young saga we see something less defensible. We are accustomed in HE to the cultural and operational disconnect: now the words of another civil servant have condemned not only the politicians but also the civil servants involved.

Toby Young was appointed to and then dis-appointed from the Board of the Office for Students over a few days in January 2018, despite [the attempt by Minister Jo Johnson](#) on 8 January to defend his appointment in Parliament. Following a media firestorm we had learned [what Toby Young wrote](#) about being invited to speak at the Brasenose ‘Gaudy’ – gathering for alumni – in 2008. It was also revealed that Young in 2017 attended a [notorious eugenics conference](#) at UCL, booked as an external event. His involvement was exposed by *Private Eye* and Ben van der Merwe of *London Student*. Anthony Seldon (VC at Buckingham, and a fully-paid-up member of those ‘like-minded people in Whitehall’) tweeted and [wrote in support of Young’s appointment](#) before doing a 180-degree turn, as [he tried in vain to justify](#) in *Times Higher Education* on 10 January 2018. Seldon then declared that Young was no longer, contrary to Young’s claim, a visiting fellow at the University of Buckingham. His supposed three-year term would have lapsed in 2014, but in Buckingham’s recent ‘Festival of Higher Education’, Young was a speaker and was still described as a visiting fellow, as [Solomon Hughes reported](#) for Buzzfeed on 17 January 2018. Well, it was still the pantomime season: “He’s behind you! Oh no he isn’t”. [Jack Grove reported](#) Young’s departure for *Times Higher Education* on 9 January 2018, and Peter Scott said [‘The universities’ Faustian pact of 2010 gave us Toby Young’](#) in *The Guardian* on 9 January 2018, an argument given greater credence by media reports on 20 March 2018 that UUK had [decided not to object](#) to Toby Young’s appointment for fear of upsetting the government.

So who **was** responsible for the debacle? Martin Paul Eve (Birkbeck) did some FOI digging in DfE for [the answer](#): “Despite his later back-tracking about how it was “right” for Young to resign, Michael Barber chaired the panel that appointed him (and the other members of the OfS board). This is not unexpected but it casts serious doubt on his judgement ... Gordon McKenzie from GuildHE was on the panel ... Previously, he was [Deputy Director](#), HE Strategy and Policy at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Stephen Jones, the senior civil servant, lists himself as “Deputy Director, Higher Education Landscape Reform” on LinkedIn.” Barber, the guru of ‘deliverology’ for Prime Minister Tony Blair, was appointed then because he favoured the political direction of the government, and presumably appointed now as chair of the OfS Board for the same reason.

The Commissioner for Public Appointments investigated the Toby Young furore and issued [a damning report](#) on 26 February 2018, which also took into account the non-appointment of an ‘acceptable’ student candidate. He complained that the DfE had delayed his investigation by five weeks by failing to supply documentation and said there was not due diligence in Young’s appointment. He noted that the preferred student candidate had their social media history exhaustively checked but there was no such check for Toby Young. Appointment of the preferred candidate was favoured by civil servants and chair Michael Barber but was overruled mainly because of objections by special advisers, who took exception to the candidate’s history of activism as a student union officer. The Commissioner concluded that “this competition had serious shortcomings”. When the three interviewed and appointable students were all rejected, an interim appointment was made from the OfS student panel. In this process ‘sift notes’ were said by DfE not to exist because OfS conducted the process, but the Commissioner unearthed a civil service note implying that lack of student union ties was an important consideration for Ministers. The DfE failed to consult the Commissioner explicitly about this interim appointment, contrary to the Governance Code for public appointments, and made a public announcement implying it was a permanent not interim appointment. The DfE then wriggled unconvincingly to try to justify its prevarication about the terms of appointment. The Commissioner expressed his ‘serious concerns’ and said: “It is now clear that the central reason was because of the political views and student union links of the main preferred candidate judged appointable by the panel”. Amatey Doku, Vice President for HE of the NUS, [pointed out, in a delicious piece for WonkHE](#) on 5 March 2018, the hypocrisy of the government in general and Jo Johnson in particular, in no-platforming NUS for advocating free speech (with NUS opposing the Prevent strategy).

All of this adds up to what, these days, seems to be politics as usual, but now with the added ingredient of the degradation of civil service integrity. The past and present civil servants who made up the panel appointing members of the OfS Board had been initially willing to go along with the appointment of Toby Young, a politically-favoured candidate whose unsuitability should have been obvious. They had at least tried to appoint one of their interviewees as the student representative, but had failed to overcome the opposition of the politically-appointed special advisers in DfE and at No 10, who are deemed to be [‘temporary’ civil servants](#). When the Commissioner tried to investigate, he was subject to obfuscation and delay, ultimately the responsibility of the permanent secretary, one Jonathan Slater, lately of the Cabinet Office, whose previous jobs include being Director of the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit, whose first Director was ... Michael Barber.

The Americanisation of the civil service seems to be almost complete. At the top level, and for several layers down, the Toby Young saga suggests that the civil service comprises people appointed for their support of, or at least readiness to comply with, the political preferences of the day, overriding their duty to offer impartial advice on policy and its implementation. Oliver Wright reported for *The Times* on 15 March 2018 on recent research by Andrew Kakabadse (Henley Business School), commissioned by Parliament’s Public Administration Committee. Kakabadse’s report suggested that “about half of cabinet ministers do not have a properly functioning relationship with their permanent secretaries” and “The report also found evidence of ministers breaking the code of conduct by directly intervening

in the appointment of supposedly impartial officials”. Wright’s story ended with a quote from a Cabinet Office spokesman: “It is important that the civil service acts with complete impartiality, and has always prided itself on supporting the elected government of the day to carry out its mandate.”

Perhaps all is not lost. An earlier civil service reform introduced management boards including non-executive members to oversee government departments, and the DfE does indeed have [such a board](#). How do people get appointed as non-executives? Well, if you give £3250 to Michael Gove, former Secretary of State for Education, and about £65000 altogether to the Conservative Party, it might help. Those were the donations by David Meller, the now-disgraced chair of the Presidents’ Club, whose sleazy men-only-plus-women-hostesses event in January was exposed by the *Financial Times*. Meller was a trustee of Michael Gove’s Conservative-leaning think tank Policy Exchange and had just been awarded a CBE in the 2018 Honours List, but when the FT story broke he was forced by No 10 to resign from the DfE Board. He was also co-chair of the Apprenticeship Delivery Board with Nadhim Zahawi, who was made a minister in the DfE in January 2018. Zahawi also attended the Presidents’ Club event: he said that he saw no untoward behavior but left early because he felt ‘uncomfortable’, an apparently contradictory combination. Paul Waugh had the whole [story for The Huffington Post](#) on 24 January 2018.

DfE civil servants trying to respond to the Commissioner for Public Appointments were between a rock and a hard place. Saving the minister and his fellow-travellers in OfS from their mistakes was a hard place to be, but the civil servants’ biggest mistake was losing hold of the rock of civil service integrity. Perhaps all is lost, after all.

Contact us



SRHE News Editor: Professor Rob Cuthbert
rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk (00 44) 1275 392919

Rob Cuthbert is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Management, University of the West of England and Joint Managing Partner, *Practical Academics* rob.cuthbert@btinternet.com.

Editorial policy

SRHE News aims to comment on recent events, publications, and activities in a journalistic but scholarly way, allowing more human interest and unsupported speculation than any self-respecting journal, but never forgetting its academic audience and their concern for the professional niceties. If you would like to suggest topics for inclusion in future issues, to contribute an item, or to volunteer a regular contribution, please contact rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk. We aim to be legal, decent, honest, truthful, opinionated and informed by scholarship. We identify named individuals with their employing institutions. *News* content is written by the editor except where authors are identified or sources are acknowledged. *Comments and suggested additions to editorial policy are welcome.*

Future editions of *SRHE News*

Copy deadline for *SRHE News* Issue 33: **31 May 2018**

The SRHE Blog

We welcome contributions from SRHE members at any time for [the SRHE Blog](#), which is now read in more than 100 countries across the world. Blog posts may also appear as items in *SRHE News*, and

vice-versa. Some blog posts are now being published in more than one language, and contributions may be submitted in languages other than English. Please email contributions, in any language, to rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk or rob.gresham@srhe.ac.uk.

Contributions and comments from SRHE members keep *News* in touch with what is going on in higher education research around the world: please let the editor know of any personal news or contributions you would like to submit for future issues. Just email rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk

Contents

Editorial: The Toby Young saga and what it tells us about the blunders of our governments	1
Government and Higher Education Policy	7
Policy and funding in England	7
The HE Finance Review	8
Office for Students	10
Private and for-profit colleges	11
Strategy, Leadership, Governance and Management	12
VCs' pay	13
In the duck-house <i>by Paul Temple</i>	14
Staff	15
UCU strike over USS pensions	16
Teaching, Learning and Assessment	17
Beware of slogans <i>by Alex Buckley</i>	17
Preventing Plagiarism – Professional Development Programme <i>by Caroline Jones and Gill Mills</i>	20
The Teaching Excellence Framework	21
Access and widening participation	22
Students	23
Quality, Standards, Performance, Evaluation	24
Quality and standards	24
Performance, evaluation and rankings	24
Research	24
Doing good by wealth <i>by Paul Temple</i>	25
Research into higher education	26
Challenges of multilingual studies <i>by Aliandra Barlete</i>	26
Publishing	27
Ethics and Academic Freedom	28
Ethics and Integrity	28
Global Perspectives	29
Africa	29
Zimbabwe	29
Asia	29
India	29
Pakistan	29
South Korea	30
Australasia	30
New Zealand	30
Europe	30
Denmark	30
Italy	31
Russia	31
Turkey	31
Ukraine	31

North America	31
Canada	31
United States.....	32
South America	32
Chile	32
Society News	32
Small ads	34
Mind your language	34
What's in a name?	34
Where have all the questions gone? <i>By James Hartley</i>	35
And finally	35
Ian McNay writes ...	36

Government and Higher Education Policy

Policy and funding in England

New faces in the Department for Education

Damien Hinds, appointed Secretary of State for Education in the January 2018 reshuffle, was once chair of the all-party group on social mobility. Its first report (in May 2012), [Seven Key Truths about Social Mobility](#), tells you what he thinks, or at least used to think, about the subject. Sam Gyimah is the new Minister for Higher Education: David Kernohan of *WonkHE* listed the [items in his in-tray](#) on 9 January 2018. Gyimah was reported as saying universities were *in loco parentis*, an apparent throwback to the 1960s and 1970s which David Malcolm (NUS) [analysed](#) for *WonkHE*. There were mixed responses to the end of Jo Johnson's era. [Nick Hillman was quick to write effusively](#) about his tenure, but he would, wouldn't he? [Andy Westwood](#) (Manchester) was more balanced, but Dorothy Bishop (Oxford) was probably much nearer the most common opinion in the sector with her highly critical ['end of term report'](#), on the website of the Campaign for Defence of British Universities. SRHE member Steve Jones (Manchester) called [on Research HE*](#) for the link between HE policy and party politics to be 'defused'. Good luck with that one, Steve.

T-levels a 'meaningless political lie'

Times Education Supplement editor Ann Mroz pulled no punches in [her 9 February 2018 article](#), pointing out that some elite universities were already signalling that they would not recognise T-levels, the latest in a long line of government initiatives to achieve 'parity of esteem' for vocational courses.

Government getting more worried about teacher recruitment

Jess Staufenberg's [story in Schools Week](#) on 28 February 2018 said the government is increasingly anxious about teacher recruitment. DfE confirmed that 'suitability to train to teach' is the criterion for selection for teacher training, rather than 'suitability to teach', and [applicants would no longer be locked out from applying to teach if they fail the entry skills](#) test in maths and English three times in a row. The change will make about 9,000 people eligible to retake the test.

What academics think often doesn't matter, and what matters is often not what academics think

Paul Burstein (Washington) argued in [his article](#) in the *Policy Studies Journal* (online 28 January 2018) that: "Researchers pay much attention to hypothetical determinants of policy unlikely to matter very much, and little attention to those likely to be the most important. "

The perils of big data

Hamish Robertson and Joanne Travaglia (both University of Technology, Sydney) [wrote for The Impact Blog](#) on 7 February 2018 about the risks of using big data applications in social policy: "The genuine risk is that the evidence produced through the lens, even more than the mechanisms, of big data ... will be elevated *ipso facto* to the status of "science" ... the social policy field will risk not just replicating but magnifying the inherent assumptions and inequalities rather than addressing them."

[Manifesto for the University of the Future](#)

Sounds like the kind of place I'd like to work. Trevor Dale (Cardiff) wrote this manifesto after a meeting of like-minded individuals in Manchester a few months earlier. Mark Leach of *WonkHE* on 9 March 2018 gave a brilliant lecture on ['The Enemy Within'](#), following up with [an agenda of change](#).

A group of Oxford academics have launched the world's first 'blockchain university', Woolf University, which they describe as 'Uber for students, Airbnb for academics', as [Rachael Pells reported](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 22 March 2018.

Cambridge VC [Stephen Toope blogged](#), and wrote to *The Times* on 16 March 2018, about the “damaging idea that students are only “consumers” ... for a generation now, politicians of all stripes have talked as if UK universities are broken, and hence in need of “market discipline” ... We are just beginning yet another review covering higher education that fails to get to the heart of concerns around the role of universities. The focus should be on what values our society expects to see reflected in our universities, not just value for money. We need a broader debate about the role of universities in the UK .. Universities are not the problem. We are part of the solution.”

MK Dons

Plans for a new ‘21st century university’ in Milton Keynes have been confirmed as the local council selected Cranfield University as the lead university for the new facility, to be called ‘MK:U’, as [reported on the BBC website](#) on 21 March 2018.



Don’t miss [Ian McNay’s blog](#) for SRHE on 14 February 2018: ‘English university education: inside one ex-minister’s mind set’, prompted by David Willetts’ seminar in January for the Centre for Global Higher Education, promoting his new book *A university education*. Ian and others were obviously in their usual forensic form but: “The poor man had been brave enough to enter the lions’ den and a light mauling was enough.”

The HE Finance Review

HEFCE’s [annual survey for 2016-2017](#) said: “... financial results for the sector as a whole in 2016-17 are sound overall, and are more favourable than projected in July 2017. However there continues to be a wide variation in the financial performance and position of individual HEIs.” Aaron Porter (Leadership Foundation), former NUS President, made [‘The case for a major review of higher education’](#) on *WonkHE* on 15 January 2018, but a [Times leader](#) on 20 January 2018 argued that the proposed Greening/Johnson tweaks of current policy (maintenance grants, not loans, for poorer students, lower interest rates for repayment) would be better than a root-and-branch review. Finally the Prime Minister announced the review. Here’s [how the government spun the speech](#), and here is [the Prime Minister’s speech in full](#). The [DfE/No 10 news release](#) said: “The wide-ranging review will be informed by independent advice from an expert panel ... chaired by Philip Augar, a leading author and former non-executive director of the Department for Education [no mention of his past merchant banking experience]. It will focus on ...

- Choice: identifying ways to help people make more effective choices between the different options available after 18, so they can make more informed decisions about their futures. This could include more information about the earning potential of different jobs and what different qualifications are needed to get them, as well as ensuring they have access to a genuine range of high quality academic, technical or vocational routes.
- Value for money: looking at how students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies, to ensure funding arrangements across post-18 education in the future are transparent and do not stop people from accessing higher education or training.
- Access: enabling people from all backgrounds to progress and succeed in post-18 education, while also examining how disadvantaged students receive additional financial support from the government, universities and colleges.
- Skills provision: future-proofing the economy by making sure we have a post-18 education system that is providing the skills that employers need. This is crucial in boosting the UK economy and delivering on the government’s Industrial Strategy.

Philip Augar will be supported by five panel members from across the post-18 education landscape ... Bev Robinson – Principal of Blackpool and The Fylde College ... Edward Peck - Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University ... Alison Wolf - (Baroness Wolf of Dulwich) a cross-bench peer ... Sir Ivor Martin Crewe - Master of University College, Oxford and President of the Academy of Social Sciences ... former Chair of the 1994 Group and President of Universities UK; Jacqueline De Rojas - President of techUK and the chair of the Digital Leaders board ... on the government's Digital Economy Council".

The Guardian's [editorial on 19 February](#) said it was 'the making of a market mess'. *The Times* leader on 19 February was similarly unequivocal - '[Not another one](#)' – "Only minor reforms are needed, and it is already clear what they are". The [Campaign for the Defence of British Universities](#) said: "... education ... serves the public good as much as it serves personal interests ... should be funded accordingly ... the main guarantor of educational quality is the sense of responsibility within institutions that are mindful of their academic reputation rather than their market share."

Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies rehearsed his irrefutable arguments for *The Times* on 19 February: 'The murky world of student loans, the national debt and a fiscal illusion'. There was [invaluable explanation](#) of the relative merits of graduate taxes and loans from Andrew McGettigan. The Treasury Select Committee issued a [report](#) on 18 February 2018 after its own investigation, arguing in particular for a reduction in the very high interest rates charged on student loans.

[Peter Mandelson was quick to join](#) the 'plague on both your houses' tendency, in the tendency's house journal, George Osborne's *Evening Standard* on 19 February: "I have been part of three university finance reviews under two prime ministers: the third I initiated myself ... If there were any radical solutions to sustaining a lower-cost, world-standard [higher education](#) on offer that could charge students substantially less, they would have been found by now."

Speaking at an Education Policy Institute conference in London on 21 March 2018, Lord Willetts said that many of the changes to student funding suggested by ministers as Theresa May [launched the review](#) of post-18 education funding in February were either politically naive, confused or unworkable. David Kernohan of *WonkHE* provided [a potted history of HE reviews](#) on 18 February; his colleague Arthi Nachiappan [voxpopped a range of commentators](#) and experts on 19 February. Best of all, [channelling the late great David Watson](#), Mark Leach gave us '[Eight category mistakes in the debate around the funding review](#)' on 18 February.

Have universities become 'bloated' under higher tuition fees? Channel 4 News [FactCheck asked the question](#) posed by Andrew Adonis, and answered 'No', on 23 February 2018. *Times Higher Education* as always has published [all the salary details](#).

Andrew McGettigan is [doing his best to keep rubbish about student loans and repayments out](#) of the mainstream media, but with limited success, as the BBC and even *Times Higher Education* succumbed to some nonsense 'analysis' from the *Intergenerational Foundation* in February 2018. McGettigan had turned his attention back to the government's sale of student loans in early January 2017, with a [series of blog posts](#) on his *Critical Education* site. Was it really a sale? He thinks quite possibly not, since the vehicle used to securitise the asset (the loans, ie the right to future repayment streams) seemed not to be sufficiently independent of government. Did they make a loss? The government obviously wants to say no, but McGettigan's analysis suggests the answer is yes. How will this show up in the government accounts? Making a loss suggests there should be an immediate hit on the capital account, but, somehow, there probably won't be.

A [HEPI survey](#) showed that two-thirds of students reject the idea of different fees for different undergraduate courses.

Office for Students

In a written Parliamentary answer, new HE Minister Sam Gyimah responded to MP Kevin Brennan's question about appointments to the OfS Board. 221 people applied for the position given to Toby Young, 11 were shortlisted, 10 were interviewed after one withdrew, all 10 were deemed appointable but Toby Young was appointed. In a parallel process 133 applied to be the student experience representative. Six were shortlisted, three were deemed appointable, but 'ministers chose not to appoint any of the three appointable candidates. Ministers then chose to make an interim appointment of one of the successful candidates appointed to the OfS Student Panel onto the OfS Board and will re-run a campaign for a permanent student representative on the OfS Board later in the year.' [Jack Grove reported](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 16 January 2018. Andrew Adonis had another [rant in The Guardian](#) on 23 January 2018 about the OfS, which he called the 'Office against Students'. This time he majored on Toby Young, supposedly a cunning plan by Jo Johnson to divert attention from the important financial issues to the non-issue of academic freedom and free speech on campus. There was [an Urgent Question in Parliament](#) from Shadow Secretary of State for Education Angela Rayner: Sam Gyimah drew the short straw, trying to defend the behavior of his predecessor Jo Johnson, now sailing serenely on as Minister for Transport despite allegedly misleading Parliament about the 'open, fair and transparent' process of appointment to the OfS Board. Gyimah settled for just defending the OfS in [Jack Grove's piece](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 28 February 2018.

The [13-member OfS student panel](#) 'will have a key role in advising the Board and senior team of the OfS'. It includes the elected President of NUS, who should of course be on the board.

[Catherine Boyd \(WonkHE\) explained](#) how the OfS is supposed to work on 8 January 2018, and Paul Greatrix (Nottingham) summarised the [new regulatory regime](#) for *WonkHE* on 9 January 2018. Gill Evans (Cambridge) sounded a warning about the rhetoric and approach of the OfS, in [her article](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 7 February 2018, and [a few days earlier](#) in *The Guardian* 'Struggling universities will be shut down not saved - it's not fair for students'. [Andy Westwood \(Manchester\) argued](#) in *Times Higher Education* on 26 February 2018 that the OfS might find itself sidelined or reshaped as a consequence of the Prime Minister's HE Finance Review.

[Chris Havergal reported](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 2 January 2018 on universities' concern that high annual OfS fees (up to £120,000) for low-risk low-regulation established universities might cross-subsidise regulation for high-risk high-regulation new entrants to the HE 'market' paying token annual fees of £1000. When the OfS published the final version of its Regulatory Framework it dropped the idea of a Registered (Basic) category, which means that on the OfS' own estimates about 120 providers will not be within the scope of OfS. The initially-proposed draconian requirements on senior staff pay have been dropped in favour of controls including an 'accounts direction' - which OfS say will be just as robust in checking senior pay and ensuring institutions justify its level. Lawyers Eversheds Sutherland gave [their take on the Framework](#) on 28 February 2018.

As the OfS washed its hands of 120 'alternative providers', Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) laid into the DfE for failing to act sufficiently on malpractice. [Eleanor Busby reported](#) for *The Independent* on 7 March 2018 that the PAC had concluded that "The alternative higher education provider sector presents 'too many opportunities to fraudsters'" and was a "chancer's charter". [The PAC report](#) also put down some serious markers for OfS: "As the Office for Students develops, we will be looking to see it demonstrate that protecting student interests is indeed central to its approach ... As one of its first tasks, the Office for Students should set out how it will investigate and clamp down on recruitment malpractice, faking attendance records and coursework, and opaque arrangements for validating degrees, and produce a robust plan for remedying these problems across the sector."

Paul Greatrix, a long-time student of ministerial directions to funding bodies and regulators, [anticipated, with tongue fully in cheek](#), ‘a bright new future of looking beyond the register and appendices stuffed full of deliverables’ when he read the [letter from the Minister](#) for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation to the Office for Students, setting out the government’s expectations. SRHE Vice-President Peter Scott was decidedly gloomy in *The Guardian* on 6 March 2018 about the prospects of the OfS actually being an Office for anything except what ministers don’t like: [‘Don’t let this university wrecking government masquerade as reformers’](#). Gill Evans (Cambridge) [ruminated for WonkHE](#) on 12 March 2018 about what the transition from HEFCE to OfS would mean and how it would work. She wasn’t optimistic, and asked [how independent is the Office for Students?](#) in the *Times Higher Education* on 18 March 2018, raising unresolved issues about OfS powers, independence and accountability. David Melville, previously VC at Middlesex and Kent and chief executive of FEFC, said we would miss HEFCE more than we realise, in his [blog for WonkHE](#) on 19 March 2018.

As UCAS published details of the 2017 admissions cycle ([visualised here](#) by *WonkHE*), [Anna Fazackerley reported](#) for *The Guardian* on 30 January 2018 that universities were at risk of closure now that the OfS had no remit to save struggling universities. Fazackerley wrote [more or less the same story](#) a year earlier. She was previously at the *Times Higher Education*, then became a speechwriter for David Willetts while he was minister for universities, and head of education for think tank Policy Exchange.

Minister announces FE Funding Review

[George Ryan reported](#) for *Times Education Supplement* on 19 March 2018 that skills minister Anne Milton had said during education questions in Parliament that day that the government was undertaking a post-16 education and funding review. The announcement was immediately welcomed by the Association of Colleges and the Sixth Form Colleges Association. However Secretary of State Damien Hinds seemed to contradict his own minister just two days later in the Education Select Committee by playing down the idea: [Paul Offord reported](#) for FE Week on 21 March 2018.

Private and for-profit colleges

Ups and downs for private providers in latest admissions statistics

Simon Baker ([for Times Higher Education](#)) dug into the latest UCAS statistics about 2017 entry to show (20 February 2018) that some private providers had suffered significant falls in enrolment in the latest admissions cycle: “... those with the largest falls in students on designated courses were St Patrick’s International College (down 24.6% on 2015-16), SAE Education (22.3%), BPP University (18.9%) and ICON College of Technology and Management (18.3%).” However, some showed large gains, notably Mont Rose College of Management and Sciences (up 48.7%), the University of Law (39.1%), the University College of Estate Management (38.2%) and the Academy of Contemporary Music (36.8%).

Coursera expands degree provision

With the failure of MOOCs to achieve anything like the outcomes they were hyped to deliver, Coursera has decided to expand its involvement in degree programmes, mostly at postgraduate level, as [Doug Lederman reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 6 March. Ellie Bothwell reported for *Times Higher Education* on 6 March 2018 on [the UK dimension of Coursera’s developments](#), with programmes in partnership with Imperial College and the University of London’s distance learning programme.

Private equity firm takes £35million in student loans

Sovereign Capital, a private equity firm, owns Greenwich School of Management and the British and Irish Modern Music Institute (BIMM), which together had students claiming £35million from the Student Loan Company. BIMM had just £7.2million in 2013-14 for 1372 students, but since its

acquisition by Sovereign Capital it has expanded to 4183 students who take £24.4million in loans, a larger sum than several universities including LSE, Harper Adams and SOAS. [Jack Grove reported](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 4 January 2018.

US for-profit sector in flux

Dan Bauman and Goldie Blumenstyk summarised recent major changes in the US for-profit sector in their [piece for The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) on 13 March 2018, notably Bridgepoint Education's [announcement](#) on 13 March that it planned to merge its University of the Rockies with the larger Ashford University. The combined institution will seek to convert to nonprofit status, and Bridgepoint will 'become an Online Program Management (OPM) company'.

For-profit switches to non-profit 'to avoid stigma'

Grand Canyon University, a Christian foundation with 19000 students in Phoenix and more than 70,000 students altogether, has tried for some time to switch from for-profit to non-profit status, 'to avoid the stigma' of being associated with the for-profit sector. Its accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission, has approved its latest bid, but the change still needs approval from the Education Department and the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education, as [Ashley A Smith reported](#) for *insidehighered.com* on 7 March 2018.

Strategy, Leadership, Governance and Management

Headhunter to promote diversity in HE governance

The Leadership Foundation has [appointed Jenny Tester](#) as a new associate for a project aiming to make university boards more representative. She previously worked for headhunters Perrett Laver, prominent in many HE senior appointments.

Open University VC Peter Horrocks: wrecker or rescuer?

Open University VC [Peter Horrocks told staff in June 2017](#) that the University should conduct a "root and branch review" of every aspect of the university's operations ... to achieve savings of £100m from the annual budget of £420m, the bulk of which would be invested in a digital transformation programme. He ... acknowledged that the scale of the changes would affect staff because they make up two-thirds of the OU's operating costs.' Then in December Horrocks made a speech which [Peter Wilby reported](#) on 9 January 2018, asking whether Horrocks was 'A visionary to save the Open University – or the man who will run it into the ground?' Former staff expressed scepticism about the changes [in letters to The Guardian](#) on 14 January 2018.

Kelly Coate to be Pro VC at Sussex

Congratulations to SRHE member Kelly Coate, appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor of Education and Students [at the University of Sussex](#). She will move to Sussex in July from King's College London, where she has been since 2013, after previous roles at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and UCL Institute of Education.

Retirements

Shirley Atkinson, the widely-respected VC of Sunderland, has [will step down](#) in Summer 2018 because of changes in her family circumstances. The Sunderland Board, well-served by Atkinson and her predecessor Peter Fidler, must hope they continue to have more success in selecting managers than the local football club.

Sir [Keith Burnett has announced that he will retire](#) as VC of Sheffield.

Resignations

Lou Anna K Simon, the Michigan State University president who faced criticism for the university's failure to respond to sexual abuse by Larry Nassar, [resigned on 24 January 2018](#), the university announced. Nassar, a gymnastics coach with roles at the university and in the national US gymnastics team, had earlier in January been convicted on multiple counts of sexual abuse of students and athletes under his supervision. [Andy Thomason reported](#) developments for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on 24 January 2018.

H Fred Walker, President of Edinboro University since 2016, had been brought in to try to turn the struggling North Pennsylvania university round, but he finally made one too many outspoken comments and he resigned on 27 March 2018, as [Jack Stripling reported](#) for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on the same day.

Headhunters refund \$110,000 Chancellor search fee to University of North Carolina

Prominent headhunters Witt/Kieffer refunded fees of \$110,000 to the University of North Carolina nine months after the North Carolina System board hired Cecil Staton as Chancellor of East Carolina University in April 2017. The issue was "inaccurate salary information for Staton's previous posts in Georgia," according to [a report](#) in *Business North Carolina*.

VCs' pay

HEFCE [published their report](#) on 20 November 2017 about a complaint about governance and senior staff pay at the University of Bath: "... while the remuneration committee meets the basic requirements of HEFCE and the guidance issued by the Committee of University Chairs, the university has 'a significant distance to travel' to open the committee's work to legitimate scrutiny through enhancing its use of various measures of transparency." In December 2017 the Committee of University Chairs issued [Draft Remuneration Guidance](#) for universities: any VC salary outside the range of 4.5-8.5 times the median salary in the university should be explained and justified. The *Times Higher Education* annual survey of [VCs' pay with all the details](#) was published on 22 February 2018. Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme on 26 February 2018, with [The Observer on 25 February](#), had an 'exposé' on UK VCs claiming £8million in expenses over two years. Mostly it looked like a few excesses in among a lot of appropriate expenditure, albeit at rates most university staff can only dream of.

Making a complete Horrocks of it 1

In an appearance with other VCs before the House of Commons Education Select Committee, Open University VC Peter Horrocks in effect said he deserved his £360,000 salary because he was having to make so many staff redundant, as [The Telegraph gleefully reported](#) on 21 February 2018.

Making a complete Horrocks of it 2

Open University VC Peter Horrocks was [forced to apologise](#) after claiming on a student forum that the university had allowed academics "to get away with not being teachers for decades".

Texas-Austin president will repay excessive expenses

University of Texas at Austin President Gregory L Fennes spent \$27000 over two years on first class and business flights for his wife, contravening the university policy, which authorises business/first class travel only for health or other good reasons. Fennes said he thought the flights were authorised; when they were revealed by internal audit he repaid the money, as [Emma Kerr reported](#) for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on 26 February 2018.

Pay at for-profits dwarfs VC pay elsewhere

Jack Grove [reported for Times Higher Education](#) on 18 January 2018 that one board director at the University of Law took home £1.6million last year, and salaries and other rewards at BPP University were also much higher than top salaries in the rest of UK HE. Meanwhile [Chris Havergal implied](#) on the same day that most VCs think the current fuss about VCs' pay is politically motivated, not a substantive issue. Not quite what the quoted survey said, but nevertheless it suggests that VCs have not yet recalibrated their thinking enough even to reflect widespread staff attitudes. [Jack Grove unearthed the 16% pay rise](#) which outgoing Kent VC Dame Julia Goodfellow enjoyed in the final year before she retired in July 2017.

In the duck-house *by Paul Temple*



Last autumn, David Palfreyman and I completed our book *Universities and Colleges* in the OUP "Very Short Introduction" series by compiling the index. It's a sign of how fast things have changed that if we were preparing the index now, just a few months later, I think that one entry would have to be on the lines of "Greed, vice-chancellors, accusations of." How on earth have we got to this?

Our late and much-missed friend and colleague, David Watson, would, I am certain, be incandescent with fury at how some of his fellow vice-chancellors have allowed Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Commons Education Select Committee, plausibly to compare some vice-chancellors' expenses claims with episodes from the 2009 Parliamentary expenses scandal. Halfon picked out the £1600 that Surrey University had paid to relocate its new VC's dog from Australia, comparing it to the notorious "floating duck island" which, as it happens, cost the same. As with the duck-house, it's the pettiness, the bathos – not to mention the comedic potential - that catch the attention. Was there nobody at Surrey able to say, "Vice-Chancellor, this really won't be a good look if (when) it comes out"? And if not, shouldn't there have been? Perhaps the duck-house and the Surrey dog will share a footnote in a future study of institutional ethics. When I worked with David, he took it for granted that our train journeys would be in standard class, using the cheapest possible advance-purchase tickets. The Channel 4 Dispatches investigation showed that UWE's VC had charged £10,000 for chauffeur-driven cars.

Our SRHE colleague Roger Brown has been quoted as saying that all this is the result of marketisation and corporatisation in higher education and while - naturally - I don't disagree with Roger, I think that there's another aspect, which is the leadership thing. If you're appointed as a VC (or to any other senior university post) today, it will be substantially on the basis of your claims to excellence in leadership, rather than in medieval French or particle physics. A leader should, the argument goes, be better in lots of ways compared with those she or he leads (or the appointment process hasn't worked): a better vision of the future of the organisation; better skills in presenting the organisation externally; better analysis of internal problems (sorry, challenges); and better ways of putting them right. (But not of course necessarily better at academic work – the purpose for which the university actually exists.)

It's a short step from here to the leader seeing themselves as different to everyone else in the organisation, because they've been told that they are fundamental to the organisation's success, perhaps even to its survival, in a way that others aren't. If that's the case, it's an even shorter step to believing that they should be paid, not just a little more, but on a completely different basis to everyone else. And expenses claims, which for the little people in the organisation mean arguments with Accounts over the paperwork for reclaiming bus fares, are for them, with their business-class flights and five-star hotels, a signifier of their difference, of their importance – an actual demonstration, in fact, of their leadership role.

In October 1915, the *Endurance*, the ship carrying the Anglo-Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton and his party to the Antarctic continent, was trapped and then crushed by pack-ice in the Weddell Sea.

Shackleton and his men abandoned their sinking ship and made temporary camp on the ice. The sleeping-bags available were either made of warm reindeer fur, or were woollen blankets stitched together. They were allocated by drawing lots, with Shackleton overseeing the process. The result, somehow, was that the ordinary crew-members got the reindeer fur and Shackleton and his officers got the blankets. And he led them all safely home.

SRHE member [Paul Temple](#), Centre for Higher Education Studies, UCL Institute of Education, University College London.

Strategic management theory and universities

Donald S Siegel (Arizona State) and Sohvi Leih (Loyola Marymount/UC Berkeley) edited a special issue of *Strategic Organization* on 'Strategic management theory and universities', but [their overview](#) in January 2018 didn't inspire confidence: "There are few theoretical frameworks to address organizational challenges and strategies of research universities. We conjecture that strategic management theory provides an opportunity to examine those challenges, such as increased competition, tight budgetary constraints, and rising stakeholder expectations. ... Our essay and the papers in this special issue address these issues." We conjecture they haven't looked in the right places: they self-cited Siegel as many times as Ron Barnett, Cohen, March and Olsen, Richard Cyert, Clark Kerr, and Oliver Williamson combined. The 'special issue' added up to two pieces using a dynamic capabilities framework, one looking at '[Strategy and narrative in higher education](#)' by Jeannie Holstein, Ken Starkey (both Nottingham) and Mike Wright (Imperial College), and a 'soapbox' piece from September 2017 by David Teece (UC Berkeley) arguing that dynamic capabilities was a better framework for interpreting strategy than organized anarchy. Not really a special issue, then, more of a belated collection giving lip service to what was perhaps advertised as something more extensive.

Staff

Liverpool wants 220 academics to leave

[The Liverpool Echo reported](#) on 22 March 2018 that Liverpool University aims to lose 220 academic staff through voluntary redundancy in a bid to 'reshape' its academic staff to become a 'top 100 university globally'.

The digital academic

Jessica Frawley (Sydney) wrote an [enthusiastic review](#) of *The Digital Academic: Critical Perspectives on Digital Technologies in Higher Education* by Deborah Lupton (Canberra), Inger Mewburn (Australian National University) and Pat Thomson (Nottingham) (eds) ([Routledge 2018](#)), for *The Impact Blog* on 11 March 2018.

Work-life balance

Times Higher Education's global survey of university staff views on work-life balance found academics feeling stressed and underpaid, and struggling to fit time for personal relationships and family around their ever-growing workloads as [Ellie Bothwell reported](#) on 8 February 2018.

Are universities inclusive learning organisations for women?

A special issue (25:1) of *The Learning Organisation* on learning organisations/organizational learning and gender issues had an [article](#) 'Universities as inclusive learning organizations for women?: Considering the role of women in faculty and leadership roles in academe' by Patricia Gouthro (Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Canada), Nancy Taber (Brock University, St. Catharines, Canada) and Amanda Brazil, (University of Prince Edward Island, Canada). They

argued that the impact of neoliberal values and underlying systemic structures that privilege male scholars need to be challenged through shifts in policies and practices to address ongoing issues of gender inequality in higher education.

Complex collaboration champions: *third space professionals working together across borders*

Natalia Veles, Margaret-Anne Carter and Helen Boon (all James Cook University, Townsville, Australia) had an [article](#) (online 31 January 2018) in *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* which analysed the literature on complex collaborations. They identified “three dimensions of collaborative engagements: ... culture ... local, national and global ... integration between professions/occupations; and ... the level of interaction/engagement ... the university third space serves both as a portal between dimensions and as a vehicle for advancing cross-border collaborations. Third space professionals are likely candidates to assume the role of collaboration champions.”

UCU strike over USS pensions

David Kernohan and Ant Bagshaw of *WonkHE* provided [A beginner’s guide to the USS dispute](#) on 5 March 2018. Sean Wallis (UCL) argued on *The Convention for Higher Education* website on 8 February 2018 that the problems with USS were ‘[Made in Westminster](#)’, expanding his letter to *The Guardian* with a well-argued piece. Alistair Jarvis of UUK set out [the employers’ argument](#) on 23 February 2018 in *iNews*: the ‘unaffordable’ versus the unacceptable. David Bailey (Aston) and John Clancy, a pensions analyst, argued that the Pensions Regulator was to blame, because of its ‘nonsensical approach to discount rates’, in an [article](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 13 March 2018. Pensions expert Ewan McGaughey (King’s College, London) [explained how pension schemes work](#) and argued for staff majorities on every university’s governing body, citing Adam Smith: when managers are unaccountable there is ‘negligence and profusion’. He followed up with legal observations on the [limits of universities’ powers](#) in cutting pay for strike action, for *The Impact Blog* on 17 March 2018.

Michael Otsuka (LSE) [blogged for Medium](#) on 12 February 2018 about the role Oxford, Cambridge and their constituent colleges played in the potential demise of USS. Oxbridge refused to continue pooling risk in the pension scheme with the other ‘weaker’ institutions and sought to separate their legal liability from others in the previously mutual partnership. They could not afford to leave the USS scheme, so they are now pushing for closure of the whole defined-benefit scheme, forcing all 68 member institutions to leave. Otsuka’s widely-circulated blog comments were [reinforced by The Guardian](#) on 21 February 2018.

Athene Donald, Master of Churchill College, Cambridge, weighed into the USS dispute with [a public letter to Alastair Jarvis](#) of UUK, saying that Churchill College had not responded to the UUK survey on USS and asking three pertinent questions: how were the responses from different institutions weighted?; how were non-authorized responses weighted compared with those for which there has been full consultation?; and, what weight was given to replies from non UUK institutions (such as Oxbridge Colleges) compared with those from UUK employers? [Jarvis replied](#) on 18 March 2018.

Last year USS chief executive Bill Galvin had [a 17% pay rise](#), lifting his salary to £566,000. Chris Havergal had [reported for Times Higher Education](#) on 28 July 2016 that the number of USS employees earning more than £200,000, once salary and bonuses are combined, had increased from 29 to 51. 13 staff earned more than £500,000, up from three the year before. The highest-paid employee in 2014-15 received between £900,000 and £950,000, in the previous year one worker earned about £1.6 million, with another on about £1.4 million. Galvin said the increases reflected a decision to take investment activities in-house that were previously outsourced, and strong investment performance that meant that the deficit, at £10billion, was £2.2billion smaller than it would otherwise have been.

ACAS talks led to a [provisional agreement between UCU and UUK](#) on 12 March 2018, but this was roundly rejected by the UCU membership within hours. A [new offer](#) was sent to UCU members on 23 March 2018, in UUK which made some major concessions.

Are students entitled to compensation if university staff go on strike? Smita Jamdar, partner and head of education at Shakespeare Martineau, gave her opinion [in ResearchResearch](#) on 11 February 2018: probably not, but it's not straightforward. Well, she is a lawyer, so that's as clear as it gets.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Beware of slogans *by Alex Buckley*



Slogans, over time, become part of the furniture. They start life as radical attempts to change how we think, and can end up victims of their own success. Higher education is littered with ex-slogans: 'student engagement', 'graduate attributes', 'technology enhanced learning', 'student voice', 'quality enhancement', to name just a few. Hiding in particularly plain sight is 'teaching and learning' (and 'learning and teaching'). We may use the phrase on a daily basis without thinking much about it, but what is the point of constantly talking about teaching and learning in the same breath?

The basic history is pretty straightforward. In the second half of the 20th century a number of ideas took hold in higher education based around the pre-eminence of learning: constructivism, approaches to study, student involvement/quality of effort, student-centred learning etc. These kinds of ideas contributed to what Robert Barr and John Tagg termed the 'learning paradigm': teaching is a means to the end of learning. The spread of the phrase 'teaching and learning' coincided with the desire to give greater attention to learning, but decades on, what impact does the constant conjunction of teaching and learning have on how we think about higher education?

I think that constantly referring to learning whenever we talk about teaching suggests one or both of two ideas: (a) **whenever teaching is happening, learning is happening**; and (b) **teaching and learning are equally important**. If these ideas are implied by the way we talk about higher education, it is worth asking whether they are helpful.

One complicating factor is that the term 'learning' is ambiguous. It can refer to an activity - 'I spent three months learning to play the clarinet but I can't play a single tune' - or to the result of that activity - 'I've finally learnt how to tie a bowtie'. That means that there are actually two versions of each of the ideas (a) and (b); and in each case, the version in which 'learning' is understood as an achievement is unhelpful. Firstly, it is deeply implausible to think that teaching is only happening if someone is successfully achieving learning; what would happen to the commonsense idea of unsuccessful teaching? Secondly, the idea that teaching is of equal importance to the successful achievement of learning directly contradicts the ideas that motivated the shift in terminology in the first place, that explicitly subordinated the value of teaching to the achievement of learning.

So the constant conjunction of 'teaching' and 'learning' implies two ideas. Each of those ideas comes in two versions (using the task and achievement senses of 'learning') and for both ideas the version where learning is understood with its achievement sense is deeply unhelpful.

If we want to avoid the unhelpful implications – that teaching requires the achievement of learning, and that teaching is of equal importance to the achievement of learning – then we really need to use a less ambiguous word, one that just has the activity sense of 'learn'.

Candidates have been suggested. In 1960 B.O. Smith proposed the neologism ‘pupilling’, to capture the activity that pupils engage in as opposed to the successful outcome of that activity. Gary Fenstermacher used the more HE-friendly ‘studenting’ in 1986, and in 2003 Pertti Kansanen used the more familiar word ‘studying’: “If we describe the activities of the teacher as teaching, we would prefer to call the activities of the students as studying”.¹

The term ‘studying’ does seem to capture the activity sense of ‘learning’ but without the achievement sense: there is nothing jarring about the sentence ‘I am studying Russian but so far I haven’t learnt anything’.

So a way of avoiding the problematic implications of ‘teaching and learning’ would be to use something like ‘teaching and studying’ instead. The ideas that phrase suggests are more helpful. Firstly, it would imply that whenever teaching is happening, studying is happening. This seems fair; it would be hard to claim that you were teaching if there was no-one engaged in any kind of reciprocal act of studying. Secondly, it would imply that teaching and studying are of equal importance, which is certainly more compatible with the ideas behind the shift away from teaching and towards learning. Some may feel that one of the lessons of the late 20th century ideas is that the *activity* of students is more important than the activity of teachers for the achievement of learning, and that therefore the implication is still a problem. Nevertheless, the key message of the ‘learning paradigm’ is that the value both of what teachers do *and* what students do lie in their joint contribution to the achievement of learning. ‘Teaching and studying’ communicates that much more clearly and unambiguously than ‘teaching and learning’.

I believe the constant conjunction of ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’, allied to the two meanings of ‘learn’, reinforces the idea that teaching necessarily implies the achievement of learning, and the idea they are of equal importance. Neither of those ideas are helpful. If we want to reinforce ideas that are more plausible, and more compatible with the contemporary pre-eminence of the achievement of learning, we should talk instead about ‘teaching and studying’. How we talk affects how we think, and the most common phrase for the most fundamental elements of what we do is a slogan that has become a burden.

Dr Alex Buckley is a Learning Enhancement Advisor at the University of Strathclyde and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. This article is based on a paper he gave at the SRHE Research Conference in December 2017.

¹ Kansanen, P. (2003) ‘Studying - the realistic bridge between instruction and learning. An attempt to a conceptual whole of the teaching-studying-learning process’, *Educational Studies*, 29(2-3): 221-232

First year drop-out rates still rising

Rebecca Finlayson (HEFCE) [blogged on 15 March 2018](#) about the continuing rise in first year drop-out rates. HESA data for 2015-2016 suggest that some, but not all, of the explanation is the changing profile of qualifications among entrants, with those qualified through BTEC increasing in number but also increasingly likely to withdraw during their first year. The proportion of degree students not in higher education after their first year is now 7.5%, up from the low of 6.6% in 2011-2012.

Class of 2017

Mario Ferelli and Rebecca Finlayson of the consistently excellent HEFCE Analytical Services team [blogged for HEFCE](#) on 11 January 2018 about degree results in 2017. The proportion of firsts and 2.1s increased from 2014-2015, even though the proportion of entrants with the highest qualifications (three A* at A-level, or three BTEC Distinction*s) fell slightly. ‘In 2015 we carried out analysis which

looked at degree outcomes for young students who graduated in the [period 2010-11 to 2013-14](#). That study found that around half the increase in the proportion of those qualifying with a first or upper second class degree was explained by changes in the student characteristics, particularly ... the level 3 qualifications ... that these students were holding when they entered higher education.'

Grade inflation?

Graham Virgo's (Cambridge) view, as [reported by Harry Yorke and Tony Diver](#) on 10 January 2018 in *The Daily Telegraph*, was that grade inflation is a fiction because students are working harder and staff are teaching better. Normally the *Telegraph* would rush to attack universities for a 40% increase in first class honours awards in four years, but for *Telegraph* readers Oxbridge 'dons' (a word now used only by journalists and crossword compilers) can't easily be gainsaid, so it was a fairly balanced piece. It still managed to end with one of the right-wing press's favourite academics: "'It sounds to me like a narrative designed to bat away criticism of what is an obvious problem,'" said Professor Alan Smithers [of] ... Buckingham University." [Liz Morrish's Academic Irregularities blog](#) last year gave chapter and verse of the Virgo-style argument. William Hammonds (UUK) asked '[Are today's degrees really first class?](#)' on *WonkHE* on 29 January 2018. Grade inflation is a real phenomenon, according to Ray Bachan (Brighton) in [his Studies in Higher Education article](#) (42(8) 2017). After his statistical analysis of UK HE degree results since 2009: "we find evidence of grade inflation in UK higher education from 2009 onwards after controlling for changes in university efficiency in improving degree outcome and factors associated with degree performance."

Do grades matter for labour market rewards?

Yes, according to Karl Ingar Kittelsen Røberg and Håvard Helland (both Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway). [Their article](#) 'Do grades matter for labour market rewards? A multilevel analysis of all Norwegian graduates in the period 1990-2006' in the *Journal of Education and Work* (30(4): 383-402, 2017) concluded that "good grades have positive effects on both income and employment and that these effects are influenced by both the type of education and sector."

Oxford graduate's case dismissed

The long-running case of Faiz Siddiqui v the University of Oxford was finally dismissed in the High Court. Siddiqui had complained that his failure to have a stellar legal career could be attributed to underperformance as a result of negligent teaching in his undergraduate degree at Oxford more than 15 years earlier. The Hon Mr Justice Foskett's [judgment on 7 February 2018](#) is a rattling good read about the reliability or not of the evidence from various academics, medical doctors and the plaintiff himself, concluding: "There may be some rare cases where some claim for compensation for the inadequacy of the tuition provided may succeed, but it is hardly the ideal way of achieving redress. Litigation is costly, time- and emotion- consuming and runs the significant risk of failure, particularly in this area where establishing a causative link between the quality of teaching and any alleged "injury" is fraught with difficulty. There must be a better way of dealing with this kind of issue ..."

Timetabling

The crucial process of timetabling seems to defy analysis, or at least theorising, but Dave Dowlan (Solent) blogged about [interesting recent developments](#) for *WonkHE* on 11 January 2018.

Stephanie Marshall steps down from HE Academy

Stephanie Marshall, HE Academy chief executive since August 2013, left the York-based teaching agency at the end of January, after the boards of the HEA, the Equality Challenge Unit and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education [signed off on a merger](#), due to be completed in August. Alison Johns, chief executive of the Leadership Foundation, is [chief executive](#) of the new agency, now named 'Advance HE'. Rama Thirunamachandran, VC of Canterbury Christ Church University and the chair of the HEA board, said that Professor Marshall had "made an immense contribution in raising

accessible to students, owing to the perils of essay mills, contract cheating and now even spy kits. Institutional policies are rightly steeped in procedural routes and punishments can be severe, with misconduct panel meetings, outcomes logged on a student's record, and even expulsion from the institution. Both staff and students report that these processes are stressful, severe and unpleasant experiences. In a bid to make changes Nicole Brown from the UCL Institute of Education has designed preventative training sessions for her international students.

With her expertise and experience, Nicole delivered an insightful, interesting and practical session encompassing an early interventionist approach to preventing plagiarism through education. These early intervention approaches had been tried and tested and the statistics stacked up in her institution on the benefits of delivering regular 'Preventing Plagiarism' training events for students. She further reported that her evidence-based method reduced the level and need for misconduct panels on plagiarism. Nicole was reluctant to claim to 'know all the answers' but she did provide generous scope for thought as she talked and walked programme participants through her student training sessions, explaining the rationale for every step along the way.

Useful practical resources were provided, with techniques being shared on how to help students discuss, debate and understand the meaning of both intentional and unintentional plagiarism through a 'key terms matching' activity. Examples of plagiarism on Turnitin were shared, creating the opportunity to debate and examine the identification of plagiarism, and the institutional procedural routes most appropriate for differing scenarios. Case studies gave real examples of plagiarism and its consequences and participants could contribute examples from their own experience.

We explored the shift in academic procedural language, with Nicole explaining that current thinking now aims to move away from the term 'plagiarism' towards language emphasising 'the fostering of academic integrity'. This created further analysis in terms of students' ability to understand these shifts in terms and language.

This was another fascinating, relevant and proactive professional development event from SRHE. We left feeling empowered, more knowledgeable, armed with resources and ideas for the development of early intervention 'plagiarism' educational approaches and practices. Open dialogue across attending institutions enabled interesting and informative debates on the topic of preventing plagiarism. Thanks to SRHE for hosting an excellent professional development event and we look forward to reviewing the network events calendar to seek further opportunities to improve our knowledge of the higher education sector.

Preventing Plagiarism resources can be accessed via
<http://www.srhe.ac.uk/events/pastevents/details/?eid=317> or from Nicole's website
<http://www.nicole-brown.co.uk/>

Gill Mills is Course Leader for the BSc(Hons) Health and Social Care/Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care and Caroline Jones is Lecturer in Health and Social Care at University Campus, Oldham, which supports their SRHE membership.

The Teaching Excellence Framework

HEFCE announced the [membership of the TEF 3 Panel](#) on 22 January 2018. Research into HE was well-represented on the [Social Sciences panel](#) for the TEF pilots, with SRHE members Debby Cotton (Plymouth), Joanne Fanghanel (West London) and Dilly Fung (UCL, moving to LSE in May 2018) all on the panel, with full membership announced in February 2018.

Learning gain so far

HEFCE issued [an interim report](#) on 21 March 2018 about the learning gained so far in their learning gain programme. SRHE member Paul Ashwin (Lancaster) had [blogged for HEFCE](#) on 21 February 2018 about some common misconceptions in learning gain, reprising his keynote for HEFCE's 'Learning Gain: Critical Explorations' event in September 2017.

Making a drama out of a consultation

The government is [consulting on subject-level TEF](#). [Minister Sam Gyimah](#) was [all over the media](#) on 12 March 2018 making it sound like the end of the world for universities concealing the truth about their courses from naïve students, despite the lower-key formal [DfE announcement](#). Various HE voices soon branded the proposals 'absurd', notably TEF authority Paul Ashwin (Lancaster), who said the options for consultation were 'odd' or worse, as [Jack Grove reported](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 14 March 2018. But [when is a subject not a subject?](#) - good stuff as always from HE data guru Alan Paull.

Access and widening participation

How to overcome the stratification of higher education

Stephen Gorard (Durham) was in his usual combative mode in his [piece for WonkHE](#) on 16 March 2018, arguing for a radically different approach both to understanding 'under-representation' and to the government's policy on institutions.

What works in widening participation?

An [article](#) by Kirsty Younger, Louise Gascoine, Victoria Menzies and Carole Torgerson (all Durham) in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (online 16 January 2018) claimed that: "In the UK there is a large amount of WP activity but a lack of robust evidence of its effectiveness. This article presents a systematic review in the topic area of WP in HE."

The birth of widening participation

Well, the birth of one version of WP at least, as John Selby (previously HEFCE, now Brightside) [reminisced for WonkHE](#) on 5 March 2018.

National Collaborative Outreach Programme

There was a year one 'formative and impact evaluation' and HEFCE commissioned an [evaluation report](#) from CFE Research, published on 22 March 2018. Its 'tentative' findings propose, for the second year: further review; examination of consortia operating models; upskilling schools and further education colleges staff; engaging parents; making use of the learner voice to inform outreach activities; innovative approaches to outreach; exploration of learners' aspirations, knowledge of higher education and future plans through a follow-up survey of participants; linking participants' primary survey data to longitudinal tracking data; design and implementation of randomised controlled trials in the context of NCOP. Gosh, who'd have thought of that?

When fees go up, diversity goes down

That was one of the findings of research by Drew Allen (Princeton) and Gregory C Wolniak (New York), [published in Research in Higher Education](#) (online 23 March 2018): "... tuition increases at open-access, non-selective public 4 year institutions are negatively and significantly associated with the racial/ethnic diversity of enrolled students. This same negative relationship can be seen among 2 year public institutions ...".

Students

Graduate sues Anglia Ruskin University over ‘Mickey Mouse’ degree

Pok Wong, a Hong Kong student at Anglia Ruskin University graduated with first class honours from her two-year International Business Strategy degree, but she is suing the university for £60,000, alleging breach of contract and fraudulent misrepresentation of her employment prospects, as [Dianne Apen-Sadler reported](#) for *The Daily Mail* on 11 March 2018. Wong complained to the university at various stages, then to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and the Information Commissioner’s Office: both found against her and an earlier court hearing ordered her to pay the university’s costs.

Will FE student loans have to be repaid?

[FE Week has been campaigning](#) for students who took loans but then faced the collapse of their FE providers to be excused repayment. The Student Loans Company allowed 12 months’ deferment but has not yet confirmed whether students will have to repay the loans, despite growing pressure from many including Robert Halfon, chair of the Parliamentary Select Committee and former Skills Minister.

Part-time student numbers down again in 2016-2017

HESA issued [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2016/17](#) on 10 January 2016. The number of first-year postgraduates was the highest for ten years, coinciding with the first year of introduction of loans for postgraduates, but first year part-time numbers fell by 4% from 2015-2016: ‘...the number of part-time students have continuously declined between 2012/13 and 2016/17. In 2012/13, first year students studying part-time represented almost a third of all first year students, but by 2016/17 this figure decreased to just under a quarter. Trends vary by country of HE provider, with Wales and Scotland seeing an increase in part-time first year students between 2015/16 and 2016/17.’

Differences in student outcomes: the effect of student characteristics

[HEFCE’s report in March 2018](#) considered how outcomes differ according to various student characteristics measured in terms of class of degree awarded and outcome six months after graduation. It also considered changes since previous reports on 2013-14 graduates.

What makes students successful?

SRHE member Steven Jones, Maria Pampaka, Daniel Swayne and Julian Skyrme (all Manchester) wrote [in Research in Postcompulsory Education](#) (online 13 December 2017) about ‘interactions between the key variables that predict success among around 9000 students at one major UK university in terms of their chances of obtaining a ‘good’ (upper second or better) degree and a ‘first’ degree ... gender is found to be significantly influential, with female students’ attainment being superior to that of male students. However, significant interactions are noted between gender, ethnicity and socio-economic class indicators.’ *Times Higher Education* picked it up on 10 January and spun it as [‘Study finds more evidence of state school ‘advantage’ in degrees’](#).

Student mental health

[Student Minds](#) released their report [Student Mental Health: The Role and Experience of Academics](#) on 8 February 2018, on the role of academics in supporting student mental health.

[Why going to university in the UK is still a wise investment](#)

Dennis A Ahlburg (Trinity, US) made the case on *The Impact Blog* on 16 February 2018, based on his article, [‘Is Going to University in Britain a Wise Investment?’](#), in *The Political Quarterly*.

How much would you pay to get into an Ivy League college?

One wealthy Vietnamese family contracted to pay \$1.5million to IvyCoach, which advises and helps candidates seeking places at an Ivy League college. The eye-watering figure has been revealed in a

lawsuit brought by IvyCoach, which has only been paid about half of the sum allegedly due. [Scott Jaschik reported](#) for *insidehighered.com* on 12 February 2018 that the Independent Educational Consultants Association had expelled Ivy Coach some few years ago "upon hearing of some of their practices." CEO Mark Sklarow said that "in our view there is no excuse for such fees."

Quality, Standards, Performance, Evaluation

Quality and standards

QAA is designated by OfS as the quality body for HE

The Office for Students (OfS) has recommended that QAA be designated as the quality body for higher education in England. In a [letter to the Secretary of State for Education](#), OfS chief executive Nicola Dandridge said: "We consider that there is only one body that is suitable to perform the assessment functions. That body is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education...". The UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment published the [revised Quality Code](#) in March 2018.

Mapping the literature structure of 'quality in higher education'

Khaled Alazafari (Technical University of Berlin) had an [article in Quality in Higher Education](#) (online 21 January 2018) using 'co-word analysis of keywords extracted from more than two thousand academic publications seeking to reveal the prominent topics and the connections among them'.

Performance, evaluation and rankings

[A Guide to UK League Tables in Higher Education](#)

Sally Turnbull (Central Lancashire) has produced a guide published jointly by HEPI and the HE Strategic Planners Association on 4 January 2018. It is sensible and clear about varying methods and the transparency (or not) which league table compilers use. There is also no analysis of the statistical significance - more likely, lack of significance – of differences in position in league tables.

Rankings fiddle

Scott Jaschik [reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 29 January 2018 that *US News & World Report* would [remove the ranking](#) of Temple University's online MBA program from its 2018 Best Online Programs list. Temple had claimed 100% of its students had taken the standardised tests which help to make up the ranking scores, but in fact the proportion was only 20%. The Fox School of Business at Temple itself reported the incorrect submission soon after the rankings were published, but not before Temple had issued a boastful news release. *US News & World Report* omitted to mention that Temple had been ranked No 1 for three years, in each of which it claimed 100% test-taking. Before then, Temple had reported 25% and 33% taking the tests, and had been ranked lower.

Research

Rethinking impact and the research-policy relationship

Christina Boswell and Katherine Smith (both Edinburgh) [wrote for The Impact Blog](#) on 12 March 2018 about their article for *Palgrave Communications* '[Rethinking policy 'impact': four models of research-policy relations](#)'.

Quantity matters

Peter van den Besselaar (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and Ulf Sandström (Linköping/KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm) studied a large sample of researchers and found a positive and stronger than linear relationship between productivity and quality (in terms of the top cited papers). This same pattern appears to apply to institutions as well as individual researchers. They wrote about it in a recent [PLoS ONE paper](#) and [for The Impact Blog](#) on 23 January 2018.

John Kingman confirmed as permanent UKRI chair

Sir John Kingman has been [confirmed as the chair of UK Research and Innovation](#), overseeing the work of the country's seven research councils, Innovate UK, and Research England. Sir John, a former second permanent secretary at HM Treasury and son of the former VC of Bristol University, has been interim chair of the umbrella body since May 2016.

Article saying peer review has no value has no value

A widely-reported article ['Comparing published scientific journal articles to their pre-print versions'](#) by Martin Klein (Los Alamos National Laboratory), Peter Broadwell, Sharon E Farb and Todd Grappone (all UCLA) was demolished by Tim Vines (Origin Editorial) [on The Scholarly Kitchen blog](#) on 15 March 2018.

No agreement among grant reviewers

Elizabeth L Pier and co-authors from Madison-Wisconsin had an [article](#) in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA (online 5 March 2018): "We replicated the NIH peer-review process to examine the qualitative and quantitative judgments of different reviewers examining the same grant application. We found no agreement among reviewers in evaluating the same application. These findings highlight the subjectivity in reviewers' evaluations of grant applications and underscore the difficulty in comparing the evaluations of different applications from different reviewers ..."

REF 2021: institutions will just game it differently

The [REF 2021 panel membership](#) was announced in March 2018. [Simon Kerridge \(Kent\) wrote](#) for *The Impact Blog* on 7 March 2018 about the new 'games' which institutions might play in REF 2021. Despite Stern's attempt to get away from them, Kerridge pointed out the possibly even more pernicious effects of the REF 2021 rules in excluding marginal performers. Kerridge, a recent chair of [ARMA](#), knows of what he speaks.

Brexit means the end of critical management studies

That constant provocateur [Christopher Grey \(Royal Holloway\) argued in Organisation](#) (online 21 February 2018) that "in the European Union Referendum vote, Critical Management Studies found itself on the same, anti-Brexit, side as big business and mainstream management studies, making it hard to sustain itself as something separate from these ... British Critical Management Studies now finds 'itself ... on the pro-Brexit side as 'the establishment elite', and ... to work effectively against Brexit, British Critical Management Studies will need to work as part of that establishment elite ... this may mark the end of British Critical Management Studies as it has hitherto existed."

[Doing good by wealth](#) *by Paul Temple*



If you missed it on the SRHE Blog, catch up on Paul Temple's examination of how some billionaires are funding academic research. Larry Ellison, of Oracle, has a research institute working on the biology of ageing; Paul Allen, Microsoft co-founder, has an institute doing brain research; and Google executive chairman Eric Schmidt's chosen field is ocean science. Jim Simons, the retired boss of a Wall Street hedge fund called Renaissance, has established an institute for computational science, looking for patterns in data from biology, astronomy, and quantum physics.

Checking the reliability of reliability checks

Michèle Nuijten (Tilburg) praised [statcheck](#) as ‘a spellchecker for statistics’ [on The LSE Impact Blog](#) on 28 February 2018.

Research into higher education

Can the institutional ‘self-critical academic community’ survive?

Thought-provoking stuff from Gill Evans (Cambridge) in [Higher Education Review](#) (50(1) Autumn 2017:89-108) about the dangers implicit in government policy on HE, despite ministerial pronouncements to the contrary: ‘Since the 1980s in the UK, there has been a repeated insistence at government level that academic staff must have something more to offer in an institution granting degrees and especially one calling itself a university. The ‘Lindop principle’ which articulated this requirement has been repeated through a series of ministerial statements, and entered the discussion surrounding the passing of the HE and Research Act through 2016 and 2017. The multiplication of HE providers, and changes in academic employment practices ... have created a widening gap between this theoretical expectation and what is really on offer by way of appropriately qualified teaching ...’.

The Toxic University

John Smyth’s (Huddersfield) book *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars and Neoliberal Ideology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) was [reviewed by Jana Bacevic](#) (Cambridge) for *The Impact Blog*. Bacevic’s PhD is on critiques of neoliberalism in HE.

British universities are in crisis and they can’t blame Brexit



A new book by Mike Finn (Exeter), *British Universities in the Brexit Moment*, analyses the impact of the Brexit decision on Britain’s universities. British universities draw their students and staff from across the global community and have world-leading reputations, with the UK second only to the US in international prestige. Brexit has already affected this, with a fall in student recruitment from abroad and, allegedly, an increase in EU academics electing to leave the British university system. Finn situates the ‘Brexit question’ in the context of recent HE history and developments in UK higher education such as marketisation. He concludes that: “in the immediate future, the tasks remain twofold. Firstly, to rebuild trust between academic citizens, their institutions and the broader publics they serve. Finally, to preserve as much as possible of the European and international

dimension of higher education in the vein of a genuine republic of science ...”. SRHE Vice-President [Roger Brown’s review](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 22 February 2018 said Mike Finn’s book was ‘useful and timely’.

Challenges of multilingual studies *by Aliandra Barlete*



Coming soon on the SRHE Blog, reflections by Aliandra Barlete (Cambridge) on the ethical implications of conducting international research. Her paper for the 2017 SRHE Newer Researchers conference was entitled: ‘Ethical challenges when conducting fieldwork abroad: reflections from a multinational and multilingual study about higher education in Latin America’. The challenge of managing many languages is one good example of an ethical dilemma. How should a research report written in English represent data from interviews conducted in Portuguese and Spanish?

Aliandra explores the options and hints at a probable solution, on the SRHE blog this month at www.srheblog.com.

Publishing

Policy Reviews in Higher Education

The new SRHE journal had a cracking start to its second year with [articles in Vol 2 Issue 1](#) on ranking systems, international terrorism, the scholarship of teaching and learning, differentiating universities, and international approaches to university-industry collaboration. SRHE member Malcolm Tight (Lancaster) was in characteristically provocative mode in his treatment of SoTL, speculating that “in 30, 40 or 50 years’ time the scholarship of teaching and research will be little more than a historical footnote, scarcely remembered by anyone.”

Unethical behaviour in (almost) every discipline

Wide-ranging [research by Al Wilhite](#) (Alabama) revealed a range of unethical practices, in particular including ‘authors’ not involved in the research, and ‘coercive citation’ in which journal editors require additional citation of articles in their own journal. In almost two-thirds of cases involving additional authors the name was added because of the reputation of the added name. He covered many disciplines, but not education.

Adoption of open access is rising, but so are its costs

Stephen Pinfield (Sheffield) and Rob Johnson (Research Consulting) [wrote about open access](#) for *The Impact Blog* on 22 January 2018, suggesting that although the UK is leading the transition to open access publishing the associated costs are also rising.

Gold standard open access accentuates academic stratification

Authors working at lower-ranked universities were more likely to publish in closed journals behind a paywall and less likely to choose publishers that levied a standard article-processing charge for gold or hybrid open access. That was the conclusion of an [article in PeerJ](#) on 19 February 2018 by Kyle Siler (Utrecht), Stefanie Haustein (Ottawa/Quebec), Elise Smith (Montreal), Vincent Lariviere (Montreal) and Juan Pablo Alperin (Simon Fraser).

The case for the megajournal

Alison Mudditt, CEO of PLOS, argued [the case for the megajournal](#) on *The Scholarly Kitchen* blog on 18 January 2018. UCL are convinced: they have announced plans to launch their own megajournal, as [Rachael Pells reported](#) for *Times Higher Education* on 17 January 2018. David Price, UCL’s vice-provost for research, was [quoted in Research Fortnight](#) as saying the new venture was “a pivotal point in the world of academic publishing ... We are breaking with the traditional model and opening it up for the good of academia and society.” The Wellcome Trust launched its open-access platform in 2016, and the European Commission and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have both announced plans to set up their own open-access journals.

However, Phil Davis, an independent consultant, [blogged for The Scholarly Kitchen](#) on 10 January 2018 about how prediction of the rise of the open access ‘megajournal’ had been wide of the mark. Instead, open access journals seem to have settled at a very small proportion of the total journal publishing market. And Jason Hoyt (CEO of PeerJ) has announced that “PeerJ will introduce section editors to take community leadership roles, working with existing academic editors to create greater consensus in publishing decisions and helping to curate and highlight important new research findings.” He wrote about it [for The Impact Blog](#) on 1 February 2018.

Publishing while female

Erin Hengel’s (Liverpool) PhD at Cambridge explored whether women are held to higher standards in academic peer review, analysing 9,123 article abstracts published in the *American Economic Review*,

Econometrica, *Journal of Political Economy* and *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. She concluded that they are: 'Using five readability measures, I find that female-authored articles published in top economics journals are better written than equivalent papers by men. Why? Because they have to be. In a model of an author's decision-making process, I show that tougher editorial standards and/or biased referee assignment are uniquely consistent with women's observed pattern of choices. I then document evidence that higher standards affect behaviour and lower productivity.' She [wrote a column](#) on VoxEU, the policy portal of the Centre for Economic Policy Research, on 22 December 2017.

102 things publishers do

Kent Anderson blogged for *the Scholarly Kitchen* on 6 February 2018, updating his [list of the things publishers do](#) to add value.

Ethics and Academic Freedom

Ethics and Integrity

Free Speech Rankings: misleading, ill-informed and worryingly influential

Carl Thompson (Surrey) summed up many commentators' opinions about the disreputable *Spiked* so-called 'free speech rankings' [in the Times Higher Education](#) on 17 February 2018.

QAA complaint against essay mill upheld by ASA

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) [said on 21 March 2018](#) that it had upheld a complaint by QAA about UK Essays, whose home page featured text that stated "... GUARANTEED GRADE, EVERY TIME We're so confident you'll love the work we produce, we guarantee the final grade of the work. Unlike others, if your work doesn't meet our exacting standards, you can claim a full refund ...". The ASA said that UK Essays had been disingenuous in professing not to offer work that could be submitted by students in place of their own, and in claiming media endorsements when they were mentioned only in coverage which was negative about the business of essay mills.

Carbondale president created jobs for daughter and son-in-law

When Carlo D Montemagno was hired to turn round the financially-troubled University of Southern Illinois-Carbondale one of the agreed conditions was that the institution would create jobs for his daughter and son-in-law. Randy J Dunn, president of the Southern Illinois University system, was on the appointing panel and agreed to those terms, but he had second thoughts after student newspaper the [Daily Egyptian](#) reported that jobs had been specially created for the two family members. Dunn told Anna Sporre of the [Daily Egyptian](#) that he had ordered investigations into the [hiring of the chancellor's daughter and son-in-law](#).

Pakistan degree mill sold 215000 fake qualifications worldwide in 2015

Ameen Amjad Khan [reported for University World News](#) on 19 January 2018 on a massive fake degree scandal involving the Karachi-based IT firm Axact. Various prosecutions by Pakistani authorities had failed amid allegations of judicial corruption, but the scandal had been picked up again after an investigation, 'Degrees of Deception', by the BBC Radio programme *File on Four* broadcast on 16 January. The programme alleged that Axact sold as many as 3,000 degrees to British nationals in 2013 and 2014, including masters degrees and PhDs. According to [the BBC report](#), in 2015 Axact sold more than 215,000 fake qualifications globally, through approximately 350 fictitious high schools and universities, making \$51m (£37.5m) that year alone.

Conflict of interest and plagiarism allegations against President-designate of Taiwan's top university
Kuan Chung-Ming, a minister in the previous Kuomintang government, had been due to take up the presidency of National Taiwan University (NTU) on 1 February 2018, but there was a delay after it emerged in January that he was an independent director of Taiwan Mobile and that the company's vice chairman, Richard Tsai, sat on the university committee that selected Kuan. Kuan has also been accused of plagiarizing a conference paper he presented in May 2017. Mimi Leung, [reporting for University World News](#) on 14 February 2018, noted that: "The ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which defeated the Kuomintang in elections held in 2016, threatened to cut NTU's budget as a way of preventing Kuan's appointment, which some see as a politically motivated threat linked to Kuan's role in the previous KMT government."

Academic identity theft

Todd A Carpenter, of the US National Information Standards Organisation, [blogged for The Scholarly Kitchen](#) on 28 March 2018 about the very large scale theft of academic credentials by a gang of Iranian hackers, aiming to secure access to the academic work of 100,000 academics worldwide, to benefit Iranian science. 8000 academics' accounts were successfully hacked . The FBI unsealed indictments of the nine Iranians on 23 March 2018.

Global Perspectives

The end of internationalisation?

Philip Altbach and Hans de Wit (both Boston College) noted some ominous trends but remained optimistic about prospects for a more inclusive internationalism in their [thoughtful piece](#) for *World University News* on 23 February 2018.

Africa

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe University VC charged with abuse of office over Grace Mugabe's PhD

Levi Nyagura, vice-chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe, was arrested on 16 February on charges relating to the award of a PhD to Grace Mugabe, wife of former Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe, as the [Associated Press reported](#) in *abcNEWS* on 17 February 2018.

Asia

India

Indian degree mill busted

Three men were arrested in January for allegedly running an operation which sold over 50,000 fake degree certificates, [OutlookIndia reported](#) on 30 January 2018.

Pakistan

Pakistan HE Commission investigates plagiarism by its own Executive Director

The Pakistani Higher Education Commission (HEC) Chairman Dr Mukhtar Ahmad set up a committee to probe allegations of plagiarism against the commission's Executive Director (ED) Dr Arshad Ali. Turnitin analysis showed that Dr Arshad's paper "A Taxonomy and Survey of Grid Resource Planning and Reservation Systems for Grid Enabled Analysis Environment," published in July 2004 was almost

an exact copy (88% match) of a paper by Chaitanya Kandagatla (Texas at Austin) in February 2004. Rooting out plagiarism is an important function of the HEC. [Waseem Abbasi had the story](#) in *The News* on 7 January 2018.

South Korea

82 South Korean academics put their schoolchildren down as co-authors

[Aimee Chung reported](#) for *University World News* on 29 January 2018 that South Korea's ministry of education had uncovered 82 cases of professors listing their secondary school children as co-authors in academic papers. 80 of the 82 cases were in the sciences, with 29 universities involved. The practice apparently stems from the intense competition for university places in South Korea; candidates who already have academic publications have an advantage in admission. In 43 cases there appeared to be no valid reason for naming the co-author; the others involved programmes where universities link with secondary schools to help school students become authors. The practice was exposed in 2017 when an unnamed Seoul National University professor, who later resigned, listed his school-age son on 43 papers for which the professor was the main author.

Australasia

New Zealand

New Zealand Sinologist suspects China's involvement in burglaries

[Yojana Sharma reported](#) for *University World News* on 20 February 2018 that Anne-Marie Brady (Canterbury, NZ) suspected Chinese government involvement in recent break-ins at her office and her home, suspicions given credence by NZ PM Jacinda Ardern, who ordered security services to investigate. Brady had earlier been warned that China was targeting academics who did not toe the Chinese Communist Party line.

Europe

Automatic mutual recognition of qualifications in Europe

Jenneke Lokhoff and Katrien Bardoel (both of EP-NUFFIC, a Dutch organization which promotes internationalisation in HE) wrote [in University World News](#) on 2 March 2018 about alternative paths towards the declared aim of the European Higher Education Area for automatic mutual recognition of diplomas and degrees by 2020. Some British universities still have statutes denying automatic recognition to degrees from all other British universities, and most have failed to comply with the Bologna declaration. But they are of course still fiercely opposed to Brexit. That's quite different.

Denmark

EU won't help Denmark reclaim student debt

The European Union has refused to help Denmark recover student debt from EU citizens who left Denmark without repaying student loans. The European Court of Justice ruled in 2012 that EU citizens in Denmark were 'migrant workers' and therefore should be eligible for the same loans as Danish citizens. Foreign student debt doubled between 2012 and 2016, reaching \$70million, but EU Commissioner Vera Jourová declined a direct request from the Danish government for help in recovering the debt, as [Jan Petter Mykklebust reported](#) for *University World News* on 19 January 2018.

Making Denmark's HE more flexible

The Committee of Experts for Better University Education has issued a major report on 'modernising' Danish HE, as [Jan Petter Mykklebust reported](#) for *University World News* on 17 March 2018. They

proposed a more flexible pathway to postgraduate study, since most students who do not progress to a Masters degree straight from their undergraduate programmes are unable to do so. The report prompted a wide range of reactions. Some said successive 'reforms' had left the universities 'exhausted', although many of the recommendations had been expected. Ivar Bleiklie (Bergen) said that if resources were made available the proposals seemed 'reasonable', but the Danish NUS president said it was 'the end of democracy', after students were not included on the Committee: one of its recommendations is to exclude students from involvement in university governance. No students at the heart of **their** system.

Italy

Changing governance in Universities. Italian higher education in comparative perspective

Roberto Moscati (Milano-Bicocca) reviewed the book by Giliberto Capano, Marino Regino and Matteo Turri (2016, London: Palgrave Macmillan): "one of the very few analyses to carry out a comparison between the evolution of the Italian higher education system and other European systems." [His review](#) was in the *European Journal of Higher Education* (online 9 August 2017).

Russia

Big changes to the Russian quality system

[Eugene Vorotnikov reported for University World News](#) on 16 February 2018 that the Russian Ministry of Education and Science was planning major changes to its quality assurance system, following a major cull of institutions in recent years, in a three-year rationalisation programme started by previous minister of education and science Dmitry Livanov. The programme has involved cutting the number of universities by 40% and their branches by 80%. Now QA will move towards a risk-based approach, with institutions assigned to one of four categories of risk.

Turkey

Mass detention and dismissal of academics continues

Brendan O'Malley reported on [continuing harassment of academics in Turkey](#) for *University World News* on 16 January 2018. David Matthews in *Times Higher Education* on 18 January reported Turkish President Erdogan's speech attacking academics at [Boğaziçi University](#) in Istanbul as not reflecting 'Turkish values'.

Ukraine

Out in the cold

When [Ukraine's universities had no money left](#) to pay heating bills, they had to close until Spring. The problem affected universities throughout the country and included its flagship institution, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

North America

Canada

Canada is 'eating our lunch'

Janet Beer, Liverpool VC, memorably said that Canada is 'eating our lunch' after research by Quacquarelli Symonds showed that more students from China and the Far East are choosing to study in Canada than in the UK, as [Brendan O'Malley reported](#) for *University World News* on 16 March 2018.

United States

Poor outlook for US HE, according to Standard and Poor's

Ratings agency Standard and Poor's says US HE will face many of the same challenges in 2018 that it has in previous years, but new government pressures suggest a bleak outlook. "S&P Global Ratings believes institutions with limited flexibility, whether that be in programming, financial operations, enrollment, resources, or student draw, could face credit pressure in the upcoming year," according to S&P. The recently passed federal tax law applies a 1.4% excise tax to some private colleges with large endowments. Although the scope of the tax is limited, it may portend an expanded endowment tax in future, as [Adam Harris reported](#) for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on 23 January 2018.

South America

Chile

Chile's HE reforms achieved just in time by outgoing President

Chile's President Michelle Bachelet achieved Congressional approval on 24 January 2018 of her HE reform law and a special law for state universities, less than two months before leaving office. The new law guarantees free education, which had existed since 2016 but was subject to its inclusion in each year's national budget. At present, the poorest 60% of students study for free. The benefit will be extended further, depending on GDP trends, but achieving universal free education may take 70 years. The reform law requires tuition fees for each degree to be set by a committee of experts; students may be consulted. The government will set a ceiling for the tuition fees of students not eligible for free education; HE institutions can only set the fees for students belonging to the richest 10% of Chilean families. [Maria Elena Hurtado reported](#) for *University World News* on 31 January 2018.

Society News

Call for Papers

SRHE International Conference on Research into Higher Education

5-7 December 2018

Celtic Manor, Newport, Wales, United Kingdom

SRHE Newer and Early Career Researchers Conference

4 December 2018

Coldra Court, Newport, Wales, United Kingdom

SRHE International Conference on Research into Higher Education 2018

The changing shape of higher education: Can excellence and inclusion cohabit?

Following on from our member mailing on Monday (9th April) we are delighted to launch the Call for Papers for the 2018 SRHE Annual Research Conference. Below is an extract from the Call for Papers expanding on this year's theme:

Higher education is increasingly subject to competing demands, often appearing to come from very different, seemingly incompatible world views. The idea of the "knowledge economy" has emerged as a dominant way of framing the work of universities, represented in global league tables that privilege a particular view of excellence and its purpose. In many parts of the world, governments are reorganising their higher education systems to support the growth of "elite" institutions, whilst a

growing number of private providers widen further the type of teaching provision available. There is thus a clear trend towards increasing stratification in many university systems whilst privileging economic ends over social ones.

Those of us engaged in higher education research are challenged by such developments, and may wish to ask difficult questions in observing the changing shape of higher education: Are these changes inevitable? Are they happening everywhere and in the same way? Is higher education becoming increasingly a means of social reproduction? We ask how we can avoid the disbenefits of current trends. What role can other beliefs and values play in challenging what are fast becoming unquestioned norms? Is it acceptable to let markets decide who gets access to what educational opportunity? Is there space for diversity and inclusion in an increasingly stratified system? To what extent can institutions develop and maintain a distinctive mission? How can higher education research contribute to understanding and managing stratification?

In a post-truth and post-Brexit world where economic and social norms are being tested to breaking point, this conference will seek to champion the breadth and depth of knowledge of which higher education research is so rightly proud. It will celebrate the diversity of theories, methods and approaches that characterise it, bringing them to bear on current higher education and future trends. The conference will take a comparative approach both at national and international level, seeking to show through comparison that there are choices that can be made.

This year's conference provides an excellent opportunity to share our understandings of where we are today, to build for the future. The Newer and Early Career Researchers conference will follow a similar theme with a particular focus on how these issues impact on newer and early career researchers, their study, their research opportunities and their careers.

The SRHE Annual Research Conference attracts wide participation from researchers globally. It provides a stimulating international forum for papers of an empirical or scholarly nature relating to research into higher education, in the broadest sense, and from a breadth of different disciplinary perspectives. The conference is highly participative, promoting the dissemination and exchange of ideas in a variety of formats, across a range of research domains.

The deadline for submission of all proposals to the SRHE International Annual Research Conference is Friday 22 June 2018 12 midnight GMT. Visit www.srhe.ac.uk to submit.

Forthcoming SRHE Network Events

We have an exciting range of network seminars running throughout the year, alongside an ever growing calendar of Professional Development Programme workshops. See <http://www.srhe.ac.uk/events/> for details and to book your place at all forthcoming Network and Professional Development Programme events.

SRHE Newer Researchers Awards

Applications for the above research awards closed on March 31st, and we received a very high number of proposals this year. All applications are currently under with our panel of reviewers, and we aim to communicate the outcomes of all applications by 30th June 2018.

SRHE Team

Helen Perkins, Director hperkins@srhe.ac.uk
Rob Gresham, Manager: Operations and Finance rgresham@srhe.ac.uk
Franco Carta, Finance Officer fcarta@srhe.ac.uk
Katie Tindle, Team Coordinator ktindle@srhe.ac.uk
François Smit, Conference and Events Organiser fsmit@srhe.ac.uk

Small ads

External examiners, referees, reviewers wanted

News will be happy to carry advertisements for external examiners in the broad field of research into higher education, for publishers' referees, for book reviewers, and so on.

Call for submissions: educational mobilities and internationalised HE

The journal *Teaching in Higher Education* has issued a call for submissions to a special issue of the journal on 'Educational mobilities and internationalised higher education: Critical perspectives'. Potential authors are asked to submit abstracts of up to 500 words with a deadline of 5pm (GMT) on **Friday 9th May 2018**. For further details see the journal website [here](#).

OU Widening Participation Conference: Is widening participation to higher education enough?

The fifth biennial widening participation (WP) conference hosted by The Open University will be held at **Hilton Hotel, Kents Hill Milton Keynes on April 26th-27th 2018**. The conference is renowned for its friendly mix of researchers and practitioners who come together to share ideas and expand their networks. Conference themes: digital inclusion; progression - the social mobility conundrum and access to postgraduate studies; skills gaps; widening participation through informal learning and the recognition of prior learning; ethical dilemmas of targeting widening participation students – policy and practice. For more information and to register visit the event page [here](#), and watch the [2016 conference video](#). Registrations close on 6 April, but email widening-participation@open.ac.uk if you're just too late, they can deal with late registrations.

Call for Participation: Science and Politics, Exploring Relations Between Academic Research, Higher Education and Science Policy, International Summer School, 10–14 September 2018, FIW, University of Bonn

Addressed at PhD students, early PostDocs, and science policy experts/practitioners, this summer school explores multifaceted science-politics entanglements. Participants will learn about core issues of STS, HES, and SPIS in small interactive workshops. In discussion panels, they will have the opportunity to present and discuss their ongoing research projects with selected groups of fellow participants and advanced scholars from their field. In addition, there are keynote lectures from leading scholars of the field, a panel discussion including science policy makers from various institutions, and leisure activities. Call for participation closes 15th May 2018.

For more information visit the event website [here](#)

Mind your language

Benjamin Paloff (Michigan at Ann Arbor) did a fine job in showing how anti-intellectuals in the US nevertheless seem desperate to claim intellectual credentials, [in The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) on 9 March 2018.

What's in a name?

A no-Wynn situation

The University of Iowa has removed the name of Stephen Wynn from its Institute of Vision Research after he faced accusations of sexual misconduct, as reported In January by [The Wall Street Journal](#). Wynn, a casino owner with close ties to the Republican Party, pledged \$25million to the Institute in 2013, of which \$20million has already been given. The University of Pennsylvania got in on the act, revoking a building and a scholarship named for Wynn, a substantial donor and previous Penn trustee.

For good measure Penn also revoked an honorary degree awarded to actor and comedian Bill Cosby, accused of sexually assaulting dozens of women over several decades.

Colorado College had named buildings after a former president, William F Slocum, but it emerged that [Slocum had been asked to leave](#) by the Board of Trustees in 1917 after a 29-year tenure, after investigations into his sexual misconduct. A residence hall and commons building will be renamed.

Where have all the questions gone? *By James Hartley*



Jim's earlier blog (*SRHE News*, April 2017) reported that the titles of articles in the field of higher education fell into three categories – ones with colons (60%), ones with statements (30%) and ones with questions (10%). In [his blog on 2 March 2018](#) he noted that the dearth of titles written in the form of questions was much more common than he had thought.

SRHE member James Hartley is emeritus professor, School of Psychology, Keele University.

And finally

Ingrid Moses, AO

Emeritus Professor Ingrid Moses was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia in the 2018 Australia Day honours. Ingrid's academic career began at the Tertiary Education Institute at the University of Queensland and she was foundation Director of the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Technology Sydney. She was Deputy VC at the University of Canberra, and later VC of The University of New England before serving as Chancellor at Canberra until 2011. Ingrid was given HERDSA life membership in 1999 in recognition of her long and distinguished service to the Society and in recognition of her outstanding commitment to the improvement of teaching and learning and the quality of academic work in higher education.

Denise Chalmers elected as HERDSA President-elect

Professor emerita Denise Chalmers (Western Australia) has been elected as President of HERDSA for 2019-2021 and will serve as President-elect for 2018-2019, succeeding Allan Goody.

The wrong kind of snowflakes

When the Stephen F Austin State University's Lumberjacks lost to Texas Tech in the first round of the NCAA men's basketball tournament, the coach knew just who to blame. Kyle Keller said his team lost because it was full of millennials who spend all their time looking at their phones rather than studying the opposition, as [Grace Bird reported](#) for *insidehighered.com*.

Sobegone

Garrison Keillor, of the long-running US radio show *Prairie Home Companion* and writer of Minnesota tales about the fictional rural community of Lake Wobegon, had a plaque commemorating his achievements on the Scholars' Walk at the University of Minnesota. After Keillor was accused of sexual harassment and fired by Minnesota Public Radio, for reasons he disputes, the plaque was removed – but he said [he never wanted to be there](#) in the first place.

Ian McNay writes ...



My views on 'professional' and 'professionalism' in HE have been tested in several ways recently. One of my doctoral students has just got his award for a study on the topic. A major part of his work was a case study in a modern university, with a survey of teaching professionals with fellowship status in HEA either by a PGCE or a reflective portfolio of experience route. The survey group presented a homogeneous monochrome picture of what Hoyle, many years ago, labelled 'restricted' professionals – classroom bound with little engagement in the wider professional context, focused on subject and students, with punctuality and smart dress as professional characteristics. That reflected the response I got from some academics when I was appointed as a head of school: I met each one of my staff and, as part of the conversation, asked their view on development issues and future possibilities for the school. The response of several can be summarised by two: 'I don't have a view; not my role and above my pay grade', and 'You're the boss. Tell me what to do and I'll do it'. One senior colleague remarked that we had an FE culture, not an HE culture, given the background from which staff had come. To that extent, they were consenting to, colluding with, a proletarianisation of professionals, and an acceptance of the corporate bureaucratic culture that dominated the university at that time. Things are somewhat better currently, but one expectation of professionals is to conform to the norms of the university (though with little influence on what those norms are stated to be). That, in turn, reflects one of the recommendations of the Stern report on REF, where a new quality criterion for research is how far projects fit the strategy of the university, so that control of the research agenda – what to do and how to do it – moves even further away from the researchers to those not engaged in the work, some of whom never have been.

That concern is reflected in procedures. I cite three incidents.

For my annual appraisal, I am required to state which career pathway I am following: teaching, research, or enterprise. 'Both..' or 'all three' cannot be accepted by the computerised model of data submission. Equally, when asked to identify a development need, I am offered a choice of how to meet it, but only one – not a mix of a course, mentoring and reading around. Just the one, which suggests the HR department, from where this comes, does not understand learning, the core activity of my university, in the context of professional development.

The second is about REF. Procedures require that I lodge my outputs on the university archive and identify those that might be submitted. I do so, and they are sent for review and grading by an internal panel. I am invited to a feedback session, where I am given ratings, which match my own assessment. The fuller feedback is then *read* to me. I am not allowed to have a copy to take away and reflect on and use when planning further output. I have to remember it.

Finally, I chaired a PhD viva panel, which failed the student, twice. The student lodged an appeal which criticised my behaviour and that of two external examiners. That was over a year ago. I submitted a short statement through my line manager, to an appeals panel, the establishment of which seemed to confirm that the claims had *prima facie* validity. I notified the externals, who had not been contacted. I heard nothing more. I checked a couple of months ago with the student's supervisor who knew nothing about progress, so I checked with the central research student office. It appears the appeal has been completed and the outcome communicated with the faculty staff member responsible for such matters. The result will be communicated to others involved 'in due course'. The faculty rep. acknowledges knowing the outcome but does not feel able to tell me anything. So three people whose integrity has been impugned are not to be told at the earliest possible opportunity whether the claims has been accepted or rejected. Is that a way to treat three senior professionals? Am I being unprofessional in criticising operational realities, which presumably are seen to fit the norms of the university – defined by whom? Not the professionals to whom they apply.

And my student? I encouraged him to test his findings in other universities. They were different. Two resisted some of his terminology – ‘professionals are the admin staff in the offices’; ‘professional competence’ - do NOT use competence in any discussions here’. One was at the other end of the spectrum – it had a prescribed and circumscribed role for teaching professionals, to which they conformed for fear of sanctions, including dismissal.

Do others have similar experiences of a reduced concept of what an academic professional should be being adopted as a norm? I am secure enough to continue to be critical and able to walk away if I choose, but I meet many colleagues from many institutions who have families to support and mortgages to pay, and so do not challenge. That cannot be good for either academic creativity, or collegial democracy in our communities, with an eventual impact on quality and the student experience. Articles based on my student’s research are in preparation, which may help inform a necessary debate.

SRHE Fellow Ian McNay is emeritus professor at the University of Greenwich