

Professorial lecture will examine changing landscape in higher education

An expert in change management will discuss a variety of topical education issues at a public lecture to be held at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh on Tuesday 19 November 2013

The lecture, which will focus on the landmark Robbins Report on Higher Education published 50 years ago, will look at the changes which took place following the report. Topics such as access to higher education for all, the effect on the baby boomer generation, and the quality of learning and teaching in our universities will all be examined.

The event is part of the Queen Margaret Professorial Lecture series, a programme of public talks which offer fresh angles on topics of relevance and are designed to appeal to a wide audience.

Professor Roni Bamber, Director of the Centre for Academic Practice at Queen Margaret University, will look at the Robbins Report on Higher Education and consider how successful it was in its aims of helping the nation unlock the untapped potential of its people and in dealing with complaints about teaching methods.

Fifty years after the Robbins Report, Professor Bamber will discuss to what extent the changes that Robbins recommended were implemented, and why. She will particularly focus on how successful access to education for all has been, as well as improvements in university staff training and the quality of the student experience.

Professor Bamber explained: "The Robbins Report is a good

example of what tends to happen in the university sector when change is top down. Top down support for change is important, but the change will happen much more easily if some key factors are put in place, like getting the timing right, ensuring people in the sector are on board, and providing resources. Even so, what the policy-makers (like Robbins) recommend will probably look very different in practice from what was initially intended.”

She continued: “Universities are far from static institutions, and are full of very intelligent individuals who are critical thinkers. So you wouldn’t expect a government policy to be implemented without them questioning it, and that’s vital to remember when new policies are issued. Over the last fifty (and especially the last twenty) years of continuous change in universities, we’ve learned a lot about implementing policy changes – how to work with the sector, rather than against it. In Scotland, specifically, HE institutions have worked closely with government, and as a sector, to coordinate change efforts. Just look at the Scottish Enhancement Themes as an example. We’ve achieved a lot, especially in the three key areas that Robbins really cared about: opening up HE to all of those who had the potential to benefit from it, training university staff, and constantly enhancing the quality of the student experience.”

Professor Bamber, who has spent the last thirty years working in the UK higher education sector, will be looking at these areas of university change from three different perspectives: her own research; her personal experience of working through three decades of change; and her own personal journey as part of the baby boomer generation. She said: “My experience of higher education will be a shared journey with many other people from the baby boomer generation who have benefited from the outcomes of the Robbins Report. Certainly my life has been positively affected by the Robbins Report, since it immediately created opportunities for women in and through

education. But although widening access has been successful in many ways, and the universities are working really hard to make it even more so, there is still a lot more work that needs to be done to even out some of the inequities in our society.”

Professor Bamber’s professorial lecture ‘Following Robbins down the implementation staircase: What have we got for half a century of effort?’ will take place at Queen Margaret University on Tuesday 19th November, at 5.30pm for a 6pm start. Places are free but booking is essential. Reserve your place by registering [here](#).