

Aneez Esmail:

University Governance and the Primacy of Senate and School Boards in Academic Matters

- Management is behaving in a way which determines that only their views matter
- There is no discussion, a very top down style of engagement. Engagement usually mean telling people what is going to happen rather than trying to build a consensus. A small clique now determines all policy.
- Senate is effectively by-passed, School Boards are ignored and the Governing Body and the SLT now run everything.
- We have to change this narrative. Senate has to become the principal academic body that determines academic strategy and School Boards need to be empowered to engage with Senate members to ensure that this happens.
- It is our University – students and staff – and we need to be heard.

Karel Williams:

False Necessity - Blundering Top Down Management

M2020 just isn't necessary. It is false necessity in three ways (1) management doesn't have a clear defensible problem definition (2) management doesn't understand the strategic options in the schools (3) management doesn't understand the consequences.

Management's dodgy problem definition

Our problems aren't financial. Yes, the University's finances are opaque But the 2015-16 report declares an operating surplus of £36 million or 3.5% of income. M 2020 won't improve our financials. Sacking 140 academics and making 100 "early career academic appointments" saves £5 million per annum when our income is around £1 billion.

Management says we need a "step change in performance". Fair enough, but it understands our underperformance through thin simplifications of league tables, kpis and bench marking.

David will explain league tables, so I'll look at bench marking and kpis.

Uncritical use of benchmarking by management without understanding the difference between absolute and relative performance.

Eg AMBS 4th out of 8 against Russell Group peers sets up the 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.

League tables, bench marking + kpis produce an aura of permanent underperformance; power points by Deans and Heads of Schools about how their reorganisations are necessary to deal with our underperformance.

Management's misunderstanding of strategic options

M 2020 is about addressing school specific problems which is sensible but the issue here is that management doesn't understand the problems or the strategic options for supporting our disciplines

Eg Modern languages in SALC

Managements problem definition is that modern languages are “in decline”, can’t attract enough well qualified applicants. Yes, but...

The national context: we have a crisis in our schools and colleges about MLs uptake. Like the old STEM subject up take crisis. Government is beginning to take remedial action because UK can’t let go of modern languages.

Manchester strengths: Manchester is part of the fight back Eg AHRC centre on future direction of languages, beginners level entry in all languages. Well placed to lead the recovery as Manchester modern languages are in the world’s top 25.

Management’s response: raise A level grades across the board which turns decline into self-fulfilling prophecy; alternative policy is flexible approach to entry grades as practised by other universities including Oxford

All this was put together by Stephen Parker and Margaret Littler in a couple of pages but the Dean of Humanities doesn’t engage

Management’s failure to understand consequences

Eg The modelling of the consequences of reducing student numbers at AMBS

Staff can’t understand the case for 40 redundancies in some targeted areas; student numbers are being reduced not by closing a few courses but by taking small numbers off courses which are often taught by staff from all divisions

The WAM (workplace allocation model) is up on the web. Subject group leaders understand it, and we can work out the nos. They don’t add up, The O and S subject group has too much teaching before staff and numbers reduction; afterwards its much worse and that’s without factoring in the alienated staff who get jobs elsewhere.

All this has been published by academics and AMBS management has repeatedly refused to publish their calculations

Dodgy problem definition + misunderstanding of options + failure to understand consequences = institutional self harm because management is trying to run the university in a blundering top down way.

Julie Froud:

Collateral Damage in AMBS

There have been widespread concerns about the M2020 redundancy plan, made worse in AMBS by failure to produce meaningful data and to engage with staff about the possible risks that had been identified by staff. By late colleagues were:

- a) being told by management that it was 'business as usual'; and
- b) told by the Chair of the Board of Governors that there was no evidence of significant problems on the ground.

A group of staff in AMBS decided to run a short and simple alternative survey in September to see what colleagues thought about the effect of the job cuts on them and the school. [M2020 put around 100 AMBS colleagues in scope and at risk of redundancy (around 40% of T and T&R staff), with a target of 40 job cuts.]

The survey was sent to 290 academic staff (T&R, R and T) using the internal directory to get emails. The survey ran for 10 days with 1 reminder and no incentives. The response rate was 63% (not far behind the official staff survey on 68%). 90 of the 182 respondents left a comment.

What do the results show?

Colleagues won't be surprised at the results.

1. ***Widespread lack of faith in management justifications*** eg 87% said no convincing rationale had been given for reducing staff numbers; 88% said no justification had been made for the targeting of particular groups; 87% said there had been no adequate response from management to concerns voiced at the school board.
2. ***Widespread concern that CR would not be implemented fairly*** eg 83% do not trust management to use fair criteria consistently in assessing for CR.
3. ***Significant concerns that it would not improve T&L*** (88%); and would make it harder to do the job (68%)
4. ***Overwhelming majority noted damage to reputation*** (88%); and 75% more likely to look for another job; with 78% less likely to recommend AMBS as a place to work.

What's striking is that the responses from those not in scope and at risk were not much different – in a school where more than half of the staff were not directly affected, the damage has not been contained (eg for those not in scope, 75% more likely to look for another job; 78% less likely to recommend; 88% acknowledge reputational damage). Almost everyone is upset and the damage of M2020 has not been contained.

One of the few positive things has been the solidarity and support from many colleagues in the school who are not at risk (partly because they fear they may be next, of course). *And attendance at School Boards now very high!*

We weren't surprised by the findings nor the comments (though some were quite shocking eg direct comments about people being coerced into applying for VS).

The findings were written up in a 5 page document '***Collateral Damage***' (available on the UMUCU website) and sent to all staff who had been invited to take part in the survey. The report drew attention to the findings of the last official staff survey which showed that 85%+ were proud to work at UoM; valued job security, autonomy etc (but less than 50% satisfied with senior management capacity to manage change and listen to staff). ***In just a few months, there seems to have been huge destruction of goodwill in return for renegeing on the implicit social contract.***

The response from management was telling – rapid rebuttal - within hours an email from head of school declaring that the survey was insecure and the data 'unreliable'. Within a few days this message had been repeated publicly by Dean of Humanities and even by the President in her weekly address. No engagement with the issues just an attempt to discredit the survey and the views reported.

Not surprisingly, this caused considerable indignation from staff who had been effectively accused of cheating (eg answering more than once).

One week later, the comments were released (redacted, which removed some very direct statements about named managers) and a refutation of the claim that the data was not reliable. This for the first time produced a response from HoS to acknowledge that there was ***a problem of morale*** (but no plans for how to address it).

As the subsequent AMBS School Board showed however, this has not led to any attempts to involve staff in discussions about how to manage shortfall in teaching resource which is, for example, seeing optional courses cancelled. Problems about morale cannot be denied any longer but management are still in denial about the scale of the ongoing problem of covering teaching and sustaining research; and they are still failing to acknowledge the significant effect on health and wellbeing of staff affected.

Overall, it was worthwhile to collect the data because other attempts to communicate concerns to management had simply got nowhere. The next step is for the School Board to send the comments to the President and to the Dean of Faculty.

We need also to be documenting the problems on the ground eg cancelled course units and working with the students to document the impact of the job cuts. The collateral damage not only refers to the staff (in and out of scope) but also on the provision of courses and we need to keep track of problems (even as we do our best to avoid detriment to teaching and learning).

David Berk:

Failures of Top Down Management / Obsession with League Tables

Introduction

On 10th May this year, the University staff received the infamous M2020 email. Under the subject heading “*Achieving the University’s ambitions - implications for staff*” it began...

The University of Manchester has a bold ambition to be a world leading institution, with a reputation based on academic excellence.

An uncontroversial opening - university staff agree on that aim. But what followed seemed the most absurd of proposals: A plan to eliminate 171 posts, mostly academic, to “*improve the quality of our research and student experience*”

In what followed, we were invited to believe that the senior leaders of the University, having brought us to the brink of greatness, have now identified the subsequent steps that will bring us to a truly exalted place. We were expected to accept that these eminent and highly-paid leaders have more experience, better access to information, better clarity of thought, better ability to “*make tough choices*”.

However, academics are people who need to see evidence and analyse it; people who question bald assertions and require convincing arguments. Across the university, academic staff are assessing the claims of senior leadership – and finding rather large holes in the M2020 story. We have heard today how the decisions on teaching of modern languages were made on a formulaic and superficial understanding without engaging with academics in that area. And how the downsizing strategy for the Business School does not make business sense when subjected to a rigorous work allocation model. In this talk, I want to examine the evidence behind the claim that senior leadership has already raised the University in global prominence, so should be trusted to make the harsh decisions to “*deliver a [further] step change*” in global standing.

- Do the senior staff have true understanding of “academic excellence” and what it takes to be “world-leading”?
- Can the senior staff identify measures they have taken that have lifted the academic excellence of the University?
- Is there a credible plan of action to achieve further increases in global standing?

I reviewed 7 years of presidential statements, including the annual Stocktake reports, and submitted questions to the chair of the board of governors over the summer. What emerges are serious doubts that the senior leadership have a full understanding of these terms.

The Shanghai league table

Since 2010, the president has been committed to the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) as her preferred measure of research prominence and global standing in general. As shown below, it is a poor measure of current institutional excellence; nevertheless, by her own chosen metric, she has been a failure.

In 2010 and 2011, her key performance indicator (KPI) 1.1 was “*Annual improvement in Shanghai Jiao Tong ‘Academic Ranking of World Universities’, 2009-15.*” Read on to see how that went.

In 2012, the president unambiguously declared that our target is “*to be in the top 25 of the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities by 2020.*” Read on to see how we are progressing with that target.

For at least 5 years, this was the major metric repeatedly highlighted by the senior management in annual reports. There was great fanfare if we rose a place, and breezy excuses if we happened to drop. Why was the president so eager to accept the judgement of some distant marketing company? Was it because she understood and agreed with their methodology – or was it simply a result that flattered us at the time?

Here are some facts:

ARWU is a poor measure of academic excellence

- The Shanghai ARWU is compiled by a marketing/advertising organisation using publically available data that they weight according to their priorities and judgement.
- **ARWU is based entirely on research output**
- **ARWU is strongly influenced by historical events.**
 - UoM gets points for Blakett’s Nobel Prize in **1948!**
 - UoM would get points for a 1970 graduate who receives a Nobel Prize today.
- **ARWU is 40% based on institution size** (number of publications in science, engineering and social science journals)
- **ARWU is 50% based on celebrity** (number of Nobel Prizes to alumni or staff, number of “highly cited” authors, of whom there are world-wide in total ~150 authors in each of 21 subject areas; most recently UoM had 7 individuals accounting for 9 positions)
- **The Arts and Humanities are completely ignored** in the Shanghai ARWU league table.

Senior leadership has had no discernible effect on our standing in ARWU since 2008

- The **miraculous rise** (a “step change”?) between 2004 and 2008 in Manchester’s rank was due primarily to its **increase in size** following the merger.
- Manchester’s ranking has been **essentially static for the past 9 years**. [see graph below]
 - We were ranked 38th in 2011 and again 38th in 2017.
 - regarding KPI 1.1: annual improvement 2009-2015: we went from #41 to ... #41!
 - regarding the top 25 target: we continue to hover above #40, with little indication that we are heading above #25.
- **Sensitivity analysis** shows that UoM rank is highly influenced by only two individuals – Professors Geim and Novoselov. [see the table below]

- If those two left Manchester, our place in the table next year would **fall 5 places – to 43rd**. We'd lose "highly cited" author credits but we would retain credit for their Nobel Prize.
- If they had never come to Manchester, back in 2001 and 2004, we would be **26 places lower at #64**.

So these points illustrate that the Shanghai league table is particularly poorly balanced in its celebrity superstar approach, and like most league tables is a collection of factors of questionable relevance and arbitrary weightings. - Fine for a game of trivial pursuits or top-trumps but a meaningless tool for leading a university.

It is disappointing that our senior leaders gave it such credence. – And it seems doubtful that they ever had any kind of strategy for moving up 10 or 15 places in that table.

Graph: Manchester rank in ARWU league table, up to August 2017

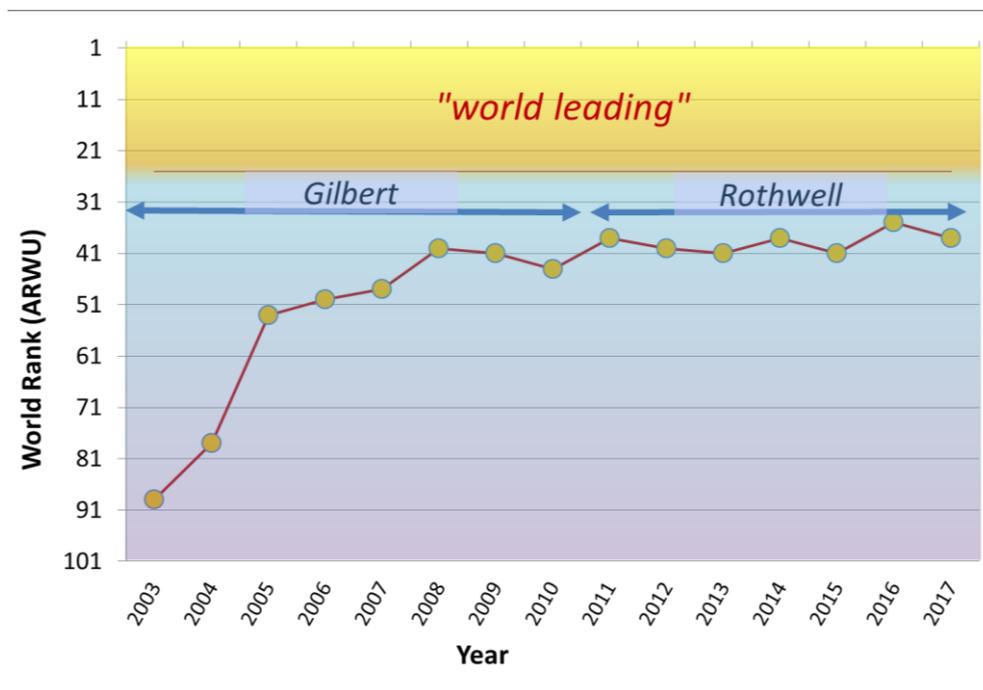


Table: Table of scenarios illustrating extreme sensitivity and precariousness of UoM position, if you accept the Shanghai ranking system.

Sensitivity analysis: contribution of Professors Geim & Novoselov to UoM position in ARWU league table

[Projected] Rank	Scenario	Change
#38	Current (2017) rank	~
#48	Exclude Nobel Prizes as a metric: the “Alternative ARWU” league table	Drop 10 places
#43	Exclude Geim & Novoselov from HiCi author list (but keep the Nobel metric) They count as 4 out of Manchester’s 9 “highly cited” authors. <i>Each appears in two categories: Physics and Material Science</i>	Drop 5 places
#64	Imagine Geim did not come to UoM in 2001: exclude Geim & Novoselov from HiCi list AND ignore Nobel Prizes	Drop 16 places in Alt-ARWU Drop 26 places in total

A new metric in 2017 – any league table, as long as it looks good

In the latest 2017 Stocktake report, we find that the target has been altered, with the ARWU no longer the exclusive metric. Now we will measure ourselves by “[any] international league tables”, and include **subject specific rankings** such as Nursing or Geography.

If anything, this approach is worse. As with ARWU, none of the league-table compilers are qualified to judge academic excellence; these are newspapers, advertising and marketing organisations. You need only read their methodology to recognise what crude and undiscerning instruments they are. They combine publicly available data with various surveys of dubious validity using different combinations of arbitrary weightings. Yet it has become evident that the University is devoting considerable resources in an attempt to sway some of these survey results. Rather than focus on excellent research and teaching, we are worrying about ‘getting our name out there’.

Another problem with the ‘any table’ approach is that we can (and will) cherry-pick the most flattering results retrospectively while ignoring any poor results. That is poor scientific practice, and as Professor Rothwell should know – it’s a dishonest approach that would be unacceptable in a clinical trial for example.

When asked about how they judge our global standing, the senior leaders say that they don’t rely solely on league tables – they use a wide range of “performance indicators” when the review each faculty. But the problem remains – they are simply compiling figures for things that are easy to measure; they don’t have a system for integrating measures and extracting a meaningful measure of global standing or academic excellence.

Conclusion – the arrogance of top-down management

Top-down management is a threat to many British universities today, but our current senior leadership provide a textbook example. Top-down management is driven by senior leaders who believe that their personal actions create excellence – by specifying formulaic generalised targets. They believe that as long as their workers simply meet those targets, top-down management does not need input from below. Communication is one-way; a fact that was already widely recognised in the April staff survey¹ and has surely become completely evident since May.

The arrogance is exemplified by this statement in the 2010 Stocktake report: *Even now, the University is taking steps, (for example, extremely detailed preparation for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) ...), to ensure it is leaving nothing to chance in maximising its international research competitiveness.* We know in retrospect that REF 2014 was a major disappointment in the wake of a successful RAE2008, necessitating the complete restructure of two Faculties. Staff in Medicine and Life Sciences found the strategy of senior management was of dubious value, and that no amount of visits by Prof Georghiou with his clipboard could make up for the absence of proper engagement with the people actually doing the research.

Perhaps we should take a lesson from Harvard University – generally seen as a model of academic excellence and the highest global standing. Eleven years ago, their president, a former high government official, believed he had all the answers and could rule the institution with his top-down style. The academic body resisted; he eventually resigned. One of his critics was quoted in the New York Times:

"A strong leader is not just someone who can name a goal or force a change, but someone who can bring out the best in people and find ways to encourage teamwork."

Perhaps our current M2020 scandal is the test that will allow Manchester to demonstrate that we too are a great university.

¹ Whereas 45% fully agree that their immediate line manager communicates effectively and involves them in decisions that affect them, only 15% fully agree that the President's Senior Leadership Team listen to and respond to views of staff.