

Is there any value in teaching-based knowledge exchange? (0169)

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A significant aspect to UK Government policy for some decades has been the exploration of the potential of universities to contribute further to the economy and society through a 'third stream' of funding – or 'third mission' (for example, highlighted in the Witty Review of Universities and Growth). As well as third stream funding instruments such as the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF), funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and other knowledge exchange initiatives such as Research Council Impact Acceleration Accounts, there has been increased focussed on engagement and impact in research policy and funding – most notably in the inclusion of impact in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework. Less attention has been given in recent years to the potential inter-play of higher education teaching and learning policy and third stream developments, although the introduction of higher tuition fees in England has put greater focus on employability and employer links. This paper will explore evidence emerging from policy evaluations that suggest a strengthening of the links between knowledge exchange and teaching, and also new approaches and evidence on demonstrating and measuring impacts of these activities, including drawing on qualitative/case study findings. The paper will conclude on significant remaining challenges to build a research and evidence base to demonstrate fully the value for money delivered in terms of wider and narrower agendas in teaching, learning and knowledge exchange linkages.

Interest in the wider contributions of HE, especially to the economy and business, is by no means limited to the UK. Lively international literatures have developed that seek to conceptualise and explain emergent relationships around the changing nature of knowledge production (Gibbons et al 1993, Carayannis et al (2012)); around the notion of the 'triple helix' of relationships between HE and external partners (for example, Etzkowitz, H (2002)); the alleged transformation of HE through various 'mutation' theories (e.g. Slaughter and Leslie 1997) and related studies of the 'Entrepreneurial University' (Clark 1998). The clear focus of attention is HE research and innovation policy and the role and activities of faculty or academic staff. Although there are an increasing number of policy and practice guides (in the UK at any rate) focussed on particular aspects of teaching and learning strategy, notably employment outcomes (e.g. HEA 2014), an obvious lacuna in the academic literature is systematic consideration of the role of the teaching and learning function and students/graduates in knowledge exchange.

In the UK, the third stream or third mission policy is sufficiently developed that extensive evaluation work is being undertaken by policy makers to understand how far these narratives are embedded in universities and the challenges that remain. A 2009 evaluation of HEIF undertaken by PACEC (PACEC 2009) concluded that third stream funding had strengthened the links between research, teaching and knowledge exchange, but that the stronger synergies were between research and knowledge exchange. An evaluation focussed on the wider non-monetisable benefits to third stream

funding (including public/community and local economic benefits) was commissioned this year by HEFCE and in part this paper will explore new findings from this work (PACEC forthcoming). This includes the extent of integration of teaching and third stream, which remains lower than with research, but with a greater rate of change. Recent recommendations from the UK quality agency (QAA 2013) may partly reflect and accelerate this trend.

In tougher fiscal times, increased focus is given by Government to demonstrating the return on investment from public interventions and opportunities to increase value for money. While there is critique of the narrowness of current measures of value, it remains the case that there will need to be public expenditure decisions with hard choices and hence an evidence base to underpin those. There is also a need for policy and practice to be underpinned by evidence of what works. Current measurements of value focus on income or payments from beneficiaries as proxies for real world impacts (with each £1 of HEIF estimated to generate £6.3 of income (Ulrichsen 2014)). This paper will consider novel approaches and new findings from the latest third stream evaluations to explore non-monetisable benefits beyond income.

The paper will include a major case study (and shorter examples) to illustrate how and why the teaching function may become a more influential player, examining in detail development on student enterprise. In the major case study, strategic commitment to an employability and enterprise strategy, with embedding broadly-conceived real-world learning in the curriculum at its core, are key. Re-shaping central careers provision and supporting bottom-up innovation emerge as important too, including a student-run retail outlet, an agency making student talent available to creative microbusinesses, student – run course based businesses (e.g. in events management), taught curriculum units (e.g. on freelance practice), and processes for allocating seed corn funding to student businesses and supporting their development (e.g. business mentors, incubation space). It also demonstrates the value that can be captured by a qualitative approach, set alongside the quantitative approach taken in national policy, currently limited to tracking sales/turnover of companies started by students and graduates (where there is an estimated gross annual value of £2.7bn in England, representing about £3.36 for each pound invested (PACEC 2015)).

The paper will draw conclusions on the richness of different types of value that can be presented in a qualitative approach, and the potential avenues to capture further this range of types of value through quantitative approaches. It will also draw conclusions on the need to improve the evidence and research base on wider forms of public benefits, particularly in the societal and teaching/KE space, linking back to the existing academic literature. This will include new developments to academic theories of 'mutation' and development of triple helix into quadruple and quintuple helix approaches (Chesbrough 2003, OISPG 2013)– to reflect wider partnerships of government, industry, academia, civil participants and the public in eco-systems of various sorts.