

A tribute and an expression of gratitude to CHERI from Mary Henkel

1. What I'm going to say is personal but I hope it will reflect something of the views of others involved in higher education research in the last 20 years. My only qualification to speak today is that I was around at the beginning and am still just about here. Was still finding my way in HE research (actually worked with John in the first higher education research project I was brought into by Maurice Kogan, a great supporter of CHERI) perceived relationships between higher education and UK society. A core value of CNAA was that there is no conflict between high intellectual ambition, a broadening of the higher education agenda and widening of access to it. Another was in the grounding of its work in research that was both rigorous and adventurous.

3. CHERI seems to me to have, in a different role and a different context, taken forward those values and beliefs in their research programmes, as well as in their response and contribution to another and more seismic set of transformations in higher education.

4. Policy researchers have always had to engage with and gain the trust of policy makers, policy implementers, public bodies, at the same time as they offer critical analysis and advice. One way in which they do so is by establishing and maintaining clearly defined areas of special expertise. But if they are going to be of more than passing value, they have to be contributors to the development of their field, and earn reputation and respect in their academic community, which is now global.

5. Want to say something about how John and his initially tiny group of colleagues have been so successful in managing all of this.

6. As I remember, their base of expertise was in a) Quality – CHERI was, of course, the Quality Support Centre for the first eight years of its life – and b) Higher Education and employment. They have without question consolidated that expertise in these areas by rigorous, empirical research and development, lots of it commissioned by public organisations. But they have done far more than consolidate:

a) Expanded these agendas – from graduate employment to the place of work in and outside the undergraduate curriculum – across the whole range of HE institutions – have been exemplary in testing and if necessary exploding myths about where in UK HE excellence is to be found.

b) Internationalised their work (and in the process been part of political and social transformations) – early on they were gaining an international visibility and influence through their work in support of higher education systems in Central and Eastern Europe, as they sought to install quality assurance as a means of rebuilding after the collapse of communist regimes.

c) Provided invaluable and extraordinarily comprehensive RESEARCH AND INFORMATION resources for policy makers, institutional managers, HE researchers, to name a few, in the HIGHER EDUCATION DIGEST and the HE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH BASE.

d) Their work has been increasingly characterised by involvement in formulating and researching the big questions. A few examples:

Higher Education and the Transformation of societies

Higher Education and Knowledge Societies

Higher Education and the Regions

Higher Education and a broader understanding of student learning (the SOMUL project)

They have made themselves the institution of choice in the UK for a host of international collaborative projects with leading Higher Education researchers from all over the world.

7. How have they done it?

Intellectually ambitious leadership, brilliant and unobtrusive administration, academic standards, social values (NB social justice), outward and inclusive orientation

Evidenced in the engagement in the CHERI enterprise of

a) international and national thinker-leaders and actors, who, like them, combine commitment to the development of HE with probing research into it.

A continuing stream of younger talented and committed staff

Huge thanks to all of them – and bon voyage to what comes next.

‘Who needs higher education research, and why?’ by Terri Kim

First of all, I would like to thank you, John, for giving me this honour to speak in this special CHERI event.

I was first introduced to the CHERI by Maurice and Mary soon after I joined Brunel as a research lecturer in 2003. I still remember clearly when John invited me to become a CHERI Associate. It was in 2006. I was then based in Paris as a visiting scholar at the *Collège de France*. I was so thrilled and grateful to have the invitation and subsequently receive an official letter signed by the VC Brenda Gourley which was to confer the appointment.

Attending the CHERI Higher Education Study Group seminars was a really important part of my academic identity whilst working in the Brunel Education Department, where I was the only one engaged in higher education research. Looking back, I can see how I have matured over the years to become an academic fully committed to higher education studies and that identity is my intellectual gyroscope and will not change wherever I go.

I find the CHERI seminar question today “who needs higher education research and why?” very important and thought-provoking. It was necessary for me to mull it over.

My immediate answer to the question is that we all need higher education research as much as universities serve the needs of individuals, society, economy, politics and culture. However, I would like to emphasise the importance of ‘critical higher education research’ and that is above all and first of all for the university academics.

Higher education that is taking place inside universities is more than professional training, and thus university academics need to be critically aware of the normative assumptions about professional accountability of the politics of our time. Who has provided this definition? Also it seems possible to ask, ‘accountability for whom’? – and in whose interests, and for what purposes?

After all, higher Education research cannot be detached from a particular political and societal context, nor can be unrelated to the interpretations of being and time, invoking Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Higher education research should raise and answer to some fundamental questions such as:

- *What are universities for?*
- *To whom should they be useful and accountable?*
- *Who says so and why?*

Contemporaneously university academics in the UK and many other countries across the globe, where the new public management has been carried out, are living with surveillance, accountability and managerialism.

The bureaucracy of surveillance grows; surveillance becomes institutionalised within the university; and the surveillance becomes internalised. The neoliberal discourse of corporatist management as 'governmentality' (following Foucault) has managed to take hold of, and is entrenched in, the university academic psyche as *subjectification* (Foucault, 1978). This phenomenon is now - in my judgement - widespread.

Meanwhile, there is a fracturing of the class within the university academic profession, reconstructed as both "managers" and "clerks" – as invoked by Professor Robert Cowen, my former doctoral supervisor at the Institute of Education.

These phenomena have become transnational. We have seen the emergence of a transnational mobile academic elite as well as a mobile academic under-class, (which is a part of my ongoing research funded by SRHE). The process of making universities into managed organisations as subordinate to the values and role of the corporate has required a conversion from academic leadership which used to be *primus inter pares* to managerial skills & competencies (in line management).

Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, a Professor of Anthropology in Victoria, New Zealand, who is originally from Germany, offers a powerful analysis of her position as an academic migrant in the neoliberal market-framed university. She says the corporatist performativity regime often creates another layer of culture shock to her as a German academic migrant. I quote - "it is experienced as a deep intrusion into my academic identity. It is an imposition of another learning process in the entrepreneurial system of producing and selling knowledge. Resisting this often means a slow or sudden professional death" (Bönisch-Brednich, 2010).

We, as university academics, need to be critically aware that the University has become a site of 'managed' knowledge production, and we should be able to see who defines what counts as 'product'; and who benefits from the new patterns of 'a university career'.

As more and more academics are categorised as academic experts, many of them increasingly define their roles as 'researchers' with transferable methodological research "skills".

University academics need critical higher education research to remain alert and see also if T&L has become an ideology, in which knowledge contents are increasingly defined by skills, including "soft skills" which are now seen as key to employability and considered more important than subject knowledge *per se*.

Similarly, it seems that the majority of university academics no longer need to profess.

In the advancement of online course development, university lecturers are told that they do not need to give lectures anymore. At Brunel University, for instance, the staff development

workshops on teaching and learning are increasingly focusing on technology-driven online learning. The workshop instructor invited from Oxford Brooks University as a specialist in online course development said to us that we do not need to create academic contents, as these are already available online.

Nowadays star professors' lectures are recorded and disseminated online and the role of ordinary academics is to facilitate students' 'learning', coordinating discussion based on online lectures.

All of these, I suggest, confirm the further division of academic labour, commodification of academic knowledge, and academics' *alienation* from knowledge capital.

The global expansion of neoliberal market-framed university regimes nowadays has left very little space available for 'university academics as critical public intellectuals', who would like to keep the position as a free-floating critical thinker whose creative role is to engage as 'legislator' and 'interpreter' – invoking Bauman (1989) - contributing to a 'creative destruction' and reconstruction of the paradigms of thoughts (Kim, 2010).

All in all, universities are already part of the culture, which, in principle, they should reform. It is in this context that I suggest we/academics need 'critical higher education research' more than ever before. Criticality is an essential part of academic identities. However, given the current climate of corporatist academic conformity, being critical is often criticised as if it is the same as being negative and pessimistic.

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Who needs higher education research, and why?

by Dr Vassiliki Papatsiba

Thanks very much for your invitation to share with all of you here today a few thoughts, my emotion, and finally a great deal of hope about CHERI's lasting contribution to higher education research, nationally and internationally. For this special event, you asked us to reflect on an interesting question about 'who needs higher education research, and why'. Although I was initially tempted to jump in with both feet, I progressively came to realise that I had three problems with the question, but please let me explain.

My first problem was with the pronoun 'who'. I wondered: would this assume that we can identify and name distinctive constituencies, users, customers, stakeholders, and so on, such as government officials, chief executives of funding agencies, senior managers at HEIs, other researchers, interest groups, various categories of citizens, and so on?

Second problem: I felt puzzled by the expression Higher Education Research and started wondering about its boundaries. How broad and comprehensive should one be when considering the field, especially given the ways in which it has developed, its stage of maturity, and finally its institutional basis? In other words, what ought to be defined as research in or on higher education? Would that mainly be theory-informed (or less frequently theory-based) empirical studies, research primarily seeking to find out 'what is out there' and collecting 'evidence' (including institutional or in-house research, commissioned work, etc.), or would one include other forms of inquiry and knowledge-seeking endeavours as well, such as scholarship and critical reflection and finally practitioner research?

Finally, my third problem was about the verb 'need'. It seems to me that there is a connotation here about some kind of lacuna that the use of research findings will satisfy, in a fairly instrumental and linear way: pressing, acute issues will be smoothed or even cured, knowledge gaps will be filled, and finally efficient decisions will be reached. It follows that appropriate action will be taken which ultimately addresses and satisfies that need. Additionally, the verb 'need' bears the expectation of a transaction that focuses on user's satisfaction. I wonder: is there an underlying view that research should address the requirements of customers, and their agendas, goals, aspirations and so on or has it a way to signpost to an outward looking inquiry mindset? Clearly, these are value-laden questions that, in addition, mirror more fundamental ones about who ought to define research agendas, who should participate in defining research problems, and finally, and perhaps more fundamentally, to what extent these should be closely mapped against social and policy issues. As early as in the 1930's, scholars such as J.D. Bernal and Michael Polanyi inquired into the purpose and utility of science (and social science) and their disagreement is indicative of a difficult, continuing debate, while it exemplifies the polarization that has taken place.

To sum up, in the light of these three problems, one can safely conclude that "Who needs higher education research?" is a good question!

Pursuing my questioning about the meaning of 'who', and acknowledging CHERI's fate, it may be tempting to conclude that not an overwhelming number of identifiable individuals, groups, or organisations would 'need' higher education research, at least not exactly right now, nor in a near foreseeable future. Having said that, I will try to present a reflection that might help us to overcome the disenchantment with CHERI's closure, event which can indicate something of an apparent lack of interest/usefulness of higher education research. Before that, I shall briefly touch upon on the 'why' of such an apparent lack of a 'need' for higher education research, via a series of further questions. I wondered: is it because priorities have to be set and choices have to be made within a world of finite resources, hence more urgent or bigger needs are to be addressed first? Alternatively or additionally, is it because other fields of research and inquiry are more valued intellectually, socially, economically, and if so, would preferences for disciplines reflect the extent to which social sectors and activities enjoy different degrees of legitimacy? Furthermore, one can question whether higher education research would have yielded outcomes that satisfy the stakeholders' utility expectations? Finally, one could question the nature/quality of higher education research and the extent to which the field is ripe for 'exploitation'? Although

legitimate, these questions are, as Toulmin (1964) put it, a 'chalk-and-cheese' problem, pointing to choices that have to be made and are at heart political ones. All too often, these choices are presented as economic or technical problems, qualification that disguises their political dimension.

Going back to my questioning of the meaning of 'who' and trying to address it, I shall err on the optimistic side. I want to argue here that despite the apparent lack of nominated customers or 'stakeholders', 'who need higher education research', higher education research benefits society because it can infuse into ways of thinking and acting of a society. I will try to develop my argument building on March and Olsen's (1989) elaboration of the 'aggregative' and 'integrative' models of social organisation which, in turn, draws on 'contractual' and 'communal' approaches of political systems. I shall combine this political approach with propositions about the ways in which research can be 'utilised', especially in the policy arena, but also more generally in society. Weiss's (1974) models of research utilisation are relevant to this discussion. I shall focus on two of her models, in particular the Enlightenment Model and the model of Research as Part of the Intellectual Enterprise of the Society.

In trying to identify 'who' needs higher education research, my first response is society at large, in a view that does not consider it as an aggregation of identifiable individuals, groups, organizations and so on, but in an integrative view which posits that the whole exceeds its individual constitutive parts. The aggregative and integrative approaches of social organisation rest on two contending world views, as I will go on to explain. To start with the aggregative view, this considers society as an aggregate of self-interested actors who act rationally in order to maximise their resources. Thus, transactions are committed with certain resources (power) and interests. Actors engage in bargaining and exchange in the service of prior preferences and calculated expected utility. Briefly put, the aggregative approach highlights the instrumental premises and purpose of a transaction: there is a need and a goal justifying a certain transaction between actors within a system governed by economic rationality.

However, despite the currency of this approach and its aptness to shed light on several situations, it cannot fully explain social order. If rational exchange, in the service of utility maximisation and self-interest, was the glue of society, then individuals would consistently use force and fraud to achieve their ends. Although this is happening, and social anomie is indeed part of social phenomena, economic theory falls short in fully explaining social order. Society can only exist where there are shared traditions, cultures and institutions. This dimension is emphasised by the integrative approach.

The integrative approach conveys an ideal of collective synergy and externalities, implying that outcomes may benefit not only those who are directly involved in a certain interaction (and not simply transaction), but the wider environment in which the interaction takes place. The integrative approach involves a commitment to something larger than the individual, the creation of shared history and culture, in a configuration characterised by the logic of unity, rather than the logic of exchange. Reasoned deliberation in search of common good, instead of bargaining, is the guiding principle. Although this approach does not deny asymmetries of power, coupled with enduring tension and potential conflicts, it considers them as a basis for engaging in deliberation in order to build a "mutual understanding, a collective will, trust and sympathy. (...). The key integrative processes (...) seek the creation, identification, and implementation of shared preferences." (March & Olsen 1989, 126). Hence, a socialisation process is at work here, bearing project and aspiration. During this process, moral and competent actors engage in the interpretation of a situation, seeking and creating meaning that exceeds the purely instrumental calculation. This 'communal' approach places them in a historical perspective conducive to shared values and norms, joint purpose and trust. This is a continuous, yet not hopeless, challenge.

Bringing these strands of my argument together, I will try to address how these approaches can inform the definition of 'who'. According to the aggregative model of social organisation, a customer, a policy body for instance, would have a clearly identified need and a goal which can be met by use of research. This need is usually a certain problem and the goal would be a preferred course of remedial action. The way they can go about these, at least in an ideal world, is to either directly commission research, or draw on available research, in order to solve the problem and proceed in decision making and action taking. In the integrative view of society, defining 'who' would need higher education research is not as straightforward as

simply nominating distinctive customers and stakeholders and identifying their problem. 'Utilising' higher education research would not just be taking a piece of research to fill an information gap. Here research findings are not simply delivered to the interested customer, following a linear transaction between producer and user. The broader issue of research 'ownership' and potential benefit is more complex than the aggregative model of exchange would suggest.

In order to show the complexities of the public dimension of knowledge, I shall combine this reading of social organisation with Weiss (1974) models of research utilization. Two models, in particular, would be of interest in this discussion of knowledge trajectories, from an integrative view of society. The first one is the Enlightenment Model. Here, research findings slowly permeate the public sphere, broadly conceived, and gradually shape the way people think about particular issues or problems. Knowledge diffusion, as assumed in this model, rests on a conception of society as democratic organisations. Release of research findings, even unpalatable ones, filters through to the public and increases its wisdom, and its disposition towards action. Research, and knowledge in general, distils into ways of public framing of social issues. In many societies, particularly open, democratic ones, an informed public is a very powerful lobby group, and can influence policy decisions gradually over a period of time. The existence of scholarly journals and informed discussion of policy issues through the mass media are indicators of the Enlightenment Model. Finally, this model does assume transactional linearity between producers and users within a problem-solving context, neither does it consider compatibility between 'need' and 'response' a necessary condition for a successful use of research.

The second model, also compatible with the integrative view of society and political systems, sees research as Part of the Intellectual Enterprise of the Society. One might call it an embedded model, according to which research is not an insular activity that takes place within bounded 'holly' spaces but is indeed an interconnected part within the intellectual enterprise of society. Thus, it is embedded in its ways of thinking and acting and can influence public policy, alongside other activities and considerations, be they political, social and economic. Weiss considers this conception of research (and social science research) as susceptible to influences from wider social paradigms. As she puts it 'like policy, social science research responds to the currents of thought, the fads and fancies, of the period. Social science and policy interact, influencing each other and being influenced by the larger fashions of social thought.' (ibid, p. 430).

In the scholarship of Higher Education Research, this approach can be qualified as an 'externalist' approach to higher education, science and knowledge generation as it encompasses arguments about the embedded nature of scientific knowledge within wider social relations. It also conveys a critical view on the University establishment, with the legitimacy it affords to scientific status and academic autonomy in defining research agendas. Nowotny and colleagues (2001) have portrayed this view of society as a Mode 2 society in which 'the categorisations of modernity into discrete domains' such as state, society, market, culture and science itself are dissolving, and institutional boundaries are getting increasingly porous. They call for knowledge to be integrated in the 'new public space' - the so-called *agora*, where science and society, the market and politics co-mingle (p. 203) allowing for socially distributed expertise to emerge. This knowledge integration becomes a structural feature of knowledge societies, according to Knorr Cetina (2007). The epistemic cultures, as she puts it, have permeated society to the extent that "a knowledge society is not simply a society of more knowledge and technology and of the economic and social consequences of these factors. It is also a society permeated with knowledge settings, the whole sets of arrangements, processes and principles that serve knowledge and unfold with its articulation." (p. 362).

I will here try to bring my reflection to a close while I remain conscious of the shortcomings in my proposal. Above all, sadly, it cannot satisfy an identified need, that is, it cannot efficiently address the acute problems that CHERI has been faced with. However it is an optimistic approach of the research endeavour which takes a historical view and the socialization process into account. It can be a long-term ally and stay with us, while it will continue to remind us that CHERI has made a contribution in this field of higher education research. No one has the ability to foresee and accurately predict the ways in which the work undertaken by CHERI will continue to address the needs of various communities, be they policy, scholarly

or civic one. However it can offer plenty of hope that CHERI's research will infuse, resurface, shape and frame the ways in which people think of higher education nationally and internationally. As CHERI is slowly entering the realm of legacy, one can only consider this to be the privilege of those who have had a distinguished contribution, and have influenced the ways in which people, in an increasingly interconnected world, think of social and public issues.

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