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million+ is a university think-tank, working to solve complex problems in higher education through research and evidence-based policy.

Introduction

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Twenty-one years after the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act paved the way for a whole new tranche of universities, we invited some of those involved as Ministers and university leaders to provide their reflections on the challenges, outcomes and opportunities of legislation which has had far-reaching effects. They are joined by the current Minister, Vice-Chancellors and by former students, including Sadiq Khan, a graduate of a modern university who was subsequently elected as a Member of Parliament and served as a Minister.

The 'binary' division within the higher education sector in the UK, outlined by at least three of our contributors (Dr Peter Knight, Lord Howarth and Professor Eric Thomas) was removed in 1992 although as they make clear some of the snobbery remains alive and kicking. The 1992 Act's attempt to 'call a spade a spade' – or in this case 'a university' – removed spurious distinctions between different types of higher education institutions. In Chapter 1, Dr Peter Knight, from the standpoint of a Vice-Chancellor steering his ship through somewhat murky waters, outlines the history of the transition from polytechnic to university. Lord Howarth (Chapter 2) and Lord Boswell (Chapter 3) provide the Government perspective at the time. In the words of Lord Howarth the aim was "to move from a system of privileged higher education to a system of mass higher education." In Chapter 4 the current Minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts MP, brings us up to date and highlights the lessons drawn from the false distinction within higher education and reminds us that anywhere else in the world the 'old polytechnics' would have been called universities.

In spite of the resistance from some quarters for a broader university sector, modern universities have successfully carved out a niche for themselves – building on their traditional roots in art and design, engineering, teacher training and health education – and developed new ones. The technological edge created by modern universities could not be better illustrated than in the University of Sunderland's thriving partnership with Nissan, described so cogently by Sunderland's Vice-Chancellor, Peter Fidler (Chapter 5).

Disappointing though it is that modern universities do not command sufficient appreciation in media and political circles – as Lord Boswell points out – there is no doubting the real difference modern universities make to people's lives. They continue to attract thousands of students who leave university armed with knowledge and skills – and bags of ambition, many reaching the very top of their chosen professions.

The two alumni included in this pamphlet are testament to the talent, achievement and drive of graduates from modern universities. Sadiq Khan MP (Chapter 6), Shadow Secretary of State for Justice, talks eloquently about the wide array of students with whom he shared lectures and tutorials at the University of North London (now London Metropolitan University), and how this now helps him represent people from all walks of life. Gemma Tumelty (Chapter 7), a former President of the NUS, explains how Liverpool John Moores University gave her the opportunity to flourish.

What shines out from these personal experiences and the reflections of Vice-Chancellors, past and present, is how modern universities so frequently give people a well-deserved 'break'. Research carried out by million+ and the NUS shows that one-third of undergraduates are mature students – an astonishing vindication of the contribution modern universities have made to higher education in the UK.

As outlined by Professor Christine King (Chapter 8), formerly Vice-Chancellor of Staffordshire University, these values – meeting students' needs through providing part-time opportunities, studying later in life, nurturing potential, focusing on outcomes and not just inputs – define the modern university ethos. The value modern universities place on the surrounding community, as illustrated by Dr John Moss (Chapter 9), Dean of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University, demonstrates the unique contribution modern universities have brought to their localities and the sector.

In Chapter 10, Dr Malcom McVicar, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Central Lancashire reflects on the need for global graduates and considers the international university of the future.

Finally, Professor Eric Thomas, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bristol and President of Universities UK (Chapter 11) outlines in concluding remarks the vitality of the university sector. He describes how the post-92 universities created opportunities for people to study at degree level and led the drive to widen participation that was increasingly important to the economy as a whole.

Professor Thomas points to the partnerships and innovation driven by modern universities, for example in meeting the evolving needs of employers, which more 'traditional' universities have subsequently emulated. He concludes with words that we wholeheartedly endorse: "Each university is unique [and] the combination of such diversity, especially following the 1992 Act, has created the single best higher education system in the world when judged on personal and public, social, intellectual and economic return on society's investment in it. We should be rightly proud of that and celebrate it loudly."

These eleven reflections embed the story of modern universities into higher education history and tell us about the values which these universities have brought to the higher education 'table' and wider society. It is indicative of the ethos and value system of modern universities that they reassigned their 'mission group' (the Campaign for Modern Universities) as the million+ think-tank in 2007 – putting the interests of students and the sector first. Its aims are to address sectoral-wide policy and funding issues, with students' concerns at its heart.

We hope this collection will tell others not only how modern universities have changed the lives of so many but have often broken down old and out-dated traditions, balancing innovation with pragmatism, and always remembering the students, graduates and researchers whose futures they hold in their hands.

Chapter 1

The power of a name

Dr Peter Knight,
Vice-Chancellor of the
University of Central
England (now Birmingham
City University)
1992-2006

It has not been dull. Every time the insular world of higher education became quiet and tedious some politician would helpfully ginger things up by introducing a new Act of Parliament. Suddenly it was all change. Old policies went out of the window and new ideas, however exotic, had to be embraced.

To give my fading memories a glimmer of academic respectability I will start by recalling the prehistoric days. In the 1960s the government decided to increase the number of places in higher education. It achieved this by elevating the four colleges of advanced technology to university status and establishing six new universities. Towards the end of the decade it was clear that there was room for further expansion but there was unease as the universities were suspected of concentrating on academic aspects of education rather than the practical skills that politicians believed the country needed. To counter this outbreak of deep thinking the government created the polytechnics. These were to be institutions of higher education but under the guardianship of local government. The local authority would ensure that the polytechnics became an equal but parallel system committed to professional and vocational study. This was, of course, complete self-delusion and utter twaddle. Nevertheless the mythology that the polytechnics would provide professional and vocational as distinct from 'academic' education was established as policy. Bits and pieces of higher education were rounded up and amalgamated to form 29 new polytechnics in England and Wales.

It was intended that the local authority would exercise strategic oversight of the polytechnics. In the articles of government this was described as the local authority being responsible for the '*general educational character and mission*'. Meanwhile, the polytechnic governing body was to look after the budget and buildings while the day-to-day management was the responsibility of the polytechnic director. This was a wonderful idealistic theoretical construct that completely failed to understand the political reality of local government. For many polytechnics the local authority completely ignored the articles and concentrated on the minutiae of management rather than the cerebral issues of higher education character and mission. One example that I vividly recall was trying to introduce a new degree course in computer studies. Naturally the polytechnic needed a new computer for the students. When I suggested to the local education department that this should be a priority I was rebuffed with the cheerful answer that the polytechnic could not have another computer because it had already got one and the Chairman of the Education Committee could not conceive of a reason why any institution would want more than one!

It all ended in tears. The idea of a national system of higher education managed by local authorities was deemed to have failed and tinkering with the detailed arrangements would not solve the problem. So, in 1988 the Conservative government passed the Education Reform Act which, amongst other initiatives, removed the polytechnics from local authority control and established them as corporate bodies.

Oversight and funding was provided by a new Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC). This was an equal and parallel body to the Universities Funding Council (UFC).

In the immediate aftermath of the Education Reform Act relationships between the institutions and their local authority were strained. Local authorities were understandably deeply suspicious of the polytechnic directors who had transformed themselves from loyal, or perhaps not so loyal, employees of the authority to their new elevated status as markedly better paid employees of the polytechnics.

Fortunately pragmatism ruled and soon all was forgiven with most local authorities quickly realising that their polytechnic was actually an important local asset. In many cases the authority found the polytechnic more approachable and adventurous than the neighbouring university which tended to maintain a discreet distance from the humdrum world of local commerce.

After the Education Reform Act the world of higher education looked a little crowded with two identical funding councils, each overseen by the Department for Education. At the time the government had two principal policies – to increase student numbers and reduce the cost per student. The universities dug their collective heels in and refused to take additional students while the polytechnics inspired by their buccaneering traditions went aggressively for growth.

This led to a situation where, as far as the politicians were concerned, the polytechnics were the favoured sons of higher education while the universities were made to sit on the political naughty step.

Another issue that concentrated minds in the polytechnics was the fact that they did not have their own degree awarding powers. Degree awarding powers remained with the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) and the polytechnics found the work of the council increasingly intrusive and bureaucratic. To be fair the CNAA recognised the desirability of delegating as much responsibility as possible to the polytechnics so there was mutual recognition of the need for change. However, such delegation was to be by evolution rather than revolution.

An irritating feature of this approach was that it treated research degree awarding powers separately from undergraduate degrees. I always thought this was illogical. After all, if a polytechnic was judged to be sufficiently mature to award several thousand undergraduate degrees why should they not also be able to sign off a few research degrees? An unfortunate aspect of this divide was that the polytechnics that were most university-like in their curriculum found it easier to get research degree powers as they had sufficient activity in the traditional academic subjects. However those polytechnics that remained closest to the original ideal of concentrating on a vocational curriculum found it harder to get research degrees devolved and were sometimes seen as lower down the academic food chain.

Did this matter? Yes, because it led to a group of polytechnic directors arguing for the designation of their institutions as universities. They felt that as they had degree awarding powers devolved for both undergraduate and research degrees they were universities in all but name. Immediately after the Education Reform Act it was made clear that this was not on the political agenda; not least because the government rather liked being able to play the universities and polytechnics against one another. Nevertheless the mutterings continued and suggestions started to go around that if this ever did happen then naturally only those polytechnics with research degree-awarding powers would be in the queue for elevation to university status. This was seen by some of us as rewarding sin and punishing virtue. After all if you had stayed close to the polytechnic ideal of professional and vocational education you would be penalised while your less loyal and trustworthy compatriots who had pursued an academic curriculum were moved up the pecking order.

The same issue had arisen in Australia in 1988. The colleges of technology were pressing for university status and the established universities were persuading the government to put obstacles in their path. The vice-chancellors were suggesting that universities had to have a medical school or a philosophy department, anything to prevent new entrants to their hallowed world. The then-minister of Education, John Dawkins, eventually got fed-up with this increasingly esoteric argument and one day announced his policy (his words have most impact when said in a deep

Australian accent) 'I know what a university is. A university is anyone who has got 8000 students by next April. Go for it boys!' One Australian vice-chancellor described the resulting melee as like the first round of a game of academic Monopoly where you buy up every square that you happen to land on. College mergers went through at great speed irrespective of logic and practicalities. All was fair game provided you got your 8000 students by the deadline. Some of the components of the newly-formed institutions were separated by several hundreds of miles and in at least one case a newly appointed vice-chancellor was bought a campervan to help with his moves between campuses. This was called, along with other changes, the 'Dawkins Revolution'. Surely nothing as radical could happen here?

There was probably an acceptance, at least in England and Wales, that at some time, in an unknown number of years in the future, the binary line would be abolished and the polytechnics would get university status. But it was on a distant horizon until an unforeseen political event happened with unexpected consequences. That event was Margaret Thatcher's reign as Prime Minister coming to a sudden end, and being succeeded by John Major. Soon after his appointment Major asked for suggestions for new legislation that was to be: consistent with his political values; cheap and; popular. If only all legislation satisfied those criteria.

There was much head-scratching in the various departments of state until, rumour has it, a senior civil servant in the Department of Education tentatively suggested that they could always just make the polytechnics into universities. This certainly would be popular, at least in the polytechnics, and would not cost anything. Crucially it was seen as consistent with John Major's values, not least because he was the first Prime Minister in recent times that had not been to university.

As with Australia a few years before there was no cerebral and tendentious academic argument about who had or had not got research degree awarding powers. All the existing polytechnics were going to be universities; the rest was detail. The Further and Higher Education (1992) Act introduced this change and was commendable in its simplicity.

Confession time! I must admit that I did not realise how powerful the name 'university' is. It quickly became apparent that the public all thought they knew what a university was, whereas it had always been obvious that they did not know what the polytechnic was. The establishment of the polytechnic as a university was overwhelmingly popular with students. However unfair and untrue it had been, it was clear that students felt that by going to a polytechnic they were second class when compared with their friends who had gone to university. This might have been an irrational view but it did not make it less valid. Changing from polytechnic to university was, in modern markets terms, a re-branding exercise. The staff remained the same, the buildings didn't alter (some still leaked), the courses were taught

in exactly the same way, but suddenly the esteem in which the institution and its students were held increased by an order of magnitude. If I suppress a bit of cynicism that might otherwise creep in, the 'elevation' was simply a recognition that the polytechnic staff and students had long deserved.

Some of us were soon faced with the tricky problem of the name of the new university. In a few cases this was straightforward: Middlesex Polytechnic became Middlesex University and Plymouth Polytechnic became Plymouth University. Unfortunately for Birmingham Polytechnic there was already a Birmingham University and a similar conjunction of names existed in most major cities.

The use of a university name is controlled by an ancient and august body called the Privy Council, which is not generally considered the most agile and forward looking part of Government. I was once advised by a senior civil servant that I should not call the Privy Council before eleven as they would not have got the kettle on yet.

The Privy Council decreed that we could have any name that we liked provided that it was not confusing, misleading or in any way offensive. The new name also had to be agreed with other interested parties, including, the local university. This meant that Lancashire Polytechnic could not become Lancashire University because it was felt, with some justification, to be too similar to Lancaster University.

Similarly Oxford Polytechnic consulted its neighbouring university and was cheerfully informed that they would happily agree any name provided it did not contain either of the words 'Oxford' or 'University'.

Some institutions when faced with a competing university adopted the strategy of using the word 'metropolitan' so Manchester Polytechnic became Manchester Metropolitan University and Leeds Polytechnic became Leeds Metropolitan University. There was much unease as to whether this strategy would result in the word 'metropolitan' being a sort of academic mark of Cain which identified the institution as a former polytechnic. Those reservations were unfounded; the word metropolitan was colloquially shortened to 'Met' and the institutions thrived. Another approach was that if you could not get the name of the town in your title, the next most attractive solution was to name yourself after a region. So Bristol Polytechnic became the University of the West of England and Birmingham Polytechnic became the University of Central England – though latterly changed to the better name of Birmingham City University.

In parallel with the issue of the university name there was the entertaining question of internal titles. The polytechnics had already introduced professorships but usually with such stringent criteria that it seemed that candidates had to be at least a potential, if not actual, Nobel Prize winner before they stood a realistic chance of having a polytechnic professorship conferred on them. I am afraid that it is an inherent feature of university life that we are all snobs when it comes to titles. Academics will fight over titles with a level of passion that they would never display if the issue was simply money.

I foresaw the prospect of a long and futile academic debate about internal titles but had neither the energy nor enthusiasm for such an enterprise. In a rare outburst of decisive management I issued a memo called 'Nomenclature' which stated that on the day the university was designated I would change my title from Director to Vice-Chancellor, the Chairman of the Board would become Pro-Chancellor, the Deputy Directors would be Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Deans would be Professors and the clear expectation was that Heads of Department would be of sufficient academic standing to also merit the professorial title.

I got away with it! This was accepted with remarkable aplomb and most colleagues seemed to regard it as a logical extension of university designation. Some of the better brought up of my fellow polytechnic directors were outraged at the unilateral arrogance I had demonstrated but then almost to a man and woman they discreetly asked for a copy of the memo and followed suit in their own institutions. I regarded this as my sole constructive contribution to our translation to university status.

On reflection the designation of the polytechnics as universities was an inspired political decision. The binary line had outlived its usefulness and nationally and internationally people thought that they knew what a university was. Students who might have felt that they were studying at a second choice institution largely lost that concern when the university title was conferred. I changed my view from having reservations about the transfer to being an enthusiastic supporter.

It is sometimes alleged in the press that the transfer caused the polytechnics to abandon the ideals that established them. I reject that assertion. I do not believe that any polytechnic changed its curriculum in any respect as a result of the transfer to university status. What we did before we continued to do after the transfer. That having been said it was undoubtedly easier to acquire some new areas of activity simply because you were called a university rather than a polytechnic. For example, the involvement of Plymouth University in the Peninsula Medical School would have been more difficult, if not impossible, if it had still been Plymouth Polytechnic.

There was one negative result and I did not see it coming. This was the establishment of league tables that compared the merits of universities. All the early league tables included a measure of research activity. As the polytechnics had never had easy access to research funds it was inevitable that they were going to be at the bottom of any league table measured on those lines. The value system associated with these early league tables effectively said that doing research was the mark of a good institution. It was wrong and unfair, not least because many of the subjects taught by the former polytechnics are not as research driven as many traditional university subjects. Thankfully most of the league tables have become more sophisticated over time so this aspect is less significant than it was in the early days.

Ultimately the transfer of the polytechnics out of local government to the status of free standing higher education institutions was entirely positive. It allowed those institutions to manage their own affairs and to flourish. I was and remain an enthusiastic supporter of that initiative; it was a pre-requisite for the subsequent move to becoming universities. I did not see university designation coming and when I woke up to what was happening I had some initial reservations. I thought it was too early and that the polytechnic sector would have benefitted from a few more years of nurturing outside the university system. Fortunately I was wrong and I was particularly impressed by the enthusiasm with which students greeted the change. They rightly viewed it as fair recognition of their work and the work of the institution at which they were studying.

I think the former polytechnics have become more conservative as they absorbed by academic osmosis the staid traditions of the old universities. We used to be like pirates – cunning, fleet of foot and buccaneering in our approach to initiatives and opportunities. ‘Carpe Diem’ could have been our motto. Now we are like Admirals, comfortably standing on the bridge, giving measured orders down the line with clear rules of engagement; no more rocking the boat! Our cutlasses are purely ceremonial.

Perhaps it has now become a little bit dull. Nevertheless it has been an excellent thirty years of change. I do not know what the future will hold. Thankfully I am now a retired pirate, having hung up my eye-patch and pickled my parrot, so I am not in a position of responsibility where I will have to find out.

Chapter 2 A personal retrospect – ending the binary line

The Right Honourable Lord Alan Howarth of Newport, Higher Education Minister, 1990-1992

As Higher Education Minister between 1990 and 1992 I had no doubt that the time had come for us to move from a system of privileged higher education to a system of mass higher education. It was a natural and proper development in educational, social and democratic progress. It was a development that should be entirely consistent with the maintenance of the academic excellence already achieved in the universities.

I strongly believed there was a pool of untapped talent. Although it was obvious that there were cultural barriers to the progress of many children through our educational system – barriers that were poorly understood – I did not believe that there was a finite quantity of intelligent young people. I did not accept that only a small proportion of people in any age group were capable of benefiting from higher education. All that effort of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to improve schooling – the Plowden Report¹, comprehensivisation, GCSE, local management of schools, increased parental engagement, pupil-led funding, the national curriculum – had to mean enhanced educational attainment for more people – many more people.

The scale of participation in higher education had already increased significantly in Britain since the Robbins Report², from around 7% in 1960 to over 15% by 1991. But the UK remained seriously out of line with continental Europe and the USA (China in those days was not thought about) – countries

where higher educational opportunity was open to a significantly larger proportion of the population. Our traditional defence, that education of first degree students in Britain was more advanced, of better quality, more efficient with three year degrees and higher completion rates, was inadequate. It was an obscurantist stance in a world in which Britain should aspire to become a more equal society and develop and mobilize the talents of all.

A move to mass higher education was also of course an economic imperative, though to me that was never the prime justification. Improved economic competitiveness was vital, but it would be the concomitant of educational improvement and was not its essential rationale. What mattered most of all was that everyone, of whatever age, who was qualified and motivated, should have the same opportunity that too small a minority had previously had to benefit from the opportunity of personal development and the fullness of life that university education offered.

I say specifically “university education” and not “higher education” because I was also clear that the “binary line” that divided “universities” from “polytechnics” was an arbitrary and invidious barrier. The creation of the polytechnics at the end of the 1960s had itself been a response to the urging by Robbins that more should be done to develop technical higher education. The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) had been a product of the Robbins

Report, and its charter enjoined it to confer degrees “comparable in standard to awards granted and conferred by Universities.” The binary line was a new bastion of the class system that remained so divisive and debilitating within our national life. Historical accident, and no objective criteria, divided the higher educational sheep from the goats. It was strange, indeed, that Anthony Crosland, the Education Secretary who spearheaded the drive to make English secondary schools comprehensive, should also have created this new division within higher education. The existing Colleges of Advanced Technology were enabled to become universities, yet the new polytechnics were not founded as universities but were corralled into a separate sector.

By the 1980s there were polytechnics that offered certainly no less rigorous and rich an educational experience than a number of institutions that had got under the wire to claim university status in the 1960s. Both the university sector and the polytechnic sector were highly diverse and these two loose categories expressed no valid distinction in educational terms. It was a conspiracy of the *clerics* to pretend that degrees awarded across all the existing universities were comparable. There was resentment about what was perceived, among students and academics alike in the polytechnics, as well as by graduates with degrees validated by the CNAA, as inferior status. It was a pernicious situation. This preoccupation with titles was a very British phenomenon, absent in the USA and continental Europe

where the university system was much more extensive and diverse and where academically elite institutions were proud to be called the Massachusetts Institute of Technology or the *Ecole Polytechnique*.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Matthew Arnold had pointed out the superiority of technical and scientific education in France and elsewhere in continental Europe. Much more recently Martin Wiener, in *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, published in 1981, and Correlli Barnett, in *The Audit of War* in 1987, had both charted the damage caused to Britain’s economy and society since the nineteenth century by cultural disdain for technical education. There was no need for this to continue in Britain and every good reason to throw off this malign legacy. The integration of the polytechnics into the university system would mark a long overdue recognition of the esteem due to technical education.

There was no controversy within the Government about abolition of the binary line. For John MacGregor and Kenneth Clarke, successive Secretaries of State for Education, it was a natural development of the policy already being pursued of increasing participation. The polytechnics had already been released from local authority control and become self-governing corporate bodies. They had been made free, as universities were, to borrow against their assets. For me, as Higher Education Minister, dismantling the binary line followed seamlessly. Even the Treasury was content.

¹ The Plowden Report, 1967, Children and their primary schools, a report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/plowden/>

² The Robbins Report, Higher Education, 1963, Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/robbins00.html>

When the 1991 Higher Education White Paper, prepared within the Department of Education and Science (DES) by John Vereker and his excellent team, went out for consultation, no significant opposition was expressed to what we proposed. It was of course what the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics, skillfully led by John Stoddart, wanted. But no objection came from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), led by David Harrison. So far from being defensive about the traditional university model, hierarchs of the existing universities favoured reform.

Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer, Chief Executive of the Universities Funding Council, had pressed me, indeed, at a private meeting, to acknowledge the merit of modular degrees and the value there might be even in an uncompleted degree course. The inevitability of differentiation was accepted. Already some universities were recognizing that they could not afford to carry on providing undergraduate education in expensive science subjects. Voices were being raised within the ancient universities, for sure, about the distortions induced by the Research Assessment Exercise and about the crass instrumentalism of the Government, but those were other arguments. There was no serious objection to the admission of polytechnics to university status.

The higher education clauses of the Further and Higher Education Bill encountered the most formidable critique, not surprisingly, in the House of Lords. Apart from Lord Beloff's jeremiad that "everything is to be sacrificed...

to increasing the numbers of students", opposition was focused on two clauses, one of which allowed the Secretary of State powers to attach generic conditions to the provision of funds by the Funding Councils and the other to make directions concerning use of funding by individual institutions. The direction-making power, in particular, was widely regarded as illiberal and unacceptable. This was a clause imposed on the DES by the Treasury, insisting that he who paid the piper should be able to call the tune. Absolutely rightly peers, led by Lord Renfrew (an old friend of Ken Clarke, but uninhibited by that), were determined to expunge this provision, offensive to academic freedom, from the Bill. Personally I was delighted, though in the name of collective ministerial responsibility I had to go through the motions of defending the Government's position. Happily the 1992 election was looming and with the passage of the Bill threatened for lack of parliamentary time the Treasury caved in and the direction-making power was confined to situations of financial mismanagement on the part of institutions.

I was concerned that, in the enthusiasm of polytechnics to embrace university status, some institutions might be tempted to redefine themselves excessively. I wanted to guard against a homogenization of the enlarged university sector. University status should be an opportunity for institutions to build on their distinctive strengths, not to neglect them in order to ape other institutions.

So we asked the polytechnics to draw up mission statements – so as to avert "academic drift" of the kind that had been so deprecated in relation to the erstwhile Colleges of Advanced Technology following Robbins – and a condition of approval of applications for university status was that these missions should be reaffirmed. David Blunkett's³ Greenwich speech in 2000 eventually reversed this policy thrust, enjoining homogenization across the universities.

Since 1992 it has become commonplace in some quarters to assert that the former polytechnics have abandoned their proper role of providing training and practical education and have given themselves over to a debased notion of Cardinal Newman's idea of a university. No serious evidence has been produced in support of this contention, which in my observation mainly emanates from academics in the less thriving pre-1992 universities. One of our more recent Higher Education Ministers did not elevate the debate when she referred publicly to 'Mickey Mouse' degrees.

Brian Ramsden and Nigel Brown⁴ in 2001 demonstrated that there had been some convergence during the 1990s as pre-1992 universities focused more on applied subjects and serving a regional market as well as mainstreaming adult and continuing education, while post-1992 universities developed their teacher education departments into more fully fledged humanities and social sciences faculties. Professor Sir David Watson, Professor of Higher Education at Oxford

University, reviewing the evidence in a lecture ten years after the 1992 Act, made the case compellingly that the former polytechnics had, by and large, stuck to their portfolios, missions and markets.

If the former polytechnics have developed their humanities and social sciences provision it has been in a forward looking recognition that modern courses and good teaching will often cross the frontiers of traditional academic disciplines. The creative economy in which Britain has come to excel over the last twenty years has to be based on cross-fertilisation between the humanities and the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects. Media studies, developed mainly in post-1992 universities, has rightly addressed the need to grapple academically with the potent reality of the media in the modern world. English was similarly sneered at when introduced as an academic discipline into universities a hundred years ago.

Throughout the history of the universities in this country the vocational has evolved into the academic. Canon law was a vocational discipline in medieval Oxford, just as preparation for the public service professions of nursing and social work is in modern universities. The older universities offer courses that are at the same time vocational and educational in law, engineering, architecture and medicine, and they proclaim the virtues of a degree in classics or history in preparing students to be administrators.

³ Secretary of State for Education, 1997-2001

⁴ Patterns of higher education institutions in the UK, Universities UK, 2001

“Red brick” universities were founded with the support of municipal and business interests in order to strengthen the economic capacity of their cities and regions, just as the post-1992 universities have raised professional and industrial preparation to a higher educational level. In repeated phases new higher education institutions have, in Eric Robinson’s⁵ words, challenged the assumptions and practices of the existing ones.

The vision of the Robbins Report in 1963 – that the university system should be expanded, that university places should be available to all who were qualified by ability and attainment, and that the Colleges of Advanced Technology should be given university status – was no different to the vision of the Government in 1992. Lord Beloff’s complaint in 1992 was the same as Kingsley Amis’s “more means worse” in 1963, and has been as little justified by subsequent history.

A difficult, and to some a painful, issue concerned access by the post-1992 universities to public funding for research. The Robbins Report, in its time, had insisted that academics in new universities should combine research and teaching. This was an ideal from which I did not dissent. We were in no position, however, to expand research funding, nor would we contemplate spreading funding for research through the dual support system widely and thinly to the detriment of the pre-1992 research universities.

⁵ Advisor to Education Secretary, Anthony Crosland in the 1960s, Director of Lancashire Polytechnic, 1982-1989 and advocate of the ‘People’s Universities’.

Some of the polytechnics already had established strengths in research, but their research was almost entirely contract and applied research which we considered should continue to be funded by business, public agencies and so forth. We did not prohibit the post-1992 universities from being funded for research by either the new Higher Education Funding Councils or the Research Councils. Indeed we took something of a risk in conferring the power to award research degrees on some institutions that had not yet gained accredited status for research from the CNAA. However we made it clear to all concerned not only that research excellence must be maintained but that the funding methodology would tend to concentrate research in departments that were leaders in their academic fields. The post-1992 university system was thus predicated on a departure from the previous orthodoxy, in that it has ceased to be axiomatic that a university will be a research university pursuing blue skies research. In this respect Britain has simply joined the rest of the world. In fact the post-1992 universities have for the most part been successful in developing their individual research capacities and profiles, albeit without much benefit of funding through the dual support system.

Do I have any regrets about aspects of the policy or the way it has turned out?

I regret that when I was appointed Minister for Higher Education and Science I was not at the same time given responsibility for Further Education (FE). My predecessor Robert Jackson’s portfolio had included FE, but at the ministerial

reshuffle in 1990 Tim Eggar, the Schools Minister, successfully made the case that responsibility for schools and FE should go together. There were good arguments for that, but it was unfortunate that, when reforming the structure of higher education (HE), we did not properly consider the relation of FE to HE. In 1991 I visited California and Minnesota and saw the huge benefit of the community colleges system with its ease of transition and no discontinuity between what we, arbitrarily, defined as FE and HE. It was one more barrier in Britain, artificially constructed and damaging, to educational and social progress. Institutions, thank goodness, were already finding ways to break down that barrier – for example, through credit accumulation and transfer – but government, persisting with distinct funding systems and a whole apparatus of administrative separateness reinforced in the 1992 legislation, did not do what it might have done to help.

It should also have been the moment to integrate support for part-time students into the overall system, but the Treasury, insisting that employers could be relied upon to fund all the support that was needed, refused to permit this.

Up to a point I regret, also, that in creating the new system of funding councils, with separate systems for funding HE in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, we risked fragmenting the UK university system. There was already by then a political imperative to pay court to varieties of national sentiment within the UK, but I was anxious that fruitful interaction might be reduced and some universities might be to an

extent marginalized. In the event, I do not think significant harm was done in terms of disintegration of the academic community, though we live with the unfortunate anomalies that devolution has generated in student funding as well as a multiplication of bureaucratic costs.

Our attempts to guarantee quality and to widen access across the post-1992 system through bureaucratic regulation, predictably enough did less good than we hoped and some harm. Painful lessons were learnt in the early attempts to provide external assurance of teaching quality before the Quality Assurance Agency was eventually established in 1997. The threat of an external inspectorate was averted (except in some teacher education) and the concept of audit soothed the *amour propre* of Vice-Chancellors. The invigilation of class sizes and contact hours was no bad thing, however.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) invented all manner of rewards and penalties for universities. It is fair to say that the greatest ingenuity in devising these bureaucratic torments has been on the part of academics rather than civil servants. The Secretary of State’s annual letter of guidance to HEFCE did, however, become more dirigiste year by year and Whitehall instrumentalism became more and more shameless. That there were problems that needed to be addressed cannot be doubted. Market forces alone were not going to underpin teaching quality, other than on an entirely inadequate conception of the purpose of education.

Nor were we going to succeed in opening up higher education to more young people from non-traditional backgrounds without strenuous insistence and incentives through the funding system. Maladroitness though too many of these interventions have been, and disappointing the progress, these efforts were aimed in proper directions. Government and universities have to persist together in addressing the problems of low aspiration in schools.

Expansion of student numbers continued headlong, particularly among the post-1992 universities, the leaders in widening participation. We did not have a target for expansion, and intended merely to create opportunities to which people would respond in a dynamic system (Tony Blair's 50% target was a much later afterthought). But expansion was encouraged, indeed driven, by the design of the funding methodology, with new universities nervous of being fined for under-recruiting. The funding mechanism, which made it cheaper to teach non-STEM subjects, tended also to change the character of universities.

What to an extent blighted the post-1992 expansion was that it was done on the cheap, at marginal cost. The Treasury, shocked by their own liberality in agreeing to an open-ended increase of student numbers, got their revenge by insisting that student numbers should only increase in step with a reduction in the unit of resource. The CVCP correctly warned that

under-funded expansion would lead to larger tutorial and lecture groups, clapped out equipment, lack of up-to-date library books, and dilapidated buildings. One of the reasons I declined John Major's invitation to continue as Higher Education Minister after the 1992 election was that I was not prepared to preside over a continuing erosion of funding for the universities.

It had been legitimate for the Government during the expansion of the system in the second half of the 1980s to insist on efficiency gains, but what the Treasury remained pleased to term efficiency gains were by now becoming crude and counter-productive economies. Treasury officials refused to categorise investment in widening participation as capital investment, albeit that human capital is the most important capital resource a country can have in the modern world. The deterioration of staff-student ratios was too brutal. Working conditions for academics deteriorated. With the simultaneous advent of student loans for maintenance and in a new culture of market accountability, students were understandably dissatisfied by the inadequacy of provision.

These pressures were in due course somewhat eased, for the universities if not for students. A new source of funding for universities was provided in the form of tuition fees following the Dearing Report⁶. There was little recognition, however, of the funding needs of those universities which were carrying the main load of

widening participation. Research continued to be concentrated and to be better funded than expansion. The abolition of the grant component of student support and the introduction of a tuition fee of £1,000 in 1998 and the subsequent permission to charge fees of up to £3,000 in 2006 caused at any rate only temporary dips in the growth in student numbers, and there is no evidence of an adverse effect on participation of students from non-traditional groups. Ideology has now, however, combined with alleged economic necessity to produce the extraordinary proposition from government that students should borrow to finance tuition fees of £9,000 per annum. Whether the mission of universities to provide higher education of proper quality to an increasing proportion of the population and to be a vehicle for improved social mobility can survive this new twist seems unlikely.

It has been unfortunate too, that responsibility for education in Whitehall was split. To brigade higher education with the business department has been to display a limited and mean conception of education. It is no repudiation of the proper responsibility of universities to nurture economic capacity to insist that universities exist to nurture the whole human being and that there must be policy continuity for the development of young people all the way through their educational formation.

John Pratt, author of *The Polytechnic Experiment*⁷, described the extension of university title as "an expensive vanity."

Really? In the last two decades universities have attained a centrality in our national life that they did not have before the revolution in higher education of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Before then it was not accepted that education, and the opening up of opportunity in higher education especially, were crucial to the quality and integrity of our national life, to our economic performance, to our democratic maturity, to our national self-respect. For sure we have not made the progress we should have done in increasing the participation of people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Graduate unemployment is now shockingly high. Our national self-respect is all too fragile.

I find it nonetheless a matter of profound satisfaction that nowadays it is normal to find oneself talking to people who themselves never had the opportunity to take their education beyond school-leaving age but who are proud that their children or grandchildren are at university and are proceeding to professional working lives that earlier generations dared not dream of for themselves. That women now make up more than half of undergraduates is a social advance of inestimable importance. Universities have become transformative presences in our cities and regions. They are major engines of our economy. Despite the efforts of the Home Office to frustrate them they are forging new relationships between Britain and the rest of the world. Would these changes have happened without the policies – legislated in the 1992 Act – to break open the old system?

⁶ The Dearing Report, The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997, <https://bei.leeds.ac.uk/Partners/NCIHE/>

⁷ *The Polytechnic Experiment 1965 – 1992*, John Pratt, The Open University Press, 1997

Chapter 3

Extending excellence

The Right Honourable Lord Tim Boswell, Further and Higher Education Minister, 1992-1995

I am delighted to contribute to this pamphlet commemorating the 21st Anniversary of the Further and Higher Education Act which brought “modern universities” into being. In my view the intervening experience has been positive. It has met the intentions and aspirations of the legislators, mainly in facilitating the extension of an excellent university education to millions of our citizens and others. Perhaps we should now hope that the next two decades will lead to further erosion of the false distinction between differing university institutions, while respecting and indeed rejoicing in their diversity of delivery and mission.

I should perhaps begin by setting the record straight. I took over at short notice as Conservative Further and Higher Education Minister in December 1992. At that time, the legislation was already in place, and I played no major part in its genesis or handling in Parliament. It is therefore difficult for me to determine motivation on the part of the then Government. It may perhaps be the case that one or two Ministers (not necessarily at Education) felt that this was a means of curbing local education authorities. I think it much more likely that the concerns of institutions with the ‘polytechnic’ label which was difficult to market abroad, and their wish to determine their own destiny were the major drivers. The move may also be seen as part of a continuing concern – if not a ‘saga’ – involving both major parties over many years to rediscover vocational education at all levels of attainment – exemplified by the introduction of NVQs in the late 1980s and by renewed Government interest in apprenticeships.

Having then been the ‘inheritor’ rather than the ‘initiator’ of policy, it might be thought that during my two and a half years as Minister I would just have sat back and let it all happen. This was far from the case, and there may well be wider lessons for the successful adoption of other Government initiatives. It was apparent at ‘vesting’ in March 1993 that the physical estate and financial position of the new universities was generally below optimum. Add to that the new governance issues and an expanded Funding Council trying to reconcile pressure between its new and older clients and there was the potential for institutional failure. As Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Ron (later Lord) Dearing, with my encouragement, went to considerable trouble to ensure institutional stability and to offer a measure of earmarked funding, not just for essential capital work but also for research capacity.

The ‘quality agenda’ was also a major preoccupation. Personally I never bought into Sir Kingsley Amis’s “more means worse,” but others were always ready to fear the worst. This was perhaps aggravated by a shift from rapid expansion at the margin to a more measured pace of growth (increasingly student loan-finances) and eventually to the shift to student based funding initiated by the subsequent Labour Government. The nation and perhaps the Government and institutions themselves had surprised themselves by the relatively sudden move from an ‘elite’ to a ‘mass’ HE system.

Pressures on resources and the mix of funding took hold and the system as a whole curtailed its vertiginous growth, though in those days without recourse to the direct charging of fees.

All this objective change was paralleled by the need for society at large to come to terms with a significant cultural shift in its perception of higher education, as much in image as in reality. I have mentioned the on-going debate about 'quality'. This was not confined to the new universities, and indeed the concept of external evaluation was novel for all universities. This was aggravated by the dual system of the then Higher Education Quality Council as well as HEFCE operating a quality function. It also surfaced elsewhere in the continuing debate about 'dual' public funding of research. More directly, it created continuing problems for 'modern' institutions which had not been 'passported' into university status by the 1992 Act, like Roehampton, Bolton and Nene College Northampton (of which as the University of Northampton I have recently served as a Governor). In the latter case matters were complicated by a thirteenth-century royal prohibition on establishing a university in that town, in order to avoid rivalling Oxford and Cambridge!

I was perhaps fortunate to come in direct to a single university sector broadly 'united' under one funding council (in England). Previously, their funding and governance had been very distinct, and it was only later that higher education

institutions began to group to represent differing interests. I distinctly remember attending the first post-merger residential meeting of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the UK (now Universities UK). I secretly feared that the Vice-Chancellors might be involved in some great cultural 'stand-off', but in fact within minutes they had relaxed into telling each other their favourite anecdotes! It is unwise for Ministers to involve themselves in public flippancy. Only now perhaps should I reveal that I used to remark in private that our mediaeval universities had been established as excellent 'vocational' institutions (to provide training to civil servants, lawyers, doctors and priests) but which had somehow 'lost focus' as a result of the Renaissance!

In truth, British educational debate thrives on extravagant and often false polarisation. Universities have always offered practical as well as cognitive skills and have prepared students for careers as well as for a fulfilled life. They have – generally – addressed themselves to local, regional and occupational needs and labour markets. They have reached an accommodation with their neighbours (either as mentioned above by extinction or absorption) or by respecting each other's 'turf' or distinctive character. I have always been fascinated by how this plays in practice in cities or localities with more than one higher education institution. Fortunately, most are sensible and constructive (and increasingly mutually supportive).

So, while they may have been of passing interest to the media, the false debates about scope and purpose in higher education, have recently rarely broken surface. However, within the corridors of power, they certainly have continued to take place. For modern universities, I would be at least equally concerned that their robust qualities and distinctive role still do not command sufficient public attention or support. It has been clear to me from the start that the media (generally) and public life has a mindset dominated, if no longer by Oxbridge, at least by the Russell Group: and played through the virtually universal middle-class concept of an entitlement to present one's own offspring at school-leaving (with sufficient A levels) for a full-time three year residential undergraduate course. Even in the 1990s, modern universities had challenged this, by much greater involvement of part-time and mature students (often wrongly conflated) and increased diversity and access. Arguably they forge greater direct relevance to local communities and their economy. While it is still perceived tacitly by some with little direct experience of higher education that "more means worse", in reality "more" means "more diverse" and we should celebrate that.

As I reflect on the changes which have taken place over the past two decades (when I have maintained my interest in higher education) I recognise and welcome evolutionary change.

In the interim, very few 'modern' institutions have collapsed, though they have continued to experience financial pressures, not least because of their generally relatively higher dependence on public funding. Fears and anecdotes of a rather silly "transfer market" in five star rated research teams have proved largely febrile; though where there are areas of excellence (as for example at Northampton in leather and tannery) they have enhanced.

Across the sector, I discern two major developments. One is the realisation that Continuing Professional Development (CPD), short 'refresher' and updating courses are a major part of securing competitiveness of our economy, comparable with the direct research and technology links being developed on a contract basis with industry. The second is growing internationalisation. Transnational education may include direct campus provision overseas; franchise and partnership arrangements; and distance learning, as well as direct import of foreign students; or any combination of these. But the outcomes are striking – with Northampton training the tanners, and the other university of which I am a Governor, Cardiff Met, many of the world's environmental health officers – and leaving a lasting 'footprint' which is of great benefit to us as a nation. As well as the greater diversity and positive cultural challenge of a varied student body, this does of course bring in an invaluable income stream.

Finance for higher education institutions is perhaps not the most important subject (I would settle for outcomes, outreach and 'value added') but it is clearly cardinal for future success. I have already indicated that financial viability of these varied institutions has been an interest of Ministers from the outset and it is greatly to their credit that institutions have generally retained their financial strength despite all the challenges thrown at them. Notable among these has been the progressive shift towards student-based funding which has just reached its logical conclusion for the 2012 cohort of undergraduates.

Some aspects of the new rules, perhaps reflecting 'old' debates, still pose particular challenges for modern universities, and it remains to be seen whether they will continue unabated. I do however take heart from two aspects of the situation. First is that these universities have always – within resource constraints – rightly emphasised the importance of teaching and a good outcome for students of all types. Second that having been conceived as corporations broadly with modern business-like governance under the Act they have the necessary structures to take this forward, paying due regard to the vital stakeholders of students, staff – both academic and otherwise – businesses and communities. I am sure that those which strive will succeed.

As to the future, my greatest hope is that debates of the past may settle down, simply because of their growing irrelevance in modern conditions. There should be scope for many types of academic course, modes of teaching and institutions themselves. The test of worth is not some Arcadian template of the nineteenth century, but how well they meet the needs of today's students and the wider economy. We still perhaps need to be challenging prevailing stereotypes of higher education – but the sector is doing this itself as institutions learn the merits of fruitful and appropriate collaboration and gain in mutual respect. Arguments preceding the 1992 reform now look dated, as institutions have defined distinctive missions and grown in confidence. Old controversies should now take their place in history as those who look forward strive for their next level of achievement, in which I wish them every success.

Chapter 4 On the right side of history

The Right Honourable
David Willetts MP, Minister
for Universities and
Science since May 2010

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Robbins report. It foresaw a single higher education sector, with one grants commission overseeing a diverse range of institutions. But in 1965 the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Anthony Crosland outlined a very different approach. In a speech at Woolwich Polytechnic, now the University of Greenwich, he promised a 'dual pattern' of polytechnics and universities.

Lionel Robbins claimed this was 'diametrically opposed to the conceptions which inspired our recommendations'. The response did not improve with age. John Carswell⁸ complained in the 1980s that 'the ladder from the technical college to paradise' had been left 'leaning against the wall'. Crosland apparently came to regret the decision, which had been made in haste soon after joining the department, and it contrasted sharply with his contemporaneous policy of abolishing divisions within secondary education.

John Major's Government was on the right side of history when it reversed Crosland's decision in 1992. The change was perhaps even more important than it might have been in other countries because of the unfortunate British habit of turning diversity into hierarchy.

Nonetheless, the polytechnics left a positive impression in at least three ways. First, today's focus on the academic experience of students takes its lead from the polytechnics, which – for example – pioneered the modular courses that now characterise the whole higher education sector. I welcome the continuing work of million+, as shown in the recent *Teaching that Matters* report, to promote high-quality teaching.

Secondly, polytechnics had pioneered hands-on engagement with employers of all shapes and sizes. They grew deeper roots within their local and regional economies than some much older institutions. When we wanted someone to investigate university-business engagement, we looked to Professor Tim Wilson, the former Vice-Chancellor of Hertfordshire University, which as Hatfield Polytechnic had helped pioneer such links. Today, a wide range of universities are playing a key role in Local Economic Partnerships.

Thirdly, polytechnics had responded flexibly to the growing demand for higher education. They expanded much more rapidly than the universities, but it was not only in numbers that they excelled. It was also in the type of provision, with part-time study given equal prestige to full-time study. It is true this growth was often underfunded, and polytechnics were often over-crowded.

That is why today's funding system is a mixed one, with progressive student loans, and the recent extension of tuition fee loans to part-time students.

I still come across curmudgeons who call for the old wall between different higher education institutions to be re-erected, but this is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the shape and complexity of modern higher education. Just as it is now impossible to see exactly where the Berlin Wall went, it is unthinkable to imagine cleaving our higher education sector in two again.

The Coalition's education reforms particularly reflect two other lessons from the old polytechnic experience – one positive, the other less so. First, that policies aimed at delivering fair access to education have to recognise the different needs of different learners. That is why we are focussing extra support on students from poorer backgrounds (for example through higher maintenance grants), ensuring the Higher Education Funding Council for England has the resources to support those learners facing higher obstacles and ensuring the Office for Fair Access (Offa) is funded well enough to spread best practice.

Secondly, polytechnics often operated with one hand tied behind their back because they were not autonomous institutions, at least until they ceased to be under local authority control in 1988. In contrast, we cherish the autonomy of individual universities because that is the best way to ensure excellent teaching and excellent research.

Crosland's Woolwich speech heralding the binary system also declared there would be no new universities for at least a decade. We have taken a very different approach: in the three years since the last election, we have created more universities than at any point since the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. As with the 1992 changes, the affected institutions have a long and proud history between them and I am confident they will thrive as just the latest newcomers to our diverse university sector.

The old polytechnics offered a high-quality education that gave benefits to individuals, society and the economy. But they would have been called universities elsewhere in the world and the binary system was ripe for change by 1992. It is right to mark the 21st anniversary of the change in status by celebrating the universities' continuing success.

⁸ Civil servant, including Under-Secretary in Department of Education and Science and Ministry of Health, 1964-74

Chapter 5

Responding to challenge through innovation

Professor Peter Fidler,
Vice-Chancellor
and Chief Executive,
University of Sunderland

The last 20 years have seen the 'modern universities' build on their individual histories and invent new kind of institutions, different and distinctive but sharing some key traits amongst which accessibility and innovation figure strongly. Many of our modern universities have a century-long, or more, history. They date back to founding institutions and a complex coalescence of proud and important constituent institutions. I have worked in five of them, both prior to and after, their confirmation as universities of this 'class of 1992'. These universities have been in some of our great British cities – in Leicester, Birmingham, Bristol, Oxford and now for over a decade in Sunderland. What follows is one story – of the university I am now proud to lead, but the narrative of innovation and transformation, differentiated by place and circumstance, is, I am sure, a consistent theme of the others.

The journey of transformation for Sunderland, both the place, and the university has been remarkable. It covers a period of constant change, challenge and opportunity, in which the development of the city and the university are inextricably intertwined. At times, change has been forced upon both city and university; at others, we have been instigators and pioneer. Throughout, both have responded through innovation to meet the needs of students, employers, as well as the city and regional communities, as a whole. The result, in 2013, is a deeply embedded relationship based on mutual understanding and respect, with the importance of the university's role in the city's economic, social and cultural life reflected in the thinking and planning of the city's executive and political leadership.

In those 21 years, higher education in the UK has also undergone major periods of transformation. This, and other modern universities, have embraced and responded to the challenges whilst continuing to innovate – in the subjects we teach, how we teach and underpin them with research and practice engagement, and in structuring an effective and enriching student experience. The year 1992 was an extremely important milestone for Sunderland; a year of genesis and great civic pride, following on from the difficult economic times of the 1980s. The town became a city, elevating the sense of place and importance for its citizens, giving them equal standing to those in other major cities. At the same time the polytechnic became a university, further underpinning this sense of pride and of a new beginning, the next phase in the long history of a city which goes back to the Venerable Bede and beyond.

Sunderland University has a strong and proud memory of its development from constituent colleges to a formidable polytechnic. Formed amidst the traditional industries and established professions, the portfolio and profile carried the legacy of ships and mines; of engineering and heavy industry; of teacher training; arts and crafts; and of pharmacy and sciences. Through the 1990s the university engaged a new agenda of technology, innovation, enterprise, health and the creative industries. This period – from 1992 through to the late 1990s – was characterised by growth, by development, and by excellence in delivering opportunities to students and families many of whom, in previous generations, would not have had either the aspiration or chance to go to university.

Government policy in higher education was one of expansion and growth, and Sunderland University responded to the call, playing its part in the overall picture of a more eclectic vision for modern universities. The university played a key role in re-shaping the city, with the development of the award-winning campus at St. Peter's, on the north bank of the River Wear. This multi-million pound development, which still stands the test of time 20 years on as a contemporary and excellent centre of learning, was one of the most notable and visible physical aspects of the city centre development plans. Opened in 1996, and further developed throughout the 1990s, the St. Peter's Campus has become the centre of internationally recognised excellence in arts, education, media and computer science, and the home for the National Glass Centre. Plus it benefits from outstanding facilities.

As a leader in widening participation – a key aspect of the university's contribution to the people of the city and region, where participation in higher education in some wards was amongst the lowest in the country – Sunderland University developed innovative academic programmes and support mechanisms to ensure that a university education was no longer seen as beyond the grasp of the majority of the population. The university's excellence in widening participation is well recognised. In nine of the first ten Higher Education Funding Council performance indicator sets, the University of Sunderland was the leading institution in widening participation. The university has received many awards and accolades for widening participation, contributing to social mobility and the quality of the student experience.

As the Millennium beckoned, and through the early part of the new century, Sunderland University and city together entered a new phase of consolidation and maturity. The university had developed its research portfolio and been recognised in the Research Assessment Exercises in both 1996 and 2001, with areas of internationally recognised strengths in computer science, engineering, arts, media, pharmacy and pharmaceutical science.

The close links with the city and community which characterised the precursor institutions of the university continued to develop, and were strengthened by the maturing research base, expertise, and facilities of the university's two campuses. This strong sense of mission was reinforced by the crafting of a vision for Sunderland to be recognised as a leading member of a new generation of great civic universities. This has helped to underpin the university's approach to knowledge transfer and innovation, working with private, public and third sector organisations to further their aspirations whilst adding value to the university and its students and staff.

An outstanding example of this approach is the work the university has undertaken to support the incredible success story of Nissan. When the Japanese car manufacturer chose Sunderland for its UK plant in 1984, it gave a massive boost to the city and regional economy. Since then, it has grown to become one of the most successful car plants in the world, and an example of world-class productivity and innovation. Working in partnership with the leadership team at the company, the university has contributed to Nissan's success in many ways. It has advanced the

workforce (including developing academic programmes at Foundation Degree, undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as specific professional training programmes in areas such as digital engineering) to meet the needs of the expanding plant.

A major programme based around the Knowledge Transfer Partnership model has enhanced graduate recruitment and development, with 38 graduates working on key projects within the company and its suppliers, all targeted at improving productivity levels and ensuring the plant secured new models. The graduates work in knowledge transfer, research and development (R&D), working on specific projects with clear targets for bottom-line benefits to the company. In the early 2000s, the university worked in partnership with Nissan, their suppliers, and many other manufacturing organisations to establish the North East Productivity Alliance, helping manufacturers in the region to remain competitive during this period of aggressive cost competition from Eastern Europe and Asia. This programme, in which the university played a leading role, secured thousands of jobs in the region and helped to attract new investment.

During this period, the university continued to invest in the future, particularly focussing on the further development of its city centre campus. An ambitious plan for the redevelopment of the city centre has been developed, and the university has worked in partnership with the City Council and made the city campus a central feature of the city's plans. The investment has seen the campus transformed and opened up to the wider community. This has given greater access

to and visibility of the university's work in science – with the £8.5m Sciences Complex launched in 2010 – and CitySpace, a £12m development with superb facilities for sport, arts, and community engagement, which opened in 2009.

The last few years have presented different challenges to both the city and university. The economic crisis which emerged in 2008 and the subsequent impacts it has had on public sector employment and the city and regional economy have been stark. Government policy towards higher education has altered dramatically, a shift away from the 1990s approach when widening participation and access to higher education were seen as driving political imperatives. This new period asks different questions of modern universities and of society more broadly. Again, the University of Sunderland has responded to these challenges with a considered, positive and innovative approach.

The City Council developed its new Economic Masterplan for the city (launched in Westminster in 2010) which sets out a manifesto for economic, social, and physical change to ensure that its citizens have great opportunities to live and work in the city in future years. This Masterplan demonstrates the distance travelled on the journeys of both the city and university since 1992, with the university's role embedded as an intrinsic part of the future vision of Sunderland as "a University City, not just a city with a university". The targets for economic development in the Masterplan are all underpinned by the knowledge base of the university, through its staff, students, and facilities.

Further development of the contribution of the automotive sector – not only Nissan and its suppliers, but the new technologies around electric and ultra-low carbon vehicles – to the city's economy is a key part of the strategy.

The university is already working with many companies on R&D and innovation projects, helping them to realise new products and business opportunities. The broader economic developments around the low carbon industries are also part of the plan, and again the university is involved in R&D and supporting inward investment opportunities in emerging areas such as Offshore Wind. The plan also targets the creative industries as an important area of economic, social and cultural development for the city, and the university will draw on its internationally recognised excellence in arts, design and media to help shape and grow this sector.

The National Glass Centre at the University of Sunderland has been the subject of a major capital development programme and Arts Council support to become a national cultural institution in the city, with international standing, galleries and research, and a centre of excellence for glass. The university is working with the Local Enterprise Partnership and other stakeholders, helping to secure the economic future of the city and region.

We have set out ambitious plans for the development of an Enterprise and Innovation Hub, to be established in the city centre, close to the city campus. This hub will act as a focal point for support for existing companies which want to grow, for entrepreneurs who want to start new ventures, and for those looking to invest and set up new facilities. Working in partnership with the City Council and other key stakeholders, the university

will extend and expand its work with innovative models such as our newly-established Intern Factory, aimed at helping companies to employ graduates whilst minimising risk to the employer. We will build on our work in graduate enterprise with our successful "Hatcheries" – CreativitiWorks and the Software Hatchery – for creative and software business ventures, developing students' business knowledge and skills. The hatcheries also offer personalised support for students and graduates starting up their businesses.

These plans, city and university intertwined with common goals and a strong sense of civic mission and civic pride, demonstrate the strength of vision and purpose which exemplify the university's commitment to innovation in responding to change and the challenges it brings.

Meanwhile, the university continues to innovate in many ways, including its remarkable international reach and approach to academic partnerships, in our region, nationally, and internationally. The university's strong partnerships with Further Education Colleges in the North East of England, initially developed in the period of growth and helping to drive the widening participation agenda in 1990s, are hugely valued both by students and by the respective partners. A pioneer of Transnational Education (TNE) in the 1990s, we now have 17 partnerships in 11 countries around the world, with thousands of students studying for Sunderland degrees in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Far East and the Americas. It is a powerful reminder of the value of our TNE work when one attends one of our international partners' graduation

ceremonies; the students there feel every bit as much part of the Sunderland "family" as our students graduating here in Sunderland. Another recent innovation in models of delivery and reach to students and partners has come with the opening of our campus in Canary Wharf, London, offering new opportunities to students to study on our programmes, and extending our work on innovation and knowledge transfer to the business community there.

Throughout the period since 1992, Sunderland has sought to be a continuous innovator in the design and delivery of academic programmes. In pedagogy – including early leadership in computer-aided learning, through developments in problem-based learning and research active curriculum – the university has looked to find ways to improve the learning experience for our students. We have continuously driven innovation in the subject portfolio, developing academic programmes to meet the needs of students and employers, and embracing developments in technology along the way (both learning technologies, and the technological subjects in our programmes). Recent examples of this approach include the new areas in laboratory sciences we have introduced, building on our long history and academic excellence in pharmacy and pharmaceuticals, moving into new areas of proteomics, metabolomics, and drug discovery. We have built on our strengths in digital media and computer science to develop new academic programmes, research and knowledge transfer in the area of "digital convergence". These are examples of the Sunderland story – innovation in what we teach, and how we teach it.

Trevor Mann, Nissan Global Vice-President (Supply Chain), Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK Ltd

"The partnership that exists between Nissan and Sunderland University is extremely rewarding. The world leading researchers in this area are not only reacting to change, they are driving it. Their advanced thinking has established a hub of expertise that's helping to boost innovation and accelerate business growth for us. Sunderland University supports us in everything from knowledge of industrial applications and digital engineering technologies to innovative research in automotive, manufacturing, maintenance engineering, and ultra-low carbon technology."

Of course, as said at the outset, all of the institutions which became universities in 1992 have their own powerful stories to tell, and there will be differences as well as similarities in the accounts. Perhaps this is to be expected; those institutions that embarked on their own 'university' journey in 1992 all carry their own history and connection to their community which helps to define them. But I believe that there is amongst these universities a strong common bond of vision and purpose which is both valued by, and valuable to, society at large.

The University of Sunderland's 21-year journey, in common with those of the other modern universities, has been remarkable, challenging, and not without setbacks and difficulties. As we enter the next period, we can reflect on an organisation that has fundamentally changed. From the local government-based establishment of a polytechnic – through periods of growth, consolidation, and the new challenges of austerity – into an independent, agile, business-like and focused organisation. At the heart of this, has been constant innovation in response to change, whilst always keeping at the core our commitment to students and great

teaching and learning. The touchstone of our vision is to be a great civic university, making an important contribution to our city, region and society. We look forward to the next 20 years relishing the prospect of delivering on that vision.

I am personally very proud of our modern universities and in particular the University of Sunderland and its remarkable contribution to the City of Sunderland, as well as its regional, national and international role. Most of all I am moved by those thousands and thousands of graduates and alumni of our universities who continue to energise me through their messages and stories of achievement. As I have often said 'life changing' and 'transformational' are big, big claims. At Sunderland and in our modern universities the evidence base says these claims are true.

Chapter 6 Igniting the desire to learn

The Right Honourable
Sadiq Khan MP,
Shadow Secretary of State
for Justice and Shadow
Lord Chancellor

The passing of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992 saw the creation of a new group of modern universities, and with it the extension of the availability of a university education to millions of people from a range of backgrounds. By increasing the provision of university education through the creation of modern universities we have seen some of the most diverse student communities develop.

As a graduate of one of these 'modern' universities I can count myself extremely lucky indeed to have attended an institution with great teaching staff and brilliant peers that is located in the middle of the best city in the world. Just as the 11+ often made children feel second class, the traditional pathways to university made young adults (who did not make it there) feel second class. My subsequent success at Law College where I academically outperformed those from traditional universities as well as my careers in law and politics are evidence, if required, of the quality of the education I received at university.

My memories of being at the University of North London (now the London Metropolitan University) are extremely fond ones. As an 18 year old making the jump from A-Levels to degree level study was made all the more interesting because of the range of ages, ethnicity, backgrounds, abilities and life experiences of those around me. Having attended a secondary school which at the time was poorly resourced, I was not expecting my higher education to be in palatial surroundings. And it was not! But I got to share my lessons and tutorials, and form friendships with people I may not have normally met, had my route through higher education been different. It makes quite an impression studying with mature students doing two full time jobs or lone parents juggling the pressures of child rearing with a degree. At the same time there are those having a second or third bite of the education cherry alongside undergraduates who themselves or their families could never have dreamed of obtaining a university education. Many really were the "first in a thousand generations" to get to university. Not only did this make for a fun and interesting learning environment but it also gave me a lot of the skills for my career as a solicitor and the other things I have done in my life; from being a Councillor and community activist to being a Member of Parliament and Minister.

Some of our greatest universities are rightly applauded for their academic brilliance and they are up there with the best universities in the world, but I question how much they represent the vast talent of the British public. Modern universities on the other hand, whilst not often mentioned in the same breath as Oxford and Cambridge, arguably provide the tools to enable greater access to further and higher education. The "value added" in some of these universities is impressive.

Whereas the older, more established institutions maintain their reputations by taking those who are already exceptional students and pushing them further, modern universities are taking on students who in previous generations would not have got to university. They teach, push and extend these students into graduates whose potentials are finally fulfilled.

Good modern universities can ignite the flame of desire to learn and to keep on learning. Not only is this good for the individual – in terms of character building, intellect and general well-being – it makes sense economically to increase the "work pool" and earning capacity of the graduate. When I was at university I met many students making many sacrifices to get a higher education. I cannot recall any who would waste that sacrifice on derogatorily termed "Mickey Mouse" degrees.

Working as a solicitor, specialising in acting for clients who may have been unfairly dismissed, discriminated against or badly treated by public authorities, as well as an MP representing one of the most diverse areas in London, has meant dealing with people from all walks of life and all levels of society. In my opinion, my university experience helped furnish me with the tools to carry out my future careers. It also played a huge part in making me who I am. I suspect one of the reasons why I am able to empathise with and connect to people of all backgrounds is due to my experiences whilst at university.

I believe that modern universities can teach their more established forebears about running a truly modern educational institution. Education is not just about learning the prescribed syllabus (important though this is), it is also about understanding the views, ideas and feelings of other people and the reasons why they hold a particular viewpoint. At modern universities we have the luxury of having a true cross section of society, representing the range of views that one needs to encounter in order to fully understand the myriad of opinions that will confront each of us in our everyday lives.

Chapter 7

The opportunity to succeed

Gemma Tumelty,
Liverpool John Moores
University, 2002-2005
NUS President 2006-2008

On the day I received my A Level results I definitely considered not going to university at all. Despite getting good predicted grades, I opened results that were a shock and disappointment to me at the time and doubted whether I was really cut out for the next level. Liverpool John Moores was my first choice but I had not achieved the grades that I needed to get onto my course. However, with a little help and recommendation from my school teacher, the university decided to give me a shot.

I had set my heart on Liverpool John Moores University after the open day. I visited a number of universities; more traditional ones, other modern universities and smaller, more specialist institutions. Liverpool John Moores University not only sold the university to me, but sold the city to me and I was not disappointed. I felt instantly at home on the open day and settled in with ease, regaining my confidence in my own ability again due to being surrounded by students of different backgrounds and ages and supported by the wonderful lecturing and pastoral care staff.

There is an element of cultural capital that some students applying for and entering higher education have just by the nature of their background or schooling. The impact of this is underestimated.

Some institutions can feel very alien for some people – from the types of students and traditions to the student and academic culture. Even on the bus in Liverpool when I was studying there, you could often tell who studied at Liverpool University and John Moores, respectively. I doubt much has changed today.

I had the best few years living and studying in Liverpool and I made sure I gave back. I set up a mentoring scheme, with support from the NUS, which partnered university students with local A-level students to help raise aspirations and consider the 'university' option. Later I became the first President of the National Union of Students to have studied at a modern university and I am so proud to have studied in and graduated from this sector.

It is fair to say I flourished at university from day one. A year later I transferred to my preferred course and graduated with a high 2:1. My own experience of applying to and thriving in a modern university is thoroughly typical of these types of institutions. They give people a chance, an opportunity to succeed or to change the course of their lives at whatever age, and to make right failures in education in the near or distant past. Overwhelmingly, they have been responsible for driving the expansion of higher education and social mobility through higher education in the UK.

Too often the debate about access to higher education focuses on the progression of a relatively small number of younger students from state schools to a relatively small number of 'red brick' or 'traditional' universities. But modern universities have a long and proud history of opening their doors to students of all ages, from all backgrounds – a record that is often sadly overlooked by policy makers who instead restrict their widening participation ambitions to Oxbridge to the exclusion of everything else.

Education is the key to social mobility and to a fairer society. For the gap between rich and poor to be lessened all individuals must be able to reach their full potential, irrespective of their background. It should be the higher education policy aim to ensure good quality higher education for all at a range of institutions with a full range of funded subjects, rather than just trying to shoehorn a handful of lower socio-economic background students into Russell Group universities.

Is an Oxbridge education best for everyone? Most definitely not, I know it would not have suited me in the slightest and rather than swimming as I did at my own institution, I think I might have sunk.

On leaving the NUS, I was proud to come to work for million+ to help forward the higher education policy debate and ensure that the sector (sometimes maligned in the media and under-appreciated by politicians) that had given me a chance to thrive was given due recognition.

In spite of all that is now known about the diversity of students, government funding and student support continues to be predicated on the idea that all students study full-time. My experience both at university and as NUS President was very different. The diversity of our student membership was an asset as well as a challenge. Involving students who have care or work as well as study commitments (and sometimes all three!) is very different from organising and representing students on a small-campus based university where the majority of students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level study full-time, mainly having entered university straight from school or college.

It is to the credit of modern universities and their student unions that they have worked together and risen to the challenge. There are now millions of graduates who have had their lives transformed as a result of the opportunities that these universities have provided. But we do need more holistic funding and student support systems and governments need to value rather than cut the adult learning opportunities that so often provide a passport to further study.

There are other areas in which government has failed to keep up. In spite of the vocal attempts of a few universities to claim wholly the research territory, modern universities have held their ground. Like Liverpool John Moores modern universities were awarded taught and research-degree awarding powers precisely because that is what they did and have continued to do ever since. They have added real value to the regional and national economy including in new industries and sectors but also in areas like health and the social sciences.

In every Research Assessment Exercise since 1992, modern universities have demonstrated that they provide more bang for the limited bucks that they receive in research funding. Yet Ministers of all governments have fallen on their swords and sought to ensure that funding remains concentrated on those institutions which claim that critical mass is required to maintain their pre-eminence in world-rankings, compiled for commercial reasons by media organisations. I find it very difficult to understand why politicians imagine that the challenges of the modern world will be resolved by restricting research funding to a handful of universities and their researchers.

British society is a richer place in every sense of the word as a result of the research, knowledge exchange and the opportunities that modern universities have provided to people like me. Their graduates have enhanced and in some cases led developments in the professions and in areas and markets that no-one imagined would exist in 1992. We know more about each other, our cultures and our aspirations as a result of studying together. We work more cohesively as a society. We will pass on to our children our aspirations and ideals and we will want them to have the same opportunities to learn and engage as we did. We will want to know where politicians stand in the future – whether they will value and fund the universities that helped us get on. We will want to know that they understand the vital role played by modern universities. And we also have a message for those who hanker after a by-gone world, who want to reduce the number of students and put the genie back into the bottle: trust me, it is game up. Look around, see what we have done and you will come to understand that argument is truly lost.

Chapter 8

Modern universities: Flexible, radical, student focused

Professor Christine E King CBE DL,
Vice-Chancellor Emeritus,
Staffordshire University
1995-2011

I start with a confession. I am unashamedly passionate about modern universities and the role they have played and continue to play in bringing about economic and social change, not only in the UK but also worldwide. They have liberated the creativity and talent of millions of students. They have been a key part of the transformation of neighbourhoods and of regions. The expertise of their staff and graduates has had impact in the UK and far beyond through invention and knowledge sharing. This has been but the first step on an exciting and on-going journey. In reflecting on the past twenty or so years and in particular on the formative years of the 1990s, I offer a personal commentary on that journey.

I graduated from what is now a Russell Group university and that was a great experience. I have researched, taught, managed and been a leader, however, in the 'modern' sector and that has been an amazing experience. The sector has adapted and changed but has kept the very best, in my view, of its honourable, practical and highly flexible roots. Although almost as soon as university status was awarded it became unfashionable in the new sector to talk of the past and the polytechnic legacy, this is something we can now celebrate rather than deny. For modern universities are no longer polytechnics under another name, and they have carved for themselves a distinctive 'niche' resisting the temptation to grow up to become 'old' universities. That has been some achievement in a context of financial pressures, prejudice and snobbery from all kinds of sources, most of which should know better.

I am very proud of what has been achieved together and in particular of the outstanding success of our students and graduates, often against some amazing personal odds. Most of all, I write as someone who still feels the need to challenge – whatever the context – the dangerously careless statements still made so casually about the 'best' universities which is code for 'old', 'research-led' and 'rich'. My favoured retort is "best for what? Have you met any of my students? If you did, your view might be very different".

Students Come First

There, of course, we already part company. Whilst the new higher costs to students will mean that all (or most) universities will need to start paying more attention to the overall student experience, the primacy of the students at the heart of the modern university has always been for me, and for most of us in this part of the higher education sector, non-negotiable.

It was not always so. In the very early days the 70 or so polytechnics newly designated as universities were adamant that nothing had changed. They had been offering degrees through the validating Council for National Academic Awards and had their own research degree awarding powers. Apart from some giants in the sector, like Eric Robinson at Preston, many newly named universities worked initially to 'fit in' rather than to carve a new niche. Research became a frequent topic of conversation with high aspiration and often little realism.

Although it was never expressed in this way, staff came first and timetables, calendars and working arrangements were designed for staff rather than students. That was true for all universities. In the 'moderns' things were to change rapidly. Changes that started putting students at the heart of their work were to help build the strong and influential cohort of universities which today have over a million students studying within them.

The change towards a student focus happened at different speeds and in different ways amongst the 'new' universities and it was not universally welcomed. I remember addressing a group of colleagues not long after the new status arrived and saying those three little words 'students come first'. Two long serving lecturers shuffled up afterwards and said that although that might indeed be the reality it was "tasteless of me to rub their noses in it and that they were both going to resign and get jobs in 'proper universities'". Wishful thinking indeed! There was little staff cross over, either way, between the two parts of the sector and it is a shame that this was the case. Better understanding of the history and role of different kinds of universities at an early date might have been a very powerful tool for higher education in the UK. Each part of the higher education sector is important. We serve different needs in different ways. What has been long lacking is a real understanding and a respect for that difference.

Putting students first was often mistakenly taken as code for a lowering of standards and a lack of concern for academic quality. That always was a cheap and unfair sideways sweep at organisations simply prepared to move with the times, addressing new economic and social needs, working with employers and, most of all, working hard to help students from a very wide range of backgrounds, excel.

Early in the 1990s at Staffordshire where I worked we created a post of 'Dean of Students' equal with and sitting alongside Deans of Faculties and of Postgraduate Studies. The Dean of Students, heading the Student Office, was both the champion of the student experience and the guardian of its quality. As in so many circumstances in those early days, an individual created the role and made its history. Staffordshire was fortunate in its first Dean of Students, Francesca Francis. With a background in registry, she was rigorous and unyielding on quality and the rights of students. Most of all, she both understood and helped to shape the DNA of that particular modern university.

We are all here for students

That a 'non-academic' was made a Dean represented to some people the end of civilisation as they knew it, but to the rest of us it meant the dawn of a new era where all staff in a university could work together in and across roles that were of equal importance.

Interestingly enough, in the early 1990s even the 'moderns' divided staff into academic and non-academic categories. That had to change in this new world we were creating.

Firstly, who wants to be defined by what they do not do? Secondly, and more importantly, it needed to be made clear that all staff, professors to porters, were in their jobs not simply for the pursuit or support of the academic but in the service of students. Administrators and technicians, in practice, supported students in a number of very practical and important aspects of their work and catering staff or cleaners were often the ones to offer a cup of tea and comfort to the student sitting alone and unhappy in the library at night.

Even, perhaps especially, the Vice Chancellors were there, because of, and for, their students. This made conversations with other Vice Chancellors sometimes difficult, and often hilarious.

Joining the Club

Directors of polys had become Vice Chancellors overnight. The Committee of Polytechnic Directors was disbanded and the newcomers were let into the sacred space that was to become the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP). Latterly, this evolved into Universities UK (UUK) with a change and improvement in its work and impact. The early days of CVCP for me were, however, material for a TV series. I will not say whether it would be comedy or drama. Suffice it to say that I was one of very few women there – and I do mean very few – and that in the first conversation I had with a Vice Chancellor from an 'august' university, as he described it, I was asked if we still taught hairdressing at my 'college'.

It is hardly surprising that many of us from the 'new' sector formed, alongside our continuing membership of CVCP/UUK what we called initially amongst ourselves a 'victim support group'. This later became the basis for a powerful voice with a think-tank ethos and approach. As a result, in its current dynamic guise, million+, is an important body with a place at the table.

Next Steps

The next steps in the development of the modern university stemmed from that basic premise of the primacy of the student and the quality of their experience with the university. It became important to work out who the students were and were likely to be. At first, in a time of expansion, the number of students with high A-level grades was sufficient for there to be little need to do anything other than recruit and indeed, for some subjects, select. However, it was clear that this situation would not last and that financial cuts and government control over student numbers would mean that income streams could be at risk.

Mission

It was in this context that discussion about strategic planning and 'mission' became live for the new universities. Although a pragmatic response to possible future recruitment problems – though seen as excessively managerial and Stalinist by some staff – the new planning process brought opportunities. Properly used, they brought an opportunity for staff across the organisation to be involved in determining exactly what kind of university theirs was to be, what values it was to live and what their role would be.

These early discussions were tough but out of them came a clarity about the values of the former polys, their commitment to social justice and therefore to the widening of participation for individuals and groups who did not have easy access to a university education. Work was done looking at just who was disenfranchised and special initiatives were set up to attract and support students with disabilities, students from poorer backgrounds and of different ethnicities. Whilst such discussions were also happening outside this part of the sector and some famous initiatives and access programmes launched, there was a difference. That was a difference of scale.

Learning and Teaching

Whilst the world judged students on their entry qualifications, the modern universities were more concerned with what qualifications they left with and the value that the university had added. Because of the scale of access from new groups of students to the new universities, along with the commitment to the student experience, the nature of learning and teaching underwent a revolution. The moderns still attracted a number of high achievers but many more students without the traditional high A-levels were coming to the new universities. They were showing tremendous talent and enthusiasm but lacked the experience of learning at a high level and the tools for study. Thus, staff whose job it was to help students learn needed to be exceptionally skilful, not only in their subject area, but in helping people learn.

The real success of the past twenty years lies at the door of these staff. They believed in the cause and gave well over the odds in time and commitment to help their students succeed.

Research

Status and promotion for lecturers in universities traditionally came from research, not teaching. Many staff in the new sector were engaged in their own research, but without the scale and history of state funding for research that the 'old' universities enjoyed. This area became a challenge for moderns. There were differences between different institutions but in the longer term a pattern emerged where scholarship and professional practice became the norm for all teaching staff and where a great deal of research was either 'applied' or had direct relevance to teaching. Entering Research Assessment Exercises to compete for government research funds with one hand tied behind their backs, the moderns were given but the crumbs from the table. At the same time they were criticised for being 'behind in the race' and penalised in league tables.

The rules by which research was judged and funds awarded did not recognise much of the real breakthrough going on in the new part of the sector, either in the development of new research areas to match a changing curriculum, the growth of cross-disciplinary work or the rapidly growing area of collaborative work between researchers, industry and business. However, this did bring its own prestige and income. New ways of looking at disciplines and assessing research findings helped lead to some innovative work such as Doctorates gained by practice, as in, for example, Fine Art.

Applied Courses

Research remained a hot topic of contention and for some, the marker of a 'proper' university. The reality was, of course, that as society changed the nature of what was taught needed to change – as indeed did the role of a university. If the student comes first and if employment is a major goal then it makes sense not only to link closely with both the public and private sectors, at home and overseas, but also to review the nature of what was being taught and learnt in the light of that. As recruitment into some areas became more competitive and as the nature of jobs changed, so the 'moderns' led the move to making elements of the curriculum applied. Thus, we saw the very successful birth of the technologies – film, TV, and music emerged out of engineering, forensic science from chemistry and so on. The moderns had always led the field in Art and Design and as more specialist colleges moved into their local university, so this became even stronger. Out of the humanities grew the professional study of journalism and the highly successful media studies. These were modern courses in modern universities for a contemporary and changing world.

The mockery that surrounded media studies and the like was widespread, if always more revealing of the fears of the critics than any problems with the courses. 'Dumbing Down' and 'Mickey Mouse Courses' were frequent newspaper headlines. This always puzzled me, out of touch with reality as these jibes were. Mickey Mouse is, after all, one of the world's most abiding and successful images. Is it so wrong

to study and to help create the societies in which we live as well as study the past? Because the study is new, does the quality of the work have to be compromised? The quality assurance systems in these universities were transparent, rigorous and, some might say, overly cautious. We certainly monitored quality outputs and acted if these were seen as not up to standard. It would have been very hard for critics to demonstrate that quality was at risk but then the argument was not really about quality but about fear of change.

Partnerships

Universities had once been the centre of their own world and a citadel to which others looked up. Not just universities but the world was changing and the modern universities reached out in new kinds of partnerships, with schools, further education (FE) Colleges and with employers. The boundaries were beginning to blur and new kinds of discourses were taking place. Through working with FE colleges, modern universities could enable access to higher education to far more people, allowing them to study at least part of their degree at their local college. Not all of these partnerships were successful and it was a learning process but they were yet another brave step into expanding the definition of what a university is and what it can do.

The Unit of Resource

There was never enough money to do what needed to be done. Many moderns had old buildings not fit for purpose, no reserves and little if any income outside of the state funding that followed students and which was always subject to changes in Government policy.

A few failed but most did not. Although the spectre of enforced merger or closure was a common obsession of the nineties, overall, the story was a good one. By careful management, by changing and adapting to accommodate growing numbers of students, often 'marginally' funded and by the creation of earning opportunities, by research and development for industry and business, the sector not only survived but also grew. Still excluded – except in token payments – from the research funding which all pre-1992 universities counted as critical parts of their income, the moderns made their own plans, and fought for and won their futures.

Where next?

As Governments came and went and economic, social and educational policies changed, the modern universities also adapted and changed. Many are now engaged in substantial amounts of research, much of which is industry based and funded. The curriculum is changing and developing as needs and economic markets change. What the early years of the new era gave the sector, however, remains firm; flexibility, radicalism, strong local and regional roots and a student focus.

The polytechnics had always welcomed mature students. This pattern continued into the new era and mature students, studying full or part time sat alongside full time school and college leavers. This history of offering flexible and part time study may well prove very important as we move, with higher fees, into yet another era of university history.

Competition will be tough, as it ever was. With the emergence of new private universities and the availability of knowledge on line throughout the world, all universities will need to be very clear about what it is they offer. A great student experience will be the non-negotiable bottom line. The interesting challenge will be the distinctiveness of what is on offer. For some it will be a name and a history. For the moderns I hope it will be those features which have come from their roots and been developed over the last twenty or so years. These are student focus, a contemporary and a changing curriculum, the employability of graduates, a flexible offering and a living commitment to the values of social justice.

The late Professor Tom Ruxton was Dean of Engineering at Staffordshire. A leading marine engineer and researcher he saw the shape of things to come and led the change from pure and struggling engineering to the technologies of film, TV and computer games for which Staffordshire University is now so famous. He fought the professional bodies and many others to achieve this goal. His comment, after yet one more attack that we had to take, was that universities are 'equal but different'. I rest my case. Thank you Tom, and thank you all those thousands of staff, students, student union officers, trades unionists, professors and porters who built the modern universities. You have a lot to be proud of.

Chapter 9 Universities and communities

Dr John Moss, Dean
of Education, Canterbury
Christ Church University

Canterbury Christ Church University was established in 1962 by the Church of England as a centre for teacher training. It now has 20,000 students studying a broad range of subjects, including arts and humanities and social and applied sciences. It has a particularly strong reputation for higher education for the public services – in particular teacher education and health and social care.

Making a contribution to local and regional communities has been central to the *raison d'être* of modern universities, not just since 1992, but throughout their history as polytechnics or institutes or colleges of education.

The centrality of this commitment to institutional identity is demonstrated in ethos statements such as the following: 'The University of Bolton is a public resource for professional knowledge and learning, working with and on behalf of people and organisations to solve practical problems.' Or, as the University of West London chooses to put it: 'We are the University for our region – working closely with: local government; the Regional Development Agencies; regeneration bodies – to enhance the social, cultural and economic lives of the communities we serve.'

The way in which this commitment to community has been most apparent is through the equal opportunities, widening participation and access agendas which have made university education available to an increasing number and widening range of participants.

Modern universities support higher education for its own sake for a diverse array of students, as well as for the reinvigoration of local and regional workforces with graduate level knowledge, skills and experience.

This commitment raises the aspirations and enriches the experience of the communities from which many of these students come, particularly those whose families have previously had little opportunity to access higher education – and contributes to the economic regeneration of what are sometimes underprivileged localities.

Underpinning this commitment, as the million+ publication *1992-2012 Modern Universities Changing Lives* demonstrates, are the values which the new universities derived from their rich and varied histories. Many were originally established from public subscription or from Christian foundations to provide education for public sector professionals, and to teach subjects such as arts and crafts that enabled their students to contribute to the local economy.

Implied by this commitment is a view of what universities are primarily for. It is not the perpetuation of a self-serving closed discourse of the kind the tabloid press parodies. Rather it is about enabling participants to inform the public discourses intended to improve society.

Moreover, the direction of travel has been towards the generation and sustaining of deep partnerships, in which universities are recognised as having a particular kind of contribution to make to the identification of agendas for education, the construction of the curriculum, its teaching and learning, and the research that informs them all. It is also a contribution which is open to negotiation with all participants and stakeholders from students to policy makers who have particular needs or aspirations that require servicing by high level knowledge.

Modern universities also insist on their commitment to bringing about change. When the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University last reviewed its strategic plan we revised our mission statement from 'working in partnership to transform education' to 'working in partnership to transform society through education'.

The change of emphasis was intended to convey that the kinds of change that our faculty is interested in are not in some way contained in and by the disciplines of education in and for their own right; or contained in and by the faculty or the university itself; but the kinds of change that work carried out through those disciplines can bring about in the world.

In his role as Chancellor of Canterbury Christ Church University, Dr Rowan Williams, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, recently defined, without undue emphasis on either word, the generation of 'intelligent citizenship' as the contribution universities should be making to society. This concept, which can be traced to John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, expresses most succinctly the dynamic relationship between knowledge and community. It is the application of learning in all kinds of active participation in society which is a defining feature of modern universities.

This has had important implications for teaching and learning. Students need to be challenged by dialogic, participatory, collaborative learning experiences, which engage them in addressing real problems, in order to learn how to become intelligent citizens. They need opportunities to define problems themselves, individually and collaboratively, to identify the appropriate means of investigating them, to experiment, evaluate, review, reflect and re-plan.

This, of course, chimes with explicitly stated commitments to solving practical problems, but also suggests the importance of universities defining their academic interests not just through the disciplines they teach, but also by the questions they are seeking to ask and answer. Many real world problems require an interdisciplinary approach to find solutions, and this has led to the need for a flexible curriculum.

The academic community of the university also needs to model many of the characteristics of the participatory society that it is encouraging its students to join or develop. First, the university itself needs to become 'a public resource' consisting of accessible, real and virtual spaces, in which public events take place that promote both problem solving and the solutions to problems with which the university is engaged. It needs to exist and operate, not just in the confines of its campuses, but in the locations where people are engaged in solving real problems and developing society.

Secondly, the university needs to operate in ways that enable staff and students to develop bottom-up initiatives that address the issues the university itself and society more broadly are concerned with: there needs to be scope for priorities and ways of working to change.

A good example of an approach to teaching and learning that promotes and is embedded in the community can be found in the professional development projects that Canterbury Christ Church University carries out with schools. For example, a local school contacted the university to ask for a researcher to evaluate its key stage 3 curriculum. Through negotiation it was agreed that a more valuable approach would involve the university in facilitating the school staff to undertake their own evaluation and incorporate opportunities for them to study for academic qualifications.

Universities have responded to the importance of interdisciplinary agendas, for example, at Canterbury Christ Church, through the development of a cross-faculty Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities. This brings together staff and expertise from the faculties of Education and Health and Social Care and facilitates the development of research that looks at children holistically and in a broad context, just as professionals are expected to do when working with children.

The university constantly redefines its relationship with local communities. Building its new library and resource centre close to the centre of Canterbury has had a dramatic impact on the city. The library is used by the community, including by parties of schoolchildren, and the rooftop café with panoramic views of the city is open to the public. The building houses a multipurpose hall in which social and cultural events open to the public take place.

The importance of a presence beyond the campus is also understood. The establishment of a professional development facility in a school in Upminster, far from our campus network, is just one of many examples of collaborations which physically identify the university in the communities it serves.

The university will not be alone in having developed its strategic plan in a consultation process that involved hundreds of staff, students and other stakeholders. The management of this process encouraged the development of bottom-up initiatives, including, a sustainability strategy commanding strong commitment from the staff who developed it.

These ways of working contribute to improvements in the quality of the student experience, and increase students' employability. While the importance of this cannot be underestimated, we increasingly think of Canterbury Christ Church University as a university of and for the intelligent citizen, with a commitment to giving all students the opportunity to engage fully in citizenship through volunteering and other forms of social participation during their period of study.

There are inherent dangers, in a more competitive environment, in setting up an oppositional discourse in which modern universities are defined as having local and regional community interests rather than national and international ones; as prioritising the application of knowledge over its development and vocational subjects over others; or as engaging in practical problem-solving rather than other kinds of research with, perhaps, more generalisable value.

The wide-ranging reach and influence of modern universities must be acknowledged. They play a pivotal role in national and international contexts, developing new knowledge across many subjects, including through research.

A particular strength is the way in which national and international work has been successfully informed by the application of the same principles of partnership that apply to local and regional work. Canterbury Christ Church's involvement in the Teach First initial teacher training programme and two World Bank funded teacher development programmes in Palestine play out our core values both nationally and internationally. In both cases our capacity to pay critical attention and respond flexibly to the changing requirements of partners, as problems and issues are redefined, has been vital to the success of our contributions.

The core strengths developed by modern universities in the last two decades are ones of particular value in the social and economic circumstances in which we now find ourselves. Being embedded in local and regional communities enables modern universities to offer students personal and academic development through a flexible, problem-solving curriculum and opportunities to participate in community activity. This improves employability and enables students and graduates to contribute to society as intelligent citizens. In addition, the knowledge exchange and research activities undertaken by modern universities with the community makes the impact of that work extremely visible, enhancing public understanding of its value and the value of higher education and universities more generally.

Chapter 10 Global graduates, global university?

Dr Malcolm McVicar,
Vice-Chancellor, University
of Central Lancashire

Many years ago, I remember being a member of a senior management development programme where the attendees came from a mixture of public and private sector backgrounds. One of the attendees was a senior executive from a very large and successful retail chain. He was much enthused by his company's strategic vision of being a significant global player, even to the extent of slipping in, I am sure inadvertently, the term "global domination"! A couple of years later the economic downturn had a significantly adverse impact on UK businesses, including that retail chain, and it began to retrench on its international activities, focusing on its UK business. That was a salutary lesson for me and one which I constantly have in my mind as my university explores opportunities for further international development.

The term "global university" is used widely now and we need some precision in how it is defined and deployed. There are clearly some major global brands which have a market presence across the world and may even have a significant percentage of market share in their particular niches. For example, Microsoft is clearly a global brand with a very large percentage of market share in its areas of operation. The same is true of BMW, or Hertz, or Jack Daniels. There are other large commercial operations which have a growing and significant international presence, such as B & Q, Marks and Spencer, WalMart and so on. Whether these are global brands is a matter for discussion.

When we come to higher education, there are certainly some universities which would be recognised across the world: Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, MIT and so on. Whether these are "global universities" is open to debate. At some stage in the future it may well be that a single university or a group of universities acting in concert develop such a powerful brand and have such a large share of the market in a significant number of countries that the term "global university" applies, but none of them meets that definition at the moment. Instead, what we have are many universities operating internationally. Rather than delude ourselves that we have "global universities", it is better to talk about universities with international activity.

There are many examples of universities developing activity outside their own country. Traditional activity is the recruitment of international students to the home country either directly or as part of some franchise arrangement. This is the traditional model of international student recruitment and is very significant for countries such as the USA, Australia and the UK. Indeed so significant is this activity for higher education sectors in those countries, that higher education now constitutes an important export industry. For example, higher education is in the top five of Australian export industries and is calculated to be in the top ten of UK export industries. Unfortunately most politicians do not understand this. They have intellectual difficulty with the idea of a student coming into a country counting as an export.

There are obviously very well established benefits from this flow of international students since when they go back to their own countries they tend to occupy important positions in companies or in the public sectors where their experience of international education may well be to the benefit of selecting international trade and investment partners.

There are very significant educational and social benefits to this model of international higher education. It clearly brings important benefits to individuals and their families, but it also brings important social and economic benefits to the recipient universities and their environment. If we set to one side the financial benefits to the recipient university, imagine a UK university without any international students. What a denuded educational and cultural environment it would be. Unfortunately, at the moment the flow of students is largely one-way. One of the major challenges for the UK is to encourage a much greater number of domestic students to engage in international higher education and to spend part of their time at partner universities outside the UK. The lack of mobility of British students internationally is a major handicap for those students entering into a global graduate employment market.

Not only do many governments and politicians fail to understand the benefits of international higher education, they are increasingly acting in ways which make it more difficult. The highly emotional and low level debate about immigration in the UK, fuelled by irresponsible and self-seeking media coverage, has

rendered it virtually impossible for any British government to deal in a rational way with the immigration status of international students coming into the UK for a period of study. There is general agreement that it is nonsense to count them as “immigrants” but the political system is paralysed and unable to remedy this. Nobody would argue for lax controls enabling people to pose as students, study at spurious colleges or illegally enter the employment market, but the current situation is leading to the perception that the UK no longer welcomes international students. This is good news for the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Alongside the traditional model of international higher education, we have significant and varied franchise activity. Some UK universities franchise a programme to a partner outside the UK either in whole or in part. The extent to which the partner has a degree of autonomy will depend upon the particular franchise arrangement, but the overall quality assurance responsibility rests with the UK university. Some franchise models work extremely well; others have been fraught with difficulty. The development of transnational education over the last few years has been very significant and now counts for a large proportion of international higher education. When it is done well it can provide real extension of educational opportunities to students outside the UK who otherwise could not afford to access UK higher education. Successful franchise operations bring real benefits to both partners and to the students. They are not easy to sustain and manage and the control of quality is absolutely essential.

One model of franchise operation which my university has promoted enables students to study one of UCLan’s programmes for one or two years in their home country working with a well-established and longstanding partner and then transfer to the UK for the remainder of their programme and increasingly for a Master’s degree on top. This model of transnational partnership works extremely well but it does require very close management and quality maintenance. It is not a recipe for vast financial benefit.

Another model of international higher education involves the establishment of a campus overseas. Many universities have done this, with mixed success. Actually, many universities have got their fingers seriously burnt by embarking on this course of action. However, done properly and when successful, it can lead to a model of higher education which can be accurately described as truly international.

Let us start with the student. A student graduating from a university anywhere in the world today, even taking account of their subject and qualifications, will find it difficult to get a graduate level job. In some fields it is an international employment market and major employers, operating internationally, are able to recruit from across the world. When you talk to such employers they often express a view that graduates from the USA or Asia have a number of advantages over graduates from Europe, including the UK.

So if we could start with a blank sheet of paper to design programmes which really helped UK students gain qualifications and educational experiences which help them to find graduate jobs in this employment market, (on the assumption that is what they want to do), what would we do?

If you want a job in a global employment market you need to have global experience, as well as cultural awareness and sensitivity to other peoples’ cultures. You may not need high level language skills, but if you can at least demonstrate that you have some knowledge of another major international language, this will count in your favour and can be directly beneficial in terms of a future career.

This is why student mobility is one of the key challenges facing UK universities. There are cultural problems with student mobility, in that British students generally appear to be reluctant to travel apart from for pleasure and unable to study in other countries unless the language of instruction is English. Compare a Chinese student coming to the UK, perhaps as part of a transnational arrangement or to undertake a three year degree. They will have at least three languages: their native dialect, Putonghua, and English; they will have English at a level sufficient to enable them to study at undergraduate level; they will be living and studying in a foreign country, thousands of miles away from home, in a very different cultural environment to the one in which they were brought up. In my experience, Chinese students are at the front of the queue for community activities such as volunteering, and they participate actively in student clubs and societies.

How many English students could go and study a degree programme in Paris, in French, let alone in Beijing taught in Chinese? Even where the language of instruction is English, universities often find it difficult to encourage English students to study for part of their time outside the UK.

Not all the problems are cultural or social. There are real bureaucratic impediments to student mobility. The fees that English universities can charge to British students who are spending part of their time studying outside the UK (for example at an English university's overseas campus) are limited for no apparent reason. It is not clear that a student studying outside the UK as part of a programme for a UK university can access maintenance loans in the same way as if they were studying in the UK. These bureaucratic handicaps need to be removed if we are to facilitate international higher education.

The gold standard of tomorrow's international higher education is where a student of university X is able to study that university's courses at a number of that university's international campuses, taught in English, under the rigorous quality assurance of the UK university and with mobility between a number of different campuses. Imagine if you were a student able to study, say, an Accountancy degree with one year in the UK, one year in China and one year in Australia, or any combination of countries. Add to that work experience, preferably outside the UK, high level IT skills and reasonable language skills and you have a highly employable modern graduate able to compete in a graduate employment market.

This is the strategic vision of a number of English universities but we have to be careful: the dividing line between vision and hallucination is a fine and indistinct one. Nobody should embark upon operationalising this vision unless they are fully aware of how difficult and complex it will be.

This is where we come to the list of "underestimates" – a list drawn from painful personal experience:

It is easy to underestimate the amount of senior management time that a single international development will take. This has an opportunity cost on management capacity in the UK.

It is necessary to set up a dedicated team both in the UK and in the international location to lead and co-ordinate this project. Those teams have to have sufficient capacity both in terms of time and skills to deliver the project. It is easy to underestimate the cost of doing this.

It is easy to underestimate the time that it takes to get a campus up and running.

You must legally comply with the local statutory and regulatory framework of the jurisdiction of the country. Legal status of the entity you are establishing is important. The concept of a "branch campus" may not be recognised. You may need to establish a full university in its own right, albeit jointly "owned" by the UK university in a joint venture company. The regulatory regime may not be straight forward and the people operating it may not have encountered proposals of the type you are suggesting.

In some countries it is not possible for a foreign company, including a university, to operate unless they are in partnership with a national of the country concerned. This raises issues about the respective roles and responsibilities of the partners.

Whatever form adopted, the overriding priority must be that the academic quality is the responsibility of the UK university, and that the academic affairs of the university are fully under the control of academic management and not in any way open to compromise for commercial activity.

Good legal and accountancy advice are crucial – and much more expensive than initially assumed. Whichever country and regardless of the relative income level in the country, the price of international firms of lawyers and accountants appear to be standard – and high!

It is easy to underestimate the difficulty of acquiring accurate and comprehensive market data and it is necessary to recognise that this does not come cheap and may be impossible to get at a reliable level.

This is a formidable and by no means exhaustive list. Nobody should embark on setting up an international campus assuming that they are going to make a quick buck or that it will be a relatively straightforward process. Some fundamental choices have to be made about the business model. Are the premises to be leased in which case the developer or landlord will want a guarantee from the home university rather than from a newly established joint venture company or university?

Is land to be purchased and a campus built (which may be required by the regulatory regime)? If the latter, capital and finance will be required to cover the period before the operations break even.

You will then encounter a rather vague restriction on the use of money derived directly or indirectly from the British Government, to fund activities outside the UK. There was an assumption that this was fairly strictly interpreted but the interpretation can be more flexible. Nobody will want to place at risk their UK operations because of the cost of financing international developments. Therefore, it is likely that as a university you will have recourse to borrowing money or trying to raise funding through an equity partner. Here you will encounter significant problems because establishing for-profit campuses outside the UK is a new venture and although many potential funders find it attractive and will commend your business plan, this will often be outside their comfort zone. Therefore they will be very reluctant to actually get involved. In my experience you need the support of professional fundraisers with expertise in what is a highly specialist area of equity and loan finance.

As the scale of that activity grows it is likely that the position of the "parent university" will no longer dominate in the way that it probably does now and there will be major governance, management and structural issues to address. For example, if a university is developing campuses of its own in a number of international locations, over time those universities grow and develop successfully, inevitably leading to the development of an identity and status of their own which is separate to the "parent university".

Should a university in the UK establish a campus, let us say in India, then that campus will have to operate under the regulatory regime of the federal government of India and the particular state in which it is based. It will probably have to have its own Council and its own Rector. Although it may be wholly owned or owned on a joint venture basis by a UK university and run for profit, (assuming the regulatory regime permits this), over time it will grow in size, diversity and income. It will develop its own research and knowledge transfer capacity. The result is that the “parent university” may have one or more wholly owned or jointly owned subsidiaries which are equal to or greater to it collectively in size and begin to develop their own sense of academic expertise. The model at the moment where the “parent university” sends out faculty, licences and intellectual property to the subsidiary university and transfers research and knowledge will in due time be matched by the subsidiary engaging in the reverse process. Thus it is perfectly plausible for the university’s activity in India, or Outer Mongolia, eventually developing its own significant academic expertise which it licences back to the UK, or transfers its research activity back to the UK, and so on.

If this model develops then the parent and subsidiary relationship is likely to change and become more akin to a “family” with elements of a common ownership and an organisational structure to oversee this development.

If these developments occur they will strain the organisational structure, management capacity and governance of the “parent” university. Having overall responsibility for the strategic direction and financial viability of a UK university and one or more international campuses may pose a considerable challenge to the experience and confidence of a university board or council. It will also strain the senior management size and skill base. Finding people with the right skills and experience to take these developments forward is very difficult.

Then there is structure. It is unlikely to be possible to give overall direction and leadership to a group of universities from the typical structure of a British university. We may need to look at how successful multi-national companies organise themselves and see if those models can work in higher education.

Is it all worth it? The honest answer is nobody really knows. There clearly is an opportunity cost to engaging in campus development outside the UK, especially if the intention is to build more than one. Arguably that resource could have been devoted to developments within the UK. However my assessment of the UK situation – or rather the English situation – is that there is unlikely to be any net growth in England for the foreseeable future; competition is likely to increase significantly and there may well be a rationalisation of providers. This is an unattractive scenario if you are ambitious about the development of your institution. Developing capacity outside the UK is a logical step to take in order to safeguard the future of your university.

And then we come to prejudice! The class system is alive and well in English higher education. When people talk about the advances of a diverse range of universities what they really mean is an elitist system of rankings based on perception and not reality. Evaluations are made about a university’s “value” or “worth” not on the basis of any objective assessment of the service they provide to their various clients and stakeholders but on perceptions or images based on their history, their market position, the level of research funding they get and so on.

We still talk disparagingly in this country about the “modern” university created in 1992. That is before today’s 18 year old students were born. Is there another context in which we would refer to something that was 20 years old as modern? I still remember the “secondary moderns”, a term which also was disparaging when compared to grammar schools. Underpinning much of the current government’s higher education policy is naked elitism, an elitism reinforced by certain members of the Russell Group who help to shape government policy.

We have a fragmented higher education sector, in which the competitive forces have been strengthened by government action, in which the market is largely based upon prejudice and perception rather than objective analysis and in which bits of the sector fight aggressively against one another for advantage.

A few years ago I was at a seminar in Hong Kong when a Vice-Chancellor from the Russell Group sat next to me and discussed with me his university’s plan for campus development outside the UK. I shared with him some of our overall visions. He was amazed that a university like mine would have such a vision and indeed doubted that it was appropriate!

Unfortunately that prejudice transmits internationally. The market in Asia is extremely well-informed and very conscious of league table rankings. This is something with which universities which are not part of the elite have to contend.

English higher education still has very considerable reputation for quality and value for money. It still has a reputation for being international and for welcoming international students. However, those assets are not guaranteed to last forever and are fragile. If English higher education is to develop international capacity which is sustainable and financially viable, it may well be that the window of opportunity is not open for long. Whatever its form, the global university of the future will owe much to the innovation and commitment of those universities awarded university title in 1992.

Chapter 11

Deep roots; wide branches

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With Vivienne Stern,
Head of Political Affairs,
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In 2008, Alison Richards, then Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, delivered an impressive speech at the Universities UK Annual Conference. In it she argued – forcefully – for the interdependence of UK universities. “We do not live here as an island. Cambridge can only be as good as it is because other UK universities are as good as they are”. To many university staff, who have built their careers in several institutions, the point is uncontroversial. However, it remains a truth we struggle to communicate in a society which remains obsessed by hierarchy and distrustful of change.

The 21st anniversary of the Further and Higher Education Act gives us an opportunity to explain why the success of our system is based on its breadth and depth. It is a moment to take stock of two decades of rapid change, and speculate about where the next two decades might take us. It is a chance to challenge the view held in some parts of the political and media worlds that there remains a binary divide in higher education – a divide between the ‘excellent’ institutions, and the ‘new’ universities.

We want to start by re-asserting something that is simply not said often enough. It is not only a duty of society to educate people as deeply and as far as possible, it is also a public good.

The evidence is clear; the more educated a person is the more likely they are to contribute to society, to be more economically productive, to be healthier and more law abiding. By expanding the university system since 1992 we educated more of our citizens to fulfil their intellectual potential and that is a great success in and of itself. It needs no more justification.

It is interesting how old some of our “new” universities are. Many of the former polytechnics have deep roots in subject specialism or local focus. Anglia Ruskin, for example, started life in 1858 as a School of Art, sharing a narrow Cambridge street with its university neighbour. It now has 31,000 students and is one of the largest universities in the East of England, but still with that School of Art – and the Ruskin ethos – at its heart. The University of Central Lancashire is another example – founded in 1828 as the Institute for the Diffusion of Knowledge, and based in Preston, with a clear and consistent mission to help people from all walks of life make the most of their potential.

“How did a British polytechnic graduate become the design genius behind £200 million Apple?” was a 2011 Daily Mail headline referring to the fact that Jonathan Ive, the designer behind the iMac, iPhone, iPod and iPad, was educated at what was then Newcastle Polytechnic, now Northumbria University.

The word polytechnic is superfluous to that headline except to imply that graduating from a polytechnic makes it even less believable. All our universities produce excellence in their graduates and in research. The 2008 Research Assessment Exercise demonstrated that excellence is not confined to a small number of institutions. There are areas of world-class research and expertise right across the country. The University of Coventry, for example, received an overall rating of 'world-leading' in seven of the sixteen units of assessment submitted in 2008. It is the partner of choice for the UK's foremost automotive engineering firms, as well as having extraordinarily wide reach amongst small and medium-sized companies, working with a staggering 9,500 companies in 2009-10, according to the Higher Education Business Interaction Survey.

The changes, brought about by the Further and Higher Education Act and what followed, represent just one of a series of periods of rapid development and profound change in the university sector. The period between 1890 and 1910 saw the establishment of the big civic universities – Manchester, Cardiff, Leeds, Birmingham, Liverpool, Sheffield and my own University of Bristol. The Macmillan era brought the Robbins Review, and the establishment of universities like Bath and Warwick. Just as in 1992, these periods of expansion and renewal raised profound questions about the nature and purpose of universities. Bristol was once the upstart new kid on the block, distrusted and held in relatively lower esteem than its older counterparts.

The same was true in subjects. Each new wave of developments in the courses universities provided was greeted with hoots of derision. English literature was the media studies of its day. However history shows that each of these expansions has proved to be to the benefit of the sector, society and the economy. Each development has been a step towards a diversified, differentiated university sector, essential to providing an appropriate range of opportunities for a growing number of students.

The university sector has changed considerably, and for the better in the last 21 years. In 1992 there were fewer higher education institutions with the university title. Those universities were more like each other. They were all engaged in teaching and research across a broad spectrum of subjects, but we had no real handle on the quality of that research. Many of them would have been hard put to articulate their role in their local society, or their economic impact. There would have been little discussion about knowledge and technology transfer, or about internationalisation and globalisation.

In the last twenty years the number of undergraduate students has roughly doubled. The number of postgraduates has also increased from 335,000 in 1994 (the first year for which comparable figures are available) to over 534,000 in 2011. In 1992 the majority of undergraduates would have been under 24, full-time and residential. Now those students are in a minority and we have a myriad of different modes of study including part-time and distance-learning.

There has been considerable international convergence in higher education models as a result of the Bologna Process⁹, in which 47 countries have taken part. We have about 400,000 non-UK students studying in UK universities, and about the same number again registered with UK institutions and studying abroad.

The expansion of universities has been driven by a clear economic purpose, and a growing demand for graduates. Universities have initiated huge numbers of new courses that meet the expressed needs of employers, especially those who are local to our universities. Our curricula have changed to meet the needs of today's graduate, not only by keeping pace with rapidly advancing disciplines, but by acknowledging that in some fields it is more or less impossible to predict the technologies that will be central to the working lives of our graduates. Indeed, our graduates will themselves create some of those changes.

So universities have not just answered the needs of existing employers, they have generated new types of employment by stimulating the creation of new industries and businesses. The same is happening around the world. A recent OECD report shows that by the end of this decade four out of every ten graduates will come from India or China, as they shift from mass production to knowledge economies. We now have universities that are offering very diverse educational experiences – not just more of the same.

⁹ The Bologna Process operates across the 47 Council of Europe member states to ensure comparability and quality of higher education.

However, the principles underpinning the education that all our universities provide would have been entirely familiar to our predecessors. A broadly-based university education is, and has always been, an excellent foundation for a variety of paths. Our universities are still committed to education that ensures we produce individuals who will go on to become self-directed, lifelong learners and individuals able to access data, assimilate and analyse it, synthesise that information and construct new opinions or knowledge from that analysis.

I recently undertook an exercise comparing the course offerings of universities who held that title pre-1992 with those of the university chartered in 1992 in the same city. On average the pre-92 universities had about 30% of their courses that were explicitly facing towards a particular work place and which taught specific skills for that workplace. In the comparable post-92 universities on average the figure exceeded 60%. In other words, all universities combine more abstract education with education directed to the workplace but they do it in different combinations. They are providing exactly the diversity that society needs.

Rapid expansion and increased competition between universities has, I believe, encouraged innovation. And while there may be considerable rivalry between senior managers, universities have a good record of learning from each other's successes.

Where some of the modern universities have led, in combining the traditional university approach with much greater sensitivity about evolving needs of employers, a great number of long-established universities have followed. In part this has been driven by the growing number of graduates, and the need for them to be able to distinguish themselves, and demonstrate the relevance of their university experience to their chosen field. It is also a feature of the drive to extend opportunity in higher education.

Alongside the economic impetus for expansion and diversification, there has also been a profound social purpose. The expansion of universities has opened the way to people who would never previously have had the opportunity to progress beyond secondary education. This social purpose is not new. The foundations of many post-92 universities were laid in creating opportunity for people for whom there simply was not room in the small, highly elitist university sector. The drive to widen participation in higher education has become increasingly important as the economy has changed.

We now know that today's graduate is not just likely to have several jobs – but several distinct careers during their working lives. Some of the jobs they do will disappear, as technology advances and the balance of the economy changes. Transferable skills are at the heart of university education, whatever the discipline. University education is uniquely well placed to equip people

with a set of skills which will enable them to adapt and survive in a shifting world of work. Graduates will, in general, be better equipped to take advantage of such shifts. And, to put this in context, the three occupational groups where graduates make up 50% or more of workers are projected to account for nearly 80% of new jobs created in the UK economy by 2017. Meanwhile, new jobs in low-skilled occupations are projected to decrease.

This is the basis of a powerful argument for widening and increasing participation in higher education. If we do not, capable people will be unable to get jobs, we will see a further decline in relative social mobility, and the UK will miss out on new economic opportunities. Universities are interdependent here too. Universities routinely collaborate with their local neighbours to raise aspirations amongst potential students. We benefit from each other's outreach work. We learn from each other through professional networks and the flow of staff around the sector. At Bristol, we are conscious not only of the people who are the first in their family to go to university, but also that we benefit from people whose parents were the first to go to university following the last wave of university expansions. They are on a journey, to which a number of universities may have contributed.

The instinct to collaborate is a prominent feature of the culture of higher education. A university like Bristol, with a strong civic mission, has a natural partner in the University of the West of England. Both institutions play an important role in serving the city's needs.

For example, together the University of Bristol, and the University of the West of England provide a large proportion of the healthcare staff of the city and our specialisms complement each other. They work hard together in the best interests of the people of the city of Bristol.

But they also collaborate in mutual self-interest, for example by establishing the Bristol Robotics Laboratory. This facility, a joint venture between the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol, conducts cutting-edge research focussed on autonomous robotic systems. It grew out of the Intelligent Autonomous Systems Laboratory (IAS) at UWE, and is now combining expertise from both universities to explore the potential of robotics for a range of applications – from healthcare and rehabilitation, to the film industry and defense.

The sector is also more aware of the opportunities created by inter-disciplinarity. Multi-factorial problems, such as social inequality, require multi-disciplinary solutions. So educators collaborate with biologists to understand why poverty is correlated with relatively poor locomotor skills, and then with social scientists and economists to understand how public policy can adapt to address these factors. It is increasingly true that no one university can hope to cover a range of research strengths which will allow this kind of necessary exchange. Of course, a huge proportion of our collaborations are international. We look for the best wherever they are. But despite advances in transport and technology, we should not underestimate the value of proximity and the unexpected avenues that open up out of informal contacts.

As the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008 demonstrated, universities are increasingly selective about where they focus their research effort. In some units of assessment in the 2008 RAE, the number of institutions submitted was considerably less than in the previous exercise. In many disciplines this has been a response to the increasing costs of research facilities. But it is also an important feature in the next stage of the development of our sector – more focused, more collaborative.

Now, universities are going through another period of profound change. Changes to the university title criteria will create the next wave of 'new universities'. Government policy is explicitly aimed at encouraging different types of higher education providers because they believe that such competition will encourage innovation and improvement across the sector – just as the last wave did. We already have a very active private market in higher education. We are now beginning to see new corporate forms and the development of for-profit provision.

International boundaries are also more permeable than ever. While a number of UK universities have overseas campuses, many more have multiple partnerships with other international institutions. Meanwhile, in the UK, we are beginning to see the arrival of some very big international higher education providers. Again, this wave of change has created some considerable disquiet and generated some soul-searching within the sector. In particular the growth of private competition raises difficult questions for the public service ethos of all of our existing universities.

Their roots in their communities, their instinct to reach out and provide a public benefit to society at large are characteristics which may not be shared, or shared in the same way by the next wave of institutions to gain university title, and with which we will increasingly compete.

In fact, we cannot know exactly how this will change the character of higher education in the UK – any more than we could have accurately predicted all of the developments of the last twenty years. But I think there are considerable grounds for optimism. Traditional universities, both pre-and post- 1992, will have to adapt – and quite possibly change – to survive. Number controls based on price and qualification have created considerable short-term uncertainty. We know that many of the major future players in private higher education provision will be highly specialised. So called ‘publicly-funded’ institutions will be more directly shaped by student demand with the shift towards private fee contributions. We will have to be very clear about what we offer students, why our university should be a destination of choice, and why our civic role and public service ethos makes ours a desirable academic community for students to join.

Competitive and financial pressures are focusing senior managers’ attention on opportunities for further collaboration, shared services and partnerships. Meanwhile open access and the unbundling of course content has the potential to be both profoundly

creative, stimulating great advances, and profoundly disruptive. So, almost all universities are going through a period of intensive self-examination. In the short term there may be some considerable turbulence.

Reflections on the 1992 Act are timely. A sector which is often characterised as conservative and risk averse has adapted to a new landscape and benefited from it. Universities have collaborated and learned from each other, at the same time as picking out their own paths, sharpening their marketing, and articulating their own particular character. As a sector, we are now more central than ever to the national economic and social interest.

It was Sir Howard Newby who famously said that “one of the great skills of the British is to turn diversity into a hierarchy”. We would like to take that one step further. We do not have a binary divide nor is it in anyone’s interests to attempt to re-introduce such. Instead we have hundreds of “divides”. Each university is unique in its combination of mission, research intensity, student demography, educational offering and relationship to its location. The combination of such diversity, especially following the 1992 Act, has created the single best higher education system in the world when judged on personal and public, social, intellectual and economic return on society’s investment in it. We should be rightly proud of that and celebrate it loudly.

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leading the
university agenda

**Neil Carberry, Director for
Employment and Skills, CBI**

"The class of 1992 have graduated as a diverse set of institutions, fostering employer relationships as varied as the universities themselves. Modern universities play a key economic role in supporting changing business demand for degree-level skills and emphasising collaboration in research. Innovating and enterprising, the CBI sees these institutions as central to the growth agenda and a vital part of the business community."

**Colin Anderson, co-founder
of Denki, and Director of
The Independent Game
Developers Association (TIGA)**

"In the 1990s when many institutions still did not recognise the economic potential of the fledgling games industry Abertay made it their priority. It's as a direct result of this sort of pioneering spirit that Abertay University is recognised throughout the world as a leader in digital and creative technologies."