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Abstract

Informed by policy sociology and a Foucauldian theorisation, this article explores how a selection of sabbatical officers from English students' unions formed their political subjectivity during the policy consultation processes leading to the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. Discourse analysis demonstrated a strong influence of the unions' professional staff members and the National Union of Students on sabbatical officers' work. In particular, they guided the officers in writing a response to the Government consultation document and lobbying politicians. These actions indicated that the sabbatical officers' political subjectivity was highly dependent on professional actors and discourses. The shift towards professionalisation, however, received diverse responses from participants. Some perceived it as leading to necessary policy amendments; others were concerned about wider depoliticisation of their role and student movement. The article suggests that the sabbatical officers interviewed operated within a complex network of competing interests, raising questions about (1)

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whose political agency they enacted and (2) their future opportunities to successfully unite and challenge higher education policy in neoliberal times. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)