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**Abstract**

Where have been the main policy drivers for the development of British higher education over the last 50 years? This article argues that while higher education policy was once driven from the inside outwards, from the late 1970s it has been driven exclusively from the outside inwards. Policy decisions under either regime were rarely driven by research findings especially from within the higher education community. The current imbalance between 'inside-out' and 'outside-in' policy formation is paradoxically most apparent when the higher education system has a more widely diversified funding base than at any time since the 1930s. The key policy challenge is now not what new policies are needed but what new framework should be developed for policy making. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)