

CAMPUS LIFE

EDITORS: ALISON UTLEY & BERNARD KINGSTON

The Ivy League beckons...

By Roger Brown, recently retired as Vice-Chancellor of Southampton, Solent University



Is Britain set to follow the US pattern of higher education where affluent students are concentrated in a few flagship universities offering high cost degrees – leaving other campuses lagging well behind in their wake?

The Higher Education Act 2004 was one of the most controversial pieces of legislation since New Labour came to power in 1997. Three years on and a visitor from Mars might have wondered what all the noise was about.

While enrolments for 2006 – the first year of variable fees – were slightly down, applications for 2007 are substantially up. There appears to have been no impact on widening participation. Government spokesmen have practically fallen over themselves to point to the success of the new policy in bringing additional revenue to the sector without seriously damaging student demand. So was all this a lot of fuss about nothing?

The introduction of variable fees is a further crucial step in the marketisation of UK higher

education whereby decisions about what programmes to offer and what to study are taken through interactions between institutions and students on the basis of information about price, quality and availability – with a greatly reduced role for both government and for the academy.

Whilst at present the extra competition for students appears muted, there can be little doubt that within a few years the existing disparities between institutions, and the social groups they serve, will become a chasm. This is the almost inevitable outcome of present policies for funding teaching and research.

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WELCOME to the second edition of Campus Life, sponsored by UNITE. Inside we take a look at the efforts universities are making to improve the student experience - as seen through the eyes of students!

There is also a controversial opinion about the so-called studentification of university towns... are today's students really a rowdy bunch of party-goers ruthlessly exploiting their host neighbourhoods?

And we investigate new research on the graduate labour market which discovers that many students are drifting into degree courses with little real idea about their career prospects.

The independent editors of Campus Life are Bernard Kingston and Alison Utley. Alison is a journalist who works in the higher education sector and Bernard is the instigator of the recently launched website www.thegooduniversityguide.org.uk

Readership feedback is important to us. We know the first edition of Campus Life was enjoyed and appreciated by many readers. If you have any comments at all about this edition please do get in touch (see back page). Many thanks.

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Resources for teaching will remain under pressure because the Government is encouraging ever increasing numbers of 'suppliers' to enter the market, with private companies and further education colleges gaining degree awarding powers, and more standing in the wings. After 2010 they will be competing for declining numbers of 18-20 year olds whilst mature enrolments remain static. On the research side, there is increasing funding but it is becoming even more concentrated. The resulting resourcing disparities between institutions can be expected to increase if, as many people believe will happen, the present fee cap is raised, or even removed altogether, after the review in 2009-10.

Those who are already pressing for this argue that it is necessary if they are to compete with their American counterparts. In America, of course, it is the flagship private universities which are the market leaders, consistently setting tuition fees at levels well above increases in either family incomes or prices. The result is well summarised in an article in the current Change magazine:

"Affluent students are heavily concentrated at the flagship universities that provide relatively high-cost education, while lower-income students are disproportionately represented at community colleges, where faculty are paid less, campus facilities are less elaborate, and less is spent on the education of each student."

How can we avoid such a situation developing here? There are four sets of issues that must be resolved before there can be any change to the present funding regime.

First, we need to be quite clear about the justification for any increases, and ensure that any additional resources are used to improve the quality of teaching (rather than leaking away into research). Second, we need to be sure that the existing differentials between institutions are not made even greater. Third, we need to be sure that increased fees will not make the social participation issue even more difficult. Finally, since the institutions likely to raise their fees are the ones that largely attract full-time 18 year old students, we must prevent the differentials between full and part-time students, already considerable, from getting worse.

It is simply not in the national interest for younger full-time students from better off areas to enjoy a more well-resourced higher education at the expense of mature and part-time students at less well-resourced institutions. This is the fundamental choice to be made if overall public expenditure is not to be increased.

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A Process of Elimination

Lois Hough describes hunting for a university which would treat her as a person and not a statistic

Choosing a university is important, but choosing the right one for you is key. I was 17 and unsuspecting when UCAS was thrust upon me. I suddenly found myself head in hands under a pile of prospectuses wondering where to begin. Thankfully, I was certain from a young age of what I wanted to be, but for those who had no idea, their task was unthinkable.

The hunt began with an internet search that told me where my subject was being taught. Universities whose websites were easy to navigate and took advantage of virtual tours, photographs and 'student's eye' views were most appealing because it showed that they were fresh and in touch with prospective students. Then it was a process of elimination.

Naturally, I wanted the best course and because journalism is so competitive, I needed something that would make me stand out. I chose an accredited course. I'd heard great things about other universities but sadly, a course that was not professionally recognised stood no chance in my mind. Next, I considered the quality of teaching, the number of graduates who got jobs, the cost of living and the location. For me, university was expensive enough without having to spend scarce funds travelling across the country for a weekend at home.

It is true what they say that first impressions count. On my first Open Day, we had a very warm welcome from the university staff. I shook hands and had a long conversation with the Head of Department - which told me immediately that I would be a student at that university and not a statistic. Q&A with the tutors also proved useful and put faces to the names I had read so much about. There were 70 nervous

youngsters in that room. They made us feel right at home which was a big tick in the box. But not every university made such a good impression. Two weeks later we travelled to another, courtesy of RAC route planner because we had not been sent directions in the post. Although the staff were more than friendly, nobody had received a timetable of events either and the day was thrown into chaos. When I overheard a couple of students joking around and criticising their own university, it was a poor reflection on the place where I could be studying. Of the seven universities I chose just three, made regular contact with information about my course, upcoming events in the city and advice about student lifestyle.

There are two factors that most influenced my choice of university. The course was essential. However, it was the people who guaranteed my university experience would be both professional and enjoyable that most informed my decision.

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The Competitive Edge

Which universities offer students the best value for money?

By Ben Marks, Managing Director, Opinionpanel Research

A few years ago a good student experience was something that students got: now it's something universities do. Over the past three years Opinionpanel has been examining and measuring student experience, largely with the Times Higher Education Supplement for their Best Student Experience Award - which has become one of the most sought after prizes in the sector. There can only be one winner, yet the whole sector is engrossed. Why all the fuss?

For me, it can be encapsulated with a comment from one of our panellists at Leeds last year: "I don't think £3,000 is too much to pay for a decent education; however it depends on whether it is a decent education. The recent strikes by lecturers brought it home that we have very little control over it [our education]..."

The key is not the student attitude to the strikes or to fees but their clear assessment of their education in terms of value for money. That's new. The concept of consumer value underpins our whole competitive economy and as higher education evolves further and further away from a managed model, universities will need to respond to competition in the same way as every competitive business does; through creating satisfied customers (students) via innovation and differentiation.

So it's unsurprising that universities now feel the need to address the student experience and use it to show they offer something different – and better – than their peers. And of course the National Student Survey (NSS) now feeds into some of the league tables that in turn help shape institutional reputation and student choice. So there's a double imperative.

So what is meant by the student experience? We went about finding out by asking a

representative sample of 1,000 full-time undergraduates how their institutions contributed positively and negatively to their time at university. We kept the questions open and unprompted in order to allow a full range of responses, and we used the 2,000 replies to build a comprehensive code frame that boiled down to 21 attributes measuring; teaching, support, social life and facilities.

Interestingly, we found that the data forced us to develop a questionnaire that was thoroughly different to the one used in the NSS. Although the latter is often used as an indicator of student experience (which is tempting given the sample size), it is essentially a final year exit interview focusing on teaching and learning. It is ideal for individual course evaluation and comparison, but that is not the same as measuring student experience.

Other points of difference between the NSS and our work include the fact that our respondents get interviewed throughout the academic year, come from all course years (not just final years) and our questionnaire focuses on the overall experience including support, facilities and social life. Finally, all our respondents get small incentives for taking part.

Last year, Loughborough won the THES award with Cambridge coming second. Other runners up were (in no particular order) the Universities of Leeds, Liverpool, Oxford, Sheffield, Stirling, St Andrews, Swansea and Warwick. So some of the usual suspects are certainly there, but there were surprises too.

Of course, the key question is how do we determine the winners; are all the 21 attributes considered of equal importance? In selecting a method, we chose to dip our toes in the trendy

(but controversial) waters of the Net Promoter Score. After asking our 21 questions we asked all respondents who had rated their university a final 22nd question which required them to rate their likelihood of recommending their institution to a friend. We then examined all the rated attributes to see how well they correlated to the overall recommendation (Q.22) scores. The attributes that correlated more strongly were then given higher weights.

Interestingly, in a separate exercise, we also asked students to explicitly rate the attributes in order of importance to them. What emerged from this analysis was a very different picture. For example, while students claimed that 'good library / good library opening times' and a 'fair workload' were very important to them, it transpired these attributes had very low correlations with recommending their university. Conversely, students claimed a 'good students' union' and 'good extra curricular activities' were not particularly important to their experience, yet these attributes correlated strongly to whether or not they would recommend their university to a friend. In other words, positively advocating a university to friends seems to go hand in hand with positively rating the social life – activities classically dominated more by the students' union than the university.

Of course, these are not the highest correlations; this related to 'high quality staff and lectures'. But it does appear that many of the soft and social aspects of student life are far more important in the student experience than many – including the students themselves – give them credit for.

For the full survey methodology, including the questionnaire, please contact benmarks@opinionpanel.co.uk



ABOUT UNITE

SPONSORS OF CAMPUS LIFE

UNITE STUDENT ACCOMMODATION, 21ST CENTURY LIVING:

UNITE is the largest student accommodation company and currently provides accommodation for some 38,000 students in over 135 properties from Aberdeen to Plymouth. UNITE has a portfolio worth some £1.6bn, with accommodation geographically spread in key university markets across England, Wales and Scotland. However, UNITE is more than just a provider of accommodation. UNITE focuses on the provision and management of high quality, well-located student accommodation and hospitality services at affordable prices in strong

higher education markets. UNITE undertakes the planning work, development and management of sites, often working closely with the universities and colleges to deliver accommodation for students across all ages and nationalities.

UNITE is proud to be a founding member of the ANUK Code of Standards for Larger Developments; all properties are signed up to this code ensuring high standards of accommodation, service and security.

- Dedicated on-site hospitality management team offering 24/7 support to customers.
- A wide choice of rooms available from single studio flats for students who want to live on their own, or typically 5/6 bedroom flats to share with friends.
- Common room facilities include Sky TV, pool tables and plasma screens. On a regular basis these are used for social events such as film or quiz nights. A selection of properties offer gyms exclusively for residents use.
- Rents and availability vary in each town/city and a variety of payment plans are in place to suit students.

UNITE launches online booking service for students

Students able to browse and book accommodation over the internet for the first time

This summer UNITE launched the UK's first fully interactive online booking service for its student accommodation. So, for the first time, students can browse what's on offer, compare prices and locations, and secure a room - all from the comfort of their own home.

Looking for accommodation is one of the most stressful aspects of undergraduate life. By allowing students to book viewings and rooms online, via a secure site, it's hoped that the process will be greatly simplified. The website enables customers to search and book rooms at a time that is convenient to them, they can also book viewings and checkin/out slots

online and be able to make payments and check their customer statement online. Importantly the website makes UNITE much more accessible to overseas students coming to study in the UK.

Students who book accommodation online will be given access to exclusive features allowing them to search for like-minded people to live with - such as vegetarians, smokers or non-smokers, girls or boys or mixed groups. They can also seek out students in the same year of study and make group bookings.

See for yourself at www.unite-students.com



UNITE'S NEWEST PROPERTIES

MANCHESTER

Piccadilly Point

Piccadilly Point is our new property in the heart of Manchester. It is home to some 530 students. It's located next to Piccadilly train station and University campuses. The property also has some great facilities including a large common room with Sky TV and pool table, a gym, a laundry room and bike storage.

COVENTRY

Callice Court

This brand new development is centrally located in Coventry city centre. Callice Court is now the largest UNITE student development in Coventry and will be home to some 668 students bringing UNITE's total student bed numbers to 1,133 students.

Raglan House

The new Raglan House is a 212-bed development in the heart of Coventry. It includes a common room, laundrette, 24/7 on site hospitality team, double and single studios and all rooms are en-suite.

BRISTOL

Phoenix Court

Phoenix Court is UNITE's 16th student accommodation property in Bristol since it started in the city 16 years ago and is UNITE's first 11 storey project to use their new off-site modular technology. UNITE's new 277-bed development, immediately located adjacent to its sister property Marketgate (490 beds), will form UNITE's first student village in Bristol, complete with retail space, communal facilities, quiet study rooms and laundry facilities.

EDINBURGH

Panmure Court

Small, but perfectly formed this property is brand new and has 59 ultra-stylish studio apartments that students can rent by themselves or with a close friend or partner. Situated in the capital and the second largest city in Scotland, students will be located right at the heart of everything student.

Lady Nicholson

Lady Nicholson is a 43-bed premium studio scheme due for completion in late 2007. It will be the fourth UNITE property in the Scottish capital and add to the already strong 394 beds that are on offer to students there. In Scotland alone UNITE has invested £140m in student accommodation and has some 9 properties situated in four cities – Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

SHEFFIELD

The Anvil

The Anvil has some 163 beds and is another UNITE modular build. Situated in Sheffield city centre it is amongst another seven UNITE properties and will now be home to some 3,729 students staying in UNITE properties in Sheffield.

The Forge Phase 2

Phase 2 of The Forge village scheme will open in September and will now be home to some 1,300. It includes on-site shops, gym, common room and 24/7 on-site hospitality team. The Forge village scheme will now be the largest student property that UNITE has in the UK and brings the total number of student beds in Sheffield to some 3,729.

LOUGHBOROUGH

William Morris

We are proud to open William Morris this year in partnership with Loughborough University. The William Morris scheme has over 480 student bedrooms and the majority of it was built using modular construction. UNITE will now be home to some 1,100 students in Loughborough.

LONDON

Charles Morton Court

Charles Morton Court is a brand new development, which opened in February 2007 in the cosmopolitan Green Lanes area. It has some 92 beds and will bring UNITE's total bed numbers in London to 3,067.

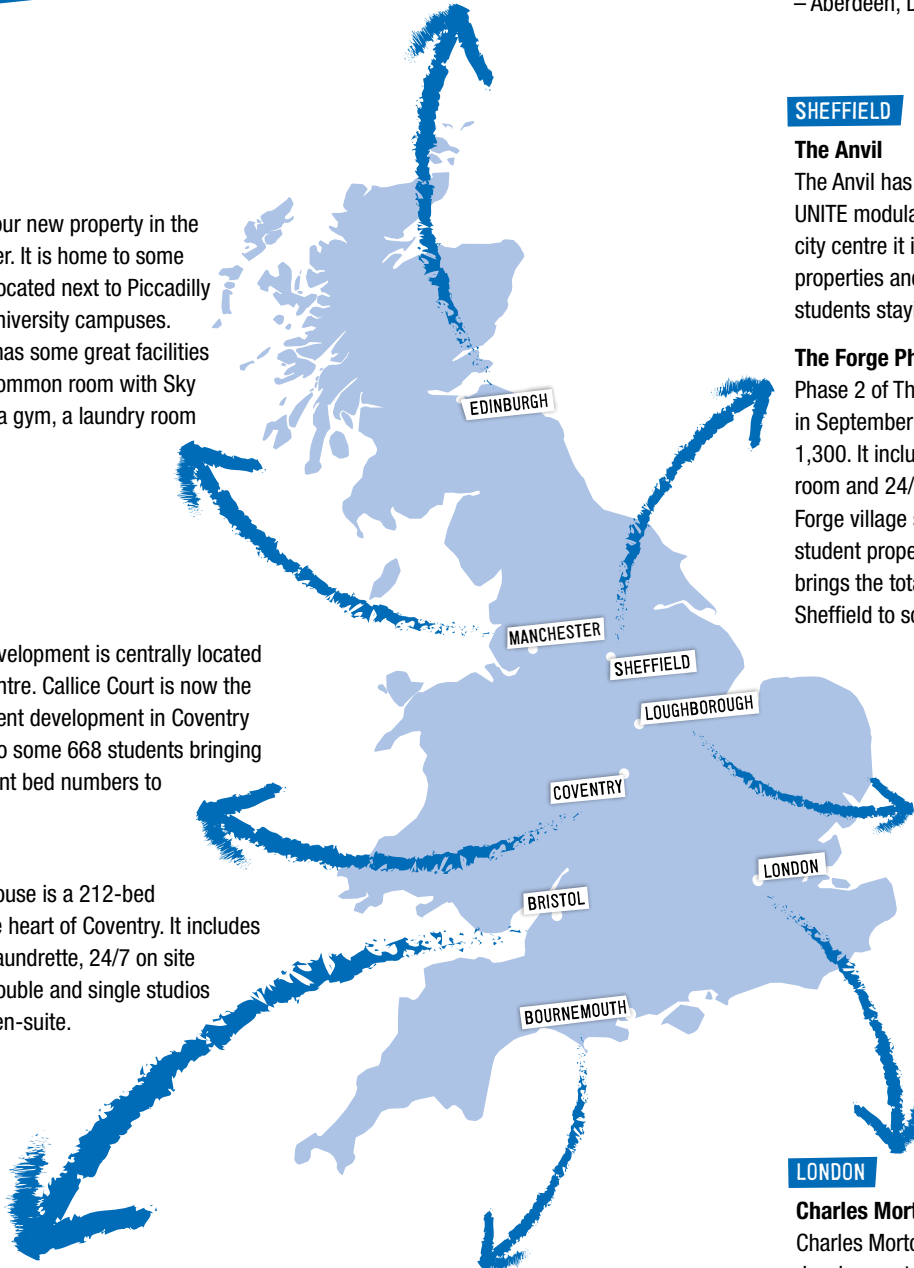
Rahere Court

Set back from the main road, this brand new East End development offers the best of both worlds - centrally located, literally across the road from Queen Mary's campus. It has some 186 beds complete with communal facilities, laundry and courtyard.

BOURNEMOUTH

Corfe House

The new Corfe House development is another UNITE property that is using the prefabricated method of off-site modular technology. The brand new development will be home to some 309 students studying at Bournemouth University. UNITE has introduced initiatives such as a Green Travel plan for Corfe House and there will also be recycling facilities for students to use.





Love Thy Neighbour

How can students live harmoniously with their local communities?

By Richard Tyler,
Co-ordinator, National Houses of Multiple Occupancy Lobby

Love thy neighbour as thyself is an excellent mantra for community relations. But not much love is lost between town and gown with Studentification of neighbourhoods becoming a dirty word in the media. Numerous conferences have addressed the issue, and front line campaigners have set up networks of residents, councillors and MPs.

Why does the ivory tower cast such a shadow over its host communities? And what can we do about it?

With the expansion of higher education in the last decade, huge student colonies have developed in most university towns. And residents in some host communities have lost the 'quiet enjoyment' of their homes. No-one doubts the good works done by student volunteers. But the latest UNITE survey (Student Experience Report 2007) finds that "half of students consider themselves as part of the community." Of course, the other half does not. And of those who do, most think that patronising local shops is enough.

Some problems arise directly from the student presence, some indirectly. In the social sphere, student neighbourhoods suffer from endemic low-level antisocial behaviour, mainly noise. But they also suffer inflated crime – in which students are not perpetrators, of course, but victims. Concentrations of student houses offer soft targets and rich pickings. Meanwhile, as the local population changes, school rolls decline dangerously.

The environment suffers too. Students are 'rubbish at rubbish'! And their cars congest

the streets. Meanwhile, landlords (maximising profits) either neglect their properties, or over-develop them. Letting boards, flyposting, taxi horns, inflict street blight. The economy changes too. The reality of the student pound is that student demand promotes a resort economy – shopping centres are dominated by letting agencies, bars and take-aways; other shops re-orient their lines and all are affected by seasonal fluctuations.

Many measures have been adopted by councils, universities, student unions and the police. Information is made available – directories of services and telephone help lines, to support students and residents. Exhortations are made to students to be responsible neighbours. The National HMO Lobby advocates a simple Community Code: Say hello, keep the peace, clean up. Direct interventions are mounted, by the police and wardens, and by university disciplinary processes.

But even if all students said hello, and kept the peace, and cleaned up, would the problems even then be solved? Two recent publications have surveyed the issue – Universities UK's Studentification: a guide (2006), and the National Union of Students, Students in the Community (2007). Both are useful up to a point, but neither addresses the basic structural problem: "the replacement and/or displacement of established residents with a transient, generally young and single, social grouping" (UUK Guide). Both reports tackle only the symptoms which arise – not the underlying cause of these effects, demographic imbalance. An example: in one quarter-square-mile of 72 streets in Headingley

in Leeds, with a population of 10,000, students outnumber residents by two-to-one.

The loss of a balanced community is the real problem posed by Studentification. A community polarised towards youth and transience is fundamentally destructive of sustainability. It replaces the older generations who preserve the community's history, the adults who maintain it, and most seriously, the children who are its future. It disrupts the social networks on which 'community spirit' (or social capital) depend. And not least, it demoralises the resident rump – 'aliens' in their own neighbourhood.

It is an indictment of higher education policy that such situations have been allowed to develop, leaving those involved struggling to cope with the consequences. Leeds and Nottingham, for instance, have set up multi-agency groups, comprising council and community, university and students, and landlords. They can pursue housing policies, especially licensing of HMOs (shared houses) as provided by the Housing Act 2004. They can pursue planning policies – areas of restraint and thresholds for HMOs can be used to resist demand in occupied areas, while promotion of purpose-built accommodation (suitably sited) can ease demand and redirect it to different locations. But local authorities are hamstrung by their limited powers. The National HMO Lobby has proposed a Ten Point Plan (see their website for details) to address the basic issue of studentification. But fundamentally, we need the government to give higher education institutions the resources to accommodate their students, and local authorities the powers to protect their communities.

www.hmobby.org.uk

University Applicants Short of Careers Advice

In the second of two articles, Kate Purcell of the University of Warwick's Institute for Employment Research reveals more findings from her research into the graduate labour market

In summer 2006, everyone who applied for a full-time higher education course through UCAS was invited to participate in the Futuretrack study – the online longitudinal survey that will follow their experiences of higher education and career decision-making through four stages, until winter 2011-12 when most will be in employment. With around 130,000 respondents at this first stage, the survey has generated a vast amount of data.

While the picture is complex, the survey reveals too many gaps and shortfalls in access to high quality pre-degree careers guidance and information. So how do applicants make career decisions in the face of the growing range of options: vocational, single-discipline, combined subjects, sandwich courses, scholarly, practical and creative courses?

Some three quarters of respondents claimed to have had no information – or not enough information – about the implications of their post-16 exam subject choices. More than half (60%) said they had no or not enough information about the relationship between courses and employment options.

Nevertheless, this generation of students exhibits greater awareness than previous ones about the relationship between their studies and their career options, with less than 8% having little or no idea of the occupation they aspire to

– and the qualifications required to get there. This no doubt reflects funding changes and the increasing stress on higher education and 'employability'.

Coming from a socially-advantaged background and attending a private or selective school was linked to greater success in – and satisfaction with – the application process, and the greatest advantage seems to be having parents with higher education qualifications. However, young people from middle-class homes, for whom going to university is "the normal thing to do", were among the most likely candidates to be drifting into courses without clear ideas about where these will lead.

Conversely, those embarking on higher education as mature students, having surmounted initial disadvantages, were considerably more likely to have clear, employment-related reasons for undertaking higher education. Does this mean that more students should be encouraged to experience employment and reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, potentials and interests prior to making course choices? Do gap years enhance or handicap those taking them in the medium-to-long term? This research will provide evidence to inform such debates.

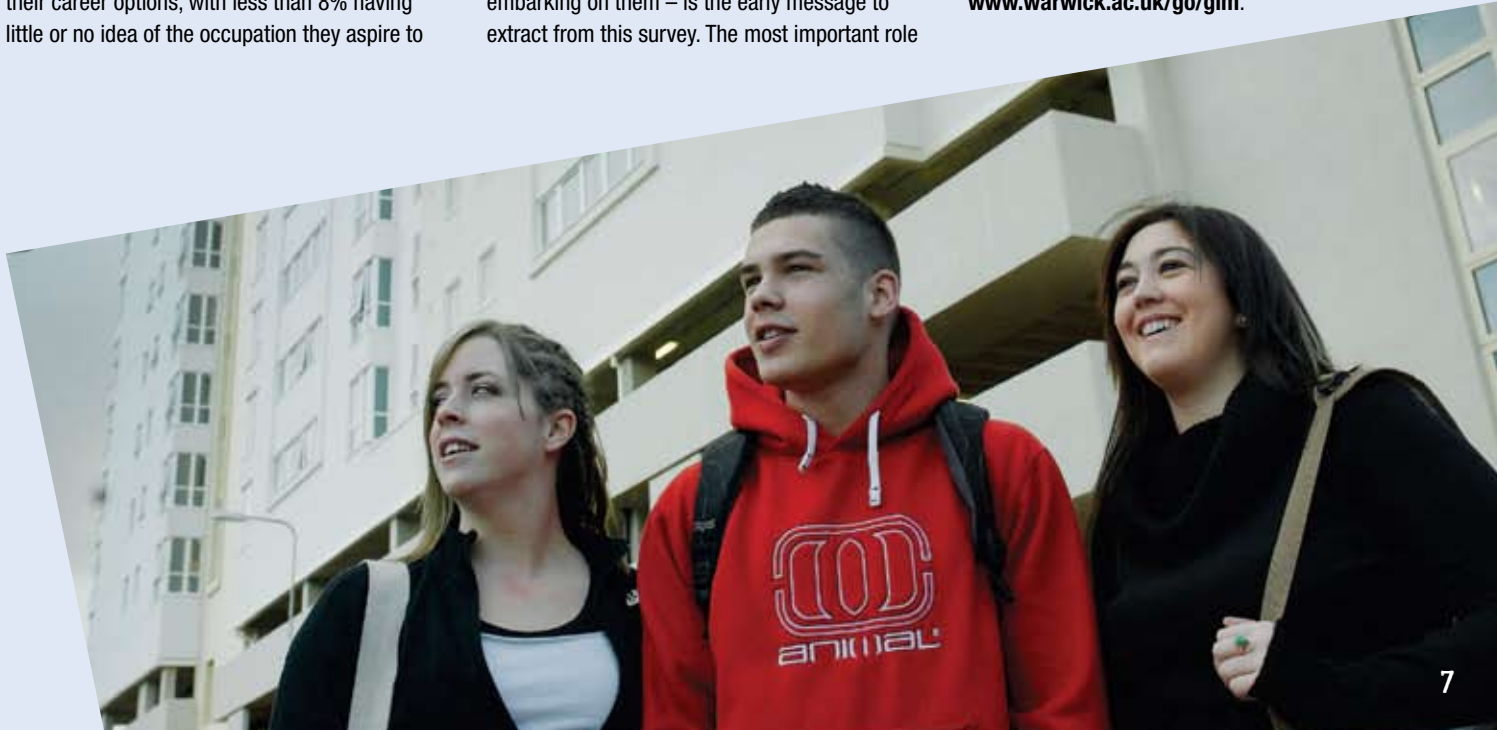
The diversity of courses – and reasons for embarking on them – is the early message to extract from this survey. The most important role

of research – compared to journalism and other sources of information about graduate labour markets – is to unpack and map complexity.

Higher education (unlike primary or secondary education) is not very homogeneous at core – it covers an extraordinary range of activities. The Futuretrack study reveals higher education as an overlapping series of very different learning experiences that constitute routes into diverse labour markets. These span specialist occupations from established professions such as medicine and teaching to recently-created new technology, management and environmental specialisms unknown to previous generations.

When the popular press asks "Is the UK producing too many graduates?" the big question that Futuretrack will provide evidence to engage with must be "Too many graduates of what?".

The latest news about the research and a series of reports that will ultimately explore all the main varieties of experience and attributes of this diverse sample will be posted on the dedicated website developed for the project by its sponsors, the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) at www.futuretrack.ac.uk or on the research team's website: www.warwick.ac.uk/go/glm.



YOUR FEEDBACK...

The heart of
student living

UNITE

**VERY ENJOYABLE
AND ENLIGHTENING.**

Terry Knight
Assistant Accommodation Manager
The Robert Gordon University

**IT WAS GOOD TO SEE THE
NEW CAMPUS LIFE.
THANKS FOR SENDING US ONE
IN THE POST.**

Alistair Lomax
CEO, UNIAID

**JUST RECEIVED A COPY OF THE
NEW CAMPUS LIFE, WHICH I THOUGHT
HAD SOME VERY GOOD ARTICLES IN IT -
ESPECIALLY THE ONE ON
GREEN CAMPUSES.**

Simon Kemp
Unipol Student Homes

**I RECEIVED LAST WEEK
THE FIRST ISSUE OF CAMPUS LIFE AND WANTED TO
PASS ON MY CONGRATULATIONS. THE BRIEFING IS VERY
WELL PUT TOGETHER AND PRESENTS A
BALANCED VIEW OF THE SECTOR.**

Terence Treadwell
Chair of the Association for Student
Residential Accommodation

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CAMPUS LIFE

If you would like to contribute letters or articles to Campus Life, please email the editors at editor@campus-life.co.uk.

We would particularly like to hear from readers who hold strong views contrary to those outlined in any of the articles in this edition.

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