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Can we all do it all? : Tensions in the mission and structure of UK higher education

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Abstract

Juxtaposing material from an analysis of the institutional returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for 1995-99 (the "Ramsden Report") with social and political pressures on the system, the author examines the question of whether or not UK higher education is "fit for purpose". He contrasts seven items of strong performance (contribution to economic growth, efficiency, student satisfaction and employability, democratisation and diversity, research quality, "service" and international reputation) with three key "tensions" (financial and institutional stability, class participation, and mission convergence). Suggested priorities for action include: a new "access" agenda, improved market responsiveness, strategic institutional alliances and rationalisation, and action on pay and the profession. The paper concludes with a set of "hard questions" about the maintenance of interdependence, the "future-proofing" of collaborative arrangements, the pattern of incentives, and the creation of public confidence in higher education. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)