

# ‘Improving What is Learned at University: An exploration of the social and organisational diversity of university education’

by John Brennan, Robert Edmunds, Muir Houston, David Jary, Yann Lebeau, Michael Osborne and John Richardson

**What is learned in universities today? Is it what students expect to learn? Is it what universities say they learn? How far do the answers to questions such as these differ according to what, where and how one studies?**

As higher education has expanded, it has diversified both in terms of its institutional forms and the characteristics of its students. However what we do not know is the extent to which it has also diversified in terms of ‘what is learned’. In this book the authors explore this question through the voices of higher education students, using empirical data from students taking 15 different courses at different universities across three subject areas – bioscience, business studies and sociology. The study concentrates on the students’ experiences, lives, hopes and aspirations while at university through data from interviews and questionnaires, and this is collated and assessed alongside the perspectives of their teachers and official data from the universities they attend.

Through this study the authors provide insights into ‘what is really learned at university’ and how much it differs between individual students and the universities they attend. Throughout, notions of ‘best’ or ‘top’ universities are challenged and both diversities and commonalities of being a student are demonstrated. Posing important questions for higher education institutions about the experiences of their students and the consequences for graduates and society, this book is compelling reading for all those involved in higher education, providing conclusions which do not always follow conventional lines of thought about diversity and difference in UK higher education.

**John Brennan** is Professor of Higher Education Research at the UK Open University and Director of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information.

**Robert Edmunds** is a Research Student in Systems Engineering and Human Factors at Cranfield University in the UK.

**Muir Houston** is Lecturer in Adult and Continuing Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Glasgow, UK.

**David Jary** is Visiting Professor in the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information at the UK Open University

**Yann Lebeau** is Lecturer in Educational Research in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia, UK.

**Michael Osborne** is Professor of Adult and Lifelong Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Glasgow, UK

**John Richardson** is Professor of Student Learning and Assessment in the Institute of Educational Technology at the UK Open University

## IMPROVING LEARNING SERIES

The Improving Learning series showcases findings from projects within ESRC’s Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) – the UK’s largest ever coordinated educational research initiative. Each book is explicitly designed to support ‘evidence-informed’ decisions in educational practice and policy-making. In particular, they combine rigorous social and educational science with high awareness of the significance of the issues being researched.