

## Coalition of thinkers vow to fight marketisation of universities

*Shiv Malik*

Purpose of university is being 'grossly distorted by the attempt to create a market in higher education', says one CDBU founder



The Council for the Defence of British Universities' backers include Dame AS Byatt. One member accuses university leaders of being 'remarkably supine' in the face of government reforms.

Photograph: Marco Secchi/Corbis

Some of Britain's most high-profile public intellectuals have formed a coalition to defend universities against the erosion of academic freedom and the marketisation of higher education.

Lord Bragg, Alan Bennett, Sir David Attenborough and Richard Dawkins are among 65 writers, broadcasters and thinkers who have jointly founded the Council for the Defence of British Universities (CDBU), to be launched next week.

The group's manifesto, also backed by former poet laureate Sir Andrew Motion, Booker prize-winner Dame AS Byatt, playwright Michael Frayn and astronomer royal Lord Rees, claims the basis of a degree is under threat.

Writing in the Times Higher Education supplement, historian and former British Academy president Sir Keith Thomas said "the very purpose of the university" was being "grossly distorted by the attempt to create a market in higher education".

Students, he wrote were "regarded as 'consumers' and encouraged to invest in the degree course they think most likely to enhance their earning prospects".

Academics, he added, were now viewed as "producers, whose research is expected to focus on topics of commercial value and whose output is measured against a single scale and graded like sacks of wheat".

The organisation is expected to campaign for the abolition of government funding bodies and propose a move to fully independent grant councils free from political interference.

Last year, dozens of academics resigned from one such funding body, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), in a row over academic freedom when the "big society" was introduced as a research priority.

Thomas also took a swipe at "remarkably supine" university leaders who were only concerned about gaining "local advantage" from government reforms rather than opposing them. "Deep dissatisfaction pervades the university sector. Its primary cause is not the lack of adequate

funding, for it is appreciated that higher education is expensive and times are hard. Rather, it arises from the feeling that an understandable concern to improve the nation's economic performance, coupled with an ideological faith in the virtues of the market, has meant that the central values of the university are being sidelined or forgotten."

He said the task of the council was "not just to challenge a series of short-term political expedients: it must also combat a whole philosophy", adding: "British universities are a precious feature of our national life and enjoy a high international reputation. They should not be imperilled by misconceived government policies, however well-intentioned."

Writing in the same publication, Rees said morale among staff was being damaged. "I am lucky to have spent many years in one in the University of Cambridge. But even there, morale is falling," said the cosmologist and former head of the Royal Society.

"Coffee-time conversations are less about ideas and more about grants, the research excellence framework, job security and suchlike. Prospects of sustaining excellence will plummet if such concerns prey unduly on the minds of even the best young academics."

**Fonte: The Guardian , Inglaterra, 8 Nov. 2012, Internacional.**

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para fins educacionais.