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A Will to Connect

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Centre for Higher
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GW's stance

- Economics of higher education has to be approached against the horizon of society and the roles it plays in society
- Higher education not sharply separable from the rest of education
- Ideas of higher education reflect broader ideas of society
- Ideas of, and issues in, higher education are value-laden
- Unintended consequences play a large part in shaping higher education

A wide horizon

Serious work on the economics of higher education has to be conducted against a very broad horizon:

- Government policy on higher education
- Markets in higher education
- Human capital theory and manpower planning
- Institutional income generation
- Private/ public boundary
- The labour market and employability
- Costs of higher education and its financing
- Institutional competition and stratification
- Mass higher education and matters of equity
- Academic profession

Leverhulme Programme of Study

Its 11 volumes included:

- Institutional change
- Access
- The labour market
- The arts
- Professionalism
- Accountability
- Resources
- Structure and Governance

A critique of markets

‘The main weakness of the market model results from its possible effects on the supply of educational services ... Unrestricted competition can lead to reductions in quality as institutions indulge in price competition and hard-selling tactics.’

(1984: ‘The Economic Approach’, in B R Clark, *Perspectives on Higher Education*)

- Unintended consequences of national policies
- Such as markets – even pernicious effects

Effects of policy on the breadth of disciplines

- Much angst these days about the place of the humanities (Nussbaum etc)
- Gareth in 1989:
 - ‘... the main danger of market financing is that it will become progressively more difficult for higher education institutions to teach broadly cultural subjects or to teach other subjects in a way that does not promise an immediate economic return’.
 - (‘Prospects for higher education finance’, in C Ball and H Eggins, *Higher Education into the 1990s*)
- Role of higher education in the formation of culture – both society and individuals.

A concern for intellectual life – but not without limits

‘... any government that attempts to use its control of the purse as a way of controlling academic life risks having a very mediocre intellectual elite and graduates who are unable to take initiatives.’

But:

‘A university that divorces itself entirely from society rapidly becomes an irrelevant ivory tower; [but] equally one that only responds to outside pressures cannot perform its proper function of disinterested scholarship, research and criticism ... [However,] there is no single correct balance between the two extremes.’

GW – neither a believer in free markets, nor heavy state steering, nor complete university autonomy.

GW's basic position (?)

'It is in fact impossible to separate particular ideas of a good society from the idea of education, including higher education as a public good ... My own starting point is Durkheim's proposition that educational systems reflect dominant ideologies ... Thus education cannot be theorised in isolation from theories of the wider society of which it is part ...'

*'Reflections on the Debate', in Filippakou, O and Williams, G (eds) *Higher Education as a Public Good*.*

- Higher education reflects dominant ideologies (+Marx?)
- Idea of good society and higher education (and education in general) as a public good intertwined.

On the public and the private

- No sharp division between what is public and what is private
- ‘Higher education has the attributes of both public and private goods.’
- And if it is said that higher education is a public service, in relation to which public is that said? ‘Which public should decide?’
- And then, ‘the question arises of whether the public benefits, economic, social or cultural, are equivalent in all the activities that come under the heading “higher education”’.

Implications

GW's work:

- Implicitly critiques work that is confined to single perspectives and even disciplines

(2) The uncertainty of quality enhancement

- This means more responsibility has to be placed on institutions and on course teams and on teachers
- This will generate debate and even conflict as to what higher education is for,
 - as to the purposes of courses and
 - as to proper forms of teaching and the pedagogical relationship
- We shall be in the realm of unpredictable change
- All of this is controversial – but it is, after all, among the purposes of universities to be engaged in controversy!



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