



SRHE News

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SRHE

Society for Research into Higher Education
Advancing knowledge Informing policy Enhancing practice

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Editorial: The Helen Perkins era



Helen Perkins was appointed as Director of the Society for Research into Higher Education in 2004. In December 2021, after another very successful Research Conference, she gave notice of her intention to retire. Her last day of office was 30 June 2022, fittingly coinciding with a meeting of SRHE Council, which was able to congratulate and thank her¹ for her outstanding contribution to the Society in her 18-year tenure.

Arriving in turmoil

Before Helen's appointment the Society was facing serious challenges, with parlous finances, uncertainty over its office accommodation, and a limited range of activities for members, despite its established annual conference, its leading journals and a respected book series. The annual SRHE Conference had traditionally been hosted each year by a different university, each time with a new conference organising committee and a new chair: that mode of operation was creaking and no longer fit for purpose. The Society's financial difficulties were amplified when the new owners gave notice of termination of SRHE's lease of its office premises in Devonshire Street, London. In 2002 the chairs of SRHE's main committees had reached the end of their terms of office, but SRHE glitterati Maria Slowey and Rosemary Deem had been persuaded to chair Research Committee and Publications Committee, respectively. Maria Slowey took charge of the annual conference and immediately started work on the quality and quantity of submissions, while Rosemary Deem began the process of restoring SRHE's finances by negotiating a new contract with long-term publishing partner Taylor & Francis. Director Heather Eggins had announced her retirement but secured new premises for the Society, which became a tenant of the Institute of Physics in Portland Place, just around the corner from its previous perch.



Nevertheless in 2004, as Ron Barnett took the SRHE Chair, there was still great uncertainty about the long-term academic and financial future of the Society. His first major task was to recruit a new Director, and the minutes of the 50th meeting of SRHE's Governing Council, held on Thursday, 28 October 2004 at 76 Portland Place, London W1B 1NT record that: "The Chair (Professor Ron Barnett) introduced the new Director, Helen Perkins to the members of Council and informed them that she would be beginning her term in January 2005."

Steadying the ship

Helen Perkins had held senior posts in British Steel and then as Head of Human Resources at Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC). While at PWC she also served for several years as Chair of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). Arriving with both senior managerial experience and

¹ Images and statistics here are taken with permission from Rob Gresham's splendid tribute to Helen, in his presentation at the lunch attended by many friends and colleagues following the Council meeting.

a knowledge of HE, she knew from the start how to achieve a workable compromise between the academic desire to argue to a conclusion (however long it took) and the managerial need to reach a timely decision. As Ron Barnett led the rewriting of [the SRHE's mission statement](#), Council happily endorsed a series of improvements in how the Society was governed and how its activities were managed; its location, staffing and finances became increasingly secure, as successive Chairs - George Gordon, Yvonne Hillier, Jill Jameson, Chris Pole, Pauline Kneale – would testify. In all these changes Helen Perkins was of course centrally involved, and behind the scenes she put together a superb staff team which, although it remains small, now oversees a [range of publications, conferences, workshops and network activities](#) which were unimaginable 20 years ago.

44 Bedford Row



The Institute of Physics decided in 2009 to reclaim its sublet premises, and the Society's offices moved for two years to Bedford Row, an Open University building, before the move to Collier Street, which for 11 successful years facilitated the burgeoning range of membership activities. The pandemic prompted a rethink on working from home and some retrenchment, with the

Society eventually moving to its present offices in All Saints Street, part of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations building.



73 Collier Street

The annual Conference continued to gain strength, but until 2008 it continued its peripatetic existence, in Edinburgh, Brighton (twice) and an unforgettable experience in Liverpool, where the Adelphi Hotel more than lived up to the reputation forged in an earlier fly-on-the-wall TV documentary. Helen sought a new approach to the Conference and her unrivalled negotiating skills secured an affordable slot at the Celtic Manor Hotel in Newport, which proved an instant hit and became the venue for every Conference from 2009 to 2019. As Research Committee took full charge of the event it became possible to expand the Newer Researchers Conference and also accommodate it at Celtic Manor, end-on with the main Research Conference. The pandemic interrupted this sequence, but the staff team led by Helen excelled themselves in creating from scratch a week-long online conference for 2021. This did more than almost any other academic conference to recreate online many of the conference features most valued by Celtic Manor participants, spawning many attempted copycat events by other learned societies.

Reaching new heights

Meanwhile Helen's negotiating skills were also put to good use in successive new long-term contracts with publishers Taylor & Francis and Wiley, achieving for the Society a level of financial security unimaginable only a few years earlier. The benefits were such that the Society was able to introduce its now established series of [annual research grants](#). Since 2005 SRHE has made 82 Research and Scoping Awards and 35 Newer Researcher Awards, with grants totalling more than £750,000 of direct support for research into higher education.

The range, scope and quality of SRHE's journals have continued to grow. [SRHE News](#) was rethought and relaunched in 2010 as a service to members, and since 2014 has developed an associated [blog](#) which is now read by researchers, policymakers and managers in more than 110 countries worldwide. Despite the apparently crowded field of journals covering research into HE, Helen Perkins was a prime mover and innovator in establishing a new journal, [Policy Reviews in Higher Education](#), which has showed that there was indeed a gap in the market for the distinctive opportunities which the new journal offers. Helen would insist we also acknowledge publishers Taylor & Francis and in particular the support and encouragement of Ian White, for many years the Society's main contact. Appointing

new editors for journals and the book series can often be problematic, demanding a balance between the interests of the Society, the publishers and the academic needs of the journal and its editors. Publications Committee is responsible to Council for all such appointments. The Committee's Chairs, most recently Sue Clegg and Rob Cuthbert, recognise and greatly value Helen's skill in bringing so many editorial appointments to a successful conclusion.

For so many SRHE members, Helen Perkins and the Society have been inseparable and it will be hard to imagine SRHE without her. But the academic and financial health of the Society have never been better, and the staff team she created but now leaves behind is a strong guarantee that SRHE will continue to develop and prosper. Helen leaves with our thanks, our congratulations and our best wishes for her next steps as she develops a new portfolio of activities to refute any idea of 'retirement'.

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Editorial policy

SRHE News aims to comment on recent events, publications, and activities in a journalistic but scholarly way, allowing more human interest and unsupported speculation than any self-respecting journal, but never forgetting its academic audience and their concern for the professional niceties. If you would like to suggest topics for inclusion in future issues, to contribute an item, or to volunteer a regular contribution, please contact rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk. We aim to be legal, decent, honest, truthful, opinionated and informed by scholarship. We identify named individuals with their employing institutions. *News* content is written by the editor except where authors are identified or sources are acknowledged. *Comments and suggested additions to editorial policy are welcome.*

Future editions of *SRHE News*

Copy deadline for *SRHE News* Issue 50: **30 September 2022**

The SRHE Blog

We welcome contributions at any time for [the SRHE Blog](#), which is read in more than 100 countries across the world. Blog posts may also appear as items in *SRHE News*, and vice-versa. Some blog posts are now being published in more than one language, and contributions may be submitted in languages other than English. Please email contributions, in any language, to rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk or rob.gresham@srhe.ac.uk.

Contributions and comments from SRHE members keep *News* in touch with what is going on in higher education research around the world: please let the editor know of any personal news or contributions you would like to submit for future issues. Just email rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk.

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Government and Higher Education Policy

Policy and funding in England

Public Accounts Committee sounds the alarm on HE finance

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee issued its eighth [report](#) for Session 2022-2023 on 15 June 2022, recording its concerns about *Financial Sustainability of the Higher Education Sector in England*: “Higher education providers face long-term, systemic, pressures on their financial sustainability and viability. The proportion of providers with an in-year deficit has increased in every one of the past four years, from 5% in 2015/16 to 32% in 2019/20. Some providers are heavily reliant on income from overseas students’ fees to cross-subsidise research and other activities, leaving them potentially exposed to significant financial risks should assumptions about future growth in international student numbers prove over-optimistic. ... Ongoing financial pressures ... increase the risk of providers failing, closing campuses or courses, reducing the quality of teaching, or limiting access, any of which could adversely affect students. In that context, protections for students, in the event of providers facing financial distress, still need strengthening.”

[David Kernohan blogged for Wonkhe](#) on 11 April 2022 about the continuing conundrum of insolvent providers: “Market exit ... has still not been normalised. As much as we might pretend that the invisible hand makes the decisions – provider monitoring, insolvency, and student support – the actuality of the process remains as messy and human as it ever was.”

Higher education is losing money ... everywhere. [Nick Hillman’s excellent HEPI blog](#) on 7 June 2022 offered ‘ten killer facts’ about university finance, including: “Higher education institutions – like schools – tend to flex their educational offer in response to the funding available. So the challenge of underfunding is not just (or even mainly) institutions going to the wall; it is institutions not delivering for their students.” There is an alarming number of stories about major cutbacks at universities including Wolverhampton and [Roehampton](#).

Free speech bill rises from the ashes of prorogation

[Minister Michele Donelan gave a speech](#) on 26 April 2022 in which she explained how wonderful universities will be when the government’s bill is enacted, with a Director of Freedom of Speech and

Academic Freedom on the board of the Office for Students. She deplored cancel culture and spoke of how a narrow monoculture is so limiting in the marketplace of ideas. And the speech was given at ... Policy Exchange, the right wing think tank, where no-one raised any of the awkward questions which the legislation poses. [HEPI's Nick Hillman's reaction](#) was to accept the inevitability of the legislation but to remain positive.

On 28 April 2022 *Wonkhe's* [Jim Dickinson wrote a superb blog](#) about the legal judgment in a long-running case involving students at Bristol University, the implied limits on the powers of universities to regulate student behaviour, and the potential implications for the OfS in its publishing its 'expectations' about harassment, and the enforcement, or not, of the proposed Free Speech Act.

[Nick Hillman's HEPI blog](#) of 23 June 2022 (summarising HEPI Policy Note 35 [You can't say that! What students really think of free speech on campus](#)) reported a convincing survey showing students are significantly less supportive of free expression than they used to be.

Ministers should not politicise the work of the OfS: discuss

You couldn't say that Susan Lapworth, interim head of the OfS, was trying to avoid big issues, with [her HEPI blog](#) on 13 June 2022. But she faithfully toed the party line: "ministers are not 'politicising' the work of the OfS when they make use of these lawful mechanisms to express their priorities and expectations. Rather, they are making proper use of the powers Parliament gave to them and that feels entirely democratic to me." Some called that 'courageous' but she was, rather, going out of her way not to upset the people who might make her interim appointment permanent. She noted that "ministers appoint the members of the OfS board: the OfS chair, independent members, the Chief Executive, the [Director for Fair Access and Participation](#), and, subject to the passage of the [Higher Education \(Free Speech\) Bill](#), another future director. These are all subject to the normal processes for public appointments. It is, though, hardly a surprise that ministers would wish to appoint people broadly aligned with the policy preferences of the government of the day. And a democratically elected government gets to make those decisions." So it's OK to appoint the wife of your good friend and neighbour (and Conservative MP) to a seat on the board, if you're the Chair who still takes the party whip in the House of Lords, because, "once appointed, we all ensure that OfS decisions are taken independently".

Graduates face eye-watering increase in repayments

[Ben Waltmann's 'Observation'](#) for the *Institute of Fiscal Studies* on 13 April 2022 noted the exorbitant implications of current policy for student loan repayments, with graduates facing an additional £3000 payment over six months as repayment rates fluctuate wildly in response to changes in inflation rates. In complete contrast, the US [paused federal student loan repayments](#), as Annie Nova reported for *CNBC* – which puts a spoke in the cohort default rate, [still a required indicator](#) as far as government is concerned. The subsequent much-trumpeted capping by government of interest repayment rates at 'just' 7.3%, instead of the 12% or so indicated by the usual (iniquitous) formula, will only benefit the future rich, as Jim Dickinson explained in [his 11 June 2022 Wonkhe blog](#).

Graduates are less authoritarian, less racially prejudiced, more right-wing on economics, according to Ralph Scott (Manchester) [in his LSE Impact blog](#) on 6 June 2022.

Challenging the skills fetish

An [article in the British Journal of Sociology of Education](#) (online 1 March 2022) by Leesa Wheelahan, Gavin Moodie (both Toronto) and James Doughney (Victoria University, Melbourne) "describes the process through which human capital theory came to dominate policy in post-compulsory education, to result in the fetishisation of skills. It relates skills policies to the contemporaneous development of policies on lifelong learning. The fetishisation of skills is related to methodological and normative

individualism displacing an understanding that capacity and skill arise from and are developed by interdependent action. The current promotion of 21st century skills, genericism and trainability leads to the alienation of skills from the people who embody and exercise them and the social context which enables and gives value to peoples' exercise of their skills. The article argues that this reification and fetishization of skills degrades education, work and social life."

The Future of Higher Technical Education in England

The Lifelong Education Commission, chaired by former universities minister Chris Skidmore MP, is full of experienced and sensible people, some slightly right of centre, but well worth listening to. "The Commission will seek to recommend how the multiple and varied barriers to lifelong learning can be removed, what future investment is needed to support this, and what regulatory change is needed to ensure the maximum possible flexibility that will benefit learners and deliver on the promise of a whole system change for education post-18." On 27 April 2022 it published [a report](#) which attracted widespread praise for its good sense. No chance under the present administration of making it into government policy, then. In a move with all the hallmarks of a co-ordinated campaign, HEPI on 28 April put out its own report '[Holding Talent Back? What is next for the future of Level 3?](#)' No doubt the Minister's commitment to free speech, reiterated only two days earlier, means she may hear and she may even read (a summary) of these proposals, before ignoring them.

The *Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022* became law with the prorogation of Parliament on 28 April 2022.

ITT Review shambles

The always reliable [Freddie Whitaker reported for Schools Week](#) on 31 May 2022 that "The first university [Nottingham] rated 'outstanding' under Ofsted's new teacher training inspection framework is among those snubbed over re-accreditation in the first round of the controversial ITT review. [Only 80 of the 216 providers – just over a third – that applied went through in the first round.](#) Other rejected organisations spoke of being treated "disgracefully", while even successful providers described a "challenging" and "stressful" process. Under the review, all providers [have to apply for re-accreditation to continue training from 2024](#). But, while the government anticipated its reforms would disrupt the market, the low numbers threaten to exacerbate current recruitment woes."

Government cuts links with NUS because of anti-semitism

[Marie Jackson reported for the BBC](#) on 14 May 2022 that: "The government is cutting ties with the National Union of Students because of concerns about anti-Semitism. Universities minister Michelle Donelan said it meant the NUS would not be eligible for government funding."

Covid-19 won't change universities unless they own up to the problems that were already there *by Steven Jones*



At a national level in the UK, two Covid narratives vie for supremacy. The first positions the government response to the pandemic as successful, pointing to a world-leading [vaccine development and roll-out](#), a well-received [furlough scheme](#), and an accelerated return to 'normal'. The second positions the government response as calamitous, pointing to recurring [misspends](#), accusations of [corruption](#), and a [death rate](#) among the highest in Europe.

Within UK higher education, two parallel narratives have arisen. On one hand, sector leaders and institutional managers claim against-the-odds [victory](#) because most universities emerged reputationally and commercially unscathed from the most unforeseeable of global challenges. On the other hand, for many students and staff, Covid-19 further exposed the [limits](#) of market-based approaches to funding universities, and the harm done by corporate governance cultures.

Discursively, Covid-19 laid bare a higher education sector fluent in the language of competition but mostly unable to articulate its underlying value to society. Senior management teams continued to pore over league table performance indicators and rejoice in individual 'excellence', but struggled to co-create a narrative of common good and humanity in the face of a deadly virus.

Yet at the local level there was much of which to be proud: university staff listened to their students and put their needs first, recognising that welfare now took priority over academic outcomes. Learning persisted, even during the depths of lockdown, with pedagogies adapting and curricula evolving. The question now is how to reconcile a renewed spirit of collegiality and creativity with top-down policy wedded to the idea that universities are 'providers' and their students little more than consumers of a premium product.

The starting point may be to accept that UK universities were struggling long before Covid-19 struck. Many of the sector's underlying problems were simply brought into sharper focus by the pandemic.

...

Read the full blog [here](#).

SRHE member Steven Jones is a Professor of Higher Education at Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester. Steven's new book, Universities Under Fire: hostile discourses and integrity deficits in higher education (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022) will be published in the summer.

Office for Students

Nicola Dandridge's retrospective at AHUA

Outgoing OfS chief executive Nicola Dandridge was invited for the Association of Heads of University Administration conference (5 April 2022) to [reflect on her time at OfS](#): "The transition from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) to the OfS represented a profound shift of approach in terms of regulation and oversight. It was partly to do with the move from funder to regulator – from a body where controls were exercised primarily through the distribution of funding, to one that exercises its control through regulation rather than the residual £1.4 billion of funding that it distributes. But beyond that, I believe that the more significant change was that our focus of attention, and our relationship with the sector, underwent a 180-degree change. The OfS's **primary** interest was no longer in the university or college that we funded, but the student who was being taught and paid tuition fees through graduate repayments. This shift of focus is still, I believe, being worked through. ... we are the first to acknowledge that without a thriving, dynamic, and well resourced institution the student experience will be impaired. But that doesn't mean, as some still assume, that our primary role should be to fund and support the institution on the basis that that will of itself automatically lead to the best outcomes for students."

More 'guidance' for OfS from DfE

[A letter of 'guidance'](#) went to the OfS from Secretary of State Nadhim Zahawi and Universities Minister Michele Donelan on 31 March 2022. In essence, they like the way the OfS is doing the government's bidding, but they want it done quicker and better. [Wonkhe's David Kernohan and Jim Dickinson](#) picked the bones out of it on the same day. [John Morgan for Times Higher Education](#) on 31 March 2022 highlighted the 'instruction' to tackle larger providers with supposed 'pockets of low quality'.

On 26 May 2022 [OfS announced](#) in a government-pleasing initiative that it had launched investigations into eight universities and colleges to decide whether they meet the OfS's conditions for quality, which had just come into effect. "Other factors to be considered include whether the delivery of courses and assessment is effective, the contact hours students receive, and whether the learning resources and

academic support available to students are sufficient. To support this work the OfS is recruiting a pool of experienced academics to lead the investigative work.” OfS warned that they would be putting ‘boots on the ground’. But on what grounds? Diana Beech (London Higher) was in combative form in [her HEPI blog](#) on 16 June 2022: “In sum, it appears that before implementation of the B3 risk framework, we have moved to a process of investigation based on undefined thresholds or metrics, accepted a subject-based evaluation rather than sector or institution, and accepted that volume balances against scale of variance. Consequently, questions must be asked about the timings, approach and motives for this announcement, which comes before the new Chief Executive of the OfS has been announced and also before a much-anticipated ministerial reshuffle.”

OfS uses validation powers for the first time

The [OfS announced](#) on 25 May 2022 that it had for the first time used its validation powers to appoint the Open University to offer a partnership option to further education colleges interested in providing vocational and technical (Level 4 and 5) courses that will provide more choice to students. This was an instant rehearsed response to [government ‘guidance’](#) which offered £10million funding to support the initiative, saying “we would like the OfS to use its powers under section 50 of HERA to enter arrangements with HEPs requiring them to offer validation.”

OfS gets the wagons in a circle for its ‘world-leading’ panel

The funding previously known as ‘small and specialist’ was transformed by the OfS to become funding for ‘world-leading’ provision, and OfS established a [specialist provider panel](#) as a time-limited committee of the board, “to oversee and make decisions in relation to whether a registered higher education provider is world-leading and specialist”. The Committee is chaired by the world-leading chair of OfS, Lord Wharton, whose latest international foray was to speak at a Conservative conference also featuring anti-semitic and racist speakers, where he endorsed [Viktor Orban](#), the Hungary leader busily increasing the state’s ideological control of Hungary’s universities, having already [driven out the Central European University](#). So Wharton has surrounded himself with a real heavyweight group of committee members including Sir Alan Langlands, former chief executive of the NHS and of HEFCE and VC at Leeds and Dundee. Who will dare to argue about the outcomes?

OfS staff union makes formal complaint about Lord Wharton

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) has made [a formal complaint](#) about OfS chair James Wharton's appearance at the Conservative Political Action Conference, alongside denounced racist Zsolt Bayer. PCS reps at the Office for Students (OfS) have written to OfS management regarding the chair of the OfS board, who spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference on 20 May 2022, at the same event as Bayer. Wharton also shared a platform with, and expressed support for, Viktor Orbán who is widely criticised for threatening liberal democracy and liberal democratic institutions, as well as interfering in the running of universities in Hungary. [David Kernohan of Wonkhe blogged](#) about it on 29 May 2022, noting the irony that, on the day Wharton spoke to CPAC, OfS staff were issued with guidance on accepting invitations to speak at events: “Staff have raised concerns that Wharton’s decision to speak at CPAC Hungary undermined ongoing work on tackling harassment in the higher education sector, and noted with alarm the concerns of the Union of Jewish Students. The fact that this all happened while OfS is following a government mandate to disengage with the National Union of Students – a group that has both apologised for historic antisemitism and set up an independent inquiry into more recent complaints – makes the apparent absence of consequences for the chair all the more worrying.”

[Guardian Education Editor Richard Adams reported](#) on 1 June 2022 that “The QC leading an independent investigation into alleged antisemitism within the National Union of [Students](#) has announced she will examine the election of the organisation’s incoming president as well as wider concerns. Rebecca Tuck, who was appointed to head the inquiry after consultations between the NUS

and the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), said an internal investigation into Shaima Dallali, the president-elect, under the NUS's code of conduct would take first priority, with her findings to be announced within weeks."

Jim Dickinson and David Kernohan looked over the minutes of the March meeting of OfS in their 1 June [blog for Wonkhe](#): "... the first meeting for a new board member announced by the Department for Education (DfE) as one Rachel Houchen. She's the wife of Conservative Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen, who "lives in Yarm with his wife Rachel" and who until recently was assistant headteacher and governor of a local school, making her arguably more qualified than James Wharton to be on the board. That's Lord Wharton of Yarm, of course. In 2017, Ben Houchen told Tees Life magazine that he enjoys spending time with Rachel and "a very small group of close friends", which includes Wharton. The Telegraph has described Wharton as one of Ben Houchen's "best friends". It's a small world."

OfS measures of success

Susan Lapworth, interim OfS CEO, spoke at a HEPI seminar on 24 May 2022, with her remarks summarised in a [HEPI blog](#) on 30 May on 'Measures of Success'. OfS proposed using three indicators to measure student outcomes: continuation, the proportion of students who continue on their course after the first year; completion, the proportion who complete their course; and progression, the proportion who go on to professional jobs or further study. As usual, she brooked no argument: "So, are we trying to measure the wrong things? No".

OfS decisions on funding for 2022-2023

OfS announced its [decisions on 2022-2023 funding](#) on 9 June 2022. Non-capital grants to be distributed by the OfS for the 2022-23 academic year will total £1,373 million, an increase of £72 million (5.5 per cent) compared with the equivalent budget for the previous year. The total comprises £1,347 million in recurrent grant for providers and £26 million in funding for national facilities and regulatory initiatives. In addition there will be £450million of capital funding across the financial years 2022-23 to 2024-25, most of which will be distributed through a bidding competition.

Policy and funding in the USA

US Education Department discharges \$5.8 billion of loans for former Corinthian students

[Meghan Brink reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 2 June 2022 that US Vice-President Kamala Harris would that day announce that 560,000 borrowers who attended any Corinthian Colleges programme would have their loan discharged. The for-profit Corinthian had been found guilty of fraud and forced to close; Kamala Harris was first to sue Corinthian when she was California Attorney-General. The \$5.8 billion discharge is by some distance the largest ever.

And then there was one ... in Phoenix

The University of Phoenix announced that it would close 17 of its remaining 18 physical campuses by 2025, leaving just one in Phoenix itself, as [Mark Anderson reported for the Sacramento Business Journal](#) on 16 April 2022. The University has been closing campuses since 2012, and especially after the introduction of stricter regulation of 'gainful employment' requirements by the Obama administration. Its enrolment fell from 470,000 in 2010 to [83,800 in 2020](#).

US tuition fee discounts hit new record rate

Tuition discounts reached a record 54.5% in 2021-2022, according to preliminary results from a [NACUBO study](#) published on 19 May 2022. The previous record of 53.9% was set in 2020-2021.

South Carolina legislature wants to fire all the University of South Carolina trustees

The University of South Carolina botched the appointment of previous President Robert Caslen and his successor, with allegations of corruption by the search committee. The University also used nearly \$16million to buy out the contracts of two sports coaches. Now the South Carolina General Assembly wants to fire the entire board, downsize it and start again, as [David Steele reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 8 April 2022.

Peer group institutions, as selected by the institutions

Jacquelyn Elias compiled [pictures for 1500 US institutions](#) in 2020-2021 for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, on 24 March 2022.

Strategy, Leadership, Governance and Management

Vivienne Stern is the new UUK chief executive

[Universities UK announced](#) on 29 April 2022 that they had appointed Vivienne Stern, currently Director of Universities UK International (UUKi), to replace Alistair Jarvis, Chief Executive since 2017. He left the organisation at the end of May to take up a new role at the University of London as Pro Vice-Chancellor, Partnerships and Governance

New Hereford Institute has cost £25million, with only 30 students recruited in first phase

Mike Ratcliffe (Nottingham Trent) was on the ball as usual, noting [the high costs](#) of the much-trumpeted New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering in Hereford, which has so far failed to live up to its promises.

Collapse of the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts

[ALRA collapsed](#) for financial reasons on 5 April 2022 and closed immediately, making 44 staff redundant. An [OfS announcement](#) on the same day said that students have been offered a transfer to Rose Bruford College. Jim Dickinson (*Wonkhe*) pointed out some issues and problems with how and when the OfS intervened in [his tweets on 4 April 2022](#), noting that students had not been offered a refund as an alternative to continuing at Rose Bruford. And ALRA's 'Student Protection Plan', much trumpeted as a safeguard by OfS, was just wrong about the college's financial stability.

Auditors record 'material uncertainty' at University of Buckingham

The University of Buckingham had a deficit of £17.5million in 2019, mostly attributable to a joint venture with an Indian healthcare provider which involved taking over the Crewe campus formerly occupied by Manchester Metropolitan University. [John Morgan reported for Times Higher Education](#) on 6 June 2022 about the PWC audit report; [Jim Dickinson blogged for Wonkhe](#) on 6 June 2022 asking 'how much trouble is Buckingham in?' – noting the University's assurances about the present and future, providing much useful background about the joint venture and reminding us of some of former VC Anthony Seldon's bold pronouncements.

Wolverhampton suspends recruitment for 56 courses

It was [reported on 18 May](#) that the University of Wolverhampton had suspended recruitment for 56 courses in sciences for 2022, with no promises about the long term future of the courses concerned.

37 redundancies at Huddersfield

Huddersfield University has announced 37 redundancies, with Linguistics particularly at risk, according to a [tweet by Huddersfield Linguistics](#) on 14 June 2022.

Do Russian universities improve when they are led by top researchers?

Daria Gerashchenko (European University of St Petersburg) asked the question [in Higher Education](#) (83:1103-1123, 2022) and decided that they do, but only if leaders are 'politicians' rather than strategic managers.

Bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct at UCL Bartlett School

[Geneva Abdul reported for The Guardian](#) on 9 June 2022 that University College [London](#) had "apologised to current and former students and staff for a "culture of unacceptable behaviour" at its architecture school going back decades. The apology comes after the university conducted an investigation into complaints of sexism and racism on campus, first [reported by The Guardian last year.](#)"

Christchurch Dean fires parting shot

Martyn Percy was head of Christchurch College and the diocesan cathedral until Easter 2022, when he stepped down after an acrimonious dispute with the college lasting [four years](#). The acrimony continues, as [Rosie Dawson wrote for the Religion Media Centre](#) on 14 May 2022: "Christ Church College, Oxford, where Martyn Percy had been the dean for eight years, refused to host any sort of farewell. The University Church of St Mary was proposed as an alternative venue but became unavailable once it became clear that the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Rev Steven Croft, and the dean, who is also professor of theological education at King's College London, could not agree on the content of the service. ... Following the settlement with Christ Church, the Bishop and Martyn Percy entered into discussions about what form a leaving service should take. In correspondence seen by the Religion Media Centre, Bishop Croft wrote that he was unable to allow him to preach. Dean Percy protested: "Your letter treats me with cruel indifference. It seems to me that you do not really want this service. You clearly think I am leaving in disgrace ... I am not.""

New chancellor for Gloucestershire

Lord Bichard, whose previous roles include VC of the University of the Arts, London, permanent secretary at the Education Department and CEO of Gloucestershire County Council, is the [new chancellor of the University of Gloucestershire](#), replacing Dame Rennie Fritchie.

Vice-chancellors are digging in

A [HEPI blog](#) on 26 May 2022 advertised a new paper on the changing tenure of UK university vice-chancellors over the past half a century, a report by HEPI with support from executive search firm GatenbySanderson. The average tenure of VCs is now approaching five years, 15% higher than its low point in 2011.

President steps down after his pay rise angered faculty facing budget cuts and a pay freeze

[Kate McGee reported for The Texas Tribune](#) on 11 April 2022 that the [Stephen F Austin State University](#) President Scott Gordon had 'mutually agreed' with the board to step down. The board had previously agreed an \$85000 increase and further \$25000 increases for the next two years for Gordon, at the same meeting where it discussed the tough economic situation facing the university. When the budget, involving staff reductions and a pay freeze, became public knowledge, faculty outrage led to Gordon handing back his raise, but he also faced allegations of bullying and intimidation, and the board eventually decided he should leave.

Phoenix President resigns amid probe into previous job

[Scott Jaschik reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 6 June 2022 that: "George Burnett has resigned as president of the University of Phoenix amid an investigation of Westwood College, which he led previously, [USA Today](#) reported. Both institutions are for-profit. At Westwood, the U.S. Education Department has already canceled \$130 million in student loan debt tied to deceptive advertising."

[Chris Quintana for USA Today](#) on 3 June 2022 had more detail: “The department questioned Burnett’s time overseeing Westwood College, a for-profit college based in Westminster, Colorado, that had run-ins with federal and state regulators over deceptive advertising among other concerns. Some of those cases helped lead to the federal government canceling \$130 million in student loan debt tied to the deception of Westwood College students. ... The department said it found credible evidence that admissions officers at Westwood were trained to use “emotional triggers” when talking to potential students and that they were “trained, directed, or encouraged to not take ‘No’ for an answer from the prospective student.”

Nevada System Chancellor set to resign

[Emma Whitford reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 30 March 2022 that Melody Rose, Nevada HE System Chancellor, was set to resign less than two years after her appointment, after filing a complaint of abuse against the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Regents.

Nebraska takes a very long term view of planned maintenance

The University of Nebraska had an \$800million backlog of estate maintenance, so it decided to take a long term view and finance its programme through bond sales, as [Liam Knox reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 12 May 2022.

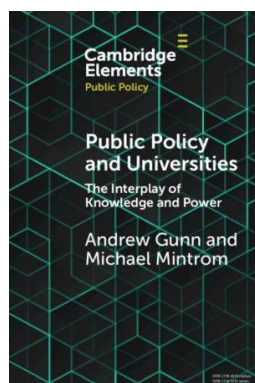
A spatial view of organising

Gary Thomas Burke, Omid Omidvar (both Aston), Agnessa Spanellis (Heriot-Watt) and Igor Pyrko (Bristol) had an [article in Organization Studies](#) (online 26 May 2022) about “how citizens co-construct social media spaces to orchestrate helping activity during a crisis. Conceptualizing a novel synthesis of classical garbage can theory and virtual space, we reveal how emergent groups use ‘spatial partitioning’ and ‘spatial mapping’ to create a multi-layered spatial architecture that distributes decision-making and invites impromptu choice occasions: spontaneous matchmaking, proximal chance connects, and speculative attraction.”

How middle managers secretly promote strategic initiatives

Ina Toergel (IMD Switzerland), Orly Levy (SOAS) and Karsten Jonsen (IMD) reported their research [in Organization Studies](#) (43(6) June 2022) on “why and how middle managers use secrecy to explore and promote strategic initiatives. We conceptualize secrecy as a dynamic social process that unfolds in the political arena and is oriented toward gaining influence and power. It is enacted through a distinct set of practices intentionally designed to conceal and control identities, activities and information. ... middle managers tend to use secrecy under unfavourable contextual and personal conditions ... [and] use three key practices – *selecting for enrolment*, *sequencing involvement* and *controlling information* – to explore and promote strategic initiatives in secrecy. These secrecy practices enable them to influence cognition, emotions and exchange relations as they compete for attention and support. ... secrecy can lead to two opposite outcomes. Managed carefully, secrecy enhances receptivity to strategic initiatives, but if it is mismanaged, secrecy leads to resistance and distrust.”

Public policy and universities



Congratulations to SRHE member Andrew Gunn and Michael Mintrom (both Monash) on the publication of their new book *Public Policy and Universities: the interplay of Knowledge and Power*. “In the global knowledge economy universities are of paramount importance to governments worldwide. This creates a strong rationale for ... exploring how the interactions between universities and the state are being reconfigured, while highlighting the role policy analysis can play in explaining these dynamics. ... four theoretical approaches – New-Institutionalism, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, the Narrative Policy Framework, and Policy Diffusion and Transfer – to inform the analysis. ... universities, while typically seeking greater autonomy, remain subject to a multifaceted form of nation state oversight as they continue to globalise in an uncertain world.”

Staff

The academic as jester: speaking truth to power

Management veteran Stewart Clegg (Sydney/Stavanger), with Miguel Pina e Cunha (Nova de Lisboa), Arménio Rego (Lisboa) and Marco Berti (University of Technology Sydney) explored “how jesting may inform academic work through using humour and laughter to deconstruct organizational taboos and convey truth to power. We suggest that academic jesting constitute a wise and undervalued way in which management learning can occur.” [Their article](#) was in *Management Learning* (53(3), July 2022). If you want a heavier take, try Erik Mygind du Plessis (Copenhagen Business School) [in Organization](#) (29(4) July 2022), examining “what happens when the critical practice of whistleblowing or ‘speaking truth to power’ is sought institutionalized and transformed into a practice of ‘speaking truth through power’ – that is, through the managerial instrument of the whistleblowing hotline. ... the Foucauldian concept of dispositive can help explain how a seemingly expedient and pragmatic technique such as the whistleblowing hotline, is in fact riddled with complexity and contradiction, which in turn creates a series of dilemmas and limitations related to aim and function of the hotline.”

Managing academic workloads

Beth R Crisp (Deakin) looked at the workload literature and asked why managing workloads is deemed necessary: “Whether due to the need for efficient use of scarce resources or ensuring equity for staff, workload allocation models are promoted as an accurate measure of each individual’s workload and as a measure of accountability. The literature privileges the views of staff whose workloads are ‘managed’ but unable to do their work within their contracted hours.” Her [article, in the Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management](#) (online 13 April 2022) identified key issues and suggested how workload managers could be more effective.

Can coaching bring back the joy to academic work? *by George Callaghan*



Pause for a moment and jot down how many tasks and projects are currently at the front of your mind? You might already be thinking, “hold on, am I asked to pause, to stop thinking, stop doing, even for a moment? Does he not know how much I’ve got to do!” I would encourage you to give it a go.

Here are mine: write this blog, check work emails, check personal emails, re-read my Career Development Staff Appraisal Form for meeting later today, check train is going to be on time for said meeting, check if Waverley station has moved bike storage area since lock-down, check today’s to-do list I made yesterday, send the two qualitative interviews which have been transcribed to the printers...” OK, I will stop there – quite a long list which only took about 30 seconds to come up with. It also does not include other University work or general

life stuff such as parenting, being in a relationship, owning pets, shopping and so on. The distinction between the private and professional life of academics is becoming increasingly blurred – and the pressure of work is becoming increasingly intense.

Then think back to when you embarked on your academic career, most likely full of excitement and joy at being able to pursue your intellectual passion for a subject, enthuse students, write papers, and successfully present at conferences.

What happened between the early excitement and present overload? How did our academic lives become so busy we barely have time for a coffee break, never mind time to think clearly and analytically? And crucially, what might we do about it? ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

SRHE member George Callaghan is Professor of Personal Finance and Economics in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science at the Open University. He is also a qualified coach with the International Coaching Federation and the Institute of Leadership and Management. If you would like to discuss any points in this blog, please email George.callaghan@open.ac.uk

Marketing and admissions

2022 admissions will be tricky

It wasn't hard to read between the lines of [Clare Marchant's \(UCAS\) HEPI blog](#) on 15 June 2022: things will be difficult for large numbers of applicants in 2022. And missing your grades is likely to mean missing your place at many universities. [Sally Weale's report in The Guardian](#) on 15 June 2022 said the offer rate for 'top' universities had fallen to 55%, down from 60.5% in 2021. [Anna Fazackerley followed up](#) on 19 June 2022 quoting Andrew Hargreaves of DataHE as saying: "Ucas hasn't released any official data yet, but I have been told that over 10,000 applicants with predicted grades of BBB are not holding a firm offer at any university. That is really shocking."

What does it really take to get a place on a university degree course?

Professor Jane White (Bath), a mathematician, looked at the data and [concluded in her Wonkhe blog](#) on 8 April 2022 that: "between 2017-2019 only half of the institutions had at least 75 per cent of their student entry meeting the minimum requirement. And between 20 and 25 per cent of institutions had a student intake where less than half of the entry cohort had achieved the minimum entry tariff."

Covid's impact on A-level students heading for HE

Peter Finn, Radu Cinpoes and Emily Hill (all Kingston) summarised the effects of Covid and the disruption caused in schools and national examinations, [for the LSE Impact Blog](#) on 25 May 2022.

Competing conceptions of fair admission

Vikki Boliver and Mandy Powell (Durham) wrote [in Perspectives, Policy and Practice in Higher Education](#) (online 25 April 2022) about "how fairness was conceptualised by those responsible for admission to highly selective undergraduate courses at 17 universities in England. Fairness was conceptualised principally with reference to the traditional *meritocratic equality of opportunity* paradigm, which holds that university places should go to the most highly qualified candidates irrespective of social background. There was sympathy for an alternative *meritocratic equity of opportunity* model of fairness, involving the assessment of prospective students' qualifications in light of their socio-economic circumstances. However, our interviewees reported institutional resistance to reducing academic entry requirements for socio-economically disadvantaged students for fear of

setting them up to fail, and acknowledged that existing pedagogical practices and academic support structures were inadequate for the task of supporting disadvantaged students entering with lower grades to fulfil their potential at university.”

‘Recruiting’ and ‘selecting’ universities in the USA

[Scott Jaschik reported for *insidehighered.com*](#) on 4 April 2022 about the pattern of applications and admissions for US HE. Entry for the most sought-after institutions got even more competitive, with Harvard and Yale seeing record application numbers and Harvard reaching a record low acceptance rate of 3.19%, taking in just 1,954 from 61,220 applicants. However most US universities are ‘recruiting’, still working hard to fill their places.

For the 2022 Harvard intake “the cost of attending, including tuition, room, board and all fees, will be free for families with annual incomes below \$75,000. This is an increase from the \$65,000 income threshold that had been in place. Nearly a quarter of Harvard students come from families with incomes under \$75,000. ... White students, who made up a majority of Harvard students just a few years ago, this year make up only 40 percent of those admitted. Black students make up 15.5 percent of those admitted, Asian Americans 27.8 percent, Latinx students 12.6 percent, Native Americans 2.9 percent and Native Hawaiians 0.8 percent. Women make up 54.2 percent of those admitted.”

Melissa Ezarik reported for *insidehighered.com* on 21 March 2022 that in: “The latest [Student Voice survey](#) from *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse, sponsored by Kaplan ...

- Students at four-year institutions had a wide variety of reasons for choosing their college, with the top responses being major or program of interest offered there, good overall academic reputation, proximity to home, quality of academics in the area of interest, price of tuition, and financial aid package/scholarships. Students at community colleges ... overwhelmingly chose based on proximity to home and cost.
- One-quarter of the full sample rate their experience with college admissions as excellent, with another 47 percent rating it as good. Community college students are about twice as likely to assess the experience as excellent compared to their four-year peers.”

Key variables in determining the image of universities

In their [article in the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*](#) (online 18 April 2022), Purificación Alcaide-Pulido (Universidad Loyola-Andaluçia, Cordoba, Spain) and colleagues aimed to weight four key variables, which they identified as ‘value for money’, ‘ethical values and social responsibility’, ‘social networks’, and ‘university rankings’.

Ranking really matters for university brands

Önder Kethüda (Düzce University, Turkey) used signalling theory to link ranking with credibility and perceived differentiation; his [article was in the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*](#) (online 12 April 2022): “prospective students and their families evaluate ranking reports as independent corroboration. This paper provides evidence on how critical the ranking is to create a solid and distinctive university brand.”

Equalities and Diversity

OfS Director of Fair Access puts the boot in

[Will Hazell reported for *i*](#) on 26 March 2022: “‘It’s not fair to shield yourself from legitimate questions of quality under the bodies of disadvantaged students’ says John Blake, the director for fair access and participation at the Office for Students. Speaking to *i*, he said that it was ‘absolutely the case that some people have left university with a damn sight less than they were promised’. Universities have been

told to stop using deprived backgrounds as an excuse for their students dropping out or failing to get decent jobs.”

Variations in access and participation plans

After the DfE issued its latest ‘guidance’ letter to OfS, OfS Director of Fair Access [John Blake wrote to HEIs](#) on 12 April 2022 about how to submit variations to their existing plans, reflecting the changed OfS priorities. Just the five documents to read and complete, no doubt part of the OfS drive to reduce the bureaucratic burden.

What works for HEIs helping to raise attainment in schools

A [TASO report](#) published in updated form on 8 June 2022 provided a review of the relevant literature and set out a typology of different interventions, assessing the strength and limitations of the evidence base in four broad types of intervention: aspiration-raising activities; activities to develop study/soft skills; teaching of the national curriculum; and school governance.

One more time: POLAR and TUNDRA are unfit for purpose

The Durham powerhouse of Vikki Boliver, Stephen Gorard and Nadia Siddiqui reiterated the message about measures of socioeconomic disadvantage in [their article](#) in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (online 19 January 2022): “We demonstrate empirically that the area-level widening access metrics advocated by England’s Office for Students, POLAR and TUNDRA, are unfit for purpose because they yield unacceptably high rates of false positives (individuals identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged when they are not). We argue that these and other demonstrably flawed area-level and school-level metrics should be replaced by officially verified individual-level indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage which yield few false positives, most notably receipt of free school meals.”

Three cheers for the social mobility tsar?

Katharine Birbalsingh’s [‘inaugural’ speech as Chair of the Social Mobility Commission](#) at a Policy Exchange seminar (naturally) on 9 June 2022 featured the statement that ‘Oxbridge is not all that matters’ (we paraphrase). It was praised in the 12 June 2022 [HEPI blog](#) from SRHE members Anna Mountford-Zimdars and Neil Harrison (both Exeter), even as many others pointed out the prominence of Oxbridge attainment in the advertising for Birbalsingh’s own school. *Wonkhe*’s [David Kernohan](#), newly elevated to Editor during Debbie McVitty’s maternity leave, was deeply unimpressed.

SRHE-funded literature review says WP initiatives have been evasive not focused on colour

Manuel (Manny) Madriaga (Nottingham) had a 2020 SRHE scoping award to conduct a systematic literature review of issues of race, widening access and participation. His hard-hitting [report, now published on the SRHE website](#), said: “Widening access policy and initiatives in English higher education (HE) have largely been colour evasive rather than colour-focused. The paper draws attention to the literature - empirical work on widening access specifically - to understand the silence on race matters. The systematic literature review repurposes a framework by Gillborn (2005) in analysing widening access policy and race matters. In getting a glimpse of how the issue of unequal access to higher education has been framed in the research field, the paper reveals a better grasp of the continued colour evasiveness of widening access policy. The findings show that widening access policy has not benefitted students of colour as they are not accessing higher education with the same kind of success as their white peers. The paper concludes with a call for colour-specific targeted interventions to remedy the continued race inequity in accessing elite universities based on the evidence gathered from the synthesis.”

Equality and diversity statistics

[OfS published a report](#) on 7 June 2022 giving equality, diversity and student characteristics data for English HE for the period between 2010-2011 and 2020-2021.

Towards a better, granular, understanding of differences in awarding gaps by *Kathryna Kwok and Siân Alsop*



As a sector, we have long known that a student's ethnicity has a relationship to the average class of degree they are awarded. Students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (or 'BAME') backgrounds can expect to leave UK universities with lower classifications than their White counterparts - up to 20% lower ([UUK & NUS, 2019](#)). Universities have been paying attention to how institutional factors like curricula, assessment and staffing

decisions might contribute to this awarding gap in a welcome shift away from focusing on the role student background might play. But not much is really changing. The [OfS \(2022\)](#) reports that although the gap has somewhat narrowed in the last five years, Black students in particular continue to receive 17.4% lower degree outcomes than White students. At this point, it is clear that sweeping, quick fix, or isolated interventions are not fit for purpose. The mechanisms underpinning awarding disparities are complex and entrenched. It seems more likely that a sharpened focus and multi-pronged approach to unpicking the multiple ways in which we disadvantage certain students would be useful, if we are serious about change.

In this vein, we took as our starting point the need to get granular - to dig into 'who', as binary 'BAME'/White distinctions are uninformative at best, and 'how', as a degree award is the culmination of many parts. We focused on understanding differences in awarded marks at the module level. But what's the best way to operationalise module mark differences between two groups? One obvious option would be, simply, to calculate the difference in means (*ie* mean of group A – mean of group B). However, this has the potential to be misleading. What if, for instance, there were a lot of variation in students' marks?

Our solution, as we describe in our [2019 SRHE Research Award final report](#), was to use the formula for the *t*-statistic, which is a measure reflecting the difference between two groups' means scaled to group variation and size. ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

Kat Kwok is an Educational Researcher at the Oxford Centre for Academic Enhancement and Development at Oxford Brookes University. She is interested in using quantitative methods to investigate race and gender disparity in higher education, and the student experience. Kat recently started her PhD at Coventry University where she will be using a mixed methods approach to investigate the relationships between feedback and student characteristics, and the impact of feedback.

Dr Siân Alsop is Research Fellow in the Centre for Global Learning at Coventry University. She is a corpus linguist whose research areas include attainment disparities in higher education, feedback, and the language of lectures. Siân was previously a Lecturer in Academic Writing and has worked on a number of projects relating to academic discourse, including the development of the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus and the Engineering Lecture Corpus (ELC).

The classed structure of social capital

The [article](#) by Andreea Alecu, Håvard Helland, (both Oslo Metropolitan), Johs. Hjellbrekke (Bergen) and Vegard Jarness (Oslo Metropolitan) in the *British Journal of Sociology* (online 1 June 2022) “focuses on the social structuring of social capital, understood as resources embedded in social networks. ... we construct a space of social ties, a spatial representation of systematic similarities and differences between individuals' social ties to a set of 33 occupational positions. In this space, social capital is structured according to two primary dimensions: (i) the level of social ties, in terms of individuals' number of contacts; and (ii), the quality of social ties, in terms of a division between being connected to others in high-status positions and others in low-status positions. ... five clusters are identified ... a homogenous working-class cluster, a well-connected working-class cluster, a cluster of high-status ties, a homogenous high-status cluster and a low-volume cluster. Moreover, the analysis clearly indicates that the structure of social capital is connected to respondents' class positions, their volumes of cultural and economic capital and their class origin.”

Working-class early career researcher's reflections on the transition to and through a Sociology PhD and into academia *by Carli Rowell*



Carli Rowell won an SRHE Newer Researcher's Award to explore working-class early career researchers lived experiences of moving through a Sociology PhD and into the academic workforce. It makes visible the successes, hurdles, and ambivalences of this precarious and often invisible group of academics.

This blog arises from a project which explores the lived experience of being working-class and moving through doctoral study into the academic workforce. It was motivated by the fact that higher education has historically existed for the working classes as a site of exclusion from participation, from knowledge production and from leadership. Despite the global massification of education, HE continues to operate as a classed pathway and bastion of classed knowledge ([Walkerdine, 2021](#)) especially so given academia's classed ceiling. The project explored the lived experiences of 13 working-class early career researchers (ECRs) in moving through doctoral study into (and out of) the academic workforce. It sought to make visible the successes, hurdles, and ambivalences of this precarious and often invisible group of academics. I reflect here on some of the key emerging findings (in depth analysis continues) and sketch out early recommendations based on project findings. ...

Read the full blog [here](#).

SRHE member Carli Rowell is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sussex. She is currently an executive member of Gender and Education Association and convenes the British Sociological Associations Social Class Study Group.

Economies of scale in supporting disadvantaged students

SRHE Fellow Marcia Devlin and six colleagues published results from their follow-up study of costs of supporting students from different socioeconomic status backgrounds, [in Higher Education Research and Development](#) (online 25 April 2022): “there are significant economies of scale where there are between 517 and 2584 fulltime undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds at a university. It follows that the average cost of supporting these students can be reduced if enrolment numbers are within this range, subject to caveats around the costs identified. Potential policy implications include: a redistribution of funding based on need; shifting emphasis from activity-based to mission-directed costing; applying the principles of ‘cost compensation’; and conceptualising funding support for

students from low SES backgrounds as a transformational investment that can improve outcomes for individuals, communities and society, rather than as a cost.”

Rapid decline in US transfer rates will hit disadvantaged groups hardest

[Liam Knox reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 4 May 2022 that [a new study](#) by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center showed a 6.9% fall in college transfer rates and total transfer enrolment had declined by about 16% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Upward transfers from two- to four-year institutions fell by 11.6 percent, reducing an important contributor to diversity thanks to the openness of community colleges to adult students of colour from low-income backgrounds. Community college enrolment has fallen significantly in the pandemic.

Overcoming Built-In Prejudices in Proofreading Apps by Ann Gillian Chu



As I am typing away in Microsoft Word, the glaring, red squiggly underline inevitably pops up, bringing up all the insecurities I have with academic English writing, as an ethnically Chinese, bilingual Chinese-English speaker. So what if I speak English with a North American accent? So what if English has been my medium of instruction for my entire life? So what if I graduated with a Master of Arts with honours in English Language from the University of Edinburgh? My fluency in Chinese somehow discredits my English fluency, as if I cannot be equally competent in both. Because I am not white, my English will always somehow be inadequate.

The way others, and I, perceive my English ability reflects how ‘standard English’ as an idea is toxic to the identity-building of those who are not middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual, white men from the Anglophone world. [April Baker-Bell](#) talks about the concept of *linguistic justice*, arguing that promoting a type of ‘correct English’ has inherent white linguistic supremacy. Traditional approaches to language education do not account for the emotional harm, internalised linguistic racism, or the consequences these approaches have on the sense of self and identity of non-white students. Extending Baker-Bell’s theory, how would this apply to the use of proofreading apps? ...

Read the full blog here.

Ann Gillian Chu (FHEA) is a PhD (Divinity) candidate at the University of St Andrews. She has taught in higher education contexts in Britain, Canada, and China using a variety of platforms and education tools. As an ethnically Chinese woman who grew up in Hong Kong, Gillian is interested in efforts to decolonise academia, such as exploring ways to [make academic conferences more inclusive](#).

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

OfS analysis of degree awards criticises ‘grade inflation’

An OfS analysis published on 12 May 2022 said that “more than half of first class degrees awarded to students in 2020-21 cannot be explained when compared to students’ attainment a decade ago.” The report – [Analysis of degree classifications over time: changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2020-21](#) – covered degrees awarded to students between 2010-11 and 2020-21. In 2010-11, 15.7% of students were awarded first class honours. The proportion of students awarded the top grade was 37.9% in 2020-21. Interim chief executive Susan Lapworth said: “Unmerited grade inflation is bad for students, graduates and employers, and damages the reputation of English higher education. ... grade inflation has been a real credibility issue for the sector for some time and the pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to allow a decade of unexplained grade inflation to be baked into the system. Our report is clear that there are a variety of reasons – including improved teaching and learning – that

could lead to an increase in the rate of firsts awarded. However the sustained increase in unexplained firsts awarded continues to pose regulatory concerns for the OfS.”

Systematic review of programmes targeting student retention/success/satisfaction/experience

Narelle Eather (Wollongong) and colleagues from Wollongong and Newcastle, [in the Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management](#) (online 3 January 2022), concluded that these programmes tend to have positive results: “The objective of this systematic review was to report the success of interventions or programs delivered in universities specifically targeting improved student outcomes based on published quantitative data. ... Most of the 55 studies included targeted 1st year undergraduate students from varied disciplines. The positive findings relating to student retention and academic success, and student satisfaction and experience reported in this review are promising.”

Should HE teachers have a professional teaching qualification?

Stacey Mottershaw and Gareth Bramley (both Leeds) considered the question in [their HEPI blog](#) on 29 March 2022. But didn’t answer it.

Do academics take any notice of student evaluations of teaching?

According to Mari Karm, Anu Sarv and James Groccia (University of Tartu, Estonia) some do, some of the time. Their [article in the Journal of Further and Higher Education](#) (online 19 April 2022) reported “three profiles of academics ... 1) academics with consistent attitude, 2) ambivalent attitude and 3) arrogant attitude towards student evaluation of teaching feedback. The study revealed how academics respond to such feedback and how they use it to develop their teaching depends on academics’ conceptions of teaching, attitude towards student feedback and participation in pedagogical courses.”

Students

Students are more satisfied since the end of Covid restrictions

[Nick Hillman’s HEPI blog](#) on 9 June 2022 anticipated the HEPI Annual Conference that day, and announced the publication of the [2022 Student Academic Experience Survey](#), showing widespread positive indications of improvement in student views. Those wanting just the headlines could do worse than read [the Jim Dickinson/David Kernohan blog for Wonkhe](#) on 9 June. Meanwhile the HEPI conference featured Minister Michele Donelan announcing the appointment of Nottingham Trent VC Edward Peck as ‘Student Support Champion’, in a role as yet undefined, as part of her talk repeating her usual text on quality and standards.

OIA Annual Report 2021

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator published its [annual report for 2021](#) in May 2022. How refreshing to read a careful, honest, self-critical account of the work done by an agency clearly doing its best for students, in accord with its remit.

Is it worth getting a first?

Jack Britton, Ian Walker, Ben Waltmann and Yu Zhu of the Institute for Fiscal Studies analysed LEO data to estimate the returns to different classes of degree at different universities among the 2012-2015 cohorts, in [their article](#) published on 20 April 2022. Among their findings: “The share of university students obtaining different degree classes varies substantially by subject studied and institution attended. ... More selective universities tend to award higher class degrees. There has been a long-term trend towards higher degree classes awarded in all subjects and at all levels of university selectivity, which accelerated around the 2010 graduation year. ... Earnings differences between those graduating with different degree classes are large. ... Women who obtained first class degrees earned around £2,200 (8%) more than women with upper second class degrees, and men with first class

degrees earned £4,100 (14%) more than men who obtained upper second class degrees. ... the premium of gaining a first class degree over an upper second is 3.5% for women and 7.0% for men. ... Payoffs for a higher degree class vary hugely by subject. ... Subjects with high labour market returns tend to have high degree class premiums and subjects with low labour market returns tend to have low degree class premiums. ... Achieving at least a 2.1 has a much bigger payoff at more selective universities.”

Back to basics for student satisfaction: improving learning rather than constructing fatuous rankings

Lee Harvey (Copenhagen Business School), a pioneer of student satisfaction surveys, [editorialised in *Quality in Higher Education*](#) (online 31 March 2022): “It is time to return to using student feedback as an improvement tool. Complacent and relatively meaningless one-size-fits-all surveys used to rank entire institutions are misleading, especially to prospective students, for whose benefit the obsession with league tables is supposedly aimed.”

Consumerism, student well-being and autonomy

The [article by Karen VA Morris](#) (Winchester) in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (online 6 April 2022) “focuses on autonomy and explores possible links between a consumerist orientation and student wellbeing and achievement in English universities. Using self-determination theory, autonomy-enhancing ways of framing policy and managing the student experience and teaching and learning are outlined.”

Students want HE to be transformative

Malgorzata Dziminska’s (Łódź) [qualitative study](#) in Polish universities (online 6 May 2022 in *Quality in Higher Education*) concluded that “students’ vision of an ideal university strongly embraces the concept of quality as transformation”.

The well-being of part-time DBA students

David Stoten (Northumbria) reported his research with DBA students and suggested how to analyse their well-being in his [article in the *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*](#) (online 6 April 2022).

The flourishing student



[The Flourishing Student](#) by Fabienne Vailes (Bristol), “a practical guide to promote mental fitness, wellbeing and resilience in higher education” is now in its 2nd edition.

Quality, Standards, Performance, Evaluation

Quality and standards

QAA moves to protect independence of its Designated Quality Body role

[QAA announced](#) on 29 March 2022 the establishment of a new Designated Quality Body for England (DQBE) Board, which will have responsibility for overseeing the Designated Quality Body (DQB) functions in England. The creation of the new Board is the first step in a package of measures providing enhanced assurance about the operational independence of DQB work.

Performance and evaluation

Advertising in *THE* will help your ranking position

The [paper by Julien Jacqmin](#) (NEOMA Business School, Mont Saint-Aignan, France) in *Education Economics* (online 26 April 2021) “investigates the relationship between university advertising in the Times Higher Education magazine and their place in the ranking published in the same magazine. Using a fixed-effect identification strategy, the analysis finds that advertising is associated with an improvement of around 15 ranks in the subsequently published ranking. Further analysis provides mixed evidences of a media bias. One potential explanation is that advertising institutions follow better reporting practices regarding data used to build up the ranking.”

There are, of course, other potential explanations.

Breaking ranks

Reed College in the USA has refused since 1995 to participate in the apparently inescapable *US News* rankings. Now the former Reed President Colin Diver has written a book called [Breaking Ranks: How the Rankings Industry Rules Higher Education and What to Do about It](#). He recommends: don’t fill out peer reputation surveys; don’t publicize rankings you consider illegitimate; celebrate rankings that truly reflect your values; and give everyone equal access to your data.

A lawsuit against Rutgers University alleges that Rutgers artificially inflated its record of employment of MBA graduates by hiring unemployed MBAs through an agency, propelling it to No 1 in the rankings for business schools in the North Eastern USA. [Ted Sherman had the story for NJ News](#) on 8 April 2022. Then on 12 April [lawyers announced](#) it had become a class action which: “... seeks to recover the premium tuition paid by Plaintiff and the proposed Class for Rutgers’ MBA and other master degree programs ... given the tainted rankings.”

Karen Symms Gallagher, former Dean of Education at the University of Southern California, allegedly submitted partial data for *US News & World Report* rankings from 2013-2020, by reporting PhD but not EdD data. The partial report, contrary to the rankers’ guidelines, had the effect of raising USC in the rankings. The new Dean started to do the same but then confessed to the Provost, and the university called in lawyers Jones Day, whose report was released on 29 April 2022, as [Scott Jaschik reported for University World News](#) on 2 May 2022.

Three leading Chinese universities exit from university rankings

[Yojana Sharma reported for University World News](#) on 11 May 2022 that “Renmin University of China, Nanjing University and Lanzhou University have withdrawn from “all international university rankings” according to Chinese official media this week, with official sources pointing to a focus on “educational autonomy” and “education with Chinese characteristics””.

War and rankings

When Russia invaded Ukraine, QS promised to exclude Russian universities from their rankings. Then they included them anyway, as [Scott Jaschik reported for insidehighered.com](#) on 13 June 2022. *THE* has said it will still include Russian universities but give them less prominence.

Research

Research Exercise Framework

HEPI ran a series of blogs running up to the publication of the REF results on 12 May 2022. On 10 May [Peter Mandler \(Cambridge\) argued](#) “The time is ripe for a root-and-branch reconsideration. Rip up the

rulebook and start again. Think seriously about whether, as is often suggested, a simple headcount might lead to rough justice without the thousands of pages of boilerplate and the hundreds of meetings and exercises. And get back to basics. Anything worthy of the name ‘research excellence’ has to put excellent research, not a lengthening government or managerial wish-list, at its heart.” Bahram Bekhradnia, the creator of the original research assessments, on 11 May offered [his usual thoughtful analysis](#), concluding that the REF really had run its course and needed to be replaced – but he didn’t know what should take its place. And [on 13 May Nick Hillman](#) offered some sensible advice about how to use the results to influence policymakers.

[David Kernohan for *Wonkhe* on 12 May](#) supplied his usual immediate and authoritative overview and helpful visualisations. The HEPI blog on 26 May 2022 was a [brilliant reminder from Elizabeth Gadd](#) (Loughborough) of what really matters and how to treat the REF results with due detachment.

More light on research allocations

The [HEPI blog on 1 June 2022 by Stephanie Smith](#), Head of Policy (Research and International) at the Russell Group helpfully summarised the latest information about government decisions on research funding, with an increase in UKRI’s budget from £7.8bn in 2021/22 to £8.9bn in 2024/25.

Visible organisational boundaries and the invisible boundaries of the scholarly profession

The article by T Siekkinen, E Pekkola and T Nokkala (all Jyväskylä, Finland) [in the *European Journal of Higher Education*](#) (online 16 April 2022) was based on a survey of 2017 PhD graduates in Finland: “New kinds of networks and collaborative arrangements have emerged to facilitate the mobility of academics between universities and other sectors. ... We found some differences between the private sector, and the public sector and universities, and between disciplines. Between public sector and universities only small differences occurred. The results indicate that the research work between sectors is rather similar according to the indicators that were used, in some cases the differences might be more significant between disciplines.”

Metadata wars

[Todd A Carpenter \(National Information Standards Organisation\) blogged for *The Scholarly Kitchen*](#) on 22 June 2022 about a lawsuit launched in the USA by OCLC against Clarivate. OCLC dominates the world of digital library cataloguing, but Clarivate has launched what PCLC sees as a competitor.

Tweeting may not add much to citations

[Phil Davis \(independent\) blogged for *The Scholarly Kitchen*](#) on 8 June 2022, arguing against what is commonly advised: “there is an abundance of papers that link some minor detail with article publishing — say, the presence of a [punctuation mark](#), [humor](#), [poetic](#), or [popular song reference](#) in one’s title — with increased citations. Do X and you’ll improve your citation impact, the researchers advise.”

Davis was back on 15 June 2022 telling [the continuing story](#) of his dogged pursuit of the *European Heart Journal* for the apparently egregious errors in their article about tweeting, and their equally apparent reluctance to do anything about it. The errors included in particular the sin of p-hacking: “*p-hacking* is a term used in the quantitative life and social sciences where a researcher analyzes data to ensure a statistically significant result. In practice, it can mean using inappropriate statistical tests, excluding data points, collecting lots of variables — in the hope that some associations will come out significant — among other inappropriate behaviors. Fear of p-hacking is the very reason why rigorous medical journals require authors to register their experiments in advance and follow a strict protocol for reporting their results.”

Statistical illogic: the fallacy of Jacob Bernoulli and others *by Paul Alper*



[Bernoulli's Fallacy, Statistical Illogic and the Crisis of Modern Science](#) by Aubrey Clayton.

"My goal with this book is not to broker a peace treaty; my goal is to win the war." (Preface p xv)

"We should no more be teaching p-values in statistics courses than we should be teaching phrenology in medical schools." (p239)

It is possible or even probable that many a PhD or journal article in the softer sciences has got by through misunderstanding probability and statistics. Clayton's book aims to expose the shortcomings of a fallacy first attributed to the 17th century mathematician Jacob Bernoulli, but relied on repeatedly for centuries afterwards, despite the 18th century work of statistician Thomas Bayes, and exemplified in the work of RA Fisher, the staple of so many social science primers on probability and statistics. ...

Read the full blog [here](#), and then his follow-up [here](#):

The Doorknob and the Door(s): Why Bayes Matters Now *by Paul Alper*

When I was young, there was a sort of funny story about someone who invented the doorknob but died young and poor because the door had yet to be invented. And, perhaps the imagery is backwards in that the door existed but was useless until the doorknob came into being but I will stick with the doorknob coming first in time. Bear with me as I attempt to show the relevance of this to the current meteoric rise of Bayesianism, a philosophy and concept several centuries old.

In a previous posting, "Statistical Illogic: the fallacy of Jacob Bernoulli and others," I reviewed the book, *Bernoulli's Fallacy* by Aubrey Clayton. He shows in great detail how easy it is to confuse what we really should want

Prob(Hypothesis | Evidence) Bayesianism
with
Prob(Evidence | Hypothesis) Frequentism

A classic instance of Bayesian revision in higher education would be the famous example at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. In the 1970s, it was alleged that there was discrimination against females applying to graduate school. Indeed, male admission rate overall was higher than female admission rate. But, according to <https://www.refsmmat.com/posts/2016-05-08-simpsons-paradox-berkeley.html>, the simple explanation

"is that women tended to apply to the departments that are the hardest to get into, and men tended to apply to departments that were easier to get into. (Humanities departments tended to have less research funding to support graduate students, while science and engineer departments were awash with money.) So women were rejected more than men. Presumably, the bias wasn't at Berkeley but earlier in women's education, when other biases led them to different fields of study than men."

Clayton's examples, such as the Prosecutor's Fallacy and medical testing confusion, give no hint of how analytically difficult it was to perform the calculations of Bayes Theorem in complicated situations. Except for a paragraph or two on pages 297 and 298 he makes no reference to how and

why Bayesianism calculations can now be done numerically on very complicated, important, real-life problems in physics, statistics, machine learning, and in many other fields, thus the proliferation of Bayesianism. ...

Paul Alper is an emeritus professor at the University of St. Thomas, having retired in 1998. For several decades, he regularly contributed Notes from North America to Higher Education Review. He is almost the exact age of Woody Allen and the Dalai Lama and thus, was fortunate to be too young for some wars and too old for other ones. In the 1990s, he was awarded a Nike sneaker endorsement which resulted in his paper, Imposing Views, Imposing Shoes: A Statistician as a Sole Model; it can be found at The American Statistician, August 1995, Vol 49, No. 3, pages 317 to 319.

Research into higher education

Changes to Research into Higher Education Abstracts categories

The new(ish) editorial team at SRHE's journal *Abstracts* [continue to review](#) the classifications they use in the light of the pattern of recent publications covered by the journal. At the meeting of SRHE's Publications Committee on 19 May 2022 Editor Roz Collings (Wolverhampton) reported on some more proposed changes, expanding some categories and explicitly adding 'comparative studies' to the 'National systems' category. [The journal's website](#) will give more details as the changes take effect.

We need more and better comparative education

Ariane de Gayardon (Twente) argued [in the Oxford Review of Education](#) (online 11 April 2022) that "higher education would benefit highly from a strong and united field of comparative studies, built around a community of comparatists."

No justice in cite

A group including Aurélie Carlier (Maastricht) wrote on the *LSE Impact Blog* on 16 May 2022 about a [citation guide](#) produced by Female Empowerment Maastricht University (FEM): "there is increasing evidence that women, people of colour, and other minoritised groups are systematically under cited".

Scoping academic oracy

Marion Heron (Surrey), Sally Baker (New South Wales), Karen Gravett (Surrey) and Evonne Irwin (Newcastle, Australia) reported their scoping study [in Higher Education Research and Development](#) (online 23 March 2022): "This study offers a scoping review ... to explore how oracy has been framed and discussed in higher education, and whether connections have been made with the equity agenda to widen participation to traditionally under-represented groups. ... oracy is framed in disparate ways, reflecting disconnected understandings of the range, breadth and possibilities for oracy teaching. An oracy as product perspective prevails in the studies, with oracy predominantly explored through monologic, monoglossic activities, assessments, and graduate attributes. The review has highlighted the need to recognise an *oracy for learning* perspective; to establish shared understandings of the features of oracy; and to embed the teaching of oracy practices that support all students, regardless of linguistic and educational background, within their disciplinary learning."

Do we want social science, or social science-fiction? by Paul Temple



Because a lot of its research work involves schools and school-age children, research training at the Institute of Education tends to emphasise issues around confidentiality and anonymity in presenting research findings. Anonymity usually happens anyway in large-scale studies with hundreds or thousands of respondents - the National Student Survey, for example - because the point is to get a picture of what a category of people think, rather than the views of particular individuals. Those of us working on higher education research, however, are often in the position

of asking relatively small numbers of informants about their professional views – that is, about the knowledge for which their employer is paying them, unrelated to their private lives. A university finance director could of course decline to be interviewed, but it's hard to see why there should be a confidentiality problem about their explanation of the university's resource allocation methodology.

...

Read the full blog [here](#).

Dr Paul Temple is Honorary Associate Professor in the Centre for Higher Education Studies, UCL Institute of Education.

Publishing

***Policy Reviews in Higher Education* gets Scopus listing**

Congratulations to the editorial team of *Policy Reviews in Higher Education* – Editors Ellen Hazelkorn (Technological University, Dublin) and William Locke (Melbourne), Consulting Editors Hamish Coates (Tsinghua) and Hans de Wit (Boston College, USA) – on being accepted for a Scopus listing for the journal [after just five years](#) of operation. The achievement is a tribute to the team and to the vision of SRHE's Helen Perkins and publisher Taylor and Francis (Ian White and Katrina Hulme Cross) in identifying a gap in the apparently crowded market of research into HE and agreeing to make the investment needed to make the new journal a success.

Open Access 101

There was a useful summary of all the things that open access publishing can mean, in [Fiona Counsell's \(Taylor and Francis\) HEPI blog](#) on 9 June 2022.

Elsevier acquires Interfolio

Roger C Schonfeld (Ithaka S&R) blogged for *The Scholarly Kitchen* on 25 April 2022 that "[Elsevier \[had\] announced that it has entered into an agreement to acquire Interfolio](#). Interfolio has a series of products that fall into two related categories, one of which I call researcher career management and the other of which is the more familiar, impact assessment."

The shackles of paper-bound logic

The [article by Przemysław G Hensel](#) (Warsaw) in *Strategic Organization* (online 1 April 2022, we don't think the date is significant) argued that research reporting is stuck in a 17th century paradigm. He argues for full exploitation of digital possibilities by reconceiving the 'package' for reporting new research: "The first element is the main text ... no longer based on the paper-bound self-contained-universe logic—and, thus, significantly shorter. The shortening would occur due to moving the minute description of methods, non-essential discussion of theory, supporting tables, additional analyses, robustness checks, and thorough discussion of limitations to supplementary materials—which constitute the second part of the package—while having them only signaled in the main manuscript. ... The second part of the package would also contain all kinds of other supporting materials, including data sets, code, images, and audio and video recordings, creating new opportunities for quantitative and qualitative scholars alike. Finally, the package would also contain a short, two-journal-page long synopsis of research (about 1200 words)."

The future for printed journals

Quality in Higher Education editor Lee Harvey (Copenhagen) mused in [an editorial](#) (online 11 April 2022) about the future, taking *Studies in Higher Education* as his example, with online articles appearing up to two years before the print volume, and said that "Something needs to be done."

Most academics think paying for open access is damaging in general, but not for them

Francisco Segado-Boj, Juan-José Prieto-Gutiérrez (both Complutense University of Madrid) and Juan Martín-Quevedo (Rey Juan Carlos University, Madrid), reported their global survey of academic attitudes on pay-to-publish, [for The Impact Blog](#) on 21 June 2022.

Ethics and Academic Freedom

The ethics of organisational ethics

The [article by Carl Rhodes](#) (University of Technology, Sydney) in *Organization* (online 8 April 2022) reviewed articles in the journal “inspired by the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. ... By acknowledging the ethics of ethics, we see that affective, interpersonal ethics and more formally organized ethics can both be translations of the ethics of ethics, each being necessarily imperfect. The tension between authoritative and interpersonal forms of ethics in organizations is not a problem for ethics, but rather a condition of the possibility of organizational ethics itself.”

Integrity

Dutch study suggests widespread questionable research practices among academics

Gowri Gopalakrishna (Amsterdam) and five co-researchers reported in *Plos One* (online 16 February 2022) a survey of 40000 Dutch academics, with 6800 responses. Just over half said they had committed at least one questionable research practice, an increase on earlier surveys: “Our results suggest that greater emphasis on scientific norm subscription, strengthening reviewers in their role as gatekeepers of research quality and curbing the “publish or perish” incentive system promotes research integrity.”

Ghost-written book reviews

Rick Anderson (Brigham Young) [blogged for The Scholarly Kitchen](#) on 5 April 2022 about an enterprise offering to pay significant sums for book reviews, which would then be published attributed to other authors.

University processes need to be kinder to students accused of cheating

Daniel Sokol (Alpha Academic Appeals) argued in [his HEPI blog](#) on 3 June 2022 that: “The presumption of innocence is not alive and well in UK universities; in many places, it’s been replaced by the presumption of guilt. In practice, this means two things: firstly, that the experience is more traumatic for students than it needs to be; and secondly, that innocent students are found guilty, with potentially serious consequences to their degree and their future.”

More German plagiarism?

The new general secretary of Bavaria’s ruling Christian Social Union (CSU) party, Martin Huber, is facing allegations of plagiarism in his doctoral thesis, as [Michael Gardner reported for University World News](#) on 14 May 2022.

Global Perspectives

Cambodia

Governance in public HE in Cambodia

Mak Ngoy, Chheng Sokunthy and Kao Sovansophal with colleagues from the Cambodia Development Resource Institute wrote [CDRI Working Paper 114](#), with an unsparing analysis : “Cambodia’s higher

education system is still in its infancy. Its higher education governance, financing and financial management are neither sophisticated nor robust enough to deliver quality relevant higher education to the society and economy.” The report made recommendations for improvement.

Canada

Canadian HE policy: what’s at stake in the election

The always-readable Gavin Moodie (RMIT) had a [piece in *The Conversation*](#) on 19 April 2022 about HE policy issues in the then forthcoming Canadian federal election.

China

More of the same, or worse, in Hong Kong?

The new chief executive of Hong Kong is John Lee, who was in charge of the draconian security measures during the wave of student protests in recent years. The appointment is seen as a signal that repression will continue, or get worse, as [Mimi Leung and Yojana Sharma reported for *University World News*](#) on 24 June 2022.

India

India will no longer recognise degrees from Pakistan

[Shuriah Niazi and Ameen Amjad Khan reported for *University World News*](#) on 29 April 2022 that India’s University Grants Commission and the All India Council for Technical Education had issued a ‘joint advisory’ on 22 April, which said: “Any Indian national or [Indian] overseas citizen who intends to take admission in any degree college or educational institution of Pakistan shall not be eligible for seeking employment or higher studies in India.” The move is believed to be aimed primarily at Indian Kashmiri students who attend universities in Pakistan and ‘Pakistan Occupied Kashmir’, the western part of Kashmir, administered by Pakistan. Tension in Kashmir has risen since the fall of the Imran Khan government; Pakistani authorities have condemned the advisory.

Ireland

Another new technological university

[Carl O’Brien reported for *The Irish Times*](#) on 1 May 2022 that the country’s newest technological university had been formally established through the merger of Waterford Institute of Technology and IT Carlow. The [South East Technological University](#) (SETU), the first university in the region, has 18,500 students at four campuses. Students who graduate in 2021/2022 will do so with university qualifications. “SETU is the fifth technological university to be established in recent years and forms part of a wider Government’s policy of creating higher education institutions of larger scale and greater capacity.”

Pakistan

Pakistan slashes budget for HE

[The News International reported](#) on 21 April 2022 that the Pakistan government had decided to increase the annual budget of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) “to promote the higher education sector in the country”. But then the [Pakistan Observer reported](#) on 27 May 2022 that the Pakistan Ministry of Finance had communicated IBC (Indicative Budget Ceilings) of only 30 billion rupees for the HE recurring grant against the rationalised demand of 104.983 billion rupees. The allocation is 45% less even than the 2021-2022 allocation of 66.25 billion rupees and led to immediate protests from the HE Council and 120 vice-chancellors convened for an emergency online meeting.

Russia

Bugger Bologna

The [Moscow Times reported](#) on 25 May 2022 that Russian Science and Higher Education Minister Valery Falkov had announced on 24 May that the country would [replace](#) the internationally recognized framework known as the Bologna Process with a new system designed to meet “national interests.”

Re-Sovietisation in Russian universities

[Pola Lem reported for Times Higher Education](#) on 24 June 2022 that the Russian state now required every university to have a rector for students’ moral development, in a move described as harking back to the structures of the Soviet Union.

Sudan

Sudan’s military leader dismisses 30 university presidents

[Wagdy Sawahel reported for University World News](#) on 1 April 2022 that Sudan’s military leader, Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, had replaced the presidents of 30 public universities and dissolved their councils: “Burhan is tightening his grip after taking power in a coup in October 2021 by reversing appointments made by the country’s civilian leadership during a two-year power-sharing period and by tackling the university sector that has, from the outset, opposed his power grab.”

Thailand

If your student’s PhD thesis is factually incorrect, can you be sued?

That question is at issue in a Thai legal case brought against a student and his supervisor by a member of the Thai royal family, alleging errors in a PhD thesis which were later repeated in books about the royal family’s involvement in political disputes. [Sulakshana Lamubol reported for University World News](#) on 12 April 2022.

Society News

Dr Clare Loughlin-Chow appointed SRHE Director



Following the retirement of Ms Helen Perkins from the role of SRHE Director, Dr Clare Loughlin-Chow will be joining the executive team as our new CEO/Director, beginning early September 2022. Clare was educated at the University of Toronto and holds a master's degree and a DPhil from Oxford University.

She is currently the Academic Registrar and Company Secretary at Gresham College (www.gresham.ac.uk). Before that Clare was at Richmond, the American International University in London, where she progressed to Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs, spearheading the university's successful bid for UK Taught Degree Awarding Powers, having previously held posts in Oxford as the director of Worcester College’s programme for visiting students, and as research editor for literature on the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

She has gained a great deal of experience in management in higher education, and through the Gresham College connection has good knowledge of the London higher education scene, and of the UK charity sector. We will look forward to working with her in September.

Dr Rihana Suliman: SRHE Coordinator: Events, Operations, & Projects



We are very pleased to announce that Dr Rihana Suliman will be joining the executive team on Friday 8th July 2022. Rihana holds a PhD in English Literature from Newcastle University and a Diploma in Research Methodology from the School of Education, Damascus University. With previous experience as a Chevening Fellow at the British Library and a Lecturer of English Literature in Damascus University.

Rihana brings a range of research, teaching, outreach, and event organisation skills to this role. Her capacity to engage international audiences and her skills in data analysis will provide valuable assistance to the team in running conferences, events, and projects, and her commitment to supporting higher education research and researchers makes her a welcome addition to the SRHE community.

SRHE Research and Scoping Awards

The Society for Research into Higher Education is delighted to launch the 2022 SRHE Research and Scoping Awards. The Society is offering:

- SRHE member research awards of £10,000 each for research focused on any aspect of higher education submitted under three overarching themes: Higher Education Policy, Higher Education and Society, and Higher Education Practice.
- Scoping awards of £5,000 each for the exploration of any new or emerging area of higher education research leading to the development of a plan for further research.

For further information including how to apply for these awards visit:

<https://srhe.ac.uk/research/research-scoping-awards/> The closing date for award applications is **1st September 2022**. For further guidance please refer to our guidance page, or else email us at srhe@srhe.ac.uk Please feel free to forward on the above information to any colleagues or contacts who may be interested in applying.

Get Involved

Are you interested in becoming more involved in the Society? Head to <https://srhe.ac.uk/get-involved/> to register your interest in a range of voluntary roles including Network Convenor, Trustee and Standing Committee Member.

Member survey

SRHE would appreciate your feedback as members. We're issuing this survey to help strengthen our offering, refine our current activities and design new ones, and identify which areas of growth are of particular importance to our member community. There is also the possibility of winning one of three vouchers worth £50. Respond via <https://srhe.ac.uk/member-survey-2022/> by **15th July**

Honorary Treasurer Vacancy

The Society for Research into Higher Education is seeking is seeking an Honorary Treasurer to join the SRHE Board of Trustees. This opportunity arises consequent on the departure of the current Treasurer at the end of 2022. Visit <https://srhe.ac.uk/about-srhe/vacancies/> to learn more about the role and responsibilities. Expressions of interest in this role should be sent by email to: Rob Gresham, Manager, Operations and Finance at rob.gresham@srhe.ac.uk

SRHE Conference 2022, Mobilities in Higher Education: Update

Submissions for the SRHE Conference are now closed, and we now move into our review period. Sincere thanks to all of you who have submitted a paper to the conference. After review we then enter into a two-stage moderation process, before communicating outcomes to authors. We hope to advise all submitter of the outcome of their submission in September. We'd like to note our thanks to reviewers for volunteering their time and expertise.

If you are interested in reviewing Conference submissions or chairing a panel, please email srhe@srhe.ac.uk with the subject line 'Reviewing/Chairing for Conference 2022.'

Forthcoming SRHE Network Events

Do visit our home page at www.srhe.ac.uk for further details and to book onto our forthcoming events. Do note in particular the Power Hour of Writing (Tuesday 12th July, 13:50 - 15:10 UK time) and the Power Hour Day Of Writing (Tuesday 2nd August, 10:00 - 16:00 UK time).

Do also book your place on our Learning Teaching and Assessment Network event entitled Do No Harm: Bringing Compassion, Joy And Social Justice Into Assessment. This will take place on Friday 15th July, 9:30 - 11:00 UK time - see <https://srhe.ac.uk/events/>

SRHE Executive Team

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Rihana Suliman, Coordinator Events, Operations & Projects rihana.suliman@srhe.ac.uk

Small ads

External examiners, referees, reviewers wanted?

SRHE News is happy to publish calls for papers, advertisements for external examiners in the broad field of research into higher education, for publishers' referees, for book reviewers, and so on.

Mind your language

No monopoly on changing names

You'll have seen those customised Monopoly games with local places replacing the classic place names. Universities are buying some of those spaces, as [Dan Bauman reported for The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) on 10 June 2022. Prices started at \$21000 for the University of Texas at San Antonio.

The price of self-aggrandisement: £155million for Linacre College Oxford to become Thao College

The [BBC reported](#) on 14 June 2022 that Universities Minister Michele Donelan is investigating a £155million donation by a Vietnamese investment company to Linacre College, enough to persuade the College to rename itself after the SOVICO Group's chair, Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao.

Ohio State trademarks 'THE'

Ohio State University has successfully trademarked the word THE, which has preceded the university title since 1878 and more recently has been jokily emphasised by Ohio State's American football

players. The question most asked: whose stupid idea was this? [Wyatt Myskow and Dan Bauman had the story for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*](#) on 23 June 2022.

After due consideration, Richmond takes names off 6 buildings

[David Steele reported for *insidehighered.com*](#) on 4 April 2022 that the private “University of Richmond announced ... that it would remove the names of slaveholders, eugenicists and other known racists and supporters of white supremacy from six campus buildings”.

Ryerson becomes Toronto Metropolitan

Ryerson’s board of governors approved a name change to Toronto Metropolitan University on 26 April 2022. This followed a long period of reappraisal of the university’s founder, Egerton Ryerson, after protests aimed primarily at Ryerson’s connection to the design of the indigenous residential schools system. [Joe Friesen had the story for *The Globe and Mail*](#) on 26 April 2022.

And finally

Congratulations to John Biggs and Denise Chalmers

Our thanks to HERDSA Connect for alerting us to this item in their Autumn 2022 issue: “John Biggs has been appointed Member of the Order of Australia (AM). John Biggs has made a distinguished contribution to teaching and learning, academic development and the higher education community in Australia and internationally, over many years. John held faculty positions in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong, and is now Honorary Professor of Psychology at the University of Hong Kong. John’s work is fundamental to our understanding of teaching and learning and underpins current texts and the work of other educational psychologists. John’s work shifted our gaze from what the teacher does to how the student learns. His book *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* is still the text of choice for university teacher education programs in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and his development of the concept of constructive alignment still underpins curriculum development across disciplines. His book *The Chinese Learner*, co-authored with David Watkins, showed the (then) Western misconceptions of Chinese learners to be largely without foundation.”

Denise Chalmers, HERDSA Life Member and former President, has also been appointed Member of the Order of Australia (AM). Denise Chalmers has been Director of two university Centres of Teaching and Learning and was the Foundation Director of the Carrick Institute (later the Australian Learning and Teaching Centre).

John Richardson

There was an [obituary of SRHE Fellow John Richardson in the *Guardian*](#) on 3 June 2022 by his friend and colleague Bart Rienties (Open University).

Ian McNay writes ...



Research Excellence Framework 2021

The irritations researchers experience when working with secondary data are exemplified in looking at the [REF 2021 results](#) and comparing with 2014. The 2021 results by Unit of Assessment (UoA) on screen are laid out with all four profiles in one line across the page. Four are fitted on to one page. When you try to print, or, at least when I do, they are laid out in a single column, so one UoA takes a full page. To add to that, the text preceding the tabulations takes just enough space to put the name of the HEI at the bottom of the page and the profiles on the next page. I know, I should have

checked before pressing 'print'. So they take 80+ pages, lots of paper, lots of ink, but I can't work with screen based data. My bad, perhaps.

When I access the 2014 results the four profiles – overall, outputs, impact, environment – are listed on four separate documents, within which English HEIs are listed first, then Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The 2021 listings take a unionist view, starting with Aberdeen rather than Anglia Ruskin. Clicking to get to UoA pages pops up a message saying 'this page is not currently available'. I do find another route to access them.

I will first give the summary of results, set alongside those from 2014, against advice, but one role of the REF is to demonstrate more and better research. Encouraging that has never been set as an objective - the sole purpose for a long time was 'to inform funding' – but the constant improvement implied by the figures is the basis for getting more money out of the Treasury. One of the principles the funding bodies set way back was continuity, yet there has never been an exercise that has replicated its predecessor. This time, following the Stern Report, there were at least 12 major changes in requirements and processes. More are promised after the *Future Research Assessment Programme (FRAP)* consultation reports. One of those changes was to give greater recognition to inter-disciplinary research. The report of the Interdisciplinary Research Advisory Panel (IDAP) at the end of June claimed that treatment was more visible and equitable, but that much still needs to be done. Panels are still learning how to treat work beyond their boundaries and institutions are reluctant to submit work because of its treatment in getting lower grades for the disciplines that constitute its elements.

Procedural propriety

A coincidence of timing led to a disturbing voice in my head as I read the reports from Main Panel C, covering Social Sciences, and the Education panel. The Main Panel asserts that "throughout the assessment process Main Panel C and its sub-panels ensured adherence to published '*Panel criteria and working methods*' and consistency in assessment standards through a variety of means [and so] has full confidence in the robustness of the processes followed and the outcomes of the assessment in all its sub-panels." The mantra was repeated in different forms by the Education sub-panel: "Under the guidance and direction from the main panel and the REF team, the sub-panel adhered to the published REF 2021 '*Panel criteria and working methods*' in all aspects of its processes throughout the planning and assessment phases." "The protocol requiring sub-panel members [with declared conflicts of interest] to leave panel meeting discussions was strictly followed for all parts of the REF assessment." "A transparent process on the reconciliation of grades and conversion of grades to the status of panel agreed grades was documented and signed off by panel members". And so on again and again. The voice in my head? "Any gatherings that took place, did so observing the Covid protocols and regulations at all times. There were no breaches." Work within [Neyland et al](#) (2019), based on interviews with 2014 panel members, suggests that all records were destroyed at the end of the processes and that reconciliation was used to ensure conformity to the dominant view of the elite power holders who define both what research is and what constitutes quality. The brief description of the moderation process in Education suggests that this may have been repeated. There were four members from modern universities on the Education panel, out of 20; and one out of 13 assessors. There were none on Main Panel C, just as there had been none on the Stern Committee, despite a commitment from HEFCE early in the last decade that diversity of membership would reflect institutional base.

Executive Chair of Research England [David Sweeney](#) was confident that universities had 'behaved responsibly' and also 'played by the rules' preventing importing of highly rated researchers from around the globe, and requiring all staff with significant responsibility for research to be submitted. (I should declare an interest: David claims his participation in a programme I ran resulted in his changing

the course of his career and led him to HEFCE and now UKRI. I accept the responsibility, but not the blame.)

It is surprising, then, that one easily spotted deviation from the framework, not commented upon by the panels (despite a footnote on intent in the ‘Summary Report across the four main panels’) was on that requirement that ‘all staff with a significant responsibility for research’ should be submitted. I took that to be mandatory, and it led to many staff being moved to ‘teaching only’ contracts. Yet, in Education, only 42 UoAs, out of 83, met that criterion; eight being modern universities. 4 submitted more than 50%, a mix of Liverpool Hope, the OU, Ulster, and Leeds (at 95%). 25 fell between 25% and 49%, and 24 had 24% or below. All those in the last two groups are post-92 designations. Special mention for the University of the Highlands and Islands with ... 605%. There were other overshoots: in History, Cambridge submitted 170%, Oxford 120%, perhaps linked to college staff not based in a department. UHI submitted 110%, but that was only 7.3 people.

The commitment to equity was also not met according to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Panel: “Although many institutions had successfully implemented several gender-related initiatives, there was much less attention given to other protected groups. The panel therefore had little confidence that the majority of institutional environments would be sufficiently mature in terms of support for EDI within the next few years”.

Statistics: ‘key facts’

	2014	2021
HEIs	154	157
FTE staff	52,150	76,132
Outputs	191,150	185,594
Impact case studies	6,975	6,781

Quality %	4*	3*	2*	1*
Overall				
2014	30	46	20	3
2021	41	43	14	2
Outputs				
2014	22.4	49.5	23.9	3.6
2021	35.9	46.8	15.4	1.6
Impact				
2014	44	39.9	13	2.4
2021	49.7	37.5	10.8	1.7
Environment				
2014	44.6	39.9	13.2	2.2
2021	49.6	36.9	11.6	1.9

So, more submissions and many more staff submitted fewer outputs and case studies, reducing the evidence base for judging quality. At Main Panel level, Panel C was the only one to have more UoA submissions, more outputs and more case studies. It had the biggest increase in staff submitted – 63%. The other 3 panels all received fewer outputs and case studies, despite staff numbers increasing by between 34% and 47%.

The Main Panel C feedback acknowledges that the apparent increase in quality can be attributed in part to the changes in the rules. It also credits the ‘flourishing research base’ in HEIs, but a recent report from DBEIS making international comparisons of the UK research base shows that between

2016 and 2020, the UK publication share declined by 2.7% a year, its citation share by 1.4% a year, its field-weighted impact by 0.2% a year and its highly-cited publication share by 4.5% a year. The 2020 QS league tables show elite UK universities drifting downwards despite favourable funding and policy preferentiality aiming to achieve the exact opposite. I suggest that better presentation of REF impact case studies and investment in promoting that internally contributed to the grade inflation there.

Note that 4* overall grades are significantly enhanced by ratings in impact and environment, confirming the shift to assess units not individuals. Ratings in both impact and environment are in multiples of either 12.5% (one eighth) or 16.7% (one sixth) in contrast to outputs, where they go to decimal points. The 2014 approach to impact assessment attracted serious and severe criticism from Alis Oancea (Oxford) and others because of the failure to do any audit of exaggerated claims, some of them to an outrageous extent. This time seems to have been better on both sides. There is still some strategic management of staff numbers – the units submitting just under 20 or 30 staff were many times higher than submitting one more, which would have required an extra case study. Some staff may, then, have lost out and been re-classified as not engaged in research.

Education

I won't claim things leap out from the stats but there are some interesting figures, many attributable to the many changes introduced after Stern. The number of staff (FTE) submitted went up by over 50%, to 2168, but the number of outputs went down by 4.5%, from 5,526 to 5,278. Under the new rules, not all those submitted had to have four outputs, and for 2021, in Education, 1,192 people – 51% of the headcount of 2330 – submitted only one. 200 submitted four, and 220, five. The gaming was obvious and anticipated – get the most out of your best staff, prune the lower rated items from middle ranking output and get the best one from people not previously submitted to get the average required of 2.5 per FTE, and get close to 100% participation. Interestingly, in Education, output grades from new researchers had the same profile as from more longstanding staff though more – 65% - submitted only one, with 21 – 7% - submitting four or five. Across all panels there was little or no change in the numbers of new researchers. 199 former staff in Education also had output submitted, where similar selectivity could operate; 28 had four or five submitted.

Within Main Panel C, Education had the poorest quality profile: the lowest % score of 3* and 4* combined, and by far the highest 1* score (7%), when the Panel C average was 3%. Where it did score well was in the rate of increase of doctoral degree awards where it was clearly top in number and 'productivity' per FTE staff member. Between 2013-4 and 2019-20, annual numbers went up from 774 to 964, nearly 20%. I postulate that that links to the development of EdD programmes with admission of students in group cohorts rather than individually.

Profiles	2014	2021
UoAs	76	83
FTE staff	1,441.76	2,168.38
Outputs	5,526	5,278
Impact case studies	218	232

Quality %	4*	3*	2*	1*
Overall				
2014	30	36	26	7
2021	37	35	20	7
Outputs				
2014	21.7	39.9	29.5	7.8
2021	29.8	38.1	23.7	7.6
Impact				
2014	42.9	33.6	16.7	6.0
2021	51.1	29.0	14.3	4.8
Environment				
2014	48.4	25	18.1	7.8
2021	45.1	27.5	17.1	9.9

Environment obviously posed problems. Income generation was a challenge and crowded buildings from growth in student numbers may have reduced study space for researchers. In 2014 the impact assessors raised queries about the value for money of such a time consuming exercise and their feedback took just over a page and dealt with organisation structures and processes for promoting impact not their outcome. This time it was much fuller and more helpful in developmental terms.

Feedback

Learn for next time, when, of course, the panel and its views may be different...

Two universities – Oxford and UCL - scored 100% 4* for both impact and environment, moving the UCL 4* score from 39.6% for output to 62% overall quality. That is a big move. Nottingham, which had 2x100% in 2014, dropped on both, to 66.7% in impact and 25% for environment. The total number of 100% scores was seven for impact, up from four; four for environment, down from eight. The two UoAs scoring 0% overall (and therefore in all components) in 2014 moved up. Only two scored zero at 4* for impact, and not other components, one being a pre-92 institution. 17 got their only zero in environment, five being pre-92ers, including Kent which did get 100% ... at grade 1*, and Roehampton, which, nevertheless, came high in the overall ratings. Dundee, Goldsmith's and Strathclyde had no 4* rating in either impact or environment, along with 30 post-92 HEIs.

Outputs

Those getting the highest grades demonstrated originality, significance and rigour in diverse ways, with no strong association with any particular methods, and including theoretical and empirical work. A high proportion of research employing mixed methods was world leading or internationally excellent.

Outputs about professional practice did get some grades across the range, but (as in 2014) some were limited to descriptive or experiential accounts and got lower grades. Lower graded outputs in general showed 'over-claiming of contribution to knowledge; weak location in a field; insufficient attention to the justification of samples or case selection; under-development of criticality and analytical purchase'. No surprises there.

Work in HE had grown since 2014, with strong work with a policy focus, drawing on sociology, economics and critical policy studies. Also strong were outputs on internationalisation, including student and staff mobility. The panel sought more work on this, on higher technological change, decolonisation and 'related themes', the re-framing of young people as consumers in HE, and links to the changing nature of work, especially through digital disruption. They encouraged more outputs representing co-production with key stakeholders. They noted concentrations of high quality work in history and philosophy in some smaller submissions. More work on teaching and learning had been expected – had they not remembered that it was banned from impact cases last time, which might have acted as a deterrent until that was changed over halfway in to the period of the exercise? – with notable work on ICT in HE pedagogy and professional learning. What they did get, since it was the exemplification of world class quality by the previous panel, were strong examples of the use of longitudinal data to track long-term outcomes in education, health, well-being and employment, including world-class data sets submitted as outputs.

Impact

The strongest case studies:

- Provided a succinct summary so that the narrative was strong, coherent and related to the template
- Clearly articulated the relationship between impact claims and the underpinning research
- Provided robust evidence and testimonials, judiciously used
- Not only stated how research had had an impact on a specific area, but demonstrated both reach and significance.

There was also outstanding and very considerable impact on the quality of research resources, research training and educational policy and practice in HEIs themselves, which was often international in reach and contributed to the quality of research environments. So, we got to our bosses, provided research evidence and got them to do something! A quintessential impact process. Begin 'at home'.

Environment

The panel's concerns on environment were over vitality and sustainability. They dismissed the small fall in performance, but noted that 16 of the 83 HEIs assessed were not in the 2014 exercise – implying scapegoats, but Bath – a high scorer – was one of those. The strongest submissions:

- Had convincing statements on strategy, vision and values, including for impact and international activities
- Showed how previous objectives had been addressed and set ambitious goals for the future
- Linked the strategy to operations with evidence and examples from researchers themselves
- Were analytical not just descriptive
- Showed how researchers were involved in the submission
- Included impressive staff development strategies covering well-being (a contrast to reports from Wellcome and UNL researchers among others about stress, bullying and discrimination)
- Were from larger units, better able to be sustained
- Had high levels of collaborative work and links to policy and practice.

But ... some institutions listed constraints to strategic delivery without saying what they had done to respond; some were poor on equity beyond gender and on support for PGRs and contract researchers. The effect of 'different institutional histories' (*ie* length of time being funded and accumulating research capital) were noted but without allowance being made, unlike approaches to contextual factors in undergraduate student admissions. The total research funding recorded was also down on the period before the 2014 exercise, causing concern about sustainability.

Responses

The somewhat smug satisfaction of the panels and the principals in the exercise was not matched by the commentariat. For me, the most crucial was the [acknowledgement by Bahram Bekhradnia](#) that the REF “has become dysfunctional over time and its days must surely be numbered in its present form”. Bahram had instituted the first ‘full-blown’ RAE in 1991-2 when he was at HEFCE. (Another declaration of interest, he gave me a considerable grant to assess its impact (!) on staff and institutional behaviour. Many of the issues identified in my report are still relevant). First he is concerned about the impact on teaching, which “has no comparable financial incentives”, and where TEF and the NSS have relatively insignificant impact. Second, in a zero sum game, much effort, which improves performance, gets no reward, yet institutions cannot afford to get off the treadmill, which had not been anticipated when RAE started, so wasted effort will continue for fear of slipping back. I think that effort needs re-directing in many cases to develop partnerships with users to improve impact and provide an alternative source of funding. Third, concentration of funding is now such that differentiation at the top is not possible, so risking international ratings: “something has to change, but it is difficult to know what”.

[Jonathan Adams](#) balanced good and bad: “Assessment has brought transparent direction and management of resources [with large units controlling research, not doing it], increased output of research findings, diversification of research portfolios [though some researchers claim pressure to conform to mainstream norms], better international collaboration and higher relative citation impact [though note the DBEIS figures above]. Against that could be set an unhealthy obsession with research achievements and statistics at the expense of broader academic values, cutthroat competition for grants, poorer working conditions, a plethora of exploitative short-term contracts and a mental health crisis among junior researchers”.

After a policy-maker and a professor, a professional – Elizabeth Gadd, Research Policy Manager at Loughborough, [reflecting on the exercise after results day](#), and hoping to have changed role before the next exercise. She is concerned that churning the data, reducing a complex experience for hundreds of people to sets of numbers, gets you further from the individuals behind it. The emphasis on high scorers hides what an achievement 2*, “internationally recognised” is: it supports many case studies, and may be an indication of emergent work that needs support to develop further, to a higher grade next time or work by early career researchers. To be fair, the freedom of how to use unhypothecated funds can allow that at institutional level, but such commitment to development (historic or potential) is not built in to assessment or funding, and there are no appeals against gradings. She agonised over special circumstances, which drew little in rating terms despite any sympathy. The invisible cost of scrutinising and supporting such cases is not counted in the costs on the exercise (When I was a member of a sub-panel, I was paid to attend meetings. Time on assessing outputs was unpaid; it was deemed to be part of an academic’s life, paid by the institution, but as I was already working more hours than my fractional post allowed, I did my RAE work in private time).

There are many other commentaries on *WonkHE*, *HEPI* and *Research Professional* sites, but there is certainly an agenda for further change, which the minister had predicted, and which the FRAP committee will consider. Their consultation period finished in May, before the results came out – of course – but their report may be open to comment. Keep your eyes open. SRHE used to run post - Assessment seminars. We might have one when that report appears.