The Warwick Senior Administration Reunion Conference Report
Executive Summary

The graduands of 2035 are just being born.

What is the long-term future for HE and what considerations and actions will we as educators, business and governmental leaders need to make now and in the near term to support the long-term future?

The Senior Administration Reunion Conference took place at the University of Warwick on Saturday 25th April 2015 to mark the University’s 50th anniversary. Delegates included current senior administrative staff and a cohort of international colleagues participating in the Warwick International Programme in the Leadership and Management of Higher Education (WIPLM). The University was particularly pleased to welcome back many former colleagues, spanning the full 50 years of Warwick’s existence, who had made such valuable contributions to the University’s development and success.

This report seeks to offer some reflections on the day’s talks and discussions, also including images from a thought-provoking and enjoyable celebratory day.
Conference Welcome

Ken Sloan, Registrar and Chief Operating Officer at Warwick, opened the conference and welcomed participants, reflecting on Warwick's growth since 1965. Expansion and development has been incredible from the original university covering a site of just 417 acres and from a ‘Foundation Fund’ of a £1 million donation, a £4 million government fund and a capital expenditure budget of £3 million. There were 380 students at the time with a forecasted growth to 5,000, possibly reaching 20,000 students at some point in the future. Warwick currently has over 23,000 students, including 8,000 international students. Warwick has developed significantly from its origins as a local/regional university to one with a global footprint, not only in terms of facilities and connections overseas but in terms of the demography of both the student and staff population at Warwick. Some of the key campus developments at Warwick up to 2015 were summarized: images of a number of these can be found later in the report and several were visited during the very enjoyable post-lunch campus tour.
Higher Education: Where We Are Now

Mike Shattock, the Registrar at Warwick between 1983 and 1999 offered a thought-provoking view on ‘Higher Education – Where We Are Now’. Mike discussed the risks and uncertainties facing the sector with successive governments, but also the potential opportunities for some institutions. A view on what the sector might look like in 2035 noted that a 65% participation rate could exist but would there be an accompanying impact on the institutional and structural development of HE? Financial and institutional stratification were issues in 1995 and what has changed in the intervening years? Following a range of adverse publicity there is a substantial risk to the overall reputation of the sector: is the system highly regarded by the public?

The increasing and lucrative international demography of the student population in some institutions also poses a potential threat, should the model change in the future. For example, in 1965 there were around 150 Chinese students at Warwick, compared to the current figure of nearer 1500: changes in this model could adversely affect overall income. Whilst the strong institutions may cope well with the increasing and lucrative international demography of the student population, it is likely that some will struggle with the changing model.

Mike concluded his session with an analogy of moving escalators. He said that whilst in the past (1995) it was achievable across years to move up and down the escalator, the escalator had now halted and positive movement may not be so easy.

“It is becoming very difficult to move up the escalator and very easy to move down.”
Keynote Speech – HE 2035

The University of Warwick’s President and Vice Chancellor, Professor Sir Nigel Thrift, gave the conference keynote speech, noting the potential for significant change in the future and posing three questions:

- What do Universities really do?
- What should we do?
- What will we look like in 2035?

Nigel reflected that most universities are only looking five years into the future with a focus on ‘survival, revival and in some cases doing over your rivals’, noting that universities are very different beasts in comparison with the past. Universities around the world are looking at what they offer and how they can meet the discerning demands of the market and he suggested some ways in which universities could differentiate themselves.

- Through the specialisation of courses that would focus on multi-disciplines and customised courses with smaller student numbers.
- To focus purely on teaching without the ‘frills of research’, commenting that many institutions are doing this well.
- Institutions could work much more closely with industry, not simply through research contracts but though closer collaboration, citing Warwick and Waterloo (Canada) as successful examples.
- Institutions could look to become more internationally focused, with teaching facilities overseas, citing that very few UK HEIs have international missions.

“We are now large corporate organisations with a vast range of different compass points, a diverse division of labour and with student populations demanding unique and differentiating experiences.”
An overarching challenge to the sector now and in the future is the financial situation. Whereas in the past universities used to receive considerable amounts of government funding, as long as they met their targets on student numbers, but this is no longer the case. Nigel went on to describe the considerations that would need to be borne in mind in any new system.

- Where institutions adopt a new strategy, can they persevere with it for long enough to give it a chance of success?
- Has the new environment fundamentally changed what’s on offer and is this for the better or worse? It will be difficult to say as there is no research.
- Has the expansion of the HE sector cemented boundaries across classes? Sir Nigel did not believe so.
- With increasing ethnic diversity there is a demand for teaching to be similarly differentiated.

To respond to these considerations, universities will need to ‘redesign themselves’. Offering a view of 2035, Nigel predicted that there will be different ways in which universities will be marketised. His view is that two thirds of institutions will offer mass produced competency based courses, in which degrees will be of variable length and taught across a range of different universities (citing Newcastle as an example). In a view of the elite market, the ‘Ivy League’ (those with huge endowments), would provide degrees for a small market (5 to 10%) who could afford to pay premium fees. In the remaining middle market, universities would need to redefine their strategies and offer semi-personalised teaching with elements of digital and face to face interventions and an increased research portfolio with a mix of applied and abstract approaches. ‘Novel and effective international strategies’, very careful financial management and building cooperatives, perhaps with FE institutions, to provide more highly tailored student experiences.
Professor Thrift concluded his highly thought provoking talk with a forecast about the demographic changes that are taking place within the UK. With the population set to grow from 73 million in 2035 to a staggering 90 million by 2065, ‘there will certainly be a boom in demand for Higher Education’.

External Perspective – Some Trends to Consider

Ben Page, the Chief Executive of Ipsos MORI, opened his exploration of some trends to consider by noting that most predictions are wrong – a comment certainly borne out in the result of the General Election that followed soon after the conference!

Ben presented some interesting insights into UK trends over recent decades, considering those of particular interest to the HE sector. For instance, the NHS has been an ongoing concern amongst the British public for the past 20 years, whilst anxiety about crime has decreased. The area of highest anxiety amongst the current population centres on inequality. In an age of ever-present technology and connectivity, it was interesting to hear a uniform desire for simplicity: people of all ages wanting a limit on choice. However, generational differences can be found on key issues, most notably the fact that young people now are much more individualistic in their outlook and political affiliation (or lack of).

Whilst he argued that politicians have never been trusted, civil servants are considered more trusted professionals than they were in 1983. An interesting follow-on from this is the fact that ‘the university’ is ranked the highest institution amongst the UK population in approval ratings. It may be wise to consider Mike Shattock’s earlier cautionary observation about the future reputation of HE in relation to this.
Theme 1 – The Global Student

Paul Greatrix, Registrar at the University of Nottingham (Deputy Registrar at Warwick from 1998-2006), began the session on the Global Student considering the Western perspective. The typical western/UK student in 2035 would be female, in light of the growing educational issue of under-performing boys. He questioned the role of technology, with predictions about the rise of online courses (such as MOOC’s) and stated that more personalised learning is also likely to play a part in the future. What will this mean for universities and will many find a way to adapt to survive?

Paul went on to question whether students would also be more physically mobile in the future? In global terms, mobility is still growing slowly, with Asian students forming the majority travelling for higher education. However, UK government constraints could limit opportunities for the potential expansion of this market in the mass HE system.

Steve Cannon, Executive Vice President of the University of Hong Kong (Finance and Administration Manager at Warwick from 1985-1988), followed with the perspective from Asia, in the face of a very sensitive time in the Hong Kong HE sector. Whilst the number of Asian students in western universities is strong, the contestability of markets and funding for global mobility should not be forgotten: it is even questionable whether Asian students will want to travel to study if domestic institutions are improving. However, as HE sees a growth in applied courses, the fact that Asian universities are notoriously remote from industry could continue to act as a draw to the West, and specifically to the strengths of universities like Warwick. Steve closed his talk with some thoughts on Generation Z, noting the danger of pre-supposing our ideas onto future generations.
In the discussions that followed, Abhinay Muthoo (Head of Economics and Programme Leader of the WIPLM Programme at the University of Warwick) posed the question if, at world level, demand for HE is set to double, how should the HE sector in the UK respond and collaborate to attract both domestic and global students?

Whilst Paul repeated that he would like to be optimistic in the face of doubt that collaboration in the sector would occur, Steve noted the responsibility that universities and states have to support emerging nations – both students and institutions.
There was an opportunity for former colleagues to enjoy a brief campus tour, visiting some of the more recent additions to the university, including the Maths and Statistics Zeeman Building for a group photograph and a walk around the Warwick Manufacturing Group plaza and new buildings. More familiar ground was then reached with a stop at Senate House, walking past the Arts Centre to the Rootes Building and down to Red Square, which still includes the ‘Toil’ sculpture. Whilst these early Warwick landmarks are still in place, it was interesting to reflect on their contemporary use (for instance Rootes now houses a student ‘Learning Grid’) and the changing landscape around them.
Theme 2 – Our Evolving Relationship with the Student Community

In the opening talk of this theme Nicola Owen, Chief Administrative Officer at the University of Lancaster (Deputy Registrar at Warwick from 2010-2013), explored trends in HE relating to the needs of the labour market in a society where general life expectancy is increasing and whose workers will not only spend over six decades in employment but who are likely to have upwards of 20 different careers during that time. Individuals with high levels of skills and training will be in increasing demand. Coupled with the rapid expansion of human knowledge (currently human knowledge doubles every twelve months with predictions pointing towards an acceleration of this to every 12 hours), an environment will be created where students will demand tailored educational offerings in order to allow them to be adaptable in an uncertain future. Universities have the opportunity to lead on the personalisation of education, particularly through the sector’s position at the technological vanguard. Criticism has been levelled at such a 'pic-n-mix' approach to HE, but Nicola proposed that in 30 years’ time this could be the norm, with the current mass HE system increasingly difficult to sustain.

Jo Horsburgh, Deputy Registrar at the University of Warwick, continued by considering societal norms and their impact on students in 2035. As individual expectations are shaped by the experience they have of the society that surrounds them, what will be the impact of 24/7 connectivity, crisis of overload and the changing employment landscape?

Facilitating and prioritising student wellbeing and creation of resilience in students will become integral to the HE mission. Universities will play a critical role in the development of skills and mindset to handle ‘portfolio careers’. HE will need to change to support the needs and development of individuals who are not tied to work or task but

“So what will our relationship be with students in 2035? Much depends on what students think, feel and believe and how changing societal norms shape what it will feel like to be a citizen in 2035.”
focussed on life meaning and achievement at a level that contributes to the enrichment of society and culture as a whole. Higher education will need to become more agile, being responsive and flexible to increasing student demand for a unique life path, not one defined along traditional concepts of a career. Universities will play a critical role in increasing student confidence pre-tertiary education and then providing convenient access to education during a lifetime of change and continuing development.

David Palfreyman, Bursar of New College, Oxford since 1988 (Finance Office at Warwick from 1977-1988), presented a counterpoint to the preceding positions. Using ‘wellbeing’ as the centre of his argument, he charted the shift in that term’s meaning from 19th Century connotations of pastoral development to 21st Century links to
employability and life goals tied to career and earnings. Embodied in
this shift is an emerging re-organisation of the university/student
relationship to one increasingly defined in a legalistic manner. As
such, universities have become ever more susceptible to ‘reviews’
from consumers, like any other product or service. Unlike other
industries, HE delivery is managed largely by academics who are not
equipped to (and hitherto have not been asked to) lead market-driven
organisations. This has placed universities under a form of public
scrutiny that they have struggled to manage. Smaller, newer
universities and those with limited investments have no such protection
and are being forced to make ever more radical adaptations, drawing
them away from traditional concepts of what a university education
should involve. Meanwhile, Oxbridge and the larger London
universities have been able to use the advantage of large endowments
to insulate themselves from this process, further fragmenting the HE
landscape. Massive changes are developing that traditional publically-
funded universities may not be able to meet and new solutions – such
as private or for-profit universities – may be called upon to meet the
needs of new generations of student-consumers.
Theme 3 – Future University Models

The final themed session anticipated the future for elite and private universities. Jonathan Nicholls, the Registrary at the University of Cambridge (Registrar at Warwick from 1999-2004), presented a fascinating picture of one possible student experience at an elite university, as seen from the perspective of ‘Daisy Clark’, currently aged 7. In 2035 Daisy would experience a whole world of unique opportunities on a global campus with access to the best facilities, cutting edge technology and the best research-led teaching available, to provide a truly rich and unique personal learning experience. That future is not without its threats. Places at university will not be assured, the financial landscape will remain challenging with ongoing spending reviews, further cuts in research grants, and the costs for engaging the best brains will keep rising.

Jonathan went on to consider Cambridge in this context and how it is trying to position itself to ensure that it remains one of the small group of world-leading research universities in a more competitive and less benign public policy environment.

David Holmes, as the Chairman of the Academic Council of BPP University (Senior Assistant Registrar at Warwick from 1970-1982), explored the model of a private provider from the perspective of the UK’s only university dedicated to business. The increase in student fees since 2004 has already seen a blurring between public and private funding and provision of higher education in the UK and there is a projected shift in demand in the US and the UK towards more privately funded postgraduate programmes. In terms of the global landscape, public and private institutions in the USA, Japan and France have been competing for some time.

“In 2035, Daisy Clark will be in her early twenties, living in Cambridge and working on a transnational research programme in bio-engineering.”

“Futurology is always a hazardous business ...
... since 2004, with the introduction of progressively higher tuition fees, albeit backed by student loans, it is clear that there is an ongoing blurring process between public and private provision in the UK.”
One prediction for 2035 would see the HE sector grow in line with projected population growth (70 million in the UK by 2036). The development of niche markets, combined with increasing demand for professional skills (such as engineering) could be met by government and employers combining to pay for the cost of degrees and institutions will need to provide a range of opportunities to satisfy a spectrum of student needs. Institutions such as BPP, which are continuing to establish themselves, would be well placed to provide for this increase in demand, concentrating in professional services qualifications.

The presentations by Jonathan and David led to the question ‘does an elite university feel at all threatened by an increase in the private sector?’ Jonathan’s response noted that in some areas this could be the case, for example in Law, concluding that there is no room for complacency. Indeed, the issue of complacency in the sector more broadly proved a recurring theme during the conference.

Graphic Visualiser representation of the afternoon sessions.
Final thoughts of the day

In the final discussion session of the day’s themes Alison Allden, Chief Executive of HESA (Director of IT Services at Warwick from 1998-2003), began with a thoughtful reference to the point raised by Paul concerning the prevalence of female students. An image from the recent International Women’s Day depicted a map, showing the proportion of students at UK universities by sex per country. Alison reflected on this significant trend, noting that female students are in the majority everywhere except India, the Middle East and Africa.

Further questions were posed on financial concerns, such as, by 2035 will anyone be talking about private and public universities in a world of fee and loan backed students: will consideration turn more towards profit and not for profit institutions? Discussion then turned to skills in
HE, beginning with a reflection on what kind of skills the leaders of universities would need in the future. Whilst issues of resilience and understanding the international agenda were raised, it was also felt that it is difficult to predict exactly who would make a good leader in HE.

Thoughts inevitably turned to concerns for graduates and the level and range of skilled jobs that may be available in the future, in an age group already disaffected by what is seen as a lack of opportunities. At the same time, industry regularly raises concerns about the graduate skill set not meeting their needs. Ken noted the example of the co-operative programme at the University of Waterloo, Canada and the need for universities to pay more than lip-service to engendering entrepreneurialism. The valid worries about graduate unemployment are nothing to the number of people leaving school with few qualifications and no real skill set from families existing below the poverty line. In a closing comment, Nicola returned to the conference theme, emphasising our responsibility as educators and suggesting that working more directly with schools, beyond the current scope of the widening participation agenda, could be an important factor in meeting the needs of future generations and hence HE 2035.

Closing Comments from Ken Sloan

“It was a thought-provoking day where, refreshingly, people were willing to break beyond the short term political cycle and truly imagine possibilities for the future of higher education.”

Report written by Kevin Hamer, Lisa Lavender & William Rupp (LDC)
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