

The Finnish Academic Profession's Divided Opportunities in Management and Governance

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Abstract. Finnish higher education consists of research-oriented universities and teaching-oriented universities of applied sciences, and both sectors have a role in research, development and innovation. This paper focuses on governance and management at the institutional and academic unit levels, based on responses to several questions in the APIKS survey regarding the influence of academics, performance targets of academic units and the influence of academics in decision making and workload. Institutions in both sectors of Finnish higher education emphasise strategies and are heavily reliant on public funding. Both sectors also have an orientation to strong performance management.

Keywords: academic profession, governance, influence, working conditions.

Suomijos universitetų akademinės profesijos padalytos galimybės valdyti ir vadovauti

Santrauka. Suomijos aukštąjį mokslą sudaro į mokslinius tyrimus ir taikomųjų mokslų dėstymą orientuoti universitetai, abu sektoriai yra svarbūs moksliniams tyrimams, plėtrai ir inovacijoms. Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamas universitetų vadovavimas ir valdymas instituciniu ir akademinio lygmenimis remiantis atsakymais į atskirus Akademinės profesijos žinių visuomenėje (angl. *APIKS*) apklausos klausimus apie akademinį padalinių veiklos tikslus ir mokslininkų bei dėstytojų įtaką ir galias priimant sprendimus bei svarstant darbo krūvį. Abiejų Suomijos aukštojo mokslo sektorių institucijos pabrėžia strategijų svarbą ir labai priklauso nuo viešojo finansavimo. Abu sektoriai taip pat orientuojasi į valdymą pagal veiklos rezultatus.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: akademinė profesija, valdymas, įtaka, darbo sąlygos.

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Introduction

Finland has an extensive network of higher education institutions, comprising universities and universities of applied sciences. The latter have a strong regional role and obligation to co-operate closely with labour markets. In addition to producing the highest-level degrees, universities have an important role to play in producing research that supports work and society across the country. Their role can be important both regionally and in the development of the information society (Delanty, 2002; Pinheiro 2014).

The Academic Profession in Knowledge-based Society (APIKS) survey, conducted in 2018, provides a perspective on the reforms in the two higher education sectors and the changing role of the academic profession under these reforms. The data are drawn from APIKS International Database version 1.0 (APIKS-IDB, 2020). In Finland, the APIKS survey was carried out in October-December 2018 and covered 11 universities and 23 universities of applied sciences. There were 765 university respondents and 612 respondents from universities of applied sciences, totalling 1,377. The response rate was 13.6% (765/5606) for universities and 18.0% (612/3402) for universities of applied sciences.

The focus in this paper is on governance and management at the institutional and academic unit level based on responses to several questions in the APIKS survey regarding the influence of academics, performance targets of academic units and the influence of academics in decision making and workload. Our research question is what are the expectations for governance and management practices in the two university sectors? We addressed this research question with two hypotheses, first, that expectations of the governance model vary at academics' different career stages; and second, that expectations of management practices are different in each higher education sector.

Finnish higher education has multi-level governance models, involving diverse funding systems in national decision making and requiring a high level of societal interaction and engagement. Finnish higher education is based on strong regulation in education and is a publicly funded system. Since 1991, Finnish higher education has comprised two discrete sectors: universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS). The increase in the volume of students in Finnish higher education was realised primarily through the education provided in the UAS sector. The governance of Finnish higher education was quite weak until the late 1990s, because each university was regulated by a separate piece of legislation and the government decided to grant a licence to each university of applied sciences separately. (Note that originally, the term 'polytechnic' was used to describe what are now referred to as 'universities of applied sciences'). State control was thus not directed to the system but to individual higher education institutions.

With the adoption of the general Universities Act of 1997, tight state control was abolished, and the autonomy of universities was strengthened. For example, regarding the academic profession, the appointment of professors was transferred from the President of the Republic of Finland to the universities themselves. Based on institutional autonomy guaranteed by the Universities Act and the Constitution, universities have been able to organise their internal administration on the principle of autonomy, which has been exceptional compared to other public education systems in Finland. For this

reason, their performance and management systems may be as difficult to evaluate as that of public organisations in general.

Since 2005, several reforms have influenced the work conditions and status of the academic profession. The focus of higher education reforms in Finland was on improving the efficiency of completing university degrees within a two-tier degree structure with a target time to graduate and personal study plans for students, and on developing performance management and quality assurance. An external evaluation of the quality of research and administration is regularly conducted at all universities and UASs. The reforms in higher education are to promote quality and effectiveness and to respond to the changing needs of society and universities (Aarrevaara et al., 2018).

The performance of universities has been evaluated by the Ministry of Education and Culture from a longitudinal perspective since the early 1980s. In the context of the reforms of the 1990s, this information was also used to support performance management systems and performance negotiations between higher education institutions and the government. It was not until reforms in 2005 that the performance management system was established, which was extended to the launching of the modern higher education system to which the academic profession reward-based salary systems were also attached. Since 2008, significant structural reforms have been implemented within universities and publicly funded research institutes. As a result of these reforms, there have been several mergers of higher education institutions, and by 2020 their number has decreased to 11 universities and 26 UASs. As of the early 2020s, about 30,000 polytechnic degrees and about 16,000 university degrees are awarded annually.

Mergers have brought economies of scale thinking to higher education institutions. Performance units generally became larger and consisted of several disciplines or they became multidisciplinary. The structural reforms and mergers in higher education changed practices in a direction where performance management has been emphasised. These pressures in higher education institutions are internal and external (Söderlind et al., 2019). Such practices have also shaped the operating culture in this direction. The introduction of a four-tier career model has led to a situation in universities in which those with posts at the first two university levels out of four do not have permanent employment relationships. The changes in the 2010s brought common operating methods and working conditions into the innovation system. However, they have not significantly increased dynamism such as institutional co-operation in teaching, employers or research infrastructure.

Key reforms concerning the Finnish academic profession in the 21st century have been that universities' status removed from the state administration in 2010 and the four-tier career model was introduced in the university sector for the academic profession (Aarrevaara et al., 2010). In this respect, Finland has followed OECD reports and recommendation and European Union regulations (OECD, 2020; OECD 2015; Kivistö et al., 2015; Diogo 2015). This development has been influenced by the governance and management models implemented over the past few decades with its various partnerships of the public, private and non-profit sectors. The consequences of managerialism can be seen in higher education as the increasing role of external stakeholders in the academy, project and temporary organisations. For the Finnish academic profession, this also means a high number of temporary academic work contracts.

Universities of applied sciences were under the control of local government authorities up until 2013 and since then, they established themselves as limited companies as the organisation model. Funding arrangements for both higher education sectors were documented in the government's funding models. Based on these funding models, academics are coping with changing expectations on competitive funding, publication forums and societal challenges. The two higher education sectors are different because universities are mostly multi-faculty universities and academic staff work in relatively independent performance units. The UAS sector was founded in the early 1990s, and its governance and management model is based on a more top-down model. In this phenomenon, Finland keeps up with global trends (Teichler et al., 2013).

This is particularly influenced by performance management practices in core functions, which monitor the results of teaching and research indicators in particular (Locke et al., 2011). There are also academics-driven results-based systems such as the publication forum, supporting performance management practices in universities. UASs have a different approach and more clearly have an institutional level top-down management system. In the Changing Academy Profession study in 2008, UASs were found to have tighter management practices than universities (Aarrevaara et al., 2011).

Governance and management in Finnish higher education

The observations above provide a context for the analysis of the results of the Academic Profession in the Knowledge-based Society (APIKS) survey and a perspective on the differences in results between the two higher education sectors. The results in Table 1 indicate that respondents in the universities of applied sciences rather than those from universities (61.5% and 45.0%, respectively) have a strong influence in helping to shape key academic policies at the department level ($\chi^2(3, n = 1304) = 37.69, p < .001$ (Monte Carlo), Cramer's $V = .17$). Comparisons of relative proportions with Bonferroni corrections are also included in the Tables 1 and 2. The proportions do not differ only if both sections have small letter 'a'.

Table 1. The percentage of respondents by the type of higher education institution for the question "How influential are you in helping to shape key academic policies at your institution?" (at the level of department or similar)

			University	UAS	Total
Not at all influential	Count		194a	104b	298
	%		26.9%	17.8%	22.9%
A little influential	Count		202a	121b	323
	%		28.1%	20.7%	24.8%
Somewhat influential	Count		215a	257b	472
	%		29.9%	44.0%	36.2%
Very influential	Count		109a	102a	211
	%		15.1%	17.5%	16.2%
Total	Count		720	584	1304
	%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of HEI type categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

$$\chi^2(3, n = 1304) = 37.69, p < .001 \text{ (Monte Carlo), Cramer's } V = .17$$

The results in Table 2 indicate that respondents in the universities of applied sciences, rather than those from universities (44.9% and 26.5 %, respectively), have a strong influence in helping to shape key academic policies at the institutional level ($\chi^2(3, n = 1297) = 57.45, p < .001$ (Monte Carlo), Cramer's $V = .21$).

Table. 2 The percentage of respondents by the type of higher education institution for the question "How influential are you in helping to shape key academic policies at your institution?" (at the level of faculty, school or similar unit)

			University	UAS	Total
Not at all influential	Count		335a	165b	500
	%		46.4%	28.7%	38.6%
A little influential	Count		196a	152a	348
	%		27.1%	26.4%	26.8%
Somewhat influential	Count		148a	201b	349
	%		20.5%	35.0%	26.9%
Very influential	Count		43a	57b	100
	%		6.0%	9.9%	7.7%
Total	Count		722	575	1297
	%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The results in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that respondents at the universities of applied sciences have stronger influence on key academic policies both at the department level and institutional level than academics at the universities. Also, Bonferroni corrections confirm the difference between the respondents especially at the institutional level in Table 2. A notable result from Table 2 is that one-third of respondents from universities of applied sciences and about one-fifth of respondents from universities have some influence at the institutional level, but almost half of the academics of the universities (46.4%) did not indicate having any influence at all in shaping key academic policies at institution. Only about a quarter of respondents from universities of applied sciences shared this view.

The academic profession has a different role within Finnish universities and UASs, and between disciplines, higher education institutions and research institutes. Research is a central task within universities, whereas the main task of UASs is teaching. These differences are significant because this orientation determines the attachment to the academic profession. In many of the APIKS reference countries, early career focus on teaching and research is at the core of senior work assignments (Teichler et al., 2013). In the Finnish

University sector early career access to academic profession is based firstly research and secondarily on teaching. In the UAS sector, junior positions may be vacant posts, but in the university sector, the first two stages of a career do not have permanent positions.

It seems that Finns accept distance from power. In both higher education sectors, academic staff feel influential, particularly in academic departments, but few indicate that they have any influence at the faculty and institutional levels. Students have influence mainly in evaluation, especially in the assessment of teaching. In particular, due to peer review practices, external actors play a key role in the evaluation of research.

Those working in academic units remain distant from institution-level practices. Senior academics feel more influential in helping to shape key academic policies at all levels compared to junior academics. This is influenced by working conditions, in particular by the fact that senior academics work under permanent employment contracts more often than junior academics. There are also indications that European higher education institutions are building similar practices at different stages of their careers (Uslu, 2018). On the other hand, seniors have a clearly stronger grip than juniors on institutions and their strategies. This is also because seniors also work in supervisory positions and participate in institutional-level decision-making more often than juniors.

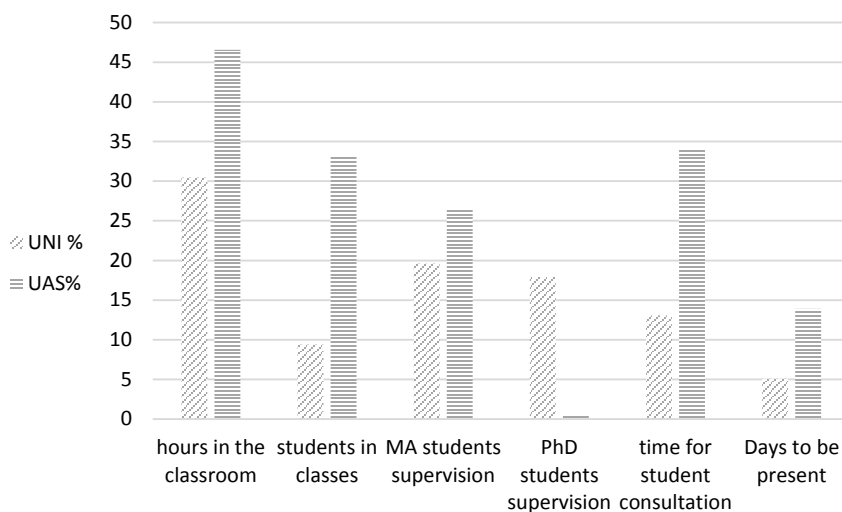


Figure 1. Regulatory expectations for individual academic staff

Source: APIKS-IDB, 2020.

In both higher education sectors, targets and regular expectations are monitored quite generally. The results of universities are affected by the total work time, in which annual work hours are monitored (1,624 hours before 1 August 2020). Individual work hours, such as contact teaching, are mainly defined in collective agreements between the trade unions and the employers.

Table 3. *To what extent do you consider yourself to be exposed to the following expectations by your institution? – Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences Seniors, a) University (n = 162), b) University of Applied Sciences (n = 125), Juniors a) University (n = 600), b) University of Applied Sciences (n = 481)*

Variable	n	Mean	Std. dev.	95% CI
Raising substantial amounts of external funds				
Seniors, University	155	4.35	1.00	4.19, 4.51
Seniors, UAS	79	3.61	1.22	3.33, 3.88
Juniors, University	526	3.65	1.27	3.54, 3.76
Juniors, UAS	148	3.02	1.32	2.81, 3.24
Focus on academic quality irrespective of social relevance				
Seniors, University	155	3.37	1.09	3.20, 3.55
Seniors, UAS (Question was not asked)				
Juniors, University	518	3.21	1.10	3.12, 3.31
Juniors, UAS (Question was not asked)				
Conducting applied (and possible commercially orientated research)				
Seniors, University	153	2.95	1.17	2.76, 3.14
Seniors, UAS	82	4.13	1.02	3.91, 4.36
Juniors, University	524	2.93	1.27	2.82, 3.04
Juniors, UAS	152	3.74	1.24	3.54, 3.94
Complying to guidelines for research funders				
Seniors, University	151	3.70	1.11	3.52, 3.88
Seniors, UAS	81	4.01	0.99	3.79, 4.23
Juniors, University	515	3.43	1.14	3.33, 3.53
Juniors, UAS	151	3.79	1.28	3.58, 3.99
Restricting public publication in tune with research funders' expectation				
Seniors, University	151	2.14	1.14	1.96, 2.32
Seniors, UAS	80	2.03	1.10	1.78, 2.27
Juniors, University	513	2.29	1.13	2.19, 2.39
Juniors, UAS	147	2.24	1.12	2.06, 2.42
Being active in carrying the research results beyond typical publications (technology transfer, dissemination in various media, etc.)				
Seniors, University	155	2.99	1.06	2.82, 3.16
Seniors, UAS	82	3.98	1.04	3.75, 4.20
Juniors, University	515	2.99	1.20	2.89, 3.10
Juniors, UAS	150	3.57	1.22	3.37, 3.76

In addition, those working in university research and teaching positions have a commitment measured in total annual work hours, which means that neither attendance nor work hours are accurately monitored. The APIKS survey results indicate that both sectors implement a work time system that does not lead the participation of researchers, teachers and RDI staff in the community's mission. Instead, performance is monitored

across units and at the individual level, with performance indicators emphasising research outputs such as publishing, research funding, and teaching assignments. As for academic freedom such as restricting scholarly publishing, there is little if any donor control within universities.

In Table 3, employer expectations in the Finnish higher education sectors are strongly based on academic performance monitoring. UASs monitor the amount of time spent on teaching, the number of students being taught and whether students have attended. Performance management subjects differ across disciplines, especially in social relevance and the availability of funding from external sources (Costa & Pesci, 2016). Higher education institutions set different expectations for staff regarding externally funded projects, social interaction and overall impact (van de Burgwal et al., 2019). It seems that employer expectations are based on monitoring results, and for UASs, primarily on hours in classrooms. UASs more often than universities monitor the time spent in classes in terms of teaching hours, the number of students in classrooms and supervision. Both sectors implement a work time system that does not guide the participation of researchers, teachers and RDI staff in the university's service tasks.

More universities than universities of applied sciences are engaged in external funded research. This is evident because career advancement at universities is strongly based on research merit. The higher number of teaching-oriented staff at universities of applied sciences than at universities also explains the differences. The proportion of applied research is naturally higher at universities of applied sciences than at universities, and this is also reflected in research funders' guidelines for funding. When looking at junior and senior roles, both higher education sectors have unifying factors. Raising the substantial amount of research funding is far more the responsibility of seniors than juniors in both sectors, and seniors feel the guidance of the institution is stronger in this respect. In both sectors, research funders do not seek to have significant influence on the publication of research results. Researchers' efforts to utilise results are stronger for universities of applied sciences than for universities.

Universities of applied sciences is clearly reflected in the fact that the responses place more emphasis than universities on the importance of the institutional level and the top-down management perspectives than universities. As Table 4 indicates, university respondents are more critical of collegiality in decision-making processes than respondents from universities of applied sciences. Although the views on competent leadership are similar, the differences are clear in the senior management style of teaching performance orientation and cumbersome administrative process. These three questions form the themes that create tensions between staff and management. UASs are largely organised according to teaching tasks, the tasks mainly have job descriptions in accordance with the teaching tasks, and the key element of the managerial division of labour is the teaching tasks. Therefore, for other tasks, the UAS administrative process mainly seems to be cumbersome to the respondents.

Table 4. Respondents' views on management in their higher education institutions (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). University: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2, 3, 4, 5 = Strongly agree

University of Applied Sciences: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 = Strongly agree

University, n = 765

University of Applied Sciences, n = 612

Variable	n	Mean	Std.dev.	95 % CI	Mean (% of maximum)
Competent leadership					
UNI	719	2.99	1.11	2.91, 3.07	59.8%
UAS	599	3.16	1.43	3.04, 3.28	52.7%
A strong emphasis on the institution's mission					
UNI	714	3.35	1.01	3.28, 3.43	67.0%
UAS	598	4.04	1.37	3.93, 4.15	67.3%
Good communication between management and academics					
UNI	723	2.76	1.07	2.68, 2.84	55.2%
UAS	598	3.11	1.32	3.00, 3.21	51.8%
Top down management style					
UNI	714	3.66	1.06	3.58, 3.74	73.2%
UAS	600	4.51	1.34	4.40, 4.62	75.2%
Collegiality in decision-making processes					
UNI	708	2.69	0.99	2.62, 2.76	53.8%
UAS	596	3.04	1.29	2.93, 3.14	50.4%
Strong teaching performance orientation					
UNI	712	2.94	0.89	2.88, 3.01	58.8%
UAS	600	4.08	1.37	3.97, 4.19	68.0%
A strong research performance orientation					
UNI	712	3.62	0.92	3.55, 3.68	72.4%
UAS	588	3.05	1.27	2.95, 3.15	50.8%
A cumbersome administrative process					
UNI	709	3.62	1.03	3.55, 3.70	72.4%
UAS	591	4.43	1.28	4.33, 4.53	73.8%

Source: APIKS-IDB 2020.

Discussion and conclusions

This paper clearly indicates that Finland's two higher education sectors have different governance and management principles. At universities, research and careers have been built through research and research projects, which afford academics more independence and opportunity to determine their own work and preferences. This is particularly evident in the fact that the influence of university seniors is also focused on the level of the

academic units. Few have influence at the level of academic units such as faculties and departments.

In the results we found the answer to the hypothesis that expectations of management practices are different in different higher education sectors. Universities have strong research performance, and the top-down management style conflicts with the traditionally implemented public organisations governance model. Since the Universities Act of 2009, governance and management in Finnish universities is a mixture of public organisation and management systems.

Based on results presented in this paper regarding the second hypothesis, expectations of the governance model are different at academics' different career stages. It is evident that those in the earlier stages of their careers have a strong attachment to the practices of academic units, but a weak influence on institutional-level decision-making. There are two themes in Finnish universities that particularly affect respondents' perceptions of the governance model. First, in the 2010 university reform, the power within institutions was transferred in particular from collegial decision-making bodies to university boards and rectors. Another clear shift in influence is the growing share of external members on university boards. These results confirm the first hypothesis that expectations of the governance model vary at academics' different career stages.

The Finnish Universities have a long history of collegiality in decision-making processes, but junior respondents rather than senior ones are critical of institutional-level decision making by universities. At universities of applied sciences, the institutional level determines the strategy, and management has strong tools to guide the academics' division of work. As a result of the 2013 law reform, universities of applied sciences are independent organisations and separated from the public administration. This causes a strengthening of higher education institutions and weakening the professional autonomy of the staff at universities of applied sciences compared to their counterparts at universities.

In both sectors, the work of academics has changed to be more focused on the direction of institutional strategies, and strategies are implemented in management practices. The policy direction and Finnish performance management practices are clearly reflected in the responses. The policy direction with its practices monitor what higher education institutions are to produce: primarily teaching at universities of applied sciences and research at universities.

The role of external stakeholders and the role of students in governance issues are limited, although they are represented by their membership in key bodies. However, students' influence is strong in the evaluation of teaching. At UASs, funding agents and institutions such as public service organisations and companies have a stronger role in defining work and outcomes than in universities.

The Finnish innovation system would need dynamism and mobility between research institutes, universities of applied sciences and universities. However, there are differences in the governance and management at universities and UASs, so the level of dynamics between the two higher education sectors and research institutes is low.

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