

<b>Institution: Liverpool Hope University</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: Social Work and Social Policy</b>
<b>Title of case study: Influencing higher education policy through research on quality assurance and its regulatory framework</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The research has explored issues of quality assurance in UK higher education. It has investigated the design and practice of quality assurance in the UK higher education sector, and especially the regulatory framework within which institutional quality assurance takes place. Changes concerning the focus of quality assurance, the regulation of institutions and the nature of the regulatory framework have been informed and influenced by the research.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The UK has probably the most extensive and elaborate quality assurance arrangements of any major higher education system. These arrangements have been in almost continuous development since the unification of the sector in 1992. In parallel, Professor Roger Brown has conducted an extensive programme of research into the purposes, design and effectiveness of these arrangements. While the outputs have mostly been published in academic journals, they have also attracted attention in the relevant policy community, in Parliament and in the public press. The research has consisted of documentary analysis, institutional case studies, interviews with key actors, participation in seminars and conferences, and conversations with leading commentators in the field – both national and international. Collaboration with colleagues at Liverpool Hope, especially those concerned with quality assurance and quality enhancement, played an important role in formulating research questions and furnishing relevant evidence.</p> <p>Key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic peer review remains the best protection for academic quality and standards, and benchmarking and the identification and exchange of good practice ('enhancement') remain the best mechanisms for maintaining and improving quality</li> <li>• Increasing institutional competition against a backdrop of reduced unit funding and the characterisation of the student as a novice consumer will put existing quality assurance arrangements, and especially academic peer review, under great strain</li> <li>• At the same time there remain important gaps in the coverage of our quality assurance arrangements</li> <li>• In particular, with the expansion and diversification of the sector, the curriculum and the student body, there is a need to focus more strongly on academic standards, the levels and types of achievement aimed at and achieved by individual students and groups of students</li> <li>• There was (and is) a need for a single independent regulator to protect academic peer judgements and processes from the effects of increased market competition and state intervention in the curriculum.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>Brown, R. (2004) <i>Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the UK experience since 1992</i>. London: Routledge Falmer</p> <p>Brown, R. (2006) 'Protecting quality and diversity in a market driven system', <i>Higher Education Review</i> 39(1): 3-16</p> <p>Brown, R. (2009) 'Quality assurance and the market' in J. Newton and R. Brown (eds.) <i>The Future of Quality Assurance</i>. Amsterdam: European Association for Institutional Research</p> <p>Brown, R. (2011) 'The new English quality assurance regime', <i>Quality in Higher Education</i> 17(2): 213-230</p> <p>Brown, R. with Carasso, H. (2013) <i>Everything for Sale ? The marketization of UK higher education</i>.</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

London: Routledge

Brown, R. and Bekhradnia, B. (2013) *The Future Regulation of Higher Education in England*.  
Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute

The research is widely cited and subject to processes of peer and editorial review. Of Brown (2004), one reviewer said:

This is a brilliantly written, blow-by-blow account by one who was a major actor in the tragedy (or was it farce?) that has befallen UK universities in the past decade. It is encyclopaedic in its coverage and no one interested in the field can afford to be without it. (Elton, *Studies in Higher Education*, June 2005)

Of Brown and Carasso (2013) it was said, "It is particularly for the research connoisseur but should be read by all those with a wider interest in the contemporary development of higher education in the UK.." (Tapper, *Higher Education* 66, 2013)

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In 2008-09 the House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee conducted an extensive inquiry into all aspects of quality and standards. The inquiry was stimulated in large part by the articles and statements that Professor Brown had made in the press and elsewhere in 2007-08. Professor Brown submitted both written and oral evidence to the Inquiry, the burden of which was that the main regulator, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, should itself be strengthened and should have a clearer remit to focus on and protect academic standards; in addition, the grant of taught degree awarding powers should always be conditional and a system of institutional accreditation should be introduced.

The Committee recommended:

*The QAA ...should be reformed and re-established as a Quality and Standards Agency...with the responsibility for maintaining consistent, national standards in higher education institutions in England and for monitoring and reporting on standards.*

(House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee. Students and Universities. Eleventh Report of Session 2008-09. Volume 1, page 148. HC 170-1. London: The Stationery Office Limited).

The Committee also recommended that:

*All higher education institutions in England should have their accreditation to award degrees reviewed no less often than every 10 years by the reformed QAA. Where the Agency concludes that all or some of an institution's powers should be withdrawn, we recommend that the Government draw up and put in place arrangements which would allow accreditation to award degrees to be withdrawn or curtailed by the Agency.*

(Ibid., page 149).

These recommendations reflected Professor Brown's proposals, especially the need for a greater focus on academic standards and the desirability of establishing a proper system of institutional accreditation.

In July 2010 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) announced the principles and objectives of a revised quality assurance regime. One of the key changes was that in future institutional reviewers would make judgements on 'threshold academic standards'. The consultation document that preceded the 2010 report explicitly listed the House of Commons report as one of the contextual factors that had led to the change. This change – to give a greater emphasis to scrutiny of academic standards – was fully consistent with the conclusions of Professor Brown's research as adopted by the House of Commons Committee.

## Impact case study (REF3b)

In June 2013 the Institute for Public Policy Research published the report of a Commission on the Future of Higher Education entitled *A Critical Path. Securing the Future of Higher Education in England*. This “sets out how Britain can continue to expand and reform higher education, protecting research and learning through austerity while ensuring that the sector is equipped to play a leading role in economic and social renewal in the future” (<http://www.ippr.org/publication/55/10847/a-critical-path-securing-the-future-of-higher-education-in-england>). Professor Brown gave both written and oral evidence to the Commission. Once again he argued the need for a single independent regulator focussing on academic standards. The Commission Report recommended that ‘a new, single higher education regulator is created, based on expanding HEFCE to incorporate QAA and OFFA’. OFFA is the Office for Fair Access. The new regulator ‘should be established by Royal Charter and should report to Parliament – rather than the Government of the day – on standards in higher education’. (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2013, pp. 108-109).

The Higher Education Policy Institute, the leading think tank in UK higher education, has recently (July 2013) published a report by Professor Brown that recommends a streamlined system of regulation for UK higher education with a single comprehensive regulator accountable to Parliament. This is likely to prove extremely influential as the government considers more radical changes to the existing system to be incorporated in legislation after the next election. Brown has been a member of the HEPI advisory board since its inception, another marker of his standing in the field of HE policy.

Professor Brown’s work has also been featured regularly in the press – particularly the *Guardian* and *Times Higher Education*, demonstrating the significance of his voice in educational ideas, politics and culture beyond academia. His most recent book, Brown and Carasso (2013), has recently been reviewed in the *London Review of Books* and *Times Higher Education*.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Associate Director, Public Services, Institute for Public Policy Research (UK thinktank).

Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute, who acted as Expert Advisor to the House of Commons Committee.

House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee. Students and Universities. Eleventh Report of Session 2008-09. Volume 1, page 148. HC 170-1. London: The Stationery Office Limited

Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2013) *A Critical Path. Securing the Future of Higher Education in England*

Education Guardian contributions by Brown include: ‘Tables can turn’ 10/4/07; ‘Regulate the regulators’ 9/10/07; ‘We cannot leave higher education to the markets’ 21/10/08; ‘Will for-profit providers do higher education any good?’ 8/3/11; ‘The case for increased university fees is losing its credibility’ 11/1/11; ‘Student choice is a myth – and it’s immoral’ 19/3/12.