

Title	The impact of government policy on the re-shaping of the academic professional
Authors	Gannon, Anne
Publication date	2024
Original Citation	Gannon, A. (2024) 'The impact of government policy on the re-shaping of the academic professional', in Nooij, J., Broucker, B., Gannon, A., O'Hara, M. and Preymann, S. (eds.) Shaping the World of Change - Higher Education as a Key Enabler. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill BV, pp. 29-47.
Type of publication	Book chapter
Rights	© 2024, Jessica Nooij, Bruno Broucker, Anne Gannon, Mark O'Hara and Silke Preymann. Published by Koninklijke Brill BV, Leiden, The Netherlands.
Download date	2026-09-18 15:44:25
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/16783

The Impact of Government Policy on the Re-shaping of the Academic Professional

Anne Gannon

Abstract

With the examination which has been shown in the literature to the changing Higher Education landscape, limited attention has been given to the impact of institutional change at the micro level in examining how the influence of government policy has impacted the roles and responsibilities of academic staff.

This chapter addresses this gap and examines the particular experience of academics employed in the university in Ireland between 2008–2014 when the sector experienced increased government oversight, the development of significant accountability mechanisms and increased public sector scrutiny.

Keywords

Irish university sector – academic changes – academic experience – academic role – university reform

1 Background of the Study

Traditionally the academic profession was viewed as a collegium, free to enjoy the benefit of academic independence and autonomy in a spirit of collegiality, and where academics played a key role in the management and oversight of their institutions. Up to recent decades academics had ownership and decision-making powers in many key processes, including the upholding of quality standards in research and teaching, and were key decision makers in the development and execution of many university policies including recruitment and promotion. With the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) into the university, the role of the academic has changed significantly in recent years and with it the attractiveness of the workplace for a significant cohort of academics (Winter, 2009).

One of the most impactful and notable drivers for reform has arisen with the emergence of NPM, whereby as described by Lynch (2017, p. 159), organisational and regulative structures and mechanisms within the university become subject to “the inculcation of market values and practices”. In Ireland, the influence of government policy has seen the university sector experience ever increasing government oversight, the development of significant and additional accountability mechanisms and strong public policy-led scrutiny and engagement.

In Ireland, the university institutional landscape has been transformed. Engagement by government in progressing the university reform agenda has been most notable since the early 2000s. While the economic recession 2008–2014 presented government with an opportunity to implement resourcing and oversight constraints, prior to this time, the sights of the Irish government, as set out in the *National Development Plan 2007–2013 Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All*, were clearly focused on higher education reform. The motivation behind this objective was to develop third level institutions in becoming “world-leaders in research and development, helping Ireland to maintain and build on its undoubted progress” (Government of Ireland [GoI], 2007, p. 42).

In Ireland, during the recession of 2008–2014, a public staffing moratorium was put in place with the intention of creating a permanent reduction in staff working in the public sector, in a bid to deliver savings to the Exchequer. This translated into the imposition of an Employment Control Framework (ECF) putting extremely challenging staffing targets in place, curtailing recruitment, and promotion within universities, whilst significantly constraining institutional autonomy. This directive led to a major reduction of 12% in core staffing across the Irish university sector, accompanied by a growth of 13.2% in student enrolments between 2007–2012. At the same time, exchequer funding was reduced by 35% (IUA, 2014). The combined reduction in staffing and growth in student numbers had a significant effect on the quality and availability of teaching and research support and the delivery of student services (IUA, 2010). As noted by Hazelkorn (2014), the quality of Irish higher education on the international stage deteriorated during this time.

Reduced government funding in Ireland re-focused the higher education sector in growing income from other sources. This was enabled by a new funding model, introduced in 2006 which was designed to incentive income generation. As noted by Walsh (2018, p. 392), the reduction in public funding and economic crisis drove increased activity in universities looking abroad to attract “lucrative” student fees. In the international literature, Høstaker (2006, p. 109) describes this development as the “financialization of academic relations”.

At the same time as these hard-hitting resourcing and funding structures and constraints were being implemented, a number of government-led reviews and plans were initiated by government. In 2011, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 was published (Department of Education and Skills [DoEs], 2011). This plan was characterised by language clearly representative of a NPM led approach. As noted by Hazelkorn (2014, p. 5) it “recommended rationalisation and merger to create efficiencies and increase mission diversity, proposing that HEI s should be subjected to greater oversight through a strategic dialogue process and institutional contract”. This blueprint setting out ambitious reform of the higher education sector was followed by a flurry of high-profile strategic reports, clearly intended to progress and enable the transformation agenda. These documents were authored by a number of key government agencies including the Higher Education Authority, whose oversight role during this time was strengthened “in driving forward the process of rationalisation (which was) consistent with the NPM practice of delegating significant authority to developed executive agencies, which were empowered to deliver a managerial reform agenda” (Walsh, 2018, p. 446, citing Walsh & Loxley, 2015).

While much has been written about the government-led reform of the university sector, a gap remains in the literature in examining the influence of government policy on the academic. This chapter seeks to address this gap and moves from consideration of the macro environment to examine the changes experienced at the level of the academic in terms of their role, academic values, and identity.

The scholarly literature describes how focus has moved away from the traditional academic endeavour, as the external environment increasingly imposes demands, impacting core aspects of the academic role and culture of the university. In this new “entrepreneurial” environment, bringing resources or reputation into the university is celebrated (Williams, 2004 as cited by Kwiek, 2016) arising from the significant changes which have taken place with the decline in public funding and increased accountability requirements. As a consequence, the work of the academic increasingly comes to be described in “terms of its commercial interests and entrepreneurial output” (Shore, 2010, p. 26).

A number of scholars have identified how these changes as described have affected the academic and their work. For Winter (2009, p. 121), academic work and identity have become reshaped “around an idealised image of corporate efficiency (and) a strong managerial culture”.

Musselin (2013, p. 28) highlights the university as experienced by academics as “more present, more important and less escapable to its own members than in the past” and where “the level of interactions between each academic and

his/her own university is simultaneously higher and more constraining". It is clear that tensions arise at the level of the academic between the traditions of the academic profession and new expectations from government and in turn – university management. As noted by Gumpert (2000, p. 69), this development translates into the actions of state actors "inspecting slices of academic life/work/teaching/learning under a microscope", leading to changes in professional identity and pressure where, as noted by Kwiek (2013, citing Kogan & Beecher, 1980, pp. 143–144) "political fashions and economic climates come and go with little regard for the well-being" of the academic.

Billot (2010) notes how as institutions experience transformation, in responding to government led policy and funding requirements, this changes the roles and responsibilities of academics. Change is difficult and leads to challenges at the professional level. As a consequence, academics increasingly feel constrained and pressurised as they are continually required to do more. Mouwen (2000) highlights the resistance, acrimony and discord which can arise between the traditional academic culture and the emerging market-place culture. Gumpert (1993, p. 67, cited by Gumpert, 2000) similarly notes the sense of unease and pressures experienced by those academics working in areas considered "of insufficient centrality, quality or cost effectiveness".

A number of Irish academics and commentators have been vocal in their discontent of the reforms which have taken place. In 2012, Mary Gallagher, an outspoken academic published *Academic Armageddon: An Irish Requiem for Higher Education*. In a 2014 newspaper article as reported by Humphries, she noted the hard felt impact of the changes experienced:

There is no breathing space any more for education for its own sake. We have given up on the idea that knowledge makes you free. Instead, education is branded as excellence; we talk about 'world-class' academics, and use a discourse of efficiency, and inputs and outputs ... we are in a world where education is being bought and sold like a commodity, and that brings its own pressures and lies. (Humphries, 2014)

2 The Academic Role and Responsibilities

Academic roles traditionally encompass three broad areas of work: teaching, research, and professional contribution. This third category, professional contribution, comprises a wide range of responsibilities including student recruitment, professional and societal engagement, and committee work. In presenting this research, this chapter will examine each of these three aspects

of the academic role, prior to investigating the overall impact of government policy on traditional academic values and identity.

Traditionally faculty had autonomy to choose research themes on the basis of their idiosyncratic preferences (Leišytė & Dee, 2012, p. 155). Huisman et al. (2002, cited by Fairweather, 2009, p. 175) highlight that “research and scholarly productivity have become more important to ministries of education throughout Europe. In Ireland, as in many other public funded systems, government-led strategies together with the introduction of procedures and research function requirements in Ireland have according to Clancy (2015, p. 260), “heralded the introduction of unbridled market principles” into the research environment and new controls and constraints on academic work.

With research activity becoming more important to government and increasingly valued, research productivity as noted by Fairweather (2009, p. 176) becomes more significant at the level of the academic, and in influencing decisions made in individual promotion and tenure.

Teaching has traditionally been at the heart of the academic role in the university. As a member of the collegium of scholars, the academic has protected and maintained the integrity of teaching standards. However recent developments have seen changes to the academic role with the introduction of evaluation standards and measurements which have become “institutionalised and normalised in everyday life” (Lynch, 2010, p. 55).

A new governance model introduced into the university, has been translated at the level of the academic, into an increased administrative workload, evidenced by requirements to comply with objective, quantifiable and comparable indicators (Hattke et al., 2016, p. 239). The internal university landscape characterised by regulative and policy frameworks and reporting requirements, has put additional pressures and workload on the academic. Bryson (2004, p. 192, as cited by Teelken, 2012) notes that engagement by an academic with their traditional role has been curtailed for many, arising from the increase in business-focused assessments and administrative duties, which has led to considerable time being spent on these secondary duties. As described by Kwiek et al. (2013, p. 51) the academic profession in Europe “is very much under pressure and working under considerable personal strain”.

3 Research Methodology

Institutional Analysis provides a useful methodological approach for exploring how individual experiences as an academic can be shaped by the university environment. Applying aspects of an institutional analytical framework

developed as part of the author’s PhD studies (Gannon, 2019, as adapted from Bulmer & Burch, 1998; Scott, 2001, p. 53) as a basis for this study, this chapter examines the influence of the changing university environment on the academic role.

This study takes a purposive criterion-sampling approach, comprising 39 semi-structured interviews with academics across three separate disciplines within three Irish universities (Trinity College Dublin, University of Limerick, and University of Galway). Using webpage staff listings, an email is sent to a number of randomised individuals seeking participation in this study. Taking this approach as described by Ritchie et al. (2013, p. 113), “[m]embers of a sample are chosen with a ‘purpose’ to represent a type in relation to key criterion”. In setting out the methodological approach undertaken, a constructivist approach is employed whereby, research is conducted through examining “the lens through which people view events, the expectations and meanings that they bring to a situation” (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 19).

While this study is not primarily focused on gender, efforts are made to be gender sensitive in eliciting gendered views and perspectives. This is a challenge given the inequalities which can exist within the population of a particular discipline. Of the 39 interviews conducted, 21 academics are male and the remaining 18 are women. To maintain anonymity each interviewee is assigned a code (see Appendix).

Semi-structured interviews are undertaken with the questions focused on the examination of the interplay between the academic role and institutional indicators as set out in the Institutional Analytical framework model (as shown in Table 2.1) with reference to (i) experiences of working with the formal regulative and structural aspects of the academic role including policies, rules and reporting mechanisms and (ii) experiences of working with the informal normative and cultural aspects of the academic role, which include behaviours, practices and values.

Table 2.1 Excerpt from institutional analytical framework

	Structural and regulative dimensions	Normative and cultural dimensions
Institutional indicators	Formal structures i.e., governance systems, rules, policies, and procedures	Norms, behaviours, and practices; beliefs, values, identities

4.1 *The Academic Research Role*

With government policy focused on the re-prioritisation of strategic areas of research activity, a significant cohort of academics are negatively impacted in their ability to bring money into the university. As commented by an interviewee, this was a “worrying development “as were the notable pressures on academics to do research simply to bring in the money (B9). While in the past there had been greater liberty to research what you wanted to, the focus moved to money which was as described by one academic “very wearing” (A6).

Many academics describe how in recent decades, research funding has become more difficult to access. As noted by a respondent of this time:

There was no interest in basic science and in research to increase our knowledge and understanding on which other things can be based. Everything needed to have a “what’s the financial gain at the end of this?”. (C13)

Pressure increases on academics in preserving and maintaining their own research, as particular research activity is promoted and incentivised through funding, and other work remains unsupported and uncelebrated. The felt experience of the academic respondent is that “academic freedom” has been eroded (C1) in that prior to this development:

You could do anything you liked almost, go off and research anything you wanted, for as long as you wanted, versus stuff that was considered valuable to the academic unit and ultimately the University. The difference I think is now I feel more pressure to do research, simply to bring in money rather than do research – while the reason I got into doing research, was to do good quality science. (B9)

In responding to external influences, academics responded in a number of ways; from withdrawing into their own work and endeavouring to ignore these developments, to adapting and re-orienting their work, in a bid to seek out available funding streams. However, some academics did not consider that they had this option available to them and looked instead to Europe and internationally, because of their view that their own area of research would never be on the national government agenda to enable access to resources and supports. As remarked upon by one academic in describing the constraints put on their research activity and focus:

We have had to become hyper aware of European funding and sources of external funding and we're no longer completely free to choose any more what areas we focus on – we always have to look at what grant could I get for this. (C7)

This situation translated into becoming more connected with networks outside Ireland which was seen as a “positive aspect of the crisis” (A1, A6). For some, scholarly led interactions outside the university became their “lifeline” and academics worked hard to maintain these important relationships. One academic described how academics started to “look outside of ourselves a little more because we were asked to do it” and this created a positive outcome in the creation of institutional collaborations and new relationships (C1).

With growing administrative and teaching workloads and arising from the simultaneous decrease in resources and increasing number of students, a big challenge for academics was that research activity suffered, arising from the imbalance between time available to undertake research and other demands. The confluence of these two pressures created strain and difficulty for many academics (A10).

A strong view held by many of this time, was that the university became more research focused to the detriment of the student and teaching, despite the university still emphasising the student experience and “the student being at the centre of things” (A3). There was also a feeling shared that in achieving promotion, individuals had to sometimes neglect things that weren't being measured and focus instead on what they should be doing to “tick a box” (A11) and that research excellence carried significantly more weight in promotion decisions than teaching activity.

One interviewee remarked how those who were successful in the research aspects of their role had been identified and for those who were not considered to be performing at this level, there was an attitude of “well we'll give up on them and our only way forward is to hire new excellence” (B11). A difficulty when thinking about themselves and colleagues was a sense of “being written off” as an academic, which was personally undermining to their own belief and values. There was a sense that the research systems were no longer supportive of scholarship in the traditional sense and that it had become all about “big research groups and KPI s” which some individuals found was exclusionary. As noted by one academic “far too much of my research time goes into grant writing which are unsuccessful and there's a bit of a feeling of futility around that” (C7).

The support experienced by academics in finding their way through the funding arena was welcomed by some with the arrival of dedicated “key members of non-academic staff” which came with the professionalisation of administrative roles. Now there was help with a research funding application, instead

of times past, when an academic would have struggled by themselves. Others viewed this development in negative terms and suggested that the growth in research administrators was created “to try and find areas where we have a cash cow”. As commented by one respondent (B9):

We’ve been in several meetings in which we have been told that people aren’t actually interested in our research ... but the moment that our research can make money, that is the point at which it becomes interesting – and that’s disappointing.

4.2 *The Academic Teaching Role*

It was clear that while many academics demonstrated a clear passion in teaching and student engagement, the challenging demands on their role clearly impacted on their ability to maintain their own standards.

There was a strong sense shared that some areas of the university which had large and well subscribed teaching programmes were subsidising other areas and academics felt resentful at this development. With the work to enhance teaching programmes by making them more attractive to fee paying students, some academics were asked in their teaching to “shift a little and move into this space or that space” (C1) and while some did willingly, others became extremely rigid. Arising from the constraints on staffing, key academic posts were not replaced. Many respondents noted the resultant impact in terms of the increase in teaching hours and heavier administrative teaching workload and the reduction in time available to adequately prepare for teaching. For many, this situation translated into “higher volume work and more students in” (C6) with less time to prepare and actively engage with students. A strongly held view was that quality and integrity in teaching had declined over this period, and that the prevalent use of the word “excellence” had begun to lose its meaning, having reached the level of “hyperbole, hype and management speak” (B8). At the same time as noted by the same interviewee, the focus on quality became “more like a box ticking exercise”. One factor accounting for this change was the increase in focus on generating fee income, which created challenges in maintaining academic standards. There was a clear desire expressed to maintain “the quality of the degree and what the student was getting” (C11). There was also a level of discomfort expressed that some international students were accepted at standards that would not be acceptable from domestic students and that this decision was strongly influenced by the additional income international students brought into the University (A7).

With the increase in academic workload, the time and support available to give to a growing number of students reduced. While traditionally a matter for the academic collegium, academics felt side-lined and increasingly subject to

managerial oversight, control, and monitoring, as teaching quality, standards and excellence became a matter of importance beyond the university with the growth of external evaluation and assessment mechanisms.

Many academics tried not to let students see what was happening. However, reduced staff resources did impact students. Academics found that with the increased workload they had to “become meaner with the students” in their feedback and time and while they didn’t like doing this, they had to for their own survival (A7). With changes to the academic role, the availability of time and resources became more limited to the detriment of the student.

However, there was some positive changes experienced. With the growth in international students, some felt that access to a “different student body” was “exciting in itself” in being both good for other students and good for the personal development of academics who moved into teaching approaches and experiences outside their own comfort zones” (B8).

One academic reflecting on the changing focus of their role, described how the priorities set by their institution were made clear in that “teaching, especially undergraduate teaching was uninteresting” (B5) and that focusing on the postgraduate domain to raise funds for the college was where their attention lay. The promotions process which recognised and incentivised staff was solely for “those who had raised money, who had grants; often people who did not have undergraduate teaching”.

Despite the myriad of changes, many academics described their passion and love of teaching and that despite these challenges, their enjoyment in teaching had not waived. The view of one respondent was that if as an academic “you don’t teach and if you don’t foster the next generation, you might as well give up” (B10). Many shared positive feelings towards teaching which was evidenced by one academic in saying, “I care a lot about teaching, and I care about the quality of teaching – so I would always have put a lot of effort into teaching” (C4). This commonly held view as to the importance of students was stated in the simplest of terms by one respondent who stated “the students are it! They are IT! ... They are why we are here, no matter what” (C5).

4.3 *Professional Contribution in the Academic Role*

While traditionally, academic work focused on two main tasks: teaching and research, activities which may in the past have been peripheral, have increasingly become important components of academic work. As noted by those interviewed, the clear focus on income generation created new work for academics requiring attendance at recruiting fairs, promoting academic programmes and other market-based activities.

In Ireland and elsewhere, economic necessity has in recent years driven activity in generating income and attracting fee paying students. As remarked upon by many respondents, the concept of the student as customer has become more prominent, as evidenced by the promotion and marketing campaigns adopted by third level institutions in attracting and retaining students. Examples given were of the pressure that academics felt to market and promote their own programmes as a consequence of the new focus on income generation. However, this move towards viewing students as customers was challenged by many of the academics interviewed, on the basis that, as remarked upon by one respondent, “the relationship between an academic and student is very different from a provider of a service to a customer” (B9).

Many were clear in their view that the role of the academic was teaching and research. As one academic explained “academia is about developing the intellect and developing ideas, helping students to develop their intellect and developing knowledge”. The view was that “if I come in every day and serve on committees, basically I’m a useless person because if I’m not doing teaching and research, I’m not actually doing a job” (C9). Academics described having become strategic in their work and their use of time. One example given was “in terms of the number of evening seminars or extra-curricular activities – while people still do it – there’s less people around now doing that sort of stuff because there’s no credit for it” (B9). For another respondent, their experience of the previous 10 years was as “the decade of administration” and that they’d “easily spend 30 hours a week doing administration, a lot of which was pretty meaningless stuff”. This led to low morale as “more and more” came to the academic “to do yourself, work that wasn’t value creating but just comprised form filling or moving documents around” (C1). During this time academic burnout became a significant issue (A2).

The development of newly formalised workload models and performance management systems were viewed with mixed feelings, with some academics highlighting the focus and goal driven nature of the performance system, the opportunity for transparency and to harmonise workloads. However, some of those interviewed viewed this development as a “box ticking exercise” and akin to “the marketplace being brought into the hallowed halls of the University” and that they “should not be forced to record all these outputs” (C2).

4.4 *Impact of the Changing Institutional Landscape on Academic Values and Identity*

It is clear from this research study that academics experienced significant changes in their role, arising from government policy and the corporatisation

of the university. A number of those interviewed described how the most shocking change had been the embracing of a corporate identity, which shifted the core values of the university towards making money. This development as described by one academic, has “eclipsed the identity of the university from what its proper core mission is to teach and research” (B6).

Many academics interviewed described how their professional identity had changed swiftly and significantly as a consequence of government policy and where a big part of the academic role had become focused on finding money. As described by one individual:

During that time, I saw myself moving from what I had really worked very hard for in my life which was to become a Research Fellow. I saw that being stripped away from me and I saw myself being turned into somebody whose job it was to make money. (B3)

The sense of identity which academics traditionally experienced changed and deteriorated and with it the autonomy, characteristic of the academic role, arising from the emergence of a micro-management ethos. As commented by one academic while you could “actually have a university without management, you couldn’t have a university without lecturers” (C9).

With the corporatisation of the university and the administrative layers which had been brought in, the view of what the university is, had become very different from an academic’s view of what a university is and what it should be (B9). The traditional order of the university had changed with new responsibilities on academics in relation to income generation activities, and while historically the role of the administrative system was to support the academic endeavour and key functions encompassing teaching and research, this had been turned completely on its head.

Other respondents described how despite changes, they made a conscious effort to maintain their academic identity and integrity. As one individual noted, as an academic you need to be “highly motivated and personally driven” and identity is “forged by this deep love of the subject and what you do” which is “quite a robust phenomenon” (B10).

From the research conducted, it is clear that the focus for academics has changed as a consequence of the “whole educational sector becoming an industry like any other sector” (B3) with the resultant influences of having strategic objectives, financial objectives and competing in a global market. While previously described as “a great place to work before”, the university has become “just a business” (A6). The bureaucratisation of daily work was a common issue raised and was keenly experienced as unprecedented “levels of intrusion and itemised recording” (B8).

The university drive in generating income and fundraising to pay salaries was a huge focus of the time (B5). It was clear that academic work had changed as a consequence of having moved to “a much more managed value for money environment”. where everyone had to become “a lot more task focused” (B3). As a consequence, the freedom to “allow people to stand back and stare or think great thoughts” greatly diminished as it was “very hard to find the time to actually do that”. As noted by another academic “there’s just no time, we have no time to meet colleagues. You will never sit down to eat or drink without there being an agenda to it” (C4). Collegiality as a key academic value was significantly impacted. As remarked upon by another respondent:

Everyone turned in on themselves. People stopped meeting each other. We were so busy that you wouldn’t say to somebody would you like to go for coffee, and we’ll have a chat. (A5)

For many working in an environment where performance was being measured in different ways, the outcomes could be seen in people’s interactions and with people becoming more and more conscious of the pressures, they started to change their work practices and the environment became “extremely, ferociously competitive” (A6). This new quantified, performance driven model didn’t “allow any possibility of flexibility or downtime or thinking time” (A7).

An experience shared by many academics was the changing culture within the university and this created tensions. One example shared occurred as a direct consequence of the focus on STEM disciplines, which as described by an academic based in the arts and humanities translated into having “to push for everything” and a feeling of having been “denigrated” (B7). Increased competition for resources was notable and as described by one respondent, collegiality was “shattered” particularly “between STEM and arts, humanities and social sciences” (B1). This academic described how “a chasm” had opened up and that the reality was that “people in arts, humanities and social sciences look at the vast amount of money going into STEM and just laugh hollowly” (ibid.).

A very small proportion of respondents highlighted the positive impact of some changes. One opportunity which was favourably viewed was the creation of the entrepreneurial aspect in the job where some academics felt “empowered to do things for students and the market” in creating a programme that would add “value to society and to the students and bring revenue to the institutions” (B4).

While decisions had previously been made by academics, this was visibly no longer the case as the profession had become “side-lined” and it was now the “commercial movers and shakers making decisions about the identity of the college” (B6). Respect was another value which had been affected, as professions

generally within society were no longer trusted and a second opinion was generally sought. Academics were not immune to this development. The focus on compliance, “checking up” and reporting indicated declining trust in academics and language within the university shifted to becoming “more threatening with a discourse highly indicative of a lack of trust in academics to “self-regulate” in terms of how time was organised (B6).

One respondent was more upbeat in the view that despite all the challenges academics “have one of the best jobs in the world and you should recognise that you have so much freedom to do things but it’s in your hands to do it” from generating money to do things to starting initiatives (B12).

The influence of reform within the university as explored in this chapter clearly affected the individual academic in carrying out their role. However, the resilience of the academic endeavour was also highlighted. As noted by one respondent “as the university changes all of those of us that work within it changes a little bit as well. You adapt to survive in the context of the new structures” (C3).

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings highlight that in the area of research activity, a strong gap has emerged between research activity worthy of support, visibility, and investment and other ‘celebrated’ work which as Williams (2004, as cited by Kwiek, 2016) explains is focused on generating resources or enhancing the standing of the university. Independence in decision making and in pursuing particular research activity has become eroded and as noted in the literature by Clancy (2015) market forces now drive research-based activity. It is clear that the value of research undertaken by the academic, together with recognition shown to this work has become increasingly subject to the extent to which it supports government goals and ambitions (GoI, 2007). Many respondents in sharing their experiences expressed strong feelings of loss around autonomy and freedom arising from the constraints imposed. This aligns with Winter’s (2009) view that the attractiveness of being an academic has deteriorated. This study evidences the feelings of discomfort which arise internally due to access to and competition for funding and its impact on access to career enhancing opportunities. As a consequence, tensions become apparent between academic areas. It is clear from the experiences shared by respondents, that many of these challenges arise from the increased significance of research activity which is seen to be of strategic importance in line with the government agenda (Fairweather, 2009).

As this study demonstrates, the academic work environment becomes increasingly more difficult and the traditional academic value system becomes eroded, arising from the emergence of a different value system described by Høstaker (2009, p. 109) as the “financialization of academic relations” within the institutional environment. The experience of a significant cohort of academics evidences the re-shaping of their role, which as noted by Winter (2009) has become increasingly focused on activities to generate income. As expressed by a significant number of interviewees, the ability to work independently in a self-regulating manner, determining work focus and activities becomes challenging. This experience where the influence of the academic as custodian of academic work and standards becomes weakened, is supported in the literature by Musselin (2013), in highlighting the changing and increasingly constraining relationship between academics and the university.

Common with the perspectives shared in the literature by Kwiek (2013, citing Kogan & Beecher, 1980) together with Billot (2010) and Mouwen (2000) the changes experienced create workload challenges and as the professional identity of academics shift, morale and wellbeing and ‘burnout’ are highlighted as resultant concerns. Collegiality, one of the enduring values of academia is no longer a stable phenomenon arising from workload pressures and the various challenges faced in carrying out the academic role.

However, despite changes and challenges experienced, for a cohort of academics, what is clear and evidenced is the love and attraction of scholarship, teaching and learning and engaging with students and peers. This sustains and enables professional values and ideals to survive.

6 Reflections and Future Research

My intention within this study is to encourage further discussion and debate on the realignment of institutional objectives and the academic role. While this research pertains to Ireland and the Irish experience, many international scholars referred to in the literature refer to similar changes taking place in many European countries and the UK affecting the academic role and identity. Across university systems internationally, government led reforms and the emergent corporatisation of the university, has impacted at the level of the academic scholar as evidenced by the changing nature and focus of the academic role in research, teaching and professional contribution. I have been motivated to write this chapter in the hope that it may open a dialogue on the future of the university and the future evolution of the academic role for the benefit of the future of the academic endeavour, the university system, government,

and society. To echo the question posed by Kwiek (2013, p. 36) what is the future of the university arising from changes to the academic profession given that from its foundations, the institutional capital of the university has been held within the profession as the “core of the academic enterprise”?

References

- Billot, J. (2010). The imagined and the real: Identifying the tensions for academic identity. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(6), 709–721.
- Bulmer, S., & Burch, M., (1998). Organizing for Europe: Whitehall, the British state and European Union. *Public Administration*, 76(4), 601–628.
- Clancy, P. (2015). *Irish higher education: A comparative perspective*. Institute of Public Administration, Dublin.
- Department of Education and Skills (DoES). (2011). *National strategy for higher education to 2030*. Report of the Strategy Group. Department of Education and Skills, Dublin.
- Fairweather, J. (2009). Work allocation and rewards in shaping academic work. In J. Enders, E. de Weert, & K. A. Loparo (Eds.), *The changing face of academic life: Analytical and comparative perspectives* (pp. 171–192). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Gannon, A. M. (2019). *Institutional change in the Irish university 2008–2014: An examination through the lens of institutional logics* (Doctoral dissertation). University College Cork.
- Government of Ireland (GoI). (2007) *National development plan 2007–2013 transforming Ireland – A better quality of life for all*. Stationery Office.
- Gumport, P. J. (2000). Academic restructuring: Organizational change and institutional imperatives. *Higher Education*, 39, 67–91.
- Hattke, F., Vogel, R., & Woiwode, H. (2016). When professional and organizational logics collide: Balancing invisible and visible colleges in institutional complexity. In J. Frost, F. Hattke, & M. Reihlen (Eds.), *Multi-level governance in universities: Strategy, structure, control* (pp. 235–256). Springer.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2014). Rebooting Irish higher education: Policy challenges for challenging times. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39, 1343–1354.
- Hermanowicz, J. C. (2016). Universities, academic careers and the valorization of ‘shiny things’. In E. Popp Berman & C. Paradeise (Eds.), *The university under pressure* (pp. 303–328). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Høstaker, R. (2006). Policy change and the academic profession. In M. Kogan, M. Bauer, I. Bleiklie, & M. Henkel (Eds.), *Transforming higher education: A comparative study* (2nd ed.) Springer.

- Humphries, J. (2014, February 15). Colleges in crisis. *The Irish Times*.
<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/colleges-in-crisis-1.1692000>
- Irish Universities Association (IUA). *Resource management and performance*. 9th Level Ireland Irish University News Politics and Law. Retrieved April 24, 2024, from https://9thlevel.ie/wp-content/uploads/75Irish_Universities_Resource_Management.pdf
- Kwiek, M. (2013). Knowledge production in European universities. In K. Marek (Ed.), *Knowledge production in European universities: States, markets and academic entrepreneurialism* (Vol. 3). Peter Lang.
- Kwiek, M. (2016). Academic entrepreneurialism and changing governance in universities. Evidence from empirical studies. In J. Frost, F. Hattke, & M. Reihlen (Eds.), *Multi-level governance in universities: Strategy, structure, control* (pp. 49–74). Springer.
- Leišytė, L. (2016). New public management and research productivity – A precarious state of affairs of academic work in the Netherlands. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(5), 828–846.
- Leišytė, L., & Dee, J. R. (2012). Understanding academic work in a changing institutional environment: Faculty autonomy, productivity, and identity in Europe and the United States. In J. Smart & B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 27, pp. 123–206). Springer.
- Lynch, K. (2010). Carelessness: A hidden doxa of higher education. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 9, 54–67.
- Lynch, K. (2017). New managerialism in education: The organisational form of neoliberalism. In A. Abraham-Hamanoiel, D. Freedman, G. Khiabany, & K. Nash (Eds.), *Liberalism in neoliberal times: Dimensions, contradictions, limits*. Goldsmiths Press.
- Mouwen, K. (2000). Strategy, structure and culture of the hybrid university: Towards the university of the 21st century. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 6, 47–56.
- Musselin, C. (2013). Redefinition of the relationships between academics and their university. *Higher Education*, 65, 25–37.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormstrom, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Sage.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage.
- Scott, W. R. (2010). *Institutions and organizations* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Shore, C. (2010). Beyond the multiversity: Neoliberalism and the rise of the schizophrenic university. *Social Anthropology*, 18, 15–29.
- Teelken, C. (2012). Compliance or pragmatism: How do academics deal with managerialism in higher education? A comparative study in three countries. *Studies in Higher Education*, 37, 271–290.
- Winter, R. (2009). Academic manager or managed academic? Academic identity schisms in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 31, 121–131.

Appendix

Code	Interviewee
A1	UL Senior Business female, interviewed 13 April 2017
A2	UL Business male, interviewed 27 April 2017
A3	UL Business male, interviewed 3 May 2017
A4	UL Business female, interviewed 3 May 2017
A5	UL Arts and Humanities female, interviewed 28 April 2017
A6	UL Arts and Humanities male, interviewed 28 April 2017
A7	UL Senior Arts and Humanities female, interviewed 28 April 2017
A8	UL Arts and Humanities male, interviewed 28 April 2017
A9	UL Arts and Humanities female, interviewed 15 May 2017
A10	UL Science male, interviewed 24 April 2017
A11	UL Science female, interviewed 28 April 2017
A12	UL Senior Science male, interviewed 28 April 2017
A13	UL Science female, interviewed 24 May 2017
A14	UL Senior Science female, interviewed 24 May 2017
B1	TCD Senior Business male, interviewed 12 May 2017
B2	TCD Senior Business male, interviewed 16 May 2017
B3	TCD Business female, interviewed 16 June 2017
B4	TCD Business male, interviewed 7 June 2017
B5	TCD Arts and Humanities female, interviewed 12 May 2017
B6	TCD Arts and Humanities female, interviewed 12 May 2017
B7	TCD Arts and Humanities female, interviewed 19 May 2017
B8	TCD Senior Arts and Humanities male, interviewed 19 June 2017
B9	TCD Science male, interviewed 10 May 2017
B10	TCD Senior Science female, interviewed 12 May 2017
B11	TCD Science female, interviewed 6 June 2017
B12	TCD Senior Science male, interviewed 6 June 2017
C1	NUIG Senior Business male, interviewed on 9 March 2017
C2	NUIG Business male, interviewed on 9 March 2017
C3	NUIG Business male, interviewed on 9 March 2017
C4	NUIG Business female, interviewed 30 June 2017
C5	NUIG Senior Arts and Humanities male, interviewed 9 March 2017
C6	NUIG Arts and Humanities female, interviewed 3 April 2017
C7	NUIG Arts and Humanities female, interviewed 5 April 2017
C8	NUIG Arts and Humanities male, interviewed 6 April 2017

- C9 NUIG Arts and Humanities male, interviewed 26 April 2017
- C10 NUIG Senior Science male, interviewed 9 March 2017
- C11 NUIG Science male, interviewed 31 March 2017
- C12 NUIG Science female, interviewed 6 April 2017
- C13 NUIG Science male, interviewed 7 June 2017