

“Be the arrow, not the target” was the title that the critical theorist, the late Raymond Williams, gave to his final address on communications...“The challenge we face is that we must confront as erroneous a prevalent perception that the necessary focus of higher education must be on that which is utilitarian and immediately applicable. Such a view sees the primary objective of the university, and those who study within it, as being in preparation for a specific role within the labour market, often at the cost of the development of life-enhancing skills such as creativity, analytical thinking and clarity in written and spoken expression. These are the skills that will be essential to the citizens of the future to make informed choices about life-work balance, about what constitutes survival and consumption, and what is meant by human flourishing, solidarity or humanity itself.’

(The President of Ireland, Michael Higgins to the European Universities Association on the future of universities: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20160412194215660>:

Higher Education institutions serve society in many ways, through pure and applied research and speculative thinking and the transmission of culture. They have a role to speak truth to power. They are a source of technical and vocational training and of broad and deep education. They promote the creation of what Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder of the vast Brac movement, called ‘enlightened elites.’ Higher Education is a means of life-long learning, enabling equality and inclusion and enlivening people to contribute meaningfully to society. The institutions have a role in the tradition of Rabindranath Tagore, who called for ‘unity in diversity’, where the university is a ‘nest where the world makes its home’.

Appreciation for much of what the draft statement says. I think there should be greater recognition of the valuable contribution made by many support staff alongside faculty.

We should challenge much of the basis of academic collaborative partnerships between developing and developed countries. The Director of SOAS, London University, has repeatedly drawn attention to the need for genuine, mutual partnership, which builds capacity in developing countries rather than often contributing to brain drain with a one-sided flow of talented students to the dominant partner.

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/v-c-overseas-student-recruitment-weakening-developing-world>

We should learn from each other internationally – the good practice, mistakes and false starts. The UK higher education system is being reduced into over-emphasis on short term employment outcomes and graduate starting salaries as a measure of effectiveness. Facing the challenges of a digital age, we should never lose sight of the richness of education and the role of the universities. There is a moving story in the Bible of the night when God visits the new King Solomon in a dream and promises that he will grant Solomon whatever he wishes. And what does Solomon ask for? He asks for wisdom. God replies that he is pleased with Solomon since he could have asked for wealth, long life or the death of his enemies but he asked for wisdom and God responds by giving Solomon everything - wisdom and wealth. That is what higher education is

ultimately for - the search for wisdom and knowledge at all levels that also opens the way to wealth or economic prosperity. If we overly stress the short term – graduate employment skills relevant for now - and we neglect deeper education and longer-term development, then, ironically, we may lose greater opportunities for the creation of wealth and economic development and impoverish society.

This is written as a personal view and not in an official capacity and is based on a previous article by Dave Dowland

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