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**Author**

FILIPPAKOU, Ourania (SALTER, Brian; TAPPER, Ted)

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**Abstract**

With particular, although not exclusive, reference to England, this article explores the appropriateness of describing higher education as a system. It has two main purposes: to explore the grounds for labelling English higher education as a system and to argue that, because this is no longer an appropriate label, a different conceptualisation is required. The central argument is that the structure of higher education is formed through the interaction of the state, market and higher education institutions and is, therefore, a shifting political construct. Furthermore, it will be hypothesised that the English (indeed, the British) model of higher education is better described as an increasingly internally differentiated network of sectors rather than as a system. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)  
Filippakou, Ourania, E-Mail: ofilippakou@ioe.ac.uk