

## Chapter 5: Neoliberal Higher Education

Over the course of several decades from the 1970s onwards, neoliberal ideology became embedded in the policymaking process. As the previous chapter made clear, this occurred across the world and in numerous policy areas. Whereas Chapter 4 analysed neoliberal *ideas* in depth, there are limits to the level of insight that can be gained by analysing the internal logic of a political idea or concept; in order to more fully understand the effect of neoliberalisation, it is necessary to see how neoliberal ideas are translated into policy, and examine the impact of the implementation of neoliberal policy in specific real-world situations. So this chapter will focus on one area – higher education – and demonstrate the ways in which neoliberal ideas have influenced policy and led to significant changes in the way higher education is funded and governed. Under the influence of neoliberalism, the discourse around higher education has shifted away from viewing it as a public good or as a community of scholars seeking to better understand the world, and towards seeing it instead as a means of producing efficient workers and making a positive contribution to the economy. This process of neoliberalisation has not occurred uniformly or without resistance, but, as shown below, the direction of travel is clear.

The first part of this chapter looks at the neoliberalisation of higher education, showing how the ideology explored in Chapter 4 has become embedded in the higher education sector. It analyses the ways in which higher education policy and governance has been influenced by neoliberal ideas. The focus is primarily on the UK – and especially England – since that is the main subject of this thesis, but with reference to the US where similar processes are visible. The second part of the chapter examines the UK's higher education policy in the neoliberal era by highlighting neoliberal aspects of specific instances of legislation and other areas of policy. By doing this, an increasing commitment to neoliberal values over the past 30 years becomes clear. This chapter paves the way for Chapter 6, which analyses the UK's open access policy within this neoliberal context.

### Neoliberalism in higher education

In Chapter 4, neoliberalism was understood as a political project to re-shape all social relations to conform to the logic of capital. This means that in each area of life, policymakers seek to introduce certain processes and mechanisms that transform our understanding of ourselves and our relationships with each other, until our behaviour is viewed solely in market terms. The policy mechanisms used to enact neoliberal ideas through governmental action include, among other things, the privatisation of public services through outsourcing and the sale of public assets; enforcing competition for resources by creating quasi-markets within the public sector; and replacing universal services with qualified support that places a greater

financial burden on individuals rather than the state. Higher education is no exception to the pervasive reach of neoliberalism in public policy (Busch 2017, Giroux 2014, Ward 2014). Specific instances of the neoliberalisation of higher education through policy decisions are analysed in the next section. First, a discussion of how the general principles of neoliberal ideology have been embedded in the higher education sector will make clear the broader political context underpinning particular policies.

One such principle is that of privatisation – the transfer of public assets to the private sector.<sup>1</sup> The theory is that the private sector can run services more efficiently than the public sector because market pressures force private firms to innovate and reduce their costs; competition from other firms means that they need to constantly find ways to make ever-greater savings and offer the best possible service to their customers.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, beginning with the Thatcher government and continuing unabated throughout all successive administrations, numerous sectors have been privatised as this theory has been put into practice. The Conservative governments took the most overtly aggressive approach to privatisation, with the direct sale of public assets including telecoms, energy, water, and rail services (Parker 2004). The New Labour governments that followed also contributed to privatisation but in a different way, one that would have great impact on healthcare and education. Rather than being sold off, these sectors have instead seen a gradual increase of private involvement in the running of essential public services. With the principles of ‘New Public Management’ – based on the ideas of neoliberal theorists such as James Buchanan, whose public choice theory was mentioned in Chapter 4 – taking hold across government in the 1980s and 1990s, New Labour governments were keen on using Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) to outsource public sector contracts to private firms. This approach gradually resulted in more and more public services being tendered out to the highest bidder. Under the subsequent coalition and Conservative governments, an ever-increasing number of schools and NHS services are being fully managed by the private sector (Exley 2017; Frith 2015). It is within this broader public policy context that higher education policy should be viewed.

In higher education, as with the NHS, privatisation has been a piecemeal process. Whether universities and other degree-awarding institutions can be regarded as public or private is somewhat complex, because the vast majority of them are private *institutions* – and hold charitable status (see HEFCE 2017b) – but as *publicly-funded* institutions they could be considered to be within the public sector.<sup>3</sup> However, in recent years the balance of funding has

1 Though McGettigan (2013: 9) has argued that we need a far more nuanced understanding of privatisation when it comes to higher education. (Since McGettigan’s work has strongly influenced this chapter, it is worth noting that he is coming from a particular political angle, and has consistently argued against the processes of neoliberalisation described here, albeit while avoiding using the word ‘neoliberalism’.) Brown and Carasso offer the following definition of privatisation: ‘the penetration of private capital, ownership and or/influence into what were previously publicly funded and owned entities’ (2013: 24).

2 [citations needed]

3 Exceptions include the University of Buckingham and Regent’s University London, which are both private non-profit charities, and the for-profit providers Arden University, BPP University, and the University of Law. These five institutions do not receive direct public funding but do benefit from publicly-backed loans to cover their student fees. Not all institutions have the same corporate form, see McGettigan (2013: 125–

been diversifying to include much higher proportions of private capital. This process rapidly accelerated following the post-2010 reforms to the funding regime in England that further shifted funding for teaching away from direct public subsidy through grants to private income from tuition fees, as discussed further in the next section. But deriving an increasing proportion of income from private sources is not a uniquely English issue and also manifests in other areas of university activity. For instance, universities have found themselves competing for income from industry collaboration, such as research grant funding from projects undertaken jointly with private companies. In doing so, the traditional outward-facing role of universities' civic mission (Collini 2012, Holmwood 2011) has taken a back seat to 'knowledge transfer' activities focused more narrowly on income generation and deeper links with the profit-focused private sector, through industrial partnerships or creating spin-off companies to exploit research-derived patents (Greenberg 2007; Geuna and Muscio 2009; Stephan 2015).

McGettigan has argued that the coalition government saw its role as reducing the public sector to merely facilitating market activity, 'to roll back the state to a minimum function – to broker deals between finance and private sector provision' (McGettigan 2013: 8). Such a position has been a consistent belief of neoliberal thinkers since the ordoliberals in the 1930s – the idea that since there is nothing 'natural' about market competition the formal conditions for it must be created and maintained, and the role of the state is to move ever closer towards pure competitive markets, resulting in what Foucault referred to as 'a state under supervision of the market' (Foucault 2008: 116; see Chapter 4). Privatisation has profound implications for universities; as Brown and Carasso have stated, 'there is a fundamental difference between what can be expected from organisations that have as their main purpose the creation of value for their owners – their proprietors or shareholders – and what can be expected from those that aim to create value for their stakeholders' (Brown and Carasso 2013: 175).

The level of privatisation within the higher education sector varies enormously around the world. Around a third of students globally are enrolled in private institutions, though this is more concentrated in Asia and Latin America (Levy 2018). In the US, there is a complex mix of public and private institutions. As with the UK, the influence of neoliberal ideology can be seen in a greater acceptance of private sector involvement...<sup>4</sup>

Since neoliberal ideology maintains that the market is the best way of organising human interactions, and for something to be positioned within a market it must have a price, it follows that a process of neoliberalisation requires attaching a price to things that previously did not have one. If a monetary value for something is not readily apparent, a proxy quantity

128) for a brief overview of the differences and Farrington and Palfreyman (2012) for a thorough legal grounding. It is worth noting that higher education in further education (HE in FE) has historically been subject to greater public accountability – prior to the end of the university/polytechnic divide in 1992, polytechnics were public institutions controlled by local councils (although reliant on central government funding, see Parry 2016 and Pratt 1997).

4 [more on US for-profit HE. Cite McMillan Cottom (2017), Newfield (2016); Giroux (2014).]

must stand in its place. In other words, under neoliberal orthodoxy, *price*, or a proxy for it, is regarded as the sole indicator of value and therefore to facilitate neoliberalisation everything must be quantifiable and positioned with a market context. Brown and Carasso (2013) have documented how a process of marketisation has occurred in UK higher education, with successive administrations since 1979 believing that market principles should determine the shape of the sector.<sup>5</sup> And this process goes beyond issues around funding and costs – for Davies, neoliberalism is concerned not purely with *markets*, centred around the pricing of commodities, but with the expansion *market-derived forms of measurement and evaluation* into all areas of society (Davies 2014: 21–22).<sup>6</sup> This has strong implications for understanding changes in higher education policy and management in recent decades. The metricisation of higher education shows clearly how neoliberalism has influenced the sector – even in areas which have not as yet had a price put on them,<sup>7</sup> quantitative values have become ubiquitous throughout higher education (Wilsdon et al. 2015). For Davies, in order to make claims of legitimacy under neoliberal conditions an institution must be understandable in market terms.

The marketisation of higher education highlights one of the issues with the insistence of early neoliberal theorists such as Hayek that the market and state are incompatible opposites (see Chapter 4). As Brown and Carasso have argued, marketisation has occurred at the same time as increased centralised control over higher education institutions by the UK government (Brown and Carasso 2013: 11–21; see also Naidoo 2008). This government intervention goes beyond simply setting up conditions in which market activity can flourish; market mechanisms have become deeply entangled in the running and governance of universities. As Naidoo has argued, ‘rather than the state facilitating and managing the market, the state can actively mobilise market mechanisms to attain political goals’ (Naidoo 2008: 2).<sup>8</sup> Despite this deep reach of the government within the sector, it is still possible that in the long run the current state of marketisation will evolve into an even more privatised sector – the introduction of an internal market or quasi-market within a public sector acts as a precursor to further privatisation, because once an internal market of ‘customers’ and ‘suppliers’ has been created, it is easier to open up the market to private providers.

The rhetoric of ‘customers’ exercising their purchasing power in a marketplace has become embedded in higher education policy. This, in turn, is linked to the commodification of higher education. Commodification refers to one of the central processes by which the neoliberal agenda of re-shaping all human activity to fit within a market structure is undertaken. When something is turned into a commodity, its *exchange value* is prioritised over its *use value*. For instance, a student participating in a commoditised higher education system is supposed to see the value of a degree in terms of its ability to generate economic returns for them at a later

5 See also Brown (2011), Foskett (2011), and Molesworth, Nixon, and Scullion (2009).

6 [cite Beer’s *Metric Power* (2016)? I should really read that.]

7 It has been argued that the level of tuition fee in England is not really a *price*, because the income-contingent nature of tuition fee loans means that for many graduates there is no difference in repayment level between loans to cover fees of different amounts (McGettigan 2013: 48).

8 [connect with Friedman’s views on HE, e.g. vouchers]

date.<sup>9</sup> (The ‘student as consumer’ issue is covered in more detail in the following section with regards to recent policy changes.) *Competitiveness*, therefore, is a potent force within a commodified higher education system – if students are purchasers or consumers of goods, then there is competition among providers for their purchasing power. In addition, as Brown (2015) has noted, academic staff are themselves re-figured as competitive agents whose job is to inculcate students with the knowledge and tools to become competitive players of the game themselves.

Indeed, a key principle of markets is competition. Economic theory that supports market-based solutions to social situations regards competition as a driving force that increases efficiency and improves standards. Under neoliberalism, ‘competitiveness’ is therefore seen as something to be encouraged in all situations and forms a centrepiece of policy interventions (Davies 2014). We can see this process at work in higher education with the evolution of universities into corporations guided by principles of competitiveness, which according to the theory can only be measured in the quantitative categories determined by the experts and gurus of business strategy. The prioritising of university rankings in league tables over issues such as what is actually taught is perfectly in accord with Davies’ depiction of the logic of competitiveness.

From the description given so far in this chapter, it is clear that the university under neoliberalism is a very different kind of institution to the liberal humanist ideal of a university that prevailed in previous eras. Brown argues that neoliberalism’s incompatibility with the kind of non-instrumental liberal education epitomised by the liberal arts tradition of higher education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century United States means that the value of a liberal education has eroded with neoliberal thought’s ascension. Education which serves purely instrumental ends is not adequate for an understanding of contemporary power relations so it fails to instil the knowledge necessary to undertake informed political judgements. As an example of how this manifests, we can refer to Brown’s earlier discussion of how the replacement of *government* with *governance* is a depoliticising move that hides power relations from view (Brown 2015: Ch.4). Without a theoretical understanding of neoliberal power this kind of analysis would not be possible.

Brown relies on a somewhat idealised image of liberal arts higher education, which by their own admission was never fully realised [and in the support of liberal arts education as the *only* way to inculcate an informed citizenry there is an implicit elitist undercurrent, that without formal higher education people cannot become informed]. A more detailed analysis of the role of higher education under liberal democracy is offered by Readings in *The University in Ruins* (1996). Readings argues that the purpose of liberal higher education was to reproduce dominant culture.<sup>10</sup> [Expand on Readings’ analysis of the neoliberalisation of higher education. See also Stefan Collini’s *What are Universities For?*]

9 [cite Naidoo and Jamieson (2005)?]

10 [C.E. - ‘this can be traced back to late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century arts subjects (e.g. literature) in educating workers.’]

[The university emerged from the enlightenment >then> liberal >then> economic (neoliberal) regimes. Social exclusion – the liberal project was only for certain social subjects. Discuss social placement of the institution (the university) in terms of the changing social imperatives of society.

Neoliberals wanted to claim the enlightenment for their own (Stedman Jones 2012: 100).]

Brown's analysis is focused on the rise of neoliberal thought as a structuring principle of higher education and does not engage with the large body of work on critical pedagogy and resistances to the neoliberal academy [Giroux etc; alternative educational traditions and practices].

'Over the centuries, of course, there have been many accounts of democracy's superiority and advantages over other political forms. However, most of them have little or nothing to do with popular rule and instead attribute features to democracy that are not inherent to it' (Brown 2015: 204). Brown identifies openness as one of the facets that does not 'belong exclusively to democracy defined as the rule of the people ... [and] could be promulgated or secured by nondemocratic regimes' (Brown 2015: 204). Opposing *restrictions* on freedom (nonuniversal rights, restrictions on speech etc.) could be affirmed by the demos. As Foucault attests, democracy is not necessarily liberal and liberalism is not necessarily democratic (Foucault 2008: 321). Liberalism, capitalism, and democracy are all concepts with closely integrated histories but no intrinsic dependency on each other.

Davies describes the role of state authority within neoliberalism shifting from playing a supporting role in maintaining efficient markets to one of acting in a managerial capacity to promote the competitive interests of the nation. Under this paradigm, state investment in research and support of 'excellence'<sup>11</sup> in higher education plays a logical and important role in maintaining a nation's competitive advantage. The UK government's support of gold open access is not only to introduce further elements of market competition into the scholarly communications market – although this is one effect, hence why no cap has yet been set on the price of an APC paid from RCUK funds because the market should decide on an 'appropriate' price – but also to increase levels of competition within industry. If research is open access then theoretically it can lead to higher levels of commercial exploitation by the private sector [reference Willetts]. Although, ironically, this process has not yet been subject to measurement, the idea is consistent with Davies' depiction of how neoliberal theory emphasises the *potential* of future competition (i.e. capacity for wealth generation) as the primary measure of competitiveness.

[cultural consequences of neoliberalism, especially for education/publication/research education as an institution.

discuss how higher education is defended.]

Hayek on higher education and research – (2006 [1960]: 330–40).

[Friedman 2002 [1962]: 98–100 – privatisation of state universities]

11 See Moore et al. (2017) for a critique of the use of 'excellence' as a marker of value.

The university salaries of Aaron Director (Stedman Jones 2012: 92) and Mises (Stedman Jones 2012: 169) were directly funded by businessmen.

[Human capital theory (Becker), education as generator of higher rates of human capital. Students as rational consumers shopping in HE market.]

[Brown talks about the neoliberal economisation of people in relation to ‘the production of future value through credit, debt and speculation’ (Brown and Kinnucan 2015) – *of the self*. The production of future human value by going into debt (e.g. HE) as part of positioning the self as entrepreneurial.]

Erosion of professional autonomy (Olssen and Peters 2005: 325).

As with their parent institutions, university libraries have also been undergoing a process of neoliberalisation (Lawson, Sanders, & Smith 2015; Quinn and Bates 2017; Seale 2013).

## Higher education funding and policy in the UK

Higher education finance in the UK is currently a complex mix of public and private funding. It has undergone numerous changes over the past few decades, with extensive reforms to regulation and funding.<sup>12</sup> For instance, under the Conservative Thatcher and Major governments, the Education Reform Act 1988 and Further and Higher Education Act 1992 led to the abolition of polytechnics (see Chapter 2) and mass expansion of student numbers (see Boliver 2011: 232; McGettigan 2013: 17–18; Wyness 2010). This was followed by the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 that, under Blair’s Labour government, first introduced tuition fees (Wise 2016). Given the fairly continual changes in high-level aspects of the UK’s higher education system such as which government department is responsible for the sector or how much of institutions’ income is derived from student fees, this section will begin with outlining the situation that prevailed during the 2010-15 Conservative-led coalition government, which is the period in which open access policy became embedded (see Chapter 6).

Education is a devolved policy area in the UK so the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly have control over higher education

12 Intervention in the higher education sector is not new, as the government has taken ‘a proactive role in shaping the development of higher education’ since Keele in the 1950s, and the new 1960s universities all relied on state funding at their founding (Whyte 2015: 224, 226; see also Carswell 1986 and Shattock 2012). The expansion of UK higher education in the post-war period (see Chapter 2) relied on interventionist government policy and high level of public funding:

What made all this expansion possible was ever-increasing state support. In 1946 just over half of the income received by the Redbrick universities came from the UGC. By 1961, that figure had risen above 70 per cent. Indeed, including tuition fees, which were overwhelmingly paid by the government, and research funding, the majority of which was also granted by the state, by the end of this period [1960s] more than 90 per cent of the universities’ income came from the Treasury.

(Whyte 2015: 227)

policy – the funding bodies for the four nations of the UK are the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), and the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfE).<sup>13</sup> These bodies are not directly controlled by government: ‘With the exception of the Department for the Economy, which allocates funding directly to higher education institutions in Northern Ireland, these entities are non-departmental public bodies and they operate at arms’ length from the government’ (Eve 2017). This situation has resulted in each of the four nations of the UK having different funding and governance arrangements (Gallacher and Raffe 2011; Rees and Taylor 2006), which is particularly noticeable when it comes to charging tuition fees – Wales has lower fees than England for ‘home’ (i.e. Welsh-domiciled) students, and Scotland has no fees at all.<sup>14</sup> So the marketisation of English higher education described below has not occurred in quite the same way in Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland. Research funding, however, is to some extent centrally determined, with the Research Excellence Framework (see below) being administered across the whole of the UK and research council grants potentially available to all UK research institutions.

During the years 2010-15, public funding for the higher education sector was provided by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) which funded both HEFCE<sup>15</sup> and the seven discipline-specific research councils<sup>16</sup> (collectively known as RCUK). HEFCE provided various streams of funding to institutions, with the two largest elements being recurrent teaching grants – which were drastically reduced by phasing out funding for humanities and social science subjects (or any disciplines not designated as ‘high cost subjects’) beginning from 2012 (HEFCE 2012; McGettigan 2013: 1) – and research grants in the form of ‘quality-related’ research (QR) funding, or Research Excellence Grant funding (REG) in Scotland (SFC [n.d.]). QR/REG funding is allocated according to institutions’ performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF), a research assessment exercise that takes place approximately every six years and is jointly administered by the four funding bodies. In this exercise, institutions submit their work to be assessed by panels of subject experts<sup>17</sup> and QR/REG funding is then allocated between institutions according to their performance (Stern 2016: 8, 37–38). REF performance is considered to be important for the reputation of both institutions and individual researchers. QR funding totalled £1.6bn in 2015/16 (HEFCE 2015); other HEFCE funding streams existed as well, such as the catalyst fund and capital grants.

13 Note that this acronym is the same as that used for the British Government’s Department for Education.

14 When the Scottish National Party first came to power in 2007, they quickly abolished tuition fees for Scottish-domiciled students (Wyness 2010: 13). See Gallacher and Raffe (2011: 471–475) for more on the history of how the Scottish fees situation developed.

15 The funding bodies HEFCW, SFC, and Northern Ireland’s DfE are funded by their respective devolved administrations.

16 The seven research councils are the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), and the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).

17 On the use of journal brand as proxy for quality in the REF see Neyland & Milyaeva (2017).



An additional £2.67bn in the same year (2015/16) also originated from BIS in the form of project grants awarded by the research councils (RCUK 2015). This ‘dual support’ system, in which ‘University research funding is provided by the twin routes of institutional block grants from the Funding Councils based on periodic quality assessment exercises and funding won in peer reviewed competition from the Research Councils’ (Hughes et al. 2013: 1), is designed to both reward institutions for past performance while also maintaining a competitive focus for new research proposals, and it results in research funding being concentrated in particular research-intensive institutions (Hughes et al. 2013: 1–14). The selectivity in both QR funding and research council funding means that UK research operates along principles that Brown and Carasso have described as a ‘quasi-market’ (2013: 41).

Tuition fees had been controversially introduced by the Blair administration in 1998 at a rate of £1,000 per year, and raised to £3,000 (in England) in 2004. Following the Browne review of higher education in 2010 (Browne 2010) – instigated by the outgoing Labour government, rather than Cameron’s coalition government that acted upon the recommendations – tuition fees for new undergraduate students in England for the 2012/13 academic year were raised from £3,225 to £9,000 (Bolton 2015). And then in [20XX] the recurrent teaching grant, administered by the funding councils, was withdrawn for humanities subjects. The £9,000 figure was a cap that universities could charge up to, but nearly all institutions soon charged the full amount (Belfield et al. 2017: 5; McGettigan 2013: 22–23, 34–36). (This undermines a central purpose of the loan regime, which was intended to introduce price competition between providers.) As a result of replacing the teaching grants with student tuition fee income,<sup>18</sup> the proportion of higher education institution funding derived from public and private sources has shifted, with the system transitioning towards higher levels of private funding. Statistics collected annually by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reflect these changes; in the academic year 2013/14 higher education institutions in the UK received £30.7bn of which £13.7bn (44.5%) from tuition fees and £6.1bn (19.8%) from funding body grants (HESA 2015).<sup>19</sup>

There is evidence that fear of debt ‘is deterring poorer students from going to university’, and therefore ‘the current system disproportionately limits opportunities for young people from poorer backgrounds’ (Callender 2017; see also Callender and Mason 2017). Importantly, the various changes to fee levels over the past 20 years have been accompanied by alterations in the amount of money provided as maintenance grants to students – they were abolished in 1998, reintroduced in 2006, and abolished again in 2016, with each abolition replacing the grant with a larger maintenance loan (Brown and Carasso 2013: 84–94; House of Commons Library 2017). These more recent changes only apply to England, since the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland all provide a greater level of direct financial support to students, such as Scotland providing grants to Scottish-domiciled students

18 As McGettigan notes, the earlier £1,000 and £3,000 fees had been *additional* income for universities, whereas the new £9,000 fee was a *replacement* of state funding (McGettigan 2013: 25–26).

19 [add a graph showing the historical changes?]

since 2001 (Bruce 2012).<sup>20</sup>

Two other significant sources of research funding for UK higher education institutions are medical charities and the European Union (EU). Among medical charities, the Wellcome Trust plays a large role; it spent £866.2m in research grants and other charitable activities in 2015 (Wellcome Trust 2016: 10),<sup>21</sup> with a majority of this going to UK researchers (Wellcome Trust [n.d.]). The role of philanthropic foundations and other non-state actors in funding essential education and research has been subject to critique by authors such as McGoey, who accuses ‘philanthro-capitalists’ of creating the inequalities that they then try to solve (2015).<sup>22</sup>

The EU funds a programme of research activities via the multi-year Framework Programmes organised by the European Commission. The current programme is Framework Programme 8, known as Horizon 2020, which covers expenditure for the years 2014–20. In June 2016 the UK held a referendum on EU membership and a narrow majority voted to leave. At the time of writing it is not yet clear exactly what the result of this decision will be, but the relationship between the UK and the EU is likely to change significantly and it is possible that the UK will need to withdraw from Horizon 2020. [The Minister of Universities and Science at the time of the referendum, Jo Johnson, released a statement on higher education and research following the EU referendum (Johnson 2016a).]

The structure of higher education funding in the UK during 2010-15 is no longer in place. The reforms that created the new governance and funding regimes began with the release of three policy documents published in Autumn 2015: the green paper *Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (BIS 2015), the Nurse review of the research councils (Nurse 2015), and the government’s spending review (HM Treasury 2015). The main proposed changes included adjustments to various grants (to both students and institutions), the introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), and the reorganisation of the research councils under a single umbrella body to be called Research UK. The green paper also included an attempt to change the classification of institutions from public to private (BIS 2015: 68). Until this point, the most recent act of parliament in this area was the Higher Education Act (2004);<sup>23</sup> the changes made to higher education funding by the 2010-15 coalition government were achieved without new legislation. The government had intended to introduce a Higher Education bill in 2012 but this did not come to pass (Gill 2012). In order to implement the reforms outlined in the green paper and spending review, however, new legislation was necessary.

20 For details of the precise amounts available as grants, see the two reports cited herein from House of Commons Library (2017) and Bruce (2012).

21 The Wellcome Trust has consistently spent a large amount on research and related activities each year – £882.2m in 2016, and £1,133m in 2017 (Wellcome Trust 2016: 10; 2017: 9, 29–30).

22 See Whyte (2015: 139–142, 199–202) for historical detail on university endowments and fundraising efforts. As an example of some of the ethical issues arising from private funding, the Wellcome Trust derives its income for research from a £23.2bn (as of September 2017) investment portfolio including hedge funds, property speculation, and shares in oil companies (Wellcome Trust [n.d.]; 2017: 20–28).

23 See Farrington (2015) for a more detailed view of recent higher education legislation in the UK.

A follow-up white paper was released in May 2016 entitled *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (BIS 2016). This document confirmed the plan to introduce new higher education legislation; begin a TEF; reduce barriers to entry for new universities, dissolve HEFCE and create a new regulatory body called the Office for Students (OfS); and create an umbrella body for research called UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) which will incorporate all seven research councils, Innovate UK, and a new body called Research England which takes over the research functions previously performed by HEFCE. All of these policy changes were included in the subsequent Higher Education and Research bill, which passed into law in April 2017 and became the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (Higher Education and Research Act 2017; Morgan 2017).

Throughout all of these policy changes, the imprint of neoliberal ideology is visible. For instance, both the REF and TEF can be considered as neoliberal instruments. The REF, administered first by HEFCE and now by Research England (part of UKRI), [Ref 2021 details (HEFCE 2017a).]

Fisher has described REF compliance as an instance of ‘capitalist realism’ (Fisher 2013). Anxiety machine <http://www.richard-hall.org/2016/06/01/notes-on-desire-anxiety-and-academic-luddism/>

A counter to ‘REF is neoliberal’ argument: the REF gives out public money, so runs contrary to the privatisation agenda.]

Since ‘universities are heavily reliant upon central government funding to conduct their research’ they are ‘also, therefore, subject to any regulatory measures that the government deems appropriate for the award of such funds’ (Eve 2017).

The first TEF results were released in June 2017 (see HEFCE 2017), with institutions ranked as recipients of gold, silver, or bronze awards. The supposed aims are to raise teaching standards by focusing the sector’s attention on teaching outcomes, and to differentiate fees between higher education providers: institutions now need to submit to the TEF in order to be allowed to raise fees in line with inflation, and ‘in the future, increases in fees may be tied to TEF outcomes’ (Ashwin 2017; see also House of Commons 2016), although it is unclear whether this will happen. The metrics used for the TEF received widespread criticism due to the fact that none of them actually measure teaching quality; they are proxies that measure certain outcomes that are assumed to reflect [...] as Ashwin says, ‘If the TEF is based on measures that are unrelated to the quality of teaching, then it will end up measuring institutional game-playing rather than excellent teaching. If this happens, then the TEF will not lead to improvements in the quality of teaching in universities’ (Ashwin 2017).

The creation of the OfS was supposedly in aid of ‘putting students at the heart of the system’ and re-orienting university attention towards improving teaching quality. Despite the lack of evidence that market reform will improve quality, and the aforementioned lack of any

effective way to measure this, the government has been pushing on with imposing market logic ever more deeply on the sector. This ideology is apparent in numerous parts of the new legislation, such as the encouragement of new private providers to enter the sector [cite Jo Johnson; HE Act section]. One of the clearest ways in which marketisation has been occurring is in the turn towards the ‘student as consumer’ (Naidoo 2008: 8–9). While this approach is not new,<sup>24</sup> it now occupies a more central place in higher education policy. [Wanting teaching to have a closer fit with the needs of business – cite Browne review.] This makes an assumption that it is actually possible for ‘consumers’ to have enough information about higher education options to make an informed choice, a notion that does not stand up to scrutiny. As Brown and Carasso have argued, since no-one can experience a degree for the first time twice to make a first-hand comparison between providers, and the full benefits of a degree ‘may not be apparent ... for many years’ (Brown and Carasso 2013: 124), people rely on symbolic proxies for quality. The consumer-driven view also makes an assumption about what higher education is for, i.e. a personal investment in one’s own human capital in order to increase employment opportunities and future earning power, rather than a public good: professional training, growing a more educated citizenry etc. [cite *In Defence of Public Higher Education* 2011)]. Education as a financial investment for the individual. As Collini has put it, the question is whether universities ‘are to be thought of as having a public cultural role partly sustained by public support, or whether we move further towards redefining them in terms of a purely economic calculation of value and a wholly individualistic conception of “consumer satisfaction”’ (Collini 2010). In the UK government’s eyes this debate has been settled. But since markets ‘tend to replicate and even intensify the existing distribution of economic power’ (Collini 2010),<sup>25</sup> the government has chosen an approach to higher education that seems unlikely to decrease social inequality in the long run (see also Callender 2011; Hemsley-Brown 2011).

Research in consumer psychology has shown that consumer decisions are seldom the result of purely rational cost-benefit analysis based on a stable set of preferences. Instead, consumer decisions are highly complex and cannot be detached from the social and political contexts in which they take place. Individuals may select a product or service on the basis of non-rational consideration ... an ‘ideal type’ consumer acting in a perfect market characterised by full information does not exist.

(Jongbloed 2008: 24, quoted in Brown and Carasso 2013: 174)

Longitudinal Education Outcome (LEO) data, available for the first time in June 2017, is

24 It should also be recognised that related debates have long been present within emancipatory educational movements, with some advocates for working-class education arguing that it should be directed towards attaining the goals sought through class struggle. For instance, Woodin, referring to the co-operative movement in Britain, writes that ‘the definition of co-operative education carried a dual conception of internal and external change’ (Woodin 2017: 30), quoting Hall and Watkins that the aim was ‘primarily the formation of co-operative character and opinion, and secondarily, though not necessarily of less import, the training of men and women to take part in industrial and social reforms and municipal life generally’ (Hall and Watkins 1937: 168).

25 See also Piketty (2014).

designed to give students information about likely graduate salaries for different subjects at different institutions (Bagshaw 2017). This plays directly into the idea of treating students as consumers purchasing a product and can expect return on their investment.

The current approach of the UK government is to treat higher education as an individual investment in human capital, as per Becker (see also Friedman 2002 [1962]: 100–05). Even down to Friedman's description of loan repayments. (Friedman only applied his theory to *vocational* training as opposed to higher education ('liberal arts' etc.), so the UK government's approach is to see no difference between a university education and direct vocational training.)

<http://wonkhe.com/blogs/deliverology-in-out-and-around-the-university/>

McGettigan has argued that the austerity narrative was used by the coalition government as cover for introducing sweeping reforms to re-shape the higher education landscape to be more amenable to private investment (2013: 1–3). As McGettigan anticipated, the subsequent 2017 Act included clauses to enable 'new forms of privatisation, in particular, facilitating the entry of private equity into a sector that appears ripe for value extraction' (2013: viii). An explicit aim of the Act was to allow new higher education providers to be established and given degree-awarding powers, and to allow 'market exit', i.e. for established providers to fail. Competition between providers is essential to the logic of this market-based system. There are already over seven hundred 'alternative providers' of higher education, which although are not in receipt of direct government funding, many of them have access to government-backed loans to fund their students' tuition fees (Fielden and Middlehurst 2017: 5–13).<sup>26</sup> The volatility of this sector is demonstrated by the fact that 'between 2012 and 2014, 114 alternative providers either closed or stopped offering higher education' (Fielden and Middlehurst 2017: 11), which raises questions about the wisdom of allowing them to receive public money when there is such a high risk of closure.

['28 per cent of the financing of all tertiary education in UK was from public sources, with 72 per cent from private sources, mostly from students. This was the lowest share of public financing in all 33 OECD countries for which figures were available.'

<http://wonkhe.com/blogs/higher-education-as-a-public-good/>. Although, 'It is likely that the OECD 28 per cent ratio underestimates the extent of public subsidies in higher education (as distinct from all tertiary education). In England, the government provides a considerable indirect public subsidy through the underwriting of that part of tuition debt that will never be paid. Some graduates will never earn enough to trigger the income threshold for repayments through the tax system and most will pay back only part of their loans before it is written off. Calculations of this subsidy vary from time to time but it is currently estimated at about 35 per

26 Definitions of alternative providers vary. In the intermediary regulatory framework in place before the Office for Students begins operations in April 2018, the government recognises several 'tiers' of providers, and a report from the National Audit Office stated that in 'September 2017, there were 112 alternative providers accessing student support funding' (NAO 2017: 5). After the government imposed student number controls in 2014/15, 'the total support paid to students [at alternative providers] has declined, from £724 million in 2013/14 to £417 million in 2015/16' (NAO 2017: 6)

cent of the cost of higher education.’]

On OfS: ‘OfS is a regulator of the English HE marketplace – designed to encourage the growth of a competitive market that informs student choice, to intervene when the market is failing in areas such as equal access, and protect the interest of its consumers (students, government, and wider society).’ <<http://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-beginners-guide-to-the-office-for-students/>>

This chapter has focused on the structure of the higher education sector, not the *content* of what gets taught or researched. However, these two strands are interlinked. Offering particular courses because of ‘consumer demand’ for them, rather than for reasons of intellectual significance, is a reaction by institutions to the marketisation of the sector. In addition, the current finance regime for higher education in England may, in the long term, narrow the choice of prospective students through creating a disincentive for institutions to run courses that do not lead to higher future earnings for graduates. The February 2018 government announcement of a review of higher education implied that differential tuition fees may be charged for different courses at different institutions – possibly based on cost, quality, future graduate earnings, or a combination of there – with lower fees for humanities and social science subjects (Adams and Walker 2018; UK Government 2018). Any link between income for universities, whether through tuition fees or other means, and the type of course that a student studies, would have negative implications for those subjects which have been shown to have a lower graduate premium. This would have the strongest effect on arts subjects. [citation needed]

## Conclusion

[summary]

Despite the best efforts of politicians, a free market in higher education still does not exist. However, Chapter 4 argued that to see the effects of neoliberal ideology in society, we should look not only for fully-formed instances of it in action, but should pay attention to on-going processes of neoliberalisation. Such processes are abundantly clear in the UK’s higher education sector – primarily in England, but throughout Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland as well. And despite the current political turmoil – at the time of writing, the Brexit negotiations led by an unstable Conservative minority government are still underway – this neoliberalisation is deeply embedded in the funding and governance of higher education. This is not to say that a rejection of this ideology is not possible in the near future. Indeed, in Chapter 7 some of the recent work on imagining alternative co-operative forms of higher education will be discussed. Rather,

The influence of neoliberalism on the higher education sector has important implications for open access policy. [expand]

[To what extent is the current state of scholarly publishing (both subscription and open access) a symptom of the neoliberal university?]

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