SES

SOCIETY FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

HIGHER EDUCATION: (RE)SHAPING THE FUTURE

ORIEL COLLEGE
4 - 5 SEPTEMBER 2025
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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WELCOME FROM THE COLLOQUIUM CONVENERS

WELCOME TO THE EIGHTH ANNUAL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES ORIEL COLLOQUIUM, THE THEME FOR WHICH THIS YEAR IS *HIGHER EDUCATION:(RE)SHAPING THE FUTURE.*

The Colloquium brings colleagues together to discuss the current state of Higher Education and how we can shape its short-term future. Higher Education in the United Kingdom today, as elsewhere, is facing an existential moment. While the general aims and purposes of higher education have remained relatively consistent over the last one hundred years, the relative focus and emphasis of these aims have ebbed and flowed. Participation rates in higher education in the United Kingdom have increased significantly over the last fifty years. So too, the institutions and places within which higher education takes place have altered – not least through the *Further and Higher Education Act in 1992*. Higher education has become increasingly internationalised and, at the same time, greater attention – in research and practice – is paid to matters of teaching quality, student experience and civic contribution. The Secretary of State has signalled strongly that any future rises in student fees will be linked to expectations to reform.

At the same time, some have spoken of higher education being in some form of 'crisis'. University finances are now a common matter of concern, with the financial environment characterised as 'increasingly challenging' by the Office for Students with 40% of providers expected to be in deficit in 2024 and many providers operating some form of redundancy scheme for staff. In such a context, universities (and indeed other providers of higher education) seek to compete for resources – including income generated from home and overseas student fees and from research. Intertwined with these financial concerns and heightened competitive environment are core questions that bring into sharp focus the purpose and value of higher education for students, for the economy and for civic society.

The keynote presentations and seminar papers presented at the Colloquium will engage with these matters; asking relevant questions and offering possible solutions.

We very much look forward to the discussions and debates over the two days of the Colloquium.

Professor Tom Harrison
University of Birmingham

Professor Andrew Peterson,
University of Birmingham

CONTENTS

PROGRAMME

Thursday 4th September

SES Executive Meeting	10:30-12.00	
Registration	11:45-13:00	
Lunch	12:00-13:00	*Dining Hall*
Welcome: James Arthur, Chair SES	13:00-13:10	*Harris Lecture Theatre*
Keynote 1: Steven Jones	13:15-14:15	*Harris Lecture Theatre*
Seminar Session 1	14:15-15:15	*Various*
Tea	15:15-15:45	*Harris Seminar Room*
Keynote 2: Chris Millward	15:45-16:45	*Harris Lecture Theatre*
Seminar Session 2	16:45-17:45	*Various*
Check in to Bedrooms	17:45-18:30	
Drinks Reception	18:30-19:30	*Champneys Room*
Dinner	19:30	*Dining Hall*

Friday 5th September

Breakfast	08:00-09:00	*Dining Hall*
Keynote 3: Debbie McVitty	09:00-10:00	*Harris Lecture Theatre*
Seminar Session 3	10:00-11:00	*Various*
Coffee	11:00-11:30	*Harris Seminar Room*
Seminar Session 4	11:30-12:30	*Various*
Plenary	12:30-12:45	*Harris Lecture Theatre*
Lunch	12:45-13:45	*Dining Hall*
Close	13:45	

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Keynote 1: Professor Steven Jones
Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester
Chair: Professor Andrew Peterson

(RE)BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND (RE)CLAIMING THE UNIVERSITY AS A PUBLIC ASSET

This paper takes as its starting point Stefan Collini's claim that 'never before in human history have [universities] suffered from such a disabling lack of confidence and loss of identity' (2012: 3). Using English higher education as a case study, I explore how the crisis is manifested in two key domains: university pedagogy and university governance. I argue that institutional managers and sector leaders have been under-prepared – or ideologically reluctant – to defend the sector against attacks from policymakers and media commentators, and timid about articulating universities' wider contributions to society. At the same time, I contend that higher education is more essential than ever in today's turbulent political, economic, and cultural environment. University teaching continues to inspire students in ways that cannot be captured by the metrics and language of the market, while prevailing models of governance – increasingly shaped by corporate logics and characterised by 'business realist' discourses – constrain the sector's democratic and intellectual potential. In examining these dynamics, I examine how universities might find the confidence to reclaim their public role, even in a climate where expertise is contested and critical thinking undervalued.

Keynote 2: Professor Chris Millward
University of Birmingham
Chair: Professor Hazel Bryan

ENGLISH HIGHER EDUCATION: FROM COMPETITION TO COHERENCE

During the first two decades of the 21st century, governments in England made reforms to the funding and regulation of higher education, with the promise of more equal opportunities in a knowledge economy.

These reforms enabled universities to grow, based on increasing student numbers and fee income, but higher education became concentrated around young full-time full degree entry and all other routes through post-compulsory education declined. These patterns have successfully widened participation but sustained the influence of school attainment gaps on higher education entry.

Alongside this, the increasing supply of graduates has not been matched by improved productivity and economic growth, yielding declining returns for graduates beyond London, STEM subjects and the public sector. This has encouraged more graduates to move for work, compounding geographical inequalities and political divisions between places with high proportions of graduates and other parts of the country.

In response, higher education policy is shifting from student choice and provider competition towards regional collaboration and coherence. This is intended to improve pathways for learners not progressing directly from school to university, and closer alignment between the supply of graduates and demand for their capabilities.
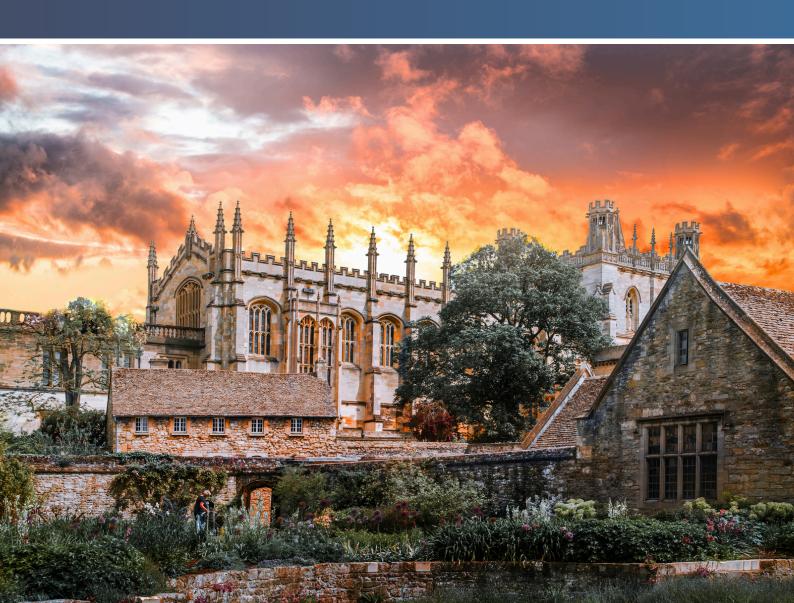
This session will explore how and whether the new approach might work.

Keynote 3: Debbie McVitty
Editor, WonkHE

Chair: Professor Tom Harrison

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC REALM

Higher education has long walked a fine line between "private" autonomous institutions and 'public' financing and accountability to the state. The current Westminster government, faced with unpalatable public finances, has ruled out a substantial injection of public finance into higher education in England. Yet it appears to remain hopeful that higher education institutions in England can be persuaded to orient themselves more systematically to 'public' goods such as civic engagement and become more responsive to regional skills and economic growth agendas. This keynote lecture will consider the various ways that the traditional balance between public and private is coming under pressure in higher education, and what a redefined settlement could look like as the relationship between higher education and state is redefined for an era of mass participation in combination with economic scarcity.

SEMINAR SESSIONS

Seminar Session 1
Thursday 4th September
14:15-15:15

HARRIS LECTURE THEATRE

Chair: Aidan Thompson

Sophie Scott-Brown
Social Movements and Universities: Past, present, future

Rebecca Sanderson, Helen Childerhouse, Maria Lopez Romero
The Care-Aware Pedagogy Project: Promoting equity of experience and outcomes through a care-informed pedagogy

OWEN WALKER ROOM

Chair: Richard Race

Julian Ayres
Evaluating a Resilience Training Programme to Support Trainee Teacher Retention: A Professional Doctorate Study

Helen Hooper and Mike Cole
What Does a Headteacher Look Like? Teaching trainee teachers about unconscious gender bias

ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM

Chair: Sarah K. Anderson

Sarah K. Anderson, Andrew James Davies, Pinky Jain
Duplexity and Tensegrity: Rethinking Complexity and Sustainability in Higher Education

Rachel Brooks
Post-Brexit infrastructures of international student mobility

MACGREGOR ROOM

Chair: Sally Elton-Chalcraft

Sally Elton-Chalcraft
'Communiversity' – planning and measuring university civic contributions

Karim Mustafa, Fiona Oster
Reimagining Education through Inquiry-Based Learning: Enhancing Quality, Civic Engagement, and Student Experience in Higher Education

Seminar Session 2
Thursday 4th September
16:45-17:45

HARRIS LECTURE THEATRE

Chair: Aidan Thompson

Aidan Thompson and Ida Lubben
Understanding the Values of Social Scientists

Sarah Whitehouse, Karan Vickers-Hulse, Malcolm Richards
Creating Space for Dialogue

OWEN WALKER ROOM

Chair: Stephen Parker

David Crighton, Will Shepherd
Beyond Reluctance: Fairness, Performativity and Intrapreneurial Pressures in a Marketised Higher Education Landscape

Richard Davies
Building a Regulatory Environment for Really Widening Participation

ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM

Chair: Lottie Hoare

Paul Shrimpton
The Oriel Origins of John Henry Newman's Pastoral Idea of a University

Maria Patricia Williams
The Catholic Residential Experience and Female Participation in Non-Denominational Higher Education: A case study in Rome 1887-1923

Seminar Session 3
Friday 5th September
10:00-11:00

HARRIS LECTURE THEATRE	OWEN WALKER ROOM	ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM
Chair: Robert Bowie	*Chair: Gurpinder Lalli*	*Chair: Lottie Hoare*
Helen Childerhouse Developing a Pedagogical Framework for All (Home and International) Higher Education Students	**Helen Hooper, Linda Allin, Emma Anderson, Kate Black, Lynn Mcinnes, Susan Mathieson, Libby Orme, Roger Pennlington** Culture Shock and the Gendered Teaching Experiences of New Academics	**Tola Amodu** Fostering Student Hope and Resilience
Robert Bowie The Identity War of Righteousness and Dissent, and the Turbulent Times for the Last Academics	**Wanwei Nie** Futures in Flux: Student Agency and the Ethics of Higher Education in Precarious Times	**Feng Su, Margaret Wood, Andrew Pennington** Is Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) a Positive Force to Shape the Future of Higher Education? Implications for universities' roles in the public realm

Seminar Session 4
Friday 5th September
11:30-12:30

HARRIS LECTURE THEATRE	OWEN WALKER ROOM	ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM
Chair: Achala Gupta	*Chair: Gurpinder Lalli*	*Chair: Sally Power*
Achala Gupta Navigating a double-edged sword: An empirical study of staff views on using generative artificial intelligence in higher education	**Ella Taylor-Smith, Helen Charlton** Key New Roles in Higher Education Apprenticeships: Exploring Boundary-Spanning Identities of Tripartite Representatives	**Aidan Gillespie** Catholic and Muslim Student Teachers' perspectives on universities as spaces for academic and personal development
Bev Hancock-Smith, Zara Hooley, Kylie Baldwin From Gatekeepers to Guides: Reconstructing Academic Identities in the AI Era	**Nicola Robertson, David Lewin** What's the 'use' in Higher Education?	**Enze Guo, Hao Wu, Peng Zhang** The Doctoral Journey as Decolonial Praxis: Self-formation of Global South students in UK Higher Education

SEMINAR PAPER ABSTRACTS

Seminar Session 1
Thursday 4th September
14:15-15:15

HARRIS LECTURE THEATRE

Sophie Scott-Brown

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND UNIVERSITIES: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Universities are at a crossroads, struggling to define and defend their educational and social identities. They appear to be flourishing. Widening Participation (WP) initiatives have dramatically increased the number of people participating in higher education. Yet, they have been less successful in generating a more participatory culture, leaving many 'non-traditional' students feeling alienated. Compounding this, the rise of the 'managerial university' has further contracted the role of staff and students in decision-making while entrenching pressure to conform to standardised models of performance. How, then, can universities accommodate greater student diversity while also challenging the constraints imposed on them by an encroaching neo-liberalism?

Social movements offer inspiration. Activists have long been preoccupied by education, especially in its adult and higher forms. While this synergy has sometimes been explicit, such as campaigns in the (late) 1960s and 1970s to democratise universities, it has more often been indirect, emerging through experiments outside or on the margins of universities. As my previous work on the British History Workshop movement showed, the circulation of individuals and ideas between higher education and activism in the late twentieth century was frequently fruitful. At the same time, the same history exposed fundamental differences in views about the purpose and value of education that suggest certain limits to this relationship.

This paper provides an overview of a newly-funded SES research project on the intersecting histories of social movements and universities. Researchers from the Centre for Social Movement Studies (Scuola Normale), the Institute of Social Movements (Ruhr University), and the Histories of Activism Research Group (University of Northumbria) will use their expertise to examine the past, present, and possible future relations between social movements and universities, participation and knowledge.

Rebecca Sanderson, Helen Childerhouse, Maria Lopez Romero

THE CARE-AWARE PEDAGOGY PROJECT: PROMOTING EQUITY OF EXPERIENCE AND OUTCOMES THROUGH A CARE-INFORMED PEDAGOGY

Recent reforms to the Office for Students access and participation priorities have promoted a move towards a risk-based approach- the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)- which aims to improve awareness of a broad range of characteristics associated with inequality in higher education (HE) (Office for Students, 2025). Within this approach one group of students noted to be impacted by inequalities of access, attainment and experience within the EORR are students with caring responsibilities. Students with caring responsibilities include students who are parents or guardians of children, and students who care for a partner, family member or friend who needs help due to illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and who could not manage without their help (UCAS, 2025). In a recent study funded by UKRI-affiliated student mental health network SMARTEN, students with caring responsibilities (SCRs) talked about their experiences of time poverty, the conflicting demands of their roles as students, workers and carers and the guilt and stress they experienced as a result (Spacey et al., 2024). The SCRs in that study indicated lower than expected levels of wellbeing and reported persistent challenges around access to equitable HE experiences, poor treatment and stigmatising attitudes from some university staff and peers. Students often hid their caring responsibilities from the institution, fearing stigma and discrimination. Participants described a precarious journey through their education which relied more on the kindness of empathetic academics willing to 'bend the rules' than policies and formalised structures of support provided by institutions.

This paper reports the methodology and outcomes of a project which developed co-designed guidance for universities in addressing the challenges experienced by SCRs in higher education. Funded by the University of Lincoln Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund, the Care-Aware Pedagogy Project aimed to create a resource for supervisors, tutors and lecturers to improve their practice and provide a more inclusive academic experience for SCRs. This presentation will be of interest to any academic or professional support staff responsible for teaching or supervising university students, those responsible for developing teaching and assessment practices in HE contexts, researchers interested in student equity and students with experience of caring while studying.

OWEN WALKER ROOM

Julian Ayres

EVALUATING A RESILIENCE TRAINING PROGRAMME TO SUPPORT TRAINEE TEACHER RETENTION: A PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDY

This study, part of a professional doctorate, evaluated a resilience training intervention within the PGCE (Post-Compulsory Education and Training) programme at Wrexham University. It responded to the pressing issue of low retention among trainee and early-career teachers and explored how universities can prepare emotionally resilient professionals equipped for careers in public service.

Using a pragmatic mixed-methods design, the research assessed the impact of resilience training on retention, employment outcomes, and participants' ability to apply resilience strategies. A secondary aim was to evaluate Duckworth's (2016) Grit Questionnaire as a tool to identify trainees in need of additional support.

Participants with lower grit scores were invited to take part in an eight-month training programme incorporating reflective blogging, Bain *et al*.'s (2002) 5Rs structured writing, and hermeneutic dialogue circles. These aimed to develop emotional regulation, self-awareness, and peer support.

Quantitative data included grit scores, retention rates, and

employment outcomes. Qualitative insights were drawn from interviews and evaluative questionnaires. While the Grit Questionnaire had limited predictive value, it helped initiate reflective conversations. The training itself positively influenced participants' self-efficacy, identity, and coping skills. Most trainees remained on the course and transitioned into employment, often continuing to use the reflective strategies introduced.

The study offers a transferable, practice-based model for supporting resilience in initial teacher education. It advocates for embedding well-being and resilience into programme design, particularly in sectors facing structural pressures, and positions such training as a meaningful civic contribution by higher education institutions.

Helen Hooper, Mike Cole

WHAT DOES A HEADTEACHER LOOK LIKE? TEACHING TRAINEE TEACHERS ABOUT UNCONSCIOUS GENDER BIAS

Despite recognition of the importance of gender equity, a 'leaky pipeline' to leadership persists in teaching. Previous research demonstrates unconscious bias may be a barrier to equality as it can persist regardless of a general/organisational commitment to increasing diversity. This paper presents findings from a longitudinal project exploring trainee teacher perceptions and reactions to unconscious bias training. Training included a drawing task that challenged students to draw a headteacher. Students were invited to discuss the images they had drawn, including the gender and ethnicity portrayed. This resulted in some strong initial reactions following self-realisation of possible unconscious bias and lively student-led debate focussing on the possible impacts of unconscious biases on teachers, teaching practice and career progression.

Images contained rich data about the personal constructs of professionals held by students themselves and were analysed for a range of stereotypical features (including gender) and autostereotypes (stereotypes of one's own profession). A clear bias emerged in the gender of drawn professionals, no (0%) male student drew a female headteacher while 23% female students drew men. A general lack of diversity was also noted alongside distinct gender based autostereotypical tropes. These findings suggest subtle unconscious gender bias is inherent in students at the start of their teaching careers in the gender of leaders they imagine and depict. As disconnection between reality and perception is likely to impact on retention and career progression, we suggest raising awareness of unconscious bias, alongside opportunity for self-reflection at a formative stage is important for pre-professional identity development.

ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM

Sarah K. Anderson, Andrew James Davies, Pinky Jain

DUPLEXITY AND TENSEGRITY: RETHINKING COMPLEXITY AND SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is at a critical juncture, facing crises of financial sustainability, contested public value, and shifting policy demands. In this context, universities must reimagine how they advocate for their civic role and transformational potential, especially in defining and assuring quality. This paper proposes a new conceptual framework for understanding quality and evaluation in higher education, applying the principles of duplexity and tensegrity, originally developed in teacher education, to the broader sector. The Duplexity Model (Anderson et al., 2024) conceptualises the key tensions universities must navigate (e.g., such as standardisation vs. contextualisation, objectivity vs. subjectivity) not as dichotomies to be resolved, but as dualities to be balanced. The model invites a shift toward fair and contextually sensitive forms of institutional judgement, framed by accountability and quality. In parallel, the concept of tensegrity, drawn from architecture and biological systems, offers a metaphor for resilient institutional design, structures that maintain stability through balanced tension and compression. Applied to higher education, it provides a lens for understanding how institutions can remain adaptive and ethically grounded amid fiscal, political, and epistemic pressures.

Grounded in systems thinking and sustainability, this framework rejects narrow, metric-driven models of improvement. Instead, it promotes complexity-aware, future-facing approaches that centre fairness, adaptability, and civic responsibility. Anchored in SDG 4 on inclusive and quality education, the paper offers a timely and generative model for institutional judgement and governance. It will be of particular interest to those engaged in educational policy, quality assurance, and strategic planning in higher education.

Rachel Brooks

POST-BREXIT INFRASTRUCTURES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

The scholarship on international student mobility has, over recent years, been influenced by what Collins (2013) has called the 'infrastructural turn', highlighting a variety of structures that have facilitated the movement of students across educational borders for purposes of education. These have included educational agents, education fairs, and social networks, as well as universities themselves (Collins, 2013; Kleibert, 2022; Wang, 2022). In this talk, we show how, in the UK at least, a new type of infrastructure has emerged, closely linked to the changes wrought by Brexit and the UK's exit from the European Union's Erasmus+ mobility programme. These 'third party providers' are characterised by their focus on the provision of mobility opportunities of very short duration and, for the majority of organisations, their roots in the 'gap year' volunteering sector.

We demonstrate the impact such providers are having in reframing understandings of international student mobility – in terms of norms about duration, geography and content. In turn, these changes raise a number of ethical issues that the higher education sector may need to grapple with, not least the extent to which this new infrastructure provides an effective means of opening up access to more disadvantaged groups, and whether short periods of volunteering are an effective means of furthering the educational objectives of the Turing Scheme. To date, the latter point has not been a focus of debate in the UK higher education sector, perhaps because of the opacity rendered by labelling such provision as a 'summer school' or 'summer exchange'.

MACGREGOR ROOM

Sally Elton-Chalcraft

'COMMUNIVERSITY' – PLANNING AND MEASURING UNIVERSITY CIVIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Many academics feel increasingly dissatisfied with the progressive marketisation of university 'education' (Taberner, 2018). This paper outlines a 'Communiversity project' which moves towards a re conceptualisation of a university for every people and culture (Lessem, Adodo and Bradley, 2019).

Funded by the Church Universities, a group of lecturers from four HEIs developed an evaluative toolkit to assess the efficacy of a sample of projects located in schools, prisons, migrant immigration centres, health organisations, arts groups and charities (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2022). We highlighted issues and challenges, both methodological and logistical, and ways universities can increase participation in volunteering and community activities by demonstrating their deeper human value (Taberner, 2018). Three years on, the principal investigator reflects on the Communiversity project and reports on the sustainability of Communiversity ideology in the current educational climate.

The ideology of 'Communiversity' involves a 'breaking down the walls of the academy to let scholarship out and invite communities in' (Lessem, Adodo and Bradley, 2019). Project aims included a desire to 'encourage and enable more of our students to enact their university's founding Christian mission to authentically serve the vulnerable and marginalised, based on the community's expressed priorities... with a strong moral ethos' (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2022). Several of the 'Communiversity' projects described in the report (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2022) are still running, but not without huge investment of time and commitment from individual lecturers.

Karim Mustafa, Fiona Oster

REIMAGINING EDUCATION THROUGH INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING: ENHANCING QUALITY, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper presents a pedagogical innovation in teaching and learning at the University of Birmingham Dubai, centred on an inquiry-based learning (IBL) framework with the goal to promote interdisciplinary collaboration between biomedical science and business management students. Drawing on action research and experiential learning, the project empowers students to design original healthcare-related products and build corresponding business models, culminating in a cross-campus entrepreneurship competition.

The initiative directly addresses current debates around teaching and learning quality in higher education by shifting from passive, lecture-based instruction to active, student-led learning. By integrating real-world problem solving, cross-disciplinary teamwork, and AI-supported innovation, the project fosters critical and creative thinking, which are core graduate attributes increasingly demanded by industry.

Moreover, the programme contributes to the civic mission of the university by encouraging students to design solutions for public health access and affordability, thus aligning enterprise with social responsibility. These civic contributions are measured through student reflections, product feasibility reviews, and community engagement outcomes tied to the competition.

The IBL model also enhances student experience by increasing perceived course relevance, motivation, and employability. Preliminary evaluation indicates improved student performance, increased interest in entrepreneurship, and an overall gain in entrepreneurial skill acquisition. In tandem, the project has helped address challenges of internationalisation by fostering collaboration across campuses and disciplines, while establishing a replicable model for student innovation globally.

Finally, by embedding action research and ongoing collaborations, the initiative addresses academic precarity and identity by positioning educators as researcher-practitioners empowered to continually refine pedagogy through evidence-based practices.

Seminar Session 2
Thursday 4th September
16:45-17:45

HARRIS LECTURE THEATRE

Aidan Thompson and Ida Lubben

UNDERSTANDING THE VALUES OF SOCIAL SCIENTISTS

Public professions and human occupations continue to hold a level of trust with members of the public, with professionals expected to 'do the right thing' in their professional practice and their personal lives. This paper extends this professional ethics focus to academics and professionals working in the social sciences in Higher Education, specifically the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) at the University of Warwick.

This paper draws from a pilot study, funded by the Society and Culture Spotlight at the University of Warwick, on the values of social scientists in FSS. The paper considers which values – or strengths of character – are seen as important in the personal lives of academic and professional colleagues, the values that are of greatest importance to being a social scientist* (*encompassing academic, professional and student participants).

With a greater understanding of the values that drive social scientists to do their work, this can be applied across more disciplines and faculties of study, and drilled into more detail within sub-disciplines of social sciences. So, this paper presents a recommendation for more work that explores how such values are valenced, and the extent to which they underpin behaviours and actions in and outside of the workplace.

Sarah Whitehouse, Karan Vickers-Hulse, Malcolm Richards

CREATING SPACE FOR DIALOGUE

This presentation outlines an ongoing initiative, developed by Malcolm Richards and Dr Sarah Whitehouse, from the School of Education and Childhood at the University of the West of England (UWE) aimed at embedding anti-racist practices across the institution. The project engages staff and senior leadership in a critical process of reflection on their positionality, professional responsibilities, and the structural dimensions of racism within higher education. Central to this work is the introduction of Dialogic Circles—a structured, participatory approach designed to foster open, democratic dialogue among staff across the School of Education and Childhood. Throughout the academic year, participants engaged in five facilitated sessions where they explored the meanings and implications of anti-racist practice in relation to their roles, students' experiences, and the wider institutional culture. The Dialogic Circle model rests on principles of equity, collective inquiry, and relational accountability, aiming to create spaces for meaningful discussion without fear of blame or judgment. Establishing this culture of openness required careful planning and negotiation, particularly considering the discomfort and resistance that often accompany conversations about race and systemic injustice. Despite these challenges, the initiative has generated valuable insights into how institutions can move beyond performative gestures toward genuine, structural transformation. The presentation critically reflects on the affordances and limitations of this approach, highlighting the importance of sustained, dialogic engagement in fostering a shared commitment to anti-racism within educational settings.

OWEN WALKER ROOM

David Crighton, Will Shepherd

BEYOND RELUCTANCE: FAIRNESS, PERFORMATIVITY AND INTRAPRENEURIAL PRESSURES IN A MARKETISED HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

This paper presents findings from a qualitative study exploring how academic staff navigate intrapreneurial expectations within marketised UK higher education institutions. Drawing on Stephen Ball's conceptualisation of neoliberalism operating "out there" via policy and "in here" via institutional culture and self-regulation, the research examines how metrics and performance logics shape the conditions of academic work.

Interviews with staff at post-92 universities in Scotland and Wales explored perceptions of income generation, entrepreneurial skills, and institutional support. The findings suggest that while many lecturers exhibit creativity, agility, and innovation in their practice, these qualities are often deployed defensively — to protect pedagogic values or manage increasing workload — rather than in pursuit of institutional revenue.

Participants reported a gap between entrepreneurial rhetoric and the realities of support and resourcing, highlighting perceived unfairness in shifting institutional expectations. Performativity frameworks help explain how such pressures are internalised,

reshaping how academics understand their roles and value. The paper argues that while many staff use entrepreneurial qualities to enhance teaching and subject delivery, most resist adopting them in service of institutional income or branding. A small minority, however, actively embrace such expectations as part of their academic role.

This presentation outlines a new SES-funded phase of the project, extending this work into the English higher education system. With its more market-driven policy context and intensified emphasis on performance and competition, the English phase explores how regional policy differences shape academic perceptions of fairness, support, and institutional culture.

Richard Davies

BUILDING A REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FOR REALLY WIDENING PARTICIPATION

The Office for Students (OfS), as regulator of higher education in England, aims to support widening participation and student success. This paper addresses the tensions between these two agendas. It is grounded in two foundational assumptions: firstly, the view that education decisively shapes the life opportunities of individuals and communities; and secondly, that higher education ought to be accessible to those who can genuinely benefit from it rather than restricted solely to those who have demonstrated prior academic success. It explores the inherent tensions within contextual admissions policies and flexible qualification pathways designed to enhance participation, examining the unintended consequences arising from recent shifts in the OfS regulatory framework. These regulatory adjustments, by penalising programs with elevated withdrawal rates, effectively discourage higher education institutions from offering opportunities to students who deviate from traditional educational pathways.

Drawing on Fishkin's (2014) concept of 'opportunity pluralism', this paper argues against a narrow interpretation of educational attainment as merely credential-focused. Instead, it advocates a broader recognition of education's role in enabling individuals to pursue meaningful and personally valued lives, suggesting that higher education may not be universally necessary or beneficial. Consequently, the paper recommends the OfS should realign its regulatory approach to encourage diverse entry points and flexible progression routes, recognising that incomplete educational journeys are sometimes inevitable. Ultimately, the paper proposes policy adjustments prioritising genuine access to meaningful life opportunities over the mere achievement of academic credentials, thereby authentically broadening participation.

ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM

Paul Shrimpton

THE ORIEL ORIGINS OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN'S PASTORAL IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY

This paper examines what a 'positive student experience' meant two hundred years ago by drawing on the practice of John Henry Newman. Famed for his Idea of a University (1873), few realise that Newman was heavily involved in the practice of education, taking a

leading part in the reform of Oxford University during his years at a Fellow of Oriel (1822–45). Though the Idea is often taken as an exhaustive treatment of a subject, Newman's pastoral idea of a university is almost entirely missing. It can be found in his 'Rise and Progress of Universities'. This little-known volume drew upon his years as vice-principal of Alban Hall, Oxford (1825–26) and as a tutor at Oriel at (1826–31).

Central to Newman's approach is the assumption that education is highly relational. For him, 'An academical system without the personal influence of teachers upon pupils, is an arctic winter'. Personal influence is what gives any system its dynamism: the action of mind on mind, personality on personality. Along with two other Oriel tutors, Newman continued the 'educational revolution' begun by John Keble which meant taking an interest in the students, spending time with them at meals and on walks, and offering them extra guidance.

Newman's example challenges the current-day neglect of the pastoral dimension of education. His higher vision helps to save us from a reductionist and curtailed vision of humanity and helps us to see that the purpose of education is the promotion of the human person.

Maria Patricia Williams

THE CATHOLIC RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCE AND FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN NON-DENOMINATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN ROME 1887-1923

This paper aims to contribute to innovative thinking on (re)shaping the future of higher education, by exploring how students from faith communities can be supported at secular institutions of higher education. In Liberal Italy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, normal schools to train teachers came under state control. Staff were required to complete a three-year course at a prestigious state controlled, Istituto Superiore di Magistero in either Rome or Florence. The paper will share findings of a case study of the residential experience of Catholic female students attending the one in Rome between 1887 and 1923. They lived in a residence established by Frances Cabrini (1850-1917) and her Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It enabled students whose parents wished them to live in a Catholic home to access and participate in higher education. It was also an innovative way to prepare teachers for the Catholic community, complementing the students' secular, professional education. There were conferences led by eminent theologians. Cabrini gave input on Catholic pedagogy, and women working outside the home. Sisters who were native speakers, gave tutoring in foreign languages. Development of character and virtues, particularly strength and gentleness, was considered as important as intellectual achievement. This was promoted through observation and experience. The students gained the highest grades in the public examinations. Reference will be made to three long letters written to the students by Cabrini, as well as to student testimonies, a prospectus and record of a student performance.

Seminar Session 3
Friday 5th September
10:00-11:00

Helen Childerhouse

DEVELOPING A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ALL (HOME AND INTERNATIONAL) HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

The place of Higher Education within society is to provide transformative education for all students and educators who experience it. Enabling a university community to understand, empathise with, and contribute to our global context is fundamental to this transformation. Students and educators who can see their environments, at home and abroad, through the eyes of others, regardless of their backgrounds and prior experiences, are better equipped to contribute to a shared and mutually beneficial world. By equipping our learners and educators to broaden their own global perspectives and understanding, we are enabling them to develop their own roles as advocates and contributors to an intercultural and interconnected world. This transformation can be guided and developed within our classrooms through our pedagogical approach. The integration of internationalisation in pedagogical approaches can develop an outward- looking and purposeful role for everyone in our HE community. An Internationalisation Pedagogical Framework (IPF) has been designed to develop an approach to teaching to ensure a positive impact on the learning of all students, whether they are local, home students or international students. A strategy shaped by pedagogy will bring about thoughtful and reflective practice for educators and learners. The approaches and practises identified will promote broader knowledge, consideration and understanding for all those within Higher Education.

Robert Bowie

THE IDENTITY WAR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND DISSENT, AND THE TURBULENT TIMES FOR THE LAST ACADEMICS

There is not much space left for the academic, between the demands of the popular masses of students, and new normativities imposed under the aegis of quality. In 1938 Martin Heidegger said the scholar was gone, replaced by research man bouncing from grant to grant. In 1996 Bill Readings thought the *University* [is] *in Ruins* with T-shirts and logo encrusted desk items. In 2001 Richard Roberts bemoaned the *end of the university and the last academic*, as managerial fiat with mechanized quality replaced living in truth.

In our times those who bemoan our institutions blame indoctrinated intellectual cancelling student hoards, backed by ideologically captured university systems, with quasi-religious tests to weed out wrong thinkers who doubt the new sacred righteousness.

Some flee academia, finding social media spaces to monetize unthinkable thoughts. Others constitute a new rebel academy, with identities radicalized by dissent and the pursuit of truth. They are newly bolstered by courts and a university regulator both less

willing to give up on tolerance, both fining an already economically crippled sector.

One side seeks to unlearn knowledge, the other battles to restore it. Both claim ultimate virtue. What advice should we give those last academics who must navigate this new identities war while simultaneously dodging the rightsizing scythe?

OWEN WALKER ROOM

Helen Hooper, Linda Allin, Emma Anderson, Kate Black, Lynn Mcinnes, Susan Mathieson, Libby Orme, Roger Pennlington

CULTURE SHOCK AND THE GENDERED TEACHING EXPERIENCES OF NEW ACADEMICS

Findings from a collaborative research project underpinned by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) are presented. CHAT is a theory of 'expansive learning' and transformation through collaborative reflection on contradictions within 'activity systems', focussed on socially situated learning through engaging in everyday tasks - in this case how new academics learn to teach. Research was undertaken in a UK University by a group of academic developers who aimed to better understand the teaching experiences of new academics, in order to improve induction to teaching and learning. The 'activity system' for induction to teaching was collaboratively mapped and used to scaffold semi-structured interview questions with 12 volunteers (2 male, 9 female,1 trans-female; 5 were from the UK, 3 from the EU, and 4 were international; 2 new staff from 6 academic departments). Data analysis focussed on surfacing typical patterns of experience and identifying key contradictions and tensions between elements of the 'activity system', within and between departments, as the basis for collaborative discussion and proposals for change to the way academics are inducted into teaching across the University.

The paper will focus on the tensions and contractions experienced by 'the subject' of the 'activity system'- academics new to teaching - stemming from changes in recruitment to appoint research-active, younger colleagues. Findings include gendered teaching experiences and the extent, nature and impact of the teaching and learning 'culture shock', such as perceived 'power imbalance' resulting from student feedback. Reflections on the 'expansive learning' promoted by researcher engagement with CHAT will also be shared.

Wanwei Nie

FUTURES IN FLUX: STUDENT AGENCY AND THE ETHICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRECARIOUS TIMES

In the context of escalating geopolitical tensions and heightened global uncertainties, transnational higher education (TNE) has emerged as a critical space where students reimagine their futures in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. This paper draws on qualitative interviews with students at a Sino-UK branch campus to explore how they enact agency through future-oriented practices amid precarity and shifting geopolitical tensions. Drawing on Appadurai's (2013) notion of the "future as a cultural fact," the paper treats the future not as a linear destination but as a terrain of cultural work, shaped by imagination, aspiration, and affect. "The future" as a lived, methodological lens through which students

make meaning, recalibrate aspirations, and mobilise hope (Sellar & Gale, 2011). Students' narratives reveal how they navigate contradictions between institutional promises of global citizenship and the lived experience of structural constraints, such as limited mobility and uncertain job markets.

The findings suggest that students mobilise their identities not just to survive instability, but to actively author futures with meaning and direction. By centring student voices, the paper positions transnational campuses not merely as sites of knowledge transmission, but as arenas where global scripts are interpreted, contested, and reworked. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates about agency, belonging, and the ethics of higher education —that is, the moral and institutional responsibilities of universities to support students not only as learners, but as meaning-makers navigating global precarity (Walker, 2006).

ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM

Tola Amodu

FOSTERING STUDENT HOPE AND RESILIENCE

Resilience underpins current inclusive education policies within the Higher Education sector. Maximizing opportunities for student success and finding ways of building capacity for underrepresented groups, is integral to institutional survival with the fostering student resilience being but one part. A number of students continue to feel isolated however, often by reason of cultural or economic disadvantage. Despite showing significant potential initially, they are often the most reluctant to seek support, unlike their more "privileged" peers.

Barriers to the fulfilment of student potential and success, point to deficits in hope, and the presentation considers how educators may create climates of hopefulness within the Academy, drawing on students' perceptions of their own situation to navigate the problem.
The presentation considers how to through the lens of hope, we might approach creating a more positive student experience, particularly in terms of fostering greater resilience and developing a more inclusive community of practice (Etienne and Wenger, 1998), using as a case study the steps taken by a small Law School during and post the pandemic. Although focusing on this context, the observations are relevant to many other disciplines.

Feng Su, Margaret Wood, Andrew Pennington

IS GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (GENAI) A POSITIVE FORCE TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION? IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSITIES' ROLES IN THE PUBLIC REALM

Much of the current discourse about generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has concerned the problems and possibilities this new technology presents for higher education. In our view, there are foundational and existential questions raised by the development of GenAI which require us to reflect critically on not only the veracity of some of the claims made for the ability of AI to 'think' (Mims, 2025) but also the implications for the civic role of the university

contribution to the public good and the democratic health of the public realm.

Critical reflection suggests the following concerns - firstly, the implications of the control and ownership of GenAI by the 'big tech;' corporations and the models of corporate governance, social responsibility and political influence they embody. Secondly, the implications for the generation and ownership of knowledge underpinning GenAI and the underlying assumptions of corporate control of creative commons and intellectual property it depends on. Thirdly, the implications of the appropriation of increasingly scarce resources of water and power to fuel the physical infrastructure of AI and the possible distortions of public policy and strategy this might entail.

Drawing on Gadamer's work (2013), we will reflect critically on the centrality of 'the primacy of the question'. Also, as Nixon (2008: 11) has suggested that 'universities need to restore a public language of education and learning which has the capacity to affirm and construct an educated citizenry'. We argue that GenAI currently does not have the capacity to achieve these educational goals.

Seminar Session 4
Friday 5th September
11:30-12:30

HARRIS LECTURE THEATRE

Achala Gupta

NAVIGATING A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF STAFF VIEWS ON USING GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Our education systems have been continually shaped by digital interventions, but the nature and extent of the reconfigurations that are based on generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) have perturbed the higher education (HE) sector and its envisioned future. Grounded conceptually in this ongoing discourse, this presentation will explore the educational opportunities and challenges presented through using GenAI vis-à-vis contemporary teaching and learning practices in HE and analyse how staff views on these vary by discipline. It draws on data produced through a 2023 British Educational Research Association-funded exploratory study that involved interviews and focus groups with staff members (educators and experts in academic integrity policies and practices) across disciplines at a UK-based university. All research participants acknowledged that the invention and rapid expansion of GenAI present significant opportunities for educators to reconsider and adapt their approaches to teaching and assessment. The majority of participants highlighted GenAI-related educational opportunities, such as reducing the time and effort required for specific tasks (e.g., calculations and coding). However, they also viewed GenAI as potentially disruptive to existing quality assurance practices. Additionally, there were significant disciplinary differences in how research participants articulated the opportunities arising from the use of GenAI. Specifically, GenAI use was regarded as unhelpful for

practice-based learning, teaching, and assessment, whereas its use was supported for accessing knowledge produced in a foreign language to enhance arguments. These findings reveal often under-substantiated themes and context-specific contentions related to GenAI in teaching and learning practices, culminating in vital considerations for the future of higher education.

Bev Hancock-Smith, Zara Hooley, Kylie Baldwin

FROM GATEKEEPERS TO GUIDES: RECONSTRUCTING ACADEMIC IDENTITIES IN THE AI ERA

The wide scale emergence of text-generative AI has shifted the landscape of Higher Education learning and teaching in nearly all disciplines (Freeman, 2025; Malström et al., 2023). Concerns about academic integrity and authentic assessment have led to deeper questions concerning the tools' impact on critical thinking and academic literacies (Fischer et al 2024; Moorehouse et al 2023; Luo 2024). Whilst many academics welcome the potential of emerging technologies to enhance teaching and engagement, many also express concerns about the future relevance of their roles (Folabit and Jita, 2024). With students now able to access vast amounts of information at any time, the traditional view of educators as knowledge provider is becoming an outdated and untenable position. Key concerns reported include anxiety about the future of their profession, issues around academic integrity, and the negative impact on student learning (Verano-Tacoronte, et al., 2025). Whilst some academics may take a reactive approach in policing the use of generative AI (Hu et al., 2025), others adopt a more developmental stance; equipping students with the critical skills necessary to navigate the data deluge (Glover, et al., 2018).
This presentation investigates the evolving attitudes of academics towards the effect of generative AI on the purpose of Higher Education. Drawing on semi-structured qualitative interviews with five academics responsible for academic integrity, it explores how their roles and responsibilities are shifting, and the subsequent impact on their professional identity.

OWEN WALKER ROOM

Ella Taylor-Smith, Helen Charlton

KEY NEW ROLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION APPRENTICESHIPS: EXPLORING BOUNDARY-SPANNING IDENTITIES OF TRIPARTITE REPRESENTATIVES

Higher education (HE) apprenticeships are a growing part of UK provision, offering innovative routes to social mobility and university-employer collaboration. At the heart of their delivery is an emergent, under-researched role: the Higher Education Tripartite Representative (HE-TR). These professionals mediate the relationship between apprentice, employer, and university, supporting learning, wellbeing, and quality assurance. Despite their significance, HE-TRs lack clear role definitions, professional development pathways, and shared models of best practice.

This SES-funded project investigates the boundary-spanning identities of HE-TRs working across four UK nations, where devolved education policy results in divergent role enactments. Drawing on identity negotiation theory, HE-TRs are conceptualised as liminal

professionals navigating institutional, regulatory, and disciplinary boundaries.

The research employs a two-phase qualitative design. Phase 1 involved rich picture workshops in three partner universities, using visual and narrative methods to surface experience and create anonymised professional personas. Phase 2 built on these personas through focus groups at six additional universities across the UK, interrogating how HE-TRs manage identity tensions and collaborate effectively across contexts. The methodology—combining rich pictures with persona-based inquiry—offers a novel lens on role formation and identity work in apprenticeship contexts.

This paper shares insights into the challenges and contributions of HE-TRs, with implications for professionalisation, sustainability, and enhanced support for apprentices. The research addresses a significant gap, offering conceptual and practical tools to inform policy, practice, and workforce development in HE apprenticeships.

Nicola Robertson, David Lewin

WHAT'S THE 'USE' IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

The 'usefulness' of Higher Education is a recurring topic of discussion across the political and social spectra in the UK. Such debates are powerful given that they result in decisions that have pedagogical and economic ramifications. Certain beliefs around usefulness are used to justify difficult decisions in response to the precarious financial situations in which many universities in the UK now find themselves.

Perceptions of use, however, are not static. Citing the example of The University of Strathclyde, it was established as a place of 'useful learning' when it was originally conceived by John Anderson in 1796, referring not only to its practical and economic benefits to society, but also to moral and intellectual development. That Strathclyde now envisions itself as a technological university shows how conceptualisations of use are prone to evolving, and it is this evolution, across the past, present and future of Higher Education, that our project, funded by the Society for Educational Studies, intends to investigate.

Our project hopes to offer a more rounded consideration of any perceived 'use' in HE that extends beyond the pervasive idea that universities are only useful to the extent that they ensure the marketability of their student body or are able to provide immediate impact through 'spinning out' new technologies. If (Re)Shaping the Future of Higher Education is a goal, then forging conceptual understandings among scholars, not only about 'use', but perhaps also about education, may be a reasonable first step.

ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM

Aidan Gillespie

CATHOLIC AND MUSLIM STUDENT TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON UNIVERSITIES AS SPACES FOR ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Although there is much research on the ethnic and racial diversity and communal experiences in universities in England, there is little research examining how Christian and Muslim students enrolled on ITE courses experience university, and in particular the nexus between the requirements to meet the Core Competency Frameworks and the wider academic experience of university life. The pilot study, currently underway, seeks to understand how students of two specific religious traditions understand how universities provide spaces for not only their academic and professional development, but also act as a forum from which to explore, interrogate and develop their personal, political and religious identities. Situated in the perspective where education is a political act, this study examines how students see how ITE courses articulate or mute this perspective against the backdrop of local, national or international concerns. Alongside this an examination of ITE student experiences of receiving Religious Education at both school and university contexts forms part of the study to ascertain if RE is reflective of students' lived experiences and what can be drawn from this. The study is a mixed methods approach undertaken between Leeds Trinity University and Birmingham City University and works with primary education ITE students.

Enze Guo, Hao Wu, Peng Zhang

THE DOCTORAL JOURNEY AS DECOLONIAL PRAXIS: SELF-FORMATION OF GLOBAL SOUTH STUDENTS IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

Previous research on Global South doctoral students in the UK has mainly situated their experiences within adaptationist paradigms, emphasising cultural adjustment and assimilation into Western academic norms. Such studies often depict students as passive recipients, overlooking their agency and the transformative potential inherent in the doctoral journey. To address this gap, this study draws on Paulo Freire's concept of praxis and Simon Marginson's theory of self-formation to explore how Global South doctoral students actively negotiate their academic journeys within the established hierarchies of Western academia. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 22 doctoral students from the Global South at an elite UK university, the study conceptualises their self-formation as a dynamic, three-stage process: Internalised Prestige, Reflexive Repositioning, and Transformative Engagement. While students initially internalise the symbolic authority of Western academia, they gradually develop critical awareness through lived encounters with marginalisation and institutional barriers, ultimately engaging in transformative practices that challenge dominant norms and seek to reshape spaces of knowledge production. This ongoing process is characterised by negotiation, ambivalence, and incremental change. By foregrounding Global South doctoral students' agency and the context-specific challenges they face, this research offers fresh insights into current discussions about epistemic justice and the decolonisation of higher education in the Global North.

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