

# STUDENTS IN CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPES

One-day conference, University of Surrey, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Venue: Lecture theatre block (LTA and LTB)



Across many countries of the world, higher education landscapes have changed significantly over recent years. Market mechanisms have become more prominent, and politicians have become increasingly concerned about graduates' transitions into the labour market. In some nations, although not all, students are now expected to make a substantial contribution to the cost of their higher education and, across mainland Europe, the Bologna Process has reshaped the nature of students' experiences considerably. This one-day conference seeks to explore understandings of students in this shifting context.

**Further information:** The conference is being organised by the 'EuroStudents' research team (Rachel Brooks, Achala Gupta, Sazana Jayadeva and Anu Lainio) – further details are available at [www.eurostudents.net](http://www.eurostudents.net). The registration fee for the conference will be £50 (to include lunch).



**9:45 – 10:00 Coffee and welcome**

**10:00 – 10:45 Keynote**

Venue: LTB **RILLE RAAPER**, Durham University

*Troubling the notion of student as consumer: Fabrications, contradictions and political engagement*

**11:00 – 13:00 Panel 1: Students in international and transnational educational contexts**

Venue: LTB	<b>LIN MA</b> University of Bristol	'International-ness'? The case of East Asian international students in the UK
	<b>JIHYUN LEE</b> University College London	Transitional and transnational opportunities? Higher education choices of non-EU international students in the UK
	<b>PRIYANKI GHOSH</b> University of Surrey	A UK based study into international student participation in theatre within university theatre societies and its impact on their challenges and sense of belonging
	<b>JINGRAN YU</b> University of Manchester	Imaginative travellers: A case study of the students at a British branch university in China
	<b>MANUEL SOUTO-OTERO</b> Cardiff University	Student mobility and European identity
	<b>A. GEHLKE, O. KEY, Š. STIBUREK M. JANTO</b> CHE Consult	
	<b>GIANLOUIS HERNANDEZ</b> Università della Svizzera italiana	'Not our students': Exploring the international university as a site of negotiating race, ethnicity, and nationality

**11:00 – 13:00 Panel 2: Constructing the student in marketised higher education**

Venue: LTA	<b>KAREN GRAVETT</b> University of Surrey	'More than customers': Conceptions of students as partners within a neoliberal landscape
	<b>CARLOS AZEVEDO</b> The Open University	Students as consumers: Going beyond the metaphor
	<b>CHRIS MITCHELL</b> University College London	Come to the edge: Postgraduate student expectations in a creative arts institution
	<b>SOPHIE CRANSTON, HELENA PIMLOTT-WILSON EMMA BATES</b> Loughborough University	International work placements: Searching for distinction
	<b>HARRY MADGWICK LAWTON</b> University College London	A system of oppressive accountability and didactic teaching: linking university student resilience to pedagogical practices of secondary education
	<b>CATHERINE WILKINSON,</b> Liverpool John Moores University	The neoliberal university and the academic-student relationship: A textual analysis of ITV Drama <i>Cheat</i>
	<b>SERGIO A. SILVERIO</b> King's College London	
	<b>SAMANTHA WILKINSON</b> Manchester Metropolitan University	

**13:00 – 13:45 Lunch**

<b>13:45 – 14:50 Panel 3: Gender and safeguarding students</b>		
Venue: LTB	<b>TAMSIN HINTON-SMITH</b> <b>KIM BRAYSON</b> <b>CHARLOTTE MORRIS</b> <b>ROSA MARVELL</b> University of Sussex	Mainstreaming gender pedagogy in higher education curricula: Practices, challenges, futures
	<b>ANNA BULL</b> University of Portsmouth	Regulation in the UK? How students who have experienced sexual harassment from higher education staff attempt to obtain redress
	<b>EMMA BOND</b> University of Suffolk	Why assuming students are 'Digital Natives' fails to safeguard them at university
	<b>ANDY PHIPPEN</b> University of Plymouth <b>KATIE TYRRELL</b> University of Suffolk	
<b>13:45 – 14:50 Panel 4: Non-traditional students and representing diversity</b>		
Venue: LTA	<b>THIAGO BOGOSSIAN</b> University of Glasgow	Geographies of exclusion: Student-mothers in higher education
	<b>RACHEL L. DUNN</b> Durham University <b>STEPHEN J. FAULKNER</b> London South Bank University	Opening doors: Perceptions and benefits of non-traditional students on Foundation years in UKHEIs
	<b>PREDRAG LAŽETIĆ</b> University of Bath	Images and constructions of higher education students on university websites in Europe
<b>15:10 – 16:15 Panel 5: Higher education landscapes and the student experience</b>		
Venue: LTB	<b>MARIA GRETZKY</b> Ben Gurion University of the Negev	Contemporary studentiality in Israel
	<b>RICHARD BUDD</b> University of Lancaster	Universities as landscapes
	<b>CHRISTOPHER CUNNINGHAM</b> University of Essex	The capricious landscape of UK higher education
<b>15:10 – 16:15 Panel 6: Pedagogical practices and learning environments</b>		
Venue: LTA	<b>SAMUEL ASARE</b> University of Cambridge	What role does teacher-student relationships play in student engagement in higher education in Ghana?
	<b>SANDRA MAJER</b> <b>SUSANNE STRAUSS</b> University of Konstanz	How learning environments impact on first- and second-generation students' drop-out intentions
	<b>LARS ULRIKSEN</b> University of Copenhagen	Balancing time. Students and study practices in Danish higher education
<b>16:30 – 17:00 Presentation from EuroStudents project and closing comments; Venue: LTB</b>		
<b>17:00 Wine reception</b>		

**‘International-ness’?: The case of East Asian international students in the UK**

Lin Ma  
University of Bristol

The internationalisation of UK higher education features increased international student admission and corresponds to domestic policy changes that privatise and neoliberalise the sector. In the predominant frameworks of national and institutional analyses (Adbullah et al., 2013), international students are selectively represented as privileged or vulnerable. Nationally, they appear in statistics for education and migration governance. In light of austerity, higher education institutions highly recognise their financial contribution, despite concerns and cynicism. With shared interest, however, neither framework actively acknowledge an ‘international-ness’ that is beyond mobility. As a group highly subjective to neoliberal and neo-colonial discourses (Brooks, 2017), East Asian international students are privileged in educational mobility and vulnerable academically and socially. International students possess an ‘international-ness’ that cannot be sufficiently understood from frameworks positioned nationally and institutionally. Little is known from their perspective. Thus, this paper adopts an emic perspective and examines at which levels they navigate their privileges and vulnerabilities. Preliminary findings suggest: 1) Economic privilege is accessed tentatively, as a part of international student experience, and asserted over peers left behind. 2) Vulnerability is rarely claimed collectively, but individually recognised as linguistic and cultural differences. In both aspects, privilege and vulnerability are not fixed; they are interpreted in accordance with nation-states hierarchy and actively balanced by individuals. As the case of East Asian international students in the UK shows, ‘international-ness’ represents internalised privileges and vulnerabilities at the international level and are further intertwined at the individual level.

**Transitional and transnational opportunities?: Higher education choices of non-EU international students in the UK**

Jihyun Lee  
University College London

Despite a growing body of literature on international student mobility to UK higher education, existing research into international students has tended to focus upon a single nationality group or a whole group with little differentiation between international students (for example, between EU and non-EU students) (Beech, 2015; Findlay, Prazeres, McCollum, & Packwood, 2017; Geddie, 2013; Sin, 2009). Understandings of student choices of UK higher education have been therefore rather simplified, painting a homogenized picture. This points to a need to explore further the diversity of the international student population, particularly those from non-EU countries. International students are particularly concentrated at postgraduate level, with students from outside EU countries accounting for almost half (42%) of the student population in the UK (UKCISA, 2017). Drawing on 55 in-depth semi-structured interviews with non-EU international postgraduate students in STEM and Social Science disciplines at three

universities in England, this paper provides a more nuanced picture of international student mobility into UK higher education. The findings suggest that higher education choices of the international students are grounded within and across the fields of family, education, work and social life. Their choice-making is also impacted by class, age, gender and race/ethnicity – these social distinctions have similarly received, to date, little attention in the international student mobility literature. Moreover, this study throws light on how the choices of UK higher education are made, and need to be understood, to fulfil various goals that lie beyond the short-term pursuit of jobs, income and status.

### **A UK based study into international student participation in theatre within university theatre societies and its impact on their challenges and sense of belonging**

Priyanki Ghosh  
University of Surrey

Existing research mostly offers generalised explanations of international student belonging based on social categories like nationality (e.g. Chinese) or ethnicity (e.g. Asians) (Yao 2016), which risk obscuring inequalities through reification. Amidst socio-political uncertainties (e.g. Brexit, differential visa restrictions), often reflected in feelings of ‘unwelcomeness’, declining international student numbers and racial segregation on UK campuses (Brown and Jones, 2013); this PhD study accesses international student belonging within the under researched contexts of university student societies. A yearlong, full-term ethnography of theatre societies within a single institution and a sociolinguistic discourse approach, addresses recurrent research gaps of an in-depth, context specific analysis to understand the construction of international student experiences in key, extracurricular university contexts (Hendrickson, 2018). The focus is on theatre societies because the convergence of the theatrical and the intercultural creates critical performances allowing to witness interculturality in action over time and between culturally different home and international students, as they voluntarily engage in varied theatre practices. Currently, interculturality can be said to be concerned with how student’s international university experiences shape their cultural competence and humility in their interactions with culturally different others (Alexander et.al; 2014). This paper focuses specifically on the themes of teamwork, friendship and bonding; the performance of bonding, group identification and belonging among society members through participation in ritualised theatre practises. Linguistic and cultural barriers experienced among certain international students were however seen to limit participation in improvised team activities, contributing to feelings of exclusion that influenced their friendships and belonging to society groups.

### **Imaginative travellers: A case study of the students at a British branch university in China**

Jingran Yu  
University of Manchester

Transnational education (TNE), ‘in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based’ (Council of Europe, 2002), has been changing higher education landscapes profoundly by connecting educational institutions and

(re)distributing educational resources across space (Leung and Waters, 2013). Yet, TNE remains under-researched (Leung and Waters, 2017), with the studies of TNE students particularly lacking. In the very few exceptions addressed this topic, Waters (2018, p.678) notes that TNE students are mainly perceived as disadvantaged 'less successful (also known as 'failing') young people' who are often confronted with 'suspicion' and 'doubt'.

This paper contributes to the gap by drawing on a seven-month ethnographic study at a British branch university in China, incorporating interviews with staff and students, participant observations on campus and online research. To be admitted to this university, Chinese students need to reach the threshold of yiben (first batch, usually top 10%-15%) with at least 77% in English in Gaokao. The campus was designed to resemble the UK home campus, is staffed by English-speaking academics and is equipped with British curriculum design. 90% of student population is Chinese, but they are obliged to use English to study and live on campus during term time. In addressing the conference theme, this paper explores to what extent and in what way this UK TNE experience (re-)negotiates the students' relational identities and provokes their imaginative mobilities, and what are the consequent opportunities and/or challenges implied to their future international career trajectories.

### **Student mobility and European identity**

Manuel Souto-Otero  
Cardiff University

A. Gehlke, O. Key, Š. Stiburek, M. Janto  
CHE Consult

European identity is high on the political agenda, particularly in the UK, but also elsewhere within the EU. A key issue is how educational interventions such as international student mobility affect such identity. Bruter sees student exchange programmes "to propose a new 'Social Contract' to European citizens, and to develop a new mass European identity rather than let citizens be mere 'consumers' of the economic benefits associated with Europe" (2005:73-74). The Erasmus programme (and its successor, the Erasmus+ programme) is the largest, most established and visible student mobility programme in the world. A lively empirical literature has emerged exploring the transformative potential of Erasmus with regards to European identity. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), Van Mol (2011), Mitchell (2012) report that participation in the programme results in changes in the European identity of students, whereas Sigalas (2010a, 2010b) and Wilson (2011) are more skeptic. Many of these studies employed small and geographically limited samples, and often UK-dominated (as host or sending country). Other studies that make use of larger samples from a wider set of countries, however, also give contradictory results. Brandenburg et al. (2014) even suggested a decrease in attachment to Europe, following participation. This paper makes use of a high quality new large dataset of over 20,000 mobile and non-mobile higher education students across Europe to explore this issue from a comparative perspective. The results suggest that Erasmus+ higher education mobility contributes to the creation of a stronger European identity. While Erasmus(+) participants are mainly pro-European they become even more so during their mobility. Gains are larger for students who exhibited lower degrees of European identity prior to mobility.

**“Not our students”: Exploring the international university as a site of negotiating race, ethnicity, and nationality**

Gianlouis Hernandez  
Università della Svizzera italiana

Increasing diversity in international student mobility/migration has gained attention in recent years (Bilecen & Van Mol, 2017). However, in the context of international higher education where national diversity is a normative premise, how the important and related concepts of race and ethnicity bear upon this premise is still not adequately addressed in the literature (Estera & Shahjahan, 2018; George Mwangi et al., 2018). Furthermore, racial inclusion/exclusion in academic migration needs further explication (Erel, Murji, & Nahaboo, 2016). This study uses data collected during semi-structured interviews with foreign and domestic students, as well as administrators, that incorporate photo-elicitation techniques (Harper, 2002; Shaw, 2013) to identify the discursive and visual elements of exclusion/inclusion. It highlights visuality as an enabling mechanism within the field of discursivity (Mirzoeff, 2006; Yue, 2000) and further links discursive exclusion/inclusion to the material conditions of embodied differences attributed to race, ethnicity, and nationality. Overall the study finds that articulations of race, ethnicity, and nationality emerge as salient nodal points (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) that delimit a modern/colonial imaginary global (Stein & Andreotti, 2017). It further demonstrates that internal heterogeneity of a country leads to varied conceptualizations of difference, engaging an innovative transregional focus in a field which has long regarded the nation-state as a unit of analysis (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002)

**‘More than customers’: Conceptions of students as partners within a neoliberal landscape**

Karen Gravett  
University of Surrey

In recent years, approaches to engaging students as partners in learning and teaching have grown in prominence within higher education internationally, and the literature has been expanding rapidly as both practitioners and theorists seek to understand how the concept of partnership can be used and understood effectively. In particular, student-staff partnership practices have been cited as having the potential to disrupt entrenched institutional cultures, as offering a route towards a more participative agenda, and as fostering genuinely transformative learning within an increasingly economically driven higher education context. This paper draws on interviews with students, staff, and senior managers within higher education in order to examine further how student-staff partnership may be conceptualised within institutions and by different stakeholders. Through map-mediated interviews using a concept mapping approach we aim to generate understandings of how partnership may be articulated and understood within contemporary higher education, and to consider the impact of these conceptions on institutions’ strategic approaches and priorities. Our research offers a counterview to recent studies that have depicted staff understandings of partnership to be firmly located within a neoliberal discourse. Rather, our interviews portray surprising overlaps within students’ and leaders’ conceptualisations depicting recurrent themes of communication, dialogue, community, and enabling students to escape neoliberal constructions: to become ‘more than customers’. Ultimately, our research highlights that student-staff partnerships can be understood as a generative, dialogic and values-based practice, that has the potential to be transformative, developmental and fun.

**Students as consumers: Going beyond the metaphor**

Carlos Azevedo  
The Open University

This paper is based on an aspect of my ongoing doctoral research, which aims to critically unpack how undergraduate higher education (HE) students in the UK are constituted as consumers. Specifically, I explore students’ identity work in order to fit labour market expectations, which often implies the need to develop or ‘fake’ a specific identity. A total of 41 qualitative interviews have been conducted in the UK, including a longitudinal aspect with one group of participants being interviewed at yearly intervals. The research adopts a Foucauldian standpoint and data was analysed using Foucauldian discourse analysis (Willig, 2006; Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2011). Additionally, secondary data (e.g. documents, adverts, prospectuses) has also been collected. One of the main conclusions is that for many students HE studies seem to be an instrumental project whose main purpose is to lead to future employability. That project is managed and achieved through norms of self-discipline (Foucault,



1979; 1980) in which the new subjectivity of the managed self (Grey, 1999) precedes the career itself. Moreover, some students pretend to be the kind of self that is marketable, so ‘faking it’ by creating themselves as a brand/project. However, the term ‘student’ is often deployed in a way that reifies and homogenises identity (Knights and Clarke, 2017), given there can be no ‘single type’ of student (Williams, 2013). Indeed, as no discourse is ever totalising (Foucault, 1980), some students decide to follow a totally different path.

### **Come to the edge: Postgraduate student expectations in a creative arts institution**

Chris Mitchell  
University College London

As part of my professional doctorate at the Institute of Education, I explored student expectations of postgraduate study at a creative arts institution. My research included an online survey and focus groups that investigated student motivations, student expectations and the nature of the relationship between student and host institution. The results were analysed in the context of the ongoing debate about the marketisation of higher education. The study suggested that students do not initially identify as consumers. They want to take responsibility for their learning and are as likely to be motivated by personal development as they are instrumental concerns. It also found that students tended to think of their education in holistic terms, rather than as a set of discrete variables delivered as part of a service agreement. This challenges the prevailing notion amongst UK policy makers that higher education is a private good that needs to demonstrate value for money through metrics such as contact hours, staff-student ratios and graduate outcomes. It does, however, also conclude that students conceive of their education in individualistic terms and can default to the language of the consumer when they experience disappointment with aspects of their learning experience. The study concludes that individual institutions need to rediscover their sense of public purpose by encouraging students to reflect on their aspirations, and in engaging them in dialogue about the public impact of their creative practice.

### **International Work Placements: Searching for Distinction**

Sophie Cranston, Helena Pimlott-Wilson, Emma Bates  
Loughborough University

In the context of changing higher education landscapes, it is argued that students no longer see a degree as ‘enough’ to secure graduate employment (Tomlinson 2008). Young people are increasingly expected to undertake activities that will enable them to create positional advantage in a competitive labour market (Pimlott-Wilson, 2015). This includes engagement in a raft of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, accumulating social and cultural capital in order to stand out from their peers (Holdsworth, 2015). In this paper, we look at one university-led mechanism through which recent graduates attempt to seek distinction: the international work placement. International work placements are where students choose to work overseas as an integral part of their UK university degree, typically for a year. The paper explores the

motivations behind students undertaking international work placements. Specifically, it looks at how the experience of international travel and international work is framed by recent graduates through comparisons to other experiences. We argue that this produces a hierarchy of experiences framed around employability.

**A system of oppressive accountability and didactic teaching: Linking university student resilience to pedagogical practices of secondary education.**

Harry Madgwick Lawton  
University College London

This paper connects the use of neoliberal governmentalities in secondary education to the emotional struggles some university students are experiencing in higher education; whereby pupils are ill-equipped for the pressures of self-directed study. Recent discourse on the deficit of resilience in university students has been problematic, reducing complex subtleties of subjectivity to an abstract and inculcating lack of character. The pejorative labelling of “snow-flake” millennial students not only denigrates a generation, but places blame for their experiences on the subject, rather than acknowledging the social systems responsible for shaping individuals. Nevertheless, rising drop-out rates and studies on poor student mental health raise concern over the experiences many UK students are undergoing in our universities.

I propose that one of the reasons students are struggling to acclimatise to the independent nature of university study is due to their experience of secondary school education. Specifically, I will draw on Freire’s polemics of didactic, dehumanising and debilitating pedagogies, which are all evidential in the current teaching of GCSE curriculums. Such practices deny pupils the space to problem-solve, the time to conduct independent work and the freedom to make errors which can then be overcome. However, blame should not be placed at the feet of teachers who, as Stephen Ball has noted, operate under an oppressive Foucauldian system of obsessive monitoring and ‘performativity’. Rather, it is the systems of mapping and performance that panic teachers into more authoritarian teaching methods, as they attempt to ensure pupil progress is evidenced through formal examinations and data.

**The neoliberal university and the academic-student relationship:  
A textual analysis of ITV Drama *Cheat***

Catherine Wilkinson, Liverpool John Moores University; Sergio A. Silverio, King’s College London;  
Samantha Wilkinson, Manchester Metropolitan University.

The Higher Education [HE] environment has undergone seismic shifts in the last fifty years. More changes are expected, as the Government’s HE White Paper: Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice, redraws relationships between government, students, and research, which have contributed to the UK HE environment as we know it. Through a textual analysis of four episodes comprising the 2019 ITV 1 psychological thriller *Cheat*, this paper explores depictions of the UK HE landscape and of the lived

experiences of being an academic and a student in the television drama. We achieve this through a focus on the central characters, university lecturer, Dr. Leah Dale, who is employed on a fixed-term contract, and final-year undergraduate student, Rose Vaughan, and the fictional HE institution where the drama is set – St. Helen’s College. This paper engages with the following themes: Emotional labour; the powerful student consumer; and UK HE as an “anxiety machine”. Insight gleaned through the textual analysis contributes to understanding of how both academics and students might be navigating the neoliberal university. We argue that despite the conceptualisation of students as consumers in more recent rhetoric, university lecturers do far more than deliver customer service. In particular, our analysis has shed light on the emotional landscape in current UK HE and the possible resultant fragility of both academic and student selves. We hope that this paper will open up fruitful conversations around the high levels of emotional labour involved in ‘being’ a university lecturer.

### **Mainstreaming gender pedagogy in higher education curricula: Practices, challenges, futures**

Tamsin Hinton-Smith, Kim Brayson, Charlotte Morris, Rosa Marvell  
University of Sussex

While most social science courses include gender focus, this can remain added-on, and some disciplines lag behind. Some suggest a crisis in feminist teaching since Women's Studies department closures through the 1990s (Wright 2016); more recently Gender Studies programmes in Europe have faced attacks.

It is recognised that all students should find positive representations of groups they belong to, in their HE learning. The 2010 UK HE fee changes repositioned the transaction between universities and their students. While accounts emphasise the positioning of students as instrumentally-driven consumers; this can also be seen as re-politicising students' demands as critical scholars; around such demands as decolonising curricula, and trans equality.

Mainstreaming gender in curricula and pedagogy across disciplines is central to acknowledging the significance of aspects of identity, including an intersectional approach to gender in informing the HE experience that students have within and outside the classroom and to fostering more equitable futures within and beyond HE.

We discuss early insights from funded research exploring presences and absences of gender and feminism in HE curricula and pedagogy across diverse disciplinary areas. The qualitative research includes documentary analysis, staff interviews, and student focus groups. The work fits more widely within the context of collaborative international HE pedagogic development work in which we are engaged, and through which partners have identified an imperative to increase gender mainstreaming for wider social justice. The research draws theoretically on hooks (1994), Freire (1970), and Ahmed (2010).

### **Regulation in the UK? How students who have experienced sexual harassment from higher education staff attempt to obtain redress**

Anna Bull  
University of Portsmouth

England has seen a changing higher education (HE) sector landscape over recent years. A recent change is the introduction of a regulatory body, the Office for Students, on April 1st 2018, which marks a shift away from the policy of autonomy of HE institutions. At the same time, rising student fees across most of the UK have contributed to policy discourses of the student both as 'vulnerable' and as 'thwarted consumers' (Brooks 2018).

This paper explores how regulation has been constituted in the HE sector in England prior to the introduction of the Office for Students by drawing on data from interviews with 16 students who experienced sexual harassment and violence from academic staff and attempted to report this to their institution. It focuses on the avenues for redress that these students attempted if

their institution failed to follow adequate disciplinary procedures, examining case studies from students who attempted to gain redress from the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education or through legal action against their institution, contrasting these with accounts from students who were blocked from either of these avenues. The paper finishes by discussing whether the introduction of a regulator in England is likely to make any difference to this situation, drawing on statements made by the Office for Students to assess their capacity and mandate to address this issue.

### **Why assuming students are 'Digital Natives' fails to safeguard them at university**

Emma Bond, University of Suffolk; Andy Phippen, University of Plymouth;  
Katie Tyrrell, University of Suffolk

In the last few years students' experiences of higher education have been transformed by the digital landscape. There has been considerable attention given to Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) and an increasing concern about graduates' transitions into the labour market in the information society. However, little academic attention has been accorded to how university students negotiate their digital identity safely in spite of a number of high profile cases of online abuse, harmful and hateful content and risky online behaviour reported in the media.

The Universities UK (UUK) 'Changing the Culture' report (2016) exposed violence against women, hate crime and harassment affecting university students and demanded further action to tackle online harassment and hate crime. Uncertain how to best respond, many universities remain unsure of how support and protect victims of abuse, sanction offenders and manage reputational risks to institutions.

Across the sector there is a failure to recognise the role of social media in students' everyday lives and lack an awareness of rights, legislation and social behaviours. This lack of understanding also places students at further risk in that they can sometimes fail to recognise such behaviours as harmful, know how to report, nor how they seek support from their university.

This paper draws on a multi-method OfS catalyst funded year-long study undertaken at a UK university which explored student experiences of social media, their online relationships and how they negotiate the landscapes of online risk in their everyday lives. We also examine what works in developing a holistic approach to successfully safeguarding students online.

### **Geographies of exclusion: Student-mothers in higher education**

Thiago Bogossian  
University of Glasgow

Mothers who attend higher education institutions face many challenges that traditional students do not. They must negotiate constraints of time and space between their learning and the other tasks they have to do on a regular basis. The purpose of this paper is to report research conducted with a group of student-mothers at a prestigious university in Scotland. Drawing from an intersection between Human Geography and Education, it plans to examine their perceptions of belonging to and within the different spaces of the university and the learning challenges they perceive of being a 'non-traditional' student in a higher education setting. Focus groups were conducted, where the participants shared their experience on their roles as students and mothers, its impact on their learning and their place attachment to the institution. Despite recent and current efforts, many social groups still have not been fully included or felt part of higher education in Scotland. Understanding the meaning the participants of this research give to their experiences at the university might not only help the students to express their commonly unheard voices but also to aid institutions to shape policies to create a friendlier and more welcoming environment to these women.

### **Opening Doors: Perceptions and benefits of non-traditional students on Foundation Years in UKHEIs**

Rachel L. Dunn, Durham University  
Stephen J. Faulkner, London South Bank University

The landscape of Higher Education (HE) in the United Kingdom (UK) is changing. The UK HE sector is traditionally based around young students who have recently completed A-levels or equivalent qualifications and are on an expected educational trajectory. However, this has altered as data from Higher Education Statistics Agency suggests significant growth in the number of UK home students studying at foundation (year zero) level prior to entering year one of a degree. This paper will discuss the nature, opportunities, and benefits offered by foundation years to non-traditional students within HE in the UK.

We will offer an insight into the alternative academic journey that students can take via foundation years at UK HE institutions, highlighting key governmental recommendations for maintaining widening participation and access to HE. The paper will address the perceptions of 'being a university student' through case studies of foundation or extended degree students at two UK universities: Durham University and London South Bank University. The foundation students in question are primarily mature students returning to education after a break, those who want to change direction, or those who have had previous unsuccessful educational experiences, e.g. at A-level. Underpinning the discussion will be the evolving concept of 'lifelong learning' and the characteristics of mature students, which can vary depending on context and perception. Examples of successful foundation students (now University graduates) will be

given, demonstrating that foundation years and extended degrees open doors that were previously closed.

### **Images and constructions of higher education students on university websites in Europe**

Predrag Lažetić  
University of Bath

Alongside being important communication tools, university websites are also intensive discursive battlegrounds on which discourses about students and higher education are articulated through a combination of visual images and texts (Rose, 2001). Previous gender-centred discourse analysis of a sample of university websites in English speaking countries (Leathwood and Read, 2009) pointed at the prevalence of a “good” feminised student within the “masculinised tradition” of the university. This paper extends this research in a much wider comparative perspective by analysing 36 university websites in 6 European countries.

Analysis indicates a divergence in the portrayal of students on university websites in different countries and across types of institutions - rather than convergence towards the image of a “good”, typically female student who enjoys a “total experience” at university, which dominates English and Irish websites but also websites of highly ranked universities across the other four countries. This (in its roots Anglo-Saxon) focus on student experience can be seen as the institutional middle-ground discursive position between the construction of students as consumers and dependent instrumental learners, and the historical enlightenment view of students as people committed to personal development. On the other hand, analysis indicates that in some countries (Spain, Germany and Poland) student images and texts are more commonly absent. Students in these countries tend to be constructed as recipients of public service, mostly as independent learners and are expected to independently manage administrative steps and navigate their studies and student life.

### **Contemporary studentiality in Israel**

Maria Gretzky

Ben Gurion University of the Negev

While many social science studies are dealing with, and based on, the student population, only a few refer to the student experience as a social and cultural phenomenon. Even less are doing that in the contemporary Israeli context. In my research I focus on the current experiences of Israeli students and question the ways students express and explain it.

As a B.A graduate and an M.A student, who works currently as teacher's assistant and also hold a part-time administrative position, I am exposed on a daily basis to different facets of what I understand as an Israeli studentiality. In my research I seek to explore the experience of being a student and propose this focus as a research perspective that is necessary for better understanding of the contemporary dynamics in higher education. I seek to map the emerging social relations within the campus and the way in which they constitute students' experiences. I suggest to understand the studentiality as being shaped simultaneously by global cultural forces (e.g. technological turn, neo-liberal culture, therapeutic discourse) and local social and political processes (e.g. Israeli ethno-national ideology, public religiosity). I also ask to follow how characteristics of the current generation of students and their generational discourse involved in the constitution of Israeli studentiality.

The presentation will present my ongoing ethnographic study and will be based on my personal and professional experience in Ben-Gurion University, one of the largest universities in Israel. I include in research students studying at the faculty of engineering, social-sciences and humanities. The research method include conducting observations at classes, focus groups and in-depth interviews with students, interviews with the administrative and academic staff, and discursive text analysis of websites and portals which serve as platforms for academic discussions for students. In my presentation I will present the initial analysis of my findings. I will specifically focus on a way in which the particular academic disciplines and departments - their knowledge and organizational culture - shape different patterns of student-professor relationships. I will also bring some insights on emerging pattern of communication between students and the university staff that reflects student's imagination of the university as an institution and lived experience.

### **Universities as Landscapes**

Richard Budd

University of Lancaster

As Wylie (2007, p.95) describes, landscapes can be conceptualised as 'circulating system[s] of cultural meaning, encoded in images, texts and discourses'. From this perspective, landscapes are social as much as they are material and visual, serving as structures for understanding and action while simultaneously re-/producing themselves. What this means in real terms, when



applied to higher education, is that the activities of staff and students are channeled by, but also constitute, their university. It also means that while universities within national contexts will be somewhat similar due to those countries' regulatory and cultural settings (Hüther & Krücken, 2016), they are individually unique and constantly changing.

This raises interesting questions for researching the contemporary student experience in that it offers a wide variety of potential comparative dimensions. At present, metrics such as student satisfaction, final degree classifications, and post-degree income, are perhaps the most dominant framing, but these reductive, proxy measures do not capture the nature of what university life is actually like for students. This paper, then, presents the theoretical and methodological basis for a project which explores how students from different social groups, at three contrasting UK universities, describe their university landscapes. In specific terms, it seeks to elicit and analyse how they see and experience its physical spaces, its organisational culture, and their position in relation to its broader student body. Some initial findings may be presented as the data collection is due to commence in May 2019.

### **The Capricious Landscape of UK Higher Education**

Christopher Cunningham  
University of Essex

Through an investigation into the concept of social mobility, I interrogate the idea of meritocracy. Initially coined by Michael Young in 1958, the term meritocracy has since been misinterpreted and misappropriated to shape education policy; this has helped to create a marketised higher education sector. I propose that, although narratives of meritocracy in relation to higher education claim to offer a challenge to entrenched structures of inequality, they inadvertently strengthen networks of privilege, while simultaneously creating further disparity. The research investigates a range of factors which shape and characterise contemporary UK universities, such as league tables, frameworks of measurement, and an expansion of professional service staff. It evaluates the ways in which universities are organised at an institutional level, and how they are governed and regulated nationally. It suggests that these power dynamics impact upon academic freedom and influence the valuing of certain types of knowledge.

As universities within the UK expand to meet the demands of the market, notions of widening access for 'non-traditional' or 'disadvantaged' students becomes a key strategy, for which the narrative of meritocracy is central. However, as students graduate into an increasingly precarious employment environment post-study, and as networks of privilege perpetuate, the sustainability of this model becomes questionable. This research suggests therefore, that a re-imagining of the purpose of a university is needed; this re-imagining takes place through an interdisciplinary lens which considers sociological, anthropological, historical, literary, and theological insights.

**What role does teacher-student relationships play in student engagement in higher education in Ghana?**

Samuel Asare  
University of Cambridge

There is increasing pressure on higher education institutions to create a supportive learning environment to raise learning outcomes, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Even though there are many factors that affect student learning, teachers have been identified as pivotal. However, much of the literature on how teachers can enhance learning tends to focus on knowledge and teaching approaches, restricting our understanding of how other related issues such as teacher-student relationships affect learning. This paper draws on student views and argues that the quality of relationships between teachers and students can facilitate or hinder learning. It employs a case study design, set in one college of a large public university in Ghana. It aims to explore students' perceptions of their relationship with teachers and how this relationship affects their learning. In all, 17 students kept a reflective diary of their experiences for 4 days and then participated in an interview. Findings suggest that relationships between teachers and students – both in and outside lectures – facilitate or hinder students' investment of time and effort in their learning. Positive relationships characterised by the use of encouraging words, approachability and, willingness to discuss learning problems facilitates learning. On the other hand, negative relationships characterised by derogatory comments, neglect of student views, and authoritarian posture hinder learning. The paper concludes that while admitting the importance of teacher knowledge and teaching approaches in student learning, the quality of relationships between teachers and students should be given important consideration. It is therefore recommended that programmes meant to enhance teaching in higher education should incorporate topics to improve relationships between teachers and students.

**How learning environments impact on first- and second-generation students' drop-out intentions**

Sandra Majer,  
Susanne Strauss  
University of Konstanz

Previous research has shown that first-generation students generally face greater problems with succeeding in higher education (Bargel & Bargel, 2010; Heublein et al. 2017). This has been theoretically framed with Bourdieu's habitus concept (1982, 1987) who argues that FGS have greater problems with adapting to the higher education learning environment. While the majority of drop-out research has focused on individual-level mechanisms (Tinto, 1993; Robbins et al, 2004; Brandstätter et al. 2006), recent research has pointed out that individual-level factors do not have a universal effect on academic success but interact with learning environments (Bohndick et al., 2018; Etzel & Nagy, 2016; Pawlowska et al., 2014). While certain

personality characteristics increase students' performance, this effect seems to be mediated by learning environments (LEs) which are either favorable or unfavorable for certain types of students (Pawlowska et al., 2014). The most comprehensive measurement of LEs has been suggested by the so-called SSCO model (Schaeper & Weiß, 2016) which captures central dimensions of the process quality of higher education, namely structure, support, challenge and orientation. We assume that first- and second-generation students' drop-out intentions vary by these dimensions. To address this question, we use data from the student survey (Multrus et al., 2017), a representative survey of higher education students in 28 institutions of higher education in Germany. To account for the hierarchical structure of the data, we estimate multilevel generalized linear models explaining students' drop-out intentions and the effect of different dimensions of the LEs. First results show that the dimensions of LEs affect drop-out intentions differently for first- and second-generation students: both groups benefit from LEs that foster cognitive activation, but the structure of the LEs is only relevant for second-generation students, while supportive LEs with good social climate only impact the drop-out intentions of FSG.

### **Balancing time. Students and study practices in Danish higher education**

Lars Ulriksen  
University of Copenhagen

Danish Higher-Education policy applies 'student engagement' and 'study intensity' in the most reduced sense as the number of hours students spend studying. However, students' engagement cannot be captured by simply counting clock time. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews among second-year students at four different study programmes, the paper discusses the students' perceptions of their studies and of being a student. The students continuously balanced different interests and activities. Some were linked with teaching and learning activities. Others were paid work or extra-curricular activities that could have relevance for the study programme, but the students also prioritised time for other realms of their lives than those related to their university studies.

The students' sense of meaning and relevance in the teaching and in the curriculum affected their priorities, as did their perception of the teachers' engagement and teaching competences. Further, the students' ideas about themselves as students played a role. For instance, while some perceived the university programme as an integral part of themselves, others considered studying more as a job while others still saw it as a means to an end. We found differences between students at different study programmes, but also between students at the same programme. The paper discusses these variations and that students' engagement and practices must be understood as a web of elements related to the students (e.g., interests, preferences, sense making and balancing various parts of life) and to the study programmes (e.g., the curriculum, the teaching and teachers, the institutional and political framing).

## Conference venue: Lecture theatre block (rooms LTA and LTB)

