SRHE News

Issue 59–January 2025

60 YEARS | **SRHE** EST.1965

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

SRHE News 59: January 2025

Editorial: Happy New Year

SRHE News is glad to bring you the Augur Report, its prognostications for 2025, based on extensive research into the works of Nostradamus, Old Moore's Almanac and Mystic Meg.

January
- Donald Trump resumes the US Presidency and announces that free speech in HE requires him to ban the use of the words Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in US HE. Elon Musk argues that this should also be applied in the UK.
- UUK launches another major campaign to point out that most universities really are in serious financial trouble.
- UCEA points out the difficulty of affording any staff salary increases at all in the present climate.
- Vice-chancellors point out that the financial difficulties facing their institutions would not be significantly alleviated if they took a 50% cut in salary, and competitive salaries are essential to enable Britain's world class universities to recruit and retain the best leaders. Especially when it has become so difficult to recruit staff.
- The OfS announces a concordat with Russian higher education to support a major increase in its use of AI, using Russian cyber experts. The first expansion of AI will be in the approval of new university titles: the new AI Department will be known as the [Nomenklatura](#) Department. The criteria remain unchanged: the OfS "will consult on a provider's proposed new name and assess the extent to which the proposed name is confusing or misleading".
- The OfS is already the investigating authority, prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner for all HE infractions, and now seeks the power to exile to Siberia any academics complicit in breaching Condition of Registration B2. Government agrees in the interests of reducing net migration.

February
- After the disappointing application figures for 2025 entry, UCAS launches a major advertising campaign to point out that the increase in undergraduate fees won't make any difference to most student debt repayments.
- UUK launches a new campaign to point out that the increase in undergraduate fees won't make any difference to the financial troubles in most universities.
- Government announces that even after all those new teachers are appointed there might be a bit left over for HE from the proceeds of VAT on private school fees. Teacher educators point out that after yet another year of missed targets in teacher training there is no-one qualified to apply for the new jobs in schools.
- OfS approves a name change from Anglia Ruskin University to the University of Cambridge(shire).

March
- The OfS approves a name change from Oxford Brookes University to University of Oxford(shire).
- UUK relaunches its campaign: "Most universities really are in deep financial trouble, honest."
- Government says there might still be something left for HE from VAT on school fees, and Elon Musk might have a point.
- The interim temporary Archbishop of Canterbury says she will renounce the power of the Archbishop to award degrees.

April
- The OfS approves a name change from University of the West of England to the Greater Bristol University.

- The OfS announces a major increase in the use of AI, to extend to all interventions on quality/standards/ breach of conditions of registration. The OfS Nomenklatura Department has been renamed, partly because no-one remembers the Soviet Union any more, and also because it was too likely to cause confusion with the rest of the OfS, who are already party-appointed bureaucrats. The suggested new name, the Behan Bots - conscripted to work for low pay, completely in the dark - is rejected because nobody remembers the Second World War any more and in any case it was too likely to cause confusion with existing university staff. OfS CEO Susan Lapworth says the new Department will now be known as the Laptops.
- The OfS announces a concordat with Chinese higher education which will start with a new student recruitment campaign in the North East: "Huawei the lads".

May
- The OfS approves a name change from Coventry University to Warwick(shire) University.
- Government says sorry - even though they couldn't appoint any new teachers there was nothing left from VAT on school fees because they diverted it to fill the £22billion hole in the public finances. It issues guidance on the use of language in HE, known as the Musk Directive.
- UUK's Taskforce on Efficiency and Transformation in Higher Education announces that it is in advanced talks with Government about restructuring the HE sector in England. Luckily the Taskforce chair is a lawyer specialising in mergers and acquisitions.

June
- The OfS approves a name change from Birmingham City University to the Greater Birmingham University
- GuildHE issues a reminder that it has no formal connection with the Church of England or any other faiths but remains committed to whatever you are allowed to call diversity, equity and inclusion since the Musk Directive.
- Canterbury Christ Church University is renamed University of Kent Two. OfS says this is unlikely to cause confusion among international students, especially since Kent is so near to Paris.
- Bishop Grosseteste University becomes the University of Lincoln Two But We Were Here First. Leeds Beckett, Northumbria, Sheffield Hallam, Greater Birmingham and Greater Bristol consider name changes.
- UUK issues a media release saying "we did warn you" as 30% of universities merge or close. OfS says everything will be OK, because all universities are required to have plans for an orderly exit from the market. Wimbledon fortnight begins and UCAS says "you cannot be serious".

July
- OfS approves a name change for Liverpool John Moores to Liverpools University.
- The BBC is forced to suspend filming of the new series of University Challenge after 30% of universities appearing have merged, have new names or have announced their intention to close.

August
- UCAS announces that the 30% reduction in available university places has luckily been matched by an equivalent fall in the number of applicants.
- Government announces its three priorities for HE - reduction, reduction, reduction – will apply particularly to the numbers of students from all disadvantaged groups.

September
- The OfS approves its own name change from the Office for Students to the Office with No Students on the Board (ONO).

October

- Government announces its new higher education policy, with the establishment of a new corporation to take over all the universities not in a position to complain, provisionally titled the Great British University. ONO says this is unlikely to cause confusion, but governments in Wales and Scotland say they are confused since all the universities in the GBU are in England. The Northern Ireland Assembly say they're glad it wasn't the Great UK University, or they would have been confused. The new HE policy includes a ~~pledge/mission/~~milestone promising net zero admissions by 2030, or maybe 2035.
- The last Bishop to leave the Church of England is asked to remember to switch off all the lights to comply with its Net Zero Bishops pledge.

November
- The Greater London Non-University College of Monkey Business publishes its annual Report and Accounts: income £925,000; expenditure £925,000, all annual salary for the principal. It recruited 100 students but they all left at the end of the year without leaving forwarding addresses. Having no students at all on its Board it claims to be completely aligned with the regulator.

December
- ONO announces it has breached its own conditions of registration and has removed itself from the Register of Approved Regulators. Dusting down a forgotten part of the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) it issues an urgent appeal – Quick, Anyone? Anyone! – for a new designated quality body to replace itself, which becomes known as the QAA appeal.
- A High Court judgment finds that publishers have mis-sold the copyright of academics to multinational AI corporations and orders financial compensation, known as Publishers Pay Instead (PPI). Publishers set aside £100billion.
- Universities launch a counter claim, asserting their ownership of, or failing that a pretty strong interest in, copyright of academics in their employ, and sue to recover the costs of journal subscriptions and transitional agreements. Publishers set aside a further £100billion.
- Multinational AI corporation share prices, now quoted only in bitcoin, continue to rise.
- The new Wallace and Gromit film, Academic Free-Don, is set in a university where the inmates are planning a mass escape. When they realise that their new zero-hours contracts allow them to leave at any time, they apply for exile to Siberia, where they expect better pay and conditions of employment.
- The theme for the 2026 SRHE Conference is announced: "Where do we go from here?"

SRHE News is a not-for-prophet enterprise. No octopuses were harmed in the making of this editorial.

Contact us

SRHE News Editor: Professor Rob Cuthbert
rob.cuthbert@uwe.ac.uk (00 44) 7710 565556

Rob Cuthbert is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Management, University of the West of England and Joint Managing Partner, **Practical Academics** rob.cuthbert@btinternet.com.
X/Twitter @RobCuthbert.

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 60: **30 March 2025**

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.

Table of Contents

Government and Higher Education Policy

Postgraduate fees and funding in the four nations of the UK
Edward Hicks, recently seconded to HEPI, provided a useful explainer of the different approaches in the four nations and their consequences for recruitment in his *HEPI* blog of 21 October 2024.

Free tuition makes no difference to university performance
That was the conclusion after research by Oscar Espinoza (Universidad de Tarapacá, Arica, Chile) and colleagues from Chile and Harvard, reported in the *British Educational Research Journal* (online 1 November 2024): "In 2016 Chile initiated a policy of free tuition for students from families in the lower half of the income distribution to improve access to and completion of higher education. … This study analysed the difference in levels of academic performance of students enrolled in 12 Chilean universities with and without free tuition. … the academic performance of students receiving free tuition was equivalent to that of students paying the full cost. There was no difference in the course pass rate of those with or without free tuition. Over time the effects of the policy could reduce inequality in the professional labour market."

Economic returns to HE in Germany
"… higher education graduates benefit from educational expansion: positional advantages therefore affect occupational returns for different higher education degrees in divergent ways. Graduates with occupation-specific Master's degrees appear to benefit most from educational expansion. Graduates with Bachelor's degrees and less occupationally specific degrees benefit less from educational expansion." Those were the findings from research by Laura Löwe (University of Bamberg, Germany) reported in the *European Journal of Higher Education* (online 15 November 2024).

Decentralisation and spending explain regional inequalities in education
Johanna Schnabel (Free University of Berlin) reported her research in the *Policy Studies Journal* (online 28 October 2024): "… a strong level of regional authority over education increases regional inequality in education. Further factors are regional differences in education expenditures and variation in the population size of regions."

Key trends in Latin American higher education: private institutions, diversity, and online learning *by Mara-Lígia Barbosa*
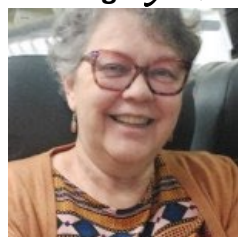
In Latin America, higher education has undergone intense transformation. In the 1950s, there were around 700,000 students; by 1970 the number had increased to 1.9 million, reaching 8.4 million in 1990, 25 million students in 2011, and 30 million in 2019. HE systems in these countries vary greatly. There are countries like Argentina, Chile and Uruguay that are universalised (with a gross enrolment rate of over 60%), while countries like Brazil and Peru are going through the process of massification. The participation of the private sector is very uneven. Argentina and Uruguay have a high proportion of HE in the public sector, while Brazil, and Chile, conversely, have a predominance of enrolments in the private sector. Brazil and Chile opted to keep a relatively small and closed public system and open up space for the private sector. In Argentina and Uruguay, the demand for higher education was met by the public sector.

Latin American HE systems are organised, in general terms, into institutional types that distinguish university institutions from other non-university academic organisations. However, there are relevant differences in dimensions such as governance, size, selectivity and educational offer. Everywhere the university sector tends to have greater administrative and academic autonomy than its non-university counterpart, concentrates on offering long-term and academically oriented courses, and is more selective in academic and socioeconomic terms, as in Brazil, Peru, and Chile. On the other hand, non-

university institutions concentrate on vocational or technical-professional courses, of short duration and teacher training, as in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, or are characterised by an offer focused mainly on teaching, with little involvement in research, as in Brazil.

Our group received a 2022 SRHE Research Award leading to a report: *Measuring the relationship between institutional diversity and student equity in Latin America countries*. The award enabled us to systematise information and analyse HE systems in the five Latin American countries mentioned above. From a conceptual point of view, we drew up a typology of higher education institutions and discussed it with experts.   Read the full blog here.

Why are governments cancelling student debt? by *Héctor Ríos-Jara*
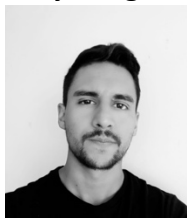
Governments across the globe are increasingly adopting student debt cancellation or forgiveness policies. Recent proposals in the US, Chile, and Colombia have reignited discussions about the student loan crisis and the need for alternative funding solutions in higher education. But why are governments pursuing these policies, and what does it mean to cancel student debt?

The demand for student debt cancellation emerged in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, a time of economic hardship for many households burdened by high-risk loans. While banks and financial institutions received massive bailout packages, ordinary citizens faced mounting debts with little relief. This stark disparity fuelled a movement for a general "jubilee" or widespread debt forgiveness. The logic was simple: if banks could be saved from their financial burdens, why not the people?

Cities like New York, London, Madrid, and Athens became centres of protest against government policies that seemed to protect the financial elite while ignoring the needs of ordinary citizens. In the US, the Occupy Wall Street movement became the focal point for debtors, calling for cancelling all debts, including student loans. Similar anti-austerity movements erupted worldwide, with student protests in countries like the UK, Chile, Colombia, Quebec, and South Africa challenging tuition hikes and market-driven education policies. These movements also pushed for free education and an end to student loans (Cini, 2021).

In this climate of widespread discontent, the call to cancel student debt became a symbol of resistance against the rising cost of education and overwhelming debts. … read the full blog here.

Policy and funding in England

Manifesto for a regional tertiary education system
There was a truly heavyweight contribution to the *HEPI* blog on 6 November 2024 by Paul Ashwin, Gonzalo Hidalgo Bazan, Ellen Hazelkorn, Ewart Keep, Chris Millward, Huw Morris, James Robson, Andy Westwood and Xin Xu, calling for a regionalised tertiary education system and setting out four broad principles for its development: "… we define a 'tertiary education system' … as a political approach that deliberately and strategically brings together multiple existing sectors – further education, higher education, apprenticeships, adult education and even research and innovation – ensuring there is holistic and joined-up policy-making. … Skills England should … create an overarching strategy for tertiary education and establish the accountabilities with other agencies necessary to deliver this. … reform of regulations governing the Apprenticeships Levy with a Growth and Skills Levy should be accompanied by a review of its coherence with other regulatory frameworks influencing tertiary education. This will ensure common definitions, shared goals and purposes, and common measurement of characteristics, progress and outcomes, and thereby joined-up incentives for learners, employers and educational institutions. … As a shift towards regionalisation … develop the

LSIP [Local Skills Improvement Plan] within one or more MCA (Mayoral Combined Authority) areas into regional commissioning boards, which would agree on priorities for the investment of funding pooled from the OfS higher education strategic priorities grant, an element of UKRI funding and the single pots devolved to MCAs. … Skills England should appoint a group of regional leads in partnership with OfS, UKRI, and, where appropriate, MCAs … responsible for identifying priorities for investment in partnership with the commission boards … as well as brokering the partnerships needed to address them."

Fee increase is "limited but welcome good news"
That was the conclusion of Wonkhe's [David Kernohan and Jim Dickinson in their blog](#) after Secretary of State for Education Bridget Phillipson announced on 4 November 2024 an uplift to undergraduate fees in line with inflation from 2025-2026, making the annual fee £9535. The sector will receive an additional £300million; for most large providers this would mean a 1-2% uplift in total income. However Phillipson also announced a cut in foundation course fees, taking them down to £5,760 for standard full-time courses, and £4,315 for part-time courses. "And of course this **doesn't** take into account the extra costs in the employers' national insurance rise, nor the cut in fee income that many will face via the cuts to foundation year fees."

One third of students are worried their university could go bust
HEPI commissioned a poll of 1000 students and [reported the results](#) on 4 November 2024, showing widespread concern about the financial future of HE among students, especially those in non-Russell Group universities. Almost half favoured a government takeover if the university went out of business.

OfS says the sector is in deep financial trouble
An innocuously-titled [OfS 'update on financial modelling'](#) published on 15 November 2024 was all over national media straight away, since it suggested that 72% of higher education providers could be in deficit by 2025-26, and 40 per cent would have fewer than 30 days' liquidity. The report was based on data submitted to the OfS in late 2023; changes to UK undergraduate tuition fee levels for 2025-26, and the increase in national insurance contributions for employers announced in the Budget, were included in the analysis. Key findings included:
- Acceptances of UK undergraduate students through UCAS increased by 1.3% in 2024 compared with the same point in 2023, significantly below the sector's forecast of a 5.8% increase.
- UK undergraduate recruitment has mainly increased in larger, higher-tariff providers. It appears to have decreased across medium, smaller and specialist institutions, and has decreased by nearly a quarter in providers predominantly offering Level 4 and 5 qualifications.
- Recruitment of international students has decreased significantly overall, with 16% fewer applications for visas in 2024 than in 2023.
- The number of international students from certain countries that send significant numbers to study in the UK has decreased by more than 40 per cent.
- By 2025-26, based on current trends and not taking into account significant mitigating action, we estimate a net income reduction for the sector of £3,445 million and, without significant mitigating actions, a sector-level deficit of -£1,636 million, with up to 72 per cent of providers being in deficit, and 40 per cent having low liquidity.
- While these results are spread across all types of providers, the forecasts of larger, especially teaching-intensive, providers appear to be particularly at odds with the optimism in their previous forecasts.

[Patrick Jack reported for *Times Higher Education*](#) on 20 December 2024 on the financial troubles affecting many English HEIs, including some of the most prestigious.

Should student number caps in England come back?

Juliette Rowsell wrote a thoughtful but inconclusive piece in *Times Higher Education* on 21 November 2024 about the pros and cons.

Student demand in England to 2035
HEPI Report 179, published on 23 October 2024 by HEPI founder Bahram Bekhradnia, pointed out that student demand in England, which has been rising in recent years, will soon start to fall, driven by demographics: "… prospects for student numbers in the future look highly uncertain. If there is no improvement in participation then demand will reduce after 2030, implying a very bleak outlook for many universities, which will be exacerbated if some mechanism is not introduced to limit the ability of others to recruit students at their expense." David Kernohan for *Wonkhe* on 24 October 2024 looked at the numbers and wasn't convinced there is sufficient capacity now, nor that demand would decline in line with demographics later.

How ministers learn
John Boswell (Southampton) and three fellow academics wrote "… a systematic account of Ministerial learning based on a comprehensive analysis of the Ministers Reflect archive—the largest dataset of research interviews with former Westminster ministers ever assembled. We identify six distinct learning styles—incremental, risk-averse, managerial, creative, instrumental and instinctive—and assess the implications for how Ministers adjust to the challenges of high political office." Their article was in *Public Administration* (online 11 March 2024).

University autonomy and government control by funding *by GR Evans*

A change of government has not changed the government's power to intrude upon the autonomy of providers of higher education, which is constrained chiefly by its being limited to the financial. Government can also issue guidance to the regulator, the Office for Students, and that guidance may be detailed. Recent exchanges give a flavour of the kind of control which politicians may seek, but this may be at odds with the current statutory framework. … read the full blog here.

HEPI Annual Report 2023-2024
Congratulations to the Higher Education Policy Institute on its most productive year ever, as its *Annual Report 2023-2024* spells out.

Urban hotspots for HE
Mike Ratcliffe wrote on his *MoreMeansBetter* blog on 16 October 2024 about 'superclusters' of HE institutions in Manchester (Oxford Road) and several locations in London.

Office for Students

OfS freezes new applications for registration to allow a focus on financial strugglers
The OfS announced on 2 December 2024 there would be a temporary pause on new registrations to "allow the OfS to work more closely with institutions under significant financial pressure … The changes are:
- no new registration applications will be accepted and all registration cases in the early stages of assessment will be paused
- no new applications for degree awarding powers will be accepted, and applications that have been received but where assessment has not yet started will be paused
- no new applications for university title, or for a change in an institution's name where it already holds university title or university college title, will be accepted. Those already submitted will be completed."

OfS joins INQAAHE

The OfS has joined the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), a worldwide association of organisations active in the theory and practice of quality assurance in higher education. The President of INQAAHE is currently Vikki Stott, chief executive of QAA, which stepped down as the designated quality body for English HE because the requirements of the OfS jeopardised its international standing. That should make for some interesting discussions at the next INQAAHE conference.

OfS consults on its strategy for 2025-2030

On 12 December 2024 the OfS issued a consultation document setting out its proposed strategy for 2025-2030. As expected following the Behan report, with Sir David Behan now installed as interim OfS chair, it proposed a more focused approach: "we propose prioritising the student interest in an uncertain environment. We will do this by
- regulating to deliver continuous improvement in the quality of higher education courses
- extending our focus to areas of the student interest that affect students' ability to engage with and benefit from high quality higher education
- supporting a resilient sector that is equipped to meet students' needs, now and in the future."

Private and for-profit HE institutions

Churchill victory

On 23 October 2024 the OfS published a post-registration quality and assessment standards report on London Churchill College Ltd, which concluded that the College had addressed the concerns raised earlier both by OfS and in 2019 by QAA.

Damning OfS report on Regent College London

RTC Education, trading as Regent College London – and not to be confused with Regents University, London - was the subject of a damning report by the Office for Students, published on 3 October 2024. There were six "areas of concern … 1: All students did not receive a high quality academic experience …. 2: Academic staff resource was often not sufficient or deployed effectively, leading to inadequate resourcing of modules and poor provision of support to students. … 3: Staff resource … did not consistently ensure that students received academic support for a high quality academic experience and success in and beyond higher education. … 4: Teaching room facilities and study spaces were insufficient to support students … 5: A lack of physical and digital library resources, including access to course reading materials. … 6: … some students were not assessed effectively and some assessments were not valid and/or reliable." Read it and weep. There were over 4000 students with just 88FTE academic staff, but the principal paid himself £325,000 a year. Staff, most of them on 'module unit' contracts, had 20% of pay withheld if they did not pass 85% of students on their module. Jack Grove reported for *Times Higher Education* on 3 October 2024, with a response from RTC Education, whose director Selva Pankaj said: "the college was "… confident that many of the concerns they have raised have been addressed" nearly two years after the OfS inspection in November 2022."

Policy and funding in the USA

What President Trump's election might mean for US HE

Liam Knox produced this instant assessment for *insidehighered.com* on 6 November 2024. Trump has named Linda McMahon, a former World Wrestling Entertainment executive and major Republican donor, to lead the Education Department – which he has pledged to abolish, as reported in *insidehighered.com* on 20 November 2024 by Jessica Blake, Liam Knox and Katherine Knott. Or maybe

he just wants to "send education back to the states". The nomination was described as a 'slap in the face' for educationists, as Khaleda Rahman reported for *Newsweek* on 20 November 2024.

Comprehensive research review of free college programs in the US
David B Monaghan (Pennsylvania) reported his research in *Policy Reviews in Higher Education* (online 12 December 2024): "I review the growing literature on these programmes, discussing postulated causal mechanisms through which they may work and summarizing effects on students, communities and colleges, with an emphasis on causal evidence. Most proposed mechanisms lack empirical support or are implausible for most existing programmes. Programmes are consistently found to change postsecondary destinations and increase enrolment at eligible colleges. Less consistently, they boost postsecondary participation and gross educational attainment, while evidence for positive effects on postsecondary performance and attainment net of participation is mixed. There is insufficient or inconsistent evidence for effects on secondary school performance, post-college income, or inequality reduction according to gender, race, or socioeconomic status."

How rich colleges cope with 'austerity'
Brown College, one of the US's richest HE institutions, reported a $46million 'structural deficit', but that is only 3% of its total budget. Josh Moody reported for *insidehighered.com* on 20 December 2024 that "Brown announced a four-pronged plan to "constrain the deficit." … the institution will "hold faculty headcount growth to 1%" and limit the growth of staff members "not fully funded externally by grants and gifts" at zero percent … reduce admissions targets for Ph.D. programs … "hold growth in unrestricted operating expenses to 3%." … "continue to grow master's [program] revenue, ultimately doubling the number of residential master's students and increasing online learners to 2,000 in five years.""

Strategy, Leadership, Governance and Management

Transformation and Efficiency Task Force
Sir Nigel Carrington, former VC at University of the Arts London, will lead the Transformation and Efficiency Task Force established by UUK in December 2024, with 'all options on the table', as he wrote in *Times Higher Education* on 19 December 2024. Carrington is a lawyer specialising in mergers and acquisitions.

Three perspectives on HE leadership
A literature review by Bruce Macfarlane (Education University of Hong Kong), Richard Bolden (West of England) and Richard Watermeyer (Bristol) identified: "… three key perspectives. The *Traditionalist* perspective is concerned with the cultural context, arguing that the import of neoliberal business practices into university leadership and management has undermined academic self-governance. The *Reformist* perspective focuses on values from a social justice perspective arguing for a more democratic and inclusive style of leadership including participation from historically under-represented groups. Finally, the *Pragmatist* perspective is more functionally focused in identifying the capabilities, skills and competences needed for effective leadership in universities at all levels." Their article was in *Higher Education* (online 29 January 2024).

Finding God in all things, including university senior management teams
Bernard Lee (Oxford) reviewed "… the significant empirical and conceptual literature to develop a comprehensive conceptual framing of leadership that integrates leadership theory related to higher education, public and private goods, and Jesuit leadership in particular."

Public Management: a Research Overview

Raúl Gutiérrez-Meave (Illinois-Chicago) reviewed Tom Entwhistle's book for *Public Administration* (online 29 July 2024): "Entwistle provides a broad but incisive synthesis of the major theoretical frameworks and empirical efforts underpinning modern public management research."

Systematic reviews of leadership and management literature are too narrow
Sefika Mertkan (Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Cyprus) and Sedat Gümüş (Education University of Hong Kong) "… analysed 236 systematic reviews spread over 60 journals. … the conceptual model presented provides important insights into the past, present and future of a knowledge base through its focus on the patterns of knowledge evident in systematic reviews. … the results reveal that systematic reviews have largely focused on a narrow range of topics, suggesting evidence available on many widely explored topics that still await to be synthesised. Reviews focusing on methodological issues have been particularly rare." Their article was in *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership* (online 11 December 2024).

Increasing diversity in HE boards of governors
Advance HE's biennial review of diversity among governors showed an increase in the numbers of women, ethnic minorities and disabled governors.

Mergers worked better in Greek HEIs with campuses in three different cities
That's what Nikolaos Giovanos and Aikaterini Chasiotou (both International Hellenic University, Serres, Greece) discovered in their research on ten mergers of HEIs in Greece that were introduced by the state to absorb the previous 13 technological educational institutes from Greek universities, as reported in *Studies in Higher Education* (online 5 November 2024). They concluded unsurprisingly that "… a state initiative for legislative intervention in HEI mergers could lead to different levels of synergies."

300 jobs to go at Sussex
Juliette Rowsell reported for *Times Higher Education* on 27 November 2024 that Sussex University had announced plans to cut 300 jobs. "The announcement makes it the 80th known university to announce cuts in recent years, according to an influential list compiled by the University and College Union branch at Queen Mary University of London."

Dundee in financial trouble
Dundee Principal Iain Gillespie resigned with immediate effect, amid financial troubles which could mean a £30milion deficit, as Patrick Jack reported for *Times Higher Education* on 6 December 2024.

Borrowing for buildings at UEA
Staff at the University of East Anglia fear that the need to borrow for new buildings is driving UEA's decision to cut 170 jobs on top of the 400 announced last year, as Juliette Rowsell reported for *Times Higher Education* on 2 December 2024.

Canberra to cut 200 jobs
One in five jobs will go at the University of Canberra because of the university's excessive spending, according to John Ross in *Times Higher Education* on 21 October 2024. Interim VC Stephen Parker said UC needed "to reduce its recurrent expenditure by about A$50 million (£26 million) by the end of 2025."

Payouts for VCs
Patrick Jack reported for *Times Higher Education* on 9 December 2024 on big payouts for VCs leaving Leeds and London Metropolitan, as revealed in annual reports and accounts. Simone Buitendijk was paid £430,000 for leaving Leeds rather suddenly after three years, Lynn Dobbs had a rather more

understandable £219,000 payment for overlapping with incoming VC Julie Hall at London Metropolitan.

HE drives economic growth
The case was argued by David Maguire and Alex Bols (both East Anglia) in their *HEPI* blog on 22 November 2024, who understandably want more government action to make universities more financially sustainable.

VCs with an educational development background
Juliette Rowsell reported for *Times Higher Education* on 25 November 2024 on the four UK VCs with a background in educational development: Shân Wareing (Middlesex), Julie Hall (London Metropolitan), Claire Taylor (Plymouth Marjon) and Paul Bartholomew (Ulster).

VCs coming and going
The new vice-chancellor at **Otago** is the former NZ deputy Prime Minister Grant Robertson; John Ross reported for *Times Higher Education* on 2 October 2024 that his appointment seems to have gone down well.

Marine biologist Emma Johnston is the new VC at **Melbourne**.

Ernest Caldwell, previously at Goldsmiths and SOAS, is the new Provost at **Regent College London**, which of course should never be confused with Regent's University, London.

John Ross reported for *Times Higher Education* on 10 December 2024 that the **University of Surrey** vice-chancellor Max Lu will be moving to Australia as the sixth vice-chancellor of the **University of Wollongong**, starting next May.

Jane Norman is the new VC at **Nottingham**, replacing Shearer West from 1 January 2025. Jane Norman was formerly a clinical academic and Professor of Maternal and Fetal Health in Edinburgh and Glasgow before becoming Deputy VC and Provost at Nottingham. Chris Havergal reported for *Times Higher Education* on 16 December 2024.

David Phoenix will leave **London South Bank** to become the VC at the **Open University**, as Chris Havergal reported for *Times Higher Education* on 18 December 2024.

Canberra has 4 VCs in a year
John Ross reported for *Times Higher Education* on 2 December 2024 that troubles at the University of Canberra as Stephen Parker, brought in to hold the reins until the arrival of politician Bill Shorten as permanent VC in February 2025, had promptly resigned, saying he had lost confidence in the governing body. There will now be a third interim VC after the sudden departure of previous incumbent Paddy Nixon in December 2023.

William Hague elected as new Oxford Chancellor
23000 members of Convocation voted and the winner was Lord Hague, as Chris Havergal reported for *Times Higher Education* on 27 November 2024. The five-person shortlist was progressively reduced through four stages of voting based on single transferable vote system, with Hague defeating Lady Elish Angiolini, principal of St Hugh's College, Oxford at the final stage. He is elected for a ten-year term, succeeding Chris Patten, Lord Patten of Barnes.

What you can learn from annual Reports and Accounts

[Mike Ratcliffe wrote on his *Moremeansbetter* blog](#) on 2 December 2024 about the financial statements season about to start, noting that a few small universities contribute a large proportion of franchised student numbers:

	Registered and taught				Only registered			
	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23
Bath Spa	5600	5940	6280	6190	1020	570	4230	8550
Buckinghamshire New	4280	4180	4580	3980	7310	10820	12150	13670
Canterbury Christ Church	8860	9290	8520	7830	300	2600	11150	19280
Leeds Trinity	2670	3000	2860	2760	1290	2900	6540	8610
Suffolk	2720	2690	2430	2180	5380	8580	11020	10410

Working environments: a short overview of the literature *by Nic Kipar*

We rarely consider whether staff on our campuses are enjoying their work environments and are able to be their most creative and effective selves. We should ask individuals how they work best, to enable them to thrive. Staff should be given the freedom to experiment with different settings, without others imposing judgments based on their own limited perspectives. Here in the first of two blogs Nic Kipar reviews what we know from research about working environments; the second blog will look at what this might mean in practice. … read [the full blog here](#).

Possible futures for working environments *by Nic Kipar*

This blog follows an earlier short review of the literature, and is based on the author's experience in a range of Universities. It suggests how working environments might change in practice, with illustrations from the author's own institution, the University of Glasgow.

Introduction

In thinking about working environments, the most effective approach is to *ask* individuals how they work best. This enables them to thrive in the environment most suited to themselves and the particular activity they are undertaking. More importantly, staff should be given the freedom to *experiment* with different settings, without others imposing judgments based on their own limited perspectives. This openness fosters a supportive and adaptable workplace, enabling everyone to find the spaces that best suit their work and wellbeing. … read [the full blog here](#).

Staff

HE professionals need to think historically

Kelly Schrum (George Mason), Sophia Abbott (Rhode Island) and Erin Fay (George Mason) wrote about how they reimagined a history of HE course for student affairs professionals, [in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*](#) (online 16 November 2024). "History of higher education courses in higher education and student affairs (HESA) programs have the potential to introduce the value of the humanities to a new audience. This article presents the results of the study examining efforts to teach historical thinking skills and appreciation for humanities to future higher education professionals."

Promotion policies as exploitative wage theft

Troy Heffernan (Manchester) and Kathleen Smithers (Charles Sturt) wrote about exploitative university promotion policies: "The work uses Australia's higher education sector as an example, as

Australia's employment and promotion conditions are similar in many aspects to other higher education sectors. The paper provides an analysis of the promotion expectations to which academics are subjected to understand what tasks academics are expected to complete, and for how long, without being paid, *before* they can apply for promotion. The paper demonstrates to academics, policymakers, and unions, yet another exploitative practice that must be monitored and removed from the modern university as the sector looks to engage more equitable practices." Their article was in *Higher Education Research and Development* (online 16 October 2024).

Citation metrics changed where academics worked, whether they got grants and were promoted
An article (forthcoming as at 30 October 2024) in the *American Economic Review* examined "… how performance metrics affect the allocation of talent by exploiting the introduction of the first citation database in science." The article was by Sebastian Hager (Oxford), Carlo Schwarz (Bocconi University, Milan) and Fabian Waldinger (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich).

How you get to be an economics professor in Germany
Martin Schröder (Saarland University, Saarbrucken, Germany), Isabel M Habicht and Mark Lutter (both University of Wuppertal, Germany) used "a unique and virtually complete national dataset that includes 70,657 publications from 3955 economists, of which 1196 received tenure between 1984 and 2021." To show that "… fewer women receive tenure than would be expected based on their representation in the candidate pool. However, gender, parenthood, and non-reviewed publications do not significantly influence tenure attainment after controlling for covariates. Instead, mobility, accessing advanced career stages, and peer-reviewed journal articles are most strongly related to receiving tenure." Their article was in *Studies in Higher Education* (online 1 October 2024).

Academic careers and social class
Marte Mangset (Oslo) and Julia Orupabo (Institute for Social Research, Norway) wrote about 'Becoming and unbecoming academics' in the *British Journal of Sociology* (online 14 November 2024): "… the analysis identifies the kind of classed resources that are in play in the unequal access to academic positions. Beyond more classical resources, such as financial, cultural, and psychological certainty, the interviewees point to the significance of an early familiarity with the rules of the game and strategic navigation of the academic system."

Technician careers in HE
Victoria Talbot (Harper Adams), a leading advocate for technical professionals, reviewed the new Routledge book *Technicians in higher education and research: an insight into technical careers, roles and contributions*, edited by Kelly Vere (Nottingham), for *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* (online 20 November 2024).

Staff at UCU striking again
UCU staff, members of the UNITE union, have been in dispute with their managers at UCU and after talks at the conciliation service ACAS broke down they were on strike again from 9-11 December 2024, as Chris Havergal reported for *Times Higher Education* on 6 December 2024.

Emeritus professors don't lose their faculties
Ian Kinchin (Surrey) wrote in *Teaching in Higher Education* (online 23 October 2024) about "… the narrative desert that exists around the role of emeritus academics by considering how such colleagues fit within the narrative ecology of the university. … the dynamic tension of composing and de-composing processes of identity construction can be traced within an adaptive cycle of development. … the anomic deconstruction of the academic is balanced by the salutogenic reconstruction of the post-academic professional identity. … The approach sees emeritus status as an active part of the process of professional identity development rather than as a passive endpoint and presents a

departure from the perception of the frail elderly academic who lurks in the shadows of the zombie university."

Marketing and admissions

How prestigious universities stay ahead
The article by Rachel Bocquet (University Savoie Mont Blanc, France), Gaëlle Cotterlaz-Rannard (Sussex) and Michel Ferrary (Geneva) in the *British Journal of Management* (online 23 March 2024) took a Bourdieusian perspective on University business models: "With an original database of 192 private non-profit American universities, this study reveals two specific mechanisms, accumulation and conversion of forms of capital, underlying the dominance and persistence of certain non-profit business models. The first mechanism consists of accumulating economic, social and cultural capital and converting them into symbolic capital to ensure dominance in the field. The second mechanism operates in the conversion of the stock of symbolic capital to accumulate *ex-post* more economic, social and cultural capital, thereby securing the persistence of the dominant business models over time."

Making places over time
Sheila Malone (Galway) and three colleagues wrote in *Marketing Theory* (online 15 November 2024) : " … through residents' narratives, place-making is defined temporally through memories (past-in-the-present), experiences (present-in-the-present), and expectations (present-in-the-future). The findings support the notion of place-making as a fluid process but extend this understanding by promoting a temporal logic that is necessary to account for the transformation of meaning over and with time – its past, present and future – and by those who experience it."

Contextual admissions: normative considerations
Joanne Moore and Anna Mountford-Zimdars (both Exeter) wrote in *Higher Education Quarterly* (online 29 November 2024): "We identify various approaches to distributive justice and consider these under the framework developed by Pike distinguishes between 'egalitaria' (everyone gets the same); 'necessitia' (people get what they need); 'desertia' (people get what they deserve); and 'marketia' (the market decides what people get). Considering applicants in context is one approach to deciding admissions designed to enhance fairness and support social justice. … This thought piece considers the philosophical/normative and practical reasoning approaches that underpin CA. We use the case of English higher education to illustrate the political and philosophical debates, to highlight practical challenges and potential limitations and to identify further considerations for realising the benefits of contextualising university applicants."

Why are fewer 18-year-olds in Wales applying for HE?
Famke Veenstra-Ashmore, a HEPI intern in 2024, blogged about reasons for the low application rates by young people in Wales, for *HEPI* on 18 November 2024. A complex mix of unsurprising reasons.

Equity and Diversity

English Social Mobility Index
Bradford, Aston and Wolverhampton led the new *Social Mobility Index*, published by HEPI on 3 December 2024. "The Index measures the social distance travelled by socio-economically disadvantaged graduates from each higher education institution in England as well as the proportion of graduates so transported. It combines access, continuation and outcomes measures for undergraduates for all modes of study (except apprenticeships)."

Developing a theory of change for a future national collaborative outreach programme
The [OfS published a document](#) in December 2024 which set out its theory of change, following a widespread consultation. It looks very much like the Aimhigher Programme used to be, especially Aimhigher South West – but with fewer collaborators. *Plus ça change …*

Institutional constraints to higher education datafication: an English case study *by Rachel Brooks*

'Intractable' datafication?
Over recent years, both policymakers and university leaders have extolled the virtues of moving to a more metricised higher education sector: statistics about student satisfaction with their degree programme are held to improve the decision-making processes of prospective students, while [data analytics are purported to help the shift to more personalised learning](#), for example. Moreover, academic studies have contended that datafication has become an ['intractable'](#) part of higher education institutions (HEIs) across the world.

Nevertheless, [our research](#) (conducted in ten English HEIs, funded by [TASO](#)) – of data use with respect to [widening participation](#) to undergraduate 'sandwich' courses (where students spend a year on a work placement, typically during the third year of a four-year degree programme) – indicates that, despite the strong claims about the advantages of making more and better use of data, in this particular area of activity at least, significant constraints operate, limiting the advantages that can accrue through datafication. … read the [full blog here](#).

How socioeconomic background affects educational choices
Isis Adelante and Jannick Demannet (both Ghent) looked at the effects of socioeconomic status on students' educational pathways in the Flemish educational system, in their [article in the *British Educational Research Journal*](#) (online 16 October 2024): "Understanding social disparities in educational attainment requires understanding of students' decision-making throughout their educational career. We focused on students' pathways throughout upper secondary and higher education (HE), identified common types of pathways and studied the role of SES as a determinant of students' pathways. … even among the academic track students, socioeconomic background affected programme choice and long-term academic success. Less engaged students were less likely to follow university pathways. Moreover, higher cognitive engagement decreased disadvantaged students' chances of ending up in typical vocational pathways."

Disadvantaged students drop out more
Håvard Helland, Thea B Strømme (both Oslo Metropolitan) and Jens-Peter Thomsen (Danish Centre for Social Science Research, Copenhagen) looked at social inequality in dropout rates in Denmark and Norway [in *Studies in Higher Education*](#) (online 21 November 2024): "This article examines the association between students' social class background, their completion of higher education and transfer between research-intensive *universities* and vocational-oriented *university colleges* in Denmark and Norway. … dropout is considerably more widespread in Norway, and … students from the working class drop out more often than their fellow students. Although the general level of social disparities in dropout rates is similar in the two countries, the horizontal differences between class fractions with different compositions of cultural and economic capital are more pronounced in Norway, particularly in university colleges. At the same time, the social differences in transfer rates from universities to university colleges are considerably higher in Denmark, which indicates the importance of institutional characteristics, as the difference in academic orientation between universities and university colleges is considerably greater in Denmark than Norway." So, in Norway they drop out before finishing, in Denmark they finish but then find it harder to transfer to university.

Do degree apprenticeships widen access?

It's complicated, and it depends on age and sector, according to research by Charlynne Pullen (Sheffield Hallam) as reported in her *Wonkhe* blog on 23 October 2024.

Access goes backward in Scotland

David Kernohan looked at the numbers, and what was missing from the numbers, in his *Wonkhe* blog on 22 October 2024: "The number of higher education entrants from Scotland's 20 per cent most deprived areas (based on SIMD2020v2) has fallen to 5,310 – down from 5,595 in 2021-22. And the proportion of entrants from these areas is just 16.3 per cent: lower than every year since 2018-19."

Admitting marginal students raised drop-out rates

That was for one 2015 cohort of students for one programme, police training, in one province in Germany. A slender basis, you might think, for arguing: "… that higher education institutions may be confronted with a performance dilemma if external stakeholders prefer institutional growth, and internal actors prefer maintenance of educational standards." But Markus Seyfried (Potsdam), Stefan Hollenberg and Judith Here-Husain (both University of Applied Sciences for Police and Public Administration, Duisburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany) did it anyway, in the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* (online 12 June 2024).

How online learning can help tackle global injustices *by Sam Spiegel*

How can online learning programmes help tackle systemic global injustices with creative pedagogies? How can universities build effective educational environments and pedagogies to support critical thinking and vigorously challenge contemporary forms of racism, colonialism and inequity?

These are some of the questions I have reflected on over the past almost 14 years of teaching at the University of Edinburgh. In 2011, I embarked with colleagues at the School of Social and Political Science to develop our school's first fully online distance learning MSc postgraduate programmes, partnering with an interdisciplinary team spanning the three Colleges of the University to co-create and co-teach the MSc in Global Challenges. Addressing global development, health and environmental inequalities, with case studies spanning an array of countries, this programme had students from all over the world. … Read the full blog here.

Professor Farid Alatas on 'The captive mind and anti-colonial thought' *by Ibrar Bhatt*

On Monday 2 December 2024, during the online segment of the 2024 SRHE annual conference, Professor Farid Alatas delivered a thought-provoking keynote address in which he emphasised an urgent need for the decolonisation of knowledge within higher education. His lecture was titled '*The captive mind and anti-colonial thought*' and drew from the themes of his numerous works including *Sociological Theory Beyond the Canon* (Alatas, 2017).

Alatas called for a broader, more inclusive framework for teaching sociological theory and the importance of doing so for contemporary higher education. For Alatas, this framework should move beyond a Eurocentric and androcentric focus of traditional curricula, and integrate framings and concepts from non-Western thinkers (including women) to establish a genuinely international perspective.

In particular, he discussed his detailed engagement with the neglected social theories of Ibn Khaldun, his efforts to develop a 'neo-Khaldunian theory of sociology'. He also highlighted another exemplar of non-Western thought, the Filipino theorist José Rizal (see Alatas, 2009, 2017). Alatas discussed how

such modes sort of non-Western social theory should be incorporated into social science textbooks and teaching curricula. … read the full blog here.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Let students see their exam scripts (mostly)
That was the argument of *HEPI Policy Note 58*, written by Rohan Selva-Radov, a PPE student at Oxford, published in November 2024.

The problem with the OfS is habitus
A splendid *HEPI blog from Tim Blackman* (Open University VC) on 28 October 2024 demolished the 'unexplained variations' argument used by the OfS to interpret supposed 'grade inflation'. Universities actually can make a difference.

**New university teachers develop self-efficacy in stages**
Esther E van Dijk (Utrecht) and colleagues from Utrecht, most in the University Medical Centre, reported their research on 201 new teachers at one research-intensive university: "Results suggested three developmental phases in novice university teachers' self-efficacy across teacher tasks: (1) development in 'teaching and supporting learning', (2) development in 'assessment and feedback' and 'educational design', (3) development in 'educational leadership and management' and 'educational scholarship and research'. Two or three phases for the development of self-efficacy were found within each of these teacher tasks." Their article was *in the Journal of Further and Higher Education* (online 10 October 2024).

The challenge of AI declaration in HE – what can we do? *by Chahna Gonsalves*

The rapid integration of AI tools like ChatGPT into academic life has raised significant concerns about academic integrity. Universities worldwide are grappling with how to manage this new frontier of technology. My recent research at King's Business School sheds light on an intriguing challenge: student non-compliance with mandatory AI use declarations. Despite clear institutional requirements to declare AI usage in their coursework, up to 74% of students did not comply. This raises key questions about how we think about academic honesty in the age of AI, and what can be done to improve compliance and foster trust. … Read the full blog here.

Gaps in sustainability literacy in non-STEM higher education programmes *by Rania Hassan and Erika Kalocsányiová*
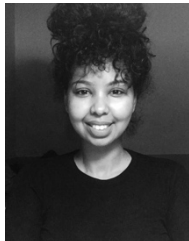
Promoting sustainability literacy in higher education is crucial for deepening students' pro-environmental behaviour and mindset (Buckler & Creech, 2014; UNESCO, 1997), while also fostering social transformation by embedding sustainability at the core of the student experience. In 2022, our group received an SRHE Scoping Award to synthesise the literature on the development, teaching, and assessment of sustainability literacy in non-STEM higher education programmes. We conducted a multilingual systematic review of post-2010 publications from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), with the results summarised in Kalocsányiová *et al* (2024). … Read the full blog here.

Students

Alternative representations of students when HE becomes 'free'
Patricio Sanchez-Campos (Nottingham) and three colleagues reported their research in *Studies in Higher Education* (online 12 November 2024) on Chile's reform that removed tuition fees for low and middle income undergraduate students, known as *Gratuidad*. "Based on a discourse analysis of news media, we present three representations of undergraduate students during public discussion of *Gratuidad* that were common in their negative portrayal: students as (1) egocentric, (2) victims of discrimination, and (3) marionettes. Our work thus indicates that in a culture of marketisation, policy efforts designed to democratise can be overshadowed by strong media discourses opposing government efforts to publicly fund HE."

Coached habitus
Bourdieu rides again, as Achala Gupta (Southampton) developed the concept of coached habitus to interpret how 'shadow education' (tutoring centres, coaching institutions and the like) help to shape individuals' dispositions and educational trajectories, in her article in the *British Educational Research Journal* (online 26 October 2024).

Postgraduate students are more satisfied than ever
The *2024 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey* conducted by Advance HE, published on 24 November 2024, showed student satisfaction at its highest ever level (84%), with international students more satisfied than home students.

Student characteristics 2024
On 16 October 2024 the OfS updated a wide range of student characteristics data from the 2024 National Student Survey.

Uzbekistan exports more students than anyone except China and India
Nic Mitchell reported for *University World News* on 26 November 2024 that Uzbekistan had overtaken Vietnam as the third-largest sending country for internationally mobile students after China and India.

Student accommodation after 2024
Martin Blakey, former Chief Executive of the Leeds-based student housing charity Unipol, wrote another very well-informed and insightful blog for *HEPI* on 20 November 2024 about the need for a strategic realignment in thinking about student accommodation for the future.

The power of the student press
Famke Veenstra-Ashmore blogged for *HEPI* on 26 November 2024 about the important role of the student press in holding universities to account and, often, breaking or supplementing stories in the national media.

Well-being of PhD students
Research by Magdalena Alejandra Gaete Sepúlveda (Navarra, Pamplona), Natalia Volkova and Aleksandra Kulbaeva (both HSE University, Moscow) used latent profiling and identified four roughly equal-sized groups among 208 Russian PhD students: "… we established four well-being profiles: 'Disrupted well-being' (20.2%), 'Confident well-being' (28.8%), 'Dominated by Health and Research concerns' (26.9%) and 'Dominated by social connections concern' (24.1%) groups. The 'disrupted' group reported poor well-being regarding five out of seven domains. These students are less satisfied with the PhD programme than other participants and demonstrate the strongest worries about career prospects and degree completion due to COVID-19." Their article was in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (online 11 December 2024).

Compassionate communication
"Compassionate communication … goes beyond the mechanics of speaking or writing effectively. It delves into the emotional and psychological dimensions of how we interact with others, emphasising the importance of empathy, active listening, and mutual respect. In an age where digital communication often supersedes face-to-face interactions, the principles of compassionate communication become even more important. They remind us that behind every communication, there is a person with feelings, perspectives, and experiences that deserve acknowledgment and understanding." That was part of the statement issued by the Academic Registrars Council, an output of the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce chaired by Edward Peck, VC at Nottingham Trent, the government-appointed 'Student Support Champion'.

Quality, Standards, Performance, Evaluation

Quality and standards

The concept of academic quality
Philosophers Leon Culbertson, Chris Lawton (both Edge Hill) and Ian Robertson (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany) "argued that … different uses of 'academic quality' are not minor changes in emphasis, but fundamentally different uses of the words rooted in different concepts of academic quality with different implications for measurement and/or evaluation." in their article in *Higher Education Quarterly* (online 22 November 2024). "Three different uses of 'academic quality' are identified (the state-driven, sector-derived, and the traditional academic uses) and their relationship to fundamentally different priorities, values, criteria, purposes and practices is established. The notion of a concept as it applies in the paper is then explained before four alternatives to the thought that there is more than one concept of academic quality are evaluated and ultimately rejected."

UK Quality Code for HE
On 27 November 2024 QAA published documents which map its UK Quality Code to the OfS Conditions of Registration and to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

Thematic issues in OfS quality assessments
OfS published *Insight Brief 23* in October 2024 based on "recent assessments of the quality of courses at a small number of institutions, in business and management and in computing. It explains the approaches and types of evidence used in these assessments and summarises the main risks we have seen to quality, to support universities and colleges to reflect on their own approaches in these areas."

Wolverhampton responds to OfS quality issue
Wolverhampton University was subject to an OfS quality visit which discovered an inconsistency between the level of assessment of different cohorts on the same programme; the university has now straightened it out, as OfS announced on 3 December 2024.

Cambridge veterinary school threatened with loss of accreditation
Juliette Rowsell reported for *Times Higher Education* on 27 November 2024 that the Cambridge Veterinary School was threatened with loss of accreditation after an inspection by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' (RCVS), which considered complaints of animals being 'automatically euthanised', students facing racism and other issues. The RCVS had brought forward its scheduled

inspection for 2025 because of numerous concerns and gave the School conditional accreditation for just ten months, pending the review in September 2025.

Oxford International Education and Travel Ltd gets good quality report from OfS assessment team
OIETL applied to OfS for initial assessment against its quality conditions B7 and B8, and an [assessment team report](#) published on 21 November 2024 was very positive.

OfS 'enhanced monitoring' of Bedfordshire
After a quality assessment of some Bedfordshire courses the [OfS decided](#) on 18 December 2024 that the university had breached condition B2 relating to resources and support. "Specifically, the university had not taken all reasonable steps to ensure that students received the resources and support they needed for a high quality academic experience. … We are now content that the University of Bedfordshire has a set of initiatives in place to deal with these issues and our monitoring seeks to ensure that these will be implemented effectively."

New approach to quality enhancement in Scotland
[Amy Eberlin (QAA) blogged for *HEPI*](#) on 4 November 2024 about the launch of Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme (STEP), managed in partnership with the College Development Network (CDN): "STEP is a new national enhancement programme that enables Scotland's colleges and universities to work together to develop initiatives to enhance the learner experience." But it is also a natural development from the enhancement-oriented approach which has for some time been a feature of Scottish HE.

Who writes about quality in HE?
Lee Harvey, long-serving editor of *Quality in Higher Education*, did the analysis for [his extended editorial](#) (online 25 October 2024).

Research

REF 2029
[Apply now to be a chair, subchair or member of a REF subpanel](#). Deadline 6 February 2025 (chairs/subchairs) and 28 April 2025 (members).

The [Open Access policy for REF 2029](#) was published on 11 December 2029.

British educational research and its quality
Matthew Inglis (Loughborough) and three colleagues from Loughborough and LSE "… analysed the full text of all journal articles returned to the education subpanel of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF2021). … we identified 35 topics that collectively summarise the journal articles that research units, typically schools of education, selected for submission. … the topics which units wrote about in their submitted articles collectively explained a large proportion (84.1%) of the variance in the quality assessments they received from the REF's expert peer review process. … there were strong associations between what the subpanel perceived to be excellent research and the adoption of particular methods or approaches. Most notably, units that returned more interview-based work typically received lower scores, and those which returned more analyses of large-scale data and meta-analyses typically received higher scores. Finally, we applied our 2021 model to articles submitted to the previous exercise, REF2014. We found that education research seems to have become less qualitative and more quantitative over time, and that our 2021 model could successfully predict the scores assigned by the REF2014 subpanel, suggesting a reasonable degree of between-exercise consistency." Higher education was just one of the 35 topics, although research in HE no doubt

appeared in other topics too. The article was in the *British Education Research Journal* (online 5 June 2024).

What does it mean to explain social phenomena?
Andrea Maurer (Trier) wrote in the *British Journal of Sociology* (online 16 October 2024) about "action-based explanations as a form of sociological theorizing that defines a clear task in exploring challenges in social life and assessing possible forms of coping with them from the perspective of individuals. … two main ways of broadening explanations are considered and compared in light of what the purpose of sociology might be."

Rhythms of repetition and disturbance
Monica Nadegger and Philipp K Wegerer (both MCI - The Entrepreneurial School (Department of Tourism & Leisure Business), Austria) wrote in *Organization* (online 30 November 2024) "… we highlight the potential of understanding arrhythmia as an invitation to transform business-as-usual by attuning to neglected, more-than-human temporalities. … Organizational and social life is determined by various rhythms: managerial rhythms, such as work schedules and the ups and downs of the financial market; social rhythms, like holidays or family schedules; bodily rhythms, such as sleep and hunger; or natural rhythms, like day and night, seasonality or weather phenomena. A rhythm "defines the order and tempo of practice" (Katila et al, 2020: 1311) through specific measures such as speed, frequency, and consistency (Lefebvre, 2004). As such, rhythms organize space and time through their different qualities."

What's love got to do with neurodiversity and HE art and design? *by Kai Syng Tan*

A loveless storm and a love-filled symposium

On 18 November I was ill. I recovered in time to travel to Helsinki for a symposium two days later, but winter storms shut down the airport, delayed flights and lost luggage, including mine. The symposium director Dr Timothy Smith (below left) had to step in to act as my wardrobe assistant. Like many neurodivergent academics, Tim works across an astonishing range of knowledges, including political science, fine art, public policy and pedagogy. But I'm quite certain that sourcing for clothes to fit 155cm grumpy people isn't part of their typical repertoire. …

Tim's *Neurodiversity in the Arts Symposium*, which took two years of advocacy and planning, and draws on several more of research across neurodiversity and art education, took place at the University of the Arts Helsinki, modelling **best practices for inclusivity, not just for neurodivergent folx.** Universities, watch and learn. Yes it can be done. So, what does a symposium *led by love* look like in action? Let's spell out a few ways how: … read the full blog here.

Research into higher education

A three-wave model of evolution of doctoral education
Sergio Celis (University of Chile), Iva Parra-Gaete (Arizona) and Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela (Univeridad de Tarapacá, Arica, Chile) analysed "… 70 scholarly articles on doctoral education in Latin America from 2011 to 2021 … the research identifies key trends, themes, and defining characteristics within the literature. We propose a three-wave evolution model for doctoral education in Latin America … The results show the consolidation of doctoral education in several countries, the 'second wave', with themes such as quality assurance policy, program development, learning, curriculum, and

advising. The study also highlights the emergence of research hubs as a 'third wave', in which doctoral programs attract individuals from different backgrounds and locations who mobilise knowledge and ideas within and across regions." Their article was in the *Journal of Higher Education, Policy and Management* (online 11 November 2024).

The crisis literature
Bruce Macfarlane (Education University of Hong Kong) wrote about 'the ideology of crisis' in *Higher Education Quarterly* (online 19 February 2024): "This paper will provide an analysis of the 'crisis' literature and identify four major crisis themes – *massification*, *marketisation, restitution* and *geopolitics*, linked to their ideological basis and influences—including *meritocracy*, *liberalism*, *restorative justice*, and *justice globalism*. … the notion of 'universities in crisis' needs to be understood critically in terms of ideology and historically via the shifting and reshaping of such beliefs over time."

Reconciling academic and professional knowledge in professional doctorates
Carol Azumah Dennis and four colleagues from the Open University reported their research in *Higher Education Research and Development* (online 26 April 2024): "Through a narrative exploration of the literature published since the first UK Professional Doctorates were awarded in 2000 … This study draws towards two broad conclusions. … the distinction between academic and professional epistemologies has little resonance. Instead of the dichotomous knowledge generated in the context of practice in contrast to knowledge generated in the context of disciplinary laws, Professional Doctorates were ensconced within several competing epistemologies. The literature identified focuses on impact and identity, concepts the study employs as lenses to guide a discussion. … The investigation then draws a second conclusion: The epistemic landscape occupied by the Professional Doctorate is involved in a reconciliation of more significance that the putative academic and professional binary. … a diffractive re-reading of this academic-professional knowledge tension. This new reading allows a full recognition of both difference and mutual entanglement between knowledge generated in the context of practice and knowledge generated in the context of disciplinary laws."

How PhD students get acculturated
Triinu Soomere, Mari Karm (both Tartu, Estonia) and Torgny Roxå (Lund) wanted to understand "the variation across PhD students' lived experiences of their acceptance by the teaching community, and their acceptance of the university teaching community's cultural norms. … The study identified three qualitatively different ways in which PhD students experienced acceptance of the teaching culture and acceptance into the teaching community. These were: as equal partners, as knocking against boundaries and as being on the margins." Their article was in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (online 21 October 2024).

A different research perspective – it's about time
The article by Riyad A Sharjahan, Adam Grimm (both Michigan State) and Jenna Mittelmeier (Manchester) in *Higher Education Research and Development* (online 21 October 2024) explored "… temporal dimensions such as: the dominant temporal structure (clock time), temporal discontinuities, and the interconnections between temporality, privilege, and oppression, and how these facets mediate the nature of international students' experiences."

**Is autoethnography a marginal method for the marginalised?**
Malcolm Tight (Lancaster) seemed to think so, as he continued his exhaustive unpicking of the research into HE literature *in Theory and Method in Higher Education Research* (online 9 December 2024).

New book from Ron Barnett
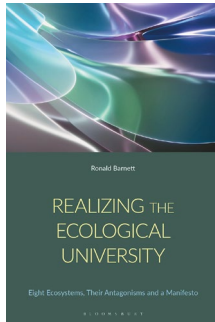
The new book by former SRHE Chair Ron Barnett (UCL Institute of Education), *Realizing the Ecological University: Eight Ecosystems, Their Antagonisms and a Manifesto*, published by Bloomsbury, develops the idea of the ecological university which he has been formulating and refining for more than ten years. The ecological university takes its interconnectedness with the world seriously. This is challenging, for the world is in difficulty *and* is shot through with antagonism. The university is partly culpable for those difficulties and so has responsibilities towards the world. *Realizing the Ecological University* spells out this thesis by charting the university's entanglements with eight ecosystems – knowledge, learning, persons, social institutions, culture, the economy, the polity and nature. The book identifies ways in which each of the eight ecosystems is impaired and points to possibilities through which universities can help in repairing those ecosystems. This book also sets out broad principles in helping to realize the ecological university in each of the eight ecosystems. Barnett draws widely from philosophy, social theory, comparative higher education and ethics, and advances a particular form of the philosophy of higher education, at once realist, societal, critical, worldly and Earthly.

Intellectual leadership and HE
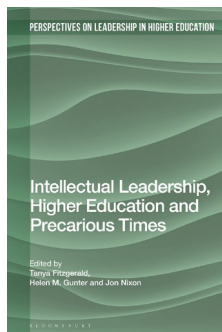
The new book edited by Tanya Fitzgerald (Western Australia), Helen M Gunter (Manchester) and Jon Nixon (Middlesex) is "… focused on provoking readers to think critically about intellectual leadership in precarious times. The contributors frame critical questions about the unevenness, ambivalences, and disruptions that now mark everyday life and interactions. Rather than thinking about 'freedom from precarious times and precarity' they consider 'freedom from within' and how the sovereignty and autonomy of the individual to think and speak within the public realm might be retained, if not reclaimed. In the precarious present and in times of precarity, what has changed and why? What might now be the new social reality within which we work?"

SRHE/Routledge Book Series: Research into Higher Education
There have been three new titles published in the SRHE/Routledge Book Series:
- Researching Social Inequalities in Higher Education: Access, Diversity and Inclusion (edited by Vikki Boliver, Nadia Siddiqui)
- Higher Education, Place, and Career Development: Learning from Rural and Island Students (by Rosie Alexander)
- Race, Racism, and Higher Education Ethnic Minority Students' Transitions to and From University (by Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers)

Publishing

Cognitive dissonance in publishing ideals
"There is no doubt in the potential value in library AI services for faculty and students. There is no doubt that copyright and licensing matters. There is no doubt that an author must publish with attribution to their work, and their content published and sold with the understanding of who the rewards accrue to, the integrity of content, and the importance of acknowledging author contributions." Thus spake Robert Harington (American Mathematical Society) on the *Scholarly Kitchen* blog on 25 November 2024. So "How do we solve for this dissonance?"

Finland downgrades Frontiers and MDPI journals

Jack Grove reported for *Times Higher Education* on 20 December 2024 that "Finland is downgrading almost 300 Frontiers and MDPI journals to its lowest rating – a de facto blacklisting move that might soon be replicated in other countries".

Silverchair buys ScholarOne
Roger C Schonfeld of ITHAKA blogged for *The Scholarly Kitchen* on 28 October 2024 about Clarivate's sale of ScholarOne to Silverchair, arguing it made sense for both parties, and kept at least one manuscript submission system independent of the major publishers.

Reviewer 2 might not be as bad you think
That was the argument of Rebecca Colesworthy of SUNY Press, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on 25 October 2024. Feel free to disagree.

New partnership for Elsevier and *Times Higher Education*
Elsevier announced on 3 October 2024 a new deal with *Times Higher Education*: "THE will continue to use data and strategic insights from Elsevier's world-leading Scopus and SciVal platforms to power its global portfolio of university rankings, including its flagship World University Rankings, Regional and Subject Rankings, Impact Rankings and the upcoming Interdisciplinary Science Rankings."

Emerald buys Information Age Publishing
Emerald announced on 22 November 2024 that it had acquired Information Age Publishing. "Publishing academic book series, monographs and journals with particular strengths in the areas of Education, Management and Psychology, IAP expands Emerald's portfolio of high-quality academic resources, and significantly enhances Emerald's author footprint in North America. The sale comprises over 2,600 books and six peer-reviewed journals."

Lee Harvey steps down after 30 years
Congratulations and best wishes to Lee Harvey, who has edited *Quality in Higher Education* since its inception in 1993, after his remarkable 30-year stint, now handing over the reins to James Williams (Birmingham City).

Ethics and Academic Freedom

Academic freedom and freedom of speech

English universities are 'deluded' if they think there is no problem with freedom of speech
Patrick Jack reported for *Times Higher Education* on 27 November 2024 that two VCs, Adam Tickell (Sussex) and Evelyn Welch (Bristol), speaking at a THE event, had agreed there were problems. Tickell said ""We point to the number of speakers who are refused, and it's tiny, but the problem isn't necessarily the number of speakers. Sometimes it's much more complex than that."

Stanford persecutes a student journalist, again
Len Gutkin reported for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on 9 December 2024 on Stanford's treatment of student journalist Dilan Gohill when he covered a campus protest about Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza. Stanford has form after the previous president was in effect forced out by a student journalism investigation. New President Jonathan Levin and Provost Jenny Martinez pledged to "strengthen the culture of inquiry on campus", but as Gutkin said: "Levin's predecessor, Marc Tessier-Lavigne, did not have the culture of inquiry in mind when he had his lawyer send a series of aggressive letters to another *Stanford Daily* journalist, Theo Baker, in 2023. Levin, and Martinez, should do better."

Integrity

The Norwegian problem with plagiarism
Emily Dixon reported for *Times Higher Education* on 27 November 2024 on a plagiarism case in which a student had allegedly self-plagiarised by reusing two paragraphs from a previous exam he had failed, without attribution. Government took the case to the Norwegian Supreme Court; the student was acquitted. However this prompted some to examine the record of government ministers, and the higher education minister was forced to resign, having plagiarised parts of her 2014 Masters thesis, closely followed by the health minister, whose Masters degree was also revoked.

Salamanca rector accused of academic misconduct
Emily Dixon reported for *Times Higher Education* on 27 September 2024 that "The rector of a Spanish university and collaborators from his research group established a "citation factory" to artificially inflate their bibliometric standings", alleged in a report from the Spanish Committee on Research Ethics. The rector, Juan Manuel Corchado, a computer scientist who edits a journal at the centre of the allegations,, said he was the victim of a smear campaign to unseat him as rector and the report was based on spurious data and bibliometrically imprecise databases. Springer Nature has been investigating and may deliver a definitive verdict.

Global Perspectives

Australia

**Is Australia's partial elimination of student debt fair?**
Maxwell Yeong (Melbourne) doesn't think so, because it benefits graduates who benefit from the graduate premium rather than non-graduates, as he wrote in *Times Higher Education* on 22 November 2024.

China

Hong Kong academic jailed for ten years
Yojana Sharma reported for *World University News* on 20 November 2024 that "Former University of Hong Kong law professor Benny Tai has been sentenced to 10 years in jail under Hong Kong's National Security Law. It is the longest of the sentences meted out to 45 Democrats – comprising former legislators, activists, academics and journalists – in a landmark High Court trial this week."

Bridging borders in knowledge: the internationalisation of Chinese social sciences *by Márton Demeter, Manuel Goyanes, Gergő Háló and Xin Xu*
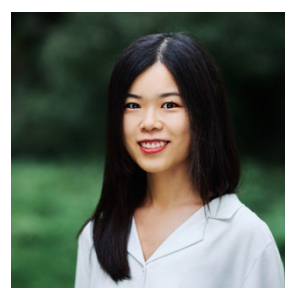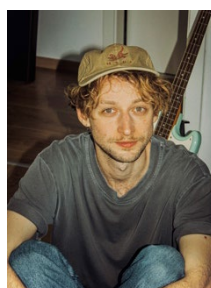
The dynamics of Chinese social sciences are shifting rapidly. As policies aim to balance domestic priorities with global integration, the interplay between China's academic output and its international reception highlights critical challenges and opportunities. In a recent study published in *Policy Reviews in Higher Education*, we analysed 8,962 publications by the top 500 most productive China-affiliated scholars in Economics, Education, and Political Science between 2016 and 2020.

Uneven impacts across disciplines
Our analysis reveals that most Chinese-authored works in these disciplines are published in Western-edited journals. Political Science publications often focus on China-specific topics, creating what may be interpreted as intellectual silos.

By contrast, Economics stands out for its significant global impact, with Chinese scholars' publications frequently outpacing the citation rates of their Western peers. Meanwhile, Education and Political Science publications from China generally attract fewer citations compared to those from the U.S., U.K., and Germany.

Why does Economics perform so well? The field's emphasis on data-driven, globally relevant research - addressing topics like economic policy, market dynamics, and financial crises - positions it effectively within international discourse. Substantial funding and resources further strengthen Economics' visibility and impact. … read *the full blog here*.

India

India to launch One Nation One Subscription scheme for journal access
Shuriah Niazi reported for *University World News* on 28 November 2024 reported on India's impending launch of a scheme for the centralised subscription of academic journals, which aims "to address disparities in the availability of scholarly materials, especially in smaller cities and under-represented areas, and encourage interdisciplinary studies." *The Scholarly Kitchen* ran an extended chat about possible implications.

Ireland

Grade deflation in Ireland
The Irish Times reported on 27 November 2024 that 22.4% of students had been awarded a first-class honours degree in 2022-23 … a drop of 2% on the year before, when it stood at 24.4%, and a drop of 6% on the previous year, when it stood at 27.9%, a record high.

Kazakhstan

Teaching and research career tracks in Kazakhstan
The article by Dinara Mukhamejanova and Gulfiya Kuchumova (both Maqsut Narikbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan) in *Studies in Higher Education* (online 11 November 2024) explored the restructuring of academic careers in Kazakhstan: "Since gaining academic and financial autonomy in 2018, a number of leading private universities in Kazakhstan have separated teaching and research into two distinct career tracks and implemented outcome-based faculty performance evaluation. This initiative aimed to increase the quality of both teaching and research, boost faculty's research productivity, and improve the competitiveness of these universities in the local higher education market."

Pakistan

Women leaders in Pakistan HE
Asadullah Lashari (University of Sindh, Pakistan) and Waqar Ali Shah (Mehran University of Education and Technology, Jamshoro, Pakistan) reported their research in *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership* (online 29 October 2024): "A growing body of literature reveals how women in higher education are either excluded from leadership roles or face challenges when they take such responsibilities. The role of religion in Muslim societies is vital to understand Muslim women's sense of "self" and their academic leadership roles and engagement in social and political activities. … discourse around women's leadership in higher education in Pakistan is influenced by a male-centric religious monoglossia characterized by discourses on the hijab, masculinist religious epistemologies, and male-centric divine imagery. In addition, the study points to heteroglossic de-centering of the religious monoglossia by suggesting heteroglossic fluidity in Pakistani religious ethics that favors women's roles as leaders in higher education."

Bureaucrats can be VCs in Sindh
The provincial Cabinet in Sindh agreed on 4 December 2024 to change the criteria for appointment as VCs, paving the way for senior civil servants and others to get the top jobs, as *Dawn* reported on 5 December 2024.

Poland

Why aren't there many female leaders in Polish HE?
Dominik Antonowicz and Anna Pokorska (both Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland) said it was because "… the large deficit of female rectors has been influenced by the traditional masculine figure of a university rector deeply embedded in the Polish academic culture." Their article was in *Higher Education Quarterly* (online 30 October 2024).

Society News

A very happy new year to all our members across the world. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Society's founding, and we have some events planned for 2025, including the revival of our Fellowship programme.

It was good to see so many of you at our December conference. We are already working on plans for our next Conference in December 2025, and we will be touch with all members with further details as soon as these are confirmed. We are delighted to announce the theme for next year's blended-format conference in December 2025: **'*Compassion, collegiality and communities in higher education: Challenging the Discourse'.***

2024 SRHE Conference (2 – 6 December)
SRHE held its Annual International Research Conference *'Higher Education: a place for activism and resistance?',* online on 2 December and in person at the East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham, UK on 4 – 6 December. We welcomed a range of UK-based and international academics, postgraduate students, and practitioners in higher education. There were over 200 presentations on a broad range of topics and international perspectives on higher education and activism.

The conference online began with a thought-provoking plenary from Professor Syed Farid Alatas on 'The Captive Mind and Anti-Colonial Thought', which set the tone for meaningful conversations around decolonising knowledge and reshaping intellectual frameworks. This was followed by a

plenary panel discussion with Professor Kathleen Lynch and Dr Bernie Grummell on 'Institutional and Epistemic Forms of Resistance'.

In Nottingham, Professor Jan McArthur delivered a keynote on aspirational thinking for resistance and change within the shrinking world of Higher Education. The plenary inspired us to think about ways that we can aspire to a more just future within higher education. We were then joined by an expert panel comprised of Professor Alice Sullivan, Dr Leila Kadiwal and Ms Michelle Shipworth on 'The Contemporary Spheres of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Sex, Racism, and Neocolonialism'.

Editors of SRHE Publications held a series of 'Meet the Editors' sessions which explored a variety of themes, including demystifying the peer review process, future trends in HE research, emerging challenges in the publishing industry, and policy changes in UK Universities. The Conference was supported by SRHE's Networks, the convenors of which held a series of sessions delving into the activities and goals of each network, and by a number of highly supportive and engaging session chairs.

The SRHE executive team would like to offer warm thanks to everyone who contributed their time, labour, and expertise to ensure the success of the conference, particularly our peer reviewers, moderators, and support staff. Recordings of the sessions from Monday 2 December can be viewed on our website. Submissions which we have permission to share will soon be added to the SRHE conference website archive, where they will be available to all.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)
Our thanks to all members who attended our AGM both in-person and online on 7th November 2024. This provided a welcome opportunity to outline activity over the 2023-2024 academic and financial year as well as plans for 2025 and beyond. It also enabled us to thank some of our award and accolade winners as detailed below.

The AGM papers and presentation are available from the past event archive

Newer Researcher Awards
We are delighted to congratulate our three Newer Researcher Award winners:

- **Agata Lambrechts**, Università della Svizzera italiana & Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training - *Avoiding Peripheralisation: Swiss and British HEIs Participation in the European Universities Initiative*
- **Ruth Squire**, Leeds Trinity University - *What counts? Who counts? Ethics in access and participation evaluation*
- **Tongyu Wu**, University of Bristol - *From Highlands to Urban Higher Education: A Participatory Narrative Exploration of Rural Tibetan Undergraduates' Transitions*

Applications are now open for the **2025 Newer Researcher Awards**, and a reminder that the closing date is **31 March 2025.** Full details, including eligibility guidelines and the application procedure are available from https://srhe.ac.uk/research/prize-for-newer-researchers/.

Note also the forthcoming **Newer Researcher Webinar** on Wednesday 22 January for further background on these awards and for any questions you may have. Book your place via www.srhe.ac.uk.

SRHE Accolades

The Accolades are range of awards recognising the contributions of our members to the field of Higher Education, to the academic community, and to SRHE itself. These awards recognise a range of exemplary work by members at multiple career stages and in a variety of professional roles. In 2024, Accolades were awarded to **Professor Patricia Kennon, Dr Michelle Morgan, Professor Sarah O' Shea** and **Professor Nidhi S. Sabharwal** for their outstanding contributions to the field of higher education. For their exemplary services to the academic community, Accolades have been awarded to **Dr Jenna Mittelmeier** and **Dr Charlotte Verney**.

Nominations for the 2025 Accolades will open in March 2025, but we encourage you to start to consider nominating a colleague soon. More detailed guidance can be found on the SRHE website at https://srhe.ac.uk/srhe-accolades/.

SRHE Fellowships

The Society's fellowship programme is being revived during its 60th anniversary, following a period of dormancy of some ten years. Members are encouraged to nominate candidates for fellowship who may have been missed out over this period, but also to consider current members who may be eligible. Visit the website for further details. Nominations will close on **31 March 2025**.

Forthcoming SRHE Network Events

Do visit our home page at www.srhe.ac.uk for further details and to book onto our forthcoming events. Below is a brief list of confirmed events so far, with more to be added over the coming weeks:

Wednesday 15 January 2025: **Inclusive AI**
Friday 17 January 2025: **Generative AI and the Work of Knowledge Production in the Multilingual University**
Friday 24 January 2025: **Evaluating UK doctoral degrees: how shall we know them?**
Monday 27 January 2025: **Earning while learning: student employment, gender and higher education**

SRHE Executive Team

Clare Loughlin-Chow: CEO clare.loughlin-chow@srhe.ac.uk
Rob Gresham, Manager: Operations and Finance.rob.gresham@srhe.ac.uk
Franco Carta, Finance Officer franco.carta@srhe.ac.uk
Rihana Suliman, Manager: Conference and Events rihana.suliman@srhe.ac.uk
Mariam Ismail, Engagement and Development Manager mariam.ismail@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.

Inspiring digital futures: meeting the needs of millennial learners in online spaces
Wednesday, 2nd April 2025 - 10.00 - 12.00
The demographics are changing! A few decades ago, the typical OU student (if ever there was such a thing) was imagined as a working-class middle-aged woman who studied part-time for a change in life direction. The 1980s film, starring Julia Walters and Michael Caine, Educating Rita, sums this up perfectly. But, the world has changed. While there are fewer older adults, there is an increasing

number of 18 – 25 -year olds who, despite the fees - remain keen to attend university and study full-time. This is a shift for the Open University (OU), and we need to explore the implications of this change and how best to respond to it. In this seminar, we want to check the accuracy of any of the assumptions we make about 18- 25 year olds as Higher Education (H.E.) students learning online. What motivates them and how do they feel about inhabiting online learning spaces? How well do our approaches to pedagogy address their needs, and in what ways do we need to change to ensure they can succeed?

[You can register for the event here.](#)

Keynote speaker Dr Achala Gupta will present on *From Disruption to Transformation: Harnessing Generative AI for Ethical and Equitable Futures in Higher Education.* Achala is a lecturer at the University of Southampton. Her published work has explored practices and processes involving education delivery systems (formal and supplementary) and schooling practices in Asia (India and China), and how higher education students are socially constructed in Europe (Denmark, England, Ireland, Germany, Poland and Spain). Dr. Gupta co-convenes the Education Study Group of the British Sociological Association (BSA).

And finally

Georg Krücken
We report with sadness that [Georg Krücken](#), leader of the International Centre for Higher Education Research at Kassel, died on 7 October 2024. He gave a [keynote speech at the SRHE annual conference](#) in 2012.

Seven pains of writing
Ron Barnett (UCL IoE) and Kelsey Inouye (Oxford) wrote about the "complex and often painful process" of academic writing [in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*](#) (online 9 December 2024). "We draw on literatures from several disciplines and our own experiences as academic writers to identify seven 'pains', each of which represents a particular set of discomforts generated by the act of academic writing, especially in the humanities and social sciences. These discomforts arise from self-confrontation, visibility and external gaze, discursive complexity, struggle for authenticity and sincerity, ambiguities in the temporal horizons, external judgment, and loss of control." Ron must have suffered a lot for [his *oeuvre*](#).

How to reformat spreadsheet data onto a text file
SRHE Award winner Kat Kwok (Oxford Brookes) has written [a total beginner's guide to using Python](#) code, illustrated by the classic problem of how to convert spreadsheet data to a text file (or even, for quick and keen learners, a Word document). "From following this guide, readers can expect, firstly, to learn how to do this task (transferring values from a spreadsheet) in an automated way, and secondly, to gain a hands-on introduction to coding and Python, which will hopefully serve as a foundation for learning how to automate other tasks."

Kafka, Catch-22 and absurdination in the public service
Darren McCabe (Lancaster) wrote about the experience of staff in a local government authority during government-imposed austerity after 2010, [in *Management Learning*](#) (online 6 December 2024). He introduced "… the concept of absurdination, which refers to a subjectivity that reflects the tension between rationality and absurdity in the workplace, which can generate unease, anxiety, frustration and disillusionment. Absurdination indicates that management need to learn from the experiences of those on the frontline and yet, paradoxically, it also points to the obstacles to doing so. Rather than

ameliorate paradoxes in ways that reproduce the status quo, it suggests that we must learn to question it."

How the outrage machine works: the debunking of online education
Phil Hill and Glenda Morgan wrote for the *OnEdTEch Newsletter* on 9 October 2024 about "The endless recycling of research by AV and an overly credulous trade press", as they showed how one piece of contested research funded by an interested party, Arnold Ventures, was repeatedly re-presented "… in an effort to sow fear, uncertainty, and doubt around online learning."

At last a completely objective ranking of universities
Paul Greatrix (Nottingham) produced a ranking of the world's tallest universities on 25 October 2024 for his *wonderfulhighered.com* website. At 240m Lomonosov Moscow State University came out on top.

Mind your language

City St George's, University of London
The new name for City after its merger with St George's, approved by the OfS on 9 October 2024.

OfS agrees new names for Bolton and Central Lancashire
We checked this OfS announcement in case it was April 1st, but no, it was 19 December 2024 and it seems to be true. The OfS has agreed that Bolton can now call itself the University of Greater Manchester, and Central Lancashire can become the University of Lancashire, on the grounds that no meaningful confusion is likely to arise. This adds to the OfS's stellar record in approving such names as the Health Sciences University.

The Temple Column

OfS with their heads: is Cromwell to blame? *by Paul Temple*

If you've been watching the BBC adaptation of Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light,* you may like me have been surprised by how little higher education featured in the story. (All right, they couldn't cover every aspect of sixteenth-century English life, but still.) England's two universities at that time (Scotland of course had four by the end of the sixteenth century) had essential roles as the principal providers of the skilled workforces that expanding commercial, administrative, and legal functions needed – although where Thomas Cromwell himself (played by Mark Rylance) gained his legal and administrative skills remains a mystery: presumably they were picked up during his travels as a young man around Europe. As a study covering a slightly earlier period put it, the medieval university professionalized knowledge, with increasingly specialised courses fitting students for careers in secular professions (Leff, 1968). Religious instruction, sometimes assumed to be the main function of the pre-modern university, was largely undertaken in separate monastic and cathedral schools. These might have developed into universities with secular roles, but instead in England largely faded away.

The significance of England's two universities is indicated by the powers that Cromwell took to control them in his ascent through English government in the 1530s. At Oxford, he saved the institution that his patron Cardinal Wolsey had established as Cardinal College and turned it into Christ Church College; and in 1534 "wrested the Visitorship of New College [by then 155 years old] from its customary holder as Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner" (MacCulloch, 2018: 275) – Cromwell's implacable enemy, played creepily in the series by Mark Gatiss. This created another grudge that Gardiner held against Cromwell, and which he would repay with interest. Tensions surrounding what

we would now call the governance of higher education had surprisingly important ramifications in the politics of the Tudor court. (Wolsey also established in 1528 a college in Ipswich, his place of birth, but for a number of complicated reasons it was short-lived, and so never, as it presumably might have done, became England's third university.)

Medieval and early-modern Oxford University was continually engaged in disputes, sometimes violent ones, with the city, and Cromwell was apparently regularly called in to arbitrate. This was the man at the very centre of the administration of the English state: if the Cabinet Secretary dropped in to help your University sort out a planning problem with the local council, it would indicate, I think, that we were looking at a big deal nationally. (We may gain a sense of the scale of these town vs gown disputes by referring to what are known as the St Scholastica's Day riots of 1354 which led to the deaths of 62 Oxford scholars. As Oxford student numbers have been estimated at around 1,500 at this time, this implies a remarkable death toll of about 4% of the student population. Not for the last time in troubles involving university students, drink seems to have been implicated.)

It seems that Cambridge University felt that they were getting a bit left out, and so in 1534 offered Cromwell the position of High Steward and a year later elected him Chancellor, in place of Bishop John Fisher, who was executed that year – although not, it seems, as a result of any failures in university leadership (MacCulloch, 2018: 276); so unfortunately we cannot properly read this as a warning about the risks involved in university management. It seems that Cromwell's first job at Cambridge was to deal with the town vs gown hostilities centred around the annual fair held on Stourbridge Common: presumably he was by now something of an expert in managing these conflicts. He was also, it seems, interested in what we would now call curriculum reform, despite having no personal experience of university study: as MacCulloch remarks, under Cromwell's direction, this was the first time "government had intruded on the internal affairs of Oxford and Cambridge, an interference that has never thereafter ceased" (306). Some of the blame for the activities of the Office for Students must therefore be traceable back to Thomas Cromwell: how did Hilary Mantel miss this plot angle?

References
Leff, G (1968) *Paris and Oxford Universities in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* New York, NY: Wiley
MacCulloch, D (2018) *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* London: Allen Lane

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