

**Serial number** 0284

**Title** A New Civics - through Higher Education Engagement

**Submitter** Ms. Lucy Sweetman, Dr. Lynne Gornall, Prof. Brychan Thomas

## **A New Civics – through Higher Education Engagement**

Can we establish a 'new civics' through higher education engagement?

Our work explores engagement - consensus, leadership, co-operation - in higher education. Work we have been exploring over the last two years on forms of leadership in HE, represents academic experience from across the Global North and South, as it examines ways of working mutually, as partners, collaborators and leaders. As academics, we are stakeholders too, participants, in higher education as well as in service to it. We seek to work with each other and those outside our walls and sector - in organisations, projects or those working in service of social goals - to further our labour of creating knowledge, meaning and seeking to influence public life, policy and thought.

To do this effectively, we argue - drawing from our studies - for thinking of ourselves as acting in different sorts of constructive engagement with others. We must reclaim these dispositions, not easy for those who resist bureaucratic regimes. In doing so we can defend ourselves against managerialism that masquerades as leadership: directive, imposing its will, presenting new demands as projects for consultation and consensus building but instead ignoring and attempting to manage out other voices.

Our work in this field has shown us that new forms of leadership are possible that resist hierarchy and *centre* mutuality, and partnership. They emerge from academics collaborating as peers with shared goals but they can also come from within structures that provide mentoring or support to junior colleagues which are still based on mutuality and the primacy of relationships and social networks as productive sites of learning. They are successful because these relationships are formed in different ways. As a consequence, they allow for *plurality*. Academic collaborations built on trust, relationships, shared goals and the clear designation of tasks, provide a workable space

for sharing and even conflict as a constructive part of public work. We argue that these are critical to creating the conditions for mutual working and sustainable outcomes. They are part of a wider educational but also social (and probably international) mission to contribute to the experience of living what Jon Nixon (2012) calls an 'interpretive' life: 'life lived...as an interpretive engagement with the self and others'.

Students, in our context, are stakeholders and collaborators too. They are our partners in learning, colleagues in the labour of creating knowledge and meaning. In our classrooms, we argue, collaboration with students must form the basis for our pedagogy, encouraging them to resist the label of 'customer' but rather to engage in academic exploration together as co-workers. Students are well represented on academic committees, they may have leadership roles in their own representative bodies, or experience leadership in their own interest groups, but many play no obvious active role alongside their teachers in the classroom. In 'Memories of European Experiences and Collaboration' we describe our experiences of project partners, including young people, as committed to the same project goals and with distinct responsibilities in their service. Leadership with students, young people and organizational 'others' must be to encourage engagement and share decision-making: what is the focus of our discussion today? What is the topic of our analytical work? Why is this the question you want to ask? How do you want to lead? (*After Nixon 2012*)

We also draw on the work of Bruce Macfarlane (2007, 2012) and others, on the role of 'service' in academic citizenship and its characteristics / features. Macfarlane's examples of service centre collaboration and the busy-work of academics who make small, often unnoticed contributions to the work of other academics and their own and others' students. These are tasks that depend on relationships and mutuality, they enable the smooth running of departments, field trips and symposia. But these tasks are not valued by systems of reward and they often involve spontaneous work and collaboration to sustain them. Much of this work is, of course, barely compatible with or recognised by micro-managerialist regimes, where disempowered educationists are told what to do (Maurice Kogan 1983) and more valued, quantified tasks are broken down into prescribed time slots for the allocation of workload (Ylijoki *et al* 2014).

So our work is to be part of a movement that aims to promote a new citizenship for higher education, one not just concerned with *rethinking* the academy and its 'civic mission', but which is much more ambitious and influential. As HE stakeholders, we argue not for adaptation to change but for a fully self-confident approach to working with others on social and global projects.

We explore ways of working that challenge managerialist methods and promote/encourage a more democratic model of leadership that is peer-based, collegiate, and comfortable outside of normal hierarchies. We include examples of research projects, institutional developments, and academic effort that focus on relationships and the desire to collaborate outside of hierarchy, where new leadership exists, from the relationships between people and driven by the needs of the academic work.

To promote a new civics, we are seeking to recreate, reimagine, revive, rethink, and reinvent the 'permeable' academy as a site of discourse where the traditional 'civic mission' of higher education can take the lead in developing sustainable public work focused on social and global projects.

Kogan, M (1983) *The Attack on Higher Education*: London: Kogan Page

Macfarlane, B (2007) 'Defining and Rewarding Academic Citizenship: The implications for university promotions policy', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 29:3, 261 - 273 DOI: 10.1080/13600800701457863 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13600800701457863>

Nixon, J (2012) *Interpretive Pedagogies for Higher Education*, London: Continuum

*Gornall et al Eds / Ylijoki , O et al (2014) 'Balancing Working Time and Academic Work in Finland', Academic Working Lives*, London: Bloomsbury Academic