

The M2020 fallacy

Can top-down management make our university great?

David Berk, Senior Lecturer, Division of Pharmacy & Optometry

Recent M2020 proposal is controversial:

- *“bold ambition to be a world leading institution”*
- *“further action is necessary to*
 - *improve the quality of our research,*
 - *reduce student numbers*
 - *improve our effectiveness and efficiency in some areas.*
- *[hence] ...proposals **from the senior staff** of the University [for] reductions of up to 171 posts”*

Questions...

- Is “global standing” ***sensibly defined*** and ***achievable?***
- Has action by “senior staff” to date ***really advanced our global standing?***
- Do “senior staff” have a ***viable plan to achieve a further jump*** in global standing?

Background

- 2004 Merger of VUM and UMIST
- Became the UK's largest university
- Strategic plan for development, "Manchester 2015" since updated to M2020
- Characterised by
 - Inspiring statements on academic ideals and the role of the university
 - Top-down management, preoccupied with KPIs and positions in league tables
 - Chose the ARWU (Shanghai) rankings as our gold-standard, the primary measure of our success
 - Target set: #25

KPI 1. Global standing

Target: To be recognised as one of the 25 leading universities in the world, with 20% of subject areas in the top 20, as measured by our position in international league tables.

Component metrics in the ARWU (Shanghai) league table

Indicators and Weights for ARWU

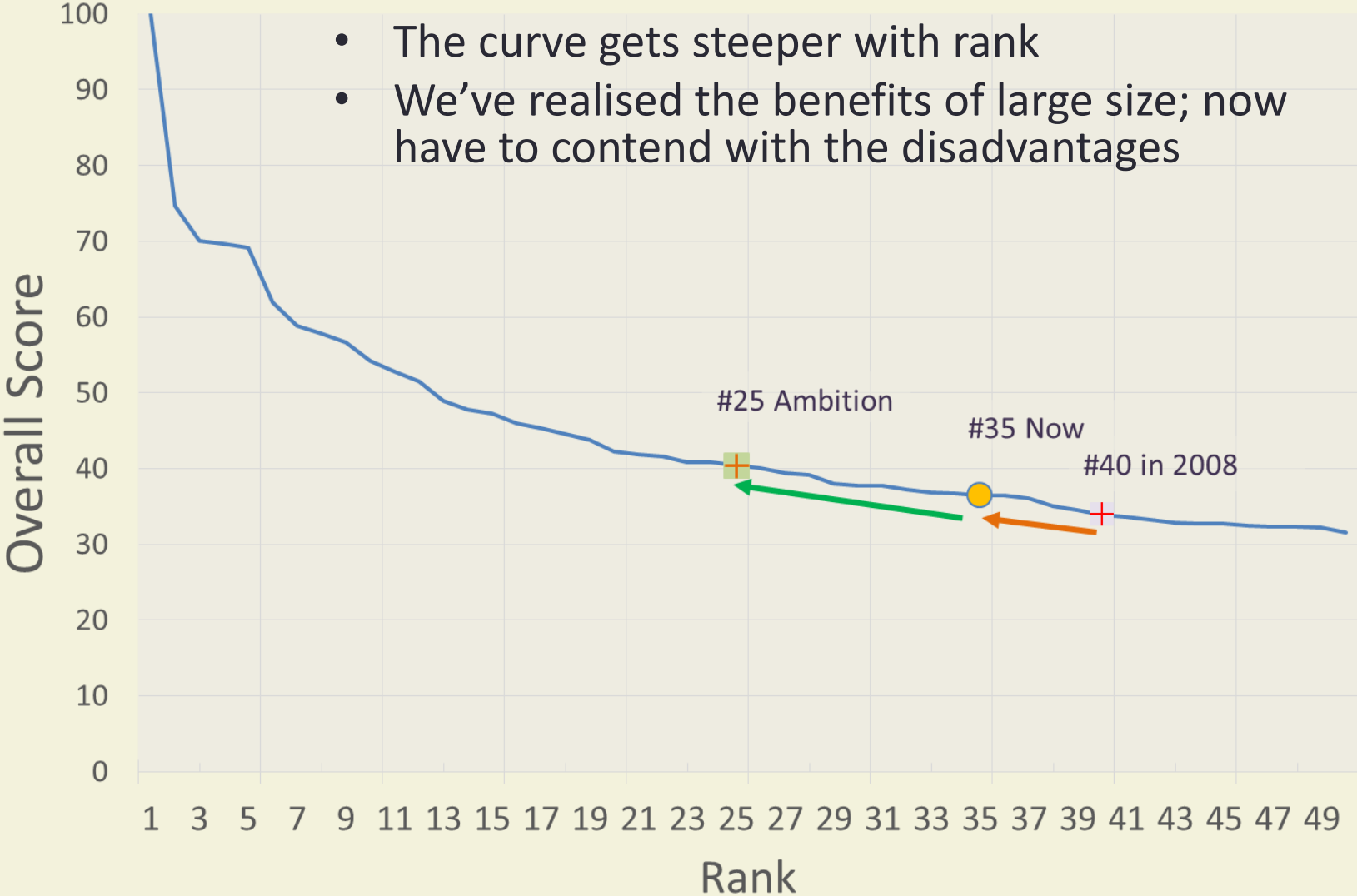
Criteria	Indicator	Code	Weight
Quality of Education	Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	Alumni	10%
Quality of Faculty	Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	Award	20%
	Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories	HiCi	20%
Research Output	Papers published in Nature and Science*	N&S	20%
	Papers indexed in Science Citation Index-expanded and Social Science Citation Index	PUB	20%
Per Capita Performance	Per capita academic performance of an institution	PCP	10%

- Objective
- Measures research output only
- Favours large size
- PCP, worth 10%, normalises the other indicators by institution staff size

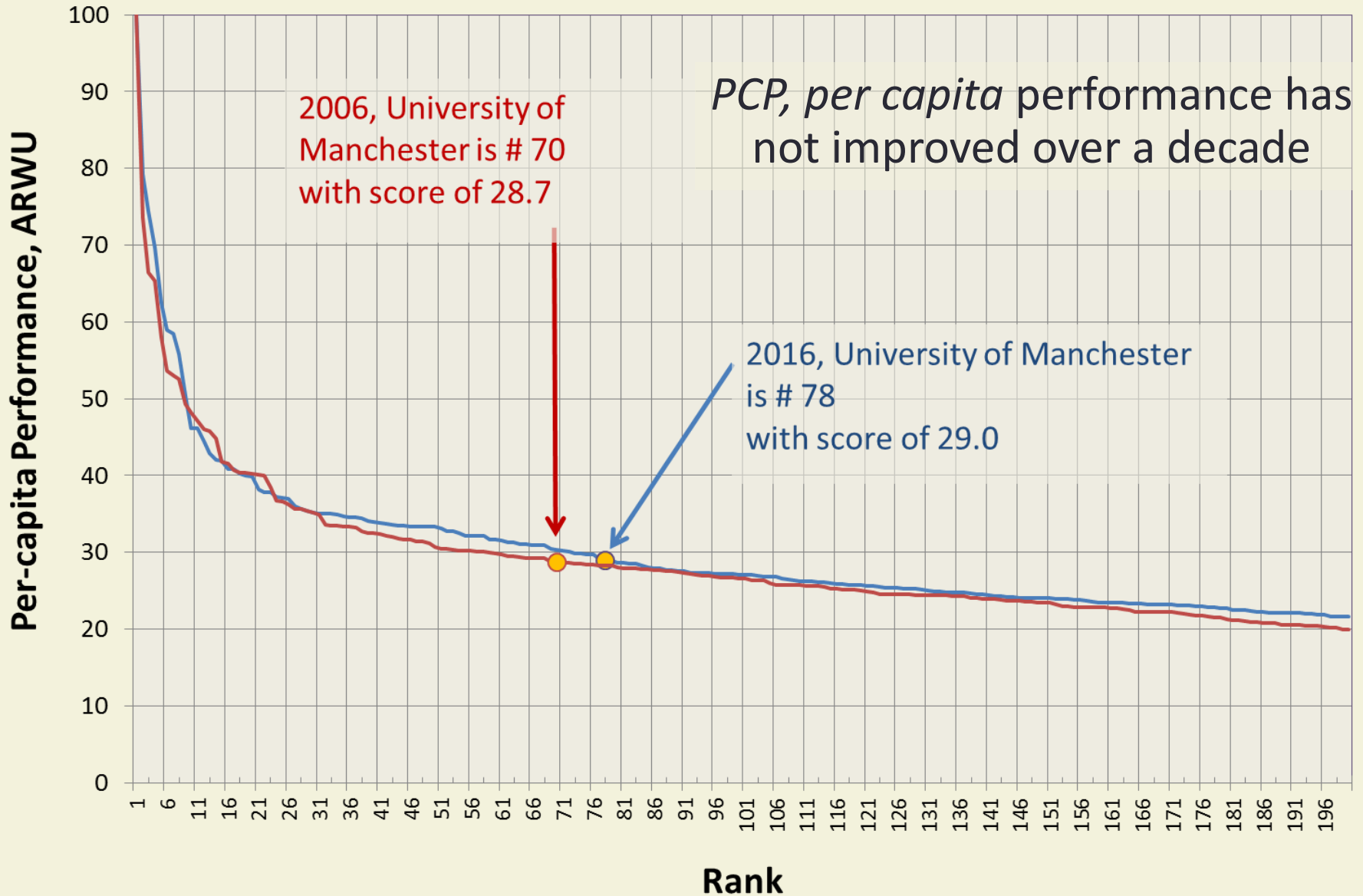
Manchester's position in the Shanghai ranking



Achieving the M2020 definition of “world leading” is unlikely



Not much scope to increase size; can we increase *per capita* research performance?



Breakdown by subject, ARWU league table *shows its irrelevance as a management tool*

Subject	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
SCI	48	48	43	44	33	33	34	27	30	24
ENG	44	35	32	33	32	36	37	>75	>75	35
LIFE	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100
MED	>50	>50	>50	>50	>50	>50	>50	>75	>75	>100
SOC	>50	>50	>75	>75	>75	>75	>75	46	50	38

Narrow Subject	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Mathematics	>75	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100
Physics	37	38	14	13	13	13	13
Chemistry	>50	>50	>100	>100	>100	>100	>100
Computer Science	47	42	49	>50	>50	>75	>50
Economics/ Business	>100	>100	>100	>150	>100	>75	>50

- **Only Physics** propelling us up the table
- 2010 Nobel Prize to Geim & Novoselov has been a major factor
- Life Sciences and Medicine consistently below top 20 , **now both below 100**
- **Medicine falling** since 2013
- Humanities do not even figure in these rankings!
- Nothing to suggest that top-down management has done much good

Conclusions

- **Dubious track record.**
 - Global league table an **inappropriate tool**, being **used dishonestly** to suggest achievement by senior leadership.
 - No substantial advance since 2008.
- **Dubious vision.**
 - SLT not articulated a credible plan for “excellence”
 - Proposals to create “headroom” are vague, secretive
 - Current proposals unlikely to enhance global standing and could damage it.
- **Reality:** Manchester is firmly in the **2nd tier**,
 - Lacks a clear advantage in wealth, reputation, desirability as a destination for students / staff
 - It is, and always will be, a mixture of world-leading and more mundane
 - Roughly equivalent to ~20 other UK universities (REF quality GPA, domestic league tables, other international tables)
 - Top 100 internationally is still “excellent”, nothing to be ashamed of,
- **Needed** – reaffirmation and restatement of the Manchester 2015 goals
 - We must work hard to be better in research **AND teaching AND social responsibility**
 - Rely on the academic community; not top-down management