

14.12.2025

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**Title**

Why learn? : higher education in a learning society

**Publication year**

2001

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education quarterly. - 55 (2001) 2, S. 175 - 184

**Inventory number**

13919

**Keywords**

Wissenschaftler ; Hochschule : gegenwärtige Situation ; Hochschulreform : allgemein ; Ausland : Großbritannien : Hochschulwesen allgemein

**Abstract**

It is an honour to be invited to give the Birley Lecture here at City University 1 . Many previous lecturers had personal contacts with Robert Birley. Alas, I did not, like Lord Prior, keep pigs at Charterhouse during the war. Nor was I spotted by Robert Birley on the strength of brilliant scholarship answers in history, but coupled with undistinguished Latin and Greek, and worse mathematics, like William Rees-Mogg. But I do share with Robert Birley a passion for education. Not only as an end in itself, but also as a means to increase the prosperity of society as a whole and the life-chances of individuals. I want to concentrate this evening on university education, and to make links with the very end of Robert Birley's distinguished career, when he was professor and head of the department of social sciences here. I shall talk about the future of higher education in a world which is changing rapidly, and in which the application of knowledge will be essential to our prosperity. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)