

Serial number 0034

Title Do universities embody the values they espouse?

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For over twenty years universities have published mission statements (Davies and Glaister 1996) to outline their purpose, strategy, behaviour standards and values – an approach derived from business, managerial and organisational studies (Campbell 1996). Such an approach can be seen as symptomatic of the corporatization of higher education (Neary & Winn 2009) and the move towards the marketization of the sector (Bok 2009) that has dominated the debate, particularly in the UK (Brown 2015). Nonetheless, the explicit setting-out of the values which a university holds and seeks to adhere to is not necessarily a bad thing; so long as the value statements that proliferate across university websites and prospectuses are genuinely reflected in their institutions' actions and wider policy priorities. Davies and Glaister questioned whether the importance of such an approach was seen in terms of developing a genuine sense of purpose or whether it was driven by the desire to meet external requirements (1996). To date little research has been undertaken to understand the current position and importance of universities self-declared values and to interrogate whether they embody such values in what they do – this paper will seek to address this shortcoming within the UK context.

This paper will report on a research project undertaken in two parts: phase one involved mapping the publically declared values of all UK universities (that is, higher learning institutions with degree awarding powers (gov.uk 2017)); and phase two will evaluate the extent to which these institutions actually embody these values in their actions and policies.

Phase one is based on an analysis of the 166 higher education institutions in the UK which can award degrees and involved the identification, documentation and analysis of the explicitly stated values of each institution. A simple internet search reveals that a large number of universities have dedicated webpages to their values which provided the initial source of data. Although relatively simplistic, by cataloguing these values across institutions it is then possible to undertake a thematic analysis, echoing the work of Morpew and Hartley (2006) and Stemler and Bebell (1999) – both of whom focused on mission statements at educational institutions. The driving purpose of this phase was to understand what the key values are across the sector: which areas receive most focus and are common, but also to understand whether there are important differences (e.g. by region, institution type etc.).

Phase two of the research will evaluate the extent to which universities pursue and embody their declared values. This will be undertaken at two levels – firstly by aggregating the data from phase one and comparing the 'big-picture' values of universities in this country with country-level data that is readily available from sources including HESA and UCAS. Secondly, a more in-depth, fine grain analysis will compare the individual records of universities with institutional-level data. At this stage the approach is not fully defined as this will depend on the full results from phase one and the availability of certain data sources, however, indicatively this could involve assessing the diversity of institutions' student bodies; the access initiatives they put in place; learning outcomes of their

students; or graduate destinations. As such this paper speaks to the conference themes of access and widening participation and higher education policy.

At this stage the research project remains formative in nature and this outline is unable to include the initial results of the research; however the full paper will undertake a more in-depth reporting of the findings.

Key conceptual arguments which form a central part of the paper revolve around questions such as do universities use values and missions as a marketing tool?; what is the purpose of value statements?; and to what extent is a university, often composed of a wide range of staff, spread across campuses (sometimes in different countries) able to embody one set of coherent values?

The research has potentially wide-reaching implications, challenging the agenda of marketization/corporatization that is so prevalent in the higher education sector and asking whether the new management style adopted by universities is suitable given their underlying purpose and role. This paper will open up various streams of future research in this area, including an analysis of whether university values have changed over time and how the contextual policy environment has played a role in changes to both declared values and universities ability to meet these.

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