

Is law as an academic discipline still an important factor in the identity of legal academics and undergraduate students in the neo-liberal university?

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Features of the neo-liberal university

Market Ideology (student fees; customers)

Managerialism (New Public Management – pseudo-commercial)

Institutional Market Competition (pseudo-market)

Student Markets (for both selecting and recruiting institutions)

Antagonism Towards Professional Autonomy (anti-monopoly; audit)

Audit (Internal - Quality Control; External – REF & QAA)

Government Imperatives (subject & research funding; employability)

Competitive Bidding for Grants (pseudo-market)

Cross-Disciplinary Initiatives (mode 2 knowledge production)

Mode 1 and Mode 2 Knowledge Production

Gibbons et al, *The New Production of Knowledge: the Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*

Nowotny et al, *Re-Thinking Science: Knowledge and the public in an Age of Uncertainty*

Mode 1 – Disciplinary based, gap in the literature

Mode 2 – Team based, problem to be solved

Rather natural science focused, and law has always:

1 – had an alternative source of knowledge production in the professions

2 – had professional multi-professional practice arena

3 – had a problem solving aspect, with problems arising outside academia

Competing Academic Identities - not necessarily exclusive

Academic Lawyer

Clinical Supervisor

Professional Lawyer who teaches or writes

Employee of NTU or the University of Hull*

Manager at NTU or the University of Hull*

Third Space Professional (see: Celia Whitchurch, academic skills etc)*

Entrepreneur*

Social Movement Activist (Cause Lawyer *per* Sarat & Scheingold)

*Neo-liberal university encourages?

Competing Undergraduate Identities – not necessarily exclusive

Student

Law Student

Legal Professional in Training*

Entrepreneur*

Legal Academic in Training

Social Movement Activist

Not fully thought through and developed

*Neo-liberal university encourages?

Do You Recognise These Sources of Identity?

- 1 - Do you recognise these sources of identity for yourself?
- 2 - Have they changed over time (career path) for you?
- 3 – Do you feel aspects of your identity are under pressure?

Possible Examples:

Pressure to change student results across a cohort to meet institutional ends which threaten your sense of professional integrity

Feeling you are faced with a choice between meeting the audit requirements and actually doing the job - publishing an article in time for REF when you really want to develop a book project or leaving your teaching materials unreviewed in order to finish the article

Am I Missing Something?

Although this has been a quick romp through changes in the academic environment, I have tried to catch the main influencers of the sense of identity of people engaged in academic law. Have I missed something – for example I have not put Information technology and distance or blended learning up as a change that has led to identity pressures but are there people who feel they are legal technologists out there?

Any Questions?

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I have written on the nature of legal academia as experienced by academics and students in articles in The Law Teacher journal:

Graham Ferris, 'Undermining Resilience: How the Modern UK University Manufactures Heightened Vulnerability in Legal Academics and What Is to Be Done' (2021) 55 The Law Teacher 24

Graham Ferris, 'Law Students Wellbeing and Vulnerability' (2022) 56 The Law Teacher 5 (open access)