UCL

Higher Education Authority Forward-Look Forum

What is the Role of Research in Higher Education?

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Two views of university research

- John Henry Newman (Dublin, 1852)
  The <u>Idea</u> of a University

- Clark Kerr (Harvard, 1963)
  The <u>Uses</u> of the University

Plan of presentation

1. Research in universities in historical context

2. New concepts / patterns of knowledge production

3. Role(s) of research in 21st-century universities

4. Research assessment - & national, institutional and professional strategies

5. Final thoughts….

Research in universities 1850-2015

- Modernity (secularism, liberalism..) & modernisation (professions, technology..)

- Postwar university and 'big science'

- Workforce needs & applications of science

- Universities and 'clever cities' (regions..)

- 'Entrepreneurial' universities in the global (high-tech) economy

New patterns of knowledge production

❏ HARD: Triple Helix (of State, industry and university)

❏ SOFT: 'Mode 2' knowledge: distributed / reflexive knowledge generation

Multiple roles of research

1. Disciplines, professions and teaching

2. Applications and impact

3. 'Pushing back the frontiers'

4. Reputations and funding

1. Disciplines and teaching

➢ Building subjects (academic & professional, theories and content)

➢ University teaching 'at the cutting edge' (active researchers as teachers)

➢ Renewing the academic profession (PhDs, post-docs…)

2. Applications and impact

➢ Putting research to use (dissemination and applications)

➢ Research in the 'real world' (networks & partnerships)

➢ Commercialisation & technology transfer

➢ Regional development & 'clever cities'

3. 'Pushing back the frontiers'

- ➢ Critical enquiry & 'thinking the unthinkable'
- ➢ Paradigms shifts & 'normal' science
- ➢ Science, scholarship and civilisation

4. Reputation & funding

➢ 'World-class' universities & global rankings

➢ Income generation

- State funding (selective funding initiatives)

- Other public funding (research councils, Europe)

- Partnerships with industry

Irresistible rise of research assessment ?

- Accountability & targeting (funding who does the research)

- Selective funding ('world-class' / 'key' / research universities and/or mission differentiation)

- Policy steers (priorities / themes, sectors, modes…)

Research funding strategies

- National strategies (light-touch – *Excellenz* initiative, heavy-touch – RAE/REF in UK)

- Linking research, development & innovation strategies

- Institutional priorities – top-down or collegial, narrow-focused or broad comprehensive..?)

Institutional / professional strategies

- Concentration (centres-of-excellence) or breadth (teaching, new areas…)?
- Separating research & teaching structures (and careers)?

  BUT what about:

  ➢ Young researchers?

  ➢ 'Research-lite' teaching?

Ways forward

- STANDING BACK (a little): universities as one of <u>several</u> players in knowledge networks

- KNOWLEDGE FACTORIES: universities as <u>key</u> players in integrated innovation systems

Final thoughts - & questions...

- Are top-down coordinated research & innovation policies better than more bottom-up 'open' strategies?

- Is it better to have as many 'world-class' universities as possible or to build networks of regional institutions to make research / technology widely available?