



## King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1080/1360080X.2019.1658839](https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2019.1658839)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Flavin, M., Chen, T. Z., & Quintero, V. (2019). Size matters: an analysis of UK higher education institution mission statements. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2019.1658839>

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# **Size matters: An analysis of UK Higher Education Institution mission statements**

## **Abstract**

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have mission statements as a matter of course. This article analyses 127 mission statements from UK HEIs, comprising 76.048% of the mainstream UK higher education sector. The statements were divided into the categories of Russell Group; Other; and Specialist Institution. A mixed methods research approach was adopted. The article identifies the fifty-seven most frequently used terms in mission statements. It also identifies the average lengths for each of the three categories. The article also analyses claims made and language used in mission statements: selected statements were subjected to close analysis. The article shows mission statements from Russell Group universities tend to be shorter, whereas HEIs outside the Russell Group make more detailed statements of their provision and credentials. Structurally, mission statements are distinct between the three categories. Linguistically, there is less distinction, though there is some difference in the most frequently used terms in each category.

## **Keywords**

Higher Education; United Kingdom; Mission Statements; Russell Group; Specialist Institutions; Mixed Methods.

## **Introduction**

Mission statements were introduced to academia from the corporate sector (Drucker 1973), developing in higher education in the 1980s, ‘under a variety of external environmental pressures’ (Davies and Glaister 1996, p.269). In the UK, specific pressures included the 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, the latter legislation substantially increasing the number of universities in the UK, as former polytechnics changed their status. In 1994, eighteen of the older, research-intensive UK universities coalesced to form their own mission group, the Russell Group, a process of demarcation practised by other strata of the higher education sector in the UK in subsequent years.

Definitions of mission statements in higher education vary. Meacham and Gaff (2006) state, ‘The mission statement is an institution’s formal, public declaration of its purposes and its vision of excellence’ (p.6). Wang *et al* (2007) argue, ‘these statements of mission usually provide a glimpse of the final outcome for a student who attends the institution,’ while James and Huisman (2009) argue mission statements describe, ‘the purpose of a higher education institution and its primary objectives’ (p.23). Mission statements are also used to create and assert a university’s distinctiveness (Kosmutzky and Krucken 2015). More sceptically, Connell and Galasinski (1998) argue mission statements are emptied of historical specificity, veering instead towards the generic.

Cochran, David and Gibson (2008) argue a mission statement should be ‘inspiring and motivating’ (p.33). More expansively, Berg, Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (2003) argue, ‘The entire institution must be dedicated to a mission that defines what good work is, in order to continue adding value to the lives of the community it serves’ (p.43). Mission statements are thus wide-ranging, express different institutional aims and are shaped by internal and external factors. However, mission statements are not simple reflections of reality. Instead, they construct a sense of organisational reality (Bryman, 2016, p.561).

This study of mission statements in UK HEIs poses the following questions:

- What terms are used most frequently in UK HEI mission statements?
- Do the lengths of mission statements correlate with institution type?
- Do mission statements illuminate differences between different types of HEIs in the UK?
- How is a sense of organisational reality constructed through mission statements?

In order to address the questions, an analysis was undertaken of 127 UK HEI mission statements. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (2019) states there are 167 HEIs in the UK, excluding alternative providers, and thus the sample represents 76.048% of the mainstream UK sector. Several stages of analysis were undertaken, centring on coding sheets as the main research instrument, and content analysis as the main research method, though quantitative analysis was also undertaken, identifying the most frequently used terms in mission statements, and calculating the average lengths of statements.

The study fills a gap by focusing on structural aspects of mission statements, as well as on content. It adds to our understanding by arguing mission statements convey different versions of organisational reality, foregrounding specific qualities aligned to either a formal mission group, or a particular type of HEI. HEIs make choices about which features of their provision to emphasise, constructing a sense of organisational reality within institution-type parameters through both linguistic and structural choices. The difference between average word lengths for different types of HEIs suggests that more established HEIs, those in the Russell Group, have a widely understood identity, but newer and more niche HEIs have to go to greater

lengths to establish their identity, quality and market position. The present study also adds to our understanding by identifying the fifty-seven most commonly used terms in UK HEI mission statements (terms used at least fifteen times in the sample of 127).

The article summarises relevant literature and describes the research method, before summarising the results and suggesting further research.

### **Literature Review**

As this is a study of UK HEI mission statements, the literature review starts from UK-based studies, before looking at studies undertaken in other national contexts, and two studies taking an international approach.

Davies and Glaister (1996) studied a sample of sixty-eight UK universities. They found only one had a mission statement before 1980, and only ten before 1989. Their overall position was sceptical: 'A suspicion exists that they are more about "public relations"... than being a significant element in strategic management' (p.266), adding, 'too many universities relied overmuch on what could be considered a generic mission statement for a university' (p.285). At this, early stage in the evolution of mission statements, there were, seemingly, considerable similarities between them.

Connell and Galasinski (1998), in another UK study, also adopted a sceptical position and argued mission statements posited a hierarchical relationship between the HEI and its students: 'Students will not achieve their full potential without the HEI's affording them the opportunity or encouraging them to do so' (p.469). They added, 'students and staff were even possessed by HEIs... Statements referred to them as its (an HEI's) students' (p.469). From this perspective, mission statements are about control, implying a vertical relationship between the HEI and its students.

Sauntson and Morrish (2011), also in a UK study, argued mission statements are, 'designed to propound a managerialist institutional narrative designed to forestall challenge, precisely because it is impossible to contest the positive images they invoke. In this way, universities construct themselves, their students and graduates in the desired corporate image' (p.83). In common with Connell and Galasinski (1998), mission statements present the HEI as a shaping force rather than an equal partner.

Seeber *et al* (2017) analysed the mission statements of 123 UK universities, in research undertaken in 2014. They argued university mission statements adopted claims similar to universities belonging to the same organisational type. Huisman and Mampaey (2018), in a related study of twenty-nine UK HEIs' welcome addresses, found high levels of homogeneity overall, while also noting a tendency in younger and less prestigious HEIs to foreground their distinctive qualities.

Kuenssberg (2011) examined the mission statements of the twenty universities in Scotland and argued there was more sameness than difference between them. Conversely, James and Huisman (2009), in a study of mission statements of HEIs in Wales, found diversity in their sample, though with some congruence expressed in elements relating to excellence, research, and a commitment to Wales and its economy. Kosmutzky and Krucken (2015) analysed mission statements of German universities, concluding the mission statements sought to

balance generic qualities alongside the unique selling point of a particular institution. Arias-Coello, Simon-Martin and Sanchez-Molero (2018) examined the mission statements of forty-seven universities in Spain, showing a prioritisation of teaching over research and service to society, with the prioritisation being most noticeable in the mission statements of newer universities. Efe and Ozer (2015) analysed the mission statements of 171 state and private universities in Turkey, finding no significant difference between them in the type of language used. Al Olayan, Ragmoun and Saidi (2018) analysed the mission statements of twenty-two Saudi business schools, concluding that the mission statements lacked objectives, either in a strategic sense or in articulating the philosophy of the institution.

Meacham and Gaff (2006) studied 312 educational mission statements in the USA. They argued mission statements should be durable, designed to withstand the departure of key personnel. In addition, they argued the length of a mission statement was unimportant, as long as the statement articulated the purpose of the institution. Morphew and Hartley (2006), also in the USA, selected 299 mission statements from colleges and universities, examining whether mission statements were expressions of distinctiveness, or organisational window dressings and normative necessities. They also posed the question of whether different institutional types produced particular kinds of mission statement, and concluded mission statements did have substance. De Jager (2011), in a comparative study of mission statements of universities in England, New York and California, argued newer universities both sought to emulate the missions of research-intensive universities, and sought to build their own unique brand.

Cortés Sánchez (2018) studied 248 mission statements from universities worldwide, arguing the statements focused almost entirely on qualitative rather than quantitative attributes, and further arguing there were no discernible similarities between university mission statements and those of other organisations, suggesting university mission statements are ultimately more conspicuous by their similarities with other universities, while being distinct from other types of organisations' mission statements.

Different studies of mission statements, in different contexts, have examined the balance between distinctiveness and the generic, and the tendency of certain types of HEI to congregate around a type of mission statement pertinent to that specific group. Previous studies have tended to focus on the language used in mission statements whereas this study combines analysis of language with analysis of structure, demonstrating a correlation between institution type and mission statement length. Moreover, previous studies have not identified the most frequently used terms and calculated average lengths for different institution types. Through this combination of approaches, the present study adds to our understanding by using its findings to illuminate differences in mission statements, and to analyse how mission statements construct a sense of organisational reality.

## **Materials & Method**

All the mission statements used in this study were in the public domain when the research was conducted in summer 2018. The research was time-bound; institutional funding was made available for a six-week period which limits the sample size, though it was still possible to analyse a significant section of the UK higher education sector (76.048%). The overall sample of 127, arrived at by desk research, was divided into three categories: Russell Group (13 mission statements); Other (80); and Specialist Institution (34), the latter denoting HEIs specialising in one distinct area of the curriculum, a category noted by Purcell, Beer and

Southern (2017), ‘as representing a distinctive market niche because of their specialism’ (p.27). The Specialist Institution category is also used by Neves and Hillman (2019), in a UK survey of over 14,000 students. The purpose of the categorisation was to address the extent to which there were commonalities within the groups, and differences between them. In particular, the Russell Group is an association of twenty-four UK universities, formed in 1994 and widely perceived as the most prestigious HEIs in the UK (Boliver 2013).

Dividing university mission statements into three categories was previously done by Sauntson and Morrish (2011), who divided their sample into Russell Group, 1994 and Million+. The 1994 Group dissolved in 2013; the Million+ Group (originally formed as the Coalition of Modern Universities, in 1997) has twenty members, all of which would fit within the Other category in this study. Seeber *et al* (2017) also classified UK university mission statements into three categories: pre-1992; former polytechnics that became universities in 1992; and other universities that gained the right to award degrees after 1992.

The authors of this study prepared a coding sheet featuring the most frequently used terms from the 127 mission statements, excluding ‘mission’ and ‘university’ and extraneous terms such as articles, conjunctions and pronouns. Each term mentioned fifteen times or more in the sample was listed on the coding sheet, in order of frequency of occurrence. Data on the most frequently used terms in the mission statements were obtained from two tools, which were cross-referenced to ensure accuracy: Voyant Tools (<https://voyant-tools.org/>) from McGill University and the University of Alberta; and AntConc (<http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/>) from Waseda University. Voyant Tools was also used by Cortéz Sánchez (2018). In the present study, accuracy was further ensured by checking the frequency of some of the most commonly used terms, using the ‘Find’ tool in MS Word. A keyword analysis of UK HEI mission statements was previously undertaken by Davis and Glaister (1996).

For the pilot study, the authors selected the first three mission statements from the Russell Group category (alphabetically), the first eighteen from the Other category, and the first nine from the Specialist Institution category, the numbers from each category being broadly in line with the ratio for the overall sample. Each author went through the sample individually, using a separate coding sheet for each mission statement. The results were compared to assess inter-rater reliability and to assess the usefulness of the coding sheet. The method in this respect was similar to other studies of mission statements: Davies and Glaister (1996) compared findings to minimise the possibilities of interpretation bias, and Seeber *et al* (2017) featured two authors independently coding the mission statements and comparing their findings. Similarly, Huisman and Mampaey (2018) coded text individually and compared notes. Regarding studies of mission statements in the USA, Meacham and Gaff (2006) devised a coding sheet, and Morphew and Hartley (2006) coded mission statements separately and compared findings to support reliability.

For this study, changes were made to the coding sheet following the pilot, enabling very similar terms to be placed within the same category. For example, ‘education,’ ‘educate’ and ‘educating’ were categorised together following the pilot study. The revised coding sheet (see appendix) was used for the main study, and the pilot group findings were aggregated, checked and entered into the revised coding sheet. Fifty-seven distinct terms were identified.

The authors focused solely on mission statements. Related statements, such as ‘Visions,’ were excluded. Morphew and Hartley (2006) also focused on documents labelled formally as

mission statements. Conversely, Purcell *et al.* (2016) did not discriminate between mission statements and equivalent vision statements, in their argument for an increasingly diversified higher education sector. This study, however, did not stray beyond mission statements, to aid clarity and focus.

The next stage of the data gathering involved the second and third authors taking a further thirty mission statements each, sub-divided by mission group category, as per the pilot study, and selected alphabetically, beyond the pilot study (starting with Kingston University and ending with University of Sheffield). This led to an overall sample of ninety mission statements which were coded; the time-bound nature of the research meant it was not possible to code the entire sample of 127. The first author re-read a sample (c.33%) of the second and third authors' additional samples, for inter-rater reliability. In addition, the average length of mission statements within each of the three categories was calculated. Furthermore, the mission statements were divided by quartile, for the full sample of 127.

The final stage of data analysis involved all three authors separately analysing eight, randomly-selected mission statements: one Russell Group, four Other, and three Specialist Institution. The findings of the final stage were compared and the analysis agreed.

The overall approach is mixed methods, though with an emphasis on qualitative content analysis. There were quantitative aspects, identifying the most frequently used terms in mission statements and calculating the average length of a mission statement in each of the three categories. However, the majority of the analysis was qualitative, with the authors concentrating on themes, and nuances of language. Content analysis of HEI mission statements has previously been undertaken by James and Huisman (2007); Kuenssberg (2011); Kosmutzky and Krucken (2015); Hladchenko (2016); Purcell *et al.* (2017); Al Olayan *et al* (2018); and Cortéz Sánchez (2018).

## **Results & Discussion**

This section moves from a summary of the pilot study, through to the sample of 90, followed by quantitative data on the coded sample of 90 and full sample of 127, followed by detailed accounts of selected mission statements.

The pilot study showed differences in the length of mission statements, with some comprising one or two sentences (for example, Imperial College London's mission statement is one sentence), while others comprised paragraphs and bullet points (for example, Edge Hill University).

The authors initially held the view that Russell Group universities would make more claims regarding the quality and excellence of their research, learning and teaching. However, the pilot study suggested this was not the case: Other-category universities also described their teaching and learning as, 'of the highest standard' (Edge Hill University 2016). Six of the Other-category universities described themselves as 'inspirational,' 'inspiring,' or aiming 'to inspire.' Herriot Watt University (2018) stated they 'create and exchange knowledge for the benefit of society' (p.3), a claim also made by Brunel (no date): 'To bring benefit to society through excellence in education, research and knowledge transfer.' Unexpectedly, Russell Group universities did not always mention their high quality. The London School of Economics (LSE) mission statement opens, 'Our mission is to advance knowledge' (LSE

2015), and Birmingham University's mission statement highlights, 'impactful research' (University of Birmingham, 2010). Neither mentioned high quality explicitly.

Universities in the pilot study claimed global significance: 'We are a university of national eminence and global reach' (University of Birmingham 2010, p.5); 'world-class learning community' and 'enrich the world' (Bournemouth University 2017, p.2). Six out of eighteen HEIs in the Other category (one third in contrast to two thirds of Russell Group in the pilot study) stressed their international credentials. In the Specialist Institution category, international impact was mentioned in 55% of the mission statements in the pilot study, more than the Other category, but less than Russell Group.

When the coded sample of 90 statements was sub-divided by category, similarities were noted within the groups, suggesting mission statements do illuminate differences between institution type. In the Russell Group category, five out of the nine statements were outward-looking, aiming to achieve wider social impact. The University of Birmingham's (2010) mission statement includes, 'making a significant contribution to society...' (p.5), while Imperial College London (2015) states it aims to, 'achieve enduring excellence... for the benefit of society' (p.3). Other Russell Group universities stressed their history. The University of Liverpool's (no date) mission statement is, 'For the advancement of learning and ennoblement of life since 1881' (p.5). The archaic, abstract noun 'ennoblement' aligns with the claim to historical longevity. A similar claim to history is made by the University of Birmingham (2010), asserting its status as, 'the first English civic university' (p.5).

Twenty-five HEIs in the Other category mentioned 'community' or 'communities' (out of 54 Other HEIs in the coded sample). These can be explicitly local: the mission statement of Newman University (2014), in Birmingham, talks about, 'the diverse community that is Birmingham' (p.7); Liverpool Hope University (2018) contributes to the life of, 'Liverpool, Merseyside, the North-West and beyond'; and the University of East London (2010) talks of, 'our communities in east London, the Thames Gateway and in the broader south east' (p.3). However, in nineteen cases the communities were not identified explicitly. The mission statement of Oxford Brookes University (2018) writes of 'the communities it serves,' while both Southampton Solent (2015, p.3), and the University of Teeside (2015, p.3), specify 'the communities we serve.' None of the coded mission statements from Russell Group universities mentioned their local community, although Birmingham University's (2010) mission statement did refer to, 'England's second city' (p.5).

When the average word length of a mission statement was calculated, using the coded sample of 90, the average length of a Russell Group statement was 34.7. The average was 51.6 for the Other category, and 55.7 for the Specialist Institutions (to one decimal point in each case). Using the full sample of 127, the average length for a mission statement in the Russell Group was 45.7 words. The average length of a mission statement in the Other category was 48.5, and the average length of a mission statement in the Specialist Institution category was 53.8 (to one decimal point in each case). Although the gap between the Russell Group and the other categories contracted from the sample of 90 to the sample of 127, it nevertheless persisted, the latter sample comprising 76.048% of the UK higher education sector. The results are summarised in the tables below, which also show distribution by quartile for the full sample of 127.



Sample size	Russell Group	Other	Specialist HEI
90	34.7	51.6	55.7
127	45.7	48.5	53.8

Table 1, average word lengths for the mission statements, to one decimal point.

Quartile	Russell Group	Other	Specialist Institution
First	15.5	18.25	20.5
Second (median)	29	33.5	32.5
Third	58	73.5	58.5

Table 2, word lengths for the sample of 127, divided by quartile

Table 2 shows 25% of Russell Group statements have 15.5 words or fewer, whereas the 25% with the lowest number of words for the Other category has 18.25 or fewer, and the Specialist Institution category has 20.5 or fewer. The pattern persists for the second and third quartiles: Russell Group statements are shorter. The gap is not huge, but the difference between average word lengths (and quartiles) for different types of HEIs suggests that more established HEIs, those in the Russell Group, have a widely understood identity, whereas newer and more niche HEIs have to go to greater lengths in their mission statements to establish their identity, quality and market position. Addressing the second research question on the lengths of mission statements, Russell Group mission statements in this study were shorter on average than the statements in the Other category which, in turn, were shorter than the statements in the Specialist Institution category.

Addressing the first research question, the five most frequently used terms in the full sample of 127 were: research; student; education/educate/educating; high/higher/highest; community/communities. In Cortés Sánchez's (2018) study of mission statements worldwide, the five most frequently used words were: university; research; knowledge; students; education. The fact that three of these terms coincide indicates there is a tendency for HEI mission statements to pursue sameness in general, and internationally, though, in the current study, allowing for some difference between institution type.

When the full sample of 127 was broken down by category, the most frequently-used terms in the Russell Group category were: research (13 mentions); world, and education/educate/educating (both 8 times); learn/learning (7 times); and teach/teaching, and economy/economies/economic (both 6 times).

For the Other category, the most frequently used terms were: research (64 times); student (56); community/communities (41); education/educate/educating (39); and knowledge (32). For the Specialist Institution category, the most frequently-used terms were: education/educate/educating (27 times); develop/development (21); high/higher/highest, and art/artist/artistic (20); and create/creating (19). The presence of art/artist/artistic and create/creating may be explained by noting that seventeen of the thirty-four HEIs in the Specialist Institution category have a creative arts focus. It was noticeable that, while 'world' was a frequently used term in Russell Group mission statements, 'community/communities' was one of the most frequently used terms in Other category mission statements, suggesting that different types of HEI had a different focus.

As the final stage of analysis, addressing the final research question, close readings were undertaken of eight statements. The analysis built on the coding and assessed how the statements constructed a sense of organisational reality. Thematic analysis (Ryan & Bernard 2003; Bryman 2016) enabled the exploration of repetitions, metaphors, transitions and missing data. The University of Southampton's (2018) mission statement (seven words) is, 'To change the world for the better.' The text underneath the strategy includes the following qualification: 'It's a very simple strategy. It's about our aspirations. It's about building our reputation. It's about being simply better than our competitors at what we do.' The strategy and the qualification construct the University as distinguished. The strategy is forward-looking, aspiring to a better future. However, the statement is also generic, and could be transposed to a different kind of institution or business, contrary to the findings of Cortés Sánchez (2018). For example, Virgin, a multinational corporation, states, 'If we can change business for good, we should also make an effort to change the world for the better' (Branson 2018). The Southampton strategy is not explicitly linked to the production, distribution and exchange of knowledge in higher education. Southampton's mission statement foregrounds its impact on society and also uses the word 'reputation' in its qualification of its mission statement, drawing attention to its status.

The University of Gloucestershire (2017), from the Other category, also has a brief mission statement: 'Founded on values, centred on students, focused on learning' (p.3, nine words). The statement is rhetorical, dividing into three, syllabically equal sub-sections. Sceptically, this could be seen as an example of what Morphew and Hartley (2006) call, 'rhetorical pyrotechnics – pretty to look at perhaps, but of little structural consequence' (p.461). That said, the statement is clearly about an educational institution. Moreover, the verb choices hone-in on stability: founded; centred; focused. The University of Gloucestershire gained its university status in 2001, but its relative newness is missing from the statement, which constructs a sense of a rooted, student-centred organisation.

Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh (2018, ninety five words) states: 'Our mission is to foster intellectual capital with both a theoretical and practical focus, giving students and staff the confidence to make a real difference to the world around them. We are known not only for excellent, relevant teaching, research and knowledge exchange but also for the care and respect we give our students, staff and partners. As a thriving campus university we strive to create a community without borders, helping to improve people's lives locally, nationally and internationally. We are ambitious and enterprising, and, in everything we do, we are committed to social justice.' The statement aims to be all-encompassing, stressing a physical location while also dissolving its borders. The statement features binaries: theoretical and practical; students and staff. Words that are not necessary syntactically for the meaning of the statement ('real,' 'thriving') construct a sense of and accentuate the university's attractiveness.

Sheffield Hallam University's (2018, eighty-nine words) mission statement opens: 'We shape our students' futures, preparing them for whatever they choose to do, and create knowledge that provides practical solutions to real world challenges.' In common with the University of Southampton's statement it is forward-looking, focusing on a future state, but in the case of Sheffield Hallam the applied nature of the university's knowledge is stressed. The university is constructed as an active agent in students' future lives, an enabling force. That said, students have things done to them in the mission statement, being shaped by the university rather than engaging with it in a partnership, in line with the argument of Connell and Galasinski (1998).

Bangor University's mission statement (2018, thirty-six words) declares it is, 'A strong, confident institution recognised regionally, nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence for its varied portfolio of teaching and research, and for the unique, multicultural, inclusive experience it provides for its staff and students.' Mission statements are synoptic by definition, but there is no mention of specific international recognition from an authoritative body. The term 'uniqueness' is similarly uninterrogated, but neither of these features are untypical of mission statements, which tend to have missing data (Bryman 2016, p.586; Ryan & Bernard 2003, p.92), not leaving an explicit evidence trail for their claims. Bangor mentions its research and education excellence too, but also conveys a sense of its inclusiveness and multicultural university experience, and mentions staff. Of these three terms, only one (staff) features in the list of most frequently occurring terms (twenty-first in the list).

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2014, 103 words) has a mission statement, but one of the sub-headings therein is 'Our Vision,' melding vision and mission statement. It emphasises both the regional, 'Scotland's national identity as a leading creative nation,' and the global, 'young artists from across the world.' The mission statement uses metaphor, 'become the crucible for the development of Scotland's national identity as a leading creative nation...' and dynamic verbs, '...spearhead the creation of a national infrastructure for performance arts education.' The conservatoire constructs itself as a vanguard, and as a site for concentrating the development of Scotland's creativity.

Cranfield University is a postgraduate institution specialising in science, engineering, technology and management, though only the latter two are specified in the mission statement (2018, thirty words). The statement stresses external relationships with 'business and governments.' The gerunds within the statement, 'creating,' 'unlocking' and 'partnering,' mix the emancipatory and the collaborative. The statement ends with the phrase, 'professional development,' highlighting employability.

The University for the Creative Arts (UCA 2013, ninety-seven words) is student-focused, opening with, 'Our graduates...' It is a forward-looking statement, articulating what its graduates will be like. It is a specialist Arts university but envisages its students contributing to, 'culture, society and the world economy,' broadening the university's scope. It identifies itself as emerging from its five founding colleges (the University was formed in 2005, though this information is missing) and aims to exceed, 'the expectations of its students and staff.'

Whereas the Southampton statement foregrounds the world, the statements from Queen Margaret University and Bangor start from the local before transitioning to the national and international. Similarly, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland transitions from the national to the world. The statement from the Russell Group university asserts its global status, whereas the statements from a post-92 and a specialist institution assert and build upon their more local credentials. The statements from Sheffield Hallam, Gloucestershire and UCA all foreground students.

The statements assert more than they explain, with limited use of linguistic connectors and scant usage of quantitative information (Cortés Sánchez 2018). While the earliest survey of mission statements referred to in this paper (Davies and Glaister 1996) argued there was a generic mission statement in higher education, this paper indicates there are different mission statements for different types of HEI, as noted more recently by Seeber *et al* (2017).

## **Conclusion**

This study identifies the fifty-seven most commonly used terms in a sample of 127, UK HEI mission statements. It shows a correlation between mission statement length and institution type. Russell Group statements are, in general, more synoptic, and less likely to drill down into the detail of their provision. Mission statements from universities in the Other category in this study often have additional elements, such as commitment to one or more communities. Specialist institutions' mission statements are most likely to drill down into the detail of their provision.

Prestigious HEIs' mission statements might be less expansive because their prestige is enough, apparent in their Russell Group status. HEIs in the Other and Specialist Institution categories in this study can emulate Russell Group universities in terms of claims made and language used relating to research and quality, but they do not, in general, emulate the structure of Russell Group mission statements.

The mission statements across the groups frequently gravitate towards similar terms, such as 'research,' 'students,' education,' 'highest,' 'community.' The most frequently used terms in mission statements in this research align broadly with the international survey of university mission statements by Cortés Sánchez (2018). Mission statements construct a sense of organisational reality through both linguistic and structural choices. This study indicates there is structural difference between mission statements, depending upon institution type, but there is less linguistic variation between mission statements.

The limitations of this study include the breadth of the Other category, encompassing both UK universities founded as a result of the Robbins Report (1963), and universities that did not acquire their status until 1992 or afterwards. The present study classifies HEIs in terms of formal mission groups and characteristics; a future study might adopt only one of these approaches and produce different results. Future research could also include a longitudinal study, analysing how individual HEI's mission statements change over time. Changes in an HEI's mission statement might reflect broader, structural changes in higher education, for example towards a privatised and marketised system characterised by increasing differentiation (Boliver 2013). Moreover, some mission statements may have changed since this research was undertaken in summer 2018. This article indicates language is mobile between categories (claims to excellence in teaching, research and service to society are not monopolised by Russell Group), but structural aspects of mission statements, including length, are frequently distinctive to institutional type. Future research might also examine mission statement outliers, HEIs whose mission statements deviate from the structure and language most commonly used by HEIs of a particular type. Finally, this study was timebound; research undertaken over a longer period could provide more detailed examination of a larger sample.

This paper adds to our understanding by showing how mission statements convey different versions of organisational reality for different types of HEI. HEIs make choices about which features of their provision to foreground, establishing an identity within institution type parameters. This study also adds to our understanding by the size of the sample, aiding reliability; by identifying fifty-seven of the most frequently used terms in mission statements;

and by identifying a correlation between size of mission statement on one hand, and type of institution on the other.

## **References**

Al Olayan, F., Rasmoun, W. & Saidi, H. (2018). An Exploratory Approach of the Mission Statement: Case of Saudi Arabia Business Schools, *International Journal of Business and Management*, 13(3), 200-210.

Arias-Coello, A., Simon-Martin, J. & Sanchez-Molero, J.L. (2018) Mission statements in Spanish universities, *Studies in Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1512569>

Bangor University (2018). Mission Statement, <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/about/mission.php.en> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Berg, G.A., Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Nakamura, J. (2003). Mission Possible? Enabling Good Work in Higher Education, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 35(5), 40-47.

Boliver, V. (2013). How fair is access to more prestigious UK universities? *The British Journal of Sociology*, 64(2), 344-364.

Bournemouth University (2017). Bournemouth University Reports and Financial Statement for the year ended 31 July 2017, <https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/bu-financial-statements-2016-17.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Branson, R. (2018). Richard, <https://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/if-we-can-change-business-good-we-should-also-make-effort-change-world-better> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Brunel University (no date), Our Vision for Brunel University London, <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/brunel-2030/our-vision#> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Connell, I. & Galasinski (1998). Academic Mission Statements: an exercise in negotiation, *Discourse and Society*, 9(4), 457-479.

Cortés Sánchez, J.D. (2018). Mission statements of universities worldwide: Text mining and visualization, *Intangible Capital*, 14(4), 584-603.

Cranfield University (2018). About the University, <https://www.cranfield.ac.uk/about/about> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Davies, S.W. & Glaister, K.W. (1996). 'Spurs to Higher Things?' Mission Statements of UK Universities, *Higher Education Quarterly*, 50(4), 261-294.

De Jager, G. (2011). Missions on the move: university systems in England, New York State and California, *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 23(1), 1-23.

Drucker, P.F. (1973). *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*, New York, Harper Row.

Edge Hill University (2016). Vision and Values: Mission Statement, <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/governance/vision-and-values/> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Efe, I. & Ozer, O. (2015). A corpus-based discourse analysis of the vision and mission statements of universities in Turkey, *Higher Education Research and Development*, 34(6), 1110-1122.

Heriot-Watt University (2013). Global Thinking, Worldwide Influence: Strategic Plan 2013-18, <https://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/strategic-plan.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2018). Higher education providers, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/providers> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Hladchenko, M. (2016). The organizational identity of Ukrainian universities as claimed through their mission statements, *Tertiary Education and Management*, 22(4), 376-389.

Huisman, J. & Mampaey, J. (2018). Use your imagination: what UK universities want you to think of them, *Oxford Review of Education*, 44(4), 425-440.

James, H. & Huisman, J. (2009). Mission statements in Wales: the impact of markets and policy on congruence between institutions, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 31(1), 23-35.

Kosmutzky, A. & Krucken, G. (2015). Sameness and Difference, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 45(2), 137-149.

Kuenssberg, S. (2011). The discourse of self-presentation in Scottish university mission statements, *Quality in Higher Education*, 17(3), 279-298.

Liverpool Hope University (2018). Our Mission and Values, <http://www.hope.ac.uk/aboutus/thehopestory/ourmissionsandvalues/> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

London School of Economics (2015). LSE Strategy 2020, <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/strLsePla.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Meacham, J. & Gaff, J.G. (2006). Learning Goals in Mission Statements, *Liberal Education*, 92(1), 6-13.

Morphew, C.C. & Hartley, M. (2006). Mission statements: A Thematic Analysis of Rhetoric across Institutional Type, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(3), 456-471.

Neves, J. & Hillman, N. (2019). Student Academic Experience Survey 2019, Advance HE & Higher Education Policy Institute, York and London, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2019.pdf> . Accessed 22 June 2019.

Newman University (2014). Newman University Strategic Plan 2014-20, <http://www1.newman.ac.uk/files/w3/about-us/pdf/Strategic%20Plan%202014-2020%20.pdf?q=247> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Oxford Brookes University (2018). Strategy 2020, <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/about-brookes/strategy/strategy-2020/> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Purcell, W.M., Beer, J. & Southern, R. (2016). Differentiation of English universities: the impact of policy reforms in driving a more diverse higher education landscape, *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 20(1), 24-33.

Queen Margaret University (2018). Vision, Mission and Values, <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/vision-mission-and-values/> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2014). Mission Statement, [https://www.rcs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Mission\\_statement\\_RCS.pdf](https://www.rcs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Mission_statement_RCS.pdf) . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Ryan, G.W & Bernard, H.R. (2003). Techniques to Identify Themes, *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85-109.

Sauntson, H. & Morrish, L. (2011). Vision, values and international excellence: the 'products' that university mission statements sell to students, in Molesworth, M., et al., Eds., *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*, Abingdon, Routledge, 73-85.

Seeber, M., Barberio, V., Huisman, J. & Mampaey, J. (2017). Factors affecting the content of universities' mission statements: an analysis of the United Kingdom higher education system, *Studies in Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1349743> .

Sheffield Hallam University (2018). We Transform Lives, <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-us/governance-and-strategy/strategy> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

Southampton Solent University (2015). Building an Excellent University, <https://portal.solent.ac.uk/documents/vco/southampton-solent-university-strategy-2015-2020.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

St George's Hospital Medical School (2017). Mission and Vision, <https://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-us/strategy-2017-2022/mission-vision> . Accessed 8 March 2019.

- University for the Creative Arts (2013). Strategic Vision 2013-18, <https://issuu.com/unicreativearts/docs/binder1c> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Birmingham (2010). Shaping our Future: Birmingham 2015, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/shaping-future.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of East London (2010). Transformation for Excellence: University Strategy 2010-2020, <https://www.uel.ac.uk/wwwmedia/uel/migratedcontent/top-level/about/strategy/WhitePaper.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Edinburgh (2016). Strategic Plan 2016, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/governance-strategic-planning/strategic-planning/strategic-plan/vision-and-mission> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Exeter (2016). Our mission, vision and values, <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/ourstrategy/values/> Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Gloucestershire (2017). Founded on Values, Centred on Students, Focused on Learning: Strategic Plan, 2017-2022, <http://www.glos.ac.uk/docs/download/Business/strategic-plan-2017-2022.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Portsmouth (2018). Mission, Vision and Values, <https://www.port.ac.uk/about-us/our-strategy/mission-vision-and-values> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Sheffield (2015). Our University, Our Future, Our Plan, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ourplan/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TUOS-Strategic-Plan.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Southampton (2018). Simply Better: The University Strategy, <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/about/strategy.page> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Surrey (2017). The Surrey Advantage: Corporate Strategy 2017-2022. <https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/corporate-strategy-2017-2022.pdf> . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- University of Teeside (2015). Teeside 2020: University Corporate Strategy 2015-2020. [https://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/docrepo/about/teeside\\_2020.pdf](https://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/docrepo/about/teeside_2020.pdf) . Accessed 8 March 2019.
- Wang, J., Gibson, A.M., Salinas, L., Solis, F. & Slate, J.R. (2007). Thematic Differences in Mission Statements Between Four-Year Public Institutions and Two-Year Colleges in Texas, *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 11(1), <http://iejll.journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/iejll/index.php/ijll/article/view/657/318> .



**Appendix – coding sheet**

**Coding sheet (features terms listed fifteen times or more on the aggregated data document, excluding ‘mission’ and ‘university’ and extraneous terms)**

HEI:		
Term	Mentioned yes/no	Frequency
research		
student		
education/educate/educating		
high/higher/highest		
community/communities		
develop/development		
excellence/excellent		
provide		
knowledge		
teach/teaching		
learn/learning		
world		
economy/economies/economic		
lives/life		
social		
society		
international/internationally		
cultural/culture		
lead/leaders/leading/leadership		
make		
staff		
innovate/innovation		
quality		
global/globally		
professional(s)/professions		
contribution		

partner/partnership(s)		
transform/transformation(al)/transformative		
work		
creativity/creative		
national/nationally/nation		
deliver		
inspire/inspirational/inspiring		
achieve		
art/artist/artistic		
create/creating		
good/better/best		
graduates		
enable		
experience		
benefit		
diversity		
impact		
support/supported/supportive		
people		
future		
environment		
individual		
promote		
serve/services		
academic		
aim		
business		
enterprise		
intellectual		
opportunity		
wide		