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# The spirit of research

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## ABSTRACT

The reinvention of the university as a research-focused institution has transformed the way in which research is defined in practice. It is now widely explained in terms of a narrow set of performative expectations. This paper draws on historical literature to trace the hollowing out of research from a broad, though often sceptical, conception shaped by the liberal education tradition to one that is now expressed and evaluated almost exclusively in terms of publication, grant getting, and doctoral completions. In so doing it is argued that there is a need to challenge neo-liberal assumptions about the purposes of higher education and reclaim what Truscot referred to as the ‘spirit of research’. This is essential both for authentic higher education teaching and as a set of scholarly, epistemic virtues. Such a conception, compatible with both the liberal education and Humboldtian traditions of the university, values research awareness over research productivity and provides a more secure link between research and teaching.

## KEYWORDS

Research-active; teaching-research nexus; liberal education; neo-liberalism; performativity; epistemic virtues

## Introduction

Excellence in research has become *the* defining feature of the highly ranked global university of the twenty-first century. Yet, what is often not fully appreciated is that this point of distinction is a comparatively recent reinvention of the purpose of the university, especially in the English higher education tradition and the Anglo-sphere of former British colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and South Africa. The roots of the oldest English universities, Oxford and Cambridge, are as teaching and training establishments for the clergy and the older professions, such as medicine and the law. A higher education was also, more broadly, about the process of reinforcing a common cultural heritage. Research was not considered a priority and was even looked on with some suspicion as the refuge of academics with inferiority complexes stemming from humble backgrounds and those trying rather too hard to prove themselves in a leisurely culture rich in the traditions of British middle class and aristocratic life (Halsey & Trow, 1971). The reach of this attitude towards research in British university life should not be underestimated. Relatively few British academics possessed a PhD until quite recent times. In the mid-1950s, before major expansion of the UK higher education system took place, less than 30% of academics teaching economics, English, geography and philosophy

possessed a doctoral degree. The figure for history was just under 35%, and 56% in mathematics. Only those in physics (70%) and chemistry (82%) were overwhelmingly likely to possess a PhD (Collison, 1956). The PhD is intimately connected with the Humboldtian tradition and was a comparative newcomer to British universities. Oxford was the first British university to award a research doctorate in 1917 and others, such as London and Cambridge, followed shortly afterwards. The reforms to Oxford and Cambridge which took place from the 1870s included, at Cambridge, the founding of the Cavendish Laboratory, the development of new scientific fields such as biochemistry, and the introduction of the PhD by research in 1919 (Jöns, 2008). In this respect, the culture of research in English universities lagged behind those in both Germany and the US.

For British academics teaching was the 'primary condition of his employment' (Herrenden-Harker, 1935, p. 110). Even in the mid-1960s, when Halsey and Trow (1971) conducted a survey of British academics in a still small and firmly elite sector, just 10% were 'interested' in research and a paltry figure – just 4% – thought of it as their primary responsibility. This is why, up until 30 years ago, British academics were always called 'university teachers', a phrase that has now virtually disappeared from the lexicon except, on occasions, to refer to someone whose contract is now 'teaching-only'. Teaching was seen as the primary role of the university academic, a point also noted by Tight (2010) in his analysis of the so-called golden age of British academe.

Going further back, those who held professorial chairs in the nineteenth century would normally have held first class degrees in one or more subjects and were intended to have 'had an encyclopaedic knowledge of their special subject' (Phillips, 1948, p. 2). This attitude still prevailed in the 1930s when, according to Herrenden-Harker (1935, p. 115), 'a university teacher of physics in this country should be capable of giving advanced instruction in all branches of his extensive subject'. A relevantly similar assertion is made by Livingstone (1948, p. 13) with respect to the wide scope of the inter-war tutor of the modern history curriculum and its subsequent splintering into medievalist and modernist strands and sub-branches within these divisions.

The gradual swing of the pendulum to the other extreme, where a professor began to be seen as a person with a deep knowledge of a narrow sub-specialism within one subject, took hold in the second part of the twentieth century in response to the changing role of the university as the government's research arm and as a result of the fragmentation of academic knowledge (Moodie, 1986), although this fear was already apparent in the nineteenth century (Turner, 1993). The splintering of disciplines into specialised silos has resulted in the isolation of scholarship at the expense of intellectually informed general discussion about key issues affecting modern society (Damrosch, 1995). The change in the lexicon – from university teacher to academic – is highly significant as it signals a fundamental change in the role and expectations of the academic profession, something that has taken place in little more than two generations.

It is against this recent reinvention of the university that the way in which 'research' is defined needs to be understood. However, much of the scholarly attention has focused on the long running debate as to whether there is a link between teaching and research (e.g. Black, 1972; Bresler, 1968; Elton, 2001; Jenkins et al., 2002; Newman, 1852/1910). This debate is a hardy perennial of the higher education literature closely connected to the Humboldtian ideal of unifying teaching and

research, and counter to Newman's mid-nineteenth century view that the functions of teaching and research are better carried out in separate institutions. Despite its origin in the German higher education tradition there is, if anything, stronger support in a modern context for Humboldtian ideals among English academics than their German counterparts (Reiners, 2014). Yet, a definition of what is actually meant by research has been largely overlooked in nearly all studies investigating the teaching-research nexus. The absence of any such analysis has meant that the literature is largely based on taken-for-granted notions of what constitutes research.

In addition to a lack of direct attention to the definition of research it is clear that, over time, understandings about how this term is interpreted have altered quite fundamentally in practice as a result of the changes that have taken place in higher education on a global basis. The nature of how understandings of research have shifted over time will form the focus for this paper and will draw on the historical literature in exploring these changes. I will question how universities now define research as a narrowly performative activity hollowed out by neo-liberal assumptions about the purposes of higher education. In so doing I will argue that there is a need to challenge these assumptions and reclaim the 'spirit of research' (Truscot, 1943, p. 143) as a scholarly activity in the liberal education tradition, something that would provide a more realistic and inclusive definition of 'research-active' and help to re-establish the link between research and teaching as something that all university teachers are capable of achieving.

## Research and the scholarly personae

There has been a narrowing of the way in which research has been defined in contemporary higher education which is both a comparatively recent phenomenon and stands in sharp contrast with a much broader conception that used to hold sway. This conception is strongly related to the influence of the liberal education tradition in shaping British, and to some extent American, higher education which stressed the importance of the good character of the scholarly enquirer as opposed to the achievements or 'outputs' of research with which we are more familiar today. The striking emphasis of nineteenth century intellectuals on the formation and development of character – such as J.S. Mill, Samuel Smiles, and Matthew Arnold – meant that, for the 'respectable' Victorians, moral worth was something that needed to be developed and displayed (Collini, 1985). This was reflected in the emphasis on character in the late Victorian public school where cricket, and other sports, were seen principally as a means to forge the good character of young men destined for leadership roles. The importance of character education in English liberal higher education needs to be understood in regard to the behaviour of academics as well as students. Being an academic was as much, if not more, about displaying certain dispositions than it was about scholarly achievements as we might understand them today in terms of publications, honours, and other forms of recognition. The 'scholarly personae' was about 'doings rather than writings' (Paul, 2014, p. 352) and demanded adherence to a set of austere, epistemic virtues.

Important among these virtues was circumspection and great care in the treatment of evidence and claim-making. For academic historians this meant 'intellectual openness (to alternative causal relationships), honesty (about evidence), and fairness (in weighing evidence or causal factors)' (Paul, 2011). Disinterestedness is, perhaps, the key epistemic

virtue of the researcher in the liberal tradition stretching from Hamerton (1873) and Arnold (1993) through to Moberly (1949) and Livingstone (1948, p. 11) the latter of whom identifies 'blindness of mind, presuppositions and the protean forms of egoism' as the enemies of the pursuit of truth. The emphasis was on ascetic self-discipline and, for Hamerton (1873) in particular, breaking the ties between scholarship and the ruling interests of the church. Epistemic virtues, such as truthfulness, were closely aligned with a gentlemanly code of honour dating from the seventeenth century (Shapin, 1994). A quite different set of virtues are required to chase economic goods, such as research income, or social goods connected with non-epistemic goods, such as honours and fame which match the performative demands of modern higher education (Paul, 2014).

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and reflecting on the Nazification of science, higher education scholars such as Karl Jaspers and Walter Moberly re-asserted the central importance of epistemic virtues, especially disinterestedness. According to Livingstone (1948, p. 10) the 'shrine is neither utility nor success nor social progress, nor even goodness, but truth'. Without a commitment to epistemic virtues the dangers of the universities acting 'like mercenaries' to serve the rulers of the day will always remain (Livingstone, 1948, p. 8). It is no accident that Merton's classic statement of epistemic virtues, via the acronym CUDOS, dates from 1942 during the horrors of the Second World War (Merton, 1942).

The importance of epistemic virtues, such as humility, disinterestedness, and circumspection, or 'the basic spirit of tentativeness' (Parsons, 1968, p. 196), meant that the emphasis we see today on publication was largely absent. While research is now seen as an unqualified virtue, there is a long history of scepticism about its role in higher education. The backdrop for this scepticism relates, in large measure, to the powerful influence of the liberal education tradition of educational thinking, particularly during the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. The influence of John Henry Newman, Matthew Arnold, J.S. Mill, A.N. Whitehead, and R.S. Peters was notable in arguing the case for a liberal education. Newman (1852/1910, p. ix) made plain his belief that the university 'is a place for the *teaching of universal knowledge*.' He italicised the words 'teaching' and 'universal' to make clear his beliefs about what is important in university learning. He urged the university to concentrate its efforts on 'the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement.' Specialist research institutes, following the practice in many parts of mainland Europe were, in Newman's view, better suited to the pursuit of research and discovery than the university. As the role of the university in Newman's vision was about the transmission of knowledge, this meant that influential figures, such as Mark Pattison, regarded research and teaching as indivisible since it was not about discovering what was new (Jones, 2007). Newman's conception of university teaching in terms of the teaching of universal knowledge still resonated in the second part of the twentieth century. This can be illustrated in Fletcher's (1968, pp. 7–8) discussion of the aims of higher education in the late 1960s when he asserts that university teachers, while starting with 'what is tentative and sceptical', always go on 'to the formulation of universal laws pronounced and taught with conviction'.

It is easy to parody liberal education as elitist with an overriding concern for producing well-rounded (invariably English) gentlemen. However, an insistence on what Whitehead (1929, p. 25) called 'the spirit of generalisation', where the emphasis should be on principles rather than details, was about resisting the trap of falling into a limited

and intellectually restricted view of the world through specialisation. A university education should not, in other words, be an experience that narrows the mind by preparing a student for a specialism or profession but one that provides 'a comprehensive and connected view' (Mill, 1867, p. 5). This tradition is by no means exclusively British. Charles Eliot's influence as Harvard President led to the introduction of the elective system, allowing undergraduates unrestricted choices of courses. In so doing he was motivated by a desire to broaden rather than narrow the educational experience of students, a sentiment that was shared with Mill and others that advocated a liberal education. They also wanted to see the development of the good character of those who would become future leaders by initiating them into a common cultural inheritance (Moberly, 1949). This meant that research was seen as subsidiary to teaching and character education as the university's main purpose, both for students and academic staff.

Even in the post-1945 period there was considerable opposition particularly in British higher education to the pressure on academics to publish in order to gain promotion. The Robbins report (1963) remarked on the perils of premature publication while Nicholl (1954, p. 275) regarded this as something that had 'seduced us from our main task in the universities, which is to hand on to students the traditional wisdom of mankind'. Nicholl was far from alone in expressing this view. Many others were concerned that a penchant for research acts as a hazardous distraction from the pursuit of a general education at the highest level. Roy Niblett saw research as 'a dangerous trade' (Niblett, 1951, p. 117) as it posed the risk of turning the academic into a narrow technical specialist as opposed to someone who could command a broader range of knowledge. Brannan (1966, p. 66) argued that research was, in many respects, 'a positive evil' and was the 'great enemy of thought' on the basis that it was not the natural function of 'philosophic minds ... concerned with the whole rather than the part, with understanding and significance rather than with knowledge' (Brannan, 1966, pp. 67–68). For Moberly, research was hazardous inasmuch that it might produce 'a botched scholar with a narrow epistemological base rather than an 'educated man' (Moberly, 1949, p. 182). It follows from this view that researchers need to possess an educational background which has 'broad and secure foundations' (Robertson, 1930, p. 55) in order to have the capacity to do meaningful work and identify the right questions to ask. According to Nicholl (1954, p. 273) 'it is the breadth and depth of a person's general culture which normally determines the value of his research – indeed, it is difficult to see how anyone can decide what is worth investigating without a considerable background of relevant learning and general culture.'

Empirical research is today accorded a high status in universities to the extent that those who do not collect 'data' are othered – or damned by faint praise – as conducting 'non-empirical' or 'curiosity-driven' research, whereas in the past the reverse was true. Brannan (1966) was far from alone in regarding 'philosophic minds' as occupying the high ground to those who conducted empirical work. Those engaged in empirical research were often negatively characterised as focusing on trivial topics (Flexner, 1930) and generating 'superficial facts' (Brannan, 1966, p. 67). Truscot, whose book *Red Brick University* had considerable influence in Britain during the post-1945 period, echoes Abraham Flexner's criticism of research in American universities during the 1930s and quotes approvingly from Herrenden-Harker (1935, p. 112) who distinguishes between 'searchers' and 're-searchers'. The former are defined as 'those who strive for

enlightenment' while the latter 'grub for facts', a very unflattering description for an empirical researcher!

There were also reservations about those individuals who wished to conduct research. A widely held view was that none but the most exceptionally gifted university lecturer could genuinely advance knowledge in their field. Herrenden-Harker (1935, p. 113) expressed scepticism that 'no amount of dissection of the ideas of others can be guaranteed to provide a person with ideas of his own and convert him into a discoverer.' His call for a sabbatical year was not, as we might understand its purpose today, about making academics into more productive researchers. Rather, it was about the importance of academics getting the opportunity to widen their horizons through foreign travel and the 'bracing effect of mingling in a different intellectual current' (Herrenden-Harker, 1935, p. 117). The only condition laid down by Herrenden-Harker (1935, p. 121) for the sabbatical year was that it should be spent abroad, and its purpose was 'leisure for contemplation and meditation'. Foreign travel, with the objective of staying up-to-date with the latest developments in academic fields, albeit within the colonial Anglosphere, was the essence of the sabbatical at least until the late 1960s, especially for academics based in Australasia.

However, the lack of academic productivity resulting from a liberal education tradition had its critics and was lampooned by Truscot in the form of 'Professor Deadwood', the 'archetypal dead-beat Redbrick academic' (Whyte, 2015, p. 212) of the inter-war years. Professor Deadwood was a thinly disguised pseudonym for a professor of philosophy at Liverpool University where Edgar Allison Peers, writing under the penname of 'Bruce Truscot', worked. During his 26 years in post, Professor Deadwood 'published nothing but a single short booklet just before he retired' (Whyte, 2015, p. 212). Even more invective, though, was reserved for those whose contribution to scholarship was considered marginal or without any virtue whatsoever. Phillip Hobsbaum (1964, p. 33) eviscerates the research of University of Sheffield's Professor of English Literature, Professor Moore Smith, in post from 1896 to 1914, as a 'case-history in universal dullness'. His legacy (or 'baleful influence'), according to Hobsbaum, were a number of young lecturers who served under him and, guided by his interests, continued to contribute to 'the annotation of marginalia' (Hobsbaum, 1964, p. 39).

Those who felt the need to publish were sometimes regarded as suffering from some sort of inferiority complex, or perhaps lacking in humility as a very English epistemic virtue. Even as late as the early 1970s, Halsey and Trow (1971, p. 328) attribute a research orientation to status anxiety about being accepted into the academic profession, a tendency more likely to be found among 'men from lower-class backgrounds' keen to justify themselves through the tangible achievements of publication rather than teaching and 'the aristocratic and middle-class traditions of British university life.' Such a suggestion should not necessarily be interpreted as an elitist one, though, especially when it was made by Halsey: a man from a working-class background who was one of the first of his generation to scale the social heights of the academic profession (Halsey, 1996).

Another more practical concern about the effects of research is the way it can result in the loss of an ability to write for a wider audience of 'intellectual laymen' (Halsey, 1957, p. 143). Halsey, writing in the 1950s, contrasts the large numbers of sociologists in the United States with the handful employed at that time in British universities. Rather than seeing this comparison as a sign of the weakness of the British sociological tradition he



expresses concern that the disciplines within the US social sciences are too 'specialized and isolated one from another' (Halsey, 1957, p. 142) and that they are in the grip of 'frantic empiricism'. By contrast, the English sociologist is favourably characterised as 'more humanistic, less scientific'. As a result, Halsey argues, American sociologists can only write for each other while their English counterparts can communicate with the educated layman. Halsey's positive spin on the public intellectual role of the British sociologist was probably influenced by the high public profile enjoyed by many of his peers during this era including Ernest Gellner, Karl Popper and Harold Laski (Halsey, 1996). However, the role of the academic as a public intellectual – 'the tendency for scientists who are recognized experts in one area to appear or present themselves as competent in other knowledge areas as well' (Teo, 2019, p. 38) – has rarely been accepted in a British context, perhaps as it is seen as a lapse of epistemic modesty. While figures such as A.J.P. Taylor, Bertrand Russell and A.J. Ayer have served as public intellectuals, an ambiguous anti-intellectualism exists in British academic life which contrasts with conventions elsewhere, such as in France and Russia (Collini, 2006).

A final criticism of research is that much of it serves little purpose in terms of advancing knowledge and is not necessarily of a high quality. Here, English attitudes to the expansion of postgraduate education, a comparatively belated development in the UK compared with German and US higher education, were typically sceptical with respect to the production of dissertations and theses. According to Fletcher (1968, p. 6), postgraduate education was resulting in the production of a 'flood of spurious and second-rate research' unnecessarily cluttering up the library shelves and getting in the way of 'first-rate research' by 'researchers of genius'. Such attitudes are easily dismissed as elitist and a much-repeated defence is that even the most unsung academic is contributing to the collective advance of science and scholarship through research publications. However, Cole (1970) has argued that this claim is a myth and that, rather, the scientists who produce the key discoveries rely on the research of relatively few of their peers. This criticism though is premised largely on a narrow construction of research as new discovery in the hard sciences and it is, perhaps, harder to apply this line of argument to a broader range of research activities, and to the humanities and the social sciences in particular. There is, though, a more general argument that the increase in the productivity of academics as a result of research evaluation has not automatically resulted in higher quality publications (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2002).

The emphasis on the scholarly personae was waning in the late 1960s when Talcott Parsons commented that the 'typical' professor now resembles the scientist more than the 'gentleman scholar' of an earlier generation (Boyer, 1990a). The fragmentation of knowledge and intensified specialisation within fields has subsequently been reinforced by the effects of internationalisation of the academic profession. Increased mobility across borders for employment and international research activities, and more open attitudes towards the value of intercultural connections, not simply restricted to the Anglosphere, have emerged over the last 30 years creating a new breed of peripatetic professors (Welch, 1997).

## **The emergence of 'research-active' requirements**

The contemporary interpretation of 'research' and being 'research-active' has shifted steadily but significantly since the late 1960s. In a British context, the narrowing definition of



research is closely connected to the decision to divide funding for higher education institutions on the basis of teaching and research activity. Before 1986, funding was undivided and assumed that all university academics conducted both activities. There was thus no need to define what was meant by 'research' as institutions received funding regardless. The Research Selectivity Exercise, and subsequently the Research Assessment Exercise and its successor, the Research Excellence Framework, radically changed matters. It made the definition and evaluation of research into a high-stakes game by dividing funding for teaching and research and determined differentiated levels of institutional financial support accordingly. It also ultimately led to the division of academics into those deemed to be 'research-active' and others classified as 'non research-active' (McNay, 1997) and made it essential to actively manage research and set performance targets for departments and, in effect, for individuals. Historically, a great deal of fuzziness has surrounded research activity because no financial consequences or funding shortfalls rested on definition. Academic staff employed in post-1992 UK universities were subject to a contract that prescribed the maximum number of teaching contact hours but did not specify any such specific requirements in relation to research (Shattock, 2001). The phrase 'teaching and scholarship' was used to convey the somewhat vague expectation that academics were to engage in both activities.

The academic role has also been subject to an unbundling of its distinct functions (i.e. teaching, research, and leadership and administration) in higher education systems in Anglophone contexts (e.g. Australia, UK, South Africa) where the policy environment is strongly influenced by neo-liberal principles (Macfarlane, 2011a). This has resulted in a deepening division between academics employed on 'all-round' contracts to both teach and research and those employed on teaching-only contracts. The division of labour has been accelerated by expectations that academics need to demonstrate their productivity through publication and compete successfully for external grant income in order to justify continued employment on all-round contracts. Academics on all-round contracts are subject to an exacting and narrowly prescriptive definition of research requiring them to be research-active.

Success in academic life is judged partly by publication and increasingly on the basis of generating income. Academic research is now seen by universities from 'a utility cost-benefit perspective rather than merely as discovery at any expense' (Ball, 2007, p. 453). In order to be considered research-active, academics must produce high-quality publications on a regular basis judged by the standards of national evaluation exercises, win external research grants, and supervise doctoral students to completion (e.g. Australian Catholic University [ACU], 2018; Griffith University, 2018). Definitions with respect to the number of publications over any set period of time vary, as do expectations in regard to the generation of grant income with target figures differing according to discipline or field of study (e.g. University of Wollongong, 2018). An increasing number of higher education institutions in the UK, Australia, and elsewhere internationally are adopting such prescriptive definitions of research. All-round academics that do not meet this definition are deemed to be under-performing and face the threat of being moved onto a teaching-only contract. Academics on teaching-only contracts rarely receive any workload space to conduct research or scholarship of any kind. While educational or pedagogic research is sometimes seen as a legitimate form of scholarship for academics on teaching-only contracts, this form of research is disesteemed via this

categorisation and its effective exclusion from definitions of ‘proper’ research. It is seen as ‘somehow less worthy than discipline-based research’ (Nixon et al., 1998, p. 290), an image that has arguably been exacerbated by tokenistic attempts to recognise teaching ‘excellence’ through university award schemes (Macfarlane, 2011b).

Reflecting the changes that have taken place in university policy, the academic literature that discusses research in universities increasingly adopts the research-active /non research-active dualism. However, many papers either use the term ‘research-active’ intuitively without definition (e.g. Coate et al., 2001), allow participants to self-classify as research-active (e.g. Billot, 2010), or provide definitions that demonstrate the wide range of understandings that this term invokes in practice, shaped to a large extent by disciplinary differences (e.g. Adamson et al., 2003). Vagueness bedevils discussion of the term research-active due to the lack of any settled understanding beyond the narrow confines of performative expectations.

In neo-liberalised systems of higher education, such as the UK and Australia, statements of the ‘impact’ that research makes on policy and practice contexts are now common requirements. This applies both in respect to many funding bids and as a substantial part of the evidence produced in research evaluation exercises such as the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF). It means that, in order to make a case that research has influenced non-academic stakeholders, academics need to collate evidence and to persuade fellow academics that their work is, or will be, ‘impactful’ (Watermeyer, 2016). Academics, however, see it as a rational necessity to ‘sensationalize and embellish impact claims’ as a way of increasing the chances of obtaining funding (Chubb & Watermeyer, 2017, p. 2365). This is resulting in the corrosion of humility as an epistemic virtue as part of a hyper-competitive culture in which ‘falsehoods’ and ‘untruths’ lead to ‘impact inflation’ (Chubb & Watermeyer, 2017, p. 2364). More broadly, the effect of the impact agenda represents a shift from cognitive rationality, which Parsons (1968) regarded as the cornerstone of academic values, to economic rationality.

## Re-establishing a liberal interpretation

Whilst it is clear that there are numerous reservations about the claims of ‘research’ on the time and energy of the university academic, there is nevertheless a place for it which needs to be restored in sympathy with the liberal education tradition. Firstly, it is important to re-assert a wider, more inclusive, and less performative interpretation of research. Even advocates of research in universities, such as Truscot (1943), have favoured a very broad definition to include ‘scholarly investigation, appreciation, creative and textual criticism, re-interpretation and a critical treatment of contemporary thought’ (p. 333). He argued that ‘keeping abreast of contemporary investigation and thought in one’s own field and to a critical receptiveness to new ideas ...’ is research. This interpretation fits with the notion of research as a lifelong extension of the Grand Tour, where scholars maintain their currency through travel and engagement with the latest ideas and thinking in their fields, although in a modern context this can take place as much virtually as physically. The Robbins report on UK higher education (1963, p. 184) argued for a similarly wide definition by stating that there are ‘many persons of first class ability, particularly in the humanities, who have never engaged in research in the narrow sense or felt any urge to publish, but whose breadth of culture, ripeness of judgement and wide-ranging

intellectual curiosity are priceless assets . . .'. The call for the parameters of what counts as research to be kept open and inclusive is central to a liberal conception, the demand for which was reiterated by Nixon and his colleagues in the late 1990s (Nixon et al., 1998). While demands for interdisciplinarity to tackle the 'grand challenges' of modern societies are growing ever louder today, the liberal tradition of the university embraces a pluralist scepticism about all claims to 'commitments' with respect to socio-economic issues as causing as many problems as they solve (Flexner, 1930; Livingstone, 1948; Parsons, 1968).

A rarefied view of research as discovery of new facts or data in the mode of the natural and applied sciences has taken a firm grip on working definitions of this term in contemporary university life. This may be attributed in part to the increasing power and influence of the so-called STEM subjects in the university, the status of which are key to ranking criteria used to compare universities on a global basis. It is a definition that works against the interests of the humanities and social sciences in particular, where considerable scholarly attention focuses on broader forms of research as detailed by Truscot. Ironically, Boyer's (1990b) attempt to re-establish the importance of scholarship with respect to teaching has had the opposite effect. In delineating four separate forms of scholarship – of discovery, integration, application, and teaching – he has also reinforced a conventional pecking order that places discovery first and teaching last. Boyer (1990b, p. 17) states that 'the scholarship of discovery, comes closest to what is meant when academics speak of "research"' and goes on to emphasise the research contribution of medicine, and American scientists in general, by winning Nobel prizes. In doing so he relegates the way in which many academics working within the humanities and social sciences may think of research in terms of connecting and interpreting disparate forms of knowledge across more than one discipline to a second category which he labels the scholarship of integration. Worse still, the so-called Boyer model – referring to the four scholarships – has been made use of by many universities as a Trojan horse for disconnecting the scholarship of teaching from 'proper' research (i.e. the scholarship of discovery). It is now quite common for university reward and recognition policies to make explicit use of the four scholarships and link the scholarship of teaching with academics assigned teaching-only contracts. Academics on all-round contracts, by contrast, are seen as enacting other forms of (higher status) scholarship. Whilst it was Boyer's intention to raise the status of research into teaching, his four scholarships have been used by university policy makers as a framework for justifying a role differentiation in respect of research between all-round and teaching-only academics.

It is clear that Boyer's model hinders rather than helps to reclaim the spirit of research as it divides rather than unifies the concept of research. An alternative, more holistic approach is to draw on the liberal education tradition to understand how research relates to, and strengthens, the distinctiveness of higher education teaching as the prime function of a university education. This purpose is possibly best explained in a short article by Eric Ashby, in which he states:

It is (in my view) not possible for a university lecturer to be a first-class teacher unless he has regard to research. Let me go on in the same breath to emphasise that I said: "has regard for research", not "does research". (Ashby, 1969, p. 64)

Ashby, in common with Robbins, argues that it is not necessary for university academics to conduct an empirical investigation or seek to publish in order to be, in today's vernacular,

research-active. Such a claim may appear perverse to the modern reader all too familiar with the continuous performative expectations of publication and grant capture. Ashby's point, however, is that the intellectual engagement of the university academic is essential in order for their teaching to be infused with the ability to question and interrogate knowledge claims in their subject. This is why they need to have what he calls 'regard for research' as opposed to actually carrying out research. University academics need to put their intellectual engagement with the research of others on display in the classroom. In the process, by observation rather than necessarily through participation in research processes, the student learns the 'discipline of dissent' (Ashby, 1969, p. 64): the ability to question received wisdom as *the* distinguishing feature of a higher education. Ashby's call for academics to have a 'regard for research' is really an echo of Truscot's point that 'the spirit of research, rather than the mere fact of research is what matters' (1943, p. 154). In other words, the emphasis is on being alive to new ideas and debates in one's own field of study and being a role model to help students understand what criticism means. This, according to Barnett (1990), is the essence of a real 'higher' education.

The liberal education conception of research is one that helps to ensure that university teaching is alive with the spirit of research. This helps to forge a close link between the role of teacher and researcher without the academic necessarily, to paraphrase Ashby, 'doing' research in the sense of original, discovery-based or empirical work. The modern literature on the teaching-research nexus places considerable stress on student participation via: learning in research mode (or 'research-based' teaching); being taught about research methods (or 'research-oriented' teaching); and discussing findings and methods (or 'research-tutored' teaching). It also includes academics using their own pedagogic research to inform teaching (or 'research-informed' teaching) and, more conventionally, using their own research findings to inform student learning ('research-led' teaching) (Healey, 2005). Ashby did not consider student participation in research at the undergraduate level to be especially important since few would go on to forge an academic career. What he did think was important was an exposure to an academic who could help model the 'discipline of dissent'. Of Healey's categories, only research-led teaching comes anywhere close to describing the liberal education position. This is not about getting students to learn in research mode but simply to be exposed to university teachers capable of helping them to understand how to engage critically with propositional and professional knowledge claims.

The legitimacy of the university academic in the Humboldtian tradition stems from the fact that they are actively conducting research at the same time as working as a teacher. The emergence of the modern research university is associated with the University of Berlin founded by William von Humboldt in 1810. It is where the research-based PhD was developed. This is why Karl Jaspers (1959, p. 45), writing from his perspective as a German philosopher, asserts that, unless a university teacher is an active researcher, all they can do is 'pass on a set of pedagogically arranged facts'. By contrast, in the British liberal education tradition academics needed to be sufficiently *research aware* in order to be able to bring their students into contact with the latest thinking and controversies in their field. They did not need to be active researchers in the sense of generating new knowledge but the Humboldtian and liberal education position are similar with respect to valuing the research engagement of the academic in a teaching context, not necessarily their pedagogic skill. Some British universities, such as Manchester, where Henry Roscoe pioneered

research-led approaches to teaching in the nineteenth century, were more influenced by the Humboldtian tradition. As a result, academics at Manchester were awarded three Nobel Prizes before a single member of staff at Oxford received the same accolade in 1921. Neither the Humboldtian nor the British liberal education tradition sees pedagogical skills as essential with Jaspers (1959, p. 45) going as far as to state that ‘the research worker may be pedagogically inept’. Here, the key issue is that only someone engaged in research can bring students into contact with what Jaspers (1959, p. 45) refers to as ‘the spirit of science rather than with dead results’. No matter how skilful a teacher might be, without some form of research engagement they will fall short in a higher education context.

Interestingly, Truscot and Jaspers are more or less on the same page by arguing for the ‘spirit of research’ and the ‘spirit of science’ respectively. Moreover, the growth of mass higher education means that the vast majority of academics work for teaching-focused rather than research-intensive universities. Given limited opportunities to compete on the same playing field as academics working in research-intensives in the increasingly performative research game, being research aware is, perhaps, a more accurate reflection of what might be realistically achievable for the typical higher education lecturer. While those on teaching-only contracts are now commonly told to pursue pedagogic research, this does not necessarily match their own scholarly interests in subject-based work. It also limits teaching and curriculum innovation to pedagogic re-organisation rather than opening up the possibilities for the intellectual development of the syllabus by an academic engaged with the latest scholarly thinking in their subject; as Minogue argued (1973, p. 58), ‘to teach an academic subject is to rethink it’.

## Conclusion

What used to be regarded as ‘research’ in a predominantly British liberal education tradition, including philosophical reflection and broad intellectual engagement, has been de-legitimised in the contemporary university. This trend has been headed by research-intensive universities, but their lead tends to set the pattern that other less highly esteemed institutions will follow. Research has been hollowed out and is now widely interpreted on the basis of the productive principles of neo-liberalism. This change has taken place in a relatively short space of time and represents a significant alteration in the way in which research is valued, represented, and celebrated in the university. Research is accorded a high status if it is empirical and externally funded while other forms of research are increasingly disesteemed. This rarefication of a particular type of research runs the risk of marginalising the broader purposes of the university to scholarship and intellectual engagement with society despite contemporary emphasis on academics evidencing the so-called ‘impact’ of their work on policy and practice. Despite the rhetoric of making their scholarship public and available to a wider community, universities continue to incentivise academics to pursue research which is assessed within conventional parameters (Alperin et al., 2019).

There is a need to reclaim research as a practice essential for real higher education teaching and as a set of scholarly values that represents something more than the narrow pursuit of new empirical knowledge through data gathering in the mode of the hard sciences and its measurement via publication in high impact academic journals. This does not mean a desire to return to the so-called golden age of academe during the thirty years

following the end of the Second World War (Tight, 2010) with all its faults – such as its elitism, exclusion of large swathes of the population, and disregard for research as the folly of working class recruits. What it does mean is that there is a need to reconnect with an idea of research in a very broad sense as ‘the search for truth’, a phrase used widely by Flexner (1930, p. 6) among others. Only then might we begin to re-establish the spirit of research and value the way in which research awareness, rather than research productivity *per se*, can enrich university-level teaching with a critical, research-informed perspective.

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