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**Abstract**

This article investigates what the current mission statements of the 20 Scottish universities reveal about their aims and priorities in the challenging environment of higher education. It traces the origins and use of corporate mission statements and their transfer into United Kingdom higher education and then demonstrates how researchers have used university mission statements as sources of information on a wide range of topics. Through textual analysis, the study identifies the main themes present in the Scottish mission statements and examines the vocabulary more closely, comparing it with the wording of recent policy documents. The analysis reveals that the mission statements convey an overall impression of sameness rather than distinctiveness. Questions emerge about the striking emphasis on competitiveness at national and global level and the surprising lack of focus on some key areas, particularly the student experience. The final part of the article suggests that an understanding of the political context can shed light on why the universities are choosing to present themselves in this way. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)