

**Universities, democracy and science:
the challenge of the new neo-liberal knowledge regime**

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Current Higher Education and Research Bill...

- Last, and most radical, stage of a process that began in 1985 (Jarrett Report)
- Browne Review 2010 and two White Papers (2011) and (2015), culminating in present legislation.
- Two broad themes:
 - Extension of the market, through facilitation of 'for-profit' higher education, and provision of 'consumer' information to students via TEF.
 - Increased powers to university management (reinforcement of managerial hierarchy) and to government ministers (revoking of Royal Charters governing [older] Universities and Research Councils).
 - [Nature of direct government intervention already indicated in 'post-Brexit' proposal to link ability to recruit overseas students to status of institutions and 'quality' of courses].
- How should we understand the nature of the knowledge regime that preceded our current neo-liberal knowledge regime?

Robbins, the inauguration of mass higher education and its public benefits: one principle and four benefits...

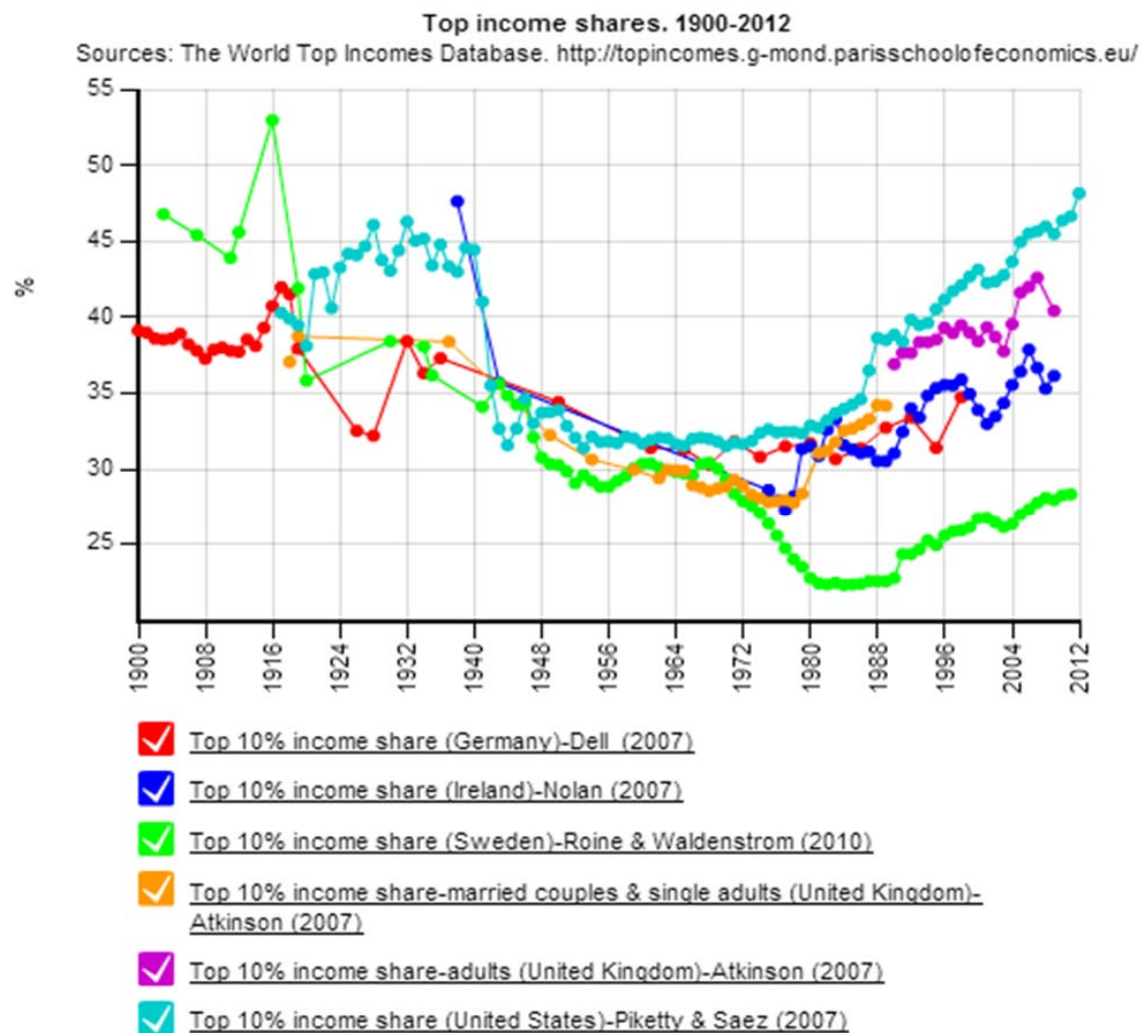
“courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so” (1963: para 30)

- the public benefit of a skilled and educated workforce (1963: para 25),
- the public benefit of higher education in producing cultivated men and women (1963: para 26),
- the public benefit of securing the advancement of learning through the combination of teaching and research within institutions (1963: para 27),
- and the public benefit of providing a common culture and standards of citizenship (1963: para 28).

A knowledge society..?

- An inclusive public interest in higher education
- Education as a social right, underpinning democratic inclusion
- Higher education associated with economic growth in the context of a secular decline in inequalities (from mid-1930s to early 1980s) and the expansion of the welfare state
- But also knowledge for democratic citizenship.
- Paradox of universities becoming like large corporations, but also corporations becoming like universities.
- Piketty and the return of 'patrimonial capitalism' and inherited wealth and position (reflected in institutions, such as private education and stratified universities)

Changing inequalities...



Neo-liberalism and the global knowledge economy...

- A 'neo-liberal knowledge regime' in research and teaching, is intimately connected to a neo-liberal conception of a globalised knowledge economy.
- This, in turn, is linked to wide and widening social inequalities over the last decades (since the inauguration of neo-liberal policies in the 1980s).
- These changes do not reflect a 'natural' evolution of the economy, but are the direct consequence of policies to produce inequality.
- Corporations driven by short-term shareholder value
- Capture of economic policy by national elites who now function 'off-shore'.
- De-regulation of labour markets and financial markets...
 - Polarisation of jobs, precarious employment and poverty in employment.
 - Financial irresponsibility and pursuit of profits from 'rent-seeking' behaviour. Finance sector earnings 1.7 x other sectors – last time they reached this level was the 1930s]
 - Student fees, privatisation of the loan book, etc, are themselves instances of 'financialisation

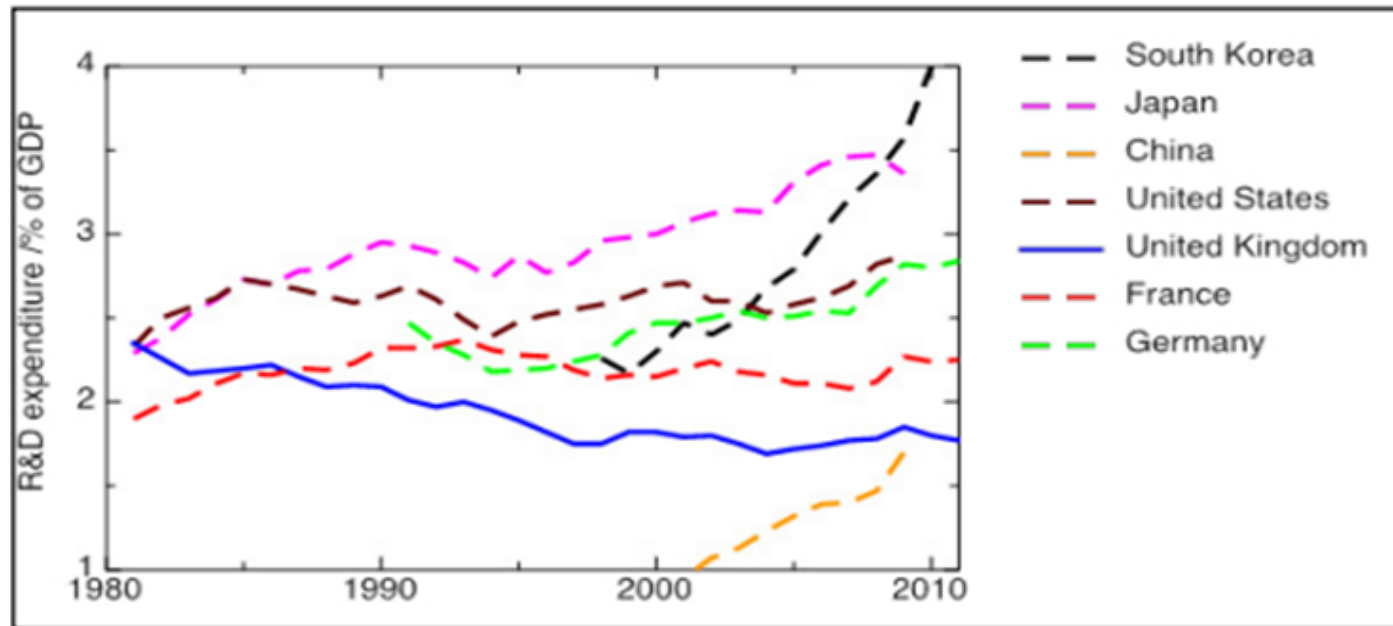


Figure 3: R&D intensity of selected economies over the period 1980-2011, expressed as Gross Expenditure on R&D as a fraction of GDP. Source: Eurostat.

From: Richard Jones 'The UK's Innovation Deficit and How to Fix it' SPERI Research Paper #6, June 2013.

A 'neo-liberal knowledge regime'...

- Education considered as an investment in human capital and a private responsibility of individuals.
- Entry of 'for profit' providers – including, and especially, multinational corporations, by removal of direct funding of teaching (eg Apollo Group and Pearson).
- 'Freeing' universities to pursue 'for-profit' activities, and to seek 'for-profit' partners; indeed, even to change their corporate form.
- 'Unbundling' of activities and outsourcing of functions (to various degrees); the bundled, elite university, versus the unbundled, teaching-only university - Universities UK and the modernisation and efficiency agenda (phase 1 and phase 2).
- 'Outsourcing of functions (to various degrees); efficiency and 'value for money'
- 'Impact agenda' for research to shorten time from idea to income.

Neo-liberalism as an attack on 'publics'...

- State/market the wrong dualism... Dewey and dependence of state on publics.
- Idea of a 'public' depends on dialogue, with politics as the representation of publics.
- Market, in contrast, as 'non-dialogical'.
- Public university serves as a space for the production and dissemination of knowledge, including the evaluation of expertise. Significant that current neo-liberal reforms attack the public university through privatisation of its functions.
- Privatisation of the public university is anti-democratic.

- But issues of our professional commitments and the functions of knowledge cannot be separated from issues of democracy. We are called to respond not simply as scientists but also as citizens.

Source: Alison Wolf *Heading for the precipice: Can further and higher education funding policies be sustained?* King's College Policy Institute, June 2015

Figure 21: Russell Group universities - trends

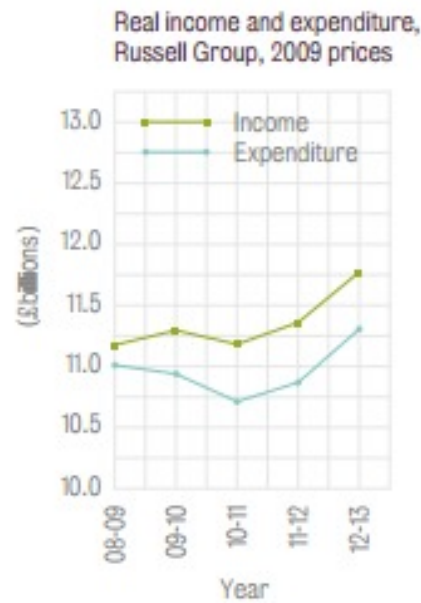


Figure 23: Ex-polytechnic - trends

