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Managing academic human resources: Mission impossible?

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Estermann et al. 2011 (EUA report II)

Organisational autonomy	Financial autonomy	Staffing autonomy	Academic autonomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection procedure for the executive head • Selection criteria for the executive head • Dismissal of the executive head • Term of office of the executive head • Inclusion and selection of external members in governing bodies • Capacity to decide on academic structures • Capacity to create legal entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length and type of public funding • Ability to keep surplus • Ability to borrow money • Ability to own buildings • Ability to charge tuition fees for national/ EU students (BA, MA, PhD) • Ability to charge tuition fees for non-EU students (BA, MA, PhD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to decide on recruitment procedures (senior academic/senior administrative staff) • Capacity to decide on salaries (senior academic/senior administrative staff) • Capacity to decide on dismissals (senior academic/senior administrative staff) • Capacity to decide on promotions (senior academic/senior administrative staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to decide on overall student numbers • Capacity to select students (BA, MA) • Capacity to introduce programmes (BA, MA, PhD) • Capacity to terminate programmes • Capacity to choose the language of instruction (BA, MA) • Capacity to select quality assurance mechanisms and providers • Capacity to design content of degree programmes

The Flagship project

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Definition of Flagship university

- a comprehensive, research intensive university, located in a major urban area.
- among the oldest and largest higher education institutions of its country.
- expected to be given more leeway than others because of their scientific leading role at the national level

Strategic management of academic human resources: a comparative analysis of Flagship universities in Norway, Finland, Switzerland and Austria

Research questions

- What are the external and internal factors of academic human resources management?
- To what extent are university internal and external actors involved in key decisions on human resources?
- How do they differ according to national higher education systems, universities and disciplines?

Table 2: Four cases'

Cases		University			Department	
		Students (2013)	Staff *Professors	Budget EUR million	Students	Staff *Professors
University of Helsinki	Chemistry	23,800	8,600 (2010) *500 (ca.)	645	800 (ca.)	250 *16
University of Oslo		27,000	6,600 *793	831	148	156 *26
University of Basel	History	13,000	3,300 *272	563 (2012)	158 (own count - 2014)	135 *9 (own count- 2014)
University of Vienna	Economic and Social History	92,000 (head-count)	9,500 (head- count) *423	522	164	57 *12

Table 3: Drivers of change in human resources management

	Policy reforms	University strategy	Academic traditions	Structural conditions
University of Oslo Department of Chemistry	-Quality reform 2003; Law on public and private universities, 2005 -University remains part of public sector	-Aims to balance salary expenses, improve career planning -Collaborative research and external funding are a priority internationalization	-Professors hired according to scientific merits (scientific publications) -Formal criteria for assessing academic merits, informal criteria for evaluating social competences	-Block grant is significantly based on student numbers -Low numbers of students at chemistry -Department structure
University of Helsinki Department of Chemistry	-2005 increasing salary flexibility; University act 2009; University becomes employer 2012 -Several mergers redesign the national landscape	-Aims to become a multi-disciplinary top European university -Priority is given to attracting funding and managing research projects Internationalization	-Acceptance of increasing competition for funding and publishing -Questioning internationalization	-Instability of public funding -High numbers of students-Department structure
University of Basel Department of History	-1995 University Act -2006 second canton becomes main public funder - 2011 Federal Act coordinating higher education	-Rectorate and faculty coordination of recruitment -Redefining profile -Internationalization	-Professorial control of recruitment -Powerful chair holders	-Block grant based on student numbers and research output -Chair structure
University of Vienna Department of Socioeconomic History	-1993, 2002 University reforms	-Large freedom for negotiating salaries internationalization - Benchmarking Swiss and German universities	-Professorial control of recruitment -Powerful chair holders	-Block grant is disconnected from student numbers -Chair structure

Table 4: Emerging strategic management of academic human resources

	Recruitment	Control and reward system	Discipline-based evolution
University of Oslo Department of Chemistry	<p>Process is shifting to take into consideration competences beyond scientific publications.</p> <p>Increasing leeway of head of department, emerging role of head of administration and of (internal) interview committee</p>	<p>Head of department has increasing leeway in starting package negotiations and salary promotions, in agreement with dean.</p> <p>Tenure track does not exist.</p>	<p>Chemistry has few students and went through difficult financial conditions after a new accounting system was put in place at the university</p>
University of Helsinki Department of Chemistry	<p>Head of department plays a key role</p>	<p>Salaries can be negotiated up to a certain point.</p> <p>Harsh bargaining for allocation of laboratory use, PhD students and postdocs.</p> <p>Tenure track introduced in 2010.</p>	<p>Difficult financial conditions require cooperation in laboratory use, in funding of new professorships.</p>
University of Basel Department of History	<p>Process has been standardized.</p> <p>Formally academic recruitment is coordinated by dean and rectorate. Several (mostly internal) actors play a role in the different stages.</p>	<p>It appears to be in the hands of the chair holders.</p> <p>Tenure track exists but is hardly used.</p>	<p>The department has adapted to the new requirements: international staff, external funding, establishment of a doctoral school</p>
University of Vienna Department of Socioeconomic History	<p>Process has been standardized. Internal careers are not possible anymore.</p> <p>Formally academic recruitment is coordinated by dean and rectorate.</p>	<p>It appears to be in the hands of the chair holders, while dean and rector coordinate assistant professorships.</p> <p>Assistant professors: 1</p>	<p>The department has become more interdisciplinary through global studies. This shapes significantly academic hiring.</p>

Uncertainty

Tenured positions, funding, teaching and student supervision.

Mechanisms to handle uncertainty

1. standardization of procedures: ensures quality and salary negotiations
2. Internationalization: provides criteria to comply with in order to select the “best candidate” from a large group.
3. strategic planning: link recruitment to overall measurable organizational objectives.

Multiple identities

Academic logic: research agenda and excellence ideals within disciplinary field

Bureaucratic-administrative logic: formal criteria have to be fulfilled (e.g. composition of commission, introduction of trial lecture)

Market logic: competition is fostered, and social, managerial and leadership skills are required, compliance with institutional strategy.

Flexibility

Salaries and starting packages have become more and more an arena for negotiations between university and new professors.

Different types of professorships have been introduced: based on tenure track, on external funding, fixed-term professorships, hiring through direct call, excellence grants for international professors.

- trial period, competition for excellent staff, support to juniors, faster recruitments and promotions.
- Vulnerability: institutional embedding

Conclusion

- Increasing institutional autonomy in human resources management.
- Different responses: e.g. delegation – centralization
- Leeway as of starting salaries and packages
- Introduction of Tenure Track
- Strong focus on excellence and competition

Recruitment is key

- Policy makers are only indirectly involved, unless they sit in university boards approving new professorships (e.g. Basel). Autonomy means “sustainable HRM”
- System of check and balances is growingly complex – more stakeholders, rules and criteria - constraining for academics
- Redefinition of academic excellence (e.g. social skills, funding attraction) is the arena where different logics coexist.