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## **Experiences of academic leadership in Ireland 2008-2014**

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### **Abstract**

The focus of this paper is on experiences of academic leadership in Ireland between 2008-2014 sustaining academic values and culture. Institutional developments have led to change in what constitutes academic success, a situation which creates challenges for academic leaders. In recent years, arising from the requirements to generate income and the focus on marketplace positioning, qualities sought in hiring and promotion decisions have altered significantly. This research presents the challenges faced by Irish university-based academic leaders in balancing the requirements of the university and the needs of academic colleagues. The research evidences the protection and support shown by academic leaders in effectively maintaining academic values and cultures. However, it also highlights the academic leadership deficit evident in the failure of some academic leaders to both adequately and effectively engage with academic colleagues which then can lead to the destabilisation of academic values and culture.

### **Keywords**

Academic leadership, Irish university reform, academic values, managerialism

### **Introduction**

Significant endogenous developments have created a new operating environment for academic leadership within the Irish university sector. Since the turn of the century, economic, institutional and social drivers originating from Europe and beyond, and driven by government, initiated a national reform agenda for the university sector. The European Community (EC) became a significant reference point for the Irish government (Walsh, 2018). As noted by Scott (2013), supra-national agencies such as the EC

and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are influential institutional carriers which through the diffusion of ideas and practices bring about institutional change. While change and modernisation within higher education have been key features of EU policy since the late 1990's, as noted by Walsh (2018, p. 387), the early part of the twenty-first century saw the 'repositioning of higher education as a key driver of knowledge-based economic development'. While this agenda which sought greater authority over the university sector triggered resistance amongst academics (Clancy, 2015), the influence of government intensified in Ireland during the period 2008-2014 bringing about significant change within the sector. Two key drivers, namely the continuation of the government reform agenda for higher education and the impact of the economic recession, created a challenging operating environment for the universities and for academic leaders overseeing academic activity at the *meso* departmental or discipline level.

In the years prior to the 2008 economic downturn, government attention had become focused on the university sector due to a number of factors; the growing demand for higher education provision (arising primarily from the abolition of tuition fees in 1996); the widening mission for higher education institutions including greater participation in research together with a national shift towards 'better accountability, increased transparency and value for money' (Department of Education and Skills (DoES), 2012, p. 9). In 2003, the Irish government invited the OECD to undertake a review of higher education in Ireland. The resultant examiners' report was seen as a major catalyst for reform and modernisation of the university sector in Ireland (Government of Ireland (GoI), 2007). While this external review of the Irish national policy framework for higher education noted how the expansion of high calibre graduates in the labour market was contributing to economic success, it described tertiary education in Ireland as being at a 'crossroads', in need of modernisation, rationalisation, an increased focus on research activity, a broadening of its funding base and a move towards international competitiveness and innovation.

Despite making a compelling call for higher education reform, the OECD report was unambiguous in clarifying the responsibilities of the universities. It noted that if the sector was to permit economic factors to become the key criterion in place of addressing educational, social, cultural and democratic roles and responsibilities, this would be a 'betrayal of their mission' (OECD, 2006, p. 219). The Irish government was keen to address the policy changes prompted by the OECD review. A number of key strategic documents and reports were produced which directly positioned higher education at the core of national

policy. Commitments were made in the *National Development Plan 2007-2013* to invest in education, innovation and technology and to reform the third level sector to advance the Irish economy as a leader in global knowledge (GoI, 2007, p. 202).

It was against this backdrop represented by a clear focus on university reform within a thriving and affluent economic period known as the 'Celtic Tiger' that the global recession occurred. This situation presented significant national challenges impacting the Irish university sector. The impact of the 2008 economic crash was significant and as noted by Walsh (2018) hastened reform within the sector directed towards the promotion of the knowledge economy, the acceptance of the Government's concept of accountability, the requirement to do 'more with less' and the achievement of performance-based outcomes. As noted by Hazelkorn (2014) higher education in Ireland became 'a victim of the crisis'. Financial constraints and the considerable curtailment in the public funding of the universities arising from the economic recession brought about very significant pressures for rationalisation within the sector (Walsh, 2018). While government funding has always been central to sustaining the university sector, public funding to the sector was reduced by over €302.5 million during this time while student enrolments grew and staffing numbers decreased (Irish Universities Association (IUA), 2014). A resourcing constraint was imposed by government in the form of the Employment Control Framework (ECF) which curtailed the number of staffing appointments made within the universities and reduced core staffing by 12% across the sector. During the period 2008-2014 staff/student ratios declined by 12% from 1:20 to 1:23 (IUA, 2014) against the OECD average of 1:14 in 2012.

Meanwhile a considerable number of government-led policy documents, strategies and reports were produced during the economic recession which clearly indicated a heightened level of scrutiny of higher education by the Irish government and a clear intention to redefine the role of the university in delivering for society and the knowledge economy. Wider public sector reform mirroring the neoliberal changes and New Public Management (NPM) which had been introduced in Ireland's nearest neighbour, the UK, and other territories including US, Australia and New Zealand were also in evidence. Following a 16-month review of the Irish Public Service carried out by the OECD, a government task force was appointed and the resultant report *Transforming Public Services* (2008a) focused on a number of actions including i) the achievement of improved performance; ii) the identification of a transformation agenda in each

sector; and iii) the attainment of greater efficiency, effectiveness and economy. It was evident that pressure was coming on the university sector focused on reprioritisation of its mission, addressing performance, efficiency and value for money, while at the same time funding available to the sector declined. By the end of 2008 with the publication by government of a document establishing a framework for the *Building of Ireland's Smart Economy* (2008b), it was clear that the spotlight was clearly focused on higher education as the Irish government 'sought to re-position Ireland as an attractive knowledge-intensive economy underpinned by a research-rich but restructured higher education system' (Hazelkorn 2014, p. 3). This situation created a clearly challenging setting for the universities.

Economic and political challenges produced a new operating environment within universities and, for academic leadership, the requirement to operate with an array of resourcing limitations, controls and constraints. The shift towards corporatisation and the increasing focus on attaining non-exchequer funding (Parker, 2011) formed part of these challenges, as did the new corporate-based structures and mechanisms imported from the private sector. The latter motivated by NPM ideals included the introduction of professional roles and a growing policy and regulations-driven working environment, incorporating managerialist-focused criteria for academic appointments and an increased spotlight on performance management.

Traditionally academic leadership resided in the position of 'professor' or 'academic head' a collegial role in which power and autonomy were vested (Fitzgerald, 2014). Macfarlane (2013) describes how the arrival of managerialism has created a separation between management and academia, represented in the changing role of the professor within the academic unit.

This chapter will describe the impact of this new working environment on academic leadership. The focus is on experiences of academic leadership in Ireland towards sustaining academic values and culture during the period 2008-2014. This will require the examination of approaches and behaviour of academic leaders at the *meso* academic unit level, in delivering both to the corporate and government agenda, while continuing to engage with colleagues in delivering academic work and undertaking teaching and research activity.

The study comprises insights given by academics working within the Irish university, a number of whom held academic leadership positions during the period 2008-2014. At the time this research was carried out there were seven universities in the Irish state. Applying a case study approach which as Merriam (1988, p. 21) notes facilitates an 'intensive, holistic description and analysis' of a phenomenon, this research study provides the opportunity to gain a broad understanding of both the situation experienced and its meaning for those working in academia during this time period. The perspectives shared in this chapter comprise comparative case study research undertaken during 2017 in three Irish universities: The University of Limerick (UL); Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG).

Applying a purposive criterion-sampling approach providing for diversity and representation, interviews were conducted with thirty-nine academics working in arts and humanities, business, and science disciplines. Interviews were fully transcribed and analysed using *NVivo* software. Where quoted, which enables the voices of these academics to be heard directly, the fourteen interviewees in UL are identified by the code A1-A14; the twelve interviewees in TCD are identified by the code B1-B12 and the participants from NUIG are identified by the code C1-C13. Only the research findings relevant to experiences of academic leadership are presented in this chapter.

The chapter is structured as follows: the traditional characteristics of the academic profession are set out. This is followed by a description of the challenges facing the academic endeavour and its impact on academic leadership. The chapter examines responsibilities for academic leaders arising from the changes which have occurred within the Irish university system. In particular, it explores experiences of academic leadership within two core areas: i) academic recruitment and career development and ii) academic decision-making. The chapter concludes by investigating the preservation of academia's core values and the role that academic leadership has in sustaining these values for the future. As noted by Askling and Stensaker (2002), examining academic leadership practices in the context of the changing higher education environment is valuable, hence the merit of this study of the Irish context.

### **The changing context facing academic activity and leadership**

Traditionally the university was viewed in society as a professional bureaucracy, characterised by a strong autonomy of actors free to decree rules and norms for practices, in line with their own professional culture and values (Mintzberg, 1996). The production of scholarly work and the nurturing of student learning served as its core purpose for this community of scholars. Academic leadership has traditionally and universally played a central role in supporting the academic endeavour. In times past it was considered as the sole source of authority. Geschwind et al. (2019) identify the strong focus of academic leaders in preserving and adhering to academic priorities, interests and values. Henkel (2005) describes how this accepted position has been challenged as the university explicitly becomes a business entity with modernised corporate-based structures which remove significant authority from the academic leader.

Walsh (2018, p.414) describes how in recent years, Irish university leaders have ‘adopted a similar discourse to politicians and civil servants regarding the positioning of higher education in relation to the economy, prioritising commercialisation, knowledge generation and corporate style management’. Askling and Stensaker (2002) identify new requirements placed on academic leaders by public sector reform which manifest themselves in demands on academic units for greater accountability and higher standard in results. Described as ‘a big game change’ for the Irish university was the realisation, as articulated by an academic head, that if his unit wanted to continue with its academic mission, faculty couldn’t rely on exchequer funding (B12). The pressures placed on the Irish university system created a drive for income generation, an increased focus on commercialisation together with significant strain on resourcing within the institution. For many academic leaders, these developments represented new and difficult terrain. At the university level, new expectations for greater accountability and for additional controls on efficiency and quality, presented academic leadership with challenges identified by Henkel and Askling (2006, p. 85) as requiring ‘a more pronounced and evident institutional leadership and management’.

### **Changes impacting the capacity of the academic value system**

Traditionally the work of professionals has been reliant on a number of key values and approaches as identified by Geschwind et al. (2019, p. 184). These encompass traits including ‘discretion, trust,

autonomy, and collegiality'. Modern academic leaders perform a central role within the university; however, as a group they are diverse in character. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004, p. 197) identify that while some academic leaders may have joined the university under the 'old regime' with a particular value set attached to academic work, others more recent to the system may be committed to a 'more entrepreneurial conception of academe'.

During this time criticism was being levelled towards the direction and focus of the Irish government reform agenda as described by Walsh (2018, p. 491) 'in the pursuit of economic imperatives, employing various mechanisms with a definite NPM imprint'. A clear role and value conflict arose between the tradition of the professional logic and the emerging expectations from the Irish government. While this was a source of considerable disquiet within the university setting, amongst the IUA, University Presidents and many academic commentators, public discourse on this subject was limited overall. This may have been due to many difficulties created societally by the economic recession which overshadowed the challenges being faced by universities and academics working within the sector. There was also a view held by many that society was supportive of government efforts to reform the university and public sector institutions. Arising from the changes taking place which significantly reduced academic autonomy and introduced new managerial based structures into the university, both the mechanisms and opportunity to raise concerns about the direction of the academic endeavour were removed. Some academics felt powerless to engage while others expressed a reluctance to speak up, fearful of the consequences of doing so.

In 2013, towards the end of the recession a movement named *Defend the University* supported by the main university union groups was established. In its charter, this organisation highlighted the importance of 'academic freedom over a fear-driven consensus, creativity over blind compliance and collegiality over managerialism' (*Defend the University*, n.d). It noted that Ireland's 'long and rich tradition of a thriving university system' was experiencing 'a crisis of perspectives, a failure of the imagination and an unthought-out turn towards marketisation and managerialism' which it said, would 'destroy Irish higher education if ...allowed to pose as the only game in town' (*ibid.*). While the launch of this interest group received some public coverage, the work of this movement was short-lived and had limited impact.



In the Irish university system during the period 2008-2014 as the government logic increasingly took hold, it was clear that some divergence was occurring within the value systems held amongst the academic profession. As noted by one interviewee 'you would get some people who were very collegiate and some people who were very managerial' (C7). There was a view expressed that increasingly university values were becoming 'driven by funding, numbers, metrics and buildings' and that the values associated with teaching had declined (C4). As highlighted by Deem (2004), the traditional role of the academic leader had been overtaken by the role of the manager-academic holding managerial responsibility for the measured results and outputs of the academic unit. Frustration at this situation was experienced within the Irish university system as described by one senior academic who referred to 'the perversion of the role of senior academics towards grant seeking, rent seeking and finance hunting, regardless of the academic logic underlining that' (B1).

Experienced as two university systems co-existing within the same institution and, as described by one interviewee, clearly 'running parallel to each other', there was the university focused on the academic mission, teaching and students, and the corporate university (C11). This resonates with the work of Ylijoki (2003), who describes the co-existence of two value sets within academia: market orientated values and traditional ideals. An academic who had previously joined the university when the focus was principally on teaching, learned during this time that her value to the university had diminished (A14). The attention of the university had completely shifted to become all about research, output and rankings (A13).

A theme reiterated by a number of interviewees was the increased focus on rankings, ratings and research excellence which came to the forefront of academic experiences during this time frame. An interviewee noted how academic work had become quantifiable with the obsession with measurement as increasing focus was given to economic value and research outputs (C7). She remarked that no-one dares write a book any more as a book can take 3-4 years to complete and so for that time period academics would constantly have to defend themselves for not having measurable output. Instead in her view, a choice had to be made between producing a noteworthy book or 'just pushing out small ten-page articles like crazy' which was the chosen path for many to get acknowledgement and a positive performance review. She described a 'worrying' development that in the new environment, research had become 'very incohesive' arising from 'the fragments of little bits of research everywhere spread over different sources of distribution'.

A divide emerged between academics whose research or disciplinary area was in demand within the marketplace such as science, engineering and business and those generally in some disciplines in the arts and humanities, that did not enjoy this position. However, despite these challenges, there was a clear sense that academic leaders and faculty across disciplines, remained faithful to their disciplines, dedicated to teaching and to student learning, working 'extremely hard to ensure' that the discipline didn't fail in this mission (B12). This perspective has been supported in the literature by Henkel (2002) who notes that while managerial practices have been adopted in the university setting, this has not been to the exclusion of academic identities, since academic leaders have identified ways of negotiating these two worlds

### **The challenges facing academic leaders; changing roles**

Musselin (2007, p. 6) in describing the transformation of academic work notes that with the emergence of instruments of control, academics are increasingly being evaluated 'by their own institution or by national measures developed by public authorities to control, rank and benchmark academic activity'. One academic leader was clear that his role changed during this time, becoming more pressurised, arising from the focus on performance which included sales and meeting the metrics (C1). Another academic leader (A1) described how with the creation of a new business model within the university and the development of managerial roles, colleagues who were excellent teachers and researchers had become fulltime administrators. A concern was expressed by this senior academic that the primary mission of the university as a teaching, research and student-focused institution was being lost.

Slowey (2019) in referring to this group as 'the squeezed middle' highlights the arduous role held by heads in negotiating between senior management and academic colleagues. Responding to cuts and being squeezed for resources became a constant challenge. One view, common to a number of interviewees, was the perception that 'we must all be very wasteful and we could do the same with less' (B8). While this was a difficult message universally and 'very hard on people', as remarked upon by this previous head, it was particularly stressful on heads dealing with this situation and trying to obtain resources. Heads of academic units found themselves having to undo agreed arrangements arising from budgetary cuts. There was a feeling of being 'stuck between the central administration and the students while your boss or Dean would be trying to protect you and at the same time getting a certain amount of aggravation'.

Implementing managerial changes was a challenge for academic heads. One academic who held a headship during this period described the experience as 'pretty negative' although there were some positive aspects (A6). He described working in a setting where the focus was beginning to be placed on the measurement of performance. As a consequence, the quality of interactions between colleagues altered and, conscious of new pressures, work practices also changed, which in his view 'led to an awful work environment' for all concerned. With increasing competition, collegiality was lost and 'back-stabbing' became a feature of academic life. Difficulties were experienced by management in trying to get faculty engaged in research activity and involved in new research themes.

The challenge facing academic leadership was noted by an interviewee who in recalling his headship during this time noted the potential for difficulty in managing academic staff arising from the fact that terms and conditions of employment for academics had not become aligned with new performance driven, management-led requirements. A tenured staff member could effectively say 'no' to a request made by a line manager and a situation where a colleague is told to do something by the academic leader becomes very difficult (A3). Another academic referenced accepting the 'poison chalice' of becoming a deputy head around the time of the beginning of the economic crash in 2008 which meant that he was 'not making many friends' because of the 'many tough decisions' that had to be made (A8).

### **Academics' experience of academic leadership; the collegial and managerial approach**

The position and experience of an academic in the university during the period 2008-2014 was highly dependent on the approach of the academic head (A4). The critical role of 'approach' is evidenced in the literature by Henkel (2004) who describes how the approach taken to disciplinary leadership and the adoption of 'strategies of accommodation' can be instrumental in sustaining the academic profession.

In some areas the situation was quite fraught arising from the relational preferences of academic heads in their approach to resolving difficulties and decision-making. Independent of the impact of any external pressures created outside the academic unit, this academic was clear from her direct experience that the manager/employee relationship within a department was highly influential and had significant impact on colleagues within the academic unit. While this academic described her department as being historically

‘people focused’ and a ‘collegiate environment’, she was aware of other departments where an academic head was ‘creating their own terms and conditions’ of employment (A4). which had the impact of disadvantaging colleagues working in other areas (A4).

Within the Irish university, it was clear that there were two approaches adopted by academic leaders: the collegial approach on the one hand and the managerial approach on the other. It was evident that the responsibilities of the academic head had become more onerous with demands and constraints imposed by the new operating requirements. While the experience of pressure and accountability varied at the level of the individual academic, at the level of the head, pressures were stronger and more apparent. Those who held leadership positions noted the strong use of business language in faculty executive meetings and one business-based academic commented that he had a job to assist colleagues from Arts to understand the language used which were increasingly becoming more business-focused and that ‘having a business plan for a school of theology’ made no sense (A2).

The sense of frustration brought about through the introduction of a business focus to academic meetings was shared by many. As remarked upon by another interviewee, the vocabulary of the university had become less meaningful as it became more managerial and in referring to the university’s strategic plan, this individual noted that it was not ‘very close to your own field experience’ as an academic staff member (C8). During this time period, the university was a less friendly and more confrontational place arising from the pressures having to manage with scarce resources (C1) and more closed in and coercive arising from the managerial approach being adopted internally (A5).

Some leaders demonstrated clear ambidexterity, with an ability to flex their approach according to the context and issue presented. This practice has been labelled as ‘switching’, which describes a leader’s ability to participate within a potential conflicting situation, adopting different approaches and different professional roles at different times (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). An academic leader who was identified as being very good and supportive by academic colleagues was described as trying ‘to play the double game of keeping the central university management happy with the figures and keeping the people happy with supporting them’ (C5). As noted by this interviewee who had held an academic leadership position during this time, adopting a collegial approach was considered important in the context of the difficult environment and he described how he would ‘go to offices and listen’ and while ‘it wouldn’t solve the

problem... it would make it more bearable' affording academic colleagues the opportunity to 'just blow off steam'. Winter (2009) similarly separates the identity of the 'academic manager' whose values are consistent with the corporate managerial agenda from the 'managed academic' whose values reflect the collegial, professional setting.

Askling and Stensaker (2002, p. 118) differentiate between the extrinsic values sought in connection with the change agenda and the intrinsic dimensions which are associated with 'preserving essential elements of higher education'. Examples were given of academic leaders who worked actively supporting colleagues in negotiating the new operating terrain. One academic head described the advice he would give to colleagues seeking resources for a new activity or programme where the main criteria for obtaining them had changed across the institution to favour the potential of an idea for income generation. In this circumstance, in order to achieve buy-in from central university management, he advised framing the idea in terms of its 'money-making' potential rather than presenting it as being good for the academic mission (B12). This example of 'collegial entrepreneurialism' as revealed by Clark (2000) identifies an approach which in addressing the challenges of reduced exchequer funding, focuses on academic collegiality, while at the same time seeks to increase entrepreneurial activity.

With the focus increasingly being shown on research activity considered of value to government and the marketplace and the reduction of academic autonomy in deciding on the direction of research work, leadership as experienced by academic interviewees varied. One stated the freedom afforded him and his colleagues in their research activity was a function not so much of the institution as of the culture of the academic unit and the 'complete freedom' afforded by the head of unit (C8). This interviewee was clear that other heads exercised tighter control and more direct management, while others again, including his own, had greater autonomy and 'a certain light touch'.

Descriptions were also presented of difficult engagement with academic leaders, resulting from the changing environment which introduced decisions unpopular with faculty. One academic described how a newly appointed head introduced 'radical budgetary driven changes' impacting on academic teaching. These were unpopular with colleagues and while negotiation led to a reduction in the level of changes, the same managerialist pressures remained 'to recruit, research, teach and carry out administration' (A8). In this new situation, other interviewees described difficult interactions with their academic head. As

described by one academic '[we] were doing it because we were told to do it and if we demurred.... usually funding was brought up' (A5).

The emerging managerial-centred system brought with it a new emphasis on monitoring and examining academic performance. One head of discipline described how consequent on these new pressures, he felt 'more of a performance manager, than ... a student-focused type of person' (C1). Expectations increased and it was deemed no longer sufficient to 'turn up to work and do some teaching'. There was a sense that 'competitiveness within the department' amongst colleagues had become 'palpable' (A13). Accountability increased as progress was reviewed, comparisons were made and long discussions took place between an academic and the head of unit. However, this same process was viewed favourably by some in supporting early career colleagues and in encouraging those who wanted to turn around a period of research inactivity (A8). This ability for both collegiality and entrepreneurship to co-exist within the academic unit has been found to be dependent on an effective academic leader. As noted by Ryan and Guthrie (2009) in an era of commercialisation and modernisation, the quality of academic leadership is central to ensuring that changes which activate the entrepreneurial agenda retain academic values, identity and collegial culture.

### ***Academic recruitment, career development and the focus on excellence***

In the literature Becher and Kogan (1980, pp. 143-144) describe how the university's traditional values and enduring qualities have come under pressure from changed times in which 'political fashions and economic climates come and go with little regard for the well-being of academia'.

The definition of 'academic success' has been greatly affected by the changes which took place in Ireland between 2008-2014. Reduced levels of income from the public purse at a time when the numbers attending university rose steadily, placed a premium on research with the capacity to generate income. This, in turn, changed the qualities sought of the academic hired by the university. The focus on income generation and on institutional positioning, ratings and ranking changed the criteria for recruitment. It also changed the criteria for promotion (A3, A13, B2, B3, C2). Respondents expressed concern that the core of the traditional academic – to teach and provide services to the community – was increasingly paid 'lip service'. Instead what was valued was higher status research activity.

There was a clear sense that individuals who had invested significant time and work in getting to where they were in their career had become diminished and their academic identity had been whittled away as a consequence of change (B3). More frequently, academics experienced a university culture, characterised by performance and a preoccupation with research ratings and rankings (Shore, 2010). As described by one respondent, a clear focus on 'excellence', in valuing particular research activity, had emerged with the implication that it was felt that there was a 'sort of an undermining of all those other people, (and maybe me as well) in terms of them getting on and doing perfectly adequate, good stuff'. The view was that the only way forward was 'to hire new excellence'. As noted by this interviewee, these academics were 'doing exactly what they were hired to do and what was always acceptable' for a long, long time. It was harder to get along and to 'be the sort of individual academic doing things that interest you and publishing and trundling along'. As remarked upon this academic, in their experience an academic had 'to be excellent' or they 'were a nobody' (B3).

The role of the head in supporting junior colleagues without tenure was highlighted by one interviewee (C1) who during his time as head of unit, noted that there was a balance to be struck for newer staff between the 'hunger' and 'competition' associated with building their *curriculum vitae* and becoming overburdened with work. This became 'visibly more cut-throat' during this time period when there were fewer opportunities to progress academic careers. As described by this academic leader they had to 'guard against and watch that' as these colleagues 'were putting their hand up for everything. I want to get to do this, I want to get some experience in that, I want to do more of this. They'd always be knocking on your door the minute you said can I have somebody to help with this'.

### ***Academic decision making***

Geschwind et al. (2019, p. 184) describe academic decision-making as being 'consensus-oriented, collegial, and bottom up'. Deem (2004) notes how with the advent of government reform of higher education in the UK, universities had become much more visibly 'managed' institutions which felt more suited to business than to an educational purpose and where traditional methods of academic decision-making became increasingly marginalised. Shattock and Horvath (2019, p. 167) note the importance of placing the academic endeavour at the core as opposed to the periphery of the university. In

acknowledging that the core business of the university comprises teaching and research, these scholars highlight the importance of university governance mechanisms and decision-making structures to enable the conditions for 'good academic work to thrive'.

In Ireland during the period 2008-2014, there was a sense that collegiality shifted and, as noted by one long established academic, there was a visible undermining of academic freedom, particularly among an older generation of colleagues who thought they had the right to speak out and participate in robust debate within the university (B6). University committees which in the past had engaged in discussion had become fora where decisions were no longer made and instead were focused on rubberstamping decisions made by university management. This situation was described as a 'side-lining of academic staff' where previously academic faculty had played a more significant decision-making role. The university 'became a managed institution' (A5), so that at committee meetings where previously discussions would have been meaningful and focused on educational issues, as described by this interviewee 'we just pushed paperwork'. This development is described by Musselin (2007, p.2), who asserts that academic norms have been transformed due to the emergence of non-professional instruments of control which have expanded within the university.

Others also noted that fewer decisions were made on academic issues and decisions tended to be based primarily on budgets and metrics (B2). This resonates with Pritchard and Slowey (2017) who note that educational decisions became based on resourcing instead of academic criteria. The opportunity for academics to express their views and perspectives diminished and the perception as shared by one interviewee was that decisions made by university management were presented to the academic community as a 'fait accompli' (C9). Some interviewees described a reluctance to speak out on academic issues due to concern that this would impact on their promotion chances or might lead to disciplinary measures. A view was expressed that due to government restrictions on permanent contracts and with greater numbers of individuals employed on temporary contracts, those individuals were less likely to express their opinions openly (B6).



### **Preserving and sustaining the academic value system**

Having examined developments which have impacted on the academic profession, the chapter returns to the academic value system and the role of the academic leader in sustaining the ideals of academic work. The core of academic endeavour incorporates the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge and comprises a value system which attaches significant importance to scholarly and evidence-based enquiry and to opportunities for learning and intellectual development. Ylijoki (2003) notes the important motivating force of the academic value system in preserving the work of the academic profession.

The research which informs this study indicates that there were notable parallels in the experience of academic leadership. Across institutions, similar institutional approaches were taken and comparable constraints and measures imposed. Within each university, academic heads were identified who endeavoured to support the academic endeavour despite challenges. Experiences across the universities also identified managerialist approaches taken by heads which academics found to be difficult to work with. Despite their situation, many academics endeavoured to remain resilient and retain focus on their academic work; on engagement with students and in progressing scholarly activities and many expressed an affinity and desire to continue to pursue their professional vocation. The following comment as expressed by one academic was a view shared by many respondents:

No matter what the management throws at you, you still have a certain amount of autonomy...constantly wanting to learn new things is what actually makes you an academic (A11).

Winter (2009) notes that as a result of changes which have taken place in the content and focus of the academic role, the attractiveness of the profession to a new generation of academics has been questioned. Interviewees record different perspectives in sustaining the academic profession into the future. The view of one head was that the academic pathway had created a substantial alteration in the professional value system, impacting on the recruitment of academics.

What constitutes academic success has changed because in order to be able to generate revenue and generate positioning, there's been much, much more of a stronger focus on rankings and stuff like that and what actually is needed to achieve them. And that is changing the nature of the academic that you hire (B2).

Another head, acknowledging the impact of the changed environment, sought to reassure frustrated and upset colleagues that the core academic values are within reach, that being an academic is 'one of the best jobs in the world' and colleagues should recognise that they have so much freedom to do things and it is in their hands to do it (B12). This resonates with the work of Ryan and Guthrie (2009, p. 319) who identify the responsibility of the academic profession to 'maintain and nurture their professional values' and protect them from 'forces both within and external' to the academy.

It is clear from hearing the voices of heads and academics, that academic leadership has an important role to play in facilitating and sustaining academic values in the context of a changing environment. This view is supported in the literature by Shattock and Horvath (2019, p. 97) who in their study of governance within British higher education, identify that actual academic business takes place at the individual ground roots academic level below the level of managerialism. It is evident that while challenges experienced in Ireland during the period 2008-2014 created a difficult situation, academic heads sought to effectively manage these new demands and pressures. It is unmistakable from this research that effective academic leaders are those who seek to enable collegiality, academic values and the new managerialist culture to co-exist within the academic unit. By doing so, academic leadership can deliver within the new operating environment, while sustaining at the professional level traditional academic values of enquiry, knowledge creation and scholarship. This is of significance if the academic mission of Irish universities is to be fully realised in 'addressing [their] educational, social, cultural and democratic roles and responsibilities' (OECD, 2006, p. 219).

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**Appendix      Table of Interviewees Quoted**

A1	UL Business female interviewed 13 April 2017
A2	UL Business male interviewed 27 April 2017
A3	UL Business male interviewed 3 May 2017
A4	UL Arts and Humanities female interviewed 28 April 2017
A5	UL Arts and Humanities male interviewed 28 April 2017
A6	UL Arts and Humanities male interviewed 28 April 2017
A8	UL Arts and Humanities male interviewed 28 April 2017
A11	UL Science female interviewed 28 April 2017
A13	UL Science female interviewed 24 May 2017
A14	UL Science female 24 May 2017
B1	TCD Business male interviewed 12 May 2017
B2	TCD Business male interviewed 16 May 2017
B3	TCD Business female interviewed 16 June 2017
B6	TCD Arts and Humanities female interviewed 12 May 2017
B8	TCD Arts and Humanities male interviewed 19 June 2017
B12	TCD Science male interviewed 6 June 2017
C1	NUIG Business male interviewed 9 March 2017
C2	NUIG Business male interviewed 9 March 2017
C4	NUIG Business female interviewed 30 June 2017

C5	NUIG Arts and Humanities male interviewed 9 March 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
C11	NUIG Science male interviewed 31 March 2017