


# Professionalisation: the British Experience

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# Outline

- ▶ My perspective
  - ▶ Three decades of change in UK HE
  - ▶ The managerial challenges
  - ▶ Professionalisation in UK HE
    - ▶ What, the barriers and some examples
  - ▶ Recruitment, training, support structures
  - ▶ The continuing challenge of professionalisation
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# Professional experience

- ▶ Four different Polytechnics (1973–1992)
  - ▶ National funding & planning body (1986–87)
  - ▶ A new University (1992–99)
  - ▶ UK Department for Education & Skills (1999–2001)
  - ▶ HE Staff Development Agency (2001–2003)
  - ▶ A Research Intensive University (2003–2008)
  - ▶ Consultancy in South Africa, USA, Hungary, Ukraine, China
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# A personal view from the 1970s

- ▶ We trained professionals but didn't employ them
  - ▶ Inefficient and unaccountable management practices were rarely questioned
  - ▶ Management was a dirty word
  - ▶ No systematic training or staff development was available
  - ▶ Seniority was synonymous with age
  - ▶ There was no sense of strategic purpose
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# Three decades of change




# 1980s

- National *Better Management* reviews
  - HE expansion and concern about the relationship between funding, quality, numbers
  - Competitive research assessment introduced
  - Moves towards a single sector
  - Strategic planning models introduced in HE
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# 1990s

- ▶ Single HE sector with common funding models
  - ▶ Degree awarding powers for the polytechnics: renamed universities
  - ▶ The Government's 50% participation target
  - ▶ Student fees and loans
  - ▶ Quality watchdogs out of control
  - ▶ Fears for university autonomy
  - ▶ Embracing diversity in the student experience
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# 2000s

- ▶ Some controls loosened – eg QAA ‘light touch’ reviews; HEFCE’s ‘earned autonomy’
  - ▶ Higher student fees
  - ▶ Increasing institutional differentiation
  - ▶ Priority (and funding) for leadership development
  - ▶ Management devolution, flatter structures, team and project working
  - ▶ Blurring of some professional boundaries
  - ▶ Constructive professionalisation?
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# What have been the managerial challenges?

## ▶ External

- Public accountability: governance, funding, quality
- Legislation/Regulation: Employment; Health & Safety; Taxation; Environment; Equalities ...
- Competition for staff, students and funding
- Unprecedented growth in student numbers


## ▶ Internal

- Strategic planning: what sort of university do we want to be/can we be?
- Growth versus funding: cost-effectiveness
- Academic management structures
- Responding to greater regulation
- Managing change


Consistent policies?

Leadership and vision

# What has professionalisation meant in British universities?

- ▶ Recruiting and/or developing *professionally qualified staff*
  - ▶ Developing *new academic-related* services
  - ▶ Working across professional boundaries through team and project work
  - ▶ Defining management responsibilities at all levels
  - ▶ Focusing on high quality services
  - ▶ Open communications and trust
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# Barriers to professionalisation

- ▶ The British tradition of amateurism
  - ▶ Fear of losing academia's traditional values
  - ▶ Innate conservatism coupled with steep hierarchies based on length of service
  - ▶ Weak understanding between different groups –  
    > institutionalised *them and us* attitudes
  - ▶ Over-enthusiastic and inappropriate managerialism
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- ▶ And since the late 1980s, divergent views on the nature of a university and how it should be run
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# The HR example

## ▶ Before

- Policy led by senior academic; Head of Personnel administered outdated systems
- Policy development not informed by professional norms
- Basic systems missing
- Poor service to staff
- Risks of legal challenge
- Workload unmanageable – no IT
- All problems referred to Personnel

Not professional

## ▶ After

- Experienced HR Director recruited – ex Health, Retail and Banking sectors – member of VC's team
- HR functional teams created to provide professional advice to managers
- Legal context clarified and explained to managers
- Routine functions automated

Professional

# The academic and student support example

## ▶ Before

- Academic staff tutored students while administrators ran the bureaucracy – separate domains
- Some academics were brilliant as personal tutors; others were not ...
- Students assumed to have identical experience and motivation
- Students sank or swam

## ▶ After

- Student support is a team effort
- New professionals work alongside academic staff to support students' learning and personal support needs
- Students are guided towards relevant advice
- Responsibility for success lies with student

Professional

New professional



# Recruiting and training professional managers

## RECRUITMENT

- ▶ Explicit requirements
- ▶ Testing of competences
- ▶ Recruiters' knowledge of other universities and organisations
- ▶ Head hunters


Lack of experience of other sectors; suspicion of managers

## TRAINING/DEVELOPMENT


- ▶ Clear ethos/objectives
- ▶ Development programmes
- ▶ Career development arising from appraisal
- ▶ Consistent, assured training budgets

Results remain uncertain; support from very top essential

# Support structures: sector

- ▶ Formal professional bodies and accreditation
  - ▶ Self-governing membership groups (professional associations)
  - ▶ Common interest groups
  - ▶ The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE)
  - ▶ Formal qualifications
  - ▶ **INVESTMENT**
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# Support structures: internal

- ▶ Leadership and management development programmes/units
  - ▶ Project teams, secondments, action learning sets
  - ▶ Tailored training and career development plans
  - ▶ Decision-making structures based on expertise and purpose rather than hierarchy
  - ▶ Effective delegation and accountability
  - ▶ **INVESTMENT**
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# Has professionalisation been a good thing?


## ▶ On balance yes

- Accountability for public and private funds
- Stability through changes and more assured outcomes
- Better care and support for all employees
- Better services for students
- Training and professional development now valued

## ▶ Ongoing problems

- Some professionals who lack empathy for the academy and the continuing risk of inappropriate managerialism
- Suspicion of HR as the locus for training and development

# Successful professionals in HE

- ▶ understand and are sympathetic to the university environment
  - ▶ respect other professionals' knowledge and experience
  - ▶ value continuing professional development
  - ▶ Are committed to ensuring that the right people are doing the right thing in the right way
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# The continuing challenge of professionalisation

- ▶ HE's traditional values – *especially self-governance and academic freedom* – must not be sacrificed to mindless managerialism or over-regulation.
  - ▶ The key is having people in universities who believe in higher education, welcome diversity and respect each other's professionalism.
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