PROMOTING THE CIVIC AND DEMOCRATIC ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: THE NEXT CHALLENGE FOR THE EHEA?

Tony Gallagher, Queen's University Belfast
Bucharest, 2017

Bologna Process
Researchers' Conference
Future of Higher Education

Common key values

Freedom of expression

Academic freedom & institutional autonomy

Independent Students' Unions

Free movement for staff and students

Developing programme of action

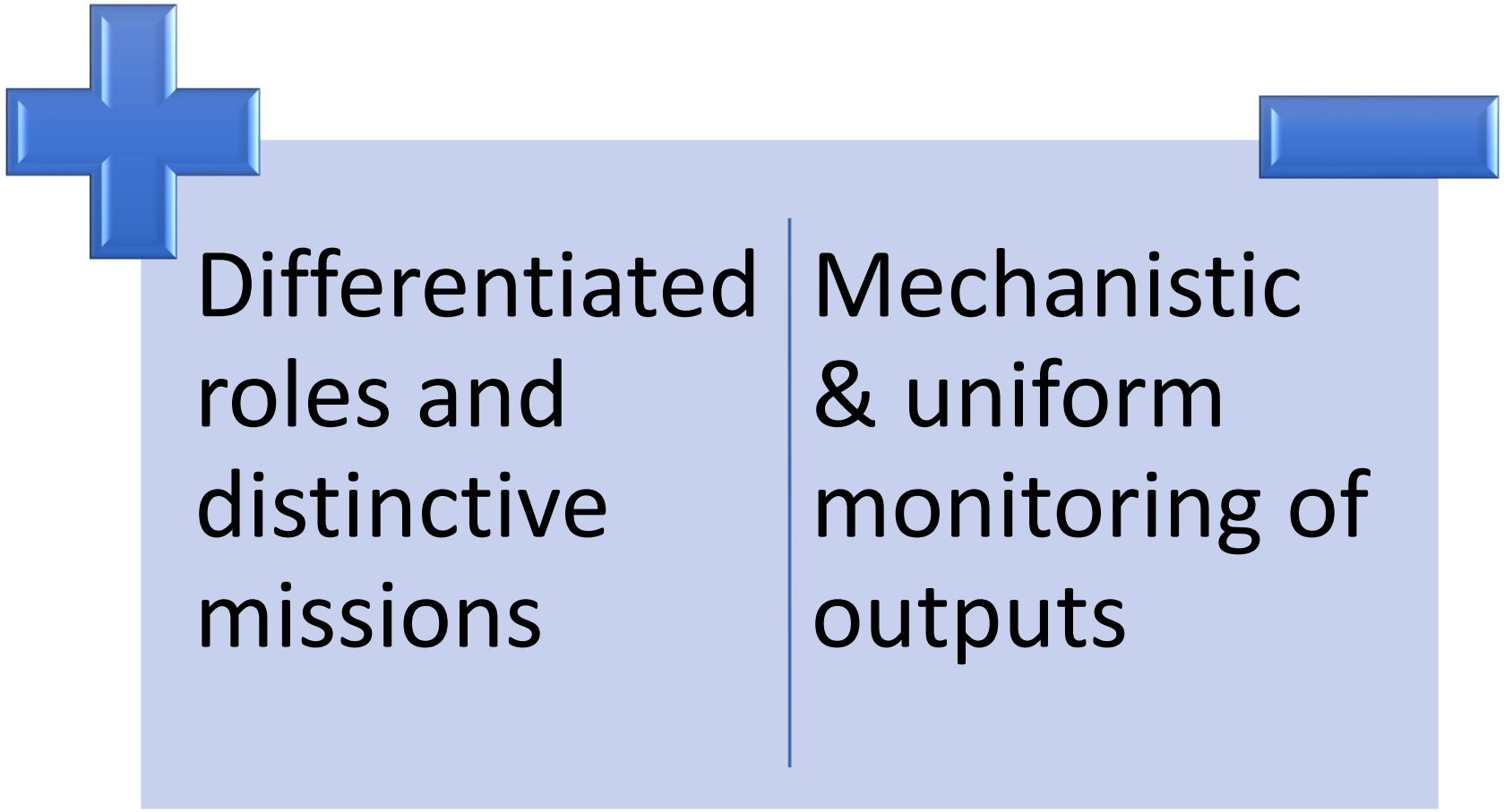
Structural reforms

Academic quality

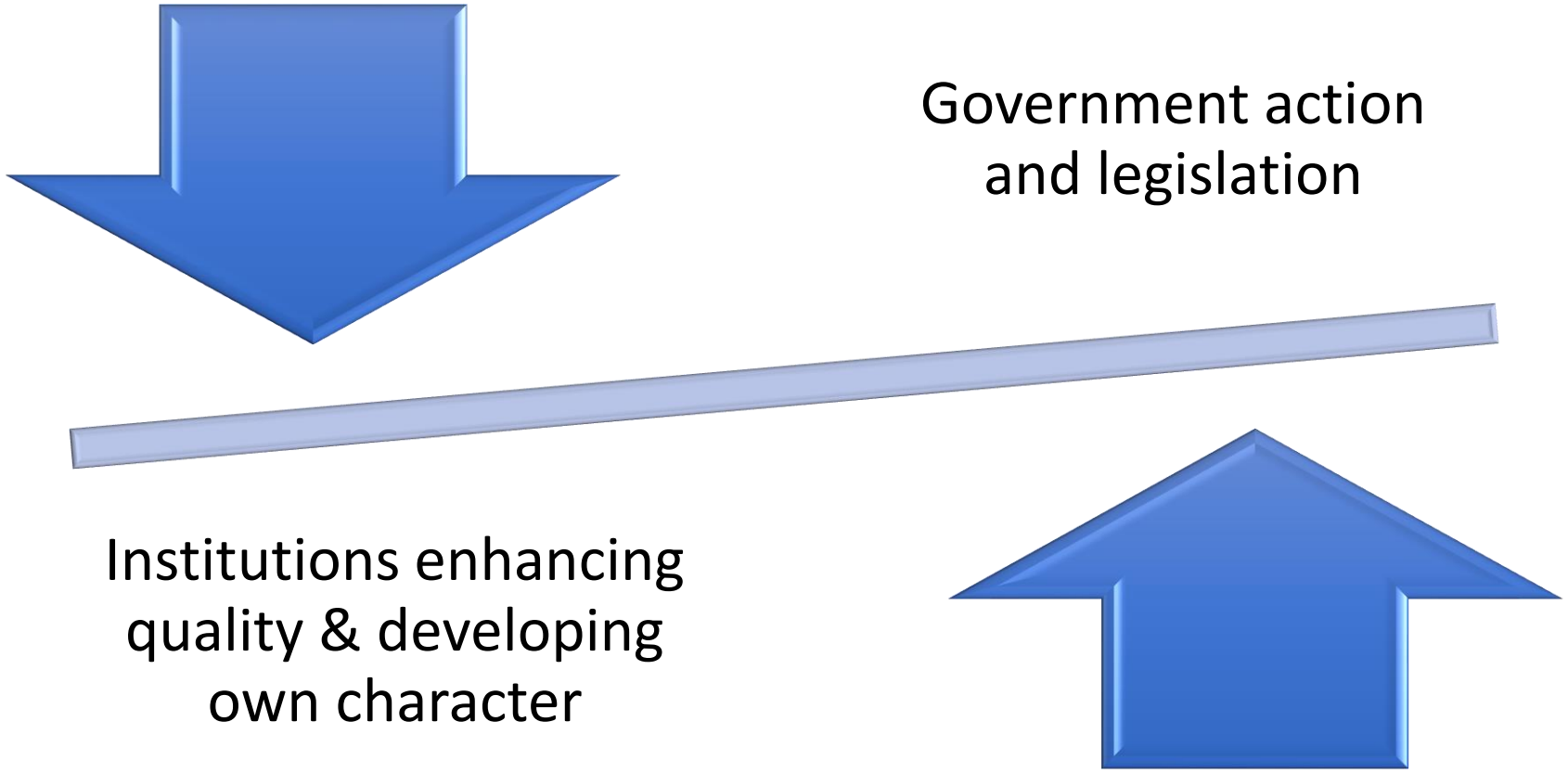
Graduate employability

Education as a public good

Pressures arising from autonomy



Top-down & Bottom-up pressure



Achievements by 2010

- Unified elements across 46 different countries
- Employability & mobility at the forefront of concerns
- More diversified student body
- More inclusive & responsive institutions

New challenges: budgets & priorities

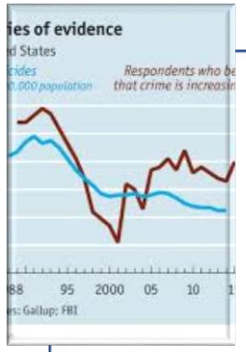
Deepening economic crisis & budget cuts

Tightening focus on economic goals & university-business partnerships

Pressure of marketization & narrow concern with utilitarian priorities

New challenges: politics

Populist politicians

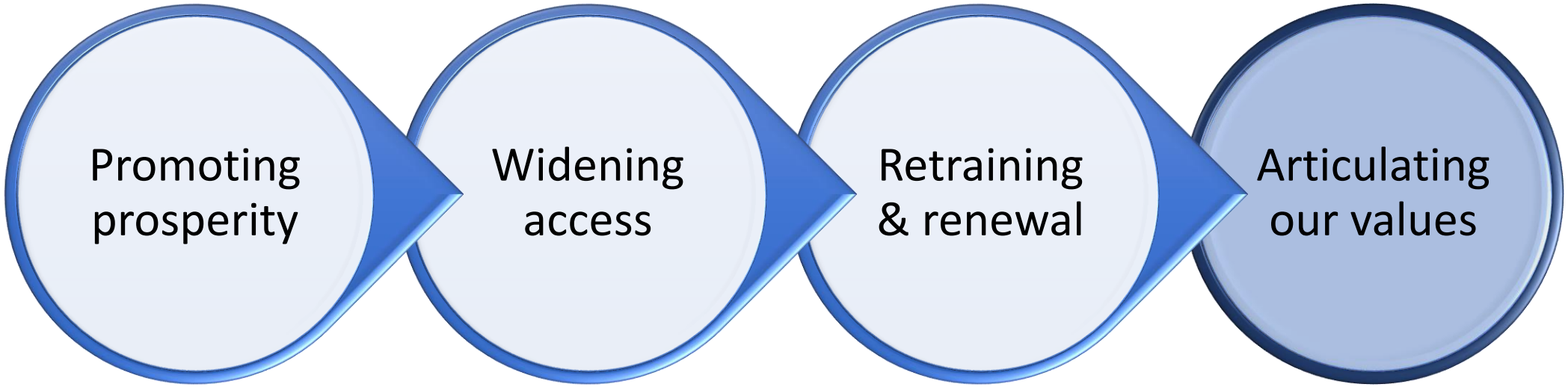


‘ Post-truth’ rhetoric

Role of emotion in appeals

Echo chamber effect of social media

Achievements and a gap



A new priority?

… we might now focus on the importance of the civic and social role of higher education, restating the importance of the free and informed exchange of ideas and knowledge that lie at the heart of democratic culture and society

Failing democracies

… a successful and dynamic democracy is one in which citizens are 'boisterous, outspoken, cantankerous'

John Ralston Saul

Most European democracies are today characterised by low or falling voter turnout. These trends are most striking amongst young people, who have become alienated from mainstream electoral politics in established European democracies

James Sloam, *University of London*

New challenges

Wicked problems

- Climate change
- Social injustice
- Drug trafficking
- Healthcare

Social cohesion

- Racism & inequality
- Migration
- War & refugees
- Populist politics

New challenges

Wicked problems

- Climate change
- Social injustice
- Drug trafficking
- Healthcare

Next practice & innovation

Social cohesion

- Racism & inequality
- Migration
- War & refugees
- Populist politics

Intercultural dialogue

Core issues for higher education

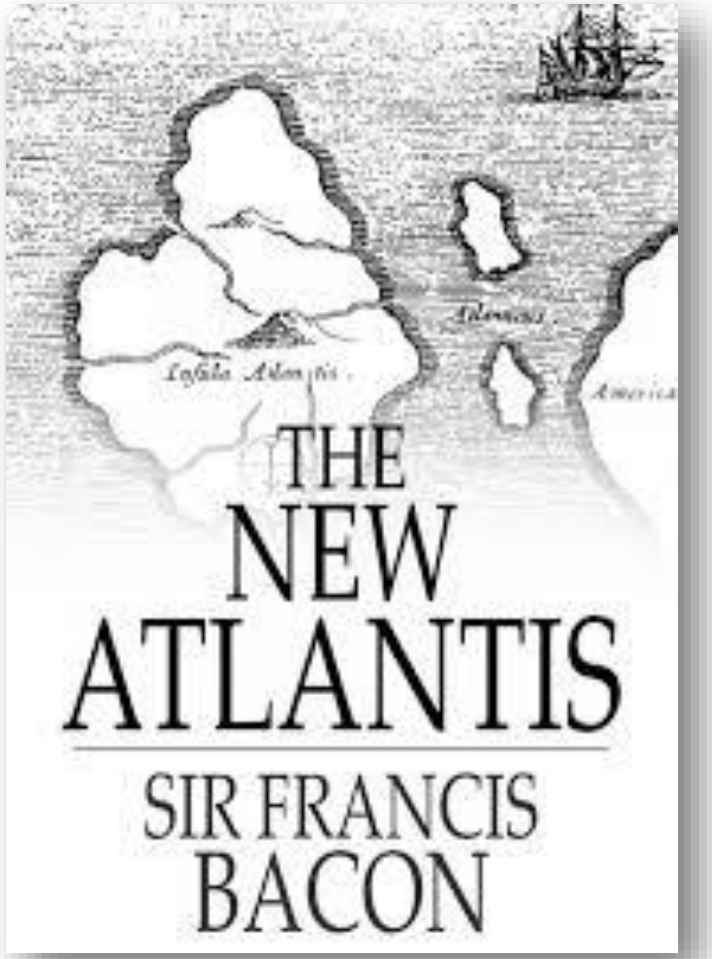
Nature of truth

Role of identity

Experts & expertise

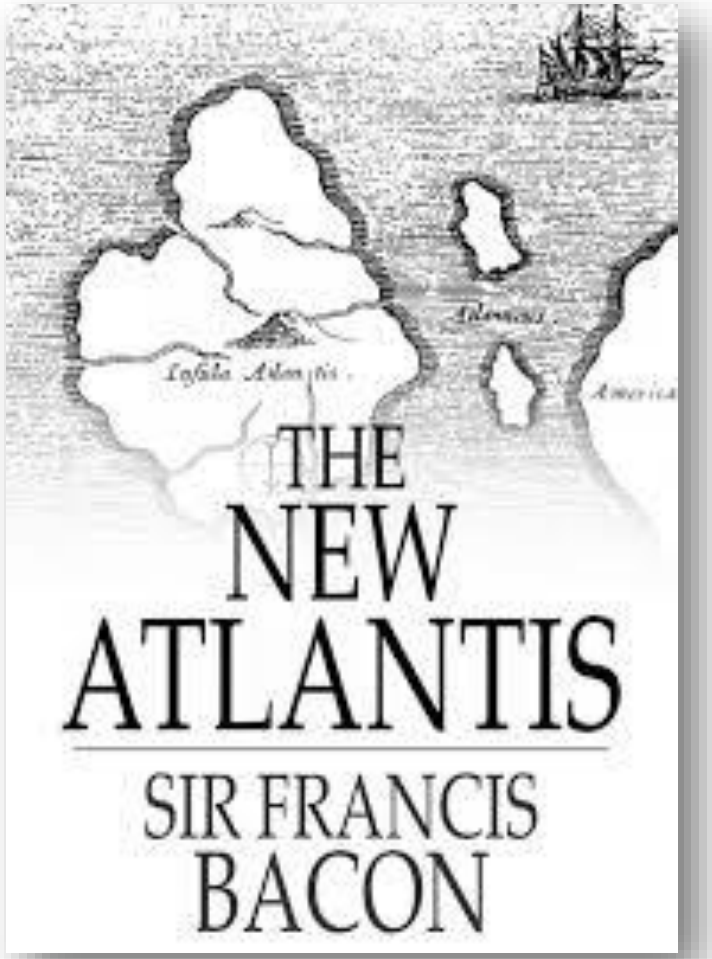
Value of dialogue

An historic legacy



… the 'blind fumbling of uninformed practical technologies' like the 'mindless task of ants'

An historic legacy



… true scientists 'should be like bees … which extract the goodness from nature and use it to make useful things'

… the 'blind fumbling of uninformed practical technologies' like the 'mindless task of ants'

From ‘cloistered’ to ‘engaged’ universities

Academic knowledge

- *knowledge generated by and for the university*

Knowledge transfer

- *knowledge made more accessible to those outside the university*

Knowledge exchange

- *recognise others have valuable knowledge and work in partnership*

Knowledge co-creation

- *universities and publics co-creating knowledge*

Advancing knowledge ‘for the relief of man’s estate’ (Francis Bacon)

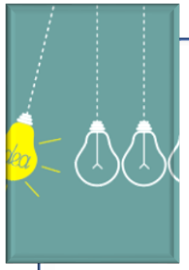
‘When the entire university is engaged – human, academic, cultural and economic – enormous progress can be made at improving the communities in which they are located’

Brophy & Godsil, 2009

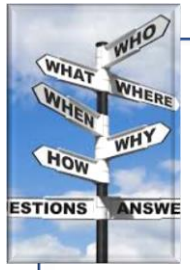
Agenda for civic & democratic higher education

Engage with society to address persistent wicked problems

Encourage a democratic culture among our students

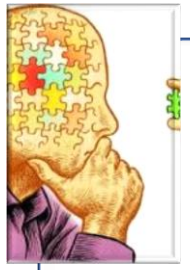


Promote innovative spaces for developing & testing creative solutions



Teach the value of discernment and critical judgement

Tap into new sources of knowledge and experience



Teach them to test, not just accept, truth-claims