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**Abstract**

The fifty-year history of higher education inquiries following Robbins is analysed through the device of 'twelve frameworks' for the funding and organisation of the system, of which Robbins is the first and that of the coalition government (since 2010) the last. Attention is focused on the relative impact of 'inquiry'-led frameworks, especially Robbins (reporting in 1963), James (in 1972), Dearing (in 1997), and Browne (in 2010), as well as wholly 'politically' managed frameworks including Baker-Clarke (between 1987 and 1992), 'Blair' (2003-2004) and 'Willetts-Clegg' (2010-2013). Conclusions are drawn about the short and longer-term impacts of the inquiries, about the potential counter-factual (what might have happened anyway), with reference to similar exercises in other jurisdictions (the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa), and about the relative lack of impact of institutional research, self-study and self-knowledge. The author also interpolates some autobiographical reflections. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)