

“Whose Universities?”

A Symposium on Academic Governance

Hosted by the Council for the Defence of British Universities (CDBU) and Influencing the Corridors of Power (ICOP)

Tuesday 11 July, 2023

10am - 4pm

**Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS, University of London,
Russell Square, WC1H 0XG**



OUTLINE AND AIMS OF THE DAY

The Council for the Defence of British Universities (CDBU) and Influencing Corridors of Power (ICOP) are pleased to welcome you to this symposium on the subject of academic governance.

The aim of the day will be critically to examine the state of the governance of UK universities. The programme has been designed to allow for exchanges with the speakers and between members of the audience in a setting that is excellent for collegial discussion. The event promises to make a significant and timely contribution to the present debate.

Please see the below for a full schedule of the day, outlines of each of the sessions, and the biographies of each of the speakers.

If you would like to become a member of CDBU, please get in touch with David Wolton at cdbumembership@gmail.com

Any comments or feedback about today's event can be forwarded to Becca Bashford at cdbupress@gmail.com

Thank you for participating in this event.

MORNING SESSION SCHEDULE

Morning Schedule Chair: Professor Anne Sheppard

1005: **Session 1: The issues identified**

1005-1025: **University governance in the UK: is there a way back?**

Professor Mike Shattock (UCL)

1025-1045: **Reimagining University Governance: preliminary findings from CBDU research**

Professor Steve Jones (Manchester University)

1045-1115: Discussion

1120: **Session 2: Views from within the university**

1120-1140: **What protects academic autonomy?**

Gill Evans (University of Cambridge)

1140-1200: **Revisiting the role of students in higher education governance**

Melody Stephen (former student, Manchester University)

1200-1230: Discussion

1230-1330: **Lunch**

AFTERNOON SESSION SCHEDULE

Afternoon Schedule Chair: Professor Aneez Esmail

1330: **Session 3: What counts as good governance? (For whom? By whom? & How?)**

1330-1350: **What role should governing bodies have in academic governance and assurance?**

Alex Bols (Guild HE)

1350-1410: **University governance at its widest extent and in its wider context**

Professor Peter Scott (UCL, and former VC, Kingston University)

1410-1435: Discussion

1440 **Session 4: Critical Considerations**

1440-1500: **How is the character of the university changing?**

Lord David Willetts (President, Resolution Foundation)

1500-1520: **Cultures of mistrust: the threats to critical thinking**

Dr Rowan Williams (former Master, Magdalene College Cambridge)

1520-1545: Discussion

1545-1600: **Summing-up** (Ron Barnett, UCL) and close (tea break ahead of CDBU AGM)

1630: **CDBU AGM**

SESSION OUTLINES & SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Professor Michael Shattock (UCL) – University governance in the UK: is there a way back?

There is widespread dissatisfaction with the ‘business model’ that currently dominates the practice of university governance in the UK chiefly on the grounds that its priorities are managerialist and insufficiently academic. It is customary to blame this on external forces, on governmental, financial and market pressures and we can add the growth in size and complexity of our institutions. It is undoubtedly true that these pressures have changed the internal governance cultures of universities. What can universities do to resist them? My argument will be that there is much that universities can do within their own self-governance to reverse the trends of the last two decades if they choose to do so. But is this part of the problem?

Michael Shattock is a Visiting Professor at UCL and an Honorary Research Fellow at Oxford; he was Registrar of Warwick 1983-99; he is an OBE and has five honorary degrees. He is leader of the governance research group in the Centre for Global Higher Education at Oxford. Publications include (with Aniko Horvath) The Governance of British Higher Education—The impact of governmental, financial and market pressures, Bloomsbury, 2020.

Professor Steve Jones (Manchester University) – Reimagining University Governance: preliminary findings from CBDU research

For most university staff, governance is a secretive and distant activity, something that happens without their consent or understanding. Yet the greater power invested in governing bodies means that their approaches - and the ideologies that inform them - now impact everyone on campus. This paper reports on a 2023 project commissioned by the CBDU that involved interviews with a range of past and present governors at UK institutions. New and critical insights into practice are offered, together with practical recommendations for more participatory and context-sensitive forms of governance.

Professor Steven Jones is Head of Manchester Institute of Education, which is part of The University of Manchester. He is particularly interested in how the marketisation of English Higher Education has impacted on staff and students, and he is one of the most prominent commentators on English universities, having written op-ed pieces for the Guardian and other newspapers, and made regular contributions to WonkHE, HEPI, the Times Higher and the Conversation. Professor Jones's newest book, Universities Under Fire, was published in June 2022.

Gill Evans (University of Cambridge) – What protects academic autonomy?

The Higher Education and Research Act of 2017 defines 'autonomy' as 'the freedom of English higher education providers within the law to conduct their day-to-day management in an effective and competent way'. Where is 'academic autonomy' in that view of a university's independence?

G.R.Evans is Emeritus Professor of Medieval Theology and Intellectual History in the University of Cambridge.

Melody Stephen (former student, Manchester University) – Revisiting the Role of Students in Higher education governance

An experience-based exploration of how governance can alienate student 'voice' and create factions within governance at the expense of the student experience. Since Covid, the demand on universities has increased, and there is a greater awareness and critique of leadership from students, which means that invisible decision-making in oak-panelled rooms is insufficient. The need to bridge the gap of trust between the student, the academic, the professional, the lay governors and the executive is imperative but the task strains under the weight of historical and performative traditions. Universities are slow to change and the repercussions can be dire for the most disadvantaged students.

Melody Stephen is a Law graduate who was elected General Secretary of the University of Manchester Students' Union as well as a Board member of Governors of the University of Manchester (2020). She is currently a board member at UCAS and UCAS media board representing 700000 students and at the National Union of Students. She is also a member of the Strategic Advisory group at Advance HE and an executive member of Bridging the Bar, a charity aimed at increasing diversity in the legal profession.

Alex Bols (Guild HE) – What role should governing bodies have in academic governance and assurance?

University boards of governors/Councils are expected to play an active role in seeking assurance that academic governance is robust and effective. Increasing numbers of institutions have independent board members observing academic board/senate, have joint senate and council meetings or are developing academic governance committees of the board. Do governing bodies have the capability and capacity to undertake this role effectively and how does this avoid duplicating, or overstepping, internal academic governance processes?

Dr Alex Bols is Deputy Chief Executive of GuildHE, which represents over 60 universities and colleges. He is an experienced university and school governor and has worked across the sector including at NUS, Universities UK, European Students Union and the 1994 Group.

Professor Peter Scott (UCL, and former VC, Kingston University) – University governance at its widest extent and in its wider context

To paraphrase a famous resolution passed by the House of Commons in 1780 the corporate character of the university has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished. But how?

Peter's argument is in two parts. First, institutional governance (councils, courts and governing bodies) is best viewed through a wide lens - as one element in a complex eco-system within which strategic and operational decisions get taken. As well as institutional governance, this eco-system includes national and system-level governance (Government itself and assorted intermediate agencies); executive leadership (senior institutional managers); and academic governance (not only formal bodies such as Senates and Faculty Boards but also the influence exercised by academic 'tribes' and professions through new fangled assessment instruments and old fashioned peer review). Second, this governance eco-system, including institutional governance, must itself be viewed through the lenses of mass higher education and the wider political economy, with their own complex synergies and contradictions. Too often this has been reduced to a series of hurrah and/or boo words – efficiency, modernisation, accountability, corporatisation, marketisation, managerialism and the rest. A more subtle reading is needed.

Peter Scott is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Studies at University College London. Previously he was Commissioner for Fair Access in Scotland (2016-2022), Chair of the Council of

the University of Gloucestershire (2012-2015), and Vice-Chancellor of Kingston University (1998-2010). He has also been a member of the board of the (former) Higher Education Funding Council for England, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Education at the University of Leeds. In a much earlier life, he was Editor of (what was then) The Times Higher Education Supplement.

Lord David Willetts (Resolution Foundation) – How is the character of the university changing?

David will briefly review previous accounts from Bruce Truscott's Red Brick which was an attack on the role of local worthies in running the civic universities and A H Halsey arguing that public funding liberated academics from such dependence. Now the responsibilities of governing bodies are increasing, reinforced by OfS regulation. The biggest risk to the character of the University would be if OfS decided that universities should be treated as public sector bodies. There is also a danger that growth in student numbers will lead to very large universities indeed unless we create new higher education institutions which is also an opportunity to promote greater institutional diversity.

The Rt Hon. Lord Willetts FRS is the President of the Resolution Foundation. He is a visiting Professor at King's College, London and an Honorary Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford. He was Chancellor of the University of Leicester. He served as Minister for Universities and Science (2010-2014) and previously worked at HM Treasury and the No. 10 Policy Unit. His book "A University Education" is published by Oxford University Press.

Dr Rowan Williams (former Master, Magdalene College Cambridge) – Cultures of Mistrust: the Threats to Critical Thinking

The crisis in academic governance, reflected in the practical and financial crises in so many institutions, is the working through of a culture that assumes intellectual activity as such has no independent justification and no capacity for self-scrutiny. This needs resisting; but it needs resisting in ways that take the argument to the basic level and address the needs of a viable democracy.

Dr Rowan Williams grew up in South Wales and has worked in various universities including Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol and Yale. After serving as Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to

2012, he spent eight years as Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and has been Chancellor of the University of South Wales since 2013.

Summing-up and concluding reflections: Ronald Barnett

Ron Barnett is a member of the Executive Committee of the CDBU and Emeritus Professor of Higher Education, University College London – having been Pro-Director for Longer Term Strategy at the Institute of Education. He is also President of the Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Society.

Professor Anne Sheppard

Anne Sheppard is Professor Emerita of Ancient Philosophy at Royal Holloway, University of London and Chair of the Executive Committee of CDBU.

Professor Aneez Esmail

Aneez Esmail is Emeritus Professor of General Practice at the University of Manchester and Executive Member of the CDBU. He was co-ordinator of the Campaign for Better Governance at the University of Manchester <https://bettergovernanceatuniman.org.uk/>

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