

Research Perspectives on Students in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1945

Perspectivas de investigación sobre estudiantes en Gran Bretaña e Irlanda, 1800-1945

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Recibido: 01/02/2022

Aceptado: 09/05/2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20318/cian.2022.6995>

Abstract: Historians of Britain and Ireland have long been interested in universities and students. They have acknowledged the importance of these institutions and individuals within the history of elites, the history of the state, intellectual history, the history of science, of social movements and of politics and political thought. Yet, for many years much of this research has centred around higher education institutions themselves rather than the student body that they cater for. Following the expansion of the higher education sector and the growth of the student movement in the 1960s the quantity and quality of literature on British and Irish students, rather than the institutions that they studied at, has

Resumen: Los historiadores de Gran Bretaña e Irlanda se han interesado durante mucho tiempo en las universidades y los estudiantes. Han reconocido la importancia de estas instituciones e individuos dentro de la historia de las élites, la historia del Estado, la historia intelectual, la historia de la ciencia, de los movimientos sociales y de la política y el pensamiento político. Sin embargo, durante muchos años, gran parte de esta investigación se ha centrado en las propias instituciones de educación superior y no en el alumnado al que atienden. Tras la expansión del sector de la educación superior y el crecimiento del movimiento estudiantil en la década de 1960, la cantidad y la calidad de la literatura sobre

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grown substantially and has become a burgeoning historical field. This article surveys the development of this historiography and the key research perspectives on students in Britain and Ireland from 1800-1945, focusing on five thematic areas: student culture, student representation and politics, student life during war, students race and empire, and student women – to track the progress, development and connections between the different strands of this historiography over the past fifty years and to offer insights into potential avenues for further research.

Keywords: Great Britain, Ireland, students, universities, social history.

estudiantes británicos e irlandeses, en lugar de las instituciones en las que estudiaron, ha crecido sustancialmente y se ha convertido en un floreciente campo histórico. Este artículo analiza el desarrollo de esta historiografía y las perspectivas de investigación clave sobre los estudiantes en Gran Bretaña e Irlanda entre 1800 y 1945, centrándose en cinco áreas temáticas: cultura estudiantil, representación y política estudiantil, vida estudiantil durante la guerra, raza e imperio estudiantil y mujeres estudiantes, para rastrear el progreso, el desarrollo y las conexiones entre las diferentes corrientes de esta historiografía durante los últimos cincuenta años y ofrecer información sobre posibles vías para futuras investigaciones.

Palabras clave: Gran Bretaña, Irlanda, estudiantes, universidades, historia social.

Historians of Britain and Ireland have long been interested in universities and students. They have acknowledged the importance of these institutions and individuals within the history of elites, the history of the state, intellectual history, the history of science, of social movements and of politics and political thought. In the past, much of this research centred around higher education institutions, rather than the student body that they cater for.¹ Nonetheless, while students have not been the primary focus of such accounts, these institutional and university histories do offer interesting insights into the content of students' education, the changes in the curriculum, policies, structures and intentions of higher education institutions, and the context in which students in Britain and Ireland have been operating.

Moreover, since the growth of the student movement in the 1960s and the expansion of higher education in the United Kingdom (as associated with the Robbins Report of 1963 and the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992),² the quantity and quality of literature on British and Irish stu-

¹ For a comprehensive literature review of university history see Robert Anderson, "Writing University History in Great Britain, from the 1960s to the Present", *CIAN-Revista de Historia de las Universidades* 20, no. 1 (2017): 17-40; and Roy Lowe, "The Changing Role of the Academic Journal: The Coverage of Higher Education in *History of Education* as a Case Study, 1972-2011", *History of Education* 41, no. 1 (2012): 103-115 which offers useful insights into the separation of the 'history of the university' from the 'history of education'.

² The Robbins Report (1963) recommended that all colleges of advanced technology should be given the status of universities and that university places "should be available to all

dents, rather than the institutions that they studied at, has grown substantially. Although many outlets for such histories continue to focus on university history, or consider students within the broader context of the history of education,³ various research groups and structures have emerged that directly focus on students.⁴ The development of the field of student history has also seen a growing emphasis on cultural themes and a greater integration of transnational perspectives within the literature. Thus far, a large proportion of these works of student history have concentrated on the post-war period, analysing the impact of the expansion of the higher education sector and the global student movement of the late 1960s on students in Britain and Ireland.⁵ This article moves away from this focus on the post-war period and instead highlights the research that has been conducted on the earlier history of students and student life. It seeks to demonstrate the significance of this period in the evolution and expansion of the higher education sector, including the changing ways that students interacted with their institutions, each other and the local populace; the importance of the entry of women into the British higher education system; and the impact that events such as the First World War and the dissolution of the British Empire had on students and student life. It will do so by examining the major research perspectives on students in Britain and Ireland from 1800 to 1945, focusing on five thematic areas: student culture; student representation and politics; student life during war;

who were qualified for them by ability and attainment". The Further and Higher Education Act (1992) also expanded the definition of 'university' with polytechnics now also being incorporated under this definition.

³ For example, see established journals such as *CIAN*, *History of Universities*, *History of Education* and *Paedagogica Historica*.

⁴ For example, in 2022, the centenary of the National Union of Students UK has given rise to various events, conferences and workshops on the history of students, the student movement and student life in the UK, such as the 'Researching Student Histories' workshop series led by academics from Portsmouth, UCL, Northumbria, and Swansea. Additionally, the 'Generation UCL' project explores two centuries of student life in London to mark UCL's bicentenary in 2026. These anniversary projects have then been complemented by the work of a growing number of PhD candidates whose funded research focuses on British student history and student life in Britain, such as Carlus Hudson (Portsmouth), Sarah Louise Webster (Manchester) and Uduma Ogenyi (SOAS/UCL).

⁵ See e.g.: Caroline M. Hoeffler, *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Esmée Sinéad Hanna, *Student Power!: The Radical Days of the English Universities* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013); Nick Thomas, "Challenging the Myths of the 1960s: The Case of Student Protest in Britain", *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 3 (2002): 277-97; and Jodi Burkett (ed.), *Students in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

students, race and empire; and student women. A consideration of these research angles will help to illustrate how the history of student life in Britain and Ireland has been written more broadly, while also drawing attention to current gaps in the literature and potential avenues for further research.

1. 'Student Culture' in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1945

Alongside offering overviews of the higher education sector in the Britain and Ireland, many university and institutional histories highlight the national and regional dynamics at play across the sector, emphasising the important role that the university system has played in sustaining distinct cultural identities in England, Scotland, Ireland and, by the nineteenth century, Wales. Thus, university culture interacts with national and regional cultures in these studies. For example, much of the literature on Scottish university history treats the Scottish institutions as separate and distinct entities, distinguishable from their English counterparts and praised for their unique national character, whilst the Irish and Welsh institutions, on the other hand, have received considerably less scholarly attention.⁶

In the English context, university histories have tended to follow a conventional chronology focusing firstly on the universities of Oxford and Cambridge ('Oxbridge'), followed by the development of the London universities and then what Matthew Andrews has termed as the «university moment» with the establishment of many of the new civic universities in the late nineteenth century.⁷ These histories tend to use this historical delineation to distinguish between student cultures and the student environment in Oxbridge and the 'other' universities in England. This distinction is shown in Anderson's discussion of the changing connections between universities, public schools and private schools over the course of the nineteenth century and the impact that the development of the new civic universities had on the stu-

⁶ Robert Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland: Schools and Universities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Jennifer Carter and Donald Withrington (eds), *Scottish Universities: Distinctiveness and Diversity* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1992); Catriona M.M. Macdonald, "'To Form Citizens': Scottish Students, Governance and Politics, 1884-1948", *History of Education* 38, no. 3 (2009): 383-402; and George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh: Edingburgh University Press, 1961: reprint 2013) and the extensive literature linked to the fiftieth anniversary of this book.

⁷ Matthew Andrews, *Universities in the Age of Reform, 1800-1870: Durham, London and King's College* (Cham: Palgrave, 2018), 2.

dent body. He suggests that «Oxford and Cambridge continued to be national universities producing a rejuvenated elite of a traditional kind and drawing mainly on the public schools... while the new civic universities were angled to local demands and catered for a rather lower strata of the middle class».⁸

A number of academics have sought to highlight the impact that these changing regional and class dynamics had on an overall 'student culture' across Britain and Ireland over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially as a more diverse range of students began to enter higher education.⁹ In considering the demographics of the student body, including their local and social backgrounds, these institutional and university history-based accounts offer important insights into the dynamics that allowed student cultures to develop and thrive. For example, in Scotland, the demographics of the student population influenced the specific cultures that developed at the ancient Scottish universities: «As late as 1934-1935 only 3.5% of Glasgow University students, 13.9% of Edinburgh University students and 24% of St Andrews University students lived in halls», with the majority of students living at home with their parents in the local community and commuting into university.¹⁰ As a result, students at these institutions were not as constrained by stereotypical notions of *loco parentis* seen in the ancient universities in England at this time. Instead, with Scottish universities drawing the majority of their students from the local area, students at these institutions retained their connections to their family and friends, allowing more locally rooted student cultures to flourish.¹¹ In a similar vein, Laura Kelly has considered the unique national dynamics at play in the Irish context, highlighting the importance of class and religious affiliations for students at Irish institutions across the nineteenth and twentieth

⁸ R.D. Anderson, *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 192-8.

⁹ For example, Anderson (*European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914*, 203) has suggested that "In 1908-9, three-quarters or more of those in the provincial universities, and two-thirds at University College London, came from within thirty miles" and examines the impact of these changing student demographics had on both student and university life. William Whyte, *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) traces the long history of the civic universities and offers insights into the relationship between class and education and how the architecture and design of university campuses has influenced and shaped student life.

¹⁰ Michael S. Moss, John Forbes Munro & Richard Hughes Trainor, *University, City and State: The University of Glasgow since 1870* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 163.

¹¹ For more on the distinctive nature of the Scottish system see: Macdonald, "To Form Citizens".

centuries.¹² Ultimately, then by considering the overarching socio-economic and geographic backgrounds of students at individual institutions, these histories can help us to understand both the make-up of the student body and to uncover potential reasons for the development of distinct student cultures across Britain and Ireland.

However, in order to understand students and student history more thoroughly, a more in-depth analysis of their backgrounds and their circumstances is necessary. In his 1998 assessment of patterns of student sociability across the ancient English universities, the US East Coast universities and German universities, H.S. Jones noted a «marked contrast between the paucity of comparative studies of student social life and the sophisticated comparative research that has been undertaken on students' social origins and destinations», arguing that historians have to study «not just the formal curriculum but also...what Jarausch has termed 'the hidden curriculum', and... its role in defining student identity».¹³ Following on from this, as the study of *student* history has grown, the more statistical, broad-stroke approaches seen in university and institutional histories have been enhanced by specifically *student*-focused histories examining these different manifestations of student life and student culture across Britain and Ireland, as discussed in this article.

Whereas in the period before the nineteenth century, religion played a dominant role in university life – structuring access to education in England and Ireland, as well as the courses and societies that were formed at these institutions – the founding of University College London (UCL) as a secular university in the 1820s opened up higher education in England to students from range of religious backgrounds. Although religion continued to play an important role in many students' lives, especially in terms of religious groups and societies formed on campuses, from the middle of the nineteenth century it was no longer seen as an impediment to people's access to education.

In his work on student character in the British university, James Arthur outlines how the progressive reforms enacted at Oxford and Cambridge over the course of the mid-late 1800s (such as the abolition of religious tests for entry) provided opportunities for these universities to shape their stu-

¹² Laura Kelly, *Irish Medical Education and Student Culture, c.1850-1950* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

¹³ H.S. Jones, "Student Life and Sociability, 1860-1930: Comparative Reflection", *History of Universities* 14, no. 1 (1998): 225 referencing Konrad Jarausch, "Liberal Education as Illiberal Socialization: The Case of Students in Imperial Germany", *Journal of Modern History* 1 (1978): 629; and R.D. Anderson, *The Student Community at Aberdeen 1860-1939* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988).

dents' characters, moving beyond their clerical image and allowing instead for a greater emphasis on their students' moral and personal development.¹⁴ Arthur argues that «universities can be a powerful influence in shaping individuals' relationships with each other and their communities and they have many opportunities to develop basic human qualities for the benefit of both their students and society».¹⁵ Reba N. Soffer and Samuel J. M. M. Alberti have supported this assessment, with Soffer arguing that «the student society developed as one of the most effective new educational traditions... [where]...young men learned the skills of debate, discussion, and reflection which inspired them to emerge as national figures», and with both authors highlighting the important role that universities, and student societies in particular, played in the development of the English elite.¹⁶ A number of studies have also explored the internal dynamics and the impact of these debating societies across the UK, considering their role in student life as well as the future careers of the students who joined these societies.¹⁷ Ultimately, then, as the study of social history more generally has expanded, so too have the insights into student culture and the particular kinds of societies and activities that students were engaging in. This included sporting clubs and societies organised around the geographical origin of students (as discussed later in this article), as well as subject-based societies, which helped to unite students of the same discipline from across the university, especially as the number of students and the range of courses taught at higher education institutions grew across this period.

¹⁴ James Arthur, "Student Character in the British University", in James Arthur and Karen Bohlin (eds), *Citizenship and Higher Education: The Role of Universities in Communities and Society* (London: Routledge, 2005), 8.

¹⁵ Arthur, "Student", 7.

¹⁶ Reba N. Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 167-8; and Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, "Civic Cultures and Civic Colleges in Victorian England," in Martin Daunton (ed.), *The Organization of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 337-356.

¹⁷ Arthur Engel, "Political Education in Oxford 1823-1914", *History of Education Quarterly* 20:3 (1980): 257-80; Karstel Plöger, "The Hanover Club, Oxford (1911-13): Student Paradiplomacy and the Coming of the Great War", *German History* 27 no. 2 (2009): 196-214; Sarah Wiggins, "Gendered Spaces and Political Identity: Debating Societies in English Women's Colleges, 1890-1914", *Women's History Review* 18, no. 5 (2009): 737-52; Taru Haapala, "That in the Opinion of this House": *The Parliamentary Culture of Debate in the Nineteenth-Century Cambridge and Oxford Union Societies* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University Press, 2012); and Bertie Dockerill, "Forgotten Voices": The Debating Societies of Durham and Liverpool, 1900-1939", in Jodi Burkett (ed.), *Students in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 101-28.

Another important manifestation of the link between universities, students and wider society that has received an increasing amount of interest in recent years focuses on volunteering and campaigning as a major aspect of student life in Britain. For example, a number of studies have looked into the history of Toynbee Hall to consider the role that university-affiliated institutions played in the settlement movement in Britain.¹⁸ More recently, Kate Bradley's study on charities and the working classes in London over the course of the twentieth century has offered detailed insights into the relationships between charities, the welfare state and the student body by looking at the university settlements which brought young graduates to deprived areas to conduct social work.¹⁹ In addition to this, as popular interest and understandings of welfare and mental health continue to rise, Keith Vernon and Sarah Crook have conducted important preliminary research into student health and welfare over the course of the twentieth century, examining the arguments and practicalities surrounding the development and expansion of provisions, services and amenities for students, and the involvement of students themselves in campaigning for these changes.²⁰ Georgina Brewis's work on student solidarity and campaigning across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries offers a broader context for such developments.²¹ Brewis demonstrates how student social service and social action in the period before 1945 acted as a unifying force, bringing students from diffe-

¹⁸ Emily K. Abel, "Toynbee Hall, 1884-1914", *Social Service Review* 53, no. 4 (1979): 606-32; Asa Briggs & Anne Macartney, *Toynbee Hall: The First Hundred Years* (London: Routledge, 1984); R.A. Evans, "The University and the City: The Educational Eork of Toynbee Hall, 1884-1914", *History of Education* 11 no. 2 (1982): 113-25; and Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Victorian Philanthropy: The Case of Toynbee Hall", *The American Scholar* 59 no. 3 (1990): 373-84.

¹⁹ Kate Bradley, *Poverty, Philanthropy and the State: Charities and the Working Classes in London, 1918-1979* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Keith Vernon, "The Health and Welfare of University Students in Britain, 1920-1939", *History of Education* 37 no. 2 (2008): 227-52; and Sarah Crook, "Historicising the "Crisis" in Undergraduate Mental Health: British Universities and Student Mental Illness, 1944-1968", *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 75 no. 2 (2020): 193-220.

²¹ Georgina Brewis, "Student Solidarity across Borders: Students, Universities and Refugee Crises Past and Present", *History & Policy Paper* (2015); Georgina Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Georgina Brewis, "Education for Service; Social Service and Higher Education in India and Britain, 1905-1919", *History of Education Review* 42 no. 2 (2013): 119-36; Georgina Brewis, "From Service to Action? Students, Volunteering and Community Action in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain", *British Journal of Educational Studies* 58 no. 4 (2010): 439-49; and Georgina Brewis and Sjur Bergan, "Refugees and Higher Education", in Pedro Nuno Teixeira and Jung Cheol Shin (eds), *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016).

rent organisations together to create a «student popular front». She argues that endeavours such as aid for refugees and former enemies from the First World War and student support for the unemployed in the 1930s cut across religious and political affiliations in the student body and helped to build a student movement in England and Wales.

Beyond these works on learned societies and political and social campaigning, both R.D. Anderson and H.S. Jones have noted the growing prominence of sport as a specific form of extra-curricular activity for students across England and Scotland over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²² Sonja Levsen too has delved into the dynamics of these sporting cultures, arguing that «the cult of athleticism was dominant around 1900, and its ideology of manliness was one of the most important aspects of the undergraduates' group identity».²³ Tracking this phenomenon over the early twentieth century, Levsen highlights the impact that the influx of older students and women on campuses had in the post-war era and considers the consequences of these changing dynamics on the masculine-dominated cultures of British universities.

These questions of masculinity are also discussed by Paul R. Deslandes, who argues that there were four competing male undergraduate personae at Oxbridge – the aesthete, the athlete, the reading man, and the aristocratic blood, recognisable by the way they furnished their rooms, the organisations they joined and supported, and the networks of sociability they constructed. Deslandes has unearthed the impact of these different forms of undergraduate masculinity in relation to class, race, and national and sexual identities.²⁴ Ross Brooks has also explored this idea of masculine university cultures, marking Oxford and Cambridge as «unique queer localities in Britain and beyond» and arguing that these universities «existed as collections of cloistered communities that revered intimate same-sex (overwhelmingly male) bonding as a superior means of elite social organization and mode of nurturing a lifelong tribal identity».²⁵ Heather Ellis too has provided an

²² R.D. Anderson, "Sport in the Scottish Universities, 1860-1939", *International Journal of the History of Sport* 4 (1987): 177-88; and H.S. Jones, "Oxford Athleticism, 1850-1914: A Re-appraisal", *History of Education* 24, no. 4 (1995): 305-17.

²³ Sonja Levsen, "Constructing Elite Identities: University Students, Military Masculinity and the Consequences of the Great War in Britain and Germany", *Past and Present* 198 (2008): 169.

²⁴ Paul R. Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

²⁵ Ross Brooks, "Beyond Brideshead: The Male Homoerotics of 1930s Oxford", *Journal of British Studies* 59, no. 4 (2020): 822 and 856.

in-depth analysis of the connections between gender and scientific study in Britain across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, offering insights into the role of masculine self-fashioning within the scientific community and highlighting how this played into the construction of the public image of a male scientist.²⁶ As such, student, university and intellectual history can be seen to be intersecting closely with the growing fields of gender and queer history, with students' private lives and relationships receiving increasing attention and due consideration within the literature, and the complexity and varied nature of the student experience being more openly recognised.

Whereas a considerable amount of work has been conducted on student life and the distinct student cultures at Oxbridge and in Scotland, more work is necessary to uncover the different national dynamics at play in Wales and Ireland and how the specific national circumstances in these countries has impacted the higher education sector and student life in these areas. In addition, further consideration of the specific regional dynamics at play across the UK and Ireland is required to move beyond the homogenous, stereotypical representations of students and student history that are currently available. Student life and student cultures varied considerably across the UK and Ireland in the pre-war period, dependent on the courses and teachers working at these institutions, the composition of the student body and their relations to the local community. It is important that as the field of student history grows, the rich and diverse history of students from across the higher education sector and at institutions across the whole of the UK and Ireland are incorporated into these histories.

2. Student Representation and Politics

As many of these unique student cultures and student societies were developing across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this period also saw the flourishing of a distinct kind of student politics and the growth of student unionisation, as students increasingly saw themselves as a powerful and united body, and began to push for increased representation. Although fleetingly mentioned in earlier university histories, Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson's influential work on student politics and representation in Britain offered the first concerted overview of the development of the 'student estate' – tracking its development firstly in Scotland from the 1820s

²⁶ Heather Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain, 1831-1918* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017).

and then southward throughout the nineteenth century, to consider both the influence of universities on students, as well as the influence of students on the universities.²⁷ This work has then been supplemented by Joseph S. Meisel who has charted the development and growth, and then the removal, of parliamentary representation of the universities in Britain and Ireland up until 1950, with a particular emphasis on the efforts of graduates to obtain and retain representation.²⁸ A similar effort has been made by Catriona Macdonald, who has focused specifically on the unique circumstances in Scotland (namely the development of Student Representative Councils, the role of rectors and the enfranchisement of students in Scotland throughout the late nineteenth century) to uncover the multiple and competing forms of citizenship that students in Scotland faced and the impact that this had on the status of the student in civil life in Scotland.²⁹

Beyond these texts on student parliamentary representation, more recent research accords greater attention to student unions and the student movement. Whereas in the past, such histories were confined to the post-war era, with a particular focus on the development of the student movement in the late 1960s, there has recently been an increasing interest in the earlier formation of these groups and structures. There is a general agreement within the literature that the development of these groups and structures took a very different form in the UK and Ireland in comparison to what was seen elsewhere on the European continent and in the United States. For example, in their assessment of student movements across Europe, Lieve Gevers and Louis Vos suggested that until the 1870s «there was no student movement [in the UK] such as the one that took place on the Continent». They argue that this “«was primarily due to the university system of Oxford and Cambridge, which...held on to a classical and purely scientific ‘liberal education’ [which...] spared Great Britain ‘the overproduction of an underpaid and underemployed university graduate class which helped fuel Continental revolutionary movements’».”³⁰

²⁷ Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson, *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1970).

²⁸ Joseph S. Meisel, “A Magnificent Fungus on the Political Tree: The Growth of University Representation in the United Kingdom, 1832-1950”, *History of Universities* 23 (2008): 110.

²⁹ Macdonald, “To Form Citizens”.

³⁰ Lieve Gevers & Louis Vos, “Student Movements”, in Walter Rüegg (ed.), *A History of the University in Europe: Volume III: Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800-1945)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 306, referencing Michael Sanderson, *The Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1975), 4.

In terms of national representation and the unionisation of students, the defining feature of the pre-war era was the founding of the National Union of Students (NUS) in 1922, which added an inter-university dimension to student politics and organisations within the UK. As Ashby and Anderson have argued, the formation of the NUS effectively changed the idea of the student estate from rhetoric to a reality, uniting British students into a lobbying body and creating a «corporate student conscience», with NUS-organised congresses and events reaching attendances of more than a thousand students (a considerably large number given the relatively small student population in the UK at this time).³¹

Although much of the work focusing on the history of the NUS looks at the post-war period, several key texts analyse the development of the NUS, often written by those with direct experience of the student movement itself. For example, Brian Simon (former President of NUS) has written on the student movement in England and Wales during the 1930s.³² He argues that the NUS's inclusion of training colleges and technical colleges into full membership was central in bolstering the legitimacy and power of the NUS, and that this strength was signalled by the fact that representatives of the NUS then had regular consultation with members of parliament, government departments, the Association of University Teachers, the National Union of Teachers, and the University Grants Committee. As such, he argues that by the 1930s «a continuous politicization was the order of the day» and, whilst acknowledging the different levels of commitment within institutions and by individuals, he suggests «that there was a general awakening of a political and social consciousness [in the 1930s] cannot be doubted. It was this that led to a shift of direction, and indeed to the transformation of the NUS as the body representative of students in general».³³

However, both Simon and Ashby and Anderson's work is entrenched in the thinking and perceptions of the period in which they were writing, arguing that success in 'representative politics' is obtained predominantly through political networks and activities, namely close connections with the governments and unions of the day. In contrast, the modern-day student mo-

³¹ Ashby & Anderson, *The Rise of the Student Estate*.

³² Brian Simon, "The Student Movement in England and Wales during the 1930s", *History of Education* 16 no. 3 (1987): 201.

³³ Simon, "The Student Movement": 195-6; and for more information on the changing political landscape on campuses in the inter-war years, and especially the development of anti-war sentiment see: Martin Ceadel, "The 'King and Country' Debate, 1933: Student Politics, Pacifism and the Dictators", *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 2 (1979): 397-422.

vement, including the NUS itself, now focuses itself on more broadly-defined goals, centralising political and social activism and social outreach within their work. As the history of the NUS and the student movement in the UK and Ireland grows, more research should be conducted into the longer history of these different forms of political and social activism, to help uncover the ways that student activism and support has manifested itself across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As a first step in this process, former NUS official Mike Day has offered important assessments of the development of the NUS and its role as a representative body, again highlighting its limitations, but also its power in the pre-war era, with every university student union in England and Wales in membership by 1924.³⁴ Furthermore, the work of Jodi Burkett and Daniel Laqua has helped to establish the important international and transnational connections that were established between British student unions, the NUS and international student organisations across the twentieth century.³⁵

In the specific cases of Scotland, Wales and Ireland, much less has been written to date on the development of the student movement in these regions and its specific local manifestations. It was not until 1944 that the NUS constitution was amended to include student organisations from Northern Ireland and the formal agreement for the formation of NUS-USI (linking the student unions of the UK and Ireland) was not reached until 1972. Furthermore, the Scottish Union of Students remained distinct from the NUS until 1972, while NUS Wales was established as a separate entity to NUS in 1974. In a recent edited volume on *Students in Twentieth Century Britain and Ireland*, Mike Day, Jeremy Harvey and Steven Conlon have offered preliminary assessments of these connections between the NUS and these national student organisations and have focused on the question of devolution in the sphere of student politics and representation.³⁶ However, more work is

³⁴ Mike Day, "Dubious Causes of No Interest to Students? The Development of National Union of Students in the United Kingdom", *European Journal of Higher Education* 2 no. 1 (2012): 34-5; and Mike Day, *National Union of Students, 1922-2012* (London: Regal Press Limited, 2012).

³⁵ Jodi Burkett, instead of "The National Union of Students and Transnational Solidarity, 1958-1968", *European Review of History* 21 no. 4 (2014): 539-55; and Daniel Laqua, 'Activism in the 'Students' League of Nations': International Student Politics and the Confédération Internationale des Étudiants, 1919-1939', *The English Historical Review* 132 no. 556 (2017): 605-37.

³⁶ Jeremy Harvey, "Investigating the Relationship Between Students and NUS Wales", in Jodi Burkett (ed.), *Students in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 155-74; Mike Day, "The National Union of Students and Devolution", in Jodi Burkett (ed.), *Students in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 129-54; Steven Conlon, "Rebels and Rustici: Students and the Formation of the Irish State", in

undeniably necessary to uncover the specific regional variations in student representation and politics and to expose the local histories of these unions and the wider student movements across the UK and Ireland. In 2022, the commemorative events and research activities surrounding the centenary of the NUS's foundation have offered opportunities to reveal these more neglected aspects of student history.

3. *The Great War and Transformations in Student Life*

In 1917, H.A.L Fisher described the First World War as a «battle of brains» with the mobilisation of knowledge playing a key role throughout the conflict.³⁷ More recently R.D. Anderson has suggested that «few institutions were as directly affected by the war as universities, as most male students were recalled to their units or volunteered for service».³⁸ Undeniably, war and conflict, and especially the First and Second World Wars, were extremely disruptive moments for universities and students alike, and had major implications for the make-up of the student body and the nature of student life in this period. To date, and especially in the period surrounding the centenary of the conflict, a considerable body of work has examined the impact of the First World War on universities, including the changing policies and consequent development of the higher education sector as a result of the war.³⁹ For example, Tomás Irish has offered insights into the changing student population as a result of the war, namely the reduction in the number of students studying during the First World War, as well as the impact of the disproportionately high number of student deaths (as many university men were mobilised as

Jodi Burkett (ed.), *Students in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 249-75; and Day, *National Union of Students, 1922-2012*.

³⁷ Preface to *British Universities and the Great War*, p.xiii referenced in Tomás Irish, *The University at War, 1914-25: Britain, France, and the United States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³⁸ Anderson, *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914*, 292. For more on student volunteers across Europe, see Alexander Watson, "Voluntary Enlistment in the Great War: a European Phenomenon?", in Christine G. Krüger and Sonja Levsen (eds), *War Volunteering in Modern Times. From the French Revolution to the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 163-88.

³⁹ See e.g. Irish, *The University at War*; John Taylor, *The Impact of the First World War on British Universities: Emerging from the Shadows* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); and Marie-Eve Chagnon and Tomás Irish (eds), *The Academic World in the Era of the Great War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

junior officers in the army).⁴⁰ His work notes the conflict's impact on student life, as student societies and groups ceased meeting or struggled to continue in the war era; thus the cessation of societal and sporting life in universities served as «a visual reminder of the rupture in the wider life of a university».⁴¹ However, Irish's work largely focuses on those who remained at the universities (mostly academics) during the war years and their interactions with the outside world, examining how university structures and academic practices changed over the course of the war years, rather than focusing on students themselves during this time.

In his history of British universities during and after the First World War, John Taylor closely examines the student experience of the war, including the changes in the numbers of students studying, the courses they were taking, the gender balance across courses during the war era, and the impact that volunteering for service had on people's scholarships and studying progression.⁴² He also highlights the increasing connections between universities and local communities over the course of the war, as students' work in munitions and medical support was often coordinated by the universities, hence «the wider population would have become more aware of University life; barriers, both real and imagined, and applied both ways, would have been eroded by the unavoidable contacts and shared working arrangements necessitated by the war».⁴³

The composition of the student body and the nature of higher education teaching was also greatly changed in this period by the influx of international students, namely Americans, studying in Britain in this period. Irish estimates that by April 1919 «almost 2,000 [American students] enrolled in British institutions, of which 200 each registered at Oxford and Cambridge, over 700 at the institutions of the University of London, and an additional 200 each at Glasgow and Edinburgh, and significant numbers at the universities of Birmingham, Sheffield, Bristol, and Manchester».⁴⁴ Thomas Weber and Tara Windsor's research into student agency and Anglo-German exchanges, as well as Heather Ellis and Ulrike Kirchberger's edited collection on Anglo-German scholarly networks in the long nineteenth century, offer

⁴⁰ Irish, *The University at War*, 73.

⁴¹ Irish, *The University at War*, 63.

⁴² John Taylor, *The Impact of the First World War on British Universities*.

⁴³ Taylor, *The Impact of the First World War on British Universities*, 264-6; for more on the connections between university staff and students and their local communities in the interwar years, see John Field, "Service Learning in Britain between the Wars: University Students and Unemployed Camps", *History of Education* 41 no. 2 (2012): 195-212.

⁴⁴ Irish, *The University at War*, 152.

interesting insights into the dynamics at play in university settings and the implications of these exchanges on the student body.⁴⁵ Windsor, for example, highlights how many students who had previously studied abroad in Britain or Germany joined up and fought against their former host country on the battlefields and how Anglo-German exchanges became particularly important zones of cooperation in the post-war era. Her work looks at student agency and the role that students themselves played in establishing, enacting and experiencing exchanges between Britain and Germany, offering a bottom-up perspective which has in many ways been obscured or neglected by the top-down, university-focused approach of much of the previous research. As such, Windsor's research suggests that «student agency was not merely a rhetorical device but also an active and central component of post-war cultural exchange which had both immediate and longer-term repercussions for international relations in the inter-war period».⁴⁶

In recent years, this more student-focused research has been expanded to look closely at the impact of the war experience on student life and student opportunities. For example, several connected projects led by Daniel Laqua and Georgina Brewis have examined the influx of ex-service students at British universities after the Great War.⁴⁷ This work has drawn particular attention to the government-funded Scheme for the Higher Education of Ex-Service Students, which provided grants to nearly 28,000 students between 1918 and 1923 and marked «a major development in state support for individual students».⁴⁸ Rather than tracing institutional developments in the post-war era, this research demonstrates «how government policy and changes in the student body related to one another» in England and Wales and examines the features of the ex-service cohort and their contributions to student life.

⁴⁵ Tara Windsor, "The Domain of the Young as the Generation of the Future': Student Agency and Anglo-German Exchange After the Great War", in Chagnon and Irish (eds), *The Academic World in the Era of the Great War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 164; Thomas Weber, *Our Friend "The Enemy": Elite Education in Britain and Germany before World War I* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Heather Ellis & Ulrike Kirchberger (eds), *Anglo-German Scholarly Networks in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

⁴⁶ Windsor, "The Domain of the Young", 181.

⁴⁷ Georgina Brewis, Sarah Hellowell and Daniel Laqua, "Rebuilding the Universities after the Great War: Ex-Service Students, Scholarships and the Reconstruction of Student Life in England", *History* 105 no. 364 (2020): 82-106; Lara Green, Daniel Laqua and Georgina Brewis, "Student Funding and University Access after the Great War: The Scheme for the Higher Education of Ex-Servicemen at Aberystwyth, Liverpool, and Oxford", *British Journal of Educational Studies* 68 no. 5 (2020): 589-609.

⁴⁸ Brewis, Hellowell and Laqua, "Rebuilding the Universities": 82.

In the Irish context, Tomás Irish has delved into the impact of both the First World War and the Easter Rising on Trinity College Dublin from an institutional viewpoint in terms of the simultaneous experience of war and revolution.⁴⁹ In particular, he examines the political and social repercussions of the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 on the university, arguing that «many members of its community still looked to the old regime rather than the new one, and the symbols of Britain – the Union Flag and the singing of “God Save the King” – were still prominent, especially on Armistice Day when the university stopped to remember its 471 war dead.»⁵⁰ According to Irish, «this was another way in which the university became distanced from the new state, as for the latter the First World War was not part of the narrative of Irish independence.»⁵¹ Thus, competing national stories have important roles to play, both in institutional histories, but also in student histories, given the implications of these national circumstances on the student body. Again, then, the history of student life during and after the First World War could be complemented by further national and regional studies into the impact of the war on students across the UK and Ireland, in particular focusing on the impact of the war in Scotland, Wales, Ireland and the North of England.

Interestingly, this level of detailed analysis of student numbers and student life in Britain and Ireland during the Second World War has not been conducted by historians yet, despite the traumatic and disruptive nature of this conflict too and the interesting comparison point given that Ireland had gained its independence by this time and remained neutral during the war. Despite the extensive post-war reforms of the British higher education system, comparatively little has been written on the experience of the war on universities and students that brought these changes about. This too offers opportunities for future research, perhaps in a comparative sense with what we know about the student experience of the First World War, or as part of a *longue durée* history of universities and students, to offer more concrete analyses into the kinds of changes, continuities and connections that were formed across this period.

⁴⁹ Tomás Irish, “Trinity College Dublin: An Imperial University in War and Revolution, 1914-1921”, in Chagnon and Irish (eds), *The Academic World in the Era of the Great War*, 119-39; and Tomás Irish, *Trinity in War and Revolution 1912-23* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy Press, 2015).

⁵⁰ Irish, “Trinity College Dublin”, 133.

⁵¹ Irish, “Trinity College Dublin”, 133.

4. *Students, Empire and Race*

Whereas a considerable amount of academic research has explored the impact of the First World War on students and student life, thus far there has been a dearth of studies looking at the role of other conflicts that British and Irish citizens were embroiled in over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the colonial wars and the Second World War. However, scholars have shown a particular interest in the global and transnational connections that were fostered in university settings, looking increasingly at the impact and intersections of race and empire in student life in Britain.

Perhaps the most prominent assessment of the connections between the British Empire and higher education in the UK so far is Tamson Pietsch's *Empire of Scholars*.⁵² In this book, Pietsch closely examines the networks that were established in the age of Victorian globalisation, linking the colonial universities of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa with the imperial metropole, arguing that the links formed through libraries, scholarships, academic trafficking and appointment practices between these institutions formed an interconnected 'British academic world'. However, her work focuses predominantly on the impact of these connections on scholars and universities within the imperial system, rather than the impact that these connections and programmes had on the students studying in Britain themselves.

This rather institution-centric focus can also be seen in the work that has been carried out so far on British universities and their historical links to slavers and the slave trade. For example, Nicholas Draper has usefully examined British universities' ability to (or failure to) successfully deal with their own past in relation to the slave trade; however, he focuses his attention mostly on the role of institutional links and faculty members, rather than analysing the direct experience or involvement of students in this history.⁵³ Nevertheless, Draper does briefly note student involvement in this history, re-

⁵² Tamson Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); this has also been supported by her detailed analysis of the role of travelling scholarships in the imperial vision at the turn of the century, "Many Rhodes: Travelling Scholarships and Imperial Citizenship in the British Academic World, 1880-1940", *History of Education* 40, no. 6 (2011): 723-39.

⁵³ Nicholas Draper, "British Universities and Caribbean Slavery", in Jill Pellew and Lawrence Goldman (eds), *Dethroning Historical Reputations: Universities, Museums and the Commemoration of Benefactors* (London: University of London Press, 2019), 93-106.

marking that he has identified over 400 slave-owners matriculating at Oxford or Cambridge in the period from 1763 to 1834.⁵⁴ Although Draper is only able to offer a statistic, rather than a concerted assessment of the role and impact of these students, this research offers distinct possibilities for future work on the status of undergraduates within these histories and highlights the myriad of ways that individuals can contribute to these complicated histories – moving our assessments away from large-scale endowments towards a more intricate understanding of the implications of fees and individuals within university settings. Further research into these stories and dynamics across the UK would supplement the work being done at institutions such as the University of Glasgow, where the Historical Slavery initiative examines the university's financial gain from slavery-related wealth.⁵⁵

Additionally, several projects in recent years have considered the lives of overseas students in Britain, especially those with links to the Empire, and how their experiences of colonialism and racism has impacted them as students. Although there was a major rise in the number of overseas students in the UK in the period following the Second World War, there were still between 5,000 and 6,000 overseas students in the UK in the 1930s, approximately 1,400 of whom came from India and 400-500 of whom came from the rest of the colonial empire.⁵⁶ Where the links between imperialism and the British universities have been explored by several researchers, including Hilary Perraton and John D. Hargreaves, the more specific implications and the impact of these connections on the lives of students, rather than the institutions they studied at, has also become a growing academic sub-field.⁵⁷ For example, Sara Legrandjacques's work examines the international experiences of students from British India and French Indochina at the turn of the

⁵⁴ Draper, "British Universities and Caribbean Slavery", 105.

⁵⁵ For more on this initiative, see <https://www.gla.ac.uk/explore/historicallslaveryinitiative/> (accessed 16/01/2022) and Stephen Mullen and Simon Newman, *Slavery, Abolition and the University of Glasgow: Report and Recommendations of the University of Glasgow History of Slavery Steering Committee* (September 2018) available at: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_607547_smxx.pdf <accessed 16/01/2022>.

⁵⁶ Philip Garigue, "The West African Students' Union: A Study in Culture Contact", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 23, 1 (1953): 55-69.

⁵⁷ Hilary Perraton, *A History of Foreign Students in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Hilary Perraton, "Children of the Gorgeous East: Indian Students and the British Empire", in *International Students 1860-2010: Policy and Practice Round the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 139-67; and John D. Hargreaves, *Academe and Empire: Some Overseas Connections of Aberdeen University, 1860-1970* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1994).

twentieth century.⁵⁸ A.J. Stockwell also traces the history of colonial students in Britain and considers the impact that the end of empire, as well as the marketisation of the higher education sector and the reclassification of colonial subjects to overseas students (and thus fee payers), had on students' relationships to Britain and to their own individual identities.⁵⁹

This has been supported by the work of James Cantres and Sumita Mukherjee, who have delved into the role that Western education, and especially the racialisation of Indian students experiences at universities in England, played in the development of Indian nationalism in the early twentieth century.⁶⁰ Mukherjee argues that the experience of the men and women from India who studied at higher education institutions in the UK and then returned back to India invariably fostered not a sense of imperial loyalty, but rather imperial alienation, and compares this experience to those of students who studies in Britain on travelling scholarships.⁶¹

Similar assessments of the impact of the British higher education system on overseas students have also been carried out in relation to African students in the UK. For example, as early as 1987, Rich Paul examined the growth of black student politics in Britain, looking back to the beginning of the twentieth century and then assessing the impact of the two world wars on student identity.⁶² More recently, a considerable amount of research has been conducted into West African students and their experiences in the UK. This has been led by Hakim Adi who has produced a number of books and essays looking at the experiences of West African students in Britain over the first half of the twentieth century and the impact and influence of Pan-Africanist ideas and nationalist movements in the radical politics of these students.⁶³ In particular, he uncovers the multiple examples of racism and

⁵⁸ Sara Legrandjacques, "Global Students? The International Mobility and Identity of Students from Colonial India and Indochina, 1880s-1945", *Global Histories* 4, no. 2 (2018): 46-63.

⁵⁹ A.J. Stockwell "Leaders, Dissidents and the Disappointed: Colonial Students in Britain as Empire Ended", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 3 (2008): 487-507.

⁶⁰ Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities: The England-returned* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); and James Cantres, "Existentialists Abroad: West Indian Students and Racial Identity in British Universities", *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 11, no. 3 (2018): 263-78.

⁶¹ Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant identities*: 113-37.

⁶² Paul Rich, "The Black Diaspora in Britain: Afro-Caribbean Students and the Struggle for a Political Identity, 1900-1950", *Immigrants & Minorities* 6, no. 2 (1987): 151-74.

⁶³ Hakim Adi, "West African Students in Britain, 1900-60: The Politics of Exile", *Immigrants & Minorities* 12 no. 3 (1993): 107-28; and Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998).

discrimination experienced by these students in Britain, and how in some instances this helped shape their outlook towards the empire, radicalising them towards more anti-colonial views and encouraging the development of various political organisations. Adi argues that the West African Students' Union (WASU) established in 1925 by Herbert Bankole-Bright and Ladpido Solanke was the «most prominent and enduring of the West African student unions» and devotes a considerable portion of his book to the development of the WASU and its impact on welfare and politics in Britain.⁶⁴ He suggests that the success and reach of the union was achieved through multiple avenues; for example, the WASU published a journal, supported nationalist activity in Africa, lobbied the Colonial Office, and resisted attempts by that government department and humanitarian bodies to direct African student political activities in Britain. Nonetheless, there remain opportunities for further research utilising more localised and personal examples from the students involved in groups and unions such as WASU, to uncover the realities of student life and the individual experiences and stories of students from across the UK.⁶⁵

5. *The Experiences of Women as Students*

The rise of second wave feminism from the 1960s generated a much more concerted focus on women's experiences within the historical literature and the development of a 'women's history' as a subject. As such, this period saw a large number of texts examining the development of women's education in the UK and Ireland and the context that facilitated this, namely women's admission into universities and higher education.⁶⁶ Scholars generally agree that

⁶⁴ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 2.

⁶⁵ A similar point could be made with regards to Marc Matera's *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015) which offers a history of the African diaspora in London and analyses the development of black internationalism and anticolonialism in this context, but which again explores the role of organisational networks (including then WASU, the League of Coloured Peoples, and the International African Service Bureau in the development of black internationalism).

⁶⁶ Josephine Kamm, *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965); and Gillian Sutherland, "The Movement for the Higher Education of Women: Its Social and Intellectual Context in England, c. 1840-80", in P.J. Waller (ed), *Politics and Social Change in Modern Britain: Essays Presented to A. F. Thompson* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), 91-116; June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991); and Gail Kelly and Sheila Slaughter, "Women and Higher Education: Trends and Perspectives", in *Women's Higher Education in Comparative Perspective* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991): 3-13; and Deirdre Raf-

this process began in the late 1840s and gathered momentum in the 1850s and 1860s, with Margaret Bryant arguing that the opening up of female education was an «unexpected revolution».⁶⁷ However, Dierdre Raftery has challenged this notion, suggesting that «considering the length of time during which female education was debated, it could be said that the opening of higher education to women was achieved remarkably slowly. Far from being ‘unexpected’ or revolutionary, it had been sign-posted and thoroughly discussed».⁶⁸

Carol Dyhouse’s pioneering work into women at university offers useful insights into the development of women’s education across Britain. *No Distinction of Sex* was the first major study to put the issue of gender at the heart of the debate among historians of higher education.⁶⁹ Although this book contains a lot of statistics and figures, Dyhouse also describes the realities of women’s lives at these new colleges and institutions, including the impact of different forms of supervision and restrictions, and the unequal provision of accommodation, facilities and scholarships as a result of the separation of the sexes. Dyhouse’s book *Students: A Gendered History* extends and complements *No Distinction of Sex* and continues to assess the issues of university access, students’ ambitions and their subsequent occupations, as well as exploring how gender issues have influenced women’s experiences of co-education.⁷⁰ Dyhouse has also produced important works on the British Federation of University Women, looking at women’s status in universities (both as students and teachers) and the importance of the Federation in offering informal, supportive networks for these women.⁷¹

Beyond Dyhouse’s work, many texts on women’s entry into higher education focus on the women’s colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, particu-

tery, “The Opening of Higher Education to Women in Nineteenth Century England: ‘Unexpected Revolution’ or Inevitable Change?”, *Higher Education Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2002): 331-46.

⁶⁷ Purvis, *A History of Women’s Education in England*, 73; and Margaret Bryant, *The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the Education of Women and Girls in the Nineteenth Century* (London: University of London Institute, 1979).

⁶⁸ Raftery, “The Opening of Higher Education to Women”: 343.

⁶⁹ Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870-1939* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁷⁰ Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

⁷¹ Carol Dyhouse, “The British Federation of University Women and the Status of Women in Universities, 1907-1939”, *Women’s History Review* 4, no. 4 (1995): 469; for more information on the British Federation of University Women see: Susan Cohen, “Crossing Borders: Academic Refugee Women, Education and the British Federation of University Women during the Nazi Era”, *History of Education* 39, no. 2 (2010): 175-82; and Susan Cohen, “The British Federation of University Women: Helping Academic Women Refugees in the 1930s and 1940s”, *International Psychiatry* 7, no. 2 (2010): 47-9.

larly around the establishment of Girton and Newnham Colleges in 1869 and 1871 respectively.⁷² Most of these texts have discussed the extended campaign for academic recognition at these colleges, and the different purposes and intents in the establishment of both of these colleges, rather than the impact of this on the women students themselves. For example, such accounts deal with the institutional considerations and the practicalities of who would give lectures and provide training rather than focusing on the student experience per se. However, over the past two decades, several historians have taken an active interest in the daily experience of women students and the material history of women's education. This has included the publication of pieces on how women's rooms and accommodation were styled, how these students and their lifestyles were portrayed in the press, the specific women's cultures that developed at these colleges, as well as the role of the female student in popular society – namely the «Girton Girl» who, according to Petra Clark, «epitomized a domain of female freedom where young women had the power to control their own surroundings».⁷³

This has also been supported by the launch of a digital archive project at Oxford University titled «Education and activism: women at Oxford, 1878-1920» which has currently digitised over 7000 archival images from the records of the former women's colleges at the university (Lady Margaret Hall, Somerville, St Anne's, St Hilda's and St Hugh's), including admissions records, annual reports, calendars, photographs, scrapbooks, minutes and letters.⁷⁴ This material will undeniably change the way we understand women's education in Oxford and will offer researchers the opportunity to delve more closely in the unique experiences of women at these colleges.

⁷² Josephine May, "Empire's Daughters: The First 25 Australian-Born Women at Girton and Newnham Colleges Cambridge, 187-1940, as Insiders and Outsiders", *History of Education* 49, no. 6 (2020): 781-804; Petra Clark, "The Girton Girl's "Academical Home": Girton College in the Late-Victorian Periodical Press", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 52, no. 4 (2019): 659; Vera Brittain, *The Women at Oxford: A Fragment of History* (London: Harrap, 1960); Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women At Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Nancy Weiss Malkiel, *"Keep the Damned Women Out": The Struggle for Coeducation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017) which compares the establishment of coeducational institutions in the United States and the UK (Oxford and Cambridge).

⁷³ Jane Hamlett, "Nicely Feminine, Yet Learned': Student Rooms at Royal Holloway and the Oxford and Cambridge Colleges in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain", *Women's History Review* 15, no. 1 (2006): 137-61; L. Jill Lamberton, "A Revelation and a Delight': Nineteenth-Century Cambridge Women, Academic Collaboration, and the Cultural Work of Extracurricular Writing", *College Composition and Communication* 65, no. 4 (2014): 578; and Clark, "The Girton Girl's 'academical home': 659-78.

⁷⁴ <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections/women-at-oxford/> (accessed 16/01/2022).

This work on student life has then been supplemented by works on women's experiences from a disciplinary/ career-orientated perspective. For example, Elizabeth Edwards has examined student life at three teacher training colleges across England in the early twentieth century, using questionnaires and oral history interviews to present the views and opinions of the women who lived through these moments, rather than solely providing an institutional history of these colleges.⁷⁵ In addition to this, Rosemary Auchmuty and Kate Faulkner have delved into the lives of women law students at Cambridge and Oxford.⁷⁶ However, in the case of the scientific and medical education of women, much more research from a much wider range of institutions has been conducted, looking at the problems that women faced in both England and Scotland in gaining entry and recognition on par with men and their career patterns post university.⁷⁷ These assessments of women's experiences are often tied in to feminist and women's history more generally, as the history of women's medical education is linked to the wider history of medicine and the need for increased availability of women doctors for women patients.

Beyond these works focusing specifically on life in Oxbridge, several academics have sought to highlight the differences in the experiences of women at Oxford and Cambridge in late nineteenth and early twentieth century England and the wider phenomenon of female higher education in this time period. For example, H.S. Jones has studied the daily experience of women students, considering the difference between the residential colleges which sought to recreate a domestic setting and life within male-dominated student

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Edwards, *Women and teacher training colleges, 1900-1960: a culture of femininity* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁷⁶ Rosemary Auchmuty, "Early Women Law Students at Cambridge and Oxford", *Journal of Legal History* 63 (2008): 63-98; Kate Faulkner, "Cambridge Women and the Law", *Legal Information Management* 19, no. 1 (2019): 50-6.

⁷⁷ William M. Gordon, "The Right of Women to Graduate in Medicine – Scottish Judicial Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Legal History* 5 (1984): 136; and Ruth Watts, "Universities, Medical Education and Women: Birmingham in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", *History of Education* 42:3 (2013): 306-319; Jonathan Reinartz, *Healthcare in Birmingham: The Birmingham Teaching Hospitals, 1779- 1939* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2009); Helen Mathers, "Scientific Women in a Coeducational University; Sheffield 1879-1939", *History of Education Researcher* no. 81 (2008): 3-19; Wendy Alexander, *First Ladies of Medicine: The Origins, Education and Destination of Early Women Medical Graduates of Glasgow University* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1987); Johanna Geyer-Kordesch and Rona Ferguson, *Blue Stockings, Black Gowns, White Coats: A Brief History of Women Entering Higher Education and the Medical Profession in Scotland* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1995); and Lindy Moore, *Bajanellas and Semilinas. Aberdeen University and the Education of Women 1860-1920* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991).

communities.⁷⁸ Julie S. Gibert too has also focused on women student's life at the civic universities, suggesting that «women at the civic universities enjoyed a freedom unknown at the women's colleges, and they occupied a more visible, fully integrated position than their counterparts at collegiate universities».⁷⁹ She therefore argues that though «segregation by gender played a significant part in students' lives at the civic universities, it was neither so consistent not so complete as to create alternative 'women's cultures'. Women's experiences at the civic universities must be understood in the context of coeducational student culture which centered on the classroom, the clubroom and the library rather than the residential college».⁸⁰ Thus, according to Jones and Gibert, the absence of social restrictions is seen as a distinguishing feature of the civic universities: «Because civic university students were drawn from the local area, most were able to live at home while pursuing their studies. Therefore authorities at the civic universities did not, like the governors of residential institutions, consider themselves *in loco parentis*» and so women who attended civic universities were granted more freedom, allowing them to become active participants in and an integral element of the general university community.⁸¹ However, Dyhouse has challenged this utopian view of women student's life, recognising that «women students met with a mixed reception from both university authorities and from their male peers. They were often the subject of 'joking relationships' and ridicule. In many cases they were excluded from membership of existing societies and student unions, and found it necessary (or expedient) to form their own.»⁸²

In recent years there has been increased focus on women's education in Ireland led by Raftery, Harford and Parkes. Judith Harford examines the campaigns that were enacted to secure places for women in Irish institutions of higher learning and to help women secure the same rights as men.⁸³ She highlights how the unique religious, social and political context in Ireland both challenged and allowed for educational reform and the consequent structural changes in Ireland. This work has been supplemented by Susan

⁷⁸ Jones, "Student Life and Sociability".

⁷⁹ Julie S. Gibert, "Women Students and Student Life at England's Civic Universities before the First World War", *History of Education* 23, no. 4 (1994): 408.

⁸⁰ Gibert, "Women Students": 411.

⁸¹ Gibert, "Women Students": 410.

⁸² Dyhouse, "The British federation": 470.

⁸³ Judith Harford, "The movement for the higher education of women in Ireland: gender equality or denominational rivalry?", *History of Education* 34, no. 5 (2005): 497-516; and Judith Harford, *The Opening of University Education to Women in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008).

Parkes, who has offered insights into the campaign for women's admission to Trinity College Dublin and the achievements of early women graduates from this institution, as well as a number of wider studies on the opening up of formal schooling and university education to Irish girls and women.⁸⁴ Here again then, considerably more work is needed both to delve into the history of students at other universities and higher education institutions across Ireland and also to offer a more nuanced picture of women student's lives rather than the institutional apparatuses that allowed for their education.

Conclusion

The amount of research being conducted on student history has grown considerably over the past three decades, as historians have moved their emphasis away from a focus on universities and higher education institutions towards more in-depth social and political histories of students as individuals. This development has mirrored the growing academic trends of the past twenty years, with an increased focus on social histories, the history of human rights and humanitarianism, the links between colonialism and racism in the UK, as well as the development of gender history as a discipline taught at undergraduate and postgraduate level at universities across the globe.

However, to date the work conducted on the history of students and student life has focused predominantly on the Scottish, Oxbridge and London examples, with considerably less work conducted on the histories of students in Wales and Ireland, and those outside of Oxbridge and London in England. As the sub-field of student history continues to grow it is important that our research also evolves to incorporate more regional and local examples from across the UK and Ireland, so that the truly diverse history of students from across the higher education sector is revealed. Research activities surrounding the NUS centenary in 2022 will generate an increased focus on student life and student activism in the academic and public spheres, which will ultimately provide an opportunity to develop the current historiography further, to track the changes and successes of the student movement over the last 100 years and to broaden our engagement with student history more generally.

⁸⁴ Susan M. Parkes, *A Danger To The Men?: A History of Women in Trinity College, Dublin 1904-2004* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2008); Deirdre Raftery & Susan M. Parkes, *Female Education in Ireland, 1700-1900: Minerva or Madonna* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007); and Deirdre Raftery, Judith Harford & Susan M. Parkes, "Mapping the Terrain of Female Education in Ireland, 1830-1910", *Gender and Education* 22 (2010): 565-78.

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