

# **Appointing Deputy and Pro Vice Chancellors in Pre-1992 English Universities: Managers, Management and Managerialism**

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## **Abstract**

The roles of deputy and pro vice chancellors (DPVCs) are changing and so is the way they are being appointed. This study examines (i) why many pre-1992 English universities are moving from an internal, fixed-term secondment model of DPVC appointment to one incorporating external open competition; and (ii) what the implications of change are for individual careers and management capacity building. At a theoretical level, it explores the extent to which DPVC appointment practice is symptomatic of ideal-type managerialism and subjects the prevailing academic narrative - that the power of academics has declined in relation to that of managers - to critical examination in the light of the findings.

The research, which uses a mixed-methods design incorporating a census, online survey and 73 semi-structured interviews, has generated some unexpected findings. Notably, the opening up of DPVC posts to external open competition has resulted in a narrowing, rather than a diversification, of the gender and professional profile of successful candidates. Therefore, although this change to DPVC recruitment practice was motivated by a meritocratic “quest for the best,” it cannot be said to have improved management capacity in the sense of increasing the likelihood that the best candidates are attracted and appointed from the widest possible talent pool.

On the contrary, the findings are suggestive of conservatism, homosociability and social closure, whereby academic managers maintain their privileged status by ring-fencing DPVC posts to the exclusion of other occupational groups. DPVCs are also expanding their professional jurisdiction by colonising the university’s management space. Far from declining, academics’ power is thus being consolidated, albeit by a few elite career track academic managers.

Moreover, although there is some evidence of a managerial ideology with respect to the DPVC appointment model, it is a context-specific ‘academic-managerialism’ rather than a generic ideal type.