

UK Universities' Work Environment or Pink Floyd Revisited

We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teachers leave them kids alone
Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone!
All in all it's just another brick in the wall.
All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

Pink Floyd
Another Brick in the Wall (1979)

The fact that UK University's environment of work is not today what use to be is not news anymore. Perhaps the new managers that govern Universities nowadays are right and students and society prefer a service-orientated university instead of institutions culture or intellectual-orientated. To be honest, the argument seems not have much interest.

On the contrary, what I believe is interesting is to briefly consider an statistical profile of the work environment. I take as source my 15-years experience in UK academic system and figures are coming from my own archives. I was working, at different periods and circumstances, in the area of cinema, philosophy, Hispanic studies and Latin America studies. Here then some remarks.

First aspect. From 1995 to 2009, the balance between administrators and academics was reverted and the growing population of administrations was duplicated and triplicate in some

cases. In 1995 most the decision making positions were in the hand of academics, in 2009 only exceptionally there are academics in decision-making positions.

Second aspect. Excluding food for students and accommodation, in 1995 most universities were not involved in any other economical activities. Since 2000 onwards most universities were getting involving in business and in several economical activities (including financial investment), in such a way that education is not the core of its target's productivity.

Third aspect. The simple budget calculations of paying salaries and fix costs from 1995 were converted into investment approach lost and profit calculations in 2009. In that context, research is not assumed anymore by the university itself but by the individual academics that need to get the founding for it outside university. In this way university is not only freeing the money that before was dedicated to research but is also *making money* as University's managers tax each grant that academics get outside campus.

Fourth aspect. Between 1995 and 2009, in the area of Humanities, 60% of the external founding for research was cut. Social science and science were also reduced but in a less amount. Therefore researchers not only lost its own institution as a financial source for research, they also lost 60% of the funding available from external sources. The original ratio of success for a grant application that was 10 to 1 in 1995, was 20 to 1 in 2001 and almost 40 to 1 in 2009.

Fourth aspect. Academics' salaries were reduced in real terms as promotions and scale positions were made less available and more difficult to obtain. In real terms, from 1995 to 2009, academics lost at least 25% of the economical capacity of acquisition, not because general economy issues (which, by the way, should be added to it) but because the bureaucratic strategies implemented by managerial staff. The bureaucratization of promotions and/or increments points of salaries, plus a substantial modification in the scale payment salary, made this possible.

Fifth aspect. As more information was made available to students, less the syllabus and degree structures encourages an intellectual approach to academic subjects. Therefore, the service-provider sense of education make things in such a way that students and parents

associate quality of education with amount of services available to students in campus. University managers are delighted with this new attitude of their now called clients.

Sixth aspect. The private pension scheme (USS), due to bad investments was reduced to more than 25% of its consolidated capital previous to 2008—even further after the subprimes and financial commodities crisis. In the same sense, the University's contributions to the pension scheme were reduced by 1/3, and therefore academics were forced to assume that 1/3 or reduce the contribution they originally made to the scheme. Acquired practices like the lump sum at the end of life period of work were dismissed.

Seventh aspect. In 1995 50-60% of the academic workload was dedicated to research, around 30% to teaching and the remaining 10% (or so) to administration and bureaucratic tasks. With the new universities approach to business and the technological changes (Internet, E-mail, etc.) that proportion was completely *reverted*. In 2010 only 20% of the work-load is dedicated to research and 60% to bureaucratic tasks, which might include also the 30% of teaching as it became much more bureaucratized and service orientated.

Eighth aspect. In 1995 most academics used to have one afternoon to sort out all the mail related to their work. In 2009 each academic used an average of 3 to 4 hours per day, only to sort out e-mail messages. The exponential increment of mail matters is not due only to university issues, however the support staff to help academics within the same period was not increased but drastically reduced.

The work related issues of this situation seems evident, however here some figures to illustrate the case:

- Every year 7000 members of the academic and academic related unions seek help for a work related problem. The forced settlements of these colleagues represent 2 millions pounds a year.
- Between 15-20 % per year of the academic or academic related UK populations took early retirement, change university or go out of the academic system since 2008. In 2010 that figure out up to 25%. Only 3% of this population was replaced and only on 5% of them was replaced at a corresponding and/or equivalent position.

- The amount of mail and administrative issues became impossible to deal with, therefore academics implemented a new mechanism to deal with it: every day-mail is made out of what have been requested and/or indicated in several occasions as urgent. Tasks and/or messages that not are requested more than once are dismissed, and requests made to several people is assumed that one of the members of the indicated group (not you) will sort out an answer.
- In 1995 50% of the UK academic publications were considered as doing “original research” while the other 50% was composed of manual, companions, text-book, etc. In 2009, despite all the claims about originality in research, only 20% of the publications can be allocated outside the category of manual, text for students or companion.
- In 1995 for a young academic move from a position of Assistant Professor to the next step of Associate Professor, could take five years, if the candidate’s performance was really good. In 2009 that gap went extended to *at least* 10 years, which means that arrive to Full Professor will take at least 15 years and to achieve a relevant salary not less than 20 years —or even never in a life work.

The famous song written in 1978 by Roger Waters was then perversely accomplished: the university’s managers developed in the last 10 years all the requested made by Water in his song. Can we said that all rebels from the 1970s are today in power at the UK universities? Surely we can. But perhaps that is the wrong question.

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