



# The Master in the Marketplace

MASCULINE METAPHORS, ACADEMIC AGONISM, AND NEOLIBERAL POLICY IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

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# 2016 Higher Education White Paper

- ▶ *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*



**Foreword from the Minister of State  
for Universities and Science**

# The Discourse of Mastery

- ▶ **'Discourse I'll call "objective"; by that I mean a discourse that does not involve an easily located subject of enunciation, that speaks [...] not just in the name of but as universal knowledge itself.'** (Hélène Cixous, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly-Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 137.)

# Ideal Objectivity

- ▶ **'Ideal objectivity is a tacit generalisation from the *subjectivity* of quite a small social group, albeit a group that has the power, security, and prestige to believe that its experiences and normative ideals hold generally across the social order.'** (Lorraine Code, 'Taking Subjectivity into Account', in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, 2nd edition, ed. by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 191-221, p. 197.)

# Agonism


- ▶ **'Conventionalised oppositional formats that result from underlying ideology by which intellectual interchange is conceptualised as a metaphorical battle.'** (Deborah Tannen, 'Agonism in Academic Discourse', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34 (2002), 1651-1669 (p. 1652).)
- ▶ **'The claim of objectivity is a cloak attackers hide behind while sticking their knives out through it.'** (Ibid., p.1644)

# Metaphor


- ▶ **'The idea that metaphor is just a matter of language and can at best only describe reality stems from the view that what is real is wholly external to, and independent of, how human beings conceptualise the world.'**  
(George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 146.)
- ▶ **'The people who get to impose their metaphors on the culture get to define what we consider to be true.'** (Ibid., p. 160.)


# Themes in the White Paper


- ▶ The 'level playing field'
  - ▶ 'Choice'
  - ▶ 'Value'
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- ▶ 'By introducing more **competition** and informed **choice** into higher education, we will deliver better **outcomes** and **value**.' (p. 8)

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- ▶ ‘**Our** universities **rank** among **our** most **valuable** national **assets**.’ (p. 5)
  - ▶ ‘We will create a **level playing field**.’ (p. 10)
  - ▶ ‘**Competition** between **providers** in any market **incentivises** them to **raise their game**.’ (p. 8)
  - ▶ ‘We want a *globally* **competitive** market that supports diversity, where anyone who demonstrates they have the *potential* to offer *excellent* teaching and **clears our high quality bar** can **compete** on a **level playing field**. If we place too much emphasis on whether a provider has a long established **track record**, this by definition will favour incumbents.’ (p. 8)



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- ▶ 'The Government should not be in the business of rescuing failing institutions.' (p. 10)
  - ▶ 'The possibility of exit is a **natural** part of a **healthy**, competitive, **well-functioning** market.' (p. 10)
  - ▶ 'This Government has therefore chosen to put **choice** for students **at the heart** of its higher education reform **strategy**.' (p. 12)
  - ▶ 'The measures outlined here will help ensure that *everyone with the potential to benefit* from higher study can access relevant information to help them make the **right choices** from a wide range of high quality universities and benefit from excellent teaching that supports their *future productivity*.' (p. 8)

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- ▶ '**Access** remains uneven, with young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds 2.4 times less likely to go into higher education.' (p. 7)
  - ▶ 'There is large variation in graduate **outcomes** across both **providers** and subjects, and even for those that studied the same subject within the same provider.' (p. 8)
  - ▶ **At the heart of** this lies insufficient **competition** and a lack of informed **choice.**' (p. 8)

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3. Higher education is no longer limited to the academic elite within a small and primarily Government-funded set of institutions. Thanks to the changes 25 years ago that brought former polytechnics into the university system, and to the more recent increase in the diversity of higher education provision, there is more choice in where and how students can pursue higher learning. Whereas only 19% of young people went to university in 1990<sup>1</sup>, in 2013 this had increased to almost 40%<sup>2</sup> – and this includes more people from disadvantaged backgrounds than ever before. We have gone from a higher education system that serves only a narrow band of people, to a broader, more diverse and more open system that is closer than ever before to fulfilling Lord Robbins' guiding principle that higher education "should be available to all who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue it"<sup>3</sup>.
  4. In recognition of this shift, in 2010, we took steps to enable England's higher education system to adjust to these new demands. In 2012, 13 years after tuition fees were first introduced, we took the decision to put higher education funding onto a more sustainable footing by moving away from reliance on grants from the state while maintaining funding levels for universities themselves. The majority of funding for tuition now comes from those who benefit the most from it, through income-contingent loans repaid by graduates and backed by the taxpayer. In 2015, we removed the artificial cap on student numbers to allow greater choice and to help competition to flourish.

- ▶ 'A 1% increase in the share of the workforce with a university degree raises long-run productivity.' (pp. 8-9)
- ▶ 'Applicants are currently poorly-informed about the content and teaching structure of courses, as well as the **job prospects** they can expect. This can lead to regret: the recent Higher Education Academy (HEA)–Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) Student Academic Experience Survey found that **over one third of undergraduates in England believe their course represents very poor or poor value for money.**' (p. 11)
- ▶ 'Many students are dissatisfied with the provision they receive, with over 60% of students feeling that all or some elements of their course are worse than expected.' (p. 8)



## **Creating a competitive market**

7. Competition between providers in any market incentivises them to raise their game, offering consumers a greater choice of more innovative and better quality products and services at lower cost. Higher education is no exception.

# Making Space

