

The final chapter of the volume is a thought-provoking piece by Muckle in which he revisits the main question of whether educational reform in post-Soviet Russia has been successful. In his very engaging storytelling style and drawing on his first hand experiences of Soviet school visits and classroom observations he vividly draws a picture of education in Russia as it was at the time of the Soviet Union collapse and asks how much of this picture survives in the new Russia. Undoubtedly change has been slow and difficult. My own research into Russian higher education reform supports some of the arguments put forward by Muckle. What I saw in the 1990s and early 2000s were mainly cosmetic and superficial reforms, achieved by creating new and renaming old institutions, programmes and courses but leaving the old system's fundamental structures intact. Although the survival and expansion of the Russian education system in the 1990s could be considered as achievements in themselves, they failed to mitigate the overall dismal picture of largely failed attempts at education reform. Thus, it would be interesting to establish the extent to which real change has permeated universities and schools since 2000.

Overall, the collection of chapters in this book is very diverse and eclectic and despite some of its apparent shortcomings it is a welcome addition to the body of research on Russian education and would be useful to all those interested in Russian education system as well as in comparative education more broadly.

## Reference

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**Managing successful universities**, second edition, by M. Shattock, Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2010, 296 pp., £28.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-335-23743-2

The problem, just now, for any author attempting to produce or update a text on higher education management in the UK is that no sooner has it gone to press than it is out of date. Such is the uncertainty in government circles about HE fees and funding, seemingly at what to do as well as how to do it, that it is impossible to predict what the sector will be like next year, let alone within the next five.

Of course, there are those who will argue, Mike Shattock among them, that we have been here before, with successive reviews of English higher education contributing to fundamental changes in the landscape. Or that what we are now seeing is just another stage in a cumulative process which seeks to shift the burden of cost from the state towards those it claims are the key beneficiaries from the investment (although, personally, I am quite glad that we do not have to rely on an individual's willingness to become indebted in order that we have doctors, teachers, engineers – possibly even lawyers).

In the second edition of *Managing successful universities*, Michael Shattock successfully manages to avoid the trap of immediate out-datedness by giving more space to 'the consequences of managing retrenchment and the importance of developing new sources of

funding' (x) in recognition of the uncertain economic climate. In his introduction he addresses the question of what a successful university is but I wonder, just wonder, if a more relevant question now is what *is* a university. As Ron Barnett puts it:

What is it to be a university? Are there forms of 'university' that are emerging and which should attract our concern? Are there kinds of 'university' that we can barely glimpse and that we might favour, that we might even encourage? (Barnett 2011, 1)

This is important because success is inextricably linked to purpose. One has to be successful *at* something – at teaching or research, at engaging with community, at delivering value for money. In a recent UCU survey of institutional financial viability, success might be seen in terms just of survival. Shattock acknowledges this, again with an eye to unknown futures when he points out that 'Our list of the most successful universities may prove to be as fragile as the companies cited in so many business texts' (26). Nonetheless, we can mitigate the impacts of funding and economic vicissitudes if we focus on effective and appropriate management which is at the core of this text.

The first edition of *Managing successful universities* is well-known to students and graduates of the MBA in higher education management at London University's Institute of Education, where Shattock is visiting professor. Another, former, stalwart of the course team is David Watson whose stricture 'get the money right and everything else will follow' caused me to turn first to the chapter on university finance. Here Shattock highlights five principles of successful financial management, the first of which is that 'financial stability makes a key contribution to successful academic work' (52). He goes on to say that '*Nothing can be so destructive of academic time, the ability to innovate, or the maintenance of good morale as a financial crisis*' (52). How prophetic – but in fact these five principles also appear in the earlier edition, as does much of this chapter. Apart from some minor updates, the most significant change here is the addition of a section under private sector markets on 'Fees for home and EU undergraduate students' (56). Here the understated suggestion that 'Decisions surrounding higher fee levels have the potential to redefine the UK higher education system' (57) gave rise to a wry smile. There is also an unsurprising expansion of the section under fundraising and endowment income.

It is perhaps tempting to be critical that such a respected authority on the history of university funding and governance did not devote more space to the possible changes to higher education funding but, in fairness, who could have predicted such an enormous sea-change? The prevailing view in 2009 and early 2010 was that if the fee cap were to be lifted it would be to a new ceiling of around £7000 and the major cuts to teaching grant were never seriously predicted until the emergency budget and comprehensive spending review of autumn 2010. To wait for clearer signs would have been to no avail – at the time of writing there is still no sign of the White Paper, expected in winter 2010. As one whose own recent publication was hit by the same levels of uncertainty, I can only express sympathy and solidarity.

So what else has changed since the first edition? In fact other than an additional chapter on 'Managing the core business' and a very timely addition of 'managing retrenchment' to the chapter on 'Turning round failure or arresting decline' most of the change has been of an updating nature. And, indeed, there is no reason why Shattock should have done much else as the text is still as relevant, well written and useable as in the original. His advice on retrenchment is a case in point. He advocates such common sense approaches as ensuring that necessary budget reductions do not conflict with strategic objectives and that reductions should be applied selectively rather than by salami slicing, which may cut costs but can

weaken the institution. The advice in these pages would be well taken by vice-chancellors and finance directors in England, just now.

The additional material on managing the core business focuses on teaching and research, elements which were implicit in the first edition but made more transparent here and given greater centrality, albeit rather briefly. The role of QAA and the RAE/REF are highlighted but lest the reader fears a recommendation to embrace additional bureaucracy the author warns us in typical outspoken style that 'In too many university central offices there is a tendency to take on a jihadist [sic] view of QAA principles and seek to enforce them unquestionably on academic colleagues' (109).

It is this continuous questioning of context, accompanied by guidance on how to achieve, maintain and enhance success that makes this book such a readable and convincing bible for university managers – indeed, for anyone who has an interest in the continued success of universities at a time when their very *raison d'être* is coming under such sustained attack.

## Reference

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**The Sage handbook of workplace learning**, edited by Margaret Malloch, Len Cairns, Karen Evans and Bridget N. O'Connor, London, Sage, 2011, 476 pp., £90 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-84787-589-1

This handbook claims to provide a 'state-of-the-art overview of the field of workplace learning internationally' (xv). Moreover it aims to serve as a basic resource for researchers and 'serious academics' who are interested in this burgeoning topic. These are bold claims indeed, and ones that are largely justified by the extensive list of contributors (46 in total) that are marshalled into 34 chapters. With editors from Australia, England and the US many of the contributions originate from these countries, although this tendency is offset by individual contributions from elsewhere including the Nordic countries, Germany, Korea and Canada and a case study of Ethiopia. Whilst the growing importance of the economies of China and India are alluded to in some chapters the limited research available in these contexts means there are perhaps limits on the 'international' purchase claimed.

Given the breadth and ambition of the handbook some structure is needed and the editors have grouped the chapters into three sections: theory, research and practice, issues and futures. In practice some chapters span these divisions of course. Each section is introduced by a brief summary of the contributions to follow, a helpful device given the extent of the volume. Cairns and Malloch's chapter opens the theory section by examining the scope of 'work' 'place' and 'learning', arguing for a shift towards broader and more inclusive meanings, encompassing unpaid work in the home and community and spiritual or virtual spaces. An impressive array of chapters follow led by Paul Hager's overview of psychological and socio-cultural theories of learning, and emerging postmodern takes on workplace learning; where he surprisingly perhaps locates Engeström's cultural historical activity theory. Contributions