Overview of seminar

1. The Higher Education Sustainability Agenda
2. The Marketisation of English Higher Education
3. Aim of Doctoral Research and Methodology
4. Key Themes of Research
1. The Higher Education Sustainability Agenda
What is ‘sustainability’ or ‘sustainable development’?

- Definition and conceptual evolution continue to stimulate academic debate
- Terms are integral to international political vocabulary
- Man’s greatest challenge
- Overarching guiding tool towards a more desirable future
- My definition:

  “A systemic recalibration between economic development, socio-political equity and environmental protection, at local, national and global scales, to assume a stable and manageable balance which ensures a good quality of life for all people, as well as preservation of the environment and natural resources for future generations”
The higher education sustainability agenda
The higher education sustainability agenda cont.
“Education for sustainable development is a vision of education that seeks to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth’s natural resources. ESD applies transdisciplinary educational methods and approaches to develop an ethic for lifelong learning; fosters respect for human needs that are compatible with sustainable use of natural resources and the needs of the planet; and nurtures a sense of global solidarity” (UNESCO, 2002)
2. The Marketisation of English Higher Education
Higher education in the 21st Century

- Forces currently shaping higher education globally are multiple and complex
- Globalisation, internationalisation, technological and social media interactions, commercialisation, corporatization, marketization, increasing competition
- Marketization - “The exposure of an industry or service to market forces” (Oxford Dictionary)
- Relates to two interlinking political-economic ideologies
- Neoliberalism & New Public Management

Image: Facebook.com/KeeleUniversity
Neoliberalism and New Public Management

- Neoliberalism - ‘the defining political-economic paradigm of our time’ (McChesney 1998)
- Associated with Reagan and Thatcher
- Economic liberalization (fewer government restrictions on economy), free trade, open markets, decentralization, non-interventionist state, privatization of public services, a decrease in the welfare role played by the state
- Stimulating markets and market control mechanisms to drive growth and competition
- HE sector not exempt – reforms, white papers, policies and restructuring
- Neoliberal ideology subject to much academic debate
- NPM = the introduction of private sector management discourse into public services in the quest to modernize, reduce spending costs, and improve efficiency, effectiveness and excellence
- Universities are more strongly controlled by the state and also more active participants in a range of markets and quasi-markets
Effects of neoliberalism & NPM on universities

General characteristics
- Universities are more business-like and managerialist
- Relationships and roles defined more in corporate terms
- More interaction with businesses and the commercial and corporate sector
- Proliferation of accountability, quality assurance and audit processes

Research and research funding
- Competition between HEIs for governmental research funds in an increasingly selective quality-related funding system
- Competition between HEIs for research funding from UK Research Councils, charities, the EU and business/industry
- Continued concentration of research funds from government in the highest performing institutions
- Focusing of research into areas which are recognized by REF/RAE and research funding bodies

Education and teaching
- Education more ‘outcome-oriented’ and linked to learning outcomes, quality assurance, subject and institutional reviews, benchmarking
- More emphasis on skills development, ‘graduate attributes’ and a range of different teaching pedagogies

Competition for students, student funding
- Competition for students between HEIs
- Drive to increase numbers of international students and associated revenues
- Reductions in unit resource of student funding from government to HEIs, money now follows the student
- Increases in student fees, from no fees in the early 1990s to ca. £1,000 per year in 1997, to ca. £3,000 per year in 2006 and up to £9,000 per year in 2012

Academic staff
- Vice-Chancellors more akin to CEOs from the business world
- Pressure to work on research projects outside of chosen field, to ‘follow the money’
- Pressure to generate additional revenue streams, for example, enterprise, new postgraduate courses, international partnerships
- Academics increasingly strategic about research collaborations and where work is published
- Staff appointments often based on research track record and potential rather than teaching capability
- More competitive and individualistic environments between academic staff
Critique of neoliberal transformation

- Antithetical to the purpose and responsibilities of higher education
- Changing purpose, values and mission of HE
- HE criticised for upholding neoliberal ethos
- Trade offs with social, environmental, ethical, democratic and anti-corporate values
- Necessary to survive and thrive in current climate?
- Do institutions have the choice to opt out?
3. Aim of Doctoral Research and Methodology
Aim of Doctoral Research

TO EXPLORE...

- The ideological and the practical relationship between Neoliberalism and New Public Management (NPM), and the Sustainable Development (SD) agenda of western Higher Education (HE), using the UK and specifically English universities as a case study.
- Key neoliberal and NPM mechanisms of control in universities, to ascertain the ways in which these forces are both driving and restricting sustainability in different areas.
- The contradictions and synergies between these ideologies and practices
- The influence of the following HE bodies and organizations:
  - The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) – including the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Research Assessment Exercise (RAE);
  - The Higher Education Academy (HEA);
  - The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA);
  - The National Union of Students (NUS);
Research Design and Methodology

Case Studies/Cross-Sectional

Case Study Types
- English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- Higher Education Organisations/Bodies

Chosen Case Studies
- 8 HEIs - Russell Group; Research Led; Post 92; New
- HEFCE, HEA, QAA, NUS + Key Informants

Research Design Approach
- Interpretivist Epistemology
- Constructionist Ontology

Data Collection Methods
- Semi-Structured Interviews
- Documentary Analysis

52 interviews done – 4 to go!

Strategic and Corporate Plans, Sustainability and ESD Policies
4. Key Themes of Research
A) Education for the public good within the neoliberal university - paradox or possibility?

“There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Shaull 2000)

- Alternatives to neoliberalizing university
- Overtly political and critical of the status quo
- Re-thinking universities as radically democratic social and political institutions
- Alternative frameworks, politics and economies
- Operating within the paradigm we seek to shift helps to sustain it
- Limiting transformational capacity of education
- A paradigm shift towards sustainability
- What about all of the positive and innovative sustainability and ESD progress being made within the neoliberal system?
B) The political framing of higher education in the UK

- 2007 - Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
- 2009 - Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
- Insignificant change? Or cause for concern?
  “The Department for Business, Innovation and skills (BIS) is the department for economic growth. The department invests in skills and education to promote trade, boost innovation and help people to start and grow a business” (BIS, 2009)
- A key component of the UK’s economic and business engine
- A tool to contribute to other primary goals
- A means to economic ends, not an end in itself
- ‘Higher skills system’ (Mandleson, 2009)
- Ivory tower view = outdated
- Broader societal role for the 21st century
- Holistically addressing societal, environmental and economic concerns

Image: Fotolia.com
C) Higher education funding mechanisms, tuition fees and student consumers

- Tuition fee hike
- Growing emphasis on ‘employability skills’
- Student consumer agenda
  - Does it stifle the creation of more humanistic, creative and ethical values?
  - Does it encourage the view that HE is a private economic interest focused on maximising future earnings?
  - Are students acting as consumers?
  - Are we (academics) anticipating and reacting more to the consumer agenda than the students?
  - What does it mean for less traditional academic courses? Environment and Sustainability?
- Synergies between employability and sustainability
D) ESD research – the impact of quality-related research funding

- UK quality-related research funding system
- Many studies on effects of the REF/RAE
- RAE/REF favour:
  - Disciplinary over interdisciplinary research
  - Short-term over long-term research
  - Individual rather than group research (social sciences)
  - Internationally applicable rather than nationally-relevant
  - Undervalue pedagogical research

- What value and esteem is currently afforded to interdisciplinary sustainability and ESD research?
- Non-academic ‘impact’ – 20% of mainstream QR funding...
Concluding thoughts

- Ideological and practical implications of the relationship between neoliberalism and managerialism in western higher education, and the progress of sustainability education agendas
- Support - integrated sustainability education across all disciplines
- Recognize - reform of HE away from the dominant neoliberal paradigm
- There are evidently many different ways of working towards sustainability within our current, fundamentally neoliberal system
- Do we need to raise the profile and legitimacy of sustainability education and ESD research within the market system?
- Does sustainability/ESD need to be better represented and valued through: academic reward systems, research quality assessment and promotion, improving reputation and status, funding and resource flows, educational quality standards and benchmarks, league tables and NSS
- Or do we need a paradigm reform?
Thank You
Questions?