

# Kent Academic Repository

## Full text document (pdf)

### Citation for published version

Shepherd, Sue (2017) Academics and Power: How a new cadre of career track academic managers are colonising university management. In: British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS) Annual Conference, 7-9 July 2017, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK. (Unpublished)

### DOI

### Link to record in KAR

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/62474/>

### Document Version

Other

#### Copyright & reuse

Content in the Kent Academic Repository is made available for research purposes. Unless otherwise stated all content is protected by copyright and in the absence of an open licence (eg Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher, author or other copyright holder.

#### Versions of research

The version in the Kent Academic Repository may differ from the final published version.

Users are advised to check <http://kar.kent.ac.uk> for the status of the paper. **Users should always cite the published version of record.**

#### Enquiries

For any further enquiries regarding the licence status of this document, please contact:

[researchsupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:researchsupport@kent.ac.uk)

If you believe this document infringes copyright then please contact the KAR admin team with the take-down information provided at <http://kar.kent.ac.uk/contact.html>

Sue Shepherd  
BELMAS Annual Conference 9 July 2017

# Academics and Power: How a New Cadre of Career Track Academic Managers are Colonising University Management



[@sueshepherdHE](https://twitter.com/sueshepherdHE)

University of  
**Kent**

# Context and Rationale

- ‘Woe is me’ academic misery narrative
- Universities going to hell in a handcart
- Managerialism “seeped into every nook and cranny”
- Academic authority and status have declined in inverse proportion to that of managers
- Managers/management have taken over
- Didn’t match my own professional experience
- Wanted to critically examine this narrative and explore who these managers are that are supposedly taking over our universities

# Research Focus

- **Second-tier managers:** Deputy and pro vice chancellors (PVCs)
  - Core members of the executive team
  - Not only play a vital management role in support of the VC
  - But also form the main recruitment pool for future VCs
  - Under-researched and under-theorised group
- **Pre-1992 universities:** University status prior to 1992 Further and Higher Education Act
  - Traditionally have part-time PVCs on internal secondment
  - Changing their PVC role and appointment method
  - Want to understand nature and implications of that change for who PVCs are, what they do, and their motivations and aspirations

# Data Sources and Methods

Two studies and data sources: SRHE-funded research award and ESRC-funded PhD

## 1. Census of PVCs (n=229)

- 42 pre-1992 English universities
- UUK members (excl. specialist and private universities)
- Snapshot in time of demographic/professional profile (June 2016)
- Publicly available data from university websites

## 2. Semi-structured interviews (n=45)

- 19 vice chancellors and 26 PVCs
- Pre-1992 universities that appointed at least one PVC via external open competition

# Academic Dominance

- PVCs still overwhelmingly career academics: 91% in pre-1992s (89% in post-1992s)
- Despite the more managerial interpretation of PVC role, key criterion is a track record of research excellence
- Academic credibility is a non-negotiable requirement
- Generic management skills/experience not recognised
- Professional managers - from inside or outside HE – are not deemed to have legitimacy to manage academics
- ‘Glass wall’, or vertical segregation, between academics and professional services managers at PVC level
- A form of “professional apartheid” (Janet Beer)

# Rise of the Career Track Manager

- Traditionally, PVCs were hybrid academic-managers who maintained their underlying academic career
- Part-time PVC role is now a full-time management job
- ‘Reluctant’ or ‘good citizen’ managers being replaced by ‘career track’ managers (previously only in post-1992s)
- Similar profile but different motivations, attracted by a “seat at the top table” and the “being-in-charge angle”
- Happy to call themselves managers and to assert their ‘right to manage’ others – a key tenet of managerialism
- They are ambitious: many aspire to the top job
- An academic management career has been legitimised

## Growing in Influence

- PVC cohort in pre-1992s is growing: increased by 55% between 2005 and 2016, from 148 to 229
- Rise from 3.8 to 5.4 posts on average per institution
- Change from 'floating' policy role to the direct management of people and performance
- Creation of new executive variants of the role: PVC/Deans and executive DVCs or provosts
- Budgetary and line management responsibility for faculties and/or professional services
- PVC portfolios expanded from T&L and research to international, planning, external relations, fundraising
- Extending collective management power and remit



# Power Relations

- Academic misery narrative suggests academics have lost power in relation to managers
- Yes, but not to professional services managers
- Academics continue to monopolise PVC posts in a form of social closure that maintains their exclusive status
- They are also extending their sphere of influence
- Arguably it is they, not professional services managers, who are colonizing university management
- Real shift of power is thus from rank-and-file academics to this new professional elite of career track managers
- Reflects a professional stratification within the academy

# Concluding Thoughts and Questions

- Changes to PVC role are an understandable response
- However, some things are lost when academic management becomes a full-time career
- This new cadre of career track PVCs are divorced from day-to-day frontline academic activities; not returning to the ranks – likely to have sacrificed research career
- Growing gulf between them and academic community
- Increasingly regarded as management “suits” acting in a managerial capacity or their own self-interests
- If PVCs are neither functioning academics nor professional managers, is this change for the better and is it still meaningful to insist they are academics?

## Find out more

- Link to Guardian article
- [No Room at the Top? The Glass Wall for Professional Services Managers in Pre-1992 English Universities](#) Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education Published online 28 November 2016
- [Managerialism: An Ideal Model](#) Studies in Higher Education Published online 13 February 2017