Higher Education and the Achievement of Democracy and Social Justice

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The evolution of the ESF report

‘Higher education and the achievement of equity and social justice’

‘Higher education the achievement (or prevention) of equity and social justice’

‘Higher education and the achievement (and prevention) of equity and social justice’
‘Higher education and the achievement of democracy and social justice

- ‘import’ and ‘export’ notions
- ‘private’ and ‘public’
- ‘redistributive’ or ‘reproductive’
- differentiation
- meritocracy
- wider impacts
‘Import’ and ‘Export’

‘Import’ notions
Social compositions of HE students and staff
How can they be made more representative of the larger society?

‘Export’ notions
‘How can we contribute to the creation of a more equitable, respectful and just society for everyone?’ (Zaijda, 2006)

‘Making the hoard of knowledge produced or preserved by universities available to society more broadly’ (Calhoun, 2006)
‘Private’ and ‘Public’ benefits

**Private**
From participation and learning
From acquisition of credentials
*Who pays?*

**Public**
Wealth creation
Social cohesion
Functioning democracy and civic institutions
*Who pays?*
‘Redistributive’ or ‘Reproductive’

Redistributive
• ‘progressive social change’
• social mobility
• knowledge society
• civic values
• ‘open’ society

Reproductive
• ‘transmitting privilege’
• legitimising inequality
• transmitting ideology
• maintaining elites
• ‘it’s your own fault’
Some policy aspirations ……

OECD (2006): ‘promote democracy, tolerance and social cohesion’ and ‘fuel economic development through creation of knowledge and skills’

IAU (2005): ‘instill … the critical thinking that underpins responsible citizenship’

Differentiation

- allows performance of multiple functions
- ‘elite’ and ‘mass’
- ‘vertical’ differentiation – 
  *reputational spread*
- ‘horizontal’ differentiation – 
  *functional division of labour*
Meritocracy

• ‘your problems are all your own fault’

• ‘your privileges are all your own achievement’
2 takes on meritocracy

Bell, 1974

‘differential status and differential income are based on technical skills and higher education, and few places are open to those without such qualifications’

Goldthorpe, 1996

‘a meritocractic legitimation of the social inequality generated by a market economy is unpersuasive’
Wider impacts

- ‘collective self-enlightenment’ (Barnett)
- wealth creation
- ‘truth to power’
- social inclusion
- social order

(or the opposites!)
Research agenda

• Who benefits from the research function of HE?
• What is learned? ‘awareness’ and ‘enlightenment’ or just acquisition of credentials?
• Is there a tension between HE providing both ‘social critique’ and ‘responsiveness’?
• Does marketisation/consumerism strengthen or weaken HE’s contribution to the ‘public good’?
• Who benefits (and who may be disadvantaged by) the different types of public and social engagement by universities?
Conclusion?

• Higher education manages to do contradictory things simultaneously

• And so it should!