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## **Editorial: The Future of Higher Education in Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism**

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There can be little doubt that, for the UK, the government White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) will have a significant impact on the development of higher education in general. But there are also some special issues that may affect Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (HLST) subjects. With this in mind this editorial will focus on three key areas where there are particular issues for the HLST subjects:

- the opportunities, threats and issues emerging from the White Paper;
- areas overlooked by the White Paper; and
- implications of the White Paper for pedagogical research and related activities.

### **Opportunities, threats and issues emerging from the White Paper**

Perhaps the first point of celebration should be that, in a White Paper dominated by science and technology paradigms, one of the HLST subjects - tourism - gets a specific mention on page 23. There are several other specific opportunities that merit discussion. Many of these require HLST lecturers to engage with specific agencies and to anticipate and plan for new initiatives. In the former category Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) assume increasing significance. The government states in the White Paper that it wishes to 'build stronger partnerships between Higher Education Institutions and RDAs' (p.6) and 'help Sector Skills Councils forge stronger alliances between business and relevant departments in universities and colleges' (p.6). In terms of initiatives, the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) is to have an expanded role and play a key part in developing a new proposal. Here the government intends to '[strengthen] the HEIF ... to encourage especially the non research intensive universities to work with employers locally, regionally and nationally' (p.6) and specifically to '[fund], through HEIF, 20 knowledge exchange centres' (p.6). Another initiative that our subject areas may wish to participate in is the 'Aim Higher programme to build better links between schools, colleges and universities' (p.9).

There are also a range of initiatives involving teaching, students and quality that can evoke a positive response from the HLST sector. Institutions will be expected to have human resource strategies 'that explicitly value teaching and reward and promote good teachers' (p.46). Whilst many of the characteristics of good teachers are generic there are clearly subject-specific aspects where HLST pedagogic research and reflection can offer guidance. HLST lecturers should be encouraged to apply for the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme which is to be expanded. The White Paper has also announced that 'Centres of Excellence in Teaching will be established' (p.47). However, currently, the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism works well in promoting good practice across its subjects and there is therefore scope for confusion,

conflict and competition over funding with Centres of Excellence. It is hoped that successful LTSNs will be given a clear role in working with Centres of Excellence. A more comprehensive sampling of student feedback and a strengthening of the external examiner system are also areas where HLST specialists can provide valuable input.

Perhaps the biggest threat to the HLST subjects comes from the new policy directions on research evident in the White Paper. There is a cluster of related issues here. First, the government intends to concentrate research funding in departments which are excellent and large. For example, the White Paper notes that there are 'benefits ... from concentrating the best research in larger units' (p.5) and that 'the government intends to improve the position of research by focusing resources more effectively on the best research performers' (p.28). The creation of the 6\* category to reward submissions which scored 5\* in each of the last two research assessment exercises (RAE) represents the first step along the road to greater research funding selectivity. Second, the government is proposing a break from the tradition that research is a central and defining feature of a university and intends to '[steer] non-research active institutions towards other parts of their mission' (p.26). Third, the government is sceptical about the relationship between teaching and research and states that 'the connection between an institution's research activities and its teaching is indirect' (p.28). Fourth, the training of PhD students is being rethought. Ideas in the White Paper include 'larger graduate schools in fewer HEIs' (p.33) and 'a model where postgraduate degree awarding powers are restricted to successful research consortia' (p.33). This should be read in conjunction with recent Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) proposals to restrict PhD teaching to departments scoring an RAE rating of 3a or above. All this has particular relevance for HLST subjects because of their paucity of 5 / 5\* / 6\* ratings in the RAE and its aftermath.

However there is much research in HLST subjects that was rated 3b to 4 in the RAE. It should be remembered that a 3b rating demonstrates national excellence in more than half of all the research activity submitted whilst a 4 rating demonstrates national excellence in virtually all research activity submitted. Hence much HLST research of national significance would be lost under the increased research selectivity envisaged by the White Paper. Increased research selectivity would cause negative effects beyond the loss of the research itself. These include loss of motivation and incentive; loss of role models to students and staff; loss of research culture; loss of dynamism; ossification of knowledge; the collapse of important academic networks and subject infrastructure and expertise; and loss of many features associated with a university experience. The HLST subject area also supports a small but growing number of PhD students. This programme would be threatened by proposals to restrict supervision of PhD students.

Crucially, the White Paper also holds out a lifeline for research in HLST subjects. It states that 'the government will develop new incentives to support emerging and improving research' (p.6) and that 'we must make sure that the allocation of funding overall encourages and rewards promising departments with comparatively low research ratings, particularly for work in new research areas, so that they have the resources to develop and improve' (p.31). This has been translated into action in the 2003-2004 research grant awards from HEFCE who designated Unit of Assessment (UoA) 69 (Sports-related subjects) an area of emerging and improving research (one of seven such designations) and offered exceptional funding arrangements to fund research rated 3b and 3a (ratings that elsewhere attract no funding). This was good news for Sports subjects. Whether it was good news for Hospitality, Leisure or Tourism subjects depended on which UoA they had submitted under (Tribe, 2003). Many tourism and hospitality submissions were included in Business and Management (UoA 43) where 3a and 3b ratings are not funded.

As well as a move towards greater research selectivity, in various parts of the White Paper the following are suggested. First, the government proposes to 'allow universities to set their own rates for graduate contributions, between £0 and £3,000 a year.' (p.85). Second, the White Paper underlines the government commitment to 'continue to increase participation towards 50 per cent of those aged 18-30, mainly through two-year work-focused foundation degrees' (p.7). Third, the White Paper signals the need to reward talented researchers and teachers. Bringing these things together creates a powerful cocktail where the potential for serious and divisive fault lines within higher education

emerge as the following plausible scenario illustrates. At one end 6\* research ratings create excess student demand enabling top end £3,000 fees to be charged. These institutions become resource rich from both teaching and research incomes and are able to offer pay incentives to recruit the best staff. A virtuous circle is created. Of course the complete opposite set of circumstances will create a vicious circle of resource poverty and decline. Because of their relative immaturity, HLST subjects tend to be taught in new universities and attract lower research ratings. There is therefore a strong possibility that much HLST provision will end up at the Cinderella end of higher education.

A key issue for HLST subjects is that of widening access. The government has underlined its intention to increase participation rates in HE to 50 per cent. It is planning to ensure that there are resources available to support this 'so that universities and colleges will be properly funded for the extra costs of attracting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds' (p.67). The clear challenge to those interested in HLST pedagogy is to determine what are the appropriate interventions (particularly those which are subject-specific) for this group of students.

## Areas overlooked by the White Paper

There can be few involved in higher education that have not had their minds concentrated on aims, particularly through course validations and Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) visits. Aims come before, and guide objectives. Yet readers of the White Paper, despite its sweeping title *The Future of Higher Education*, will search in vain for a coherent exposition of what the government sees as HE's aims or purposes. There are many objectives but no clear aims. This poses a fundamental problem. For if we are not clear what universities are for, we can tinker with them and even radically change them with impunity. Only a clear idea and statement of the purposes of higher education will offer us an evaluative framework to test the validity and consequences of proposed changes. It is because the White Paper offers no clear or convincing insight into the aims of higher education that it is able to suggest two radical reforms which will by themselves redefine the purpose of higher education. These reforms are first the notion that many universities become research-free zones with the de-coupling of knowledge creation from knowledge transmission, and second, the rapid expansion of Foundation Degrees. Both of these imply a narrow vocationalist view of higher education. Institutions where research withers away and Foundation Degrees flourish effectively revert to technical college status whilst retaining the title 'university': it is tempting to redefine them as 'post-universities'. Their business will be that of training, and HLST subjects are likely to become heavily implicated in this movement if they are unable to retain a credible research profile. A final irony may be discerned in terms of access. Whilst access may be raised to 50 per cent the scenarios described above may see perhaps 8 per cent of students educated in elite universities whilst the other 42 per cent gain places at 'post-universities'. A neat example of back to the future which would take us roughly back to the situation of the 1960s.

Ron Barnett's seminal work *The Idea of Higher Education* (Barnett, 1990) should be required reading for policymakers in this sector. In the introduction Barnett states: 'The aim of this book is quite simple. Its focus is higher education, and its purpose is to ask: What is it all about?' (1990:ix). In his conclusion Barnett outlines six minimal educational conditions for an educational process to justify the title 'higher education'. These are:

1. "A deep understanding, by the student, of some knowledge claims
2. A radical critique, by the same student, of those knowledge claims
3. A developing competence to conduct that critique in the company of others
4. ... some form of independent inquiry
5. The student's self-reflection, with the student developing the capacity critically to evaluate his or her own achievements, knowledge claims and performance

6. The opportunity for the student to engage in that enquiry in a process of open dialogue and co-operation (freed from unnecessary direction)" (1990:203).

It is not suggested that these criteria are adopted wholesale by the government - but rather that it gives some serious thought to the purposes of higher education. The default position implicit in the White Paper is that higher education is for the economy, industry and employment - a narrow conception indeed.

## **Implications of the White Paper for pedagogical research and other activities**

The proposals in the White Paper are wide ranging and will cause considerable change in HLST higher education. From the above discussion there are a number of implications for the HLST community. First, the need for the HLST community to understand the implications of the White Paper and to make a reasoned response underlines the importance of pedagogical research and reflection. For without this we are less able to make a convincing case and contribute to the beneficial development of the subject areas. A clear example of this is the White Paper's assertion about the lack of relationship between research and good teaching. There does not yet appear to be research in HLST subjects to evaluate this assertion. However there is published research on aspects of HLST provision such as aims, RAE results and e-learning that enable us to offer evidence-based evaluations of other White Paper proposals. Indeed this edition of the journal offers insights into teaching methods (Armstrong), evaluating the student experience (Brookes), the purposes of education (Stuart-Hoyle), gender and education (Aitchison), virtual learning (Haven and Botterill) and quality (Tribe).

Second, if the HLST community is to have an impact and input into national policy-making commensurate with the size of educational provision and importance of the subjects to the economy it must organise itself and educate itself and others. Here the activities of information gathering, dissemination, lobbying and networking come into play. In Australia, tourism research has never been stronger thanks to the creation of the Centre for Sustainable Research in Tourism at a national level. In the UK, tourism research looks vulnerable post RAE and White Paper. There is a clear role for subject associations - ATHE (Association for Tourism in Higher Education), BASES (British Association of Sport and Exercise Science), CHME (Council for Hospitality Management Education), and LSA (The Leisure Studies Association) in conjunction with the LTSN for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism to drive up the importance of HLST subjects at the national level.

The designation of all HLST subjects as areas of emerging and improving research is perhaps the most urgent item of a joint-lobbying agenda. This would offer HLST subjects a more dynamic future in the heart of higher education rather than ossification at its fringes.

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