

The unavoidable weaponisation of higher education

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ACSES acknowledges Indigenous peoples as the Traditional Owners of the land. With 60,000 years of history as the original educators, their knowledge and culture play a vital role in our work and vision for a fairer nation. We respect Elders past, present, and future, and are honoured to learn from our Indigenous colleagues, partners, and friends.

Today's presentation is in three parts



- **The background and context of increasing ideological polarisation**
- **The range of disputes and their underpinnings**
- **Likely responses and future scenarios (discussion)**

Summary argument

The equity crisis in higher education is one aspect of a larger set of problems. These include the loss of social licence and questionable privilege. Today, educating students to participate in the knowledge economy is accompanied by claims that universities conspire to undermine the societies they serve.

Hostility to seats of learning has been preceded by, and now bundled into, general ambivalence towards higher education. On top of rows about exploiting students, corporate highhandedness towards staff, eye-watering executive pay and lukewarm engagement with societal needs, universities have been dragged into disputes over ideological indoctrination, freedom of speech and support for violent extremism.

Summary argument

Several disputes now exist:

- *Top universities have been caught red-handed serving unresponsive, global elites **
- *Campuses have become one-sided engines of indoctrination **
- *Universities have created opportunities for new participants but not enough and unevenly*
- *Higher education's training of sharp minds has also bred progressive, values-driven opinion*
- *Scholars operate a machine that discovers new knowledge at scale using methods that are robust and enduring. They embody the human genius of combining intelligence, toolmaking and cooperation. This is an overlooked, unavoidable feature. **
- *Higher education has been poorly served by corporate managerialism and structures **
- *Academics' loyalties to knowledge and truth renders them as aloof and monk-like*

The context of ideological polarisation

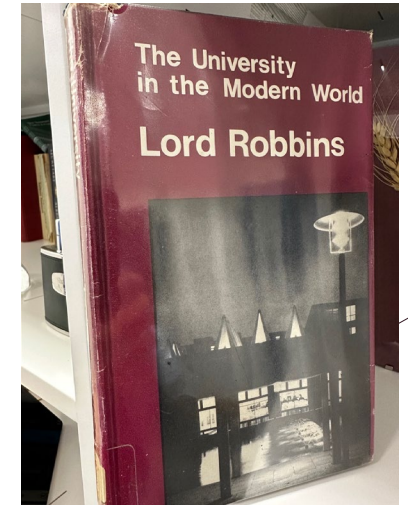
- *Mounting societal polarisation*
 - US and UK in particular
 - Knowledge and creative industries or universities alone?
- *Change within higher education*
 - Labour market and business oriented goals
 - Expanded and contested academic understanding of knowledge
- *Some personal observations and orientations*
 - Plate glasses, Ivy Leagues, Russell Group, Gum-trees
 - Managerial classes and their hungry tribes

Disputes: explanations and frames

- *Unresponsive, globalist elites*
 - Attachment to abstract and/or globalist values
 - Nixon and the professors
 - Self-inflicted: LSE/Gaddafi to UEA/Climate Change to USC/Operational Varsity
- *Progressive exuberance*
 - Setting for contested ideas and identities
 - Growing echo chambers among faculty, students and in seminars

Disputes: explanations and frames

- *Opening up the academy*
 - Different roots and stories in the US, UK and Australia
 - Mixed results, especially among top institutions; contested value systems; patchy use of evidence to drive reform
- *Nourishing or radicalising young minds?*
 - Training sharp minds to be curious and investigate versus naivety
 - Weighing up the evidence of effects – generational, cohort, other?



Disputes: explanations and frames

- **The best machine invented?**
 - Knowledge discovery using enduring, self-adapting methods – human cooperation at its best?
- **Neoliberal shallow roots and corporate managerialism**
 - Professed goals of universities focus on utilitarian student and business needs but scarcely on social change
- **“Monks before we became professors”**
 - Loyalty to knowledge and truth; unwilling to embrace educational utilitarianism

Discussion/questions?