Identity crisis: working in higher education in the twenty-first century, by Liz Marr and Rachel Forsyth, Stoke-on-Trent, UK and Sterling, USA, Trentham Books, 2011, 157 + xviii pp., £20.99, ISBN 9-7818-5856-4678

Between the 1960s and the 1980s school-teachers were regularly tempted by personal investment in what might be called 'survival guides'. 'Tips for teachers' was a phrase that tripped off the tongue and eventually sprang its own branch of satire ('don't let anybody sit in the back row'). Since the 1990s, such guides for the wary have been joined by counter-parts in higher education, building on the 'sleeper' success of Donald Bligh's *What's the use of lectures* (first published by Penguin, 1971). For at least the past two decades 'academics' have been regularly targeted by works such as Phil Race's popular *2000 tips for lecturers* (Routledge, 1999), Paul Ramsden's evidence-rich *Learning to teach in higher education* (Taylor and Francis, second edition 2003), and (my pick for this particular job) Heather Fry, Steve Ketteridge and Stephanie Marshall's compendious *The effective academic: A handbook for enhanced academic practice* (Routledge, latest edition 2005). These, and others, are now joined by Liz Marr and Rachel Forsyth's *Identity crisis*.

Like their predecessors, Marr and Forsyth are from the 'academic development' stable. And (mostly) like their predecessors, they exude confidence and cheerfulness: the job can be done. One reaction after 157 pages is to say 'crisis, what crisis?' Here for example is the list of response to individual aspects of the 'impact of generation Y on practice' (like 'attendance is optional'): 'make greater use of technology'; 'involve students in the design of learning'; 'build career planning into the curriculum'; 'use more Approved Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)'; 'provide flexible routes through programmes'; 'consider replacing grades with learning outcome commentaries'; 'challenge assumptions'; 'integrate buddy systems, mentoring and peer support'; 'support challenge and set parameters for student influence on curriculum and delivery' (Figure 3.5, 55). And BOB (Better Observed Behaviour) will be your uncle (as Simon Hoggart would say, I made that last bit up).

The book has several distinct strengths. Sensibly, and as Professor Janet Beer points out in her very positive foreword, it is at least as much about the 'why' of contemporary academic practice as the 'how'. There is also a powerful sense of felt experience. If in difficulty, the authors advise, relax and seek support: 'it doesn't have to be like this' (72). They know that most early career HE teachers are particularly concerned about assessment and dealing with feedback to students and rightly concentrate on these perennial features of the job.

At the same time they are careful about avoiding the technological fixes on which many of their rivals bet the farm ('the pace of change means that the technologies cited as examples could be out of date by the time this is read'; 98). They give off a powerful aura of understanding generational tensions, and of being relaxed about the consequences. The realities of contemporary higher education (like full time students regularly working for income, and thinking hard about not only postgraduate employment, but also the challenges of global responsibility) are accepted and calmly played into the equation: 'the purposes of HE are… now broader and more varied' (124). Above all, they reinforce how much of the job today is about management, and self-management.

The downsides are almost the reciprocal of these qualities. I wanted on several occasions to exclaim that life is more complicated than that. The discussion of the current funding and policy framework is on a hiding to nothing, as the book went to press during an even more manic than usual passage of political fixing around fees and student support. However, this doesn't forgive some of the more egregious over-simplifications. Examples are the suggestion that government funding is solely for teaching and research (ignoring HEIF and the policy evaluation industry, as well as regional development; page 6). England is the

default administration for almost all discussion of policy, with hats tipped to Wales and Northern Ireland, but no serious discussion of Scotland (a land with no 'graduate contribution', no foundation degrees, centrally driven cooperation on some fields of research, a historically more generous pattern of economic hospitality to international post-graduates, and so on).

In short, *Identity crisis* does its major task well. It is a well-rounded, fluent and sympathetic account of our present condition, as well as sensibly priced. That it will prove more useful to recent immigrants to our strange land ('people who come to academic life in mid-career', many of whom may be post-recession asylum-seekers) rather than to those established settlers who have grown into their roles knowing little else, is no bad thing.

References

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© 2012, David Watson
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2012.659068

European universities and the challenge of the market: a comparative analysis, edited by Marino Regini, with contributions from Gabriele Ballarino, Sabrina Colombo, Loris Perotti and Renata Semenza, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA, Edward Elgar, 2011, 233 pp., £69.95, ISBN 9-7818-4980-4035

It is clear, even to casual observers, that there have been far reaching changes in the higher education arrangements of most European countries during the past quarter century. There have been dramatic increases in student numbers, reforms of qualifications frameworks and radical changes in institutional governance, financing mechanisms and academic cultures. These changes have often been seen, as the title of this volume implies, as responses to market challenges. Yet this simplistic interpretation raises many questions. Why has 'the market' become so central? Is it deep ideological and cultural change? Is it a result of new technology which makes different modes of management and governance feasible? Or is simply that there are insufficient resources for universities and colleges to be managed in the rather casual way that was widespread in most the twentieth century.

Regini and his colleagues attempt to throw light on such questions by detailed case studies of two decades of higher education change in six major European countries, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and the UK. The largely descriptive case studies provide little information that will be new to academic higher education specialists. However, they do follow a common structure covering changes in funding, governance, curricula and qualifica-