

New Managerialism in British Higher Education—a Vice-Chancellor's Perspective

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This article sets out a vice-chancellor's perspective on "new managerialism." It begins by defining what is meant by the term and then considers how it affects my university and UK higher education in general. It is, incidentally, very much a vice-chancellor's perspective, though it also draws on my experience as a former government official and chief operating officer of a national quality assurance agency.

THE MEANING OF NEW MANAGERIALISM

I am not aware of a common definition. I am using the term to indicate that a more conscious and systematic effort is made by the authorities at a university—the vice-chancellor and the academic and administrative leadership—to manage the affairs of the institution, including the activities of the academic staff, and to fulfill certain overall organizational objectives rather than leaving outcomes to be determined simply by the interplay of the various interests within the institution. The shift reflects the increased external stakeholder interest in higher education that has accompanied massification and the knowledge economy with the central role for universities as producers of knowledge. Higher education is now too expensive and too important to be left to the academy.

NEW MANAGERIALISM AND MY UNIVERSITY

My institution is subject to a bewildering array of accountabilities to the state. The maximum fees we charge for home undergraduate tuition, the bursaries (scholarships) we offer impecunious students, and the numbers of state-funded students we recruit are all closely controlled. Our governance and management, particularly financial management, are regularly and closely scrutinized. The Quality Assurance Agency periodically audits and issues public reports on our mainstream teaching provision; it also looks from time to time at our collaborative programs, including those with overseas partners. Its reports are published and attract wide publicity. A government-sponsored Web site contains publicly endorsed information about quality and standards at each institution.

As in the United States, professional and statutory bodies accredit programs leading to professional qualifications in areas such as teacher education and health education. Our staff research effort is periodically assessed through the nationwide

Research Assessment Exercise, which determines how much (if any) state funding we might receive for such activity and what is the single most important allocator of institutional and departmental prestige. Finally, the other services we provide for local businesses and communities are also subject to a good deal of external scrutiny.

However, there is also an appreciable degree of self-regulation. The academic community remains essentially self-governing. Individual faculty are still largely responsible for what they focus on for teaching and research and, to a very large extent, how, when, and indeed where they do their work. My institution cannot be unusual in its Jekyll and Hyde character. Huge numbers of students arrive at the start of October. They remain there (with one or two breaks) until about the middle of May. Staff disappear about a month later, and the university is largely empty—apart from young revenue-generating students from southern or eastern Europe—until October. Moreover, staff are clearly accountable as much to the invisible subject armies as to their employing institutions. I know that this phenomenon is not confined to the United Kingdom.

This position is, however, beginning to change. State initiatives on things like access are beginning to affect previous "black box" areas such as student admissions, desired learning outcomes, student assessments, and even choice of research topics. The introduction (through variable fees and bursaries) of a greater degree of competition in the home undergraduate market and the increasingly sharp concentration of state research funding—10 institutions have over 30 percent and 4 institutions nearly 20 percent of Funding Council research funding—are also beginning to shape institutional missions. There is, of course, already fierce competition in the markets for overseas and postgraduate students and in gaining research funding and donations from business, private donors, and government agencies. Also as in America, increasing

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amounts of institutional resources are going into areas like marketing, enrollments, and fundraising that would previously have been used for teaching and research. These trends affect all institutions, and there is little sign that institutions receiving a lower proportion of state funding are significantly better off in terms of freedom from regulation.

THE THREAT OF THE MARKET

The position is about to change as we move into a new era of price competition in the main undergraduate market, with the introduction in fall 2007 of variable fees and bursaries.

In the long run it is these market forces, as much as state action, that will determine the quality and relevance of what

my institution will offer or even whether it (and the kind of learning experience it tries to provide) will survive. What view do my faculty take on this? Nearly every survey shows that academic staff are generally hostile to these forces. Already many of them feel alienated from what they see as increased bureaucratization and a reduced academic control as a result of state initiatives. Some of these perspectives but by no means all of them are justified.

Similarly, institutional heads are fond of complaining about the accountability "burden." But every independent study has

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shown that the direct costs are at least tiny in relation to the overall level of public and private expenditure now committed to higher education.

What worries me far more is the increasing volume of student complaints and appeals, the declining level of trust between institutions and students, the increased levels of cheating, the increasing characterization of higher education as a private rather than a public good, and the view that ultimately it is the customer who should determine the appropriateness of program and research outcomes. In my view this growing marketization represents a much greater threat to the academic enterprise than any number of government initiatives. I hope I am wrong. ■

Flying Brains: A Challenge Facing Iran Today

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Today, Iran suffers a major loss of intellectuals, scientists, medical doctors, and academic elites. According to the International Monetary fund (IMF), which surveyed 91 countries, Iran has the highest rate of brain drain in the world: every year, 150,000 educated Iranians leave their home country to pursue better opportunities abroad. Iranian experts put the economic loss of brain drain at some \$50 billion a year or

higher, making the exodus of an inventor or scientist comparable in local terms to the eradication of 10 oil wells.

The desire among Iran's elites to seek higher education degrees abroad goes back to the early 19th century, but the phenomenon of brain drain is a contemporary one. The main purpose of leaving the home country in those days was to attend foreign universities in Europe, especially in France and Germany, to acquire expertise in the fields of engineering, medicine, and military sciences that would be applied at home. Even then, fascination with Western culture or intermarriage motivated some Iranian students to remain abroad, but the majority of students—especially those on government scholarships, which often stipulated that the expertise acquired abroad be applied at home—returned to Iran after their studies ended.

UNEMPLOYMENT/UNDEREMPLOYMENT

Numerous factors contribute to the current unprecedented outflow of human capital from Iran. According to economists, Iran needs to create more than a million jobs a year just to keep pace with its growing population. In reality, only about 300,000 new jobs are added each year, creating high unemployment rates among educated youth (one out of 10 unemployed youth hold a university degree).

Official statistics have set the rate of unemployment at 15 percent. Only 75,000 of the 270,000 university graduates who enter the labor market each year will find jobs, creating a situation in which university graduates must line up with the rest of the population in search of sources of income. The jobs that they find often have little to do with their studies and special-

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ization. Many young educated Iranians have left or are actively seeking employment in the countries of the UAE, India, Turkey, and Australia—or anywhere they can obtain a visa.

UNIVERSITIES' INTELLECTUAL ATMOSPHERE

In addition to economic hardships, the intellectual atmosphere at universities does not encourage qualified academics to remain. Scholars and scientists feel excluded from decision making their expertise qualifies them for and believe their work is unappreciated. An Education Ministry official states that a large number of university scholars who go abroad on sabbaticals contact their home institutions requesting unpaid leave: a tacit way of acknowledging they intend to stay abroad. Officials attribute this to lack of resources, including insufficient research facilities and laboratories, a lack of new books and access to education Web sites as well as low salaries.

CONCOURS

An often unacknowledged factor in brain drain is the rigorous