



# HISTORY & POLICY

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## *Historian calls for university funding to reward both teaching and research*

A new History & Policy paper by Edinburgh University historian, Prof. Robert Anderson, examines the development of thinking on the function of universities, and argues for a balance between teaching and research, autonomy and accountability.

In [\*The 'Idea of a University' today\*](#), Prof. Anderson examines the 19<sup>th</sup> century Humboldtian ideal that many of the best universities today are modelled on - a community of scholars and students searching for impartial truth - and asks whether it is still relevant in an age when the number of school-leavers attending university is nearly 40 per cent.

Anderson suggests that as universities have different missions, some following the traditional model while others focus on teaching, they should be funded on separate criteria. He urges policymakers to allow different models to co-exist within the U.K. Higher Education system, highlighting the teaching-led polytechnics of the 1970s and 80's as evidence that effective skills training does not always need to be linked to a research base.

Anderson shows that universities have always been expected to serve economic ends, and have done so in the past without sacrificing their autonomy. He warns that closing the gap between government and university decision-making will have negative results.

Prof Anderson said:

'Universities should of course respond to economic demands, but the principle of academic freedom and university autonomy must be protected. Academic priorities should be driven by curiosity, originality and the internal development of disciplines. A knowledge economy depends on the quality and independence of the knowledge, and intellect can only be a creative force when it is free.'

Prof. Anderson argues that:

- Even in the nineteenth century, the golden age of laissez-faire capitalism, no-one suggested that universities should be run as commercial organisations.
- The new Research Excellence Framework, with its emphasis on economic, social and public 'impact,' is likely to drive a wedge between research and teaching, which may damage the international ranking of British Universities.
- Universities have always faced external social demands; for example current concerns over admissions policies should be seen in the context of the reforms of Oxford and Cambridge during the Victorian era.

### Notes to editors

1. Robert Anderson's paper [\*The 'Idea of a University' today\*](#) is published today on the [History & Policy website](#).
2. Robert Anderson is Emeritus Professor of History, University of Edinburgh. He has written extensively on the history of universities. His latest books are *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914* (Oxford, University Press: 2004), and *British Universities Past and Present* (London, Hambledon Continuum: 2006). He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Society of Arts.
3. [History & Policy](#) is an independent initiative working for better public policy through an understanding of history. The initiative was founded by historians at the Universities of Cambridge and London and is based in the [Centre for Contemporary British History](#), at the [Institute of Historical Research](#), University of London. History & Policy is funded with charitable grants from [Arcadia](#) and [The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#).
4. For further information or to request an interview with a historian, please contact: Ruth Evans, History & Policy, tel: 020 7862 8783 email: [ruth.evans@sas.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.evans@sas.ac.uk).