



**Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management degree programmes?**

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## Abstract

### Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to establish the extent to which prospective students can see a visible commitment to study gender in the UK business/management school curriculum prior to enrolment.

### Design/methodology/approach

A content analysis of the descriptions of modules offered as part of business and management degrees offered by 112 UK universities was conducted. The analysis was restricted to the publicly available information on the websites visible to prospective students. Descriptive statistics re the distribution of gender topics across programmes and HEIs are presented in addition to university group affiliation (e.g. Russell Group), and accreditation in respect of variables.

### Findings

The analysis reveals significant gaps in the undergraduate and taught postgraduate offerings of UK business schools that we suggest are reflective of subject silos, and institutional risk reduction strategies.

### Research limitations/implications

We conclude by arguing that accreditation bodies can use their influence to leverage change and to ensure gender content becomes core to curriculum design and its visibility as part of the practice of management to prospective students. **Originality/value**

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3 This study provides a benchmark for the visibility of gender as an issue and perspective within  
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5 UK business/management school offerings.  
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Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management degree programmes?

Section/page	Comment	Response	Check
<b>Title</b>	"Where is the visible commitment to gender in UK management education" appears first as promising somewhat too much, given its restricted approach. The title should be rephrased.	Thank you. We have changed the title to, "Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management degree programmes?"	Y
<b>Methodology</b>	The authors should add a section where they discuss and reflect the limitations of their approach focusing on website content. The reader is also curious about how they are going to continue their research beyond this exploratory phase.	A section has been added on p17.	Y
	I wonder if a footnote on the ongoing situation at the Leicester University Critical Management School would be in place here	A footnote has been added to p. 8	Y
<b>Results</b>	It might be useful to include a comparison of data between the Russell Group and Million Plus?	We did comparisons all the ways to see if there was a significant difference between the different universities. There isn't anything in the Million Plus data that suggests it is worth presenting separately, as the only meaningful comparison in the data is (perhaps irritatingly) Russell Group v the rest.	Y
<b>Conclusions</b>	Universities may benefit from further alignment of diversity and inclusivity institutional statements and course offering marketing on their websites. It appears that this research is suggesting a current disparity, and this point might be further highlighted in the conclusions.	We have added this point to p.20 onwards along with other contextual information requested.	Y
	Further detail regarding the alignment to accreditations might be provided so that the reader is able to follow the argument in relation to	We have added additional explanation. Accreditation bodies do issue broad guidelines around social responsibility issues, of which gender and other forms of diversity are key,	Y

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	the external influence of these bodies on gender and course design.	however it is not clear to what extent these are interpreted as issues of faculty and institutional commitment to their own staffing as opposed to curricular content.	
<b>Presentation</b>	Some grammatical errors are present but these are easily rectified with a final proof read.	Have checked again. Our apologies.	Y
	p.5, line 22-31 para starting "We can then use the measurement..." remains unclear to the reader and needs editing.	Now reworded. Apologies for the failure to spot the repetition.	Y

## Introduction

Management is not a gender-neutral activity. Gender should be central to any management education curriculum that claims to address current issues in the workplace (Mavin and Bryans, 1999), and that aims to equip managers with the understanding to shape the future social and economic impact of work in positive ways. Tackling gender inequality is a critical organizational challenge (Beirne & Wilson, 2016; Olsen *et al*, 2016; Author B *et al*, 2019). Women remain conspicuously absent in organizational leadership and progress towards advancing women at the board level is slow (Catalyst, 2014; Vinnicombe *et al*, 2019; Author B *et al*, 2019). However, the regularity of calls for gender issues to have a higher profile in the curriculum suggests that the visible commitment to gender when presenting degree content to prospective students of management is still low.

The brand identity of the institution has become the main purpose of the public-facing pages of university websites (Tobolowsky & Lowery, 2014). Even so, institutions add summaries of module content on their websites to aid prospective students in the choice of their degree programmes. Each university takes a design decision on how much detail regarding module

1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

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4 content to reveal to prospective students. The format of descriptive summaries varies as a  
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6 result, but it is important to stress that they are not performing the same function as the module  
7  
8 documentation that includes learning outcomes, reading lists, and topic summaries that  
9  
10 students typically have access to once enrolled. The web summaries exist as a shop window  
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12 for the degree, and to fulfil institutional responsibilities to provide information that enables  
13  
14 students to make 'informed choices' before selecting a programme of study. Our argument in  
15  
16 this paper is that – whatever corporate claims are made regarding 'cutting edge' programmes,  
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18 or the importance of current issues in management in the curriculum – gender issues and  
19  
20 perspectives are largely absent from this shop window.  
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25 This paper reports on a content review of gender content, undertaken between 2017 and 2018,  
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27 within publicly available summaries of modules that are offered on business and management  
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29 degrees in the UK. We use only those descriptions that are available to prospective students,  
30  
31 not enrolled students, as an indicator of the extent to which student expectations are being  
32  
33 shaped regarding management as a gender-neutral practice.  
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38 University websites are the focus of the study because of the role digital technologies now have  
39  
40 in providing information to prospective students. Published surveys of business schools using  
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42 full module documentation including learning outcomes are uncommon. For example, Webb  
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44 *et al* (1999) studied US business school curricula in respect of internationalization in the late  
45  
46 1990s but their data was based on interview data. Sub-disciplinary studies are equally rare -  
47  
48 Burchell *et al's* (2015) research focused on ethics and social responsibility teaching, and the  
49  
50 practice orientation of UK marketing programmes is a more recent study by Finch *et al* (2018).  
51  
52 Content analysis of full module documentation is rare because of the difficulties of accessing  
53  
54 and auditing content. The need for longitudinal and/or follow-up studies to understand  
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56 curriculum change fully is noted. However, our position is that reviews – such as the one we  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 have undertaken – of publicly accessible information are useful in establishing a time-stamped  
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6 baseline measurement. By repeating the exercise at regular intervals, we will be able to track  
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8 shifts in the visibility of gender in the curriculum at the point that students choose their degree  
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10 programme and expectations are shaped as to what the study of management entails.

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14 The findings of our review confirm the low visibility of gender as a core aspect of the study of  
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16 management in module summaries visible to prospective students at undergraduate and  
17  
18 postgraduate levels. Our research contributes to the ongoing debate about management  
19  
20 education's ability to speak adequately to management practices and key challenges, including  
21  
22 equity and social justice issues (Williams *et al*, 2017) that are core to the Critical Management  
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24 Education (CME) project. The paper concludes that given institutional consciousness is raised  
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26 – although not always actioned – by accreditation activity, including a curricular commitment  
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28 to gender in addition to management practice of the institution as part of accreditation by bodies  
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30 such as EQUIS, AMBA, and AACSB<sup>1</sup>, would provide useful leverage to increase the visibility  
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32 of these important social issues within business and management degrees.  
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### 38 **Theoretical field**

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44 The theoretical context of this paper is situated at the crossroads of several literatures and  
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46 concerns. One could reasonably frame the research in terms of higher education branding, or  
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48 wider neo-liberal influences on the university, or even gender and education. However, the  
49  
50 wider field of Critical Management Studies and its more specialist sub-category of critical  
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55 <sup>1</sup> EQUIS = European Foundation for Management Development Quality Improvement System. AMBA = Association of Masters of Business  
56 Administration. AACSB = Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. All three are internationally active accreditation and  
57 quality standard bodies relevant to the field of business and management education.  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

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4 management education is the best lens through which to consider the issue. This is not to say  
5  
6 that branding, the neoliberal university, and gender and education perspectives are not salient  
7  
8 in and of themselves, but that CME already works with these concepts as part of the landscape  
9  
10 of its critical warrant (Author A, 2016).

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14 CME exists, in part, because of the concern in the 1980s that the marketization of higher  
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16 education was directing management education towards a predominantly technicist form of  
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18 management education. Critical Management Studies, (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992) was  
19  
20 amongst the first publications to question the function of business schools as the home of  
21  
22 mainstream, normative teaching approaches to the job of being a manager. Their work drew on  
23  
24 critical theory, and this choice undoubtedly influenced other key figures who agreed with the  
25  
26 premise that 'management [was] too potent in its effects upon the lives of employees,  
27  
28 consumers and citizens to be guided by a narrow, instrumental form of rationality' (Alvesson  
29  
30 and Willmott, 1992:1). Critical theory dominated the critical content that was used in  
31  
32 management education in the first wave of the movement, only later did feminist challenges  
33  
34 ensure that gender and other forms of diversity were included in the stable of critical  
35  
36 approaches and pedagogies (Author A, 2004; 2018). CME – albeit in a minority of UK HE  
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38 institutions – ensured that difference based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sexual  
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40 orientation, disability (and latterly, neurodiversity) was embedded in the curriculum. However,  
41  
42 the accelerated commercialization of HE in the UK narrowed the space available for critical  
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44 management process radicalism in delivery (Author A, 2018).

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48 The introduction of student tuition fees, supported by student loans, at undergraduate level in  
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50 England (other UK nations opted for subsidized models) in 2012 is seen as the point at which  
51  
52 HE was commodified. However, tuition fees for postgraduate courses have been the norm since  
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54 the early 1960s (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007) so the commodification thesis is based on the  
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2 degree programmes?  
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4 changes to undergraduate educational norms. The combined effect of human capital theory  
5 normalizing the idea that higher education is a private good rather than a public one (see  
6 Baptiste, 2001; Nafukho, Hairston, and Brooks, 2004; Ployhart and Moliterno, 2011; Author  
7 A, 2018) and the internationalization of education that has enabled universities to develop large  
8 cohorts of international students at UG and PG level to 'fund the gap' between income from  
9 domestic students and the cost of running their institutions. The ability to charge premium,  
10 unregulated fees to international students has added impetus to inter-institutional competition  
11 (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007; Mazzarol and Souter, 2012). There is a paucity of research in  
12 respect of internationalization and critical pedagogy, but Choo's (2007) study suggested that  
13 international students were dissatisfied with non-technical content that they saw as detrimental  
14 to their employability and were especially uncomfortable with raising issues related to  
15 difference and diversity.  
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32 The emphasis on employability as a justification for the acquisition of tuition fee debt, the  
33 shifting of balance to premium international cohorts, and the narrowing of space in which  
34 critical pedagogy can practice, explains the growing conservatism of HE (Naidoo and  
35 Jamieson, 2005). However, up until this point, critical management educators have been more  
36 concerned about the reduction in the opportunities for programmes that appeal to social  
37 solidarity or social justice issues (Gross and Hogler, Sinclair, 2007; Bridgman, 2007),  
38 especially those that recruited smaller cohorts. The 'disciplining' (Sinclair, 2007) of  
39 pedagogical practice within programmes has been a more pressing issue than examining how  
40 management programmes position themselves to prospective students. Author A (2018) has  
41 suggested that criticality in management education has always lacked reflexivity because it has  
42 always operated out of the Western white male academic tradition that finds it difficult to  
43 confront its power, even as it positions itself against the dominant (male) technicist tradition in  
44 the field. More recently, it has also been forced to acknowledge its privilege in believing that  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

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4 it was uniquely placed – as a predominantly white, Western field – to define difference and to  
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6 offer the opportunity to 'learn about' difference in a classroom, rather than acknowledge  
7  
8 students' own lived experience of discrimination and oppression in their lives to date.  
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11 Distracted by the effects of internationalization and marketization at programme level, and  
12  
13 cognisant of the need to be reflexive of how critical content is positioned, critical management  
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15 education has not been attentive to the wider trends in technicist education. Content with their  
16  
17 assessment of the disadvantages of a wholly technical approach to management in the 1980s,  
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19 there has been scant attention paid to how the curriculum and the way it is 'sold' to students has  
20  
21 changed in the period since Alvesson and Willmott's (1992) Critical Management Studies was  
22  
23 published. Had CME kept pace with the mainstream curriculum and how it was changing  
24  
25 alongside the critical one, it may have been able to gauge the extent to which accreditation,  
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27 mission group differentiation, premium fees, internationalization, and inter-institution  
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29 competition appeared to result in the sector becoming even more conservative in terms of  
30  
31 drawing attention to any socio-political content – critical or otherwise - to prospective students  
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33 despite higher-level appeals to current management issues as being core to management  
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35 education<sup>2</sup>.  
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43 Our concern here is therefore not with the content of modules as they reveal themselves to  
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45 students who have already enrolled in degree programmes – as mentioned above, the research  
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50 <sup>2</sup> This issue has come to prominence in the decision, by Leicester University, to make 16 academic staff redundant in their Business School  
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52 on the alleged justification that to successfully compete with other Russell Group institutions the School must follow a certain set of  
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54 mainstream research priorities and disavow others, namely Critical Management Studies and/or Political Economy  
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56 (<https://uculeicester.org.uk/ulsb16/perspective-page/>). In response, the staff representative body, the University and College Union, is  
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58 officially in dispute with the University and instigated a global academic boycott of the institution on May 4th 2021. At time of writing the  
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60 dispute is still active.

1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

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4 is not a curriculum survey. Rather, we were looking to benchmark the efforts that business and  
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6 management schools made in respect of signalling gender content to students they were  
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8 competing for with other institutions. Had we but known it, the timestamp of our data collection  
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10 may well prove to be the high- (or low-, depending on your perspective) water level of  
11  
12 marketized marketing of business and management degrees to prospective home and  
13  
14 international students before the impact of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic on UK  
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16 university finances, and any knock-on effects on the positioning of degrees and the conscious  
17  
18 highlighting of gender and other persistent issues in the workplace. It was always our intention  
19  
20 that this visibility survey is the start of a series of snapshots of the shifting presentation of  
21  
22 gender within management education. Continuing the data collection series is more important  
23  
24 than ever as we enter a period of revision and retrenchment in the management education  
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26 project, and that of UK HE.  
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### 35 **The UK Business School context**

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37 A generic claim of business schools across the UK higher education sector is that students will  
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39 be exposed to content that is relevant to the 21st-century workplace e.g. students will 'develop  
40  
41 the breadth and depth of knowledge required for managers in the 21st century' (Aston  
42  
43 University, 2018) or 'new global perspectives that contribute to and shape a responsible future  
44  
45 for both business and society' (Newcastle University, 2018), and '[an] educational experience  
46  
47 that connects people and organizations to deliver ground-breaking social and economic impact'  
48  
49 (Southampton, 2018). Given the accepted importance of addressing gender inequality in the  
50  
51 workplace (Beirne and Wilson, 2016; Olsen *et al*, 2016), gender should therefore be a central  
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53 concern of degrees that purport to focus on essential knowledge for managers, shape a  
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55 responsible future, and deliver social and economic impact (Mavin and Bryans, 1999; Author  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 B, 2018) as advertised. An initial random sample of ten management and business school  
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6 websites, however, suggested that gender was not advertised in most of the institutions in the  
7  
8 sample. This was the 2015 pilot of the study to determine the extent of the visibility of gender  
9  
10 content in UK business schools.

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14 A point of differentiation between institutions – and one which they visibly deploy in support  
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16 of brand identity in respect of quality in the 21st century – is that of accreditation. Higher  
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18 education is increasingly influenced by standard-setting agencies (Durand and McGuire, 2005;  
19  
20 Lowrie and Willmott, 2009; Wedlin, 2010; Masrani *et al*, 2011; Thomas *et al*, 2014) therefore  
21  
22 we were keen to look at the possible impact of accreditation on the visibility of gender in the  
23  
24 curriculum. The European Foundation for Management Development's (EFMD's) European  
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26 Quality Improvement Standard (EQUIS) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools  
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28 of Business (AACSB) are the two main accreditation bodies (Thomas *et al*, 2014). Both EQUIS  
29  
30 and AACSB have, despite differences in methodology, the common goal of assessing the  
31  
32 quality of education offered (Dudin and Shashalova, 2019). However, the driver for institutions  
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34 to pursue accreditation is the need for universities to be able to signal that they are 'international'  
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36 in a global education market. International accreditation is the recognized marker of that status  
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38 (Dudin and Shashalova, 2019).  
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45 Accreditation contributes to the creation - and perpetuation - of the idea of 'elite' business  
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47 schools, which in turn creates expectations from stakeholders and norms of behaviour across  
48  
49 the sector (Wilson and McKiernan, 2011). Norms that are created in respect of content have  
50  
51 been suggested as an explanation for the curricular isomorphism in business schools (Baruch  
52  
53 *et al*, 2019). But although accreditation is assumed to drive the curricular offering  
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55 commentators are divided about the extent to which this is the case. Wedlin (2010), for  
56  
57 example, views accreditation as a way of distributing symbolic capital around the HE system  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

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4 and as a soft regulatory mechanism of internal sense- and decision-making around curriculum  
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6 (Paradeise and Thoenig, 2013; Burchell *et al*, 2015) rather than dictating content.  
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9  
10 However, whilst there might not be a prescribed curriculum issued by the accrediting bodies,  
11 there are attempts to steer the content towards socially progressive content. The Principles for  
12 Responsible Management Education (PRME), for example, are intended to encourage more  
13 responsible business practice (Burchell *et al*, 2015) including gender equity. The AACSB has  
14 recently updated its criteria to state that participating business schools need to pay attention to  
15 'emerging corporate social responsibility issues' (AACSB, 2018) including diversity (gender),  
16 sustainable development, and environmental sustainability. EQUIS (2018) states that ethics,  
17 responsibility, and sustainability should be integrated into programme design. Given that the  
18 accrediting bodies have signalled that they wish to see evidence of socially responsible  
19 curricula it was reasonable to check to see if accreditation did bring with it a more visible  
20 commitment to gender issues. We, therefore, started with the following proposition around  
21 accreditation:  
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38 Proposition 1. Universities with accreditation show higher levels of visible gender content in  
39 UG and PGT programmes than those without  
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44 We have used university affiliation i.e., membership of 'mission groups' rather than rankings  
45 in our study. Rankings are an unstable measure of similarity of quality or approach because of  
46 the large amount of movement on a year-by-year basis of institutions below the top quartile  
47 (Wilson and McKiernan, 2011). Mission groups are groupings of universities who identify as  
48 peers, e.g. the Russell Group who characterize their institutional membership as '24 leading  
49 UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding  
50 teaching and learning experience, and unrivalled links with business and the public sector'  
51 (russellgroup.ac.uk), or the MillionPlus Group who claim to represent 'Modern Universities in  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 the UK, and the voice of 21st century education (millionplus.ac.uk). We propose that  
5  
6 institutions in the Russell Group are more likely to reflect research expertise in gender issues  
7  
8 in module content.  
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11 Proposition 2. Russell Group universities show higher levels of visible gender content in  
12  
13 programmes than universities with no or other mission group affiliations  
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## 16 17 **Methodology**

18  
19 To assess the visibility of gender content in business and management school programmes we  
20  
21 conducted a content review and analysis of the websites of 112 UK HEIs. The review was  
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23 undertaken at two census points. The summaries of modules on full-time undergraduate  
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25 programmes were harvested between November 2016 and January 2017, and the postgraduate  
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27 programme information was collected between November 2017 and January 2018. The 2015  
28  
29 National Student Survey return for Business and Management degrees covering an initial 130  
30  
31 institutions was used to identify institutions that offered degree programmes in the subject area.  
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33 We removed specialist institutions such as Harper Adams University (e.g., agriculture) and  
34  
35 further education colleges (e.g., Blackburn) from the list, leaving 112 higher education  
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37 institutions offering named degrees in business and management. The key variable information  
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39 was recorded for each institution i.e., country of location, institutional affiliation to groups such  
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41 as Russell Group or MillionPlus, and the accreditations held both in terms of bodies such as  
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43 AACSB, Equis, and AMBA.  
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50  
51 The first two authors worked together to record the data. Institutions were worked through in  
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53 alphabetical order, with one researcher accessing the website, noting the number of  
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55 programmes aloud, and then clicking through to the page containing information on each  
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57 degree and its module summaries. Those summaries were then checked for pre-determined  
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59 search terms relating to gender. Where gender content was identified, the title of the module  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

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4 was recorded, in addition to its status as core or elective, level, credit value, and programme  
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6 title was read out and recorded by the second researcher on a different computer. Researchers  
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8 swapped roles throughout the data harvest to ensure consistency of approach and data  
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10 recording. Information was only collected from those areas of the website that would be visible  
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12 and accessible to prospective students.  
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16 The extent to which prospective students can access detailed information about the content of  
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18 their degree courses is problematic. Successive UK governments have sought to influence the  
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20 type of information given to students, but the emphasis has been on contact hours and  
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22 employability metrics (e.g. Department of Business, Innovation, and Skills, 2016) to comply  
23  
24 with Competitions and Markets Authority regulations for higher education providers. In the  
25  
26 same period, web content management processes – and the marketing functions of universities  
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28 – have become more influential, which has resulted in module descriptors becoming 'an  
29  
30 elevator pitch' that are brief and easy to understand. The full, detailed, and comprehensive  
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32 content descriptors that include assessment approaches and teaching outlines are now behind  
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34 institutional information firewalls and only available to students once they are fully enrolled in  
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36 the programme. Any study that seeks to make a definitive judgment of whether gender is  
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38 supposed to be taught on any given module in a degree must, of course, have access to the full  
39  
40 course documentation. A full curriculum survey of all UK business and management schools  
41  
42 in the UK would require a large grant, and the services of a dedicated research assistant to  
43  
44 gather the material. As mentioned previously, our survey is not, and was not, designed to  
45  
46 determine to what extent gender is included in module content and visible to existing students.  
47  
48 Our survey is a measure of the extent to which universities, who market management degrees  
49  
50 based on their relevance to the 'real world' of work and its challenges, mention gender as an  
51  
52 integral part of a module's offer. The advantage of this approach is that it gathers data from  
53  
54 publicly accessible areas of university websites, removing the necessity of requesting module  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

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4 documentation from over 100 institutions and that it focuses on the information that is available  
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6 to prospective students.  
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13 Gender content was recorded as present or not present in individual programmes, rather than  
14 simply counting the number of modules with gender content advertised at each business and  
15 management school. This was to establish a percentage of programmes with (core or elective)  
16 gender content of the total number of programmes offered to students. A percentage figure was  
17 considered useful as a comparator if, as planned, future surveys are undertaken. Consequently,  
18 this paper reports the findings of our review of 1,222 business and management programmes  
19 at UG level and 1,562 programmes at PG level.  
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30 The Access database, in which the data were initially inputted, was exported into IBM SPSS  
31 Statistics 25 for further analysis. The correlation structure was examined (see Table 1) and  
32 shows no initial concerns with multicollinearity as no coefficients are stronger than 0.8. For  
33 example, accreditation by one body is positively related to being accredited by others but the  
34 strongest such relationship has a correlation coefficient of 0.718 (EQUIS and AACSB). The  
35 Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were checked for all models and confirmed that  
36 multicollinearity was unlikely to be an issue as most values were well below two, and all below  
37 three.  
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53 [INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?  
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4 As the dependent variables correspond to count variables (i.e., number of programmes with a  
5 gender component), and because for some of the variables the standard deviation exceeds the  
6 mean, a Poisson link might result in an underestimation of the standard errors in the models.  
7  
8 Instead, a Negative Binomial link in a Generalized Linear Model was used (McCullagh and  
9  
10 Nelder, 1989). The Negative Binomial parameter used in each model was estimated through  
11  
12 maximum likelihood estimation (MLE). The number of corresponding programmes (i.e., UG  
13  
14 or PGT) is controlled for in the model to account for possible size-dependent effects.  
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## 22 Findings

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24 Of the 1,222 undergraduate degree programmes reviewed, 236 highlighted gender in the  
25  
26 module summaries (19%), with 104 programmes offering gender in core modules (8%) and  
27  
28 132 programmes offering students option modules with gender (11%). Sixty-two institutions  
29  
30 of the 112 reviewed did not mention gender as a management issue to potential students in  
31  
32 respect of their undergraduate business and management degrees. We were also surprised by  
33  
34 the gaps that our review revealed in terms of subject areas that were least likely to show visible  
35  
36 gender content. Whilst it might have been anticipated that economics and finance would not  
37  
38 feature this topic prominently, its absence from marketing is less explicable. The results also  
39  
40 challenge assumptions that the natural route for gender content to enter the management  
41  
42 curriculum is either via human resource management as a subject area (Greene *et al.*, 2005;  
43  
44 Hutchings & Thomas, 2005), and supports the findings of Haynes and Murray (2015) that it is  
45  
46 not covered in sustainability and corporate social responsibility modules either.  
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53 [INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]  
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57 We also looked at core and module distribution per institution to see if gender content was  
58  
59 offered via optional, as opposed to compulsory, modules. If perceived 'challenging' subject  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 matter is placed in option modules, it allows students to avoid issues that will be central to their  
5  
6 experience of workplaces. By this logic, a university that placed gender as core topics across  
7  
8 its business and management degrees would be one that saw these topics as essential to  
9  
10 understanding work and employment, and (perhaps) also as reflecting their values as an  
11  
12 institution. Only 13 UK universities out of the 112 in the data communicated to potential  
13  
14 students that gender is considered core knowledge on their UG programmes.

15  
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19 At postgraduate level, we recorded 1,562 degrees of which 177 had visible gender content  
20  
21 (11%), of which 106 (7%) offered this content in core modules. A higher number of institutions  
22  
23 (60) advertised gender content at PG level than at UG level. However, this provision was  
24  
25 heavily skewed towards the MBA, and Business and Management generalist degrees, with only  
26  
27 12% of degrees outside of the general management category having core content in gender.  
28  
29 MBA degrees represented 11% of the total number of PGT degrees offered by the 112  
30  
31 institutions. The largest category of degrees was business and management (or core subject  
32  
33 specialisms within that category such as marketing, HRM, and international business) at 42%.  
34  
35 Accounting and finance (including variants) degrees represented 24% of the degrees offered.  
36  
37 Only 3% of accounting, finance, and economics degrees had core content that advertised  
38  
39 gender content. The remaining 24% were named degrees in areas such as logistics, data  
40  
41 analysis, heritage management, and hospitality and events.  
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48 Although approximately 50% of the business and management schools included references to  
49  
50 gender content in the summaries of at least one module of their overall provision, only 33%  
51  
52 were consistent in doing this at both UG and PG level. The five institutions that had the highest  
53  
54 proportion of visible gender content in core module summaries at UG level were not the same  
55  
56 institutions that showed the highest proportion at PG level.

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60 [INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?  
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7 Accreditation shows no association with the number or gender content of UG programmes.  
8  
9 Belonging to the Russell Group has a negative association with the number of UG programmes  
10 (exp  $\beta = 0.59$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but appears unrelated to their gender content. This suggests that  
11 Russell Group universities compete for students based on reputational capital rather than the  
12 number and variety of their degree provision. The number of UG programmes on offer,  
13 however, is positively associated with gender content (exp  $\beta = 1.07$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). Breaking this  
14 down between core and optional modules, this positive association holds for core modules (exp  
15  $\beta = 1.10$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ) but not optional ones. As the offering increases, there is more scope to move  
16 beyond the mainstream subject areas, but this appears to be to the detriment of gender being  
17 signaled to prospective students as core to business and management education.  
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34 [INSERT TABLE 4 HERE]  
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42 Accreditation by PRME has a positive association with the number of PGT programmes (exp  
43  $\beta = 1.22$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ), which suggests that institutions who compete on degree coverage hold this  
44 accreditation, which has less onerous membership terms at the signatory level than other  
45 accreditations in the sector. PRME principles, to which universities are invited to become  
46 signatories, are based upon UN Global Compact concerns including the need to support human  
47 and labour rights (Williams *et al*, 2017) to encourage students' global social responsibility  
48 including gender equity. As such we would expect PRME principles around gender to be a  
49 prominent feature of module summaries. Yet, they are not. AMBA accreditation, however,  
50 does show a strong association with having gender content highlighted in PGT programmes  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3 (exp  $\beta = 2.06$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ). However, this is a result of including gender content in optional  
4 module summaries (exp  $\beta = 3.21$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ) rather than within core modules. No other  
5  
6 accreditation types show an association with gender in PGT programmes content.  
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15 Russell Group membership does not indicate differentiation in respect of the number of PGT  
16 programmes i.e., they are just as likely to offer a high number of programmes as other  
17 university mission groups. But Russell Group universities do return a higher number of PGT  
18 programmes with gender mentioned in module summaries (exp  $\beta = 2.27$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). Again, this  
19 is a result of including gender in optional module summaries (exp  $\beta = 2.92$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ). Their  
20 position in respect of gender in core module summaries at PG level is only marginally  
21 statistically significant (exp  $\beta = 2.09$ ,  $p = 0.10$ ) to other mission group members.  
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36 To conclude the data section, we found no evidence that accreditation plays a role in the  
37 inclusion of visible gender content in the curriculum summaries at UG level. Russell Group  
38 membership is also not associated with gender content in the UG module summaries, but  
39 membership does show a negative relationship with the number of UG programmes i.e.,  
40 Russell Group universities tend to offer the choice of fewer degree programmes to prospective  
41 students. In contrast, at postgraduate level, certain types of accreditations (i.e., PRME) are  
42 related to a higher number of PGT programmes offered. Whereas in terms of content, AMBA  
43 accreditation is associated with a higher number of PGT programmes with gender in the  
44 curriculum, but we find that content in option module summaries, and not core modules.  
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57 Belonging to the Russell Group is unrelated to the number of PGT programmes offered. At PG  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 level, Russell Group institutions are more likely to have gender in their programmes than the  
5  
6 other mission groups. Again, the effect is strongest for optional content.  
7  
8

## 9 **Conclusions**

10  
11 Over 20 years ago, Mavin & Bryans (1999) argued that gender should be central to  
12 management education to challenge traditional conceptions of "manager equals male" (p. 99).  
13  
14 This call echoed the concerns of Critical Management Educators (CME) more broadly, who  
15  
16 were also dissatisfied with the technicist direction of mainstream management education and  
17  
18 who were championing the need for critical content covering a range of social and political  
19  
20 issues. Feminist CME scholars were also drawing on feminist radical educators (e.g.,  
21  
22 Ellsworth, 1989) to focus on gender and warned that management theory risked being labelled  
23  
24 "malestream" (Mavin *et al*, 2004, p. 293) if it failed to acknowledge that management is not a  
25  
26 gender-neutral activity.  
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34 Over the course of those 20 years, the concern within critical management has primarily been  
35  
36 with the decline in the number of specialist programmes that focused on social justice issues  
37  
38 as a central focus. We suggested above that the concern should also have been with how the  
39  
40 shifting business model of universities was also eroding the warrant for criticality at the module  
41  
42 level. Our research has shown that gender content – vital to the effort to alert the next  
43  
44 generation of managers to the issues connected with gender in the workplace – is now largely  
45  
46 absent from the view of prospective students. The visible curriculum of management to  
47  
48 prospective students does nothing to challenge the expectation that management is male, white,  
49  
50 and neurotypical.  
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55 This is despite calls from relatively conservative organizations such as the Chartered Institute  
56  
57 of Personnel and Development (CIPD) calling for employer and government action on gender  
58  
59 equality in the workplace. The CIPD's action plan for employers highlights the fact that gender  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 discrimination has been unlawful in the UK for more than four decades, but it continues to be  
5  
6 an issue alongside sexual harassment, maternity discrimination, the gender pay gap, and  
7  
8 representation at the senior level (CIPD, undated). Appropriate training is put forward as a  
9  
10 possible solution but the opportunity to use accreditation as leverage for change in higher  
11  
12 education has been ignored. The CIPD had, until recently mainstreamed equality, diversity,  
13  
14 and inclusion (EDI) in their accredited modular curricula. A specialist gender and diversity  
15  
16 module has now been created – but it has been launched at a time when it has released  
17  
18 universities with CIPD accreditation from following their curricular structure. We see this  
19  
20 disconnect as indicative of the failure of accrediting bodies of all types to not recognize the  
21  
22 role they can play in focusing on EDI issues in training future managers, and a tacit lack of  
23  
24 confidence in the management education curriculum to develop good management practice and  
25  
26 awareness. This strikes us as a lost opportunity for both universities and accreditation bodies  
27  
28 to benefit from a closer alignment of EDI ambitions and course offerings, rather than 'just'  
29  
30 seeing EDI through the lens of staff diversity.  
31  
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37 The audit of module summaries confirms a homogenous approach to programme design and  
38  
39 curriculum content and the trend towards isomorphism. Business school websites are now  
40  
41 dominated by the institutional brand and are optimized for mobile devices. New website  
42  
43 designs have led to a reduction in content and detail at the pedagogic level. Our findings  
44  
45 confirm the move away from previous website templates that provided hyperlinks to full  
46  
47 module information that attempted to stress distinctiveness in content (Author B, 2012), to  
48  
49 content lite designs.  
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54 The greater likelihood of gender content being highlighted in option module summaries  
55  
56 suggests that there is a persistent issue across institutions about mainstreaming gender  
57  
58 perspectives in foundational modules in business and management. The focus on gender in  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 core modules and setting expectations with students that gender is considered core knowledge  
5  
6 in the field is crucial if business schools are to demonstrate that they are serious about their  
7  
8 role as developers of the next generation of managers who may wish to work in, and develop,  
9  
10 organizations where gender dynamics do not largely benefit men (Simpson, 1995).  
11  
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13  
14 Our data suggest that at UG level accreditation does not influence the visible emphasis on  
15  
16 gender in the curriculum to prospective students. But it does appear to do so at PG level.  
17  
18 Previous curriculum studies (e.g., Burchell *et al*, 2015; Finch *et al*, 2018) have noted the lack  
19  
20 of an accreditation effect on topics covered in programmes. However, our results suggest that  
21  
22 AMBA, alone out of the accreditation types, does have a role in influencing the visibility of  
23  
24 gender content at PG level, albeit at a modest level. This is perhaps a reflection of the MBA  
25  
26 degrees' greater emphasis on current workplace issues, although a qualitative follow-up study  
27  
28 would be needed to explore this finding further. With regards to accreditation, it is, however,  
29  
30 important to recognize that the low level of variation shown in the visible curriculum across  
31  
32 institutions is probably the outcome of marketing decisions made by similarly educated people  
33  
34 who lack diversity themselves (Wilson and McKiernan, 2011).  
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41 The institution's sense of what it means to be an accredited business school is regulating the  
42  
43 curriculum. There is, for example, no required AACSB body of knowledge because applicant  
44  
45 institutions are measured against their mission statements (Lowrie and Willmott, 2009). Yet,  
46  
47 because institutions view accreditation as the goal and the key to international status  
48  
49 enhancement, the urge to mimic the curricula of already successful institutions locks those  
50  
51 seeking accreditation into the same or similar topics, approaches, texts, and unconscious biases  
52  
53 (Darley and Luethge, 2019) as the global accreditation movement increases. Whether it is the  
54  
55 issue of gender in the UK, or the acknowledgment of local knowledge in Africa, the power of  
56  
57 accreditation is its ability to colonize by assumption.  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 We are not calling for a mandated curriculum in response – that would be counter to our  
5  
6 position as critical educators and as gender scholars. Rather, we see an opportunity for the  
7  
8 equality and inclusivity statements already included in each of the accreditation bodies' mission  
9  
10 statements to leverage curricular change. If there must be accreditation, then we see no reason  
11  
12 why it should not work pro-actively in support of a visible commitment to workplace gender  
13  
14 issues in the curriculum as well as business school administration. We also see an opportunity  
15  
16 to change the emphasis in the curriculum visible to prospective students to one that is more  
17  
18 socially aware and critical at the time when their expectations of what management education  
19  
20 means is being formed.  
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25  
26 Relatively small changes of emphasis in the self-assessment templates for institutions putting  
27  
28 themselves forward for accreditation (and re-accreditation) that show how equality and  
29  
30 inclusivity are reflected in the curriculum would, we suggest, result in a greater visible signal  
31  
32 to prospective students of management of the centrality of gender in management practice.  
33  
34 Institutional and individual practices can be influenced by external actors, as has been obvious  
35  
36 with regards to journal ranking lists (Anderson *et al*, 2020). Although these lists are contested  
37  
38 their acknowledged influence on academic practice nevertheless points to the potential that  
39  
40 accreditation bodies such as AACSB, EQUIS, and AMBA to perform a form of soft  
41  
42 governance (Burchell *et al*, 2015) to the curricular highlighting of gender issues.  
43  
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47  
48 Rutter *et al* (2017) may be correct in claiming that the priority for business schools is to appear  
49  
50 credible and low-risk and that this is achieved through homogeneity of the offer. It follows  
51  
52 that the detail around individual modules e.g., their specific aims, learning outcomes, and  
53  
54 specific content is removed so that only the bare minimum of material needed to establish  
55  
56 credibility remains in the module summaries included on web pages. Module descriptors on an  
57  
58 HEI website may – in this view – simply function as a risk reduction mechanism not connected  
59  
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1 Where is the visible commitment to gender in the advertised content of UK management  
2 degree programmes?

3  
4 with rational decision-making (Johnson, 2001), and reflect a wish not to send out curricular  
5 signals that differentiate it from other educational institutions (Rutter *et al*, 2017). This is a new  
6 barrier in the way of criticality and a socially responsible curriculum. Our challenge to our  
7 institutions is to see gender, and other forms of diversity acknowledged in the curriculum as  
8 central to their credibility.  
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16 Sending strong signals to prospective (and current) students about the ubiquitous nature of  
17 gender issues in the workplace is important. Workplaces are sites where contemporary social  
18 challenges are played out. Although these challenges are not limited to those connected with  
19 gender there is a need to normalize gender issues in the curriculum. The potential held by  
20 external practices of academic governance already adopted by business schools suggests that  
21 accreditation bodies have the potential (Burchell *et al*, 2015) measures to nudge universities to  
22 a position where there is congruence between statements regarding the centrality of gender to  
23 the management of business schools and the curriculum that they make visible to prospective  
24 students.  
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Table 1 Correlation matrix

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	Total undergraduate programmes	1																
2	Undergraduate programmes with gender content signalled	.287**	1															
3	Undergraduate programmes gender is core	.297**	.704**	1														
4	Undergraduate programmes where gender is an option	0.118	.729**	0.029	1													
5	Total postgraduate programmes	0.151	.220*	0.14	0.17	1												
6	Postgraduate programmes with gender content signalled	-0.04	0.021	0.066	-0.039	.283**	1											
7	Postgraduate programmes where gender is core	0.069	0.059	0.115	-0.026	.234*	.749**	1										
8	Postgraduate programmes where gender is an option	-0.139	-0.036	-0.033	-0.03	0.157	.648**	-0.02	1									
9	England	0.152	0.093	0.063	0.069	0.014	0.015	-0.018	0.043	1								
10	Wales	-0.038	-0.104	-0.062	-0.086	0.036	0.006	0.094	-0.1	-.517**	1							

11	Scotland	-0.177	-0.048	-0.042	-0.026	-0.019	0.016	-0.019	0.046	-	-0.109	1						
										.734**								
12	Northern Ireland	0.053	0.033	0.031	0.017	-0.065	-0.1	-0.079	-0.06	-	-0.037	-0.053	1					
										.252**								
13	AMBA	-0.062	-0.013	0.007	-0.022	.273**	.204*	0.105	.187*	0.105	-0.072	-0.034	-0.104	1				
14	EQUIS	0.006	0.089	0.061	0.069	.293**	0.103	0.001	0.154	0.082	-0.129	0.022	-0.063	.602**	1			
15	AACSB	0.023	0.099	0.135	0.012	.350**	0.082	0.057	0.057	0.102	-0.075	-0.038	-0.076	.555**	.718**	1		
16	PRME	0.116	0.154	0.101	0.116	.254**	0.101	0.087	0.052	0.098	0.005	-0.072	-0.132	.309**	.195*	.198*	1	
17	Russell Group	-.218*	0.029	0.005	0.037	0.044	.203*	0.085	.207*	0.049	-0.05	-0.062	0.103	0.174	.415**	.299**	0.009	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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Table 2 Gender signalled on undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes (n =112 HEIs)

	n	Mean per HEI	Std. Deviation
Undergraduate			
Programmes total	1,222	10.91	6.637
Programmes with gender content	236	2.11	3.628
Programmes where gender is core	104	.93	2.481
Programmes where gender is an option	131	1.17	2.578
Postgraduate			
Programmes total	1,562	13.95	7.206
Programmes with a gender content	177	1.58	2.142
Programmes where gender is core	106	.95	1.632
Programmes where gender is an option	71	.63	1.421

Table 3 Undergraduate programmes

	Total UG Programmes				UG PROGS WITH GENDER				UG GENDER CORE				UG GENDER OPTION			
	Beta	Exp B	SE	Sig	Beta	Exp B	SE	Sig	Beta	Exp B	SE	Sig	Beta	Exp B	SE	Sig
Intercept	2.43	11.34	0.08	**	-0.44	0.64	0.53		-2.10	0.12	0.74	**	-0.55	0.58	0.70	
Wales	-0.07	0.93	0.20		-0.79	0.45	0.77		-0.25	0.78	1.06		-0.98	0.37	1.01	
Scotland	-0.36	0.70	0.16	*	0.08	1.09	0.56		0.34	1.41	0.84		-0.06	0.94	0.69	
Northern Ireland	0.39	1.47	0.39		0.50	1.65	1.32		1.09	2.97	1.74		0.26	1.29	1.70	
AMBA	-0.24	0.79	0.14		-0.39	0.68	0.50		0.16	1.17	0.69		-0.58	0.56	0.66	
EQUIS	0.34	1.40	0.23		0.31	1.37	0.83		0.10	1.11	1.20		1.54	4.68	1.30	
AACSB	0.11	1.11	0.18		0.13	1.14	0.56		0.57	1.76	0.59		-1.16	0.31	1.11	
PRME	0.18	1.19	0.11		0.58	1.79	0.39		0.68	1.98	0.53		0.57	1.77	0.52	
Russell group	-0.53	0.59	0.16	**	0.21	1.23	0.61		0.09	1.09	1.03		0.18	1.20	0.72	
Total UG Programmes					0.07	1.07	0.03	*	0.10	1.10	0.04	**	0.05	1.05	0.05	
AIC	714.61				410.76				259.86				306.78			
BIC	741.79				440.67				289.76				336.69			
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	19.25	8.00	0.01		11.50	9.00	0.24		11.70	9.00	0.23		6.03	9.00	0.74	
N	112				112				112				112			
Negative binomial	0.20	0.04			2.78	0.60			4.57	1.30			4.47	1.11		

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ \*  $p < 0.05$

Table 4 Postgraduate taught programmes

DV	Total PGT Programmes				PGT Programmes with Gender				Gender PGT Programmes Core				PGT Gender OPTION			
	Beta	Exp B	SE	Sig	Beta	Exp B	SE	Sig	Beta	Exp B	SE	Sig	Beta	Exp B	SE	Sig
Intercept	2.42	11.21	0.08	**	-0.90	0.41	0.37	**	-1.36	0.26	0.44	**	-2.01	0.13	0.60	**
Wales	0.17	1.18	0.18		-0.14	0.87	0.52		0.27	1.31	0.60		-1.31	0.27	1.22	
Scotland	0.00	1.00	0.14		0.06	1.07	0.38		-0.05	0.95	0.48		0.24	1.27	0.56	
Northern Ireland	-0.03	0.98	0.38		:	:	:		:	:	:		:	:	:	
AMBA	0.05	1.05	0.13		0.72	2.06	0.34	*	0.40	1.49	0.42		1.17	3.21	0.56	*
EQUIS	0.10	1.11	0.20		-0.51	0.60	0.50		-0.86	0.43	0.62		0.24	1.27	0.88	
AACSB	0.29	1.34	0.16		-0.29	0.75	0.40		-0.07	0.94	0.47		-1.01	0.37	0.82	
PRME	0.20	1.22	0.10	*	-0.02	0.98	0.28		0.04	1.04	0.34		-0.21	0.81	0.45	
Russell group	-0.09	0.91	0.13		0.82	2.27	0.34	*	0.74	2.09	0.44		1.07	2.92	0.50	*
Total PG Programmes					0.07	1.07	0.02	**	0.07	1.08	0.03	**	0.07	1.07	0.03	*
AIC	754.59				380.51				302.48				232.57			
BIC	781.78				407.52				329.48				259.57			

Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	18.33	8.00	0.02		18.56	8.00	0.02		11.68	8.00	0.17		15.48	8.00	0.05	
N	112				110				110				110			
Negative binomial	0.17	0.03			1.08	0.29			1.50	0.45			2.28	0.75		

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

\*  $p < 0.05$

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