

## False Necessity

This briefing has been produced by the Better M2020 group of professors for circulation to all members of the Board of Governors ahead of their meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> October when they will decide whether to allow the compulsory redundancies required by the M 2020 projects. The aim is to show why in every School academic staff question the rationale for the M2020 projects, believe SLT and Faculty Management do not understand the risks and are not formulating and applying fair criteria for selecting those who are to be made redundant.

Our argument on these points draws on the operating knowledge and expertise of our members in the Schools which we illustrate by considering one issue in detail from each school. In SALC, the issue is the rationale for further cuts in modern languages and the policy of uniformly raising A level entry requirements; in AMBS, the issue is whether large and unfairly targeted cuts will increase workloads for survivors, in FBMH, the issue is the arbitrary process and selection criteria to be used in deciding who is made redundant.

The issues are about what the Governors would ordinarily consider to be operating detail where they would expect us to raise our concerns at School Board and meanwhile would accept the assurances of SLT and Faculty heads that everything is in order. But, we cannot get discussion of our concerns at School Boards because these are either moribund or controlled by management in ways which prevent discussion. At AMBS, management has refused to disclose its modelling of teaching requirements after student numbers have been reduced. The assurances of SLT should be treated with caution because they have instituted a top down management system where inconvenient operating truths do not travel upwards.

Instead, the University is being managed on “ambition for excellence” operationalised through bench marking and KPIs. The objective of upward mobility in the world university rankings is now being down played because SLT has belatedly recognised it will not happen when rankings depend on number of Nobel prize winners and other unattainable metrics. But uncritical management use of bench marking exercises has set the (unrealistic) aim of improving faster than our Russell Group peers on a variety of indicators without preliminary debate about what matters, whether and how the variable is manageable and at what cost. The multiplication of KPIs produces measurement overload and makes it more difficult to decide what to do about stubborn problems.

Against this confusing background, it is clear that the rationale for the M2020 projects is not financial: our 2015-16 report declares an operating surplus of £36 million or 3.5% of income. This is better than in many major corporates like Tesco. The 2020 projects envisage 140 academic redundancies followed by “the creation of 100 plus new early career academic appointments”. On our rough calculations, this will recurrently save no more than £5 million per annum which is negligible in a university with income of around £1 billion

The M2020 projects instead aim to produce that elusive “step change in performance” by addressing school specific problems. We welcome any policy focus on the specifics of school problems because our activities are diverse and the strategic choices and operating issues are different in SALC and AMBS or FBMH. But the benefits of focus only come through if SLT

has a precise diagnosis of our problems in each school and can prescribe fixes which deliver solutions without creating secondary problems. The three cases illustrate how M 2020 falls short on all these criteria partly because academic staff have not been engaged in dialogue about the nature of local problems, the policy options or the consequences of management action.

An isolated SLT team then tends to underestimate the depth and extent of staff dissatisfaction with their policies while selecting measures and claims which fit with what they want to believe. Thus, SLT claims that the 240 professors who signed our earlier letter of no confidence are one sixth of the total and by implication a small group of malcontents; maybe that is so if we count all the honorary professors. But, from two solid sources, the staff directory and published HEFCE returns, 240 is around one third of the number of salaried professors actively engaged in the life of the institution and that is the politically relevant total.

By June 2017 a substantial minority of staff believed the M 2020 projects were about false necessity and we believe the number has since increased and the unofficial staff satisfaction survey will demonstrate that point. Faculty and School management would benefit from dialogue with them.

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***Q. Can management define issues and formulate policy for supporting a broad portfolio of disciplines in a large research university?***

**A. Not in SALC where modern languages are crudely stereotyped as “in decline” and the policy of uniformly raising A level grades threatens to turn decline into self-fulfilling prophecy.**

Modern languages can thrive and contribute to our university’s reputation if their long standing and successful effort to enhance excellence in Manchester is supported. In an earlier period, Manchester did support modern languages and the legacy of that earlier supportive environment is the current high position of Manchester modern languages in the global rankings. In the latest QS University World Rankings of 2017, as in the previous year, modern languages at Manchester are in the top 25 in the world, along with a few blue chip British peers like Oxbridge, UCL and Edinburgh<sup>1</sup>. Modern languages at Manchester is already where the University would like to be through M2020.

But, more recently, modern languages have not been supported and through M2020 now face further severe cuts which will undermine their hard won achievement. Staff have asked management to make a reasoned case to support the latest proposed cuts and, in response, they hear only the mantra that ‘languages are in decline’. This is a crude and unjustified

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2017/modern-languages>

judgement which misunderstands the national context and provides no basis for deciding policy on modern languages at Manchester.

The national context is a crisis in the uptake of languages in our schools and colleges – like the one STEM subjects experienced for decades pending the very welcome impact of successive governments’ multi-pronged, remedial action-plans. As earlier with STEM subjects, since 2010 the government has committed to long-term remedial action in support of modern languages. Reforms to GCSE, AS and A-level are being progressively implemented. Along with the DfE, Ofqual and the British Academy, the Russell Group played its part through the A-Level Content Advisory Board.

Together with STEM subjects and quantitative methods, modern languages have long been designated by HEFCE as strategically important and vulnerable subjects (SIVS). This recognises their importance to the country’s economy and security as well as their cultural value. Our University at present hosts one of four AHRC-funded centres to support research into the future direction of languages and, if supported by management, modern languages at Manchester is well placed to take a lead in a renaissance of languages at British universities.

The skills acquired in a Modern Languages degree are not just practical language competence but also adaptability, analytical and intercultural skills fostered by intensive study of a culture other than one's own. Bodies such as the CBI make it amply clear in their reports that precisely this mix of skills is required by employers. There can be no doubt of the need for our language graduates - as seen in outstanding employability statistics. For example, 85% of German graduates from Manchester in positive graduate destinations in 2015-16 – ranking 6<sup>th</sup> in the Russell Group. It is hardly necessary here to point to the further multiple reports on the UK languages deficit and what it costs the British economy.

As long as it takes for student numbers to recover through the school system, the skills deficit will, of course, have to be filled by universities. Modern languages at Manchester are already playing their part, notably through the provision of a beginners’ entry level in all languages. But there are local impediments to success, including the University’s inflexible policy on A-level grades and the centre’s increasing demands for school contributions

Against the background of schools’ crisis, the admissions base for modern languages at Manchester is strong. This is manifest in the outcome to the present admissions round where modern languages not only met the home UG target but also comfortably exceeded overseas recruitment. Applications for French rose in 2016-7 and German greatly strengthened its conversion of applications to acceptance. Academics in modern languages now fear that further staffing cuts will bring about the very ‘decline’ that is the alleged rationale for the cuts and incidentally, as in other areas like archaeology, make it impossible to fulfil the university’s obligations to its existing students.

At Faculty level, the proposed further cuts to languages in M2020 are informed by the assumption that the best policy going forward is for Manchester to raise A level grades across the board (which would then result in modern languages failing to meet recruitment targets so that downsizing is required). But this is not the only or the best admissions policy

response to the present schools' crisis. Faculty does not consider the bigger picture and how a flexible approach to entry grades in modern languages is central to strategy in other leading universities like Oxford. That approach recognises that A-level grades are an unreliable guide to performance at University and beyond. This is particularly so in modern languages where there is an ongoing problem about harsh and unreliable grading at A-level. Statistics reveal continuing discrepancies between this year's A\* boundary at A-Level Spanish (27/45 = A\*), French (32/45 = A\*) and German (39/45 = A\*).

In the past, modern languages have recruited students in sufficient numbers through quite high entry grades without the homogenization that is at present being implemented. Manchester's fetishisation of A-Level grades – apparently in response to the TEF – betrays a strategic insecurity, which underestimates the University's underlying strengths. The present inflexible policy would be best abandoned.

Contributions are another problem because rising contributions reduce the amount of School earned revenue locally available to employ front line academic staff. The level of contribution required from SALC by the centre of the university has risen by more than 10% over recent years, from the mid-30s % to the mid-40s %. Faculty has rightly attempted to reverse this trend, recognising the deleterious impact upon staff and students. However, the centre has persisted, engineering a situation of permanent financial crisis in SALC, in which divisions are pitted against each other in competition for inadequate resource. As happened in the former Faculty of Life Sciences, this approach can turn academic excellence into something that looks like its opposite. Yet, M2020 proposes that faculties and schools generate an additional £35 million in contributions which will manufacture further academic failure.

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***Q. Does management understand the consequences of M2020 so that it is prudently managing risk***

**A. Not in AMBS where too many redundancies unfairly concentrated in some groups will create problems about meeting teaching obligations**

At AMBS the M2020 project requires redundancy of academics as the corollary of reduced student numbers. The target was for 40 job cuts through compulsory redundancy if voluntary severance fails to attract sufficient applications.<sup>2</sup> The job cuts are concentrated in some sub groups, like the Organisation and Society subject group within the People, Management and Organisations division. Staff in those areas have been notified that they are 'in scope' for and subsequently 'at risk' of redundancy.

Staff in AMBS are concerned about whether this unprecedented, large, selective culling of staff is justified and whether the teaching loads of survivors may increase. School

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<sup>2</sup> This number has been subsequently reduced to 33, to reflect staff resignations outside of the VS scheme and redeployments, though the overall reduction in posts remains at 40 if those staff are not replaced.

management has repeatedly refused to disclose its modelling of how the planned reduction in student numbers will reduce overall demand for teaching and staff across different parts of the School. This is despite requests from the School Board for this data to be disclosed to allow an internal discussion about student numbers and teaching needs.<sup>3</sup>

The issues here are complicated because AMBS has both discipline based programmes like specialist masters and cross school programmes like the MBA; and because some of the student number reductions produce smaller classes rather than a reduction in teaching hours. But, from publicly available information and local knowledge, members of the Organisations and Society subject group have been able to model the effects precisely and their full workings and conclusions are available in a document on the UCU web site<sup>4</sup>. The UCU provided the group with target student numbers, disclosed to them as part of the consultation process. They then analysed the effect of lower projected student numbers on teaching needs, using the School's workload allocation model (WAM), available on the AMBS S Drive.

Their analysis shows that there is no justification for 40 staff redundancies because the aggregate reductions in teaching requirements are much smaller than the planned reduction of 40 posts. The selection of some areas of the School for cuts is also not supported because, in the case of their own group, there is no evidence to support the targeting of that specific subject area; and there is a significant resulting threat to the ability of remaining staff in that area to deliver teaching obligations.

At a School level, the M2020 project projects a reduction of 81 undergraduates (the annual intake would fall from 610 to 529) and 124 postgraduates (from 1,044 to 920). Analysis shows that these lower student numbers would result in a reduction of 4 teaching and scholarship (T&S) or 9 teaching and research (T&R) staff in 2017/18, rising to 7 (T&S) or 15 (T&R) staff in 2019/20 (see Table 1 on p.3).

The targeting of specific groups within AMBS for redundancy is also questionable. Some of those programmes with the largest expected reductions in students (e.g. BSc Management, MSc Management, MBA) are cross-school, taught by colleagues from all divisions in AMBS.<sup>5</sup> Other programmes with reductions in target numbers are taught by staff in areas not in scope. The logic for selecting some parts of the School is therefore unclear.

Analysis of one subject group, Organisations and Society (O&S), shows that there is no case for putting this group in scope and at risk. Lower student numbers in AMBS do not create redundant posts in this group. In WAM terms, the O&S subject group is under-resourced *before* the reductions in student numbers begin. Following projected changes to student numbers and ongoing teaching rationalisations resulting from curriculum reviews, it is

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<sup>3</sup> For example, a request was made in advance of an extraordinary meeting of the School Board on 28<sup>th</sup> June (when the President, Nancy Rothwell, also attended) and again during that meeting. No data of any kind was provided at the meeting or subsequently.

<sup>4</sup> "Modelling Teaching Needs" on the UCU web site at <http://manchester.web.ucu.org.uk/files/2017/09/Modelling-teaching-needs-in-AMBS.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See analysis of programmes on pp.9-11 of the UCU document.

estimated that the O&S SAG will continue to be under-resourced by 3,109 WAM hours and will struggle to meet its teaching obligations in 2017/18 and beyond.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, there is a significant risk that teaching obligations will not be met, even if less than 40 posts are cut. As well as unnecessary loss of valuable staff members, this will place an unreasonable burden on remaining staff, many of whom are already over-loaded in terms of the WAM.

The analysis summarised in this document highlights an urgent need for School management to release its modelling and to have an open and constructive internal discussion about future teaching requirements. Failure to do so, to date, has undermined staff confidence in School and Faculty management. In the circumstances, the Board of Governors and the University senior management should not accept general assurances but need to ask focused questions about the modelling behind the case for 40 job cuts. If they do not obtain and scrutinise this evidence, they are ignoring the risk that future teaching requirements cannot be met, or can only be met by eroding working conditions and research productivity for remaining staff.

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***Q. Can management devise and apply fair criteria when making selections for redundancy?***

**A. Not in FBMH where the “rank and yank” process is arbitrary and criteria are flawed**

The process is arbitrary because a preliminary selection for compulsory redundancy will be made through a fast-track desktop exercise based on the limited data available to management (*and without allowing staff to present their cases*). This is a matter of practical exigency because the number in scope is large in FBMH. But this kind of selection runs counter to the University’s equality and diversity policy because such exercises have been shown to systematically disadvantage women and ethnic minorities. The Athena Swann Charter and the Race Equality Charter that the University has signed up to identifies such exercises as inimical to good practice in equality and diversity. In other schools, despite protests by the most senior HR academic in this University, sickness record will be used as the tie breaker to choose between redundancy candidates of equal merit.

The selection also cuts across the staff appraisal process. FBMH, like other schools, has established procedures of annual appraisal which are used to exit underperforming staff and transfer the research inactive to teaching only contracts. The criteria used in making appraisal decisions about satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance are well understood and generally accepted by school management and academic staff. The implication of the M2020 exercise is that some individuals whose performance was deemed satisfactory in annual appraisals will now be selected for compulsory redundancy because they are in the

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<sup>6</sup> See detailed analysis in the UCU document. A standard full-time workload is 1540 hours per year. The standard allowance for research is 616 hours. Assuming no administrative or PGR supervision responsibilities, 3,109 WAM hours is more than 3 FTE teaching and research posts.

bottom tranche as judged by management. But the criteria are newly announced and ill thought through in a school where management reserves the right to announce new rules half way through the game.

Staff will be given numerical scores on different criteria including the quality of their research outputs and the input measure of grant income. "Sustained, regular publication" will be assessed solely by scoring the "quality" of three best publications. This judgement will be made by a panel whose range of expertise will be much more limited than, for example, REF panels). Academic jobs are gained and careers are built around research assessments for appointment, probation, promotion, external fellowships etc. None of the other processes rests on such subjective judgement of limited evidence.

Grant income in FBMH will be scored according to ranges (for different academic staff grades) that take no account of differences between disciplines and specialisms in their requirement for grant support. The implication is that staff undertaking inexpensive research – for example, theoretical work – will be heavily penalised. The development and capture of large grants always requires teams and often depends on multi-disciplinary effort. But when grant income has been won, it is often allocated by the PI in a conventional and arbitrary way with the contribution of some team members not properly recognized. Grant income allocation acquires a new importance if it is going to be used for determining compulsory redundancy; and this is likely to lead to more care about allocation and a negative impact on team work and collegiality in future.

The criteria do not take proper account of different career tracks, so colleagues may attain unfairly low scores if they have the "wrong" balance of teaching, research and administration. In particular, in FBMH, teaching-focused staff will be scored on the same criteria as teaching and research staff, despite the fact that they have little or no opportunity to score points on research. In other areas, we believe "teaching and research" academics with relatively large teaching loads will fare badly. Staff who have contributed significantly to school, university or professional communities through leadership and administration roles will receive little credit for this, despite the detrimental effects on their teaching and research.

There is no indication of how the numerical scores for different areas will be determined, so this is highly subjective. For example, what level of activity in social responsibility, knowledge exchange etc. will be required to score a top mark, and how will this be defined for different disciplines? The whole apparatus of scores for criteria creates a false impression of precision which covers disturbing arbitrariness.