

## Neo-liberalisation, Universities and the Values of Bureaucracy

*Neo-liberalisation of universities is advancing through a bureaucratic revolution. 'Marketising bureaucracy' advances neo-liberalisation through audit and rankings in the name of ensuring value for money and consumer choice. However, bureaucracy in universities is not total, just as neo-liberalisation is a project which advances on an uneven terrain of values. I argue that to exercise academic autonomy, to continue to value education, we must learn to distinguish between 'marketising' and 'socialising' bureaucracy. Socialising bureaucracy encodes the ethos of impartiality in practices that support academic judgement – both against marketisation and against abuses of collegiality.*

*Key words: collegiality; audit culture; street level bureaucrats.*

Neo-liberalisation of the public sector involves the extension of market competition into organisations constructed around specific values of public good: education, health, social security. Marketisation is well-established in practice in universities in the UK today (Brown 2013; McGettigan 2013). Nevertheless, it is still important to think of neo-liberalism as a *project* - as neo-liberalisation – rather than as an outcome, a complete and final state of affairs. It is important not to presuppose too easy a fit between ideology, policy, political outcomes, and practices (Barnett 2010). Marketisation does not completely replace values of public good; invariably there are competing and contradictory values in the everyday life of public sector organisations (Skeggs 2013). This article investigates neo-liberalisation as an ongoing bureaucratic revolution in universities, and the uneven terrain on which marketisation is being advanced in relation to the value of education.

Although advocates of New Public Management, the theory of administration through which neo-liberalisation was first presented in the public sector, emphasise the 'choosing citizen-consumer' and the 'enterprising self' and so are often explicitly *opposed* to bureaucracy, Patrick LeGalès and Alan Scott argue that it is through a 'bureaucratic revolution' that neo-liberal governmentality has been introduced in practice in the UK: it means the appointment of more managers, and the creation of more paperwork and more regulations in the service of 'innovation', 'accountability', 'transparency' (LeGalès and Scott 2010; see also Du Gay 2000; Du Gay 2005). Studies have shown how 'audit culture', involving performance indicators of all kinds, imports market values into organisations that are not appropriate, that divert or undermine the values the organisation is supposed to uphold (Rose and Miller 1992; Power 1997; Strathern 2000). More recently, analysts of neo-liberalisation in universities tend to agree (without necessarily making the argument explicit) with David Graeber's critique of what he calls 'total bureaucracy'. Graeber argues that the way our everyday lives are increasingly administered in the name of efficiency and rationality *obscures* the fact that the system is designed to reward the rich and punish the poor, to facilitate and consolidate social stratification (Graeber 2015; Barcan 2013: 52-3; Doherty 2015; Martin 2016).

This article takes up the theme of values in relation to bureaucracy. I adopt Weber's definition of bureaucracy as enacting an 'ethos of impartiality', treating individuals as cases according to strict rules of professional and technical expertise. Each person in an organisation should follow correct procedures to guard against making personal judgements; to avoid using the authority of their office to exercise power according to their own personal decisions, whims or alternative values (Weber 1948; Du Gay 2000). For Weber, famously, instrumental values, the means rather than the ends, come to predominate in a modern

capitalist economy and we are all caught in an ‘iron cage’ of technical evaluations (Beetham 1987: 60-1; Mommsen 1989: 109-20).

In this article I take issue with analyses of bureaucracy as inherently totalitarian in tendency – as functioning only to completely distort or to obscure values other than administrative efficiency. I argue that bureaucracy as an ‘ethos of impartiality’ should not be understood as a totality *even within the same organisation*. It is against the destruction of education by *certain kinds of bureaucracy* that we should campaign and act collectively, *rather than against bureaucracy as such*. What is necessary to resist marketisation is the protection of values other than those of entrepreneurship and consumer choice. I argue that exercising academic autonomy involves making distinctions between different kinds of bureaucracy, that which undermines and that which supports education in universities.

I make my argument through reflection on personal experience, drawing on other personal accounts, on qualitative studies of the marketisation of higher education, and on analysis of the context of policy shaping universities today. I do not take my experience to be representative: I came into academia in my late twenties, a mature student, the first in my family to go to university; I am white, a woman, a professor; I work in a small, ‘old’ (pre-1992) university, which is not a member of the Russell Group, and in a social science Department in which the majority of staff and students are women. My analysis does not, however, *depend* on my personal experience – and indeed I am relatively little concerned here with the affective and experiential as such; I use it rather to develop and to illustrate conceptual distinctions and connections to make my argument that different kinds of bureaucracy encode different values in universities today.

### **Shaping universities in the UK: state, markets and collegiality**

In general terms, the entanglement of universities with states and markets is not new. The economic value of universities was mentioned in the Robbins report, which set the stage for the expansion of universities in the 1960s (Committee on Higher Education 1963: 5; Gibney 2013). Today, however, the contribution of universities to the economy is a much more prominent theme in higher education policy – as exemplified by the title and recommendations of the 2016 White Paper on Higher Education, ‘Success as a knowledge economy’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016). Changes began, according to John Holmwood’s analysis, as early as 1971, with the Rothschild Report advocating that research produced for private benefit should not be funded publicly (Holmwood 2016: 66). However, funding for research and teaching was allocated in a block grant to each university and came without detailed conditions specified for its use until the Research Allocation Exercise (RAE) was introduced in 1986. Since then, government research funding has been allocated only on the basis of performance indicators and competition – between Departments in the RAE and now the REF (Research Excellence Framework), and between research teams for funded projects from Research Councils, the ESRC, AHRC and SERC. There is also increased competition for funding from charities (like the Leverhulme Trust, and the Nuffield Foundation), and European funding bodies (like the European Research Council). What is commonly known now as ‘grant capture’ in turn impacts on the likelihood of a Department ‘winning’ a good position in the REF, and therefore the possibility of government funding for research. Research in UK universities is still funded by government, but money that is explicitly reserved for carrying out research is allocated as a result of competition – a form of administration through ‘quasi-markets’.

In addition, universities have long administered and awarded degrees for exchange in the labour market. In the post-war settlement, degrees were directly linked to the values of social mobility and state-sponsored meritocracy (Committee on Higher Education 1963: 265). Although relatively few benefitted directly from university degrees, in a context of economic growth and anticipated decline in social inequality more generally, university education could plausibly be seen as a social right (Holmwood 2016: 64). Today, meritocracy and social mobility are referenced by ‘widening participation’ and linked to ‘employability’, and the goal of administering higher education is ‘improving choice, competition and outcomes for students, the taxpayer and the economy’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016: 14). Teaching in universities is now funded through the government student loans system – again a form of administration by quasi-markets.

Despite the massive change public policy over the last 50 years, it has been fairly consistent in relation to the raising the numbers of people in universities: the numbers of young people in Higher Education have grown. In 1962 only about 4% of those aged 18-21 were at university (Anderson 2006). Since 2011-12 - and despite the introduction of student fees which most universities have charged at the top rate of £9,000 per year since 2012 (after which the numbers went down slightly) - the percentage of 18-21 year olds in Higher Education has been around 35-40% (Full Fact 2016). It has become quite normal for young people to go to ‘uni’ when they leave school.

What consequences has the marketisation of higher education had on values in universities? Stefan Collini (2012) argues that despite all the changes, universities have continued to build themselves around the specific value of *education*. Collini argues that the continuing importance of education rather than simply training in universities, despite market pressures, is both a condition and a consequence of the autonomy of academics: even in the face of government pressures to be more useful, universities have shaped their own principal value as ‘the open-ended search for deep understanding’. In fact, according to Collini, academic autonomy and education are virtually synonymous: he sees education itself, especially at PhD level, as preparation for the exercise of autonomy in the academic profession (Collini 2012: 8). Collini’s view is optimistic – though it is shared by other academics (see Back 2016; Barcan 2013: 81). In contrast, for Henry Giroux ‘neoliberal market fundamentalism... has weakened if not nearly destroyed those institutions that enable the production of a formative culture in which individuals learn to think critically, imagine other ways of being and doing, and connect their personal trouble with public concerns’ (Giroux 2011: 145-6). Thomas Doherty argues that alongside what he calls the ‘everyday Stalinism’ of senior management, which produces nothing but conformity, there is the ‘clandestine university’, where good academic work still goes on in research, writing, and teaching (Doherty 2015).

Collini’s ‘academic autonomy’ and Doherty’s ‘clandestine university’ may usefully be understood through Weber’s concept of ‘collegiality’. Malcolm Waters argues that the concept receives relatively little treatment in Weber’s work, and no clear definition, because Weber sees it as relatively unimportant historically as a form of administration compared to the ascendance of bureaucracy in modern societies (Waters 1989: 952). Waters analyses the continuing relevance of collegiality as an ideal-type (which is never ‘pure’ in practice) in universities along three dimensions. Collegiality, he argues, is relevant to university life in that, firstly, as academics we understand ourselves to be experts in our different fields, and therefore as possessing insights into knowledge – scientific, of the humanities, of the arts - on which there are no higher authorities. As such, academics have a degree of expert authority; we expect, and to a large degree we maintain, our ability to ‘have the last word’ on what

counts as a university education in our specialised disciplines through procedures of peer and student evaluation. Secondly, academics tend to think of the university as a ‘company of equals’. Where knowledge is ultimately what matters, other markers of status, wealth and power must be irrelevant. As Waters puts it, ‘if expertise is paramount, then each member’s area of competence may not be subordinated to other forms of authority’ (Waters 1989: 955). Finally, Waters suggests that the value of ‘consensus’ is a norm of universities: only decisions that have the full support of the collectivity ‘carry the weight of moral authority’ (Waters 1989: 955). Waters’ point may seem unlikely in the context of Higher Education today given how public policy is oriented towards creating competition within and between universities. However, if Collini is right to suggest that academics continue to believe that universities are for education, which we understand as intrinsically linked to academic autonomy, it seems that the profession is working to maintain consensus on our vocation despite policies that seem designed to destroy it.

Is the conclusion to this analysis, then, that collegiality should be celebrated as a mode of resistance to the incursions of marketisation in universities? It is tempting to make this assumption: if, as McGettigan puts it, ‘[c]ollegiality has been displaced by corporatism’, then collegiality seems the most appropriate form of organisation for universities (McGettigan 2013: 186; see Cannizzo 2017: 5). However, Waters’ analysis is concerned with the *disadvantages* of collegiality. What concerns Waters is that collegiality can mean ‘*social closure*’, the protection of insiders in relation to outsiders: in universities, against those who are not qualified to make academic judgements (Waters 1989: 969). Social closure in this respect is powerfully exemplified by patronage and ‘old boys’ networks’, which confirm the status and institutionalise the interests of privileged members of the profession *in the name* of the value of education as the ideal of university life, whilst actually working against ‘the open-ended search for deep understanding’. In fact, the *disadvantages* of collegiality may be *exacerbated* by marketisation, as individuals focus on building their own autonomy and ‘star’ status (Dill 2005).

A return to collegiality is not only unlikely, it is also undesirable. The neo-liberalisation of universities is taking place on a complex terrain in terms of values. There is a continuing commitment to the value of education as the ‘the open-ended search for deep understanding’ in universities today, even as marketisation is being extended into academic life. But marketisation competes with the value of collegiality, the desire for academic autonomy, which continues to be a motivating force in universities – and which can itself be dangerous for education in terms of the abuse of professional power. It is in this context that I suggest we can understand differences in forms of bureaucracy in universities today.

### **Marketising bureaucracy**

It is the undermining of academic autonomy that most concerns writers on the spread of audit culture in universities. Autonomy is crucial to academics. Autonomy in universities has meant the freedom to pursue research and thought without government interference.

Although academic tenure is no longer guaranteed by academics’ contracts of employment in the UK, and there is pressure on some colleagues to publish in journals with high citation indices, which is a limitation of independence, there is still the expectation that we should be free to research, to publish and to teach ‘the truth’, however inconvenient or troublesome for university administrators, governments and civil servants, without fear of losing our jobs (1). Learning to think beyond what is immediately presented as ‘truth’ – and which is very often no more than *doxa* - is one of the principal aims of teaching in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, as academics we are expected to cultivate our own capacities for

autonomy. Cultivating autonomy in the social sciences and humanities means reading widely, with curiosity, developing capacities to think through different meanings of concepts, challenge fundamental assumptions, and design and use systematic methodologies, as well as to uncover facts through scholarship and empirical research. Traditionally, this aspect of the job has meant that academics have enjoyed a good deal of control over how we spend our time at work – including working outside the university and outside conventional daily routines. The cultivation of autonomy takes an incalculable amount of ‘free’ time in which nothing is visibly being produced (see Hartman and Darab 2012).

Michael Power’s analysis of ‘audit culture’ remains compelling as a way of understanding marketisation through bureaucracy in UK universities – though performance indicators have proliferated since he wrote *The Audit Society* (Power 1997). Power identifies two ways in which marketising bureaucracy undermines academic autonomy. The first he calls ‘colonisation’. Colonisation is an unintended consequence of auditing, according to Power: it involves the transformation of an organisation’s values, even though all that was intended was their quantification and measurement. His main example is the RAE (now replaced by the REF). Not only are these exercises immensely time-consuming and expensive, they *alter* what academics do, forcing scholars in the humanities to mimic scientists in doing discrete pieces of research, and leading scientists to focus more on patentable research, on results, rather than on blue-sky thinking (Collini 2012; see also Burrows 2012; Burrows and Knowles 2014). They also shift the emphasis of university life from teaching to research for all academics. In fact, although Powers sees the transformation of values as an *unintended* consequence, for REF 2014 Departments (or Units of Assessment) had to show that at least some of their research had demonstrable ‘impact’ on the economy, social policy, or public well-being. Clearly, if academics try to produce research with measurable impact there is a risk of damaging the value of education as ‘the open-ended search for deep understanding’ that is precisely *not* constrained in advance by what those undertaking it expect to find out or to be able to do with their findings. In addition, wealthier universities are now employing PR and marketing experts to boost ‘impact’, further distorting the educational aims of universities – if only by using resources that should be used for research and teaching.

The other aspect of auditing Power identifies that distorts education in universities is what he calls ‘decoupling’. This is when auditing processes do not actually audit anything but the paperwork that is produced for auditing. They take up enormous amounts of time and energy to create a paper trail that exists quite independently of anything people actually do in the organisation. Power’s example of decoupling is the regular Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) inspection of UK universities. QAA inspections, or ‘periodic reviews’, have involved teams of academics appointed by the agency who have looked over all the paperwork in a Department for several days every six years to assess the ‘robustness’ of the processes internal to the university by which teaching is monitored and ‘enhanced’. In 2012 – after fifteen years of operation - the QAA was subject to a parliamentary review, which concluded that it was ‘toothless’. However, ‘decoupling’ is associated with what is most obvious, and most hated, about auditing processes: they lead inexorably to more auditing, more bureaucracy. Power is very clear on the reason for this. Auditing is introduced because professionals cannot be trusted to do their jobs well; in particular, we cannot be trusted to deliver value for money. There is, therefore, no final resting point for auditing. Indeed, QAA periodic reviews have been supplemented by the National Student Survey (NSS), an online questionnaire taken by final year students. If it is education to which students should have access at university, the NSS is seriously flawed as a methodology for measuring it – a fact that focus group research suggests students themselves understand very well (Sabri

2013). What the NSS does do, however, is to promote the idea that a degree should be a matter of ‘student choice’, that choosing a degree, like any other consumer behaviour, depends on information about the product. Since 2016 the Teaching Exercise Framework (TEF) has replaced the QAA, largely based on ‘metrics’ such as entry standards, student/staff ratios, drop-out rates, earnings after six months and so on, as well as NSS scores, to make league tables that compare and rank degrees and universities and to award institutions Bronze, Silver or Gold. Insofar as the NSS and the TEF involve decoupling, they will mean that more time, effort and energy must be put into fine-tuning processes of setting targets to ‘enhance student experience’, drawing up strategies to meet those targets, and competing with other Departments and universities to move up league tables and rankings – all of which may have no effect other than to increase paperwork and provide work for administrators. Colonisation is, however, also a danger: if the NSS and the TEF lead universities to try to please and entertain students in the place of cultivating the ‘open-ended search for deep understanding’, and if students come to see themselves as consumers who are buying a certain kind of experience, a good (2.1 or above) degree, and a well-paid job afterwards.

### **Socialising bureaucracy**

All this being the case, however, it seems to me that the kinds of bureaucratic work on which I spend most of my time does not directly involve ‘audit’. Not all university bureaucracy is of the same kind. Some even *supports* education in universities – both against abuses of collegiality and against marketisation.

According to Waters, Weber saw bureaucracy and collegiality as fundamentally opposed: while bureaucracy is ultimately hierarchical, with legal responsibilities concentrated at the top for decisions which are then routinised in procedures, collegiality supposes a ‘company of equals’, the autonomy of individuals and consensus government (Waters 1989: 969). In contrast, Waters argues that bureaucracy and collegiality invariably co-exist in modern organisations. In universities, although colleagues may formally be equally respected as experts, and there may be consensus on the value of education and therefore on the importance of cultivating academic autonomy, decisions are made in committee structures in which some are more equal than others. In fact, decision-making and administration has been increasingly centralised in recent years: Vice-Chancellors make decisions which are then routinised by the growing numbers of administrative staff in bureaucratic practices across universities (Martin 2016: 19; McGettigan 2013: 151-4). Moreover, the decisions of university management are constrained by state bureaucracy through which resources are allocated and in which university administrators and academics themselves play a role (sitting on REF panels, advising government commissions that report on Higher Education and so on), which is itself shaped by government policy. Hierarchical bureaucracy and egalitarian norm-governed collegiality are entwined in universities and in the policy context that shapes universities.

What I am arguing here, however, is that we should not see bureaucracy *solely* as marketising, nor *only* as imposed from above. Alongside the development of marketising bureaucracy in universities, there has also been a development of bureaucracy that serves the value of education. Much of this bureaucracy *pre-dates* neo-liberalisation, though it has undoubtedly increased and become more detailed and demanding with the expansion of student numbers in universities.

Socialising bureaucracy both regularises and regulates collegiality. It is bureaucratic not so much in that it involves hierarchical committee structures and procedures (though to some

extent it does), but rather in that it encodes rules that individual academics should follow to help us cultivate an ethos of impartiality, to set aside personal judgements and interests, and to create contexts and to make judgements that enable education. In this respect, it is less an efficient means to realising an end, and more a series of props and prompts to help support and free academic judgement, to secure the value of education in everyday practice. Socialising bureaucracy regularises collegiality in that it helps academics communicate what counts as good teaching and learning, what counts as research and learning that is of academic merit, and what assumptions and biases should not be allowed to make a difference in these judgements. It regulates collegiality in that documents and procedures help set limits on academics' discretionary judgements. As Michael Lipsky (2010) has shown, bureaucracy amongst professionals never involves the mechanical application of rules; what he calls 'street level bureaucrats', those who have a degree of autonomy from organisations, are continually exercising judgement, and therefore a degree of discretion in rule-following. As professionals, academics make judgements all the time about how students and colleagues benefit from common resources – including our time, knowledge and care. In terms of the ultimate value of universities, common resources should only be used for education. In making academic judgements we are obliged to try to avoid stereotypes, to think about our own and others' assumptions about what is worthwhile, to avoid acting only in our own interests, and to take responsibility for exercising our discretion – the discretion that is structured into our jobs. Everyone who works in universities today has had experience of and/or heard stories of power exercised in ways that confirm the self-importance and the interests of privileged members of the profession rather than the value of education (see Davies, Gottsche and Bansel 2006). I am suggesting here that the expansion of socialising bureaucracy helps support education where it is threatened by the professional power of academics.

There are at least two types of socialising bureaucracy in universities. The first I call 'the formalisation of equal treatment'. It is oriented towards ensuring that assessments of staff and students are made only on the grounds of academic performance, without discrimination between them on other grounds. This type of bureaucracy includes that which surrounds the appointment and promotion of faculty staff: reading their CVs and published work, sitting on appointment panels, shortlisting and ranking candidates, interviewing and deciding on the most suitable candidate or on whether or not promotion is justified. It also includes that which surrounds screening of student applications for degree courses, as well as marking work and supervising marking to ensure that it has been done carefully and reasonably, evaluating students' reasons ('mitigating circumstances') for not being penalised when they hand work in late, and all the paperwork associated with assessments and examinations (preparing and chairing exam boards, writing reports, responding to reports to improve practices and so on). All this bureaucracy is done in the name of formal equality, treating 'like as like', and avoiding discrimination that should not enter into evaluations of staff and students, which should be based solely on criteria of academic merit.

The second type of bureaucracy that supports education in universities I call the 'contractualisation of learning', formalising what is required of teachers and students (see Yeatman 1994). Academics today often feel that we are expected to 'deliver' education to students who are increasingly positioned, and come to see themselves, as consumers. However, a well-designed and well-communicated 'contract of learning' can work *against* consumerism. In concrete terms, in my university the 'contractualisation of learning' includes producing course outlines according to specific criteria, and making the grounds on which assessment of students' work is to be made clear to those who take the course. It also

means processing student feedback on a course, feedback that is bureaucratised by asking students to fill out ‘feedback forms’ and to represent their classmates in ‘staff-student forums’, the data from which is then processed in ‘learning and teaching committees’ as well as by individual lecturers responsible for the courses. Detailed course outlines that communicate criteria by which students can expect to be assessed, lay out what lecturers expect from students in terms of reading, participation in seminars, formative and summative assessment and which are revised annually following analysis of student feedback, make for a clarity of expectations on both sides: a ‘contract of learning’.

As well as limiting the arbitrary exercise of power by academics, I see socialising bureaucracy as, at least in part, *mitigating marketisation*. This aspect of socialising bureaucracy is most marked in relation to students. In terms of the creation of students as consumers, we should note that it is a very particular type of consumption in which they are engaged, more akin to a gym membership than to shopping in a supermarket (2). Each student must learn to exercise skills of reading, note-taking, listening, structuring an argument, organising information and evidence for themselves – with the support and encouragement of academic staff. What some of us worry about, especially as university fees rise alongside credentialism in the labour market, and with many students already doing too many hours of paid work while they study, is that many students will be concerned *only* with getting good marks. ‘The contractualisation of learning’ should mitigate this tendency insofar as students accept their role – which is far greater than that of their teachers - in the process of learning. In the case of ‘formalisation of equal treatment’, procedures for ensuring that marking is done fairly and well should also provide a safeguard against consumer demand for higher marks insofar as they are not under the control of individual markers and cannot easily be changed once they have been confirmed in bureaucratic procedures. In fact, it seems to me that reduction in this type of bureaucracy is problematic: the limitation of ‘blind double marking’ (in which students’ work is marked by two academics who do not see each other’s marks), for example, in my university and in others I have heard about that is intended to reduce workloads (in the face of increased student numbers, demands for ‘research outputs’ and administrative burdens) at the same time reduces capacity for training new members of staff into organisational culture and provides less protection for markers against consumerist demands (3).

To critics of bureaucracy as such, the ‘formalisation of equal treatment’ and the ‘contractualisation of learning’ threatens spontaneity, killing charisma and the curiosity and ‘thinking without borders’ that teaching should encourage. Moreover, as we have noted, bureaucracy may always be decoupled, producing paper trails without really guiding or shaping decisions and judgements. Nevertheless, one of the reasons for the increase of bureaucracy in general in universities in the UK has been the growth of student numbers in higher education. In a system of mass university education, how can values of teaching and learning be secured for everyone? According to Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) figures, the high numbers of young people entering university today include more than ever before from ‘disadvantaged areas’ (defined for these purposes in terms of historic likelihood of young people going to university), even if those from ‘advantaged areas’ continue to be in the majority (Full Facts 2016). When university education is extended to include far more young people, they cannot all be expected to adapt confidently to what is implied in studying for a university degree; they are not all equipped with the social and cultural capital to do well that might have been expected from a small elite, the majority of whom were drawn from the established middle classes before the 1980s (Gibney 2013). Moreover, although there is undoubtedly sexism and racism in universities, and many

students from working class backgrounds do feel ill at ease in elite institutions, at the very least the ‘formalisation of equal treatment’ provides a context in which discrimination is considered, and can be discussed as, unacceptable (4).

Above all, the importance of socialising bureaucracy is that it helps form the institutional culture of universities. The apprenticeship of lecturers in learning the ‘formalisation of equal treatment’ and the ‘contractualisation of learning’ is training in communicating with students about the processes of learning and in treating ‘like as like’ – whether judgements concern students, colleagues or potential colleagues - according to academic merit. Treating people with equal respect and separating what people *do* from who they *are* should become part of the institutional culture of universities; it should become ‘how things are done around here’.

### **Good, bad and into the grey**

So far in this article I have argued that although there has certainly been an increase in bureaucracy in universities, it is not all of the same kind, and there are general principles according to which we can distinguish good from bad bureaucracy. While marketising bureaucracy undermines the value of education as ‘the open-ended search for deep understanding’ in the name of competition and value for money, socialising bureaucracy supports education in universities to which all those eligible and willing should have access, and who should be treated according to an ethos of impartiality that is less oriented towards efficiency than towards supporting academic judgement.

Although marketising and socialising bureaucracy may clearly be distinguished, then, as ideal-types, distinguishing them in practice is more difficult. In part it is difficult because of pressures due to the immense growth of bureaucracy in general. And within bureaucratic procedures those pressures are often increased by deadlines that suddenly appear, paperwork that seems unnecessarily detailed, that seems to duplicate itself, or to require constant revising for no good reason.

Moreover, the hyperactivity fostered by neo-liberalisation, the expansion of numbers of students in higher education and also rapid technological change, all contribute to the expansion of a grey area of bureaucracy between marketising and socialising. This grey area includes some activities that academics have long undertaken, but which have massively increased with competition between universities to attract research funding and student fees. It includes dealing with the paperwork associated with the explosion of publishing, showcasing and promotion of academic work - from reviewing articles for journals and book manuscripts and editing journals to organising and publicising conferences and seminars; the bureaucracy of applying for and dealing with funded research, which can mean managing a team; designing, developing and publicising popular programmes and courses; reviewing new programmes for other Departments and universities; acting as external examiner for other universities; and writing references for colleagues and students. In virtually every case, these activities require hours of meetings and emails, as well as filling in forms, and they often require producing online as well as offline materials. In addition, there are also meetings, emails and paperwork associated with running a Department and a university as if it were a business: writing and re-writing ‘business plans’, ‘job descriptions’, ‘programme specifications’, ‘strategies’ to promote research, enhance student experience and so on.

It is difficult to know how to assess the ‘grey area’ of university bureaucracy. On one hand, all this work takes up time and energy, and there is pressure to be a ‘good citizen’. In this respect, it takes away from the incalculable time needed for scholarship, research and

thought. On the other hand, for most academics the work it includes is more voluntary than, say, participating in the REF, which has seemed necessary to many of us to get and to keep our jobs. For the most part it involves the exercising of professional judgement, which has its pleasures, and its benefits. Some of it is voluntary for the individual and paid (for example, acting as an external examiner); some involves networking, which is sometimes painful or boring and sometimes interesting and stimulating; some is potentially rewarding in itself and has benefits for careers in the longer-term. However, it is not voluntary in the same way for everyone: for Heads of Department much of what is included in the ‘grey area’ is part of the job, along with even more demanding responsibilities concerning the management of staff and students. And Heads of Department often seem to put pressure on junior colleagues, perhaps especially women, to do all kinds of bureaucracy, including ‘grey bureaucracy’, rather than on professors, who feel more empowered to choose what to do.

More problematically from the point of view of distinguishing ideal-types of socialising and marketising bureaucracy in practice, there is also a degree of continuity between them. The QAA was an excellent example of decoupling in that it reviewed only university procedures for ensuring teaching quality: what was reviewed was a paper trail that was created to be reviewed. However, those procedures *included* committee structures set up to oversee the production of documents and the practices of what I have called ‘the formalisation of equal treatment’ and the ‘contractualisation of learning’. Producing course outlines with clear learning outcomes and assessment criteria, to take one small example, comes under the heading of *both* marketising and socialising bureaucracy.

In fact, sometimes it may *only* be audit that makes an organisation take socialising bureaucracy seriously. The implementation of ‘equality and diversity’ policies is an interesting example here. In her in-depth ethnography of equality and diversity policy implementation, Sara Ahmed found that while ‘diversity’ can become a promotional tool when universities are ranked according to their policies on equality, decoupled from efforts to actually address institutional racism, many diversity practitioners employed in universities to implement these policies believe that without any counting of heads, without any ‘stick’, administrators and academics would be quite unconcerned about white privilege (Ahmed 2012) (5). Audit can stimulate debate and affect how much attention to given to which part of an academic’s job – and a shift of emphasis is not necessarily to the detriment of values of education. Tackling exclusionary academic judgements concerning race and ethnicity would require far-reaching reforms of university structures as well as ‘decolonising the curriculum’, revising assumptions about what counts as knowledge and who is able to generate and assess it authoritatively (Alexander and Arday 2015; Goyal 2017). However, socialising bureaucracy, the ‘formalisation of equal treatment’ (in promotion and interview panels, and in assessing students’ work) and the ‘contractualisation of teaching’ (developing and implementing decisions to review curricula, rewrite course outlines, ask better questions on student feedback forms and so on), would undoubtedly play an important part in making equality and diversity policies effective. Socialising bureaucracy would be necessary to transform institutional culture, to address white privilege that currently informs academics’ judgements in the everyday life of universities.

In practice, then, there can be overlap between socialising and marketising bureaucracy. There is a large grey area of bureaucracy that has increased massively in recent years, and on a day-to-day basis both marketising and socialising bureaucracy can equally be experienced as destructive of academic autonomy, especially perhaps in some roles and for junior members of a Department. Socialising and marketising bureaucracy are even more difficult

to distinguish when the latter stimulates the former. Despite overlap, however, it is urgent that we learn to distinguish different kinds of bureaucracy, and the general principles that enable us to do so are clear. While marketising bureaucracy may, on occasion, have some value in drawing attention to poor practices in universities, the paperwork and procedures to address abuses of collegiality must be ‘close to the ground’ to transform institutional culture. Marketising bureaucracy makes judgements from *outside* academic life more effective, and in general it serves only to stimulate concern over fees and funding that are not directly relevant to improving scholarship, research and teaching. It is vital that we distinguish between different forms of bureaucracy in practice in order to preserve the value of education both against abuses of collegiality and against ongoing neo-liberalisation.

### **Exercising Autonomy**

My aim in this article has been to contribute to a conversation about bureaucracy in universities. Academics undoubtedly resent the massive increase in bureaucracy, but resistance to bureaucracy in general tends to be random and individual: occasionally or regularly opting out unilaterally (often causing more work for colleagues). It is difficult to organise collective resistance in universities. One reason for this difficulty is competition between individuals, Departments and universities for promotion and position in ‘rankings’, and the representation of failure as having disastrous consequences for those whose jobs are insecure – which is also effective in creating anxiety in those who *feel* their jobs are insecure (Loveday *forthcoming*). Fear of failure also sharpens appeals to ‘good citizenship’ if ‘the institution’ is perceived as in danger: of losing funding, status, students, ultimately of going bankrupt. (In my experience, it is always ‘the institution’ and never ‘the university’ that is invoked in such appeals.) In addition, some academics surely experience pleasure in marketisation: the excitement of competing, of making decisions and exercising leadership (with high stakes in terms of personal rewards of money and prestige), of predicting how best to ‘play the game’ in uncertain times (Du Gay 2000: 62-3; Kanter 1990). Finally, the difficulties of collective resistance in the workplace are due to time spent thinking, reading, writing which is integral to cultivating academic autonomy, and which makes coming together in any sustained way quite difficult.

Autonomy and higher education are synonymous. Firstly, as Collini has argued, autonomy is necessary to the cultivation of scholarship, thinking and research in the service of the ‘open-ended search for deep understanding’ that characterises higher education. Secondly, however, and implicit in the first point but much less talked about, academic autonomy involves making necessarily discretionary judgements on standards in education: what counts as excellence in making persuasive arguments and in carrying out scholarship and research. What I am suggesting in this article is that academic autonomy should not only be seen as something that is exercised in private or in small research teams, through ‘my own work’. It should also be understood as exercised in academic judgements concerning how to support education as a public value in the everyday life of universities.

Bureaucracy in universities is not total. Marketising bureaucracy is, in the classic Weberian sense, means-end oriented, where the ultimate value is money. Socialising bureaucracy, in contrast, is not just a means to an end. Cultivating the ethos of impartiality is fundamental to realising the value of education as it is established through collegiality, by academics in universities. Where it is formative of institutional culture, socialising bureaucracy regularises and regulates collegiality in practice, ruling out as inappropriate what should not impact on teaching and on the assessment of academic merit. In contrast, marketising bureaucracy - except on rare occasions when it may stimulate socialising bureaucracy that is needed to

transform institutional culture – tends to impinge on the academic autonomy that is so important to the realisation of education in universities.

I have noted that it can be difficult to distinguish between socialising and marketising bureaucracy in practice, especially given increases in the workload of academics generally, time pressures, and the overlap between them. Nevertheless, it is crucial that as academics we consider the relative value of different types of bureaucracy in universities – rather than, as happens now, scrambling to do it all more or less well or opting out individually. The marketisation of universities will lead to greater social inequality as privilege is reproduced, cycled through distinctions between ‘top universities’ and those rated lower in league tables, including ‘new providers’ that barely resemble universities as we understand them today (Wakeling and Savage 2015; Holmwood 2016). A resetting of priorities in public policy is necessary to address such growing inequalities: a turning back from marketisation to the re-valuation of public goods, including education. It is, however, possible to maintain the value of education in universities, despite contemporary pressures and constraints. In order to do so, however, it is crucial that we make time to discuss and to learn how to identify what is *progressive* in universities from what is dangerous and repressive. Distinguishing between different kinds of bureaucracy is important in these debates; socialising bureaucracy merits being given time and done well, even as we develop strategies to resist marketising bureaucracy.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks for comments and discussion to KC, NF, MG, CH, VL, FT, AS, NW

## Notes

1. Examples of colleagues who have been disciplined for criticisms of contemporary universities, and the scandals that have followed, demonstrate the importance of this expectation as well as its increased vulnerability (see Morgan 2014; Morrish 2017).
2. Thanks to my colleague MG for this insight.
3. David Dill argues that grade inflation and uneven standards are precisely the consequence of what he calls ‘hollowed collegiality’ a complete lack of socialising bureaucracy around teaching and assessment in the US context (Dill in Barnett).
4. Bureaucracy does not end abuse of authority if people are intent on it, nor where systematic inequalities are institutionalised. Sexist and racist assumptions have to be challenged collectively to change what counts as exercising an ethos of impartiality well (on which more below). With regard to sexism in universities young academics and students have been speaking out in the UK in recent times (see O’Connor 2015; Todd 2015). With respect to institutional racism in universities and the difficulties of dealing with it bureaucratically, see Ahmed 2012. For a nuanced analysis of the experiences of working class students in elite universities, see Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009.
5. To give an idea of the scale of obstacles faced by BME people in universities: BME students are less likely to be offered places in Russell Group universities even when they have the same A-level grades as their white peers – and this has been the case for at least 20 years; BME students are less likely to be awarded a 2.1 or above than their white counterparts, despite entering university with the same A-level grades; in 2012-3 only 7.9% of academics identified as BME, compared to 13% in the 2011 census of the UK population as a whole (see Alexander and Arday 2012).

## References

- Ahmed, S. (2012) *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Alexander, C. and Arday, J. (2015) *Aiming Higher: Race Inequality and Diversity in the Academy* London: Runnymede
- Anderson, R. (2006) *British Universities Past and Present* London: Continuum.
- Back, L. (2016) *Academic Diary: Or Why Higher Education Still Matters* London: Goldsmiths Press.
- Barcan, R. (2013) *Academic Life and Labour in the New University* Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate
- Barnett, C. (2010) 'Publics and Markets: What's wrong with Neoliberalism?' in S. Smith, S. Marston, R. Pain and J. P. Jones III (eds), *The Handbook of Social Geography* London; Sage.
- Beetham, D. (1987) *Bureaucracy* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Brown, R. (2013) *Everything for Sale? The Marketisation of UK Higher Education* London: Routledge
- Burrows, R. (2012) 'Living with the "h-index"?' Metric assemblages in the contemporary academy' *The Sociological Review* 60/2: 355-372
- Burrows, R. and Knowles, C. (2014) 'The impact of impact' *Etnográfica* 18/2: 237-254
- Collini, S. (2012) *What are Universities For?* London: Penguin
- Cannizzo, F. (2017) "'You've got to love what you do; Academic labour in a culture of authenticity' *Sociological Review* 1-16
- Committee on Higher Education (1963) 'Higher education: report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-63', London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2016) 'Success as a Knowledge Economy', London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office
- Davies, B, Gottsche, M. and Bansel P. (2006) *The Rise and Fall of the Neo-liberal University* *European Journal of Education* 41/2: 305-19
- Dill, D. (2005) 'The Degradation of the Academic Ethic: Teaching, Research and the Renewal of Professional Self-Regulation' in R. Barnett (ed) *Reshaping the University: New Relationships between Research, Scholarship and Teaching* Maidenhead: Open University Press
- Docherty T. (2015) *Universities at War* London: Sage
- Du Gay, P. (2005) 'Bureaucracy and Liberty: State Authority and Freedom' in Du Gay, P. (ed) *The Values of Bureaucracy* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Du Gay, P. (2000) *In Praise of Bureaucracy* London: Sage
- Full Fact (2016) 'Are there record numbers of young people going to university' <https://fullfact.org/education/are-there-record-numbers-young-people-going-university/>. (Downloaded November 11<sup>th</sup> 2016)
- Gibney, E. (2013) 'Robbins: 50 years later' *Times Higher Education* 24<sup>th</sup> October
- Giroux, H. (2011) 'Beyond the Swindle of the Corporate University' in M. Bailey and D. Freedman (eds) *The Assault on Universities* London: Pluto
- Goyal, P. (2017) 'Yes we must decolonise: our teaching has to go beyond elite white men' *The Guardian* Friday 27
- Graeber, D. (2015) *The Utopia of Rules: on Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* Brooklyn: Melville House.
- Hartman, Y. and Darab, S. (2012) 'A Call for Slow Scholarship: a Case Study on the Intensification of Academic Life and Its Implications for Pedagogy' in *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* London: Routledge

- Holmwood, J. (2016) "'The Turn of the Screw"; marketisation and higher education in England' *Prometheus* 34/1: 63-72
- Kanter, R. B. (1990) *When Giants Learn to Dance* New York: Simon and Schuster
- LeGalès P. and Scott, A. (2010) 'A British Bureaucratic Revolution? Autonomy Without Control, or "Free Markets, More Rules"' *Revue Francaise de Sociologie* 51/1: 119-146
- Lipsky, M. (2010) *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* New York: Russell Sage Foundation
- Martin, B. (2016) 'What's happening to our universities?' *Prometheus* 34/1: 7-24
- McGettigan, A. (2013) *The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher Education* London: Pluto
- Mommsen, W. (1989) *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber: Collected Essays* Cambridge: Polity
- Morgan, J. (2014) 'Thomas Doherty to be "cleared of all charges" by Warwick' *Times Higher Education* October 21
- Morrish, L. (2017) 'Why the audit culture made me quit' *Times Higher Education* March 2nd
- O'Connor, R. (2014) 'Sexism at university: a third of women face unwelcome advances' *The Independent* September 15, 2014
- Power, M. (1997) *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Reay, D, Crozier, G. and Clayton, J. (2009) "'Strangers in Paradise"? Working Class Students in Elite Universities' in *Sociology* 43/6: 1103-1121
- Rose, N. and Miller, P. (1992) 'Political power beyond the state: problematics of government' *British Journal of Sociology* 43/2: 173-205
- Sabri, D. (2013) 'Student Evaluations of Teaching as 'Fact-Totems': The Case of the UK National Student Survey' *Sociological Research Online*, 18 (4) 15  
<<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/18/4/15.html>> 10.5153/sro.3136
- Skeggs, B. (2014) 'Values beyond value? Is anything beyond the logic of capital?' *British Journal of Sociology* 65(1): 1-20.
- Strathern, M. (ed) (2000) *Audit Cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy* London: Routledge
- Todd, S. (2015) 'The Academics Tackling Everyday Sexism in University Life' *The Guardian*, February 24, 2015
- Yeatman, A. (1995) 'Making supervision relationships accountable: graduate student logs' *Australian Universities Review* 38: 9-12
- Wakeling, P. and Savage, M. (2015) 'Entry to elite positions and the stratification of higher education in Britain' *Sociological Review*, 63/2 290 – 320.
- Waters, M. (1989) 'Collegiality, Bureaucratization, and Professionalization: A Weberian Analysis' *The American Journal of Sociology* 94/5: 945-72
- Weber, M. (1948) 'Bureaucracy' in H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.