

Degrees of collaboration: doctoral training and the production of the new researcher. (0339)

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Background and context

Successive governments have made changes to the way that research in the UK and its constituent countries is funded and directed. Alongside an overt concern with achieving value for money, changes given different emphases to three policy aims: to maintain and strengthen a research base, to reward and support work which is considered to be of the highest quality and to direct efforts towards areas that are consonant with other policy aims. An overall effect of this has been to increase the selectivity of funding and to concentrate resources in 'centres of excellence'. Whilst attention has been mainly on research done by academic faculty, significant developments have also taken place in doctoral research.

Most prominent is a shift from direct funding via studentships to a system of Doctoral Training Centres (DTC) or Partnerships (DTP) and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDT) -referred to generically in this paper as doctoral training institutions (DTIs). They emerged from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, who issued the first call for bids to establish the first two CDTs in 2003, (Lunt, McAlpine & Mills, 2014). Following publication of the *RCUK Strategic Vision for 2011-2015*, such schemes became the prime vehicles for allocating research council studentships and have constituted 'the most significant trend shaping PGR provision at UK universities' (Universities UK, 2014:4), becoming virtually the only models for allocating research council studentships and therefore government support for doctoral research. These schemes are often multi-institutional requiring stronger operational management, strategic alignment between institutions' research strengths and the Research Council's priority themes, and more emphasis on partnership building and match-funding opportunities (Universities UK, 2014:4). Also significant is the focus on the notion of *training* as the central aspect of doctoral activity which reflects wider international trends (Bogle 2014).

Theoretical approach and methodology

This paper offers a critical examination of doctoral 'centres of excellence' and their role in supporting postgraduate research and developing researchers. It draws on the experiences and involvement of one of authors as academic director of a Doctoral Training Centre and of the other as having the leading administrative role in bidding for a number of CDTs, DTCs and DTPs with different research councils and subsequent involvement with their management following successful bids. The focus of our analysis is on two contrasting cases, one a DTC based on a single institution and the other a DTP involving collaboration across several universities. As such the data on which this paper is based include minutes of meetings, journal notes and reflections on experience elicited in part from discussion - mutual interview - of the two authors, and interviews with other actors.

Results Findings and Argument

DTIs are analysed as essentially neoliberal structures. Foucault's (2008:16) analysis of neoliberalism contends that it is distinguished by 'a state under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by the state' to the extent that a market economy functions as the 'principle, form and model' (p.17) of the state. The crucial characteristic of the model is competition rather than free exchange (Gane 2012). DTIs and studentships are gained through a process of multiple competition where research councils, doctoral training partnerships, supervisors and applicants compete to gain awards at different levels of the system. What is funded is determined by compliance with state policy that reflects its supervision by and resemblance to the market.

Lunt et al. (2014: 167) claim that as intermediaries between the state and the universities research councils have becoming ever more energised and 'lively' bureaucracies'. Moreover they have instilled a mimetic isomorphism in other bodies. For example, the trend of demanding 'impact' and 'value for money' was raised by the ESRC in 2009 and echoed by HEFCE in 2011 (Colley, 2014). The liveliness of these bureaucracies is a key aspect of the growth of administrative staff. The experience of working on the establishing, securing and operating DTIs has embodied many of the facets identified by Clarke as belonging to managerialism, proclaiming to academic colleagues that the 'secret garden' (Park, 2008) is no longer 'robust' (Bogle, 2014:5) and indoctrinating them into an often very foreign world of new public management (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Knowledge of the expected behaviours was part of valorizing the position of the administrator / manager. However as far as DTI structures are concerned, the isomorphism is rather normative or coercive as the competitive structures are required both by the bidding and the monitoring processes of the research councils. In effect they compete for funding from the government demonstrating their worth through demonstration that their practices and outcomes - more especially those demanded from the DTIs, conform to governmental priorities.

Compliance with this is enforced through monitoring and accountability through annual reports and visits and a demand for measures of effectiveness of excellence hence a focus on training as and on the inculcation of a set of skills - a commodification of the doctoral degree linked to the demands of employability.

To take the market analysis further DTIs can be seen as conforming to the model of a franchise where Universities are increasingly reliant not so much on the funding through research councils - they only fund 15% of postgraduate research students at UK institutions (Creasey, 2013) - as on the endorsement which positions them strategically in the market. In material terms universities contribute more to DTIs than they receive thus paying for the franchise. The administration of the studentships and all that that entails is lies with them rather than the research councils.

Implications

As well as new institutions -DTIs - the system as it is evolving is changing the nature and practices of all those who are implicated in it. Competition around

excellence tends to go for the safer options the effective meeting of measurement goals and the homogenization of criteria. Administrators, academics and students are all implicated. There is a danger that the definition of good research and the good researcher are being re-formed.