McKinley UEK Nov 2023 Q&A Questions and responses

Q: It was quoted in the presentation that nowadays education does not contribute to student competitiveness on the labour market. Do you agree and what do you think can be changed to the educational system?

A: Competitiveness as a graduate quality is indicative of the marketization of higher education and student employability initiatives. However, there is plenty of evidence to indicate that universities shouldn't be job-training centres. I certainly agree with this. The 'holistic academy' is a place where people can develop their critical thinking skills to be active, thoughtful contributors to society (see McKinley et al., 2021). This more holistic approach is best, in my view.

Q: I would love to know your opinion about cancel culture. Should the class be opened to different points of view as uncomfortable as they might be, or a class is only for lessons? Thank you.

I believe classes should be open to different points of view, but it's important for the tutors leading the discussions not to assert their own opinions due to power dynamics. Facilitation of healthy, critical debate is paramount. I wrote about this concisely in the paper "Fostering Global Citizenship in (despite?) Internationalized Higher Education" (McKinley, 2022).

Q: What do you think about working during education? Can it be harmful to academic success?

Working during university studies can be a healthy outlet and need not be harmful to academic success if students don't overdo it. Employment that is relevant to the studies can be very complementary. However, even just the shift of focus to any part time job, and the work involved of completing work tasks, can be good for a student's mental health.

Q: How do you see the perfect education in the university? And how do you see the perfect teaching attitude?

It's nice to think about this! I suppose an ideal university education would be one in which academic staff and students work collaboratively to generate, discuss, and address academic questions. It's an education that's not fixated on outcomes such as academic marks. The teaching attitude I see accompanying such education is one that fosters a safe space for alternative thinking and approaches.

Q: Is there a possibility that some kind of online courses for work in a certain speciality can replace higher education?

Online courses have been supporting learning in nearly the full range of disciplines for decades, improving every year. And while such courses are certainly getting very good and will replace aspects of university education, I don't see them replacing higher education as we know it. The human element in creativity is needed for the generation of new ideas and

construction of new knowledge, and research shows this is best achieved in face-to-face/in-person interactions.

Q: Nowadays the majority of my friends see no sense in getting a higher education and going to the university. How do you see the future of universities and the idea of higher education as a whole?

This is likely the result of seeing universities as job training centres – if the objective of higher education is to *train* graduates for specific jobs, then this changes the whole nature of the university. Discipline-specific education is important, but examples from liberal arts education in the United States suggest a range of topics should be covered to support students' critical thinking skills. I support this and imagine universities rethinking their curricular offerings in the future as it more closely resembles a holistic academy.

Q: What can be done to improve individual perceptions of students? And what is meant by perceptions?

Students' individual perceptions are significant and need to be fostered and shared in supportive academic spaces. This is a big part of the desire to diversify universities through internationalisation agendas by hiring more international academic staff and actively recruiting more international students. These perceptions are the students' personal opinions and bias – their subjectivity. These need to be acknowledged, shared, and problematised for learning and improvement of perceptions to happen.

References

McKinley, J. (2022). **Fostering Global Citizenship in (despite?) Internationalized Higher Education**. *IIS University Journal of Arts, 11*(1), 1-7.

McKinley, J., McIntosh, S., Milligan, L. O., Mikolajewska, A. (2021). **Eyes on the enterprise: Problematising the concept of a teaching-research nexus in UK higher education**. *Higher Education, 81,* 1023–1041.