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Who Really Runs English Universities?

Research Context

- Transformation of UK higher education over last 30 years: expansion, globalisation; competition, tuition fees, political/media profile

- Impact of new public management reforms: focus on efficiency, accountability and a more business-like approach

- Shift from 'administration' to 'management' of universities:
    - Vice chancellors as CEOs
    - Emergence of the executive management team (EMT)
    - Recruitment of professional/specialist managers, often from outside HE

- Managerialism, i.e. ideology of management, is perceived to have permeated universities (Deem & Brehony 2005)

- Dominant academic narrative:
    - Managerialism is pervasive and problematic
    - Loss of academic autonomy/power to managers

Research Focus

First Tier
Vice Chancellor

Second Tier
Deputy and Pro Vice Chancellors (PVCs)

Third, or Next, Tier
Deans of Faculty/ Heads of School

Directors of Professional Services

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Changing PVC Appointment in Pre-92s

Internal Secondment

Appointment by invitation

Part time

Fixed term

Return to academic role

External Open Competition

External advertisement

Executive search agencies (ESAs)

Full time

Fixed term or open ended

- 71% (32 of 45) of pre-92s externally advertised at least one PVC post (2006-2013)
- A third of current PVCs were appointed as a result of external advertisement

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Research Questions

1. Who are PVCs in pre-1992 English universities?

2. What impact has the change to an external open competition appointment model had on the profile of these PVCs?

3. To what extent do my findings support the prevailing academic narrative that academic authority is declining as managerial authority is increasing?

Data Collection

Mixed methods research design utilising multiple data sources

1. *Advertisement Monitoring Exercise (2006-2013)*
   - Adverts in THE and jobs.ac.uk for all PVC posts in English HEIs (n=287)

2. *Census* of PVC post holders (Aug 2012 and 2013)
   - Snapshot in time. Publically available online data. Pre-92s. (n=215)

3. *Online survey* of 'next tier' post holders (Nov 2012)
   - Identifiable 'next tier' managers – academic and PS Directors - whose email address could be found. Pre-92s (n=132)

4. *Semi-structured interviews* (May-Nov 2013)

   - Purposive sample of VCs, PVCs, Registrars and 'next tier' managers in those pre-92s that have advertised externally and ESAs active in HE. Predominantly face-to-face. Respondent validated (n=73)

Profile of PVCs: August 2013

	Number	%		Number	%
Male	164	76.3	Female	51	23.7
White	206	95.8	Non-white	9	4.2
Professor	194	90.2	Not Professor	21	9.8
Career Academic	202	94.0	Not Career Academic	13	6.0

219 PVC posts in 45 pre-92 English universities, including four vacant posts

PVC Profile by Appointment Method

	Appointed via External Open Competition n=71		Appointed via an Internal Process n=144	
	Number	%	Number	%
Female	11	15.5	40	27.8
Non-white	3	4.2	6	4.2
Not Professor	4	4.2	17	11.8
Not Career Academic	4	5.6	9	6.0

Impact of Change on PVC Profile

- External competition has led to widening, but not diversification, of the candidate pool

- Significant negative impact on proportion of female appointments suggestive of structural impediments for women (e.g. geographical mobility)

- Safer, more conservative appointment decisions

- Focus on experience as indicator of quality - and the ability to 'poach' those already in post - has led to a recirculation of existing PVCs (39% v 22%)

- Evidence of homosociability, or the appointment of "people like us"

- Experience outside higher education is not recognised and non-academic managers from within higher education are an invisible group

- Main job criteria remains research track record and academic credibility

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Emergent Theory: Academic Narrative

- Belief that PVCs should be academics remains undimmed and there is clear evidence of occupational closure

- So, rather than a diminution of academic authority, there is arguably an assertion of it, albeit by a few 'elite' academics

- PVC role is growing and academics are taking over the management 'jurisdiction'

- This may be a *defence* against the incursion of generic managerialism and professional (non-academic) managers, who are perceived to be gaining in power

- Academics are running English universities and arguably consolidating their authority

- Academic narrative on relative power relations is thus more myth than reality? It reflects the fact that PVCs are no longer seen as part of the academic community

Find out more

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