Higher Education Authority Forward-Look Forum

What is the Role of Research in Higher Education?

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Two views of university research

- Clark Kerr (Harvard, 1963) The *Uses* 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 several players in knowledge networks
- KNOWLEDGE FACTORIES: universities as key 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?