

No one would dare to call Laurie Taylor part of the higher education establishment - he has spent far too long sticking pins in its over-inflated egos, fads and fashions for that. But we might get away with calling him an institution. At the very least he is responsible for creating one of the best known lower-ranking higher education institutions in the land: the University of Poppleton, which has appeared in his Times Higher Education column since 1978. Described as “the funniest satirist of academic life in our time”, Taylor’s Poppletonian column is a weekly dispatch from a small but thrusting university with close ties to a pork pie factory.

It began when he was a professor of sociology at the University of York, where he stayed until 1994, making his name as an ethnographer who studied prison life and the sociology of the criminal underworld. Since his retirement, he has worked as a journalist and broadcaster, bringing academic research to life through his BBC Radio 4 programme, *Thinking Allowed*, and investigating fame in his Sky Arts series *In Confidence*. His qualities were summed up by the late sociologist Stanley Cohen, who in 2008 was asked by THE to write a few words about his long-time collaborator. “I am asked to pay a brief tribute to Laurie as a sociologist and as a friend,” he wrote. “This is a bit like being asked for an essay about Muhammad Ali with particular reference to his life as a boxer’. Being a sociologist and a friend are what Laurie does.”

Commenting on the decision to give Taylor the Lord Dearing award, a THE editorial board member said he “has done more for the sanity of university staff than most of the great and good put together”.