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**Abstract**

The Robbins Report was the most deeply researched and most highly regarded report ever written on British higher education. By common consent at the time it marked a watershed in the development of higher education in Britain and took its place as one of the most influential contributions to the growth of British society since Beveridge. However, some of its most important recommendations were not accepted and for nearly 30 years the pattern of development that it proposed was in abeyance. This article describes the context of the establishment of the Robbins Committee, considers the processes that it followed in reaching its conclusions and offers an account of why some key recommendations were rejected. The article is intended to provide an historical introduction to the articles in this special issue of the journal. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)