

# Letter from 121 professors in The Guardian 7 July 2015

## Higher education

# Let UK universities do what they do best – teaching and research

## London Metropolitan University's super-lab

'Micro-management of academics is relentlessly eroding their ability to teach and conduct research.' Above, London Metropolitan University's super-lab. Photograph: View Pictures Ltd/Alamy

## Letters

The UK's universities can justifiably claim an outstanding international reputation, generating multiple direct and indirect benefits for society, and underpinning our core professions through training and education. Yet these attributes are being undermined and degraded from within and without, with innovation, creativity, originality and critical thought, as well as notions of social justice, being threatened by forces of marketisation demanding "competitiveness" and "efficiency" in teaching and research. This generates continuous pressures to standardise, conform, obey and duplicate in order to be "transparent" to measurement.

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Government regulations are escalating pressures on academics, insisting they function as 'small businesses'

Government regulations and managerial micro-management are escalating pressures on academics, insisting they function as "small businesses" covering their own costs or generating profits.

Highly paid university managers (and even more highly paid "management consultants") are driving these processes, with little regard for, or understanding of, the teaching and research process in higher education. Yet these outdated models of "competitiveness" and "efficiency" have long since been rejected

is necessarily underproductive, and cannot innovate.

Unprecedented levels of anxiety and stress among both academic and academic-related staff and students abound, with “obedient” students expecting, and even demanding, hoop-jumping, box-ticking and bean-counting, often terrified by anything new, different, or difficult. Managerial surveys then “measure” their consumer “satisfaction” – such are the low ambitions of today’s universities, locked into a conservative status quo mentality; for what is there left to learn, when you already know it in order to demand it?

We call upon parliament’s newly elected education committee to conduct an urgent investigation into these grave matters.

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The list of signatories above was amended on 7 July 2015. An earlier version omitted the first five names.