

## For “The University as World Heritage” symposium –

### Wisdom and Passion for Knowledge in Current Transformation of Higher Education

(0090)

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#### Outline:

Universities have been the conscience and critic of societies for many centuries. They help societies make wise choices, improve human lives and liberate human spirits in various aspects. If wisdom can be defined as the ability to liberate ourselves in thoughts or actions in a world where lives are contradictory and subject to constant change in their nature, the passion for knowledge can be interpreted as liberation of truth.

Such passion has played a central role in academic integrity. If integrity is defined as “the state or quality of being complete, undivided, (and) unbroken” (Baltimore, 1999: 260), an integral academic means someone who takes the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge seriously. S/he is passionate of liberating truth sharing both the understanding and the pleasure of discovery. Integral higher education refers to a system which seeks preserving such space for liberation of truth. Such system places the passion for knowledge at its centre: it shares its love by engaging students and the wider public through its disseminating activities, by being self-critical and by creating space for creative and adventurous scientific endeavours.

However, the recent change in higher education funding policies from a supply to demand model (Warry Report, 2006; Chiang, 2010), makes the research atmosphere move away from ‘trustful’ to ‘opportunist’. The comparison between RAE and forthcoming REF is offered in Table 1.

**Table 1: Comparison between RAE and REF**

	<b>RAE</b>	<b>REF</b>
<b>Funding Councils’ position</b>	<b>Supply End</b>	<b>Demand End</b>
<b>Main features</b>	<b>Output-focused</b> Unit level of assessment	<b>Outcome-focused</b> Impact on “desirable behaviours” at individual, unit and institutional levels
<b>“Research” definition</b>	“Original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding”	“A process of investigation leading to new insights effectively shared”
<b>Key elements for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research output</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research outcome:</li></ul>

<b>assessment</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic impact</li> <li>• Research output</li> <li>• Research environment</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment methods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer review</li> <li>• Bibliometric citation</li> <li>• Case study</li> </ul>

Sources: RAE2008 Guidance on submissions (HEFCE, 2005) and Research Excellence Framework second consultation on the assessment and funding of research (HEFCE, 2009)

Drawing on Hallén and Sandström’s framework (1991, Figure 1), it is found that the reform of UK research assessment signifies a move from an atmosphere of trust towards opportunism in the system. A comparison between the two models in three major dimensions of atmosphere dimensions is offered in Table 2.

Figure 1. Atmospheres classified by power balance and trust

	Trust	Opportunism
Power balance	Peers	Competitors
Power imbalance	Paternalism	Bully/underdog

(Hallén and Sandström, 1991: 122)

**Table 2: Supply and Demand Models in Major Atmosphere Dimensions**

<b>Atmosphere Dimensions</b>	<b>Supply model</b>	<b>Demand model</b>
<b>Perspective emphasis</b>	Possibility for medium-term perspective	Short-term calculated perspective
<b>Freewill choices</b>	Some choices over other types of research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research volumes</li> <li>• Limited risk taking</li> </ul>	Little freewill choices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research with ‘desirable results’ - impact beyond the discipline</li> <li>• Risk averse</li> </ul>
<b>Recognition of disinterested pursuit of truth in universities</b>	Superficial recognition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Output-focused</li> </ul>	Not concerned <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome-focused</li> <li>• Economic impact</li> </ul>

It is reasoned that a supply model signifies a competitive atmosphere, while a demand model facilitates a coercion/bully atmosphere. The supply model embodied in RAE supports what Kuhn called, normal science (1996). Its measure is dominated by the quantitative output of research, which represents an emphasis on the accumulative nature of knowledge. Owing to this, it permits limited risk taking research activities for scientists. Although it is output-oriented and seriously flawed in many other aspects (Talib, 2001; Banatvala et al., 2005; Lee, 2007; Oppenheim, 2008; Macilwain, 2009), the supply model nevertheless leaves some limited space for other types of research,

therefore supports to some extent the freewill choices of scientists and some possibility for medium-term vision.

Dissimilarly, the demand model is characterised by its short-term vision, requirement of immediate response and its calculated nature. The dominance of research outcome creates a risk averse environment. This not only impedes the rise of scientific revolutions (Kuhn, 1996) but also poses a threat to the development of normal science. This model which encourages only research with 'demonstrable economic impact', leaves almost no freewill choices for scientists.

The prevalence of an opportunist atmosphere, especially a coercive one, is damaging for higher education. To begin with, under such atmosphere, what academic opportunists concern are not about the liberation of truth, but the attached values which scientific enquiries bring about, such as desirable impact, amount of research grants, quantity of publications and career advance opportunities. The passion for knowledge is simply replaced by instrumental knowing. Knowledge is no longer an end in itself; it becomes a means to an end.

Failing to retain the passion for knowledge, higher education risks its academic integrity. This means, academics are no longer truly passionate about knowledge or advancing knowledge for its own sake. Higher education like this means that there is no longer space for genuine scientific enquiries, because all is steered by other motives. The passion for liberation of truth is lost. The students can no longer feel the passion from the academics. The society can no longer feel the passion of pursuing true enquiries at the universities.

### **“The University as World Heritage” Movement and Conclusion**

If Trow (1996) was right in arguing that higher education hasn't lost the public trust, then we would like to make a call – call for real politics in higher education. “The University as World Heritage” therefore is an idea to create an open space for debate and discussion on the important questions concerning the essence and idea(s) of a University, and its core spirits in the current political and social contexts, the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It aims to facilitate dialogues not only interdisciplinary, cross-sector and cross-country, but also inter-generational and inter-cultural.

Through applying for the UNESCO World Heritage status for universities, this movement aims to remind people of the significant values and contributions that the University has made to the world. The University is one of the most precious treasures of all mankind. It is therefore that the valuable space that Universities create and represent to allow free pursuit of knowledge and highest level of learning and knowing should be recognised.

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