

PROFESSOR GARETH LLOYD WILLIAMS (K 46-54)

After leaving Framlingham he did his National Service with the Royal Signals, and went on to read Economics at St John's College, Cambridge.

His appointments included Principal Administrator, Directorate for Scientific Affairs, OECD, Paris, Assistant Director, Centre for Higher Education Research Unit, LSE, Professor, Educational Planning, and Director, Centre for Higher Education Research and Development in Post-Compulsory Education, University of Lancaster. Gareth established an international reputation for analysis of the impact of government funding on universities.

His research with future Education Minister, Tessa Blackstone, for the Leverholm Trust and the Society for Research into Higher Education resulted in *Response to Adversity: Higher Education in a harsh climate*. (1983).

As Professional of Educational Administration, University of London, he was Founding Director, Centre of Higher Education Studies. He was acclaimed as an "inspirational teacher", and as someone who had "made a huge contribution to educational research and policy analysis".



He died on 25th August 2021, aged 85 and is survived by his wife, Ann, and their three children.

The following obituary appeared on the [Springer Link](#) website

Gareth Williams came from a family of Welsh schoolteachers—both parents, brother and sister. At age 11, he won a scholarship to Framlingham College in Suffolk in England, from where he later won a place at St John's College, Cambridge, to read economics. On graduation, as the result of an undergraduate paper on the economics of education contributed to the Cambridge Political Economy Society, he was appointed to a research post at the Agricultural Economics Research Unit at Oxford.

*From there Gareth moved on to his first love, the economics of education, in a post at the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) working on econometric models of education, including the application of forecasting models. In 1968 he became Joint Director of the Higher Education Research Unit, the group which had worked under Claus (Lord) Moser on the statistics and forecasts of the Robbins Committee which had now transferred to the London School of Economics (LSE). Five years later at the age of 37, he was appointed at Lancaster as Professor of Educational Planning and Director of the Institute for Research and Development in Post Compulsory Education. In 1984 he accepted an invitation to join the Institute of Education, which is now part of University College London (UCL), as Professor of Educational Administration where he established the Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES). This became a leading centre for research and policy studies in the field. On his retirement, Ron Barnett, Paul Temple and Peter Scott edited a festschrift, *Valuing Higher Education* (UCL Institute of Education Press, 2016) which brought together contributions from academic colleagues from around the world who had been stimulated by his work.*

*Gareth's move from OECD to LSE gave him the opportunity to broaden his interests in higher education policy from the more technical work on which he was engaged in Paris. A good example of this was his keynote chapter, 'The scale of expansion to come', written with Richard (now Lord) Layard in the enormously influential Penguin Special, *Patterns and Policies in Higher Education* (Brosan et al., 1971). A single passage on the value of forecasting—the chapter was mainly concerned with the Department of Education and Science's (DES) failure in this—captures Gareth's authentic voice as an economic generalist and policy scholar:*

Forecasting is not an academic pursuit to be judged by whether it gives rise to true or false propositions. It is an operational exercise to be judged by whether it gives rise to better decisions than would have been taken without

it. So long as there is planning, that is to say an organised attempt to achieve consistency between the activities of different agents, there must be forecasting.

*While at LSE, he also produced, in conjunction with Tessa Blackstone and David Metcalf, the influential *The Academic Labour Market. Economic and social aspects of a profession* (1974), a far cry from the econometric modelling of countries like Greece which he had undertaken at OECD. Years later his inaugural lecture at the Institute of Education, 'New Ways of Paying the Piper', again illustrated how he could employ an exploration of policy, informed by economics, to stimulate fresh ideas.*

*The editors of the *Valuing Higher Education* festschrift bring out effectively the extent to which his work extends beyond a narrow economic approach 'to take a broad and inter connected view' of policy issues, and they list a series of quotations from Gareth's works which are well worth recalling both from the perspective of when written and from the travails of today:*

The main weakness of the market model results from its possible effects on the supply of educational services ... unrestricted competition can lead to reductions in quality as institutions indulge in price competition and hard selling tactics (Williams, 1984, p. 97).

The relationship between higher education institutions and the society which surrounds them is a reciprocal one. It is a partnership ... any government that attempts to use its control of the purse as a way of controlling academic life risks having a very mediocre intellectual elite and graduates who are unable to take initiatives (Williams, 1992, p. 85).

A university that divorces itself entirely from society rapidly becomes an irrelevant ivory tower [but] equally, one that only responds to outside pressures cannot perform its proper function of disinterested scholarship, research and criticism....[However] there is no single correct balance between the two extremes (ibid).

One of Gareth's great abilities was a facility to disentangle long-range policy issues, a skill well demonstrated in the book quoted from above. His views were frequently sought by the UK Parliamentary Education Select Committee, and a good example of his understanding of the issues surrounding system change can be found in a paper he wrote for the Committee in 2000 setting out his thoughts on these-long term questions:

The critical public policy challenges for the next decade are as follows:

- a) To set acceptable ground rules for institutional differentiation so as to continue to meet the claims of international recognised excellence in research and teaching while increasing social inclusion and encouraging lifelong learning*
- b) To seize the opportunities offered by information technology to improve the quality of learning and reduce unit costs further while maintaining and enhancing appropriate standards across the sector*
- c) To improve the funding arrangements and to promote better understanding of the relationship between public and private funding*

(House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, paper HE27, 2000)

Looking back from a standpoint of now 20 years or so, it is difficult to fault his analysis and its continuing relevance.

*As a major figure both in the UK and the international scholarly community, it was natural that Gareth would play a leading role in the affairs of the British Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE). He was the Chair of the Society for two periods, 1977–1979 and 1986–1988, served for a period as General Editor of the *Higher Education Quarterly* and became an Honorary Fellow of the Society. For 15 years (1984–1999), he and I jointly chaired a bi-monthly SRHE Policy Forum which Gareth hosted at the Institute. But undoubtedly his largest contribution was as Director of the Leverhulme Programme of Study into the Future of Higher Education (1980–1983). This was conceived by Gareth who also took responsibility for leading the campaign to resource the study.*

By 1980 the furthest extension of the Robbins student number forecasts had been reached, and the latest publication from the Department of Education and Science had suggested a fall thereafter; the government was showing no interest in any follow-up inquiry. Persuaded by Gareth, the society took up the challenge, an extraordinarily ambitious undertaking for it to have contemplated. The study, funded by the Leverhulme Foundation with some contribution from the Gulbenkian Foundation, consisted of a series of seminars, each chaired by someone senior from outside higher education, with invited speakers who for a fee presented well-researched findings in the specialist topic of the seminar. The study extended over two and a half years and was concluded by a single policy meeting which made a wide ranging set of recommendations. Each seminar was the subject of a full report in the Times Higher Education Supplement and in book form in the name of the seminar convenor. The success of the programme lay in the seminars and their related publications, the product of what one American participant described as 'the rolling Leverhulme crap game', rather than in the final recommendations, because what it did was to open higher education policy issues to wider discussion and induct a range of participants into the practice of debating them. Peter Brooke, the Minister for Higher Education, called it 'probably the most systematic review of [UK] higher education policy by an organisation outside government that has ever been undertaken'.

The Leverhulme process of expert seminars showed Gareth at his best. A superb lecturer and teacher, his reputation also depended on his interventions from the audience in conferences, colloquia and seminars up and down the country and internationally. An accomplished debating agent provocateur, he was never happier than putting forward alternative and plausible arguments against those advanced by the speaker, and always with good humour, suggesting contrary points of view. He had the unique ability to turn a rather plodding address into a lively discussion bristling with further questions and counter propositions. He brought a sense of intellectual challenge which the higher education community will very much miss.

*Gareth was responsible for my invitation to a visiting position at the institute in 1999. One outcome was the MBA in Higher Education Management in 2002 of which we were Joint Directors and Paul Temple was a key member of the team (and a later Joint Director of the programme with David Watson). The MBA differentiated itself from MA programmes in higher education because it approached topics via a management perspective while retaining a strong scholarly approach. We wanted it to breathe some new life into the running of institutions and higher education systems in these difficult times. As a programme it flourished, with many of its participants going on to high-ranking positions in the system. Gareth brought to the programme just those characteristics of robust questioning of established *nostra* and the need for open discussion of issues that he brought to his academic life as a whole.*

The British and international higher education communities have lost a key scholar and communicator of ideas with a unique impact on research, teaching and policy in higher education.