Unravelling the Fabric of Academe:  
The Managerialist University and Its Implications for the Integrity of Academic Work


Rosemary Deem

Introduction

This chapter enquires into the extent to which the impact of current management practices in higher education on the integrity of academic work resembles the frequent unravelling of Penelope’s loom in Greek mythology.\(^1\) Recent research on the management of higher education is examined, focusing in particular on the phenomenon known as “new managerialism” (an ideological approach to the management of publicly funded services in western societies particularly prominent in the 1980s and 1990s) and its implications for the integrity of academic work. Although the analysis draws principally on research conducted on UK, it is recognized that this is a distinctive and culturally specific set of higher education systems.\(^2\) There are, nevertheless, many aspects of new managerialism which are more widely applicable to other higher education systems and which will be recognizable to many academics, wherever they work.

We first offer a definition of what is meant by new managerialism, before considering the findings of a UK Economic and Social Research Council-funded study investigating how UK academics, manager-academics, and career administrators perceive the management of higher education and the extent to which it is perceived to have been permeated by new managerialism.\(^3\) This research was conducted at Lancaster University, England, in eleven learned societies and sixteen UK universities between 1998 and 2000. It is augmented here by reference to some current research on university leadership and management, particularly focusing on the roles of vice chancellors (presidents/chief executives) and their deputies. The discussion then moves on to an examination of some of the consequences of new managerialism for the integrity of academic work. Three separate examples of this are provided: the explicit management of research activity in universities; external quality evaluation of teaching standards;
and the shift of doctoral degree programs from a primarily academic concern to the subject of local and national monitoring and surveillance. Finally, we analyze early impressions from the higher education element of a current UK-based project, which is investigating public service modernization, organizational leadership, and change agency. In this study, leaders in universities are being compared with the leaders in publicly funded hospitals, primary (community-based) health care, and secondary schools. We conclude by asking who is involved in the unravelling of the fabric of the academic loom, and consider how, in future, we can work towards sustaining rather than destroying the integrity of the loom of academic life.

**What is New Managerialism?**

Academic debates about the growth of new managerialism in public services in western societies and its effects both on those working in public service organizations and on service provision itself became particularly predominant in the 1990s, although new managerialism well predates this period. By the 1990s, new managerialism looked as though it was becoming a firm ideological choice for many western governments in overseeing the running of publicly funded organizations. The roots of new managerialism lay in 1980s cuts in public expenditure, the introduction of quasi-markets to public services, and examination of the so-called producer-dominance of public services organizations, as part of a more general shift to neoliberalism in many western societies. Many academic writers use the terms “new managerialism” and “new public management” interchangeably, and indeed some of their alleged features overlap but theoretically and conceptually, the two have quite different origins. Thus, while new public management arose out of public choice theory and has become seen as a new technocratic orthodoxy for public service organizations regardless of the dominant political ideology of the country concerned, new managerialism is much more unashamedly ideological when applied by policy makers, with the private sector seen as providing the efficient and effective organizational model which public services must emulate.

The characteristics of new managerialism vary somewhat by sector but include an emphasis on the primacy of management over all other functions and a concentration on “doing more with less.” As Trow noted in a commentary on trends in the management of UK higher education in the 1990s, there is often an underlying assumption that somehow efficient management can be a substitute for resources. Managerialism is a hierarchical form of organizing practice and so is very different from the collegial self-governance traditional among
academics and some other public service professionals. New managerialism focuses on monitoring the achievement of targets (both at the organizational level and in devolved budgetary sub-units) and the performance of individual employees. Greater competition both between organizations providing the same service and between sub-units in the same organization is encouraged. So, for example, universities must compete not only for students and staff as they have long done but also for scarce research funding and positioning in national and international league tables such as those published by Shanghai Jiao Tong University or the *Times Higher Education* Supplement, while different disciplines in the same university are expected to vie with each other for money and even survival. Thus, recently in England, some universities have been closing chemistry departments, as these are expensive to run and there is declining student demand for degrees in a number of institutions. Outsourcing of functions previously carried out in-house is encouraged; in higher education this might include activities like catering and cleaning. The private finance of buildings is also encouraged under new managerialism. In the UK this is termed the “private finance initiative” or PFI, and its assumptions about publicly funded building projects and its long term liabilities and consequences for the public purse and service provision have been subject to considerable criticism, particularly in the UK National Health Service. New managerialism often finds itself in tension with the ways in which professionals are used to working, including not only self-government and a climate of trust but also the use of discretion. It is also not necessarily a phenomenon that remains stable over time. As Reed has noted, what began as a form of bureau-professionalism that permitted a degree of regulated autonomy (though with neocorporatist elements) in the 1960s–70s was replaced by neoliberal managerialism by the beginning of the 1980, which was seen as heralding a revolution in public service provision. In the late 1990s, neoliberal managerialism was being subordinated by neotechnocratic managerialism, with a greater emphasis on collective organizational learning and attention to service delivery to, and the empowerment of, citizens.

New managerialism has permeated or been imposed on public services in a variety of ways, including via public funding mechanisms and policies, government reports and recommendations and the use of consultants with private sector experience. However, while governments and policy makers may expect those in management and leadership positions to embrace the tenets of managerialism, no assumption is made here that everyone holding a
managerial position in public service organizations necessarily embraces new managerialism. Some will subvert it or resist it, while others will engage with it wholeheartedly or benefit from the opportunities it offers for widening the range of management positions available, as Ozga and I found in the mid-1990s when studying the experiences of women managers with feminist beliefs who were working in further and higher education. We now turn to examine some of the findings of a research investigation into new managerialism in UK universities.

The ESRC New Managerialism Project and the Management of UK universities

This project involved a team of researchers based at Lancaster University. Funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, award no. R000 27 7661) between 1998 and 2000, the study investigated the extent to which new managerialism had permeated UK universities and analyzed the accounts of careers and management practice provided by a purposive sample of academics holding management positions in the academy (from heads/chiefs of departments to heads of institutions). These individuals are termed manager-academics, to distinguish them from career managers such as human resource directors. A full account of the project is available elsewhere, so here there is a focus on those elements particularly relevant to the integrity of academic work.

The project fieldwork, using a variety of qualitative methods including interviews, focus groups and institutional case studies, was organized in three phases. In phase one, focus groups based on members of eleven learned societies and professional academic bodies discussed what they thought was happening to the running of higher education. The value of these groups was that they were cross-institutional, included academics, manager-academics, and administrators, and covered a range of academic subjects from physics through arts/humanities and social sciences to business studies. The focus group data suggested that the UK universities were now viewed as highly managerial and bureaucratic, with declining levels of trust between employees and managers and a big reduction in the levels of discretion and self-governance afforded to academics. There was a feeling that some universities now regarded themselves as businesses. Among issues that focus group participants reported concerns about were: high workloads and long hours (and not just for academic staff); decisions made on the basis of monetary considerations, not academic factors; the growth of powerful, unaccountable and uncommunicative senior management teams; and greater pressures for the development of internal and external audit systems for research, teaching, and academic standards. Not
everything was negative; some participants mentioned more emphasis on teamwork, a greater sense of accountability, and more responsiveness to students as positive changes.

The second phase of the study involved a cross-section sample of sixteen publicly funded universities with different histories, locations, and missions. The fieldwork consisted mainly of individual interviews with 137 manager-academics (heads of departments, deans, pro- and deputy vice chancellors/presidents and vice chancellors/presidents) and a much smaller number of senior career administrators. The interviews were revealing in more ways than we had anticipated, as often when we set out to meet our respondents, the more senior of them proved quite difficult to locate, being surrounded by gatekeepers and not infrequently sequestered away in hidden suites of offices or in buildings where no students were allowed and where few ordinary staff ever went. Our interviewees, like the focus group participants, talked about changes to the environment of higher education (declining public funding, massification of undergraduate enrolment and the growth of research and teaching quality evaluation), but were in general much more positive about recent changes to higher education. This is not surprising, as for many of our interviewees, such changes had made possible or contributed to their careers. Respondents talked about how they had ended up in management roles, emphasizing their personal biographies and the ways that their identities had been defined by teaching, disciplinary commitment, and research. A number of the women manager-academic respondents, who were far fewer on the ground than their male peers in our sixteen institutions (we interviewed pretty much all the female manager-academics we encountered), felt they had been held back by gendered expectations of managers that required different things from women than men, home responsibilities, and/or a lack of positive sponsorship or mentoring.

Among our sample, the motivations for being a manager varied from enjoyment of institutional politics and liking power, through wanting more money, to a desire to protect a discipline or the fear that someone less able to cope would otherwise take on the role. The latter two motivations were particularly found among heads of department. From the manager-academic interviews as a whole we identified three typical routes into management. Career-track managers tended to have found that they enjoyed management at an early stage of their careers and had given up substantial teaching and research commitments soon after. This group were most often found in the post-1992 former polytechnics:
I rose through the ranks as it were and I was senior lecturer, principal lecturer, course director for the major undergraduate course there, head of postgraduate department. Then dean, I think, unless there was another head of department’s job in between. And I had a couple of sort of side trips, — I ran what was then the Faculty of Health & Social Sciences for a while for a few months, and I worked as an assistant to the previous director at the Polytechnic, for a short while. Then, as I say, I became dean (at X) and then the pro-vice chancellor left, so I applied for the job and got it. (male pro-vice chancellor, social scientist, post-1992 university)

At pro-vice chancellor (PVC) level and above, however, a wider group of our respondents in both types of university than simply career-long manager-academics had set their sights on a management and leadership career path. This was not always straightforward, as in the pre-1992 universities, PVC posts were often rotating and fixed-term, so that those who did not succeed in finding a post as head of another institution might well find themselves back in the academic ranks at the end of their term of office.

A second track of those we termed “reluctant managers,” a group already identified in other sectors, were typically found among fixed-term heads of department in established pre-1992 universities. This group tended to strongly reject an identity as a manager and saw themselves instead as academics and academic leaders. Most were planning to return to academic life at the end of their term of office, so were keen to treat their colleagues in a collegial manner. They did not always warm to their management role:

The previous head of department . . . finished last July. . . . One of my colleagues . . . was commissioned by the vice chancellor to sound out members of staff to see who they would prefer. . . . They said me. . . . Then I got a letter from the VC . . . asking me if I would be head of department. . . . I felt completely trapped. . . . I don’t think it’s fair to refuse to do that task’ nobody wants to do it as far as I can see. And so I said I would, with great misgivings, because it’s had a terrible effect on my research output. I’ve got a book that I haven’t touched for over a year now . . . and I still have a fair bit of teaching and my PhD students and so forth. (female head of department, Humanities, pre-1992 university)
Finally, we identified a small group of “good citizen” manager-academics, who had often entered management at a comparatively late stage in their academic careers. This group were mainly deans or PVCs, and their motivation was often repaying a perceived debt to their university through service in a management role:

> It started simply by other people mentioning it to me. I had no ambitions to be a dean. As I said earlier, my main motivation is an academic motivation and largely research. So the only, the first occasion that I even considered being dean, was about ten days before I actually was one. In other words, when the process of consultation started, a number of names apparently were mentioned, but eventually it was crystallised on one individual and that was me, and really that was the first time that I had even considered it. . . . I had been asked to be dean much earlier in my career by a previous vice chancellor and I turned it down. . . . But it’s simply related, I think to two factors. One, I’m towards the end of my career. I’m now sixty. It sounds very old-fashioned but I perhaps wanted to give something back to the university in terms of management. And I did bring an unusual blend of expertise, having been out at [a research funding body] you know, for some time. . . . Secondly, I knew that if I turned it down, that a younger colleague whose career should not be burdened at this stage by being a dean would have been asked, and would perhaps have been leant on quite heavily. And this is an individual whose research career is blossoming at the moment and I simply didn’t want that to be invaded in any way. (male dean, Sciences, pre-1992 university)

We also made some assessment of the state of the UK higher education sectors through the project. Here we drew on models of “new managerialism” derived from research on the late 1980s reforms to the UK National Health Service (NHS) done by Ferlie et al. (1996).XX Ferlie et al. proposed four models. The efficiency model, “doing more with less,” supported by funding policies and league tables, was perceived as having significantly permeated higher education. We found no evidence of Ferlie et al.’s “downsizing” model, but there was some evidence of decentralization in the form of partially devolved budgets (responsibility for fundraising, control of expenditure, and avoidance of debt being an integral part of devolved budget units). Often there was no right to hire staff or spend money, so the devolved element frequently amounted to
responsibility without power. The third model, the learning organization model, was perceived to have some permeation, e.g., endeavours to achieve cultural change (always in the workers, not in the managers), development of teamwork and some moves towards planning for strategic activity but almost no one thought that staff empowerment had been attempted. It would be ironic if universities showed no indication of being a learning organization. Elements of Ferlie et al.’s fourth model, developing a radical new approach to public service provision with a high level of user involvement in the design and provision of services, were not mentioned by any of our respondents and we saw no other indications of this model. This may also relate to the fact that quite a few of our respondents, particularly in the established universities, did not appear to think that they worked in a public service.

In the final phase of the project, we examined the views about university management drawn from a broad range of university employees, from manual workers to contract researchers, in four institutions. Whilst most of our manager-academic respondents told us that they were consultative in their approach to their work, a rather different story emerged from other university staff. Either the consultations had not reached them or the outcomes of these consultations seemed to have been ignored by managers. Employees, especially those in non-academic jobs, were at pains to point out their high loyalty to their institutions (they often said they enjoyed their jobs) but suggested that, in return, they had experienced poor communication from senior management, a failure to listen to staff concerns and problems, slow decision-making, amateur approaches to management, an absence of clearly understood policies, and a growing gap between senior management and everybody else. There was also some mention in a few cases of bullying and (more often) of inappropriate people being put into management roles. This portrait of university management contrasted with the much more upbeat picture of university management given by our manager-academic respondents.

**Senior Manager-Academic Roles**

There are two major changes that seem to have occurred in the last decade or so, in respect of senior management roles in UK universities. First, there has been a big increase in the number of institutions that have established senior management teams and the size of these teams is also increasing. This is an international trend, as Marginson and Considine’s work on changes to Australian universities demonstrates. In 1998–2000 when we carried out the new managerialism project fieldwork, it was relatively rare for career administrators to be members
of these teams, and the teams were quite small. However, in the project we are now doing on public service leadership, career administrators are core members of the senior management team in all the higher education institutions we are researching, and it is clear that all these institutions all also have several pro- or deputy vice chancellors, not just one or two. In some cases, deans are also members of senior management teams.

The role of pro- and deputy vice chancellors is an interesting one. Their portfolio is often both general (to deputize for the vice chancellor/president) and specific (a portfolio for research, teaching and learning, resources, staffing, etc). They rarely have any budgetary or line management responsibilities and many are still engaged in research or supervise doctoral students. Smith, Adams and Mount’s recent work for the UK Leadership Foundation on PVCs has suggested that regardless of portfolio, all PVCs are concerned with similar tasks, including quality standards, compliance and balancing competing pressures, strategic thinking, and dealing with cultural values. Smith et al. also suggest that PVCs act as facilitators at organizational boundaries and as brokers of relationships (rather than operating using executive power). There are few reluctant managers at the PVC level and indeed Gosling, Bolden, and Petrov in current research on leadership development in UK universities suggest that, compared to heads of department, institutions often find it relatively easy to recruit to PVC posts, which are well paid and a stepping stone to becoming a vice chancellor.

Second, although in 1998-2000, external appointment to a management role other than vice chancellor/president was rare in the established UK universities, it was much more common in the former polytechnics for head of department, dean and pro-vice chancellor posts. Since then, the role of headhunters (or executive recruitment agencies) has increased, and more jobs, especially at pro-vice chancellor level, even in established universities, are subject to external recruitment processes. This may have all sorts of other effects, for example, on the social characteristics and backgrounds of those appointed and also on the distancing of the selection process for senior jobs from all other academic post recruitment processes. The social and academic background of vice chancellors has certainly been shifting in recent decades, with more social scientists and more women entering from the 1990s on, although there are still fewer than twenty women VCs in the UK, out of well over 120 universities. Given the rise in the number of pro-vice chancellors, and the turbulent environment for higher education in the UK and worldwide it would not be surprising to find that the role of vice chancellors is also
changing. Though the shift away from being the leading academic towards a more overt concern with being a chief executive was predicted and recommended in the UK as long ago as 1985 by a report looking at how the non-academic decision-making processes of universities could be improved, the job itself has changed more slowly. Even in 2000, in a study that involved work-shadowing vice-chancellors, as well as interviewing them, it was noted that their claims to be mainly concerned with strategic activity were often thwarted by their frequent need to deal with crises and react to events. However, rather like their North American counterparts (who have been doing it much longer), more UK VCs are becoming extensively involved in fundraising from alumni, philanthropists, and the private sector. Furthermore, the VC external relations role now involves the entire globe, so that the “airport lounge” VC, distant from and distanced from their staff and students, and more familiar with the environs of airports than universities, is now arguably more common in the UK (particularly in the pre-1992 sector) than one who spends a lot of time in their own institution and knows many of the staff and students. Having considered some of the manifestations of new managerialism as revealed in research at the end of the 1990s and the recent trends in recruitment to and roles and composition of senior management teams in universities, we now turn to a consideration of what effects new managerialism may be having on the integrity of academic work.

**New Managerialism’s Consequences for Academic Work**

As we have seen for the UK (and it is also so for many other higher education systems in the world), there has been a huge investment in management and leadership posts in universities over the last decade or so. Of course, some of this is a consequence of growth in institutional size and complexity. However, in the managerialist focus on efficiency, effectivity, performances, targets, outcomes, markets, audits, and league tables, it is also easy to lose sense of what the academic enterprise is actually about. The creativity of research may be seen as secondary or even as detrimental to a view of research as something that can be overtly “managed” by others than academics, as a process of generating extra institutional income and as contributing to an international reputation and positioning in world league tables. Similarly, the developmental aspects of education may be replaced by a view of teaching that provides what ‘consumers’ want or mainly offering a form of employability training for students. Academics are notoriously difficult to manage, the process often being referred to as akin to “herding cats,” and have frequently proved resistant to managerialism. However, subverting managerialism is
time-consuming and as Leisyte has shown in her comparison of the effects on academics in biotechnology and medieval history of recent changes in research governance in the Netherlands and England, xxxi the subversion or distancing is often accompanied by some playing of the “game,” too, particularly in relation to research. xxxii For example in Leisyte’s study, many academics agreed to undertake research in areas where there is extensive funding available but little intrinsic academic interest, as well as continuing to do “blue skies” research. Others wrote short articles that but were published relatively quickly while still working on books which took years, because they felt their credibility and survival depended on doing both.

In many UK universities, research is now thought of as too important to be left to academics; recent studies in Europe suggest this attitude is becoming more widespread. xxxiii This trend means the whole research process, from intelligence about funding and the development of bids, to the themes that shape research problems, intellectual property rights, and knowledge transfer strategies, is no longer just the preserve of academics. Since 1999, UK academics have been required by their higher education funding councils to fill in a form each term saying how much time they have spent (of a notional and mythical 37.5-hour week) on research, teaching, scholarship, and administration. This is to ensure that research and teaching do not cross-subsidize each other. Despite an apparent rhetoric about integrating research and teaching, for example, via the Higher Education Academy xxxiv (founded in 2004), which is tasked with enhancing academics’ teaching and improving the student experience (the academics’ experience apparently being secondary), there is increased pressure to separate the two, not only in the UK but elsewhere as well. xxxv

In the UK, research activity is also closely monitored and audited externally via the periodic Research Assessment Exercise, in which research-active academics send a small selection of their research outputs and other data about research students, research funding, research culture, and infrastructure, to be quality-assessed by subject-based peer panels. The outcomes of this exercise are then used to drive subsequent funding to institutions from the higher education funding bodies. The exercise, which uses a range of quantitative and qualitative data but is dependent on academic experts discussing and considering the outputs, is due to be replaced in the period 2010–2013 by a purely metrics-based exercise for science, engineering, and technology subjects, combining this with “light touch” peer review for social sciences and arts/humanities. xxxvi Currently there is also a plan to assess the citation impact of every paper
produced by the academics involved. Internally, university research units and academics with the responsibility for overseeing research activity and strategy examine funding performance and research outputs of academics. Universities may also offer funding or other incentives for undertaking research on particular themes. Research sponsors, from government research councils to private industry have a big role in shaping research themes and issues. Private industry has long sponsored academic research, but in the contemporary world, there is little choice but to apply for external funding (even if some private funders restrict publication rights or how research data may be utilised) if an academic wants time, equipment, or a research assistant with which to pursue research. Applied research often has the capacity to generate more money than “blue skies” research, so there may be pressure to do more of the former than the latter. In 2007 it was announced that government research councils, which currently fund a good deal of “blue skies” research in the UK, would in future be required to assess the economic impact as well as the academic merit of future grant applications, thus reducing the possibility that curiosity-driven research would be funded.

Managerialism does not only mean considerable interference in research. It also adds significantly to academic workloads, as both the internal requirements and external audit systems work on the basis that academics cannot be trusted to do their work but must continually be checked or show that they have jumped through a series of hoops (for example, by specifying the learning outcomes of a new program before they have ever taught it or by listing and self-evaluating the quality of their own publications on a regular basis). In respect of the evaluation of teaching now being adopted in many countries in the world, the focus is now often more on the paperwork involved than on the actual teaching itself. Furthermore, some academics may become very stressed by the processes involved in the evaluation of their teaching, which is itself an alternative form of governance and a new set of power relations over academic work. In the UK, a government agency, the Quality Assurance Agency established in 1997, has sought to impose a series of regulations and codes of practice on higher education, covering everything from the content of undergraduate degrees and the qualifications awarded (with so-called “level descriptors” for bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees) to overseas collaboration. The QAA carries out regular visits to institutions to inspect their academic standards and until the early 2000s, also inspected individual subject departments. As with research, the audit culture in teaching has led to the establishment of central quality and academic development units in many
universities. It is now much harder for UK academics to make independent decisions about curricula or teaching. Quality audit of teaching is certainly something to which academics have shown strong reactions, as Morley’s study shows. A current study of academic attitudes to quality audit of teaching in one research-intensive UK university suggests that a good proportion of respondents think quality audit processes are mostly about paperwork and bureaucracy, rather than really being concerned with or affecting the quality of teaching.

A further example of how managerialism has invaded academic life lies in the field of doctoral programs for research students. It is now increasingly rare in Europe (and in many other countries) for doctoral study to simply be left up to academics and their students. Institutions and agencies are intervening, whether it is in the form of supervisor training, codes of practice for supervisors and students, or determination of policy on doctoral recruitment and selection. Doctoral students are seen as a measure of the research culture, status, and international competitiveness of their institutions. There has been a proliferation of doctoral programs, including variants such as professional doctorates combining significant continuing professional development in the form of taught units with a dissertation. More doctoral students means less individual attention for each one. It also means that many no longer see the doctorate as a preparation for academic employment, so that institutions and outside agencies want to emphasize the importance of doctoral programs also including generic skills training and “employability.” Meanwhile supervisors, like teachers, are no longer trusted to do their work properly and are regularly monitored, as are the dropout and completion rates of their students. Supervision is no longer just an academic interaction but may be digitally recorded by students in the event of a future complaint or failure to pass. Supervisors and students are also urged to keep written records of supervisions, partly so these can be used in appeals. Doctoral thesis defences are increasingly also subject to independent chairing by other than an expert examiner or may instead be digitally recorded. Managerialism removes discretion and trust from academics and replaces it with bureaucracy, distrust, surveillance, and additional paperwork.

As Peters has argued, the contemporary university is fixated on globalization, the market, the world’s economy, and student demand. There are, he suggests, two particularly striking variants of this orientation. One is the idea of a “global service university.” This is based on the notion that the publicly-funded university, in the face of global changes, needs to take on private sector for-profit organizational characteristics in order to contribute to the growth of the world
economy and corporations. (Products including include the trained graduates and technology transfer, involving turning wherein research outcomes are turned into a form usable by industry or commerce). This model, Peters argues, is closest to that used in the UK’s current higher education systems. The second variant is the “hollowed out” university, which is stripped down to a core of functions largely focused on meeting student and employers’ demands and then aggressively marketed to students around the world. Peters suggests that this is exemplified by the Australian system. The managerialist university would fit happily into either of these templates. But a move is underway, in the UK at least, to drive out managerialism in public services and replace it with a new phenomenon – leadership. Why this change, and what are its implications for the integrity of academic work?

**Leadership and Change Agency in Publicly Funded Universities**

Currently I am co-director on a project funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, which is examining some the New Labour government’s endeavours in relation to the modernization and leadership of public services. In particular, we are looking at their effects on those who hold leadership positions in three key public services: health, secondary schools, and universities. An initial critical discourse analysis of key documents from New Labour’s term of office from 1997 has suggested that transformational leadership, rather than new managerialism, has become a major aspect of New Labour’s reform program for public services.\textsuperscript{xlviii} New Labour has also established or supported the establishment of several national leadership development bodies, including one each for the health service, schools, and universities. The body for universities, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, founded in 2004, arose out of an initiative between two organizations representing higher education leaders\textsuperscript{xlix} and is not directly financed from the public purse. Nevertheless, it is still heavily dependent on money from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and a 2006 independent evaluation suggests it is unlikely to be self-funding for several more years.\textsuperscript{1} We are interested in whose agendas health, school, and university leaders follow in their efforts to lead and change their organizations and are also investigating the extent to which leadership development provision supports, is neutral towards, or is critical of government policy. A further concern, particularly in universities, is to find out the extent to which the apparent superseding of new managerialism by inspirational leadership is simply a rhetorical device. Certainly many of the key features of new managerialism, such as national and international league tables, performance management,
devolved units, and “doing more with less,” still seem to be in place in England’s public services. A number of people in bodies allied to UK higher education have objected to the framing of our project, arguing that higher education is not a public service and hence is not comparable with the more overtly publicly funded health service or schools. Yet there is only one completely private university in the UK with the right to award degrees. All the other universities receive a considerable amount of public funding, although there is also an increasing amount of private money from international students, home undergraduate tuition fees, and research and consultancy projects.

In 2007, we interviewed five vice chancellors (presidents/chief executives) and twenty-four members of their senior management teams in six universities in England. Almost without exception, the academics in these teams described themselves as leaders, not managers. Unlike in North America, none of this group of respondents would think of referring to any of their work as administration — only career managers (such as finance directors or registrars) are happy with such a role identity. However, respondents were also keen to tell us about their distributed management arrangements, which are not consistent with New Labour’s emphasis on inspirational leadership:

I’m a member of the directorate; my portfolio is everything to do with the academic work of the university — all the student facing side of things: academic administration, learning resources, the international office registry, which includes admissions, research degree students, all student support services, and in terms of my more general role with the vice chancellor. . . . I work closely with the vice chancellor doing all the things that aren’t in that list that are the general things that go on in any university. . . It’s a fairly typical PVC role. . . . All of that involves leadership. (female PVC, Longley, post-1992)

Distributed leadership is not only about senior management teams sharing responsibility. It was also argued to include academic decision making through committees and the development of devolved budgets to individual units. However, it may be that responsibility is much more widely dispersed than power in such distributed leadership systems. Being on a committee may give an academic a sense of involvement, just as it does for a head of department who has a devolved budget, but if the committee’s decisions are overruled or ignored by senior management and if the head of department is not allowed to hire any new staff or spend any surpluses, then the distributed leadership may not mean a great deal.
On the theme of whose agenda for change is being followed in England’s higher education system, several interviewees said that they were far from being mere implementers of government policy. What most felt they did was to mediate government changes and policies to fit the circumstances and priorities of their own institutions and also embark on changes of their own:

When I came here I asked how many faculties there were, and nobody could quite answer the question. It was somewhere between eight and nine; it depended who you asked, and there were eighty-something departments, maybe more, complete chaos, and it's actually not atypical of where universities were, and in fact some still are, and they were in the process of trying to sort out what they should do instead, because they all knew it was nonsense, so I spent a long time with the then eighty heads of department on away days, away weekends, chewing over the strategy for the institution and a structure. We, first of all, worked out the structure, because I insisted we should have a managerial culture, of some sort, that was better than what we had, and that power should be aligned with accountability. All these words were completely foreign to the institution, never heard of, and among Humanities and the Social Science caused apoplexy. . . .

I resent the fact that {because} the government gives us 30 percent of the money, they think they can control 100 percent of what we do. So, I object to that very much, and I'm a very staunch advocate of more autonomy because the more successful universities in the world have the greatest autonomy. (male VC, Furzedown, pre-1992)

It is interesting that for this VC, being independent of government nevertheless seemed to involve managerialism.

Several of our other respondents did feel that they were (independent) agents for change:

Implementing government reform? I think I'm responding to it, and there's a whole set of things that I'm doing at the moment . . . {but} I'd hate to be a sort of “kept” change agent on behalf of the government, if you see what I mean. (male DVC, Furzedown, pre-1992)

When I was an HoD, one of reasons I got very frustrated . . . is that I didn't seem to be able to act as an agent of change, that I was simply reactive. . . . People told
you what to do even though you were supposed to be the person that was making
decisions. (Female dean, Parklane)

One or two respondents, though, had been given cause to reflect on the consequences of
leading change without paying sufficient attention to the needs of staff:

When I first came into this job, someone came to see {me} . . . a chap in tears . . .
and said, “Rick* I'm packing up, I've had enough. . . . I've worked here twenty-
five years, I've never got into trouble, I've worked weekends, done evening work,
done the whole lot, and do you know, Rick, in those twenty-five years, nobody
has ever said thank you.” . . . I learnt an awful lot from that, about valuing people
. . .. How often do we say thank you or well done? Far too infrequently, actually.
(Male dean, Parklane)

In the Lancaster managerialism project reported earlier in this chapter, we saw that there
were some discrepancies between the allegedly consultative approach to leadership and
management noted by those in manager-academic positions and the views of the staff in the
same organizations, who suggested there was amateur management and leadership, poor decision
making, and a failure to consult. The interviewees in our new project also talked about their
consultative approach to leadership:

I think what would characterize it . . . is change by persuasion, dialogue,
convincing people of the need and how to get there, and the strategies, and
building consensus and of course you have to be patient and willing to consider
longer time scales if you're going to reach consensus, rather than do it by dictat,
but it takes root better. (Male PVC, Hopton)

I would say a combination of approaches, really, and whilst on the one hand I like
to undertake consultation with people who are going to be involved in the change,
it's not . . . I don't operate, a strictly democratic, I would say, a strictly
democratic approach, tow ards change. It's taking consultation and then trying to
put that together with our own thoughts as to the way to go (Male Associate dean,
Littleoaks)

However, as the last respondent makes clear, consultation and a democratic approach are
not the same. Consultation does not mean that leaders will do as their staff suggest. Indeed, too
much dissent may be seen as a problem — there have been a number of instances in the UK recently where VCs have disciplined staff who criticize managers.

We are also interested in how far the kinds of leadership development activities senior management teams undergo, reflect government policy or encourage a more independent approach to it. There was a general view among those who had recently experienced such provision, whether from the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education or elsewhere, that no particular line was pursued:

I mean the thing about the Top Management Programme [run by the LFHE] is really, I mean the best bits of it are about reflection and being exposed to a variety of different ideas, and the other part is just, again, you know, it's the networking thing, sharing common experiences, so no, they didn't promote any particular... I mean they promoted the idea that change was an important thing that you had to deal with, and they said, you know, I can't remember the details of what they expected, the different ways of meeting it. (Male DVC, Furzedown, pre-1992)

The main purpose for the week was emphasising that as you moved up the ladder, your role increasingly was to not think of one particular part of the institution in isolation from another, that more and more as you got, as your level got higher, and you essentially were dealing with matters more strategic, you needed to be connecting matters physical with HR, with legal, with marketing, with academic, and so on and so forth... I mean at the end of the week our job was, as a group . . . We were the University of X, and so we were given some constraints about what the task was about, you know, this is the kind of admission, these are the kind of issues your institution deals with, and you have to develop your own mission, and you know, what it is you were going to [do] by way of growth, and physical developments and all the rest of it. (male Senior Management Team Administrator, Valley, pre-1992)

However, we might want to question whether leadership development activities are as innocent of government policy and current orthodoxies about how public service organizations should be led as some of our respondents have suggested. Both respondents and leadership development providers are deeply immersed, consciously or not, in current ways of doing things, and there is certainly little evidence in England’s higher education sector that there has been any
significant move away from managerialism, despite the new rhetorical emphasis on inspirational leadership. The hold of the evaluative state is also still strong.iii We might also want to ask why the dominant approaches to running universities are still being taken for granted by both leaders and leadership development providers, given some of the consequences for staff spelled out in the previous sections.

Who’s Unravelling the Academic Loom?

The answer to this puzzle appears to be that it is often academic leaders who are involved in this process, though clearly it does not mean that all of them are implicated, and it is certain that there are examples of academic leaders who are committed to preserving the integrity of academic work. However, we have no real means of knowing the distribution of such leaders compared with those to whom, seemingly, academic work is a necessary evil that must be “managed,” curbed, audited, and generally distrusted. At the same time, who is able to defend academic integrity? Individual academics clearly have a role, but any sustainable defence must surely involve collective action. Although the two main UK academic trade unions have recently merged into a single organization, the Universities and Colleges Union, it is not clear from either the limited degree of recent academic support for action (for example, in the summer of 2006 over pay, by refusing to mark exams or other assessed work) or from the response of academic leaders to such action (in some cases docking significant amounts of pay, even though in all other respects academics were working normally) that there remains a strong climate for or tolerance of collective trade union activity among UK academics and their leaders. Without this, the unravelling of the academic loom seems set to continue.

So far, we have established that managerialism appears to be still alive and well in UK higher education (and almost certainly elsewhere too), despite, in the case of England, an attempt by government to supplant (or perhaps to supplement) it by reference to inspirational or transformational leadership. Managerialism also seems to have led to a number of specific consequences for the integrity of academic work. The consequences include, as noted earlier, active intervention in how and on what topics academics conduct research and in the outputs of that research; the development of audit regimes to assess the quality of teaching and learning, which are based on a distrust of academics and a belief that the outcomes of teaching can be predicted in advance: a shift in the axis of doctoral degree from a mainly academic concern to one embroiled in a whole range of intrusive quality measures and bureaucratic devices and
changes to doctoral programs and viva procedures, with students also displaying a consumerist attitude to their studies, for example by recording supervisions in case they ever need to appeal against the failure to award the degree. Manager-academics and academic leaders may claim they are consultative but their colleagues do not always think so. As we have seen from our current ESRC study on leadership development and public service modernization, academic leaders often perceive that they are following their own change agendas, but in practice they are still significantly constrained by the audit compliance culture and an “evaluative state." The state’s role in this process can often lead to contradictory government policies, such as the English emphasis on all institutions engaging in widening the social basis of HE higher education participation (itself an important political project) but accompanied with a quest for world class status by universities via their excellence in research and a requirement that all higher education institutions demonstrate the economic impact of their activities, with the social and cultural impact being very much secondary. These activities pull institutions in different directions. In this context, it is important to think through what action academics can still take to preserve the integrity of their academic work.

**Conclusion**

We have seen that the managerial university and the evaluative state are alive and well in the higher education institutions of the UK’s four countries, despite an apparent recent attempt to replace new managerialism by an emphasis instead on inspirational leadership. Undoubtedly similar regimes are at work in other higher education systems, too. While not all manager-academics and academic leaders have embraced new managerialism, many of them have. The consequences of new managerialism’s grip over academics and their work can be seen in a climate of distrust in universities and overt performance management of academics, together with institutions that are “hollowed out” or focus too much on their “global service” function to the exclusion of all else. As a result, the creative aspects of research and the developmental elements of teaching and learning are being subordinated to other considerations, such as the focus on applied research for large companies (even if this research has problematic ethical elements or never produces outcomes that are placed in the public domain) and the emphasis on job training and employability skills for students. Can the integrity of academic work survive this onslaught?
What follows are some suggestions on how academics and those of their leaders who are committed to maintaining the academic integrity of their teaching and research work might approach this task in the current climate. The first point is that we need to (re)learn to trust academics to teach and research without constant audit trails and a compliance culture. This is not to deny that those who are in receipt of public money should be accountable for what they do, but there is a big difference between academics taking steps to do their work professionally and with due regard to the investment of public money in higher education and no academics being trusted to do their work well without constant intrusive surveillance. Secondly, in terms of academic leadership, there are two possibilities. One is to only appoint academic leaders managers to temporary posts so that those who are more managerially inclined only have a finite remit. At the same time, more attention should be paid to the kind of leadership development support that leaders and those who aspire to leadership should receive; the cult of the “amateur” manager/leader is not in anyone’s interests and neither is an adherence to the belief, in development activities and elsewhere, that there is only one way to run contemporary higher education institutions. A critical debate among academic leaders on alternatives to managerialism in running universities and a move away by governments from imposing “what the private sector did ten years ago” would be two significant steps forward. Academics themselves should fight for the right to retain an active role in both teaching and research and ensure that the two parallel activities are firmly connected and linked, with teaching and research both emphasizing intellectual engagement and not just training for work or applied research development activities that mainly support — using public resources — the activities of multi-national corporations. Moreover, the climate of higher education worldwide does not always reflect a genuine belief in the value of academic work. We should seek ways of retaining free access to university knowledge without giving it away to commercial publishers or other big corporations who then make steep charge to universities to get it back, or — worse — insist on keeping findings secret. Finally, it might make sense to think of universities as organizations that still retain a vital role in validating and legitimating and making available knowledge, despite not having a monopoly on that knowledge.

If we are to overcome the restraints and constraints of the managerial university on the integrity of academic work, academics, their trade unions, and their students need to be in the
forefront of those endeavours. Otherwise, there is a real danger that both the integrity and the value of academic work will be lost.

When Penelope’s husband Odysseus did not come home from the Trojan War, she was besieged by other potential husbands. However, Penelope still hoped Odysseus would return and so told would-be suitors that she could not remarry until she had completed a woven shroud for Laertes, her husband’s father. She spent some of every day weaving the shroud, but each night she would unravel the work on the loom. Eventually a servant told her suitors what she was doing, and they demanded she choose one of them to marry. She declared that she would marry the first suitor who could string Odysseus’s bow and shoot an arrow through twelve axes. Meanwhile, Odysseus returned, dressed as a poor man, passed the bow test and then murdered the suitors who had harassed Penelope. See http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/penelope.html.

The UK higher education system is in reality composed of four different national systems: England (the largest), Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (the last named is the smallest, with only two universities). Higher education policy is largely a devolved power, though confusingly, science policy, including the Research Assessment Exercise, is UK-wide.


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