

CGHE Annual Conference
24-25 May 2022: Session details



**KEYNOTE & 2022 Burton R. Clark Lecture on Higher Education –
Sagas of contemporary higher education: foreground and
hinterland**

25 May 2022, 9.10am (UK)

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Back in 1972 Burton Clark introduced the idea of an organisational 'saga' in higher education. In my lecture I repurpose this concept, and extend it to the system level. Clark defined a 'saga' as, first, structural and organisational arrangements - which I term the 'foreground' - and, second, a set of beliefs and values - the 'hinterland'.

Currently there is one dominant 'saga' permeating both policy and practice and conceptualisations about higher education. This is to see universities predominantly in relation to political economy - with greater emphasis on economy in terms of skills and knowledge production, although in the light of the contest between globalisation and populism (and 'woke wars') there is now a strong dash of politics too.

Often this 'saga' is reduced to subordination to neoliberal ideas - mistakenly, I argue, because the same focus on political economy was apparent in the era of the welfare state when the idea of mass higher education was born, although then it was as much on social reform as on economic growth and the efficiency of the market. In other words, the foreground has stayed constant even if the hinterland has changed.

Almost every feature of the higher education landscape reflects this dominant 'saga' - the striving for 'excellence' (buttressed by rankings), the popularity of contractual (in place of fiduciary) funding, the growth of research assessment, the focus on student outcomes, the irresistible rise of corporate-style governance and management...

The lecture explores the possibility of an alternative 'saga', focused on human rights and democracy as much as political economy.

Peter Scott is emeritus Professor of Higher Education Studies at IOE – UCL Faculty of Education and Society, and Commissioner for Fair Access in Scotland. He was previously Vice-Chancellor of Kingston University London, and also a member of the board of the (former) Higher Education Funding Council for England. For eight years he was President of the Academic Cooperation Association, the Brussels based umbrella group that brings together European organisations concerned with international education such as the DAAD in Germany and EduFrance. He was Editor of The Times Higher Education for 15 years before becoming a Professor of Education at the University of Leeds. His most recent book is 'Retreat or Resolution? Tackling the Crisis of Mass Higher Education'