

Widening Participation and Doctoral education Doctoral Education for the future: the role of professional doctorates

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Professional doctorates are positive contributions to two controversial agendas dominating higher education debates today: widening participation and the potential impact of rising tuition fees on disadvantaged sectors of society and the ascendancy of a managerialist paradigm to make universities accountable to the public and to the market (Beckmann & Cooper 2004). Managerialism is a challenge to the traditional hegemony of the professoriate as protector of the autonomy of the university and its role as generator and guardian of knowledge that informs critical challenges to the way society thinks, manages and plans for the future of the planet and its 7 billion inhabitants.

I suggest that professional doctoral pathways reconcile the incompatibility of the paradigm shifts which have occurred since the 1960's revolution in university education which, in terms of scale, were most effective in the United States where widening participation and emancipation for several social groups were considered a success. From the 1960s to 1989, entrance into higher education rose by 3,000,000 and doctoral conferment from 2,000 to 45,000. (Gumport et al 1997). Then came 'the disappointments of success' (Lazerson 1998).

Since the 1990s higher education subsidies have had to be justified due to a growing perception of universities as no longer fit for the purpose of the public good and over focused on individual benefit; periods of economic upheaval and political change; failure of universities to prepare people for employment and changed notions of disadvantaged groups. In the UK widening participation monitoring and initiatives reported small percentage rises in some groups but prior to the introduction of substantial fees in 2011/2012 (TLRP 2008, NAO 2008).

Professional doctorates offer a different approach to concerns regarding both widening participation and accountability. They seek to blend work practice and higher education through recruiting those already in work. At undergraduate level, the UK government's higher apprenticeships scheme aims to tackle widening participation, employability and

higher education through one strategic initiative which places school leavers in work with the financial and skills support of employers to develop on the job competences and these to be accredited against higher learning grades and awards. This will have an impact on the purpose of a university.

With regards to doctoral education and widening participation, few papers have been written on the subject (McCulloch & Thomas 2012) but there are indications that widening participation is achieved through members of the workforce and various professions becoming increasingly involved in doctoral level research. The US and UK have been at the forefront of this approach in areas such as nursing and engineering and more recently in professional practice. Europe has taken steps to encourage collaborative engagements that go beyond a discipline bound approach and the knowledge authority being invested solely in the university (Borrell-Damian 2009, Horizon 2020). Such shifts and successes raise the possibility of the university transforming into something other than the continuation of school. Scenarios include a university of the future being a rarefied research hive where discipline specialists are seeded and grown. Another option or complement to this is a co production knowledge hub of radical transdisciplinary efforts to meet societal needs and resolve societal problems: a university whose students are in work, where vocationalising becomes professionalising and research informs and is informed by practice knowledge. It offers those with practitioner knowledge an accumulative and collaborative pathway to researcher and practitioner excellence. The university itself is then regenerated as a centre of knowledge exchange and transfer, a knowledge entrepreneur between different disciplines, enterprises and ideologies; a centre of aspirational excellence and generator of informed and collaborative social action to sustain a future that is tolerable for the greatest number of people. Such an approach embraces the complexity of globalisation and how superorganisms survive and would give the university a unique and desirable value in society and in the market.

The university can be an instrument of emancipation and transformation of thinking, doing and being. Failure to address the university of the future could return the university to a place for the privileged and shift the generation of knowledge for the future to competing private organisations and multinationals not one of which would be interested in or be able to hold the overview of the complexity of knowledge and social action.

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