Framing turbulence in the academy : UK planning academics in a period of change

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ABSTRACT

Higher education in the UK is undergoing a process of significant transformation involving major changes in the roles of academics, including planning academics. The argument of this paper is that these changes can be usefully understood within an institutionalist framework as changes that have implications for the identity and roles of planning academics and the nature of planning education. Within this framework, influencing change requires understanding institutional traditions. The paper begins the task of assessing how familiar the academy is with traditions relating to higher education, with a view to initiating a more fruitful engagement with broader changes in the future.

Introduction

This is a paper about the UK planning academy within a context of institutional turbulence. Yet the changes and ethos it describes have some resonance in very many countries, especially north America and northern Europe (eg Burawoy, 2011; Larner and Le Heron, 2003; Sullivan and Matthews, 2008). It is widely acknowledged that British universities are in a period of significant change, and that this involves a recasting of their purposes and values. Some of the language is apocalyptic, and there is no doubting the seriousness with which many view the issues at stake (Collini,2012; Holmwood,-2011; Shore, 2008). This is the latest of a series of such periods since the 1960s, and now, as then, it is one where university systems in many countries are being questioned in similar, though not identical, ways. The uneven nature of changes, the lack of any single cause of change, and the differences between and even within the myriad institutions which populate the landscape of higher education in any developed country, adds to the dangers of simplistic generalising about what is happening (Larner and Le Heron, 2003; McLennan et al, 2008). It is clear, though, that very many universities in very many countries are being subjected to broadly similar pressures and demands, are tending to respond within relatively narrow ranges of options, and are acutely aware of what other institutions – especially those which they may regard as comparators/competitors – are doing[i].As a consequence, a discussion of the UK planning academy will have something to offer an international audience.

A generally complex picture in relation to universities may be even more complicated in planning schools; these are affected by changes within higher education, but also have to be responsive to developments in planning, for which they are preparing their students (or at least a good proportion of their students). In the1970s, for example, many UK planning schools began to regard a PhD as a standard requirement for their new lecturers in line with trends in the humanities and social sciences in British universities (Becher and Trowler, 2001,p 134; Thomas, 1981); this had implications for the recruitment of lecturers with

direct experience of practice. Moreover, it was argued that it marked a shift from recruiting lecturers who regarded the planning school and professional practice as two settings for the same professional activity (planning) to recruiting lecturers who regarded themselves as academics who had an interest and some expertise in planning (Thomas, 1981). In a phrase, it marked a shift in the professional and work-place identity of at least some planning academics (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002). Yet a recent survey of UK planning academics found that close to 60% identified themselves as planners (Ellis et al, 2010, 49). Moreover, many non-academic professions – and the UK Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is an example – still expect that a significant proportion of the staff of professional schools will be members of the professional body. One might expect that this can only complicate their responses to change in a university's demands upon them.

Significant changes in higher education can also have potential implications for the content of professional curricula. For example, Schön (1987) suggests that professionalism be regarded as a form of artistry; and he argues that appropriate models for professional education can be found in the educational traditions of developing competence in the arts. Central to education along these lines is the practicum ('a setting designed for … learning a practice', Schön, 1987, 33). In this setting students work together on projects of various kinds. In Schön's view, a professional education along these lines will run against the grain of important features of then contemporary US higher education, especially the research universities, not least because the practicum is not best taught by research-active lecturers who are bringing their research to the classroom. Other dissonances Schön points to also have resonance in some accounts of current changes in UK universities, for example, 'the current mood of vocationalism and consumerism among students ….' (Schön, 1987, 313; cf Boden and Nerada, 2010) or the disproportionate amount of effort, time and hence commitment required of student involvement in a practicum compared to the now-standard curricular units (modules, semesters). This may lead to student disquiet as well as institutional resistance (Schön, 1987, 310 ff; cf Erault, 1994, 10ff). Whatever the merits, or otherwise, of Schön's argument it makes the point powerfully that different kinds of university 'missions' and contexts will

facilitate or inhibit particular approaches to professional education. It is important, therefore that planning academics are able to foresee the broad implications, both shorter and longer term, of actual and proposed changes and trends. Beyond this it is desirable that planning academics try to influence the changes. It will be suggested that this requires them to have a way of framing the changes that will orient their actions, and a vocabulary that will resonate with the kinds of discussions and debates being conducted and allow them, as necessary, to sketch alternatives.

Systematic discussion of these changes within the planning academy is limited, and in the UK largely confined to case studies (Thomas, 2005; Allen and Imrie, 2010). The terms of reference of the RTPI's recent commissioned study of planning education (Ellis et al, 2010) allowed it to note, but not question, the trends in UK higher education. As a consequence, it did not investigate the kinds of frameworks within which the planning academy viewed the changes going on around it and within it, nor did it probe the potentially sensitive question of how familiar planning academics were with the traditions of thought, and the terms of contemporary debates, about universities.

Consequently, this paper has two key objectives. First, it makes more precise one helpful way of understanding the changes that are taking place in UK higher education, namely, as radical institutional change that has at its heart recasting the professional identities of academics. This can have implications for the curriculum of planning education, how it is taught, and more broadly the institutional expectations of planning academics, though it is not the purpose of this paper to examine these outcomes in detail. The broadly institutionalist analysis that the paper develops emphasises the significance of 'traditions' (understood as ways of viewing/understanding the institution and its environment) in contesting and legitimising institutional change. As well as being used (explicitly and implicitly), these traditions form a reservoir of ideas and perspectives that may be drawn on and may have resonance in contesting institutional change. Thus if planning academics have some understanding of contemporary and historic ideas about the nature of higher education and vocational education this will be an important resource in their interventions within struggles about institutional change. This is not to say that any and every

planning academic need be an educational theorist; nor does it imply that practical academic experience is somehow secondary to 'book-learning' about university education. It is just pointing out that, as with planning itself, discussions of fundamental nature and purpose (such as what are we are trying or wanting to do, and why, in our professional lives), will typically be deepened by an awareness of traditions of thought on such matters – in this case about universities (and vocational education within them). Indeed, most contributions to discussions will – knowingly or not – use the terms developed in these intellectual traditions; but doing so knowingly allows for a more reflective and potentially critical input into discussions. In times of great, and contested, change, this is even more important, as it would be for any professional making a serious contribution to broader questions about the nature and purpose of her or his occupation.

The paper's second main objective follows from the importance of familiarity with 'traditions' – it is to establish, through survey findings, how much familiarity there is among planning academics with influential ideas and models of the nature and purpose of higher education. This provides a base-line from which the members of the planning academy may choose to develop their understandings of their own higher educational and broader societal context with a view to maximising their influence over change. The conclusion of the paper is that UK planning academics are not as well-equipped as they might be, in terms of traditions of thought about the nature and purpose of universities, for intervening in contemporary debates. This does not mean that planning academics are in a worse position than academics at large; nor that they need a knowledge of traditions of thought in order to teach or research effectively on a day to day basis. But by their nature, major institutional changes are not day to day events, and the resources needed to intervene effectively in them are of a different kind.

The next section outlines, and interprets, the key changes that have been occurring in UK universities in recent decades within an institutionalist framework.

Framing recent changes in UK higher education

That there have been huge changes in UK universities in recent decades is widely agreed, though it is misleading to suggest that all universities are uniformly following a template for reform, be it a global or national one. The individuals and organisations in higher education have exercised agency, albeit generally not under circumstances of their own choosing, and it is this possibility to influence change that makes it so important that members of the planning academy develop an analytical framework for understanding trends in universities and a reservoir of ideas and principles that can inspire discussions of options and possibilities. The result appears to be broad patterns and similarities in what has been emerging in universities, with local variations. Two of these trends, sometimes but not always interacting, have been especially influential in shaping the lived experience of being part of the contemporary UK university.

The first is the increasing influence in universities of what has been termed in relation to the public sector more generally 'new management' or 'new public management' (NPM)(e.g. Henkel, 1998; Shore, 2008;Pollitt, 2013). This approach to managing has variants (Deem and Brehony, 2005), but centrally involves, (1) the definition of corporate goals independently of the vocabulary/interests of any given service department or profession; (2) the defining of how service departments or professions might help achieve these goals by the setting of indicators according to which performance would be measured (Deem, 2004). Its proponents argue that NPM forces professions and departments to think about what their work is contributing to a broader goal, and also facilitates accountability and transparency by making it clear how well they are performing.

Today, central to the management of most UK universities is a system of performance measures which have necessitated the construction of academic roles as collections of discrete measurable activities. The measurement of performance is overseen by a large bureaucracy, within which many academics have found new managerial roles (Deem, 2004). One consequence of this is that as a profession academics (including planning academics) have become fragmented into a number of roles – specialist teacher, researchers, managers, and roles which combine elements of all these (Shattock,2001 ; Ellis et al, 2010, 49).

A second trend in higher education has heightened the significance of NPM. This is the gradual, sometimes erratic and contradictory, but overall clear trend towards the loosening of national planning of the system of universities and its replacement by a system involving more competition between, and financial responsibility on the part of, individual universities (Henkel, 1998). The model of the provision of university education that is currently in place is a familiar one within UK, especially English, public (and ex-public) services : first, education is re-defined as a service to be consumed (Rustin, 2016); competition between service-providers is seen as helping drive up standards; therefore, service-users, in this case students, should be encouraged to expect as wide a choice as is practically possible of service providers, and be given the necessary information to exercise an informed choice among the providers (Vidler and Clarke, 2005). In recent years, as an aid to informed choice between universities a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been identified which it is claimed relate to teaching quality and other concerns of students such as 'employability', and what is called in the jargon ubiquitous in UK universities at present, 'the student experience'. Many have pointed out that these KPIs amount to a definition of an ideologically-loaded and contestable conception of what constitutes a good university education, and of what the role of universities should be (e.g. Collini,2012; Evans,2004). Yet the brute fact remains that government policy requires that these KPIs be made easily accessible to prospective students, who are encouraged to take them seriously, alongside influential league tables of university performance produced by private organisations such as national newspapers.

It would be misleading to make the unqualified statement that higher education in the UK has become a market-place, but over at most twenty-five years the higher education system in the UK has been radically changed from a state system of research and teaching institutions planned and managed by a public agency, and still feeling its way from elite education to universal education (Henkel, 1998) into one where government sets a broad policy framework, and provides basic funding, but individual universities must compete hard for a substantial proportion of the funding (research monies and student fees) that will allow them to continue in existence or expand. These circumstances have provided a rationale for the

consolidation and further development of managerial structures associated with NPM within universities. The more a university is expected, or required, to act as a competitive unit, the more concerned the senior management of a university is likely be that all aspects of the university's activities are contributing to, and certainly not detracting from, its competitiveness. NPM, and its KPIs, appears to provide some important tools for achieving this. KPIs have come to shape (perhaps dominate) academics' lives These indicators are not generally derived directly from some of the more traditional sources of changes in academia, such as the internal dynamic of a discipline, or – in the case of a professional school, like a planning school – the relationship of school to the profession it is preparing students for, and perhaps researching into and with. Rather, the indicators are set with reference to the corporate goals of the university, which in turn respond to key elements of the external environment such as governmental priorities or even political 'mood music', the wishes of major funders (especially of research), and the components of indices used to construct influential league tables of universities and their subjects. Thus the form that academic work takes can be increasingly dictated by the needs of the university; for example, it is the universities that are now emphasising to any would-be researcher the significance of building in 'impact' into their research proposals, thus inevitably skewing the nature of what research is prioritised by researchers themselves. The consequences of the corporate action can be very direct for planning education – for example, planning schools may be candidates for closure apparently because that helps meet a university's corporate objectives, even though the school may perform a valuable function as defined within a different perspective on the nature and purpose of planning education (Dewar, 2004).

These changes make new demands on academics. They are being required to think of themselves and many aspects of their work in new ways. The significance of a potential reconstruction of work-based identity is attested to by the apparently widespread use in universities of the techniques for promoting 'identity regulation' of the kind analysed in Alvesson and Wilmott (2002), such as corporate newsletters and messages (Thomas, 2005); increasing emphasis on 'staff development' in order to promote changing

practices (e.g. McArthur, 2013, pp 80ff; Nichols, 2001), and directly defining what the academic should be. But if this account describes some key changes, there remains the task of how we might analyse it.

What has been termed 'new institutionalism' suggests that we can think of institutions as 'the ensemble of norms, rules and practices which structure action in social contexts' (Healey, 2006a, 302). They are relatively enduring, but constantly dynamic, in response to external and internal environments (Lowndes, 2001). Institutions, so understood, can include, but also reach beyond, any given organisation (see, e.g., Lowndes, 2001; Vigar et al, 2000). The rules and norms (which are not necessarily formalised) both enable and constrain a pattern of relationships involving individuals and other units, such as organisations, in varied combinations. Usually, rules are not consciously invoked; rather, they are typically experienced as taken for granted frames of reference and ways of doing things (Vigar et al, 2000, pp47 ff). On a day to day basis, these may remain stable, while there is some fine-tuning of norms, rules and relationships. More substantial institutional transformation, on the other hand, will involve a reframing of the world and the institution within it (Healey, 2006 a, b). Sustaining (or changing) the constituent elements of institutions – the frames of reference, the ways of doing things, and so on - requires the deployment of resources and an awareness of the historical, but constantly changing, social construction that is the institution.

Inside an institution, individuals will have a sense of identity that is based on the nature of their institutional roles and relationships. In higher education, within which universities and academics are important actors,   planning academics, for example, will have certain perceptions of the way their relationships should be conducted with their university, with outside organisations (including the RTPI), with students, with their colleagues – both academic and non-academic - and, indeed, with the public at large. These perceptions will encompass what constitute reasonable expectations on each side, including modes of address, deference (or lack thereof) on certain issues and so on. A sense of professional/work identity is nurtured and sustained within these relationships. These expectations change, but usually slowly. When one or more of them is significantly disrupted then it can throw into question the very

nature of professional identity. One way in which this can manifest itself has been noted in relation to higher education, namely the way 'that many who work and study … [in UK higher education] … do so with a nagging sense of unease; a sense that something is not right about what we are doing' (McArthur, 2013, p152).

Institutional change typically involves attempts at 'culture change' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Inch (2010, 361) has described this process, in relation to planning by UK local government, as 'an identity project, designed to change the terms through which public servants relate to their roles'. In UK universities, too, culture change has been explicitly discussed and promoted (Deem, 2004). We can consider culture change to be an example of what Bevir et al (2003,10 ff) term a 'dilemma', where individuals are forced to consider beliefs which are at odds with their existing ways of understanding the world, and their practices within them, a 'set of understandings' which the authors term a 'tradition' (Bevir et al, 2003,6). Traditions, as they understand them, are not to be taken as 'unquestioned ways of behaving' (Bevir et al, 2003, 9); for it is in questioning and developing (or rejecting) traditions – addressing dilemmas, in their terminology - that individuals display agency, including agency within institutional change. Put bluntly, doing something about one's institutional circumstances is easier if one has a broadly coherent account of one's institutional setting, and its place in the world, and an ability to draw on alternative accounts, i.e. 'traditions'(Bevir, 2011; see also Healey, 2006b). Inch (2010,2012), for example, has shown how UK local government planners critique, and often resist, calls for culture change by drawing on some of the better established traditions of what constitutes planning, and their roles within it. In doing this, they are making the best sense they can of their own lives, within a complex context. They are likely to share experiences and meanings with colleagues (geographically local and not so local) as well as being influenced by their personal backgrounds and biographies (Healey, 2006 b,62 ff; Lowndes,2001,2005). These differing personal, organisational and institutional histories and trajectories means there will be differences in the ways that individuals and institutions respond to ostensibly similar changes in the external environment (Healey, 2006b; Lowndes,2001,2005). As Inch (2010; 2012)

demonstrated, within the turbulence and transformation of local government planning it is clear that the response of planners in particular offices cannot be 'read off' from simply analysing external forces which operate upon them. Nevertheless, it remains the case that there has been a transformation of planning, and that it is travelling in a similar direction in every local government office (Inch, 2012).

Is this variety of response also found in the planning academy, and if so what kinds of responses are they? In particular, what kinds of ideas and beliefs (the 'traditions' of new institutionalism) do academics seem to be invoking as they describe, discuss and work within transformative pressures in their workplaces?

Some new institutionalists (notably Bevir 2011) place a heavy emphasis on the individuality of traditions – ie individuals construct them themselves. But while acknowledging their point, it is still important to remember that individuals will be part of social networks within and outside work, within which they will be sharing ideas, beliefs and attitudes and emotions. It is a reasonable expectation, therefore, that attitudes and beliefs of planning academics will sometimes echo some contemporary discussions (and vocabulary) about higher education, and that there might also be resonance with longer-established models of what the nature and purpose of education should be – such as the idea of a liberal arts university, or a research-based institute, and so on. Moreover, discussions of the nature of higher education over decades, indeed centuries, provides a potential store of beliefs which can help planning academics develop their own positions.

For example, the significance for discussions of planning education of the tradition of the university as a research institute, developed in its most influential form in nineteenth century Germany and later in the USA, has already been noted in Schön's analysis of and prescription for professional education. In brief, if professional knowledge is in large measure practical knowledge, and the most important professional judgements are practical judgements, then a university that valorises only technical rationality will never be a supportive home for a sound planning education. This perspective, or tradition, gives planning academics a distinctive way of scrutinising the increasing importance of research as an activity of academics

in universities, and its increasing importance within the curriculum. A closely related line of thought in relation to the idea of the research university has suggested that exclusively focusing on the notion of critical thinking as the goal of contemporary university education is actually inimical to the development of the capacity for practical, situated judgement that is central to educating the professional (see, for example, Campbell, 2006, on situated judgement in planning; Sullivan and Matthews, 2008, on critical thinking).

Drawing on rather different traditions, there have been debates about whether university life in all its aspects should be built around explicit adherence to religious, or other world-views, and what the implications of this are (MacIntyre, 1990, 2009; Nussbaum, 1997; Hesburgh, 1994). Building on ideas aired in these discussions, it has been suggested that within planning education a rigorous approach to the teaching of values – so central to professional education - is only possible within a school that has an explicit adherence to a specific world-view such as Catholicism or Marxism as its key organising principle (Thomas, 2012). This is likely to be a contentious idea; but as in any discussion, engaging with it will be more fruitful if it is undertaken with some understanding of the intellectual hinterland of the 'opponent', what might be called in institutional terms the 'tradition' within which it is located. In this case, that would be a tradition of thinking about knowledge, disciplines, and universities, in holistic and hierarchical terms.

Discussions about universities cannot avoid engaging with the relationship between the university and the society of which it is a part; the nature of this relationship will be of special interest to the planning academy for obvious reasons given its area of expertise, and the planning academy will have much to contribute to those debates and discussions. Again, such contributions are likely to be the more influential if they are aware of the intellectual, and political, legacy – the tradition - that is likely to be shaping the contributions of others outside the planning academy. For example, contemporary discussions about the prospects for a 'public university' (e.g. Burawoy, 2011) and the university's potential contribution to educating a democratic polity (e.g. Rustin, 2016) sometimes echo ideas pioneered by Dewey's (2012)

strand of Pragmatism. A rather different view of the relationship – actual and desired - between university and society motivates critical pedagogues within the planning academy (e.g. Sletto, 2010). And as with any institutional tradition, their conception of what a university should be involves distinctive identities for, and relationships between, lecturers, students, and others within and outside the academy.

These considerations provide good reasons for ensuring that collectively the planning academy, and others with an interest in its future, such as the professional institute, have the ability and willingness to engage with the dramatic changes and arguments around changes in the university with an awareness of the institutional traditions that inform them.

Until recently, academics in most 'western' universities had no training in education, simply in their subject (e.g. Barzun, 1993; Klinge,2004). Consequently they were never required to think systematically about the values and purpose of their occupation. These days, in British universities and elsewhere, new academics are required to do some in-house training, but anecdotal evidence suggests that these courses focus on teaching methods rather than questions of values and purpose. Reflecting on their universities' missions and ambitions – which are usually couched in the terminology of performance management - is unlikely to advance their understanding of these matters. It is quite possible, therefore, that the academic profession in Britain is embroiled in a period of far-reaching changes without any secure understanding of the kinds of issues at stake. This would be a major limitation to the depth, and legitimacy, of the discussions, and a serious fetter on the capacity of academics to help shape their own identities and destinies. A questionnaire survey of UK Planning academics, conducted in the summer of 2014, and funded by a small grant from the author's School, began to shed some light on the nature of the planning academy's engagement with wider institutional traditions within higher education.

The survey

A questionnaire survey was used in order that a picture of the academy as a whole could be achieved. This limited the possibility of following up individual responses in depth, but the use of open questions did

allow respondents to provide a more nuanced account of their beliefs and attitudes on many matters. As close as possible to 100% of UK planning academics were included in the survey. These were identified as members of planning schools. The intuitive, if crude, notion of what a planning school consisted in was that of a group of academics who spent a substantial proportion of their time teaching and/or researching planning. This was operationalised as all or parts of UK university departments with programmes accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), based on a list of such programmes on the RTPI web-site. There were some exceptions to this as will be explained below. Five accredited programmes in non-UK universities (including two in Ireland) were excluded.

It is increasingly unusual for planning programmes to be taught in university departments solely focused on planning (Ellis et al, 2010 pp12 ff). In some universities, planning may be part of a unit which can include as many as a hundred academic staff and a wide variety of vocational and other degree programmes. Consequently decisions had to be made as to how to identify groupings of planning lecturers. No single rule could be applied universally, and the following were followed as appropriate

- if an administrative unit had 'planning' in its title, then its staff would be included;

- if web-sites provided sufficient detail staff who were described as planning lecturers and/or listed as teaching on planning programmes would be included; alternatively,

- key informants would be used to identify staff with a substantial input into planning education. These were either the author or a contact in the relevant university.

Where there was doubt, staff were included rather than excluded.

These procedures constructed a sample of 389 planning academics in 25 planning schools. This compares with the 518 academics in 27 planning schools included in the RTPI-funded study by Ellis et al (2010). E-mail addresses were gathered from university web-sites.

After piloting in the researcher's own school, the survey was sent to 389 addresses. Eight were returned as undeliverable. 135 were completed in full or in part, giving a response rate of 35%. This compares reasonably well with the RTPI sponsored survey of 2009 (Ellis et al, 2010) which had a response rate of 42% and 211 responses. Of the 2014 survey respondents, 28% (n=37) were under 40, 32% 41-50 (n = 42), 28% 51-60 (n = 38), and 12% over 60 (n = 15). Figures for the 2009 survey were: under 39, 22%: 40-49 22%: over 50, 36%. If the survey results are taken as representative of the planning academy then it means that the age-profile of the academy has not changed significantly, which might be expected over just 5 years.

In the later survey, the proportion of respondents in each age group whose first job was outside a university increases directly with age, from 41% among those aged 21-40, to 64% among those aged 41-50, 73% in the 51-60 group, and 80% among those over 61. Numbers are too small to draw conclusions about gender differences in each age category and taking the sample as a whole, the differences are slight (58% of men and 66% of women had their first jobs outside universities). The proportion of lecturers with at least some experience of life outside the academy is quite high at all ages, but likely to fall if the recruitment criteria of heads of school continue to emphasise academic rather than practice experience, as the findings of Ellis et al (2010) suggest. We have here, then, a group of people for whom their academic identity is likely to be significant in their lives as a whole.

Thinking about the nature and purpose of universities

The questionnaire sought to get an idea of what beliefs and attitudes ('traditions' in the terminology of some new institutionalists) planning academics had in relation to higher education. As pointed out earlier, what universities take to be their purpose and priorities, and how they translate this into organising teaching and research, can either facilitate or undermine particular approaches to professional planning education. We begin by examining their thoughts about their own universities, before looking at their beliefs about what might be desirable in higher education.

What motivates your university ... and what should motivate it?

The questionnaire survey asked for a phrase which described what respondents took to be the actual motivating purposes of their universities; this might or might not be what ideally *should* motivate universities. Seventy-nine responded, with a variety of content and tones. For example, one woman senior lecturer/reader over 60 described the purposes of her university as:

> Teaching and learning to develop critical faculties; research; open and inclusive access; local and global community (with a bit of business) engagement, and justice.

On the other hand, a male, 21-40 states the motivation of his university as:

> get money from students, get money for research, work staff to death, boost VC's cv.

Some were more ambivalent, and neutral in tone:

> excellence and exclusivity – one positive, one negative; and has failed to bring two together (male, 41-50).

> Research, teaching, innovation and impact (male, 41 -50).

Respondents could list as many things as they wished as motivating purposes, and coding was by the researcher and arose from the answers given. While a variety of motivating purposes featured, three emerged as the most commonly cited, either alone or in phrases or short lists. These were research, teaching/education and making money/financial security. All were mentioned by around 40% of the 79 who responded to this question. Just under a quarter mentioned competition/success (especially in leaguer tables) as a motivating factor. If these answers appear less than noteworthy it could be argued that this is because they so closely reproduce the categories of the corporate university that currently dominates UK higher education. This reflecting of a particular tradition or perspective on universities emerged, too, when respondents were asked to consider what might be possible purposes of a university.

Overall, two thirds responded to a question asking them whether they thought that there could be distinct types of universities, with different sets of purposes. There were some differences in response rates across age cohorts, but no clear patterns emerge. A pattern did emerge in relation to whether respondents thought there could, in principle, be universities with very different purposes. In the age groups under 51, 80% (44) of respondents replied in a way which made it clear that in their view there was only one kind of university; among those over 51, 64% (34) replied in this way. The older age groups would have lived through the period of the 'binary divide', which ended in 1992, where British higher education consisted of universities on the one hand and polytechnics and various other colleges ostensibly offering more specialised, often vocational education, including but not confined to, degree programmes. Nevertheless, overall, it's clear that most planning academics do not think in terms of radically different purposes for different kinds of universities. Moreover, as will be seen, even when they do think in these terms, the primary axis of difference is research-teaching, which is only one of a number of axes that have been discussed in the older and more contemporary literature on universities.

Twenty-two respondents (25%) distinguished between different types of universities. The difference between the significance of teaching and researching in a university was, for many of these respondents, a major factor in defining the purposes of the different types of universities. The vast majority (20) identified research-intensive universities as a particular kind of university, and 13 of these distinguished between research-intensive and teaching-intensive universities. But in the 51-60 age group, of 9 who identified different kinds of universities, 7 contrasted research-intensive universities with something other than teaching-intensive universities. The descriptors 'vocational' (4) and 'consultancy' (1) (which appeared to be similar when described further) emerged as more common. Also significant in this group's answers were terms counter-posed to research and/or vocational universities which hinted (and sometimes did more than that) at a type of university wished-for, remembered, or imagined in some (possibly golden) past : six respondents referred to : 'academic', 'educational', 'research-informed' (as opposed to 'research-intensive'), 'elite', 'true', and 'healthy' (as opposed to 'unhealthy'). While details

of these varied, all involved an emphasis on teaching, featured research as driven by a desire for understanding as opposed to income generation, and often had some element of intellectual curiosity ('blue-skies thinking', 'widening horizons') as a purpose. In most of these there was a clear undercurrent of dissatisfaction with some of the perceived distorting effects of pressures and trends in contemporary higher education.

There was one respondent in the 51 -60 age group who did not employ either the term research or teaching in distinguishing between possible types of university. This reply distinguished between universities which pursued public goals through physical science and universities which inform public debates; the purposes of the latter should be to promote student learning and motivate student reflection – a version of educating future citizens. Yet this kind of complete withdrawal from the terms 'teaching' and 'research' was notable by its rarity, reflecting the ubiquity in the corporate narratives of contemporary universities of understanding university life as the (measured) performance of certain tasks, with research and teaching foremost among them.

Nevertheless, in the over 60 group, as with the 51-60 group, there was a marked augmenting of the vocabulary of 'teaching' and 'research' with phrases such as ' providing a 'rounded education', developing students' critical faculties', 'fostering an ethos (emphasis added) of generating …knowledge', 'speaking truth to power' 'research for government – identifying problems and solutions'. While the influence of decades of UK higher educational policy and university practices was still clear, there were also in these answers a gesture towards a broader conception of how universities might function, towards different institutional traditions.

When respondents were asked to simply list what they took to be the main purposes of universities (be these different for different kinds of universities, or the same for all), research and teaching dominate the answers (Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Engagement with the profession is very much a minority concern (16% of respondents), but the findings do confirm Ellis et al's (2010) contention that younger academics are if anything more concerned with links to the planning profession and practice than are older ones.

These answers are interestingly different in some respects from the descriptions of actual motivations of universities. It is striking that whereas a concern for money-making ranked high in statements about *actual* motives of universities, it was not mentioned at all in answers about ideal-type universities. Similarly, competitiveness – in its various manifestations – ranked as a major descriptor of actual universities but did not feature in ideal-types. Of course, competitiveness – within universities and disciplines as much as between them - has long featured as part of academic life (Fuller, 1997). But there can be little doubt that the answers in this survey are responding to a significant deepening and expanding of the phenomenon in recent decades. And beyond these responses are phrases such as 'playing the system', 'maintaining status for its own sake', and 'education factory' which display a noteworthy cynicism. For cynicism, however reasonable, to become a more productive force, then it may need to be leavened by some positive conceptions of what universities can be. It is here that awareness of appropriate discussions – ancient and modern – have a role to play in buttressing the planning academy's ability to make a positive response to the call that 'the university should be viewed as a critical public sphere in which there is … discussion among academics about the nature of the university and its place in society…' (Burawoy, 2011, 40). Making this contribution is not simply a matter of academic collegiality; as discussed earlier, different ways of thinking about universities relate differently to professional planning education and facilitate and constrain it in different ways. How well versed, then, are planning academics in the various traditions of thought relating to universities?

Models of the university

Respondents were asked whether they could name people whose writings were associated with distinctive models/ understandings of the nature and purpose of higher education. The phrases and terms used to

characterise these models were a mix of terms that are common in the relevant literature (such as 'multiversity', 'entrepreneurial university'), or in discourses beyond that (e.g. 'liberal arts'), and, finally, phrases generated by the researcher which captured well-known positions (e.g. 'the university as a research institute', 'the university as a place to develop capacities for democratic life'). The question can be found in Appendix 1. What models to include or exclude, and how to characterise them, was an exercise of judgement by the researcher; but the final list, taken as a whole, is a reasonable test of people's awareness of writings and discussions about universities. While accepting that the meanings of even familiar terms such as 'liberal education' can change over centuries (Rothblatt, 1976), the list of terms generated for academics' comments was neither obscure nor vague to an informed contemporary audience. As mentioned earlier, the piloting of the questionnaire was helpful in finding a wording that was clear and as engaging as possible to those surveyed.

Consequently, the fact that almost three quarters of the respondents did not even attempt an answer at this question suggests a widespread lack of knowledge (and possibly interest) on the part of planning academics. Partial confirmation of this interpretation arises from the fact that of the answers given two thirds were reasonable, even when not always the ones that the research had anticipated[ii]. Table 2 shows how many such answers were received

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Response rates were at a similar level for a question which gave the names of prominent contemporary commentators on higher education and asked respondents to write a phrase which summarised what position the commentators took in relation to the nature and purpose of universities. Just over three quarters of those aged up to 60 did not answer, with about two thirds of those over 60 not responding. Numbers involved are too small to deduce anything from these differences.

Of the 84 answers given, 30 were clearly incorrect. The most common incorrect answers related to: MacIntyre (5), Burawoy (4), and Grayling (4). It is plausible to suppose that these are authors whose

names are more familiar than are their writings specifically about universities. Nine answers were contestable and/or general, but showed a knowledge of at least some of the author's ideas. For example, of Stefan Collini, 'university should be like it's always been, whatever that was'; or of A.C. Grayling : 'entrepreneurial claptrap', 'excellence for those who can pay'.

Unambiguously accurate mentions were of: Collini (9), Burawoy(8), Grayling (7), Holmwood (6), Annan (4), Beloff (4), Nussbaum (3), Docherty (3), MacIntyre (1). The first four of these are active academics, two of them in the social sciences, and three of them are in British universities. All have a profile outside their disciplines, and are examples – to varying degrees – of the publicly engaged intellectual. Yet, some of these attributes also apply to Docherty and Nussbaum, with some of the latter's work on matters other than education regularly, and seemingly increasingly, cited in planning literature. But as previously noted, the small numbers of responses make it impossible to draw any fine-grained conclusions. More significant is the apparently low level of engagement with contemporary debates about the nature and purpose of higher education.

Annan, Docherty and MacIntyre were mentioned correctly only by respondents over 40, an illustration of the tendency for older respondents to display a wider range of knowledge/ references in their answers to the question about the models of universities and contemporary debates (though numbers were small, of course). It was also clear that some respondents were familiar with the major works of MacIntyre and Nussbaum but not their work on universities.

Concluding discussion

The argument of this paper is that changes already well underway in UK higher education, and have resonance internationally, can be usefully understood as institutional changes that have implications for the identity and roles of planning academics and the nature of planning education. It is desirable that the planning academy engage in the university-wide debates and discussions about these changes; doing so will be more effective the more the academy's members are familiar with a variety of institutional

traditions in higher education because many of these inform contemporary debates; others could be influential in the future. Planning academics need not agree with the traditions, nor be experts in educational history or theory (any more than professional planners need be planning theorists or historians), but an understanding of key principles and trends *is* helpful. The research assumed that a basic understanding would be reflected in a knowledge of key individuals and terms in historical and contemporary discussions of universities.

Some of the write-in answers to the questionnaire survey that is reported upon in this paper clearly imply strongly held normative principles about universities should be and what the roles of those involved in higher education (including lecturers) should be. Yet these beliefs do not appear to be strongly embedded within broader frameworks and institutional traditions. This can only reduce the capacity of the academics to negotiate constructively and collectively any tensions between the demands of changes in the wider academy and particular conceptions of what constitutes a good quality planning education as they reflect upon and reconstruct their roles within the academy. The paper is not suggesting that the planning academy is riven by ignorance; and certainly not by incompetence. It is simply pointing out that making the bridge between the specific concerns of the academy and those of others within the field of higher education (interpreted broadly) is easier and more effective if the academy's concerns (which may well be internally contested of course) are understood within broader traditions of higher education.

A number of forums already exist where the concerns, issues and dilemmas of the UK planning academy can be discussed – one thinks of the leading planning journals, as well as conferences and meetings, such as the UK and Ireland Planning Research Conference in the UK, the Planning Schools Forum (Heads of Planning Schools) and the RTPI itself; while in each continent there is an association of planning schools – in Europe, the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP). This paper suggests a framework within which leading actors and stakeholders in the academy – such as heads of planning school, as well as other senior academics and professionals, such as journal editors – could think about the changes under way. It is a framework which highlights the need to think about planning education in relation to wider

traditions of thought about education and, specifically, the contestable nature and purpose of university education.

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Appendix 1 Selected survey questions

Q There have been times when different universities have had differing purposes; some say that this is true of contemporary Britain. Certainly some term themselves as 'research universities' , and so on.

In your view, what should be the main (up to 5) purposes of a UK university, in order of importance? If you believe that there should be more than one type of university then repeat the exercise for each type.

Q. Describe is a short phrase up to four key purposes of the university you work for. These should be the purposes that you believe actually motivate what it does.

Q In recent centuries there have been various ideas put forward about what universities' main purposes should be. These are often associated with the names of significant scholars and commentators who proposed or elaborated upon them eg people such as Cardinal John Newman. Can you write the name(s) of any person(s), living or dead, who have promoted orr expounded upon, any of the following models of what a university might be :

The university as a research university/institute
The university as multiversity
The university as developing citizens' capacities for democratic life
The university as liberal arts college
The entrepreneurial university

Q There are contemporary debates about what universities should do, and be for. Each of the authors below is associated with a distinctive position in such debates. Can you state each author's position in a phrase or short sentence?

Noel Annan
Max Beloff
Michael Burawoy
Stefan Collini
Thomas Docherty
A C Grayling
John Holmwood
Alasdair Macintyre
Martha Nussbaum

Tables

Table 1   Purposes of a university : most popular answers by age

	21-40	41-50	51-60	61 +	All	

Response (% of all surveyed)	25 (68%)	30 (71%)	24 (63%)	10 (66%)	89 (67%)	
Research	17	21	21	8	67	
Teaching	17	21	23	7	68	
Critical reflection on society	8	6	0	1	15	
Questioning/critical space	0	4	1	4	9	
Engagement with profession and practice	6	4	3	1	14	

Source : survey

Table 2 : 'Models of universities' : numbers of reasonable answers, by answer given

Model of university	Number of reasonable answers	Number of answers not accepted
Developing capacities for democratic life	10	6
Multiversity	5	6
Entrepreneurial university	6	1
Liberal arts	8	2
University as research institute	4	2

Source : survey.

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[i] For example, Stiftel (1999) and Stiftel et al (2004) have drawn attention to some pressures on north American universities which appear to have parallels in the UK .

[ii] The researcher anticipated that some names would be given (e.g. von Humboldt would be associated with the university as research institute). When unanticipated answers were given, these were checked using the

internet and libraries. Such answers were accepted as reasonable if (1) the name was indeed of someone who had written about the university model concerned; or (2) the answer suggested a particular, and reasonable, interpretation of the question asked, albeit not the interpretation the research was interested in.

There were two facetious answers to the question of who was associated with the idea of the entrepreneurial university ('all vice chancellors'); two responded 'don't know' to particular models; and there were three people named in answers which were unknown to the researcher and could not be found via an internet search.