

# 2024-2025 RECONCILING MARKETISATION

#HigherEdSeminarSeries

Understanding the  
new political  
economy of higher  
education

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# OVERVIEW

Scholarly discussions of the state of higher education in settings like the UK, the US, Australia and other leading marketised systems may be said to have excessively privileged an anti-marketisation discourse. Indeed, supposedly critical studies of higher education may be argued to feature an implicit perhaps even unconscious bias towards predetermined, partisan appraisals that attribute the various failures and ills of universities with their financial rationalisation or be that, pathologisation. Consequently, a jeremiad of marketisation has come not only to saturate but stall the critical imagination of higher education scholars who appear trapped in an ideological chrysalis from which there is no maturation or escape.

Against this backdrop, the relationship between marketisation and the innate tendency of academics towards competitive behaviours has been for the most part, and perhaps, intentionally overlooked. Scholars have instead privileged a rationale for universities current malaise – and inexorable envelopment by polycrisis – on the basis of intensive federalisation within universities and market-led reform which has excluded their participation and allegedly weakened their institutional capital and agency, and aptitude and appetite for meaningful reform. While such diagnosis has drawn attention to important aspects – habitually failings – of university workings it has also arguably exaggerated the extent of academics' deagentification and subordination while over-claiming the attribution of market logic to universities' cultural, economic and political uncertainty. It has also led to poor attention on new emerging issues that, we contend, are shaping higher education and will do so for years to come, yet to which there is a palpable prevalence of resignation and despondence. These include contested visions of higher education's value proposition – its public good or private value; its financial sustainability; its ethical responsibilities ; its efforts for internationalisation amidst geopolitical instability and growing nationalisms; academic freedom and free speech in an age of identity wars; systemic malpractices in academic research and publishing; student recruitment and degree awarding.

Our provocation is that is if there is no desuetude from a market paradigm of higher education, the energy of its ideological opposition should be positively repurposed to understand through theory-driven and evidence-based empirical research how academia might revivify its role of intellectual, scholarly and scientific beacon.



In this co-curated online seminar series, we seek to interrupt and break the discursive hegemony around marketisation. We intend to nurture new theoretical and empirical pathways towards visions and materialisations of higher education that are unstuck from the weight and efficiency of singular explanations and which are dialectically accommodating. To do so, we will draw on the expertise of a multi-disciplinary community of field-leading thinkers addressing concerns related to the widest community of higher education scholars, higher education administrators, higher education support and membership organisations and funders, and higher education policy makers.

By drawing on a multiplicity of perspectives we intend to deprivilege – but not invalidate – an anti-marketisation discourse, in order to reverse theoretical stagnation, transgress critical creative inertia and pluralise higher education’s value proposition through scholarly publications, wider public communications and policy recommendations. The seminar-series is focused upon yet not limited in its scope to addressing questions such as:

- How can (and should) marketisation be made acceptable and tolerable?
- What is the remedial potential of – and potential pathways for – universities operating within a quasi-market paradigm in responding to polycrisis?
- To what extent can a post-market paradigm facilitate (socially) reformist agendas?
- Is there scope for an improved settlement of universities as a public good where disentangled from a quasi-market status?
- To what extent might a fully free-market economy of HE resolve the persistence of polycrisis and better enable the public mission of universities, free from government intervention and control?
- Can universities’ (and many academics’) urge towards ‘competitive accountability’ be channelled and adapted towards more ‘authentic’ outcomes?
- What should universities focus on, what should they drop to avoid mission overload, be true to their nature and deliver successfully to their stakeholders?
- What is the role of higher education in producing democratic citizens as well as a highly skilled workforce?
- How can we rethink academic freedom and free speech in an age of identity wars?
- What can universities do (and what can’t they do) to contribute to innovation?
- How should universities address the tide of corrupt practices emerging in several parts of the sector?

# THE FORMAT

The seminar series will run from September 2024 – April 2025, with seven individual (online) seminars that problematise higher education as a site of possibility and opportunity in the post-marketisation milieu.

The seminar series will consider external forces and internal realities shaping the architecture of higher education as a crucible of reformist agendas (impacting both the wider public and university communities). Each seminar will feature a panel of speakers and a discussant.

# OUR CONVENORS



**Tatiana Fumasoli**

Director, Centre for Higher Education Studies, UCL  
Faculty of Education and Society



**Richard Watermeyer**

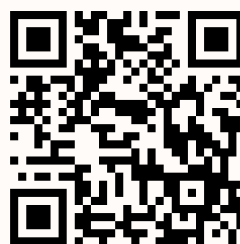
Co-Director, Centre for Higher Education  
Transformations, School of Education, University of  
Bristol

2024-2025

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## OUR UPCOMING ONLINE SEMINARS 2025

### From higher education to employment and public citizenship

Date: Wed, 26th Feb 2025

Hour: 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. (GMT)

**Panellists:**

Andy Westwood, University of Manchester  
Ellen Hazelkorn, BH Associates & TU Dublin  
James Robson, University of Oxford

**Discussant:**

Martin Kitchener, University of Cardiff

### The death of prestige: disbanding a rankings imperative

Date: Wed, 26th Mar 2025

Hour: 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. (GMT)

**Panellists:**

Leslie D Gonzales, University of Arizona  
Michelle Stack, University of British Columbia  
Georgiana Mihut, University of Warwick

**Discussant:**

Camille Kandiko Howson, Imperial College London

### The implications of polycrisis for higher education

Date: Wed, 2nd Apr 2025

Hour: 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. (GMT)

**Panellists:**

Sharon Stein, University of British Columbia  
Basma Hajir, University of Bristol  
Steven Jones, University of Manchester

**Discussant:**

Richard Hall, De Montfort University

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