The University and the Public Sphere after the Celtic Tiger

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Many contemporary commentators have recognised that economies, cultures and political systems cannot be held together simply by individual pursuit of self-interest, combined with the rule of law. Something much deeper and richer is required and commentators have sought for this elusive quality through studies of 'social capital' (Putnam, 2000), 'trust' (Fukayama, 1995) and 'civil society'. Each of these themes draws our attention back to a vital element of contemporary democracy: the 'public sphere' - a shared, open space where dialogue, debate and deliberation can flourish. The classic images of the public sphere are the coffee houses of seventeenth century Europe or the vigorous debates among George Washington, James Madison and their colleagues in eighteenth century New England.

The public sphere has long been seen as a vital component of democracy – without it, representative democracy and the rule of law can only provide a thin shell of representation and democratic debate over a hollow core of non-participation and political apathy. But the public sphere is also crucial to culture and economy. In an era when the meaning of the nation and the national political community is increasingly debated, the public sphere becomes all the more important in creating a civic sense of

community that can replace existing ethnic conceptions of political community – a shift that we see in recent Irish life as well as elsewhere (Fahey et al, 2005). Even less widely recognised is the crucial role of the public sphere in techno-economic innovation and economic development – as indicated in the crucial importance of communities of technical professionals and state technology and innovation agencies to high tech growth in Celtic Tiger Ireland (Ó Riain, 2004).

However, in contemporary societies the question of the public sphere is much more complex as our lives are increasingly led across a range of complex, hierarchical institutions – schools, workplaces, state agencies, private corporations, media conglomerates and so on. For authors such as Jurgen Habermas (1962), therefore, the 'public sphere' is a "space of institutions and practices between the private interests of everyday life in civil society and the realm of state power" (Kellner, 2000). For the public sphere to flourish in the contemporary world, a set of institutions and organizations must be in place that nourish and support it.

Critical to this is the university. The place of the university in society is perhaps more hotly contested in recent decades than at any other time. The realisation among policy makers and business elites that universities place a crucial role in economic development, and the growing emphasis on a 'knowledge economy' has placed the goals and organisation of universities firmly on the public policy agenda. The unruly intellectual life of the university is seen as something that needs to be disciplined and corralled within the needs of economy and, occasionally, society.

This view challenges the historical vision of the university as a self-contained public sphere, where a community of scholars engages in reasoned dialogue regarding issues of moral, cultural, scientific and political significance. For those who emphasise the public policy role of universities, business and the state should intervene in the inner workings of universities to direct those dialogues towards issues of importance to business (primarily) and society and economy.

This paper argues that the historical vision of the university as public sphere can be rehabilitated in the face of these challenges. It briefly explores the recent history of Irish universities in the 'Celtic Tiger' years to argue that the universities have made their greatest contributions to Irish economic and social life when there were significant public supports for the public sphere within the university and for a broad range of ways of engaging with the societies around them. The paper argues that recent years have seen a narrowing of this agenda in the name of the re-orientation of universities towards policy and business needs and that this is proving to be socially and economically self-defeating, although still politically dominant. Finally, the paper seeks to articulate a vision of the university that sees the university as a vibrant public sphere engaged with and overlapping with other public spheres in society, that sees academic work as organised through a system of 'accountable autonomy' and that proposes a model of knowledge creation that is both scientific and democratic.

Competing Models of the University

John Henry Newman's classic text on *The Idea of a University* has been a starting point for most discussions of the place of the university in society over the past 150 years. Newman's text is often taken to be an absolute defense of the university as an ivory tower, isolated from society. This is, of course, a simplification as Newman was centrally concerned with the contribution that universities make to society. This contribution was very closely linked to the *nature of the knowledge* that universities provided – the education of 'gentlemen' (sic) with a broad, universal knowledge that serve them well in the world beyond the university. Because 'men of the world' needed this universal knowledge, higher education could concern itself with knowledge for its own sake – 'knowledge was its own end' (Newman, 1852/1858).

Newman argued that in order to make this social contribution by fostering learning of knowledge for its own sake, universities needed to be communities where learning was achieved through dialogue among their members – in short, the *organisation of academic work and culture* needed to take the form of a 'public sphere'. If the European coffee house was the iconic institution of the early public sphere, the university was to be one of the crucial places where it was to be institutionalised in an increasingly complex, and commercial, society.

While Newman therefore saw the university as contributing richly to social life, he saw no need for strong central political or commercial control of the university itself, In fact,

in terms of the *relationship between university and society*, the university needed to be autonomous in its governance and funding in order to protect the kind of universal education that served both academia and society. There was a natural fit between the purpose of the learning of universal knowledge for its own sake and the requirements of a society that needed 'men of the world'.

Despite invocations of Newman's legacy, the new idea of the university challenges each of the three dimensions of the university. Articulated primarily in a series of policy reports (OECD, 2004; Skilbeck, 2001), it seeks a rethinking of *what kinds of knowledge are produced* in the university, particularly towards 'relevant' business and policy knowledge. Not all knowledge is equally useful, leading to both a broadening of the kinds of knowledge that are seen as legitimate (the increased worth attached to professional and applied knowledge) and a narrowing of that range (as reflected in the systematic devaluing of arts and humanities subjects). Where Newman saw the study of knowledge for its own sake also serving society, the new idea emphasises that the kinds of knowledge produced and learned in universities must be molded to the perceived demands of economy and society.

The notion of the autonomous scholar is challenged through a *re-organisation of academic work and culture* to provide greater monitoring of academic work and output, and to provide incentives for those carrying out research on what are seen as more useful topics. This brings with a greater emphasis on metrics of performance that can be assessed outside the academic community, including numbers of publications, citation

indices, research funding raised, and so on. Governance shifts firmly towards the bureaucratic centre of the state and the university, and away from self-management in the academic community. The self-regulation of the public sphere of the university so crucial to Newman is replaced by centralised bureaucratic control.

This corporate vision of the university also seeks to change the *relationship between the university and society* - to break the walls around the alleged 'ivory tower', pushing the public sphere of the university to engage in a more sustained way with the society around it, and more specifically with the needs of business. The new vision of the university as an actor on behalf of market actors seeks growing ties with businesses and concern with commercial applications, but also with increasing access of under-represented social groups. However, it is state and commercial elites who are increasingly represented on universities' Governing Authorities and other governing bodies. Newman's autonomous governance is replaced by increased roles for political and economic elites.

Taken together there are significant differences between Newman's idea of the university and the new corporate vision – named corporate here because of the links to corporate public and private power and the increasingly corporate, rather than communal, organisation of the university itself (see Table 1). But these are not purely abstract models – they have existed as contending models and visions in the changing political economy of Irish higher education since the 1960s. It is to this historical evolution, and its shaping of contemporary trends that we now turn.

Table 1: Ideas of the University

	Newman	*Corporate*
Nature of Knowledge	Universal knowledge as its own end	Knowledge relevant to policy and commercial needs
Organisation of Academia	Self-governing community	Bureaucratic governance
Relationship to Society	Autonomous	State and corporate role in governance is enhanced

Contending Models in the Evolution of Irish Universities

Irish socio-economic development was famously weak until recent years. Mjoset (1992) linked this weakness to the failure to develop a national system of innovation – at least partly because of an emphasis on technology transfer through foreign investment (O'Hearn, 2000). Irish universities were similarly weakly supported and fared poorly in international comparisons of both funding and research (Skilbeck, 2001; OECD, 2004). In his history of modern Ireland, Joe Lee (1989) refers to the failure of Irish academics to excessively 'trouble the printer'.

Nonetheless, absolute numbers in third level education more than tripled between 1963/4 and 1984/5, largely because of increased participation rates (Breen et al., 1990: 129). While the state was the agent of change, state ties to international forces such as the World Bank and OECD were also significant. The catalyst for the change in the education system was the 1965 OECD report *Investment in Education* which drew on the increasingly influential human capital theory of education to argue that 'manpower'

training would be essential to a growing economy like Ireland's. Vocational education was seen as particularly important by both the OECD analysts and the Minister of Education of the time (Breen et al., 1990: 127).

However, the major thrust of educational expansion after the *Investment in Education* report was towards the expansion of vocational and technical education at the post-primary and tertiary levels. Furthermore, "the growing utilitarianism in policy has been achieved by a progressive process of state intervention" (Clancy, 1989: 129). Ignoring alternative proposals, the government pursued a strategy of educational change based on building up new institutions alongside the existing 'academically-oriented' institutions rather than taking on these institutions directly – "the principal strategy chosen to effect this policy reorientation was to establish new colleges which were directly controlled by the Department of Education" (Clancy, 1989: 123).

This state-led reorientation of the education system was reinforced over time by the increasing influence of the new colleges and in particular the newly founded National Institutes of Higher Education (NIHEs) whose success put pressure on the existing universities to change their orientation to technical and scientific education and to links between industry and academia (Osborne, 1996: 47; Share, 1992). The universities actually responded quite early to these pressures as is shown in their generally positive responses to an invitation for proposals for new courses in engineering and computer science in 1979 (O'Donnell, 1981). In general then "it could be argued that in Ireland over the past two decades the provision of higher education has been supply-led rather

than demand-led. The huge growth in the non-university short-cycle sector reflects more the decisions of government than the nature of client demand" (Clancy, 1989: 129). Indeed the goal of policy was to create demand by increasing supply.

All this intervention did little however to change the low rates of relative social mobility between classes, which largely persisted through the boom of the 1990s (Whelan, 2000). The education system is deeply inegalitarian as research supports the thesis of 'maximally maintained inequality' up until the 1970s (Raftery and Hout, 1993) and into the 1990s (Whelan and Hannan, 1999): 'the effects of social origin [on educational attainment] do not change except when the demand for a given level of education is saturated for the upper classes' (Whelan and Hannan, 1999).

Despite this growing role of the state, Irish universities enjoyed a deal of autonomy from state or corporate demands, but at the cost of being poorly funded. Research funding from within the state was particularly difficult to come by, as universities were seen as primarily providing graduates for industry in a system that valued the availability of a skilled labour pool for foreign investors over any sustained commitment to indigenous innovation (Ó Riain, 2004).

In the 1990s, however, there were signs of change. In the early part of the decade EU research funding was crucial for scientific research. Under the EU second and third Framework programmes for Research and Development, Ireland received the fourth highest amount of funding per capita and the highest amount per R&D employee of any

country in the EU (Peterson and Sharp, 1998:144). Some of the keenest participants in EU projects were the university computer science departments, from which projects leading indigenous software companies of the time such as Iona Technologies and Piercom emerged. “The National Board for Science and Technology did get recognition for international connections in the 1980s - Europe etc-Ireland did well in Europe we had a good effect there. It was one of the few niches left to us in Irish policy, no one else looking at international issues, at the funding of research - that was our big contribution. European money kept research in universities alive” (Ex-NBST employee, quoted in Ó Riain, 2004). The Irish indigenous innovation coalition were able to take advantage of not only the increasingly institutionalized world polity institutions dealing with science and technology but with a very elaborate set of specific programmes being operated within the EU (Ó Riain, 2004).

As the decade went on, public spending on higher education increased and key elements of a new research infrastructure for the universities were put in place. The Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions began in 1998 and put some €604 million into third level research infrastructure. Research Councils were set up for both the sciences (2001) and the humanities and social sciences (2000). At the same time, private philanthropist Chuck Feeney donated ‘several hundred million dollars’ to the universities.

While an emphasis on the sciences persisted in national policy, these new institutions and funding mechanisms largely connected well to the research communities in academia and beyond. The new institutional mechanisms operated largely to support the further

development of the strengths of the academic system, by providing much needed resources. The channelling of the new resources through the universities and the existing academic researchers themselves meant that this approach had something of a 'bottom-up' character in that universities and researchers retained a great deal of influence in shaping the academic agendas of the day. Companies benefited from the continuing emphasis of university computer science departments on high end computing skills over production skills, despite pressure to change their focus from some policy makers. More broadly, the support of academic research communities in the university was part of a broader trend towards developmental economic policies and institutional innovations to broaden participation and consultation (Ó Riain, 2004).

At the end of the 1990s, however, both the broader climate and the politics of research policy shifted. Across the broader political economy, greater emphasis was placed on marketisation – for example, through lower personal and capital gains taxation rates, competition legislation, privatization and deregulation, and greater emphasis on public institutions (including universities) being self-funding. But if the politics of markets re-asserted themselves, the central state also attempted to regain control over the institutional spaces and new social groups that had emerged in the 1990s boom. The dynamic of economic growth shifted from export-led growth to a domestic consumption boom, fuelled in particular by the construction sector.

The politics of third level education also shifted, as government and the educational bureaucracy made their most serious attempt to exert control over the internal workings

of universities. The dependency of the sector on state funding, even at a low level, left it vulnerable to such a political strategy. From 2002 onwards a process of 'softening up' of the universities operated as the PRTLI programme was 'paused' (for what turned out to be almost four years) and university non-pay budgets suffered cuts in real terms. When the new streams of funding started to emerge again in late 2005, they were much more closely linked to the vision of the corporate university. New funding mechanisms were introduced that linked increases in funding directly to universities competing with each other to serve government goals – a portion of the university 'block grant' was cut and moved to a 'Strategic Innovation Fund' where universities competed for funding based on proposals around organisational restructuring, improving access, increasing research, teaching innovation, and so on. While this were desirable goals in general, the devil lay in the details.

The new corporate vision of the university narrowed the range of the *nature of the knowledge* to be developed in the universities. The major initiative of the late nineties was the establishment of Science Foundation Ireland, with massive funding for research. SFI has been very effective in pursuing its stated goals – but these goals were constituted very narrowly as the promotion of research in ICT and biotech, typically though the attraction of international scientists into the university system. The networks of smaller scale innovation developed in the 1990s were weakly integrated into this model, which transposed the logic of FDI attraction into the world of science and technology. Since its inception, SFI has been by far the most significant source of research funding and has played a key role in research policy making.

This narrowing of knowledge was pursued in the name of economic development and upgrading. However, even this is a misunderstanding of Irish economic development. In the 1990s, even as agricultural employment continued its steady decline, manufacturing grew 3.6% per annum while social services grew at 4.4% p.a. and market services grew at 5.7% p.a. The transformation looks more dramatic when we focus on key sectors such as 'Insurance, Finance and Business Services' (incorporating financial services and software) and 'Health and Education' – the only sectors to record steady employment growth in every decade since the 1970s (NESC, 2002). Biotech and ICT were only one element of a much broader expansion of employment. Even in these high tech industries, the new institutions such as SFI were only loosely connected to the existing, relatively decentralized technical communities that were central to high tech growth in the 1990s (Ó Riain, 2004).

The knowledge economy is based not only on technical and scientific knowledge. In fact, the greater part of the expansion of knowledge and knowledge related occupations is around knowledge of culture (marketing, advertising), social needs (health, education) and organisations (management, business services). All of these emerging areas pose new questions about the ethical application of knowledge to people and nature – questions that have been sidelined in the rush to a narrow vision of research policy based on only a couple of sectors. Furthermore, biotech and ICT development can only benefit from a deeper engagement with studies of ethics, social practices of technology use, linguistic

and cultural difference, and so on – instead, the disciplines where these understandings are developed have been marginalised.

Meanwhile, the *organisation of academic work and culture* has shifted significantly, with much greater emphasis on direct monitoring of staff compliance with 'strategic goals'. Academic work has long been monitored through promotion boards, 'double blind' reviewing of journal articles and other forms of peer review. The new mechanisms rightly extend these systems of review but also assert greater central control over academic work. As Kleinman and Vallas (2001) point out for the US, we find a troubling convergence – even as knowledge workers in the private sectors often find themselves with greater autonomy and collegiality in the workplace, academic knowledge workers are subject to increased corporate control. However, peer and collegial control of academic work is much stronger in the US than in most other systems. In the UK, which – despite the rhetorical appeal to the US as the model for educational reform - has effectively served as the model for reform in Ireland, the central state has exerted much greater control through narrowly defined measures of performance and much greater emphasis on bureaucratic procedures in areas of academic work such as student supervision, advising, and so on. This remains however, much less developed in Ireland at this point.

In the Irish system, however, the starving of the bulk of academics in the system of the necessary resources has been the crucial mechanism of influence. Based on census data, between 1991 and 2002 when total employment grew by over 30% and professional

employment by significantly more, employment among ‘University, RTC and higher education teachers’ declined by 12%. No other ‘professional’ occupation posted such a miserable employment performance - despite the rhetorical policy emphasis on the importance of higher level education for the ‘knowledge society’. Given this situation, the incentives for individual academics to ‘follow the money’ to new areas of research in order to fund the most basic requirements of research (research assistance, travel to conferences, books etc) are greatly increased.

The *relationship between university and society* has clearly changed therefore. Universities are much more directly engaged with servicing what the state and business define as crucial issues. This engagement is produced through competitive funding and the discipline induced through the fear of losing that funding. But this engagement is increasingly produced through increasingly direct involvement of corporate actors in the governance of universities themselves. This has taken the form of greater corporate involvement in university governing authorities and a variety of boards within universities. At times, these links have been very narrowly defined. One example is particularly telling. The President of UCD is a one time Director of the Conway Institute, a leading centre for biomedical research. 4 of the current 7 Vice-Presidents are also ex-Conway Institute. Elan, the leading Irish pharmaceutical firm, moved its headquarters to UCD to be closer to the Conway Institute. Meanwhile the new Chairman of the Governing Authority is on the Board of Directors of both Elan and United Drug, the leading Irish drug sales firm. Ties this close and narrowly constituted between a

university and a single industry are a far cry from Newman's idea of the university that serves society through the pursuit of a broad and general knowledge.

The Public Sphere in the Engaged University

The corporate vision of the university appeals to a future of an engaged university, serving the society (or, more typically, the economy) in direct and measurable ways – rewarding those who provide this service and marginalising those who don't. Newman's notion of the university as a public sphere that generates knowledge and learning of a broad and inclusive nature is left far behind – condemned as elitist and irrelevant, despite occasional, often ritualistic, references to civil society, social needs and so on.
The corporate vision, however, is ultimately unable to achieve its own ends. Unfortunately, this agenda is based on a dangerously narrow vision of the knowledge society and the place of the university in it. It is misguided in the strategies it proposes – even to meet its own stated goals of promoting access, innovation and accountability. The Celtic Tiger years, and the undoubted improvements in university resources and research, may have created the illusion that the hard work of investing in the development of the university sector has been done. But there is still a long way to go before the conditions are put in place in Irish universities that will enable them to be sustainable world class centres of research.

If the corporate vision offers a false promise of engagement that simply covers a narrow commercially motivated and bureaucratically controlled agenda, Newman's vision is

vulnerable to criticisms of elitism and lack of accountability. A vision of the public sphere must be re-invigorated for an engaged university that is both a vibrant academic community of research and learning and is embedded within the society around it.

Is an alternative possible? It might be argued that the seeds of such a system were being sown in the 1990s, when institutions were put in place that would fund research and that offered new possibilities of international class research. If resources were increased accordingly for teaching and learning, for promoting access and for other crucial dimensions of academic life – as they were for a period – then a broader vision of the university and its place in social and economic life was possible. Such a system would have supported indigenous innovation by connecting indigenous industry to academic research; by contributing richly to growth in areas such as tourism and heritage; and, by providing the crucial insights into social behaviour and organisational dynamics that are crucial to industrial upgrading. It would have enhanced democracy through informing public debate across a wide range of areas and with a wide range of perspectives.

However, at the crucial time, the narrower corporate vision has re-asserted itself, emphasising the connection of big science to large firms over indigenous innovation and the primacy of market and statism over democracy. Many commentators look to the US to justify such a model. However, compared to top public research universities in the US, Irish university departments teach more students with far fewer academic staff and far less administrative support. The large private US universities such as Harvard and Stanford are often invoked as models for the Irish system. But these apparently ‘private’

universities have been built upon a variety of public and quasi-public supports that dwarf the resources put into Irish universities. Massive financial endowments provide a financial base that Irish universities can only dream of. Huge inflows of public research funds – through the National Institute of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defence and other agencies – have been crucial to the development of research in even the most elitist 'private' US institutions. Ultimately, too, the US private universities are able to 'cherry pick' the US system only because of the extensive public system of universities and colleges across the US. When private funds flow into US universities they come in to the system as a top-up on significant public and internal funds – not as the building blocks of the basic research and teaching system itself. Indeed, as Derek Bok (former President of Harvard) has warned, the US system is itself deeply threatened by excessive commercialisation (Bok, 2003).

Table 2: The Idea of an Engaged University

	Newman	*Corporate*	*Engaged*
Nature of Knowledge	Universal knowledge as its own end	Knowledge relevant to policy and commercial needs	Diverse Knowledges; Research that informs Public Debate
Organisation of Academia	Self-governing community	Bureaucratic governance	Scientific communities, interlocking with other publics
Relationship to Society	Autonomous	State and corporate role in governance is enhanced	Accountable Autonomy

An alternative vision of the public sphere in the engaged university (see Table 2) would emphasise the diversity of *knowledges* and the crucial importance of the university as a 'habitat' of learning where a 'bio-diversity' of disciplines is crucial to innovation – which is ultimately threatened by too narrow a focus on one or two disciplines. But, as we saw in our initial discussion of the public sphere, the issue goes much deeper than this. It will be tempting to argue, as many do, that we need to put money into only those parts of the university that are responsive to the direct demands of business. But the goals of the university are not simply to promote economic growth. A vibrant university sector is essential to deepening democracy and to a rich, diverse cultural life.

Genuine democracy depends not only on elections but upon a rich variety of public spaces where debate can take place. This includes the political system and the media but it also depends upon other spaces such as local partnerships, community groups, schools - and universities. Without these autonomous public spaces we become consumers of democracy rather than citizens.

Similarly, we need spaces where we can reflect upon what kind of society we are and indeed want to be. A society that educates graduates with strong skills but with no time or talent for reflecting on what they want to do with those skills, will be a poorer society. Ultimately those kinds of graduates can make only limited contributions to the society around them.

Furthermore, deepening democracy and providing a space for furthering our understanding of our selves and our place in the world, will ultimately strengthen the economy. World class research within the university depends on a strong intellectual community within the university sector, linked to other communities nationally and internationally. Even the most specialised technological fields depend upon this broader intellectual community - paying attention to teaching, fostering links between the arts and sciences, and creating links between the university and public life are crucial to developing the research culture so central to the knowledge society and economy. Science Foundation Ireland funding of information technology and biotech cannot substitute for a sustained and coherent research policy for the full range of disciplines within the university.

Universities are a crucial element in linking together the acquisition of new skills and capabilities with democracy and culture. If they are made increasingly dependent upon industry funding, the space available in our society for open debate and discussion will shrink and the economy will ultimately be damaged. A university sector that promotes democracy, cultural reflection and innovation will require a sustained programme of development – this work has had a good beginning in recent years but must continue.

But this does not mean a return to a university of ‘gentlemen’, isolated from the broader social world. There is after all a critique of the ‘traditional’ university from within academia itself, arguing that the model of knowledge creation and transformation in universities has been too elitist and is now challenged by growing mass participation in

higher education. Universities should be made more accountable – but not only to business but to the social classes, women and other groups historically excluded from them. The state in turn must be made accountable for providing universities with the resources necessary to make real provisions for improving access.

Academic work would be organised through the crucial role of peer review in scientific communities. However, this public sphere of the university must overlap with other public spheres – those of business, of communities, of the community and voluntary sector, of the broader political system and debates. As Nancy Fraser (1989) points out, there are multiple public spheres within society that overlap and interlock. It is crucial that the university in particular be both a vibrant public sphere in its own right and be engaged with the other public spheres in the society through an ongoing, dynamic dialogue. The professional work of academics and their public engagement must be combined (Burawoy, 2004).

Finally, how might we *govern* universities in this system? Fung and Wright (2001) suggest that there is an organizational alternative to command and control by experts, aggregative voting and strategic negotiation - all of which are present in the political process in Ireland through centralized planning, elections and catch all politics and neo-corporatist bargaining. They argue for a model of decision-making which they call ‘empowered democratic deliberation’. This approach devolves power to the local units of the system, promoting bottom up participation and encouraging a focus on deliberation around practical problems. However, there are also “linkages of accountability and

communication that connect local units to superordinate bodies" (Fung and Wright, 2001: 22). This is a form of coordinated decentralization where local units are autonomous but receive resources from the centre and are accountable to the centre for their 'performance'. Such systems are therefore state centred rather than voluntaristic. Fung and Wright conceive of this institutional alternative as one which empowers ordinary citizens but we can reformulate it as a creative way to rethink the relationship between state and university – and between the university, the state and the broader set of social constituencies to which each is responsible. Such a system of external accountability was a critical part of the Irish technology and industrial development system in the 1990s (Ó Riain, 2004) but is now being downplayed in favour of more direct centralized forms of control. If this trend persists, then the public sphere will be diminished – and the social and economic contribution of higher education with it.

Improving access too will require providing specialised attention for students with diverse backgrounds, often alien from the culture of the university. Can this be adequately provided through the mass education that is the standard across the Irish universities? Firms and policy makers rightly ask for better team work and presentation skills but these are difficult to provide in classes that frequently consist of more than 200 students. If access, skills and innovation are to be promoted in a sustainable way then policy must recognise that substantial and reliable public funding will continue to play a crucial role.

It is not necessary in criticizing the corporate vision of the Irish university to demand a return to the ivory tower. Retaining the diversity of academic knowledge does not weaken economy and society but strengthens it. Indeed, the emphasis on the knowledge society represents an opportunity for greater dialogue between arts and sciences, a chance to overcome the divide between the 'two cultures' (Snow, 1959) rather than to elevate one above the other. A strong professional culture and autonomy of knowledge work means that researchers will bring richer bodies of research and knowledge to public debate – but it is crucial that academics make these connections to public debate and that the public demands that they do. We should not tell academics what to study but we must demand that they bring that knowledge to the public and inform public debates and learning. Finally, the assertion of corporate and bureaucratic control over the details of research and teaching activity, accompanied by poor funding, threatens the university sector rather than strengthening it. A system of 'accountable autonomy' will be much more effective – both in promoting economic growth and industrial innovation and in enriching democratic dialogue in a re-constituted public sphere.

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