

Academic Libraries of the Future

Outline scenarios for 2050: Wild West

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Introduction

This is one of three outline scenarios that have been developed as part of the Academic Libraries of the Future project. The scenarios are based on the contributions from a wide range of stakeholders at workshops earlier this year – librarians, institutional managers, funders, service providers, publishers and government. This document provides an outline of the global, education and HE context for Scenario 1: “Wild West”. This scenario is not intended to be a “preferred” scenario; it just describes one possible future world.

This document has been drafted to stimulate discussions about the information services that need to be delivered in this world, and on how we might reach this world from today. These discussions will be held with participants at the SCONUL Conference 2010, and at three project workshops with various stakeholders from across the sector which are being held in July and August 2010.



Scenario 1 overview: Wild West

2050 is an era of instability. Governments and international organisations devote much of their time to environmental issues, ageing populations and security of food and energy, although technology alleviates some of the problems by allowing *ad hoc* arrangements to handle resource shortages and trade. In this environment, some international alliances prosper but many are short term and tactical. The state no longer has the resources to tackle inequality, and is, in many cases, subservient to the power of international corporations and private enterprise.

The challenges of the 21st century have created major disruptions to academic institutions and institutional life. Much that we see as the role of the state in HE today has been taken over by the market and by new organisations and social enterprises, many of them regional.

The global environment

Political: Central governments have lost some of their power to city states, regional governments and private corporations, and the world is divided into globally prosperous regions where commonalities exist. Asia has grown in population and struggles to feed and educate its youthful population; its influence has grown in the world but internal tensions have allowed US and Europe to maintain some power. The UK’s social cohesion, notably around London, has been a struggle.

Economic: Economic power is shifting towards Asia and BRIC. Countries tend not to compare themselves by GDP but by multiple metrics. There has been a significant shift in the world economy to low carbon. The new technologies of nanotech, biotech and IT have taken over the jobs market in both products and services.

Social: Around the world there is a wide divide between rural and city economies and societies, and there is significant migration driven by local conflicts. There are very diverse societies in economic and social terms compared to the start of the century, with global cities such as London and Beijing linked to each other more closely than to their neighbouring regions. There is a focus on cohesion of values within these blocs for economic and wider reasons. Economic migration is disruptive to some communities and causes local conflicts.

Technological: Technology is largely developed by the private sector which the state finds difficult to regulate. IPR difficulties lead to the rapid commoditisation of technologies. Economic value is created by services and business models rather than raw products. Solutions based on Open source ideas spread globally even as continual attempts are made to commoditise them.

Legal: The power of Internet sharing, peer networking and piracy have meant that attempts to create top down global solutions to IPR have failed. Solutions to IP are found regionally as close relationships between research establishments and regional economic clusters try to protect IPR as best as they can. Patent is declining as a useful tool.

Environmental: Again regional solutions are found for water supply, food supply and energy. The search for scalable global solutions consistently fails to deliver the goods.

UK HE context

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| Number of teaching and learning institutions | <p>The boundaries of HE are blurred, but the system is effectively multi-tiered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – There are 20 academic and research intensive universities with around 5-10,000 FTE students at each, but there is less teaching at these institutions than today. – There are 2-3 major vocational institutions in regional clusters (total 40-50 institutions). There have been many mergers within FE and with HE. They have an equivalent of 2 million FTE students. – There are ~25 new entrants from the private sector, eg publishers, technology companies and e-learning specialists. Each need ~100,000 FTE students to be viable. Most are for profit, though some social enterprise models exist. |
| Number of research institutions | <p>Fundamental research is mainly in the 20 research intensive universities. Each region has 1-2 clusters of private led near-market research and knowledge transfer institutions. Institutions are supported by local business and regional government.</p> |
| % of population in post-18 learning | <p>The total number of students ~5 million (around 10% of the adult population) at any one time. Much of adult learning is in small intensive bursts.</p> |
| Number of researchers | <p>Fluidity between business and research means that few people stay in research for a long time. This, together with the many short term secondments into research, means that it is difficult to estimate researcher numbers at any one time.</p> |
| Number of non-UK learners and researchers | <p>Overseas students are concentrated in the 20 research institutions. There is a sharp decline in overseas students to other institutions except as a result of migration.</p> |
| Funding of post-18 learning and research | <p>Funding of research is mixed between industry, state and regional partners. Industry tends to be lead with tax breaks rather than grants in key societal and economic areas. The research intensive HE institutions seek to grow endowment funding.</p> <p>Funding of learning is from employers and students. The elite institutions provide an education for those who can pay and for exceptional students via scholarships. Students are able to buy “bundles of services” from different institutions, with course fees separated from other services they might purchase.</p> |
| Regulation of post-18 learning and research | <p>There is little state regulation of learning. Private company league tables are dominant in setting expectations of value. Research is regulated at cluster level. Some sectoral regulation exists where society demands it, such as for health.</p> |

Learning – how is it organised?

Learning is commonly conducted across institutional boundaries, with students able to undertake a personally tailored education. The majority of students go to regional vocational institutions, or private institutions that have bought up “failed” institutions and developed skills-based packaged adult education. These institutions provided structured learning with rigid timetables, materials and approach. Only a minority of students attend research intensive universities, where there is a greater emphasis on guidance and less on teaching.

Many trends at the start of the century last well into the future. There are fewer full-time students, there is substantial growth in part-time and punctuated learning, e-learning is mature with fewer live lectures. Accountancy is nearly 100% online; nursing and caring disciplines tend to have the lowest level of online activity. Vocational qualifications have many faces with some sectoral qualifications and industry qualifications having greater perceived value than institutional offerings. Business, science and technology disciplines do well, but there is a reduction in access to the Arts and Humanities.

Research – how is it organised?

The research intensive HE institutions become increasingly independent and global in their aspirations, competing and partnering with each other, while reducing their interaction with other UK institutions. Regional HE/FE organisations partner with Research Institutes to develop spin offs and economic clusters. These are most successful in areas where there is an elite HE institution. Research at national and regional levels has a strong focus on STEM and economically relevant disciplines. Arts and humanities research relies heavily on philanthropic giving and is largely conducted within the 20 research intensive institutions. Tenure has all but vanished. More research is outside of HE than today, especially for near market work to offer some protection of IPR. This tends to be done in regional clusters.