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# Creating a Supportive Working Environment for Academics in Higher Education: Country Report Ireland

MARIE CLARKE, AIDAN KENNY, ANDREW LOXLEY

# Creating a Supportive Working Environment for Academics in Higher Education: Country Report Ireland.



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## AUTHORS

**Dr. Marie Clarke** is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, University College Dublin. She was the Principal Investigator for Ireland in the European Science Foundation/Irish Research Council for the Social Sciences funded programme of research entitled: *The Academic Profession in Europe: Responses to Societal Change (EUROAC)*. She is published internationally and nationally in higher education, education history/policy and teacher education. She was appointed Head of the School of Education, UCD for a four-year term 2007-2011 and is a member of UCD Governing Authority since 2009. She is a past President of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) having served a two-year term from 2011-2013.

**Dr. Aidan Kenny** is currently on secondment from DIT to TUI in the role of Assistant General Secretary (2011-2016) assigned to higher education and apprenticeship. Employed in DIT since 1994, he served in the following positions; Lecturer, Manager UNESCO-UNEVOC Centre, Project Manager Skills Research Initiative and Qualifications Framework Development Officer. He received a Doctorate in Education from Trinity College Dublin in 2010. He is a regular Guest Lecturer in TCD on qualitative research approaches for postgraduate students. Research interests include; academic work, employment rights, qualitative research, higher education policy, European tertiary education policy and vocational education and training.

**Dr. Andrew Loxley** is a sociologist by trade and PhD graduate from the University of Bath (1999). He has been involved in a number of small and large scale research projects both in Ireland and in the UK around social inclusion, as well as higher education policy and practice and research methodology. As an associate professor he has been in TCD since 2002 (Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning and currently Director of Research in the School). Before that, he was a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Leeds, and prior to that, a research fellow at the Open University. He has recently been involved in a number of projects looking at the changing nature of Irish higher education, in particular macro policy changes, as well as the 'lived' student experience of higher education. He is also a member of the Cultures, Academic Values and Education (CAVE) research centre in the School of Education and currently Director of the Professional Doctorate in Education. He is co-editor with other colleagues in the CAVE of *'Higher Education in Ireland: Practices, Policies and Possibilities'* published by Palgrave Macmillan in March 2014.

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## FOREWORD

In March 2010 the Higher Education Ministers of the European Higher Education Area issued the Budapest-Venue Ministerial Declaration. This statement, inter alia called for “a more supportive environment” for academic staff across the Continent of Europe”. By this important Declaration the Ministers made two statements, at least by logical implication; that a healthy and thriving system of Higher Education requires the provision of a supportive environment for the academic staff who are charged with delivering it and; that the current environment is not supportive enough.

Whilst welcoming this important recognition of the role and entitlements of academics, ETUCE, the European Region of Education International<sup>1</sup> felt that there was an obvious need to spell out in detail just precisely what European academics themselves would identify as the elements necessary to build the supportive environment which had just been given such strong political support. ETUCE therefore conducted a detailed study across nine European Countries (carefully selected for representational balance); Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and the UK. The Irish section of this massive research project was conducted by the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) and the Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI).

This report contains the details of the Irish case study findings. The report constitutes, we believe, essential reading for any person or body with an interest in Higher Education in Ireland. The report maps out the current issues, concerns and challenges of the sector, sign-posting routes for enhancing supportive work environments for academics, including researchers. If they are, in the main, predictable then all the more reason to take them extremely seriously. We see familiar themes such as lack of funding, deteriorating staff-student ratios, lack of confidence in the thrust

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<sup>1</sup>ETUCE represents 11 million members organised in 129 Teacher Unions in 45 countries.

of national policy for the sector, deteriorating working conditions, excessive workloads, and pressure to raise funds externally. Other concerns that emerged may be less familiar but are equally deeply felt and crucial for the health of the sector. These issues require even greater attention from those in positions of authority who find them novel or surprising. These include the following: teaching-related duties not adequately funded, lack of pedagogical support, lack of institutional support for research-led teaching, teaching not valued or consideration of when it comes to career progression.

Much has been written over recent years regarding the decline of collegiality and the growth of managerialism it is not surprising that lack of influence in institutional decision-making was also identified as an issue. We need to ask ourselves; do we really understand the full negative consequences of turning away from such a core value of higher education.

TUI and IFUT are proud of this body of work and are very grateful to the authors who have done a superb service to Irish Higher Education.

Mike Jennings  
General Secretary,  
Irish Federation of University Teachers.

John MacGabhann,  
General Secretary,  
Teachers' Union of Ireland.

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## **Executive Summary**

Creating a positive working environment is key to the future success of higher education across Europe. Self-direction and autonomy are positive influences in the work context (Adelmann, 1987). Those who feel supported at work will enjoy their experience, like their jobs and have high levels of job satisfaction (Taylor, 2008). The capacity to form supportive relationships at work is one of the main features of productive work environments (Gummer, 2001).

The period of continued austerity in the wider world can undermine work identity in negative ways (Armansin and Thompson, 2013). Austerity involves downsizing, changing direction and focus on budgetary cuts. In the face of such challenges, the need to focus on the creation of supportive work environments and positive work identities is urgent, particularly in the higher education context. This sector in Ireland is currently undergoing wide-ranging reforms. In order to comprehend the various aspects of the working environment, it is important to explore the ways in which individuals view themselves in their work context. This includes the variety of activities, tasks, roles, groups and memberships that individuals employ to compose a work-related self (Dutton et al., 2010). In this study, Irish academics who are trade union members identified a number of key issues that impact upon their working environment. These included decreased funding for the sector; deterioration in working conditions; the changing demands of the teaching and research roles; their lack of influence and their non-involvement in decision-making processes within their institutions.

### **Decreased funding and staffing, increased student demand**

Ireland's economic crisis had a major impact on the higher education sector. The sector as a whole experienced a 29% reduction (€385,688,801.00) from 2007 to 2014. When the funding is disaggregated per sector the cuts experienced were; IoTs 32% (-€170,719,711.00), Universities 26% (-€200,610,172.00) and Colleges 24% (-€14,358,919.00). During the same period staffing numbers in the public sector were reduced by 10% (32,000).

Staff numbers in the education sector were reduced by 4,500 in the period 2008-2013.

From a review of the enrolment data obtained from the DES (2014) there is evidence that the higher education sector has experienced steady annual growth. Between 2008 and 2014 enrolments, in the university sector experienced an increase of 14% (n=15,346) whilst the IoT sector witnessed an increase of 19% (n=16,294). Both sectors combined showed an increase of 16% (n=31,640).

Academics in this study viewed Government policy in relation to higher education and cuts to funding combined with the responses of HEIs as the major drivers in higher education. Academics were of the view that HEIs adopted a market-driven approach to generating extra income through the recruitment of extra students and research funding. Academics in this study did not have confidence in the thrust of national policy for the sector and in the agencies responsible for policy development.

#### Recommendations

- The Irish higher education sector requires significant and sustained levels of investment to meet growing student demand. This requires at a minimum restoring staff levels to the levels they were prior to the onset of the recession. Investment is also required to allow the sector compete in the global context.
- Higher education institutions should not feel pressured to generate extra income in order to deal with the funding cuts imposed by Government policies.

### **Deterioration of working conditions**

Almost three quarters of academics (72%) in this study believed that their working conditions had deteriorated. They were under pressure to teach more students and they worked longer hours. They did not feel that they had enough time to devote to their research. The lack of administrative support was referred to frequently. Many viewed administrative work as being unproductive and time consuming.

## Recommendations

- More investment is required to accommodate the greater numbers of students entering higher education.
- Provide adequate supports so that academics can achieve a work life balance.
- Provide administrative supports that will help individual academics directly with their work.
- Develop workload models that are appropriate to the nature and structure of academic work.

## **The teaching role**

Academics in this study were of the view that teaching-related activities were not adequately funded in their institutions. Over half of respondents (55%) did not consider that management in their institutions supported the teaching aspects of their role. Almost three quarters (73%) of academics in this study indicated that student diversity had increased since they had started working. They identified a number of challenges that this context presented. Students were now coming to higher education not having basic skills, particularly writing skills. It was also noted that students presented with a greater variety of needs, which in turn increased the pastoral aspect of academics' work.

Over a third (39%) of academics expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of pedagogical support to which they had access. Over half of academics (54%) were of the view that their higher education institution did not support research led teaching. Some academics did not have enough time to research new developments in their subjects due to the pressures of current workloads. The trend towards research only and teaching only contracts was viewed as a further challenge to the promotion of research led teaching. It also emerged that for many teaching was not valued by the institution when it came to career progression. Over a quarter (25%) of academics indicated that they were not encouraged to improve their instructional skills in response to teaching evaluations. The perception was that HEIs viewed the evaluation of teaching as a bureaucratic exercise.

## Recommendations

- There is a need for more investment in activities that support the teaching function and provide academics with high quality pedagogical support that focuses directly on their practice.
- Specialised training should be made available to academics so that they can deal with students who are presenting with diverse needs.
- All higher education institutions should make specific and public commitments to the teaching role of academics.
- All higher education institutions should support research led teaching.
- Higher education institutions should recognise teaching as a legitimate career progression route.
- Higher education institutions should prioritise the evaluation of teaching. Such evaluations should facilitate academics in the improvement of their pedagogical activities.

## Research

A quarter of respondents (25%) did not feel adequately supported by their institutions to attend national and international conferences. Over half of respondents (53%) indicated that there was increased institutional pressure to raise external research funding since the time of their appointment. Academics had a number of choices when it came to conducting research, pursue personal interests, engage in research that secured funding and work in multidisciplinary teams. It was recognised that each choice had implications for career progression as institutions tended to support research initiatives that aligned with national priorities and that secured funding. Over two thirds (67%) of respondents considered the availability of research funding to be inadequate. This lack of funding has resulted in academics vying for grants making it a pressured experience. Research areas which are not funded tend to be neglected, thus having a negative impact on knowledge generation and on the careers of academics who work in those less popular areas. Over half (55%) of academics in the study agreed that publications and citations influenced career progression. Citations are important for institutional international rankings and securing research funding. The growing pressure to publish in high profile journals has meant that academics must conform to publication criteria and interests.

## Recommendations

- Higher education institutions should provide more support to academics attending conferences by way of timetable organisation and funding.
- Higher education institutions should have policy and procedures to facilitate academics time to engage in research activities.
- Higher education institutions should avoid reliance on research funding to support other essential activities.
- All academics should be provided with appropriate supports to support their research including publishing activities.

## **Level of Influence**

Over three quarters (76%) of academics felt that they were influential at departmental level. Over half (56%) of academics felt that they were influential at faculty level. Over two thirds (68%) felt that they were not influential in the wider institutional context. Almost three quarters (73%) of the academics in this study were of the view that a top-down approach predominated in their institution. Over two thirds of academics (67%) in this study viewed the communication processes in their institutions as being inadequate. Over half (59%) of academics did not regard senior management in their institutions as providing competent leadership. Over two thirds (64%) of academics in this study experienced a lack of collegiality. Over two thirds (64%) did not view themselves as participants in decision making processes. Over two fifths of participants (45%) did not view trade unions as recognised partners in the decision-making processes within higher education institutions. Over two thirds (68%) of academics viewed institutional managers as the main decision makers with reference to budgets and promotions.

## Recommendations

- Higher education institutions should create opportunities for academics to become meaningfully engaged at all levels of the institution.
- Higher education institutions need to develop meaningful communication systems that are not focused only on information transmission.
- Higher education institutions should promote a culture of academic collegiality supported by policies and procedures regarding consultation and decision making.

## **CHAPTER I: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Within Europe demand for access to tertiary education has increased significantly. According to Eurostat<sup>2</sup> (2014), there were 20,088,600 students enrolled in tertiary education and training programmes in 2012, representing a 15% increase since 2002. By disaggregating the data for Ireland, there is evidence of an 8% increase in demand from 2002 (176,300) to 2012 (192,600). This increased level of demand for access to tertiary<sup>3</sup> education and training has raised policy issues relating to capacity, funding, structures, quality, management, performance and organisation of work. The economics of public funded higher education were brought into sharp focus during the financial crisis of 2008-2010. Those countries most affected by the financial crisis were forced to initiate austerity measures. These measures, which emphasised a 'more for less' approach, directed higher education systems to increase productivity to meet the expanding demand needs whilst simultaneously reducing funding. The austerity discourse has increased the pressure on the higher education systems, particularly the academic workforce, resulting in increased workloads across the areas of teaching, research and administration. It is arguable that the austerity discourse has quickened the move away from the agency of the individual academic professional and accorded primacy to organisational goals over and above individual intellectual interests.

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<sup>2</sup>Eurostat originated from a requirement to analysis trade agreements in Europe from 1953. Now Eurostat is part of the EU Commission for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility. Eurostat gathers and supplies statistics on identified indicators within the European communities.

<sup>3</sup>The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) provides a framework for comparative statistical analysis of education systems. Eurostat adopted ISCED framework in 1997. The framework contains seven levels (0-6) ranging from pre-primary, primary, secondary and post-secondary. The framework classifies tertiary education as post-secondary which includes level 5 (includes degrees) and level 6 (doctorate/PhD) these levels include both vocational and academic fields.

Empirical studies indicate that managerialism<sup>4</sup> has neither been wholeheartedly rejected nor accepted by academics, but rather has been received in a more fluid and haphazard way. It has also been acknowledged that there are variations in how managerialism has rolled-out in terms of its timing, pace, and extent, in different social locations. Even within the same country, cultural variations may be observed across universities, individual departments, and in the attitudes of individual faculties. It has also been noted in the literature that ‘within variance’ may be greater than ‘between variance’, that is, those working in the same country or institution may construct and experience managerialism differently from one another than do those across countries.

This study explored the impact of the current change agenda on the creation and maintenance of supportive working environments for academics in Irish higher education. The research focused on such areas as academic autonomy, the division of labour, management practices, their experiences of change, the locus of control within their organisations in relation to decision making processes and career trajectories. The first chapter explores academic working environments, focusing on academic professions, identity, career formation, gender, roles and duties. The implications for fostering a supportive working environment for academics are considered. In chapter two the focus is on the Irish higher education system. The legislative framework of the binary system is analysed with reference to the university acts and the institutes of technology acts. Current policy issues are considered, with particular reference to the impact of the economic recession. The emergent challenges and concerns relating to higher education are examined. The findings from the survey are presented in chapter three and chapter four presents the findings from the interviews.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

This research is part of a broader European study commissioned by Education International to investigate the working environments of academics in eight European countries: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy,

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<sup>4</sup>The new public management doctrine emerged from the neo-liberal ideology of the 1980-90s. Within higher education new managerialism is associated with strong central control, private sector practices, drive for efficiencies, external accountability measures, monitoring procedures and establishment of standards.

Latvia, Portugal, Serbia, Romania and the UK. Education International is a federation of 401 associations and unions in 171 countries and territories. It represents 30 million educators and support professionals who work in education institutions that include early childhood settings, primary and post-primary education, further education and university. The Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) and the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) conducted the research for the Irish case study.

In conducting any international study there are many challenges. Higher education systems are different across Europe and the language issue is also problematic (Fumasoli, et al., 2015). These difficulties were addressed through a series of meetings between the researchers in each country. The meetings focused on conceptual themes and developing shared understandings around language and differences across systems. A mixed methods approach was employed in this study utilising both a survey instrument and semi-structured interviews to explore participants' experience of their everyday working reality. Whilst the survey provided substantial numerical data, the interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of views and opinions. The study employed a modified version of a survey instrument used in a study entitled *The Academic Profession in Europe: Responses to Societal Challenges* (EUROAC<sup>5</sup>), which was funded by the European Science Foundation in 2008 in the thematic area of Higher Education and Social Change in Europe (Euro HESC). The findings from that study were published in *The work situation of the academic profession in Europe: findings of a survey in 12 countries* (Teichler and Höhle, 2013). The decision to use an existing survey instrument was informed by its validity and robustness and it covered many of the topics relevant to this study.

### **1.3 Survey instrument for Irish case study**

For the Irish case study the questionnaire was modified to suit an online survey format, which allowed for distribution by means of email addresses. The survey tool consisted of a letter which contained the URL link<sup>6</sup> to the survey. The letter provided information relating to the survey, process, purpose, and procedures. In addition, participants were guaranteed

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<sup>5</sup>EUROAC was a collaborative research project (2009-2012) which explored the academic profession, career, changing working practices and organisation of work. The project was funded by the European Science Foundation.

<sup>6</sup>For this research the online survey software programme utilised was Survey Monkey.

anonymity, the tracking setting was not enabled. The letter also notified participants in advance of the length of the survey (45 items of which 5 contained multiple questions 7-15) and the expected time for completion (20 minutes). The survey tool was piloted with 10 participants from both the university and institute of technology sector in December 2013. The online survey tool was distributed in January to February 2014 to academic staff who were members of either IFUT or the TUI. The distribution consisted of three email circulations; first invitation to participate and then two subsequent reminders 10 working days apart. The research team responded to comments from participants as they emerged. In total 17 queries were responded to, most were of a technical nature to do with accessing the survey instrument.

The total number of participants who responded to the survey within the timeframe was n=1,187. Responses from academic staff who were a member of either union (TUI and IFUT) were broadly proportionate to membership sizes. With a combined membership of academic and research staff of 5,781 (TUI n=3,881 and IFUT n=1,900), the overall response rate was 20%. This is a reasonable response rate for an online survey. Nulty (2005) notes that response rates for online surveys of samples size over n=2,000 can range from 1% (liberal condition) to 25% (stringent condition). The response rate per union was; TUI 18% (n=718) and IFUT 17% (n=330). The data was not weighted.

The gender breakdown of survey respondents was (n=498) males and (n=407) females. A further 282 people did not answer the gender question. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the ages of the participants cross-tabulated by gender. Slightly less than half (48%) of respondents described themselves as aged between 41 and 50 years of age, with over a quarter (28%) aged between 51 and 60 years. One fifth (20%) of respondents were below the age of 40 years. There was proportionally little difference between males and females in any of the age groups. Slightly more females (5%) had higher representation in the younger groups (below the age of 35) compared to males (3%). There was a higher proportion of males (11%) in the 56 to 65 year age groups compared to females (5%).

**Table I**  
**Age and Gender**

Age	Male	Female	Total (% n)
26-30	1	1	1 (11)
31-35	2	4	7 (60)
36-40	7	5	12 (105)
41-45	13	12	25 (225)
46-50	12	10	22 (200)
51-55	10	7	17 (152)
56-60	8	3	11 (100)
61-65	3	2	5 (43)
Over 65	0	0	0
Total	56	44	100 (896)

#### **1.4 Semi-structured interviews**

The interviews explored academic autonomy, the division of labour, management practices, their experiences of change, and the locus of control within their organisations, decision-making processes and career trajectories. The interviews were conducted using an interview schedule, which consisted of a standardised instrument of guided questions and prompts. The interviewing process commenced with a pilot interview. The selected participants were emailed prior to the interview in order to introduce the research formally, provide contact information, articulate the intent of the study, request participation and identify the anticipated data that the participants would be expected to provide. Assurances of confidentiality, anonymity and data protection were also given.

Sixteen interviews were conducted with academic and research staff who were members of each of the trade unions, a purposeful sampling technique was utilised. Nine participants came from the IoT sector, six came from the university sector and one came from the colleges of education. The sample achieved a good balance between male/female academics, universities/institutes of technology sectors and senior/junior staff. There

was a wide geographical spread and interviewees were from all fields in Irish HEIs. Participants included full-time and tenured academics and full-time / part-time, contracted, non-tenured academics, who were members of either of the trade unions.

The interview sample group participants held permanent whole time positions. Their employment duration in the higher education sector ranged from 5 years to 38 years. The sample group employment grade category is presented in Table 2. Three broad grade categories were employed to capture the different grade distinctions between the sectors; (1) Lecturer, career grade academic which includes Assistant Lecturers (IoT sector) and Associated Lecturers (university sector), (2) Manager, management grade academic post such as Head of Department, (3) Senior Manager, management grade academic post such as Head of School. The sample comprised of 56% from the Lecturer category and 44% from the manager categories.

**Table 2**  
**Interview, sample group employment grade and gender**

<b>Sector/ Grade</b>	<b>Lecturer</b>		<b>Manager</b>		<b>Senior Manager</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	
University	1	3	1	1	0	0	6
Colleges	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
IoT	1	3	1	1	1	2	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>

The gender composition of the interview sample was female (69%) and male (31%). The breakdown of participants per sector was university (6); IoT sector (9) and colleges (1). Table 3 presents the data.

**Table 3**  
**Interviews, participants by sector and gender**

Sector	Male	Female	%
University	2	4	38
IoT	3	6	56
College	0	1	6
Total	5	11	100

The interviews were digitally recorded to ensure accuracy and later transcribed verbatim. The qualitative data pertaining to the participants' interviews was thematically categorised using qualitative data software<sup>7</sup>, and a system of open coding was adopted. One of the strengths of using software for data coding and analysis is the instant 'audit trail' it provides through a combination of 'sources' and 'references' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The software package permits researchers to use graphic models to represent relationships between data and themes, allowing for a more rigorous analysis of the collected data. Each transcript was then coded as a case node, the code included three factors; gender, sector and grade and a numerical value. The main thematic areas were major influences on the academic work context; the dimensions of the academic role; teaching, research and changes in the working environment. A further round of sub-coding was conducted within each thematic node. An interpretative process was utilised to analyse the thematic nodes and construct meaning from the data. From within each coded thematic node, sample text extracts were clustered to provide a broad range of participants' descriptions and views.

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<sup>7</sup>For the qualitative component of this research project the software programme used in was NVivo (Version 8)

## **CHAPTER 2: EXPLORING ACADEMIC WORKING ENVIRONMENTS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the concept of academic identity and work, the nature of working environments in higher education and the literature that examines the issue of supportive working environments in an international context.

### **2.2 Academic identity and work**

Academic identity generally relates to teaching and research activities that are subject or discipline based (Deem, 2006). While the academic department (or a sub-unit of it) is usually the main one for academic staff, faculty members also operate within research, curriculum development or teaching programme teams (Trowler and Knight, 2000). Discipline-based cultures are the primary source of faculty members' identity and expertise and include assumptions about what is to be known and how, tasks to be performed, standards for effective performance, patterns of publication, professional interaction, and social and political status (Becher, 1989). Each discipline has its own concept of success as a vehicle for prestige. Despite these differences, the academic profession possesses a set of common values across disciplinary and institutional boundaries, such as "academic freedom, the community of scholars, scrutiny of accepted wisdom, truth seeking, collegial governance, individual autonomy, and service to society through the production of knowledge, the transmission of culture, and education of the young" (Kuh and Whitt, 1986). In the same vein, reward structures in the academic profession across disciplines are based on prestige and symbolic recognitions such as publications and awards. Faculty members learn the academic culture according to their discipline and specific department through a socialisation process (Mendoza, 2007). However, changes in higher education have added a further complexity to identity formation within higher education.

Academic work is the subject of substantial structural pressures. Kenny (2010) argues that academic work is located in the social context:

Academic work as an activity can be physical, cognitive and social, focusing on inquiry, scholarship and teaching, in order to further human knowledge and understanding which can contribute towards social and economic well-being. This type of work is located in the social, political and cultural traditions of society, HEI, academic disciplines and the identity of the academic worker. While the organisation of academic work is subject to localised structures, practices and monetary exchange value, it is, however, emancipated by academic autonomy and academic freedom (2010: 96).

This perspective suggests that academic work is not confined to observable action or, indeed, observable outcomes. The principal activity of academic work is directed towards gaining knowledge, insights and understandings, the appreciation of ideas, things and human society. The academic worker then shares this learning, expertise and skills with peers, students and others. This process can have either a direct or indirect influence on developing individual or collective social or economic 'well-being' (Putman, 1998). As academic work is a social construct, it is subject to the social context, which includes the state, the region, social institutions and relevant laws and policies. The organisation of academic work is subject to localised considerations such as the contract of employment, employment legislation, and the organisational structures and policies of the higher education institution. Finally, academic work is remunerated on the basis of national or, sometimes, localised exchange value agreements which set the salary levels for the type of academic work that is being undertaken.

The emerging international policy context has become more restrictive with reference to academic autonomy (Wassler, 1999). Academics are encouraged to engage with the external environment and adopt market strategies (industry, business and commercial interests) in order to stimulate innovation, entrepreneurialism and economic activities. This trend can be observed in the OECD Review of Tertiary Education (2008) where it was

suggested that there was a need for policy makers to restructure tertiary education to make it more relevant to the labour market. It also recommended the introduction of quality systems similar to industry, the development of performance measures relating to work and pay and increased external evaluation of tertiary education institutions. This view confines the academic worker to the instrumental policy of the state and agency is not based on freedom but, rather, on measurable, goal-directed action. This type of directional approach locates the power of autonomy and academic freedom within the state, which directs higher education institutions.

Altbach (1999) argued that the emergence of a more casual academic work force, increased class sizes and additional teaching workloads were having an adverse impact on the tenure system, the traditional principle of academic freedom and the development of the academic professional in general. He expressed concerns about the long-term threat that the casualisation<sup>8</sup> process would pose to the future development of the traditional academic duties of research and scholarship. He viewed this approach as not being conducive to long-term capacity building, knowledge generation and the development of the academic disciplines. Becher and Trowler (2001) labelled the new part-time academics as ‘gypsy scholars’ where academic workers had to work part-time in several HEIs to make a living. In the emergence of a post-fordist employment system for academic workers, the characteristics are: fewer permanent or tenured jobs, greater diversity of work-related tasks, a variety of employment contract types and a demand from management for greater flexibility. They argued that such changes in the academic labour process would lead to the intensification of work, the degradation of working conditions, increased bureaucracy and a power shift from academics to manager-administrators. Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) suggested that the main pressures on American faculty to change were: a general focus on cost reduction and expansion of faculty duties, in essence ‘imperatives for faculty to do more’. Bousquet (2008) claimed that in the USA there has been a substantial increase in the

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<sup>8</sup>The casualisation process refers to the expanding utilisation by higher education institutions of precarious employment contracts (including, hourly paid, part-time, fixed-term, zero hour) and the reduction of permanent whole-time positions this includes tenured posts.

employment of graduates who were still studying (such as PhD students) to teach undergraduates.

### **2.3 Working environments**

Work is a major role in life (Loscocco and Spitze, 1990). The terms ‘working environment’ and ‘working conditions’ are used interchangeably and little agreement exists about specific definitions (Taylor, 2008). The working environment suggests a broad area, which encompasses professional and personal dimensions. The work environment generally can be described as the place, conditions and surrounding influences in which people carry out an activity. Studies have shown quite consistently that excessive workload and ambiguous or conflicting role demands can lead to negative work experiences. Self-direction and autonomy have a positive influence in the work context (Adelmann, 1987). Those who feel supported at work will enjoy their experience, like their jobs, make friends in the work context and will have high levels of job satisfaction (Taylor, 2008). The capacity to form supportive relationships at work is one of the main features of productive work environments (Gummer, 2001).

The period of continued austerity in the wider world can undermine work identity in negative ways (Armansin and Thompson, 2013). Austerity involves downsizing, changing direction and focus and budgetary cuts. In the face of such challenges, the need to focus on the creation of supportive work environments and positive work identities is urgent, particularly in the higher education context. Across Europe the sector has undergone wide-ranging reforms and has been identified as a central element of economic policy. This has resulted in the corporatisation of the sector with a focus on managerialist approaches to measuring outputs. This has created a challenging environment. A focus on positive working environments is essential in this context and the framework of positive organisational scholarship, positive work identity and social integration theory facilitates greater understandings about this area.

### **2.4 Positive work identities: some theoretical perspectives**

Positive organisational scholarship marks a shift from describing the negative aspects of organisational conditions to exploring the contexts that enable workers to develop positive identities (Armansin and Thompson,

2013). Studies exploring job satisfaction in the workplace have tended to focus on the negative aspects of the work context. Less attention has been paid to the positive identities that work has for people (Armansin and Thompson, 2013). This approach to organisational theory explores areas such as networks, routines and relationships. It examines the organisational aspects that contribute to individual potential and positive approaches to human and organisational welfare (Armansin and Thompson, 2013).

In order to understand how to create positive working environments, it is important to explore the ways in which individuals view themselves in their work context. This includes the variety of activities, tasks, roles, groups and memberships that individuals employ to compose a work-related self (Dutton et al., 2010). It is generally agreed in the literature that employees in organisations want to possess positive identities. A positive work identity is key to adjusting to organisations where such identity is valued both privately and publicly (Pratt, 2000). It is also an important factor in organisational change (Rao, Monin and Durand, 2003). When people possess positive work identities this results in favourable outcomes for organisations (Caza and Bajozzi, 2009).

A key element to building positive work identity in the workplace is having access to social resources. This is understood as the number, variety and quality of relationships that an individual experiences at work (Dutton et al., 2010). The creation of social resources is essential for greater job involvement (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008); and improved performance in inter-dependent work contexts (Gittell, 2003). Having a variety of social resources impacts on individuals' networks for career progression (Burt, 1992). In contexts where employees are generous, they earn more trust and respect from their colleagues (Flynn, 2003). Trust and respect are significant characteristics of positive relationships at work (Dutton et al., 2010). It has been found that those who engage in self-affirming practices are more open to seeing viewpoints that are different to their own, resulting in a willingness to compromise. The affirmation of an employee's identity by others results in higher levels of connectedness on the part of the employee to the organisation (Swann et al., 2000). These aspects are central to understanding the development of academic identity in higher education institutions.

## **2.5 Professional socialisation in the academic working environment**

Weidman et al. (2001: 4) defined socialisation as “the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society”. They argue that throughout the socialisation process, graduate students acquire necessary information by way of communication strategies to aid in their transition to an academic profession.

Organisational socialisation has received substantial research attention as a means of understanding how organisational newcomers come to identify and understand the norms and expectations of their new environment and future profession (Austin and McDaniels, 2006). Tierney and Rhoads defined organisational socialisation as a “ritualised process that involves the transmission of culture” (1993: 21) through a mutually adaptive process between the organisation and individuals. In Tierney and Rhoads’ framework, faculty socialisation consists of two stages: anticipatory and organisational. Anticipatory socialisation occurs during graduate school, where individuals learn attitudes, actions, and values about the faculty group in their discipline and the profession at large. During anticipatory socialisation:

as young scholars work with professors, they observe and internalise the norms of behavior for research as well as supporting mechanisms such as peer review and academic freedom (Sweitzer 2009: 4).

The organisational stage occurs as faculty members embark on their academic careers and build upon the anticipatory socialisation. During the organisational stage, faculty face extraordinary challenges to gain membership into the profession. However, this stage is usually framed by the experiences during anticipatory socialisation, because individuals learn during their training what it means to be a member of an organisation (Sweitzer, 2009). This learning process might be at odds with what the individual ultimately finds at the chosen institution. Thus, the organisational socialisation stage might reaffirm what a new faculty member learned during anticipatory socialisation if his or her graduate school setting held similar cultures and structures; otherwise, the entering organisation will try to modify the new faculty member’s qualities (Tierney

and Rhoads, 1993). It should also be remembered that individuals bring a multitude of experiences to work and academic contexts that are likely to influence the ways they make sense of socialisation experiences (Trice, 1993). Their development is also linked to their access to both professional and social networks.

## **2.6 Networks and the academic working environment**

Research has shown that individuals' networks influence career outcomes including job satisfaction and attainment (Podolny and Barron, 1997), promotion and advancement (Burt, 1992), and overall career success (Sweitzer, 2009). Social network scholars have argued that an individual's social networks may serve as identity construction mechanisms (Ibarra, Kilduff and Tsai, 2005).

Operating under the assumption that individuals construct their identities through their developmental networks, Dobrow and Higgins (2005) studied the extent to which individuals' developmental relationships enhanced the clarity of their professional identity. They employed two developmental network characteristics: high and low developmental network range (social relationships from multiple contexts or from a single context) and density (access to redundant or non-redundant sources of information). Their research suggested that as developmental network density increased (i.e. less access to non-redundant sources of information), the clarity of one's professional identity decreased (Sweitzer, 2009). However, the authors noted that more longitudinal research is needed that examines the content and help-giving interactions of relationships and why and how developmental networks change over time (Sweitzer, 2009).

Resources that individuals invoke from networks of weak ties are forms of social capital important to success in professional labour markets. Such ties can provide information regarding perceptions of job candidates' social skills, personality, and ability to fit in with colleagues (Lin, 1999). The use of informal methods to gain professional employment signals access to influential networks that can be beneficial to subsequent career success, including mobility opportunities (Burt, 1992).

While an individual may be new to a particular organisation, that person may not be new to a given field or to being a professional (Wulff, Austin,

Nyquist and Sprague, 2004). The expectations of the faculty career are changing in many fields and across institutional types. Pressures for promotion and tenure such as publications in top academic journals, procurement of external funding, and earning a reputation for being the best among one's peers are becoming overwhelming (Sweitzer, 2009). Gender differences are also important in relation to access to networks. Professional networks have remained highly gendered, with women experiencing greater difficulty than their male colleagues in establishing and maintaining high-level network ties (Rogers, 2000).

## **2.7 Gender and the academic working environment**

Geographic mobility is of paramount importance in many professional labour markets, especially in academia. Some argue that geographic mobility among academics signals commitment to career over personal life (Kauffman and Perry 1989). On average, academic women are more likely than academic men to place geographic limits on their careers, suggesting an indirect nature of the negative effect of geographic constraints on women's versus men's career mobility. Family responsibility or husbands' careers could constrain the geographic mobility of married academic women (Bielby and Bielby, 1992), and unmarried women may be geographically constrained relative to men as well, preferring to stay in a particular location because of family or social ties (Rosenfeld and Jones, 1987).

It has been argued that the norms which are assumed to operate in academia suggest that promotion and mobility opportunities should accumulate more quickly for the most productive workers in terms of contribution to the discipline's body of knowledge, one of the most important measures being research productivity (Long, Allison and McGinnis, 1993). Although the gap appears to be closing, women have tended to publish less than their male colleagues (Zuckerman, 1987).

Part of this publication gap, Branch (2003) suggests, could be due to women's heavier domestic responsibilities; to job segregation that disproportionately places women in jobs such as skills-related teaching, with high teaching demand but fewer publishable topics; to more time spent by women than men on class preparation; and/or to female teachers' greater service-related labour for schools, including service on committees as well

as in their capacity as unofficial counsellors to students (Apel, 1997). It is also possible that although female academics produce fewer articles, these articles are published in higher-status journals than those of male academics (Sonnert, 1995). While many factors impact upon gendered patterns of identity within academia, age and length of service also contribute to issues of professional identity in higher education.

## **2.8 Mid-life career academics and the academic working environment**

Baldwin et al. (2005) suggest that mid-career is the longest and, in most cases, the most productive phase of academic life; it covers as much as 15 to 25 years of one's professional career. During this period, most faculty teach a majority of their students, produce the bulk of their scholarship and publications, and serve their institution, disciplines, and society in a variety of expert and leadership roles. Furthermore, faculty in the middle years represents the largest segment of the academic profession. They argue that for these reasons alone, mid-career deserves the interest and attention of academic leaders, policymakers, and higher education researchers (Baldwin et al., 2005). Issues of definition bedevil the mid-career phase of academic life. There are several ways to distinguish faculty in the middle of their career from their colleagues. Levinson (1986) tentatively segments middle adulthood into the years between 40 and 65 with distinctive sub-stages and developmental tasks falling within this lengthy period. Cytnbaum and Crites (1982) define mid-life faculty as "men and women in their late 30s to mid- or late- 50s who are consciously or unconsciously confronting midlife tasks", such as revising career goals, seeking balance between personal and professional life. A second way to look at "faculty in the middle" is to separate faculty by total years of teaching in higher education. Williams and Fox (1995) report that another way to define mid-career is based on duration in an occupation. Mid-career is a variable phenomenon that arrives once a person advances beyond novice status and becomes a full-fledged member of his or her profession and institution (Hall, 1986). Mid-career continues until disengagement begins in anticipation of retirement or a major career transition. Most faculty need several years in the occupation to advance beyond novice status and become established professionals.

Baldwin et al (2005) suggest that today's mid-career faculty are living through a period of unprecedented change in higher education. Greater

student diversity, new educational applications of technology, for-profit education competitors and increased use of part-time and term-contract appointments are some of the developments transforming faculty work and careers. In this change context, it is important to know how the large middle component of the academic profession is adapting to changed work demands and performance expectations while, simultaneously, they are serving critical instructional, leadership, administrative, and mentoring roles within their programmes and institutions. Baldwin et al (2005) suggest that teaching and administration begin to take larger portions of faculty time while time devoted to research, service, and professional development decreases, supporting the view that faculty work during mid-life and beyond has a perceptibly different character than the work distribution of early-life faculty. The authors found in their study the percentage of time faculty devoted to administration was highest in the middle years with lower levels of faculty engagement from the middle years onward in key roles and activities such as research, service, and professional development. This may result as faculty move into career maintenance or a career plateau where habitual patterns take hold and less new professional ground is broken. This is an area that requires more in-depth research and analysis.

While some forms of productivity (e.g., articles and presentations) peak in the early or middle years of faculty life, books and book chapters increase in a linear pattern across the career. It is logical that forms of scholarly productivity requiring longer gestation periods would be somewhat more common during the middle and later years of the faculty career. The findings from the Baldwin et al. (2005) study reveal that some forms of scholarly productivity (e.g., articles, presentations) follow a downward pattern from some point in the middle of the academic life cycle.

Baldwin et al (2005) sought to measure levels of dissatisfaction by years at the institution. They found that a downward linear pattern of dissatisfaction emerged. When they employed life stage and total years of teaching as the metrics, early mid-life and mid-career faculty exhibited slightly higher levels of dissatisfaction on several key variables than did their peers at other points in faculty life. They concluded that the added administrative burdens common among mid-life and mid-career faculty may account for some of their dissatisfaction. The process of life and

career re-examination that frequently characterises the mid-life and mid-career periods may also contribute to the somewhat elevated dissatisfaction identified (Baldwin et al., 2005). To understand the overlooked middle years of academic life, scholars need to design research focusing specifically on faculty in the middle years (Baldwin et al., 2005). Equally important to this discussion is the fact that higher education is now populated by many different types of professionals, which poses a number of challenges to understanding the complexity of identity within higher education.

## **2.9 Mixed identities in the academic work place**

McInnis (2006) suggests that an issue of major concern within higher education is the nature of the relationships between academics and administrators, which can generate difficulties for both sides. Many academics expressed dissatisfaction with administrative burdens, which have increased their workload (McInnis, 2006). It has been argued that changes in the higher education system have produced more administrative jobs, but fewer administrators at the departmental level are available to do this work (Cheng, 2010).

Traditionally, activity in higher education institutions has been viewed in binary terms: of an academic domain, and an administrative or management domain that supports this. While some academic staff retain a balanced teaching and research portfolio, others focus on one or the other (Whitchurch, 2008). Although there has begun to be recognition in the literature of movements within and across academic and management domains (Rhoades and Sporn, 2002; Gornitzka and Larsen, 2004; Gornitzka, Kyvik and Stensaker, 2005), little empirical work on cross-overs has been conducted (Whitchurch, 2008). While considerable attention has been paid to the implications of a changing environment for academic identities (Henkel, 2000), there has been less recognition of the impact on professional staff or on the emergence of increasingly mixed identities (Whitchurch, 2008; Deem, 2006). New forms of blended professionals are emerging, with mixed backgrounds and portfolios, dedicated to progressing activity comprising elements of both professional and academic domains. Professional staff who work across and beyond boundaries are re-defining the nature of their work (Whitchurch, 2008) and also contributing to changes in working patterns in higher education (Whitchurch, 2009).

## **2.10 Participation in decision-making processes**

The active participation of academics in the decision-making processes of higher education institutions is central to their success. Many issues of importance are decided that impact upon the working lives of academics with reference to academic policies; personnel policies; disciplinary procedures and university statutes. Governance is important to the life of academics and to the higher institutions. Participation should facilitate getting to know the diversity of people, programmes and values across the institution. Yet, a number of international studies suggest that academics do not feel part of the decision-making processes. There are a number of reasons advanced as to why management processes are removed from academic staff. Shattock (2013) has summarised these to include the impact of external pressures, financial, erosion of autonomy, greater emphasis on accountability and autonomy and competition between institutions as expressed in ranking systems. He argues that a combination of these factors has reinforced centralised decision-making. Changes in funding arrangements, he acknowledges, requires detailed analysis in smaller executive bodies by people with expertise in the area. This is a challenge to retaining staff involvement on a wider level. Increased staff-student ratios and the dispersal of campuses across different locations and cultural regions have contributed to less involvement by academics in the decision-making processes. The introduction of modular teaching, the restructuring of academic units, mergers of different departments, school and faculties have also contributed to the distance that has emerged between what Shattock (2013) describes as staff at the periphery and staff at the centre of the institution. This distance is also evident in debates surrounding the decline of collegiality.

Park (2013) suggests that collective decision-making and self-governance by scholars (governance by committee) have been features of the European university. However, the collective decision-making in the traditional chair system of university governance included only a few members, as not all academics were equally involved. The extent to which managerialist ideology has superseded collegiality is debatable (Hyde et al., 2012). Research suggests that managerialism has neither been wholeheartedly rejected nor accepted by academics. There are variations in how managerialism has rolled-out in terms of its timing, pace, and extent in different social locations (Hyde, 2012). Even within the same country,

cultural variations may be observed across universities, individual departments and in the attitudes of individual faculty.

## **2.11 The Academic Profession: a European perspective**

Existing research suggests that staff in academic institutions face many challenges within their working environment (Teichler and Höhle 2013). The academic profession across Europe is under pressure and is working under considerable strain (Kwiek and Antonowicz, 2013). Academics work beyond routine hours, but they are relatively satisfied and consider their working conditions good or acceptable (Kwiek and Antonowicz, 2013). There are considerable differences in the work situation of seniors and juniors in the university sector. Female academics find it difficult to secure permanent employment and are less likely to be involved in national/international scientific committees, boards or bodies (Kwiek and Antonowicz, 2013).

### ***2.11.1 Teaching and the academic work environment***

Teaching has become more diverse and includes embracing teaching technologies and arranging student placements as aspects of that role (Hyde et al., 2012). There is greater student heterogeneity and this has implications for teaching, and cultural engagement (Freudenberg and Samarkovski, 2014). Lecturers believe that the student's approach to their university education is instrumental and have expressed disappointment that present-day students seemed uninterested in their chosen degree subject and require more instruction and guidance. For some lecturers, this devalues the teaching experience (Rolfe, 2002). Change in pedagogy is an area where academics require continued support.

New approaches and expectations within teaching are time-consuming and, without support, academics find this challenging. The associated tasks with continuous assessment, small group teaching and the development of new programmes are challenging for many academics. These changes are often introduced by university management where clear rationale for change is either communicated badly or not at all (Clarke et al., 2015). This creates difficulties within academic work environments. For many academics, dealing with diverse student populations is challenging. This is particularly the case where they are expected to teach students in the one setting in which these participants are pursuing different qualifications and

courses. The institutional emphasis on teaching performance linked to evaluation and quality outcomes makes it difficult for academics who require continuous support in these areas (Clarke et al., 2015).

### ***2.11.2 Research and the academic work environment***

The research role has changed from being closely associated to the researcher. Research groups, temporary grant-funded research centres, clusters and alliances now dominate the discourse (Mittelstrass, 2010). Academics are expected to be research active and publish that research in journal articles (Murray and Cunningham, 2011). However, there are only a certain number of journals and there is a limited amount of research funding. The pressure to publish (Wellington and Torgerson, 2005) has been accentuated in a context where securing research funding is dependent on research publications (Murphy, 1998). The high status perception of research is a common theme across the literature. Promotion to posts requires not just evidence of academic writing, but also the capacity to lead research teams and organise the activities of others (Hyde et al., 2012). Securing research funding is regarded as a key component of the academic role.

The academic profession is faced with various challenges that potentially impact upon autonomy and academic freedom as well as on types of research undertaken. Academics are now required to be accountable and make explicit their research work, including how it is funded, conducted and disseminated (Drennan et al, 2013). It also emerged that academics are of the view that the quality of research is being threatened due to the pressure to increase research productivity and to produce useful results.

Many higher education institutions have reorganised their own structures in order to actively pursue a research orientation. In some cases, universities resemble industrial parks with a range of companies. Those academics, employed primarily to teach, find it very difficult to get the time to engage in research. The importance of external funding, the development of relationships with private industry, the constant requirement to secure funding streams, the short-term nature of such funding and the lack of institutional support all contribute to the challenges that exist in the working environment that academics experience (Clarke et al., 2015).

External funding is considered critical to higher education institutions due to the persistent cuts in public funding. The greatest challenge experienced by academics is to raise external funds and this is perceived to have increased since their first period of appointment (Drennan et al., 2013). Academics feel pressured in their work environments to access funding streams frequently. Much of the funding is short-term and this in turn impacts negatively on the quality of the research. Support structures for academics at institutional level are often inadequate in relation to securing research funding (Clarke et al., 2015). Academics spend as much time on the administrative side of research funding than engaging in the research itself due to the lack of support. For academics working in institutions where teaching is the main activity, the challenges now presented in the context of engaging in research are numerous due to lack of time, lack of ethos and lack of mentoring support in the area (Clarke et al., 2015).

### ***2.11.3 Administration and the academic work environment***

Academics are required to take on more administrative roles, even though their teaching and research loads are not reduced (Clarke et al., 2015). The nature of the relationship between academics and Higher Education Professionals (HEPROS) is a new dimension within the academic working environment. Many HEPROS hired from outside the university do not have recognised career structures within the university and do not understand the role or the work of academics (Clarke et al., 2015). This often results in poor communication and adds to challenges in the academic working environment.

### ***2.11.4 Networking and the academic work environment***

Networking and collaboration is identified as being an important element of the academic role. This includes participating in international networks and engaging in collaborative research activity, which is often outside the academic's subject specialism (Clarke et al., 2015). This requires new ways of working and the development of new skills and competencies to cope with the diverse roles performed. The acquisition of new skills and competencies is very important in current working environments. Many academics consider that they need to be administrators, human resources and finance experts.

### ***2.11.5 Acquisition of new skills and competencies in the academic work environment***

Keeping up to date with new skills and competencies is a key element of the academic working environment. Acquiring teaching qualifications is considered important. Greater international collaboration necessitates the acquisition of new skills in a range of areas such as funding applications and the development of different attitudes to work (Clarke et al., 2015). In addition to the development of language skills, information technology skills are also considered necessary. Many academics do not have time to avail of training opportunities to develop necessary skills and rely on support of their colleagues in order to avail of such provision. The challenges that academics experience have a number of implications for the creation and maintenance of a supportive working environment.

### **2.12 Summary**

It is clear from the research literature that understanding how the organisational context promotes positive work identity construction is important. It requires a focus on organisational practices, which shape employees' positive self-constructions at work. There is also a need to consider how different types of institutional practices shape identity construction (Dutton et al., 2010). Equally, conversational practices (Le Baron et al., 2009) impact upon positive work identity.

Fostering a supportive work environment in higher education institutions is a key element in meeting the diverse challenges that the sector faces. The ability to form supportive relationships at work is one of the strongest characteristics of highly productive workplaces (Gummer, 2001) and this is especially true in universities where there is a premium on networking. Ganster and Murphy (2000) have argued that a small number of focused interventions can create substantial increases in feelings of support. Arneson and Ekberg (2005) have argued that being part of a work-group can be an important source of support. University managements should therefore concentrate on facilitating meaningful networks for academics in the institutional context. Relationships with managers can impact hugely on perceptions of support and this is especially true in higher education. Koslowsky et al., (2001) have suggested that supportive, as opposed to more heavy-handed, contacts with supervisors is generally tied to greater job satisfaction. This is very important with reference to the relationships

with university managers who need to concentrate on creating opportunities for academics to participate and actively influence decisions and institutional direction. Duxbury et al., (2010) have argued that the creation of support groups for those who experience personal strain is helpful.

Mid-career academics run the threat of becoming isolated with reference to research output and high administrative burdens. This group requires support in higher education so that they can experience fulfilling mid-career experiences. For many academics who are at the start of their careers and who experience disrupted periods of employment, strategies are required so that their needs are met in terms of receiving mentoring and developing professional and personal networks. This is also the case for women in higher education. The success of higher education institutions in a period of austerity is inextricably linked to the creation of supportive academic work environments.

## **CHAPTER 3: IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION: A CHALLENGING LANDSCAPE**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter details the primary legislative framework governing the higher education sector in Ireland. The binary nature of the system is detailed with reference to the university sector and the institutes of technology sector. Current policy initiatives are considered within the context of the Irish economic recession.

### **3.2 The higher education system structure and policies**

The Irish third-level sector is quite diverse consisting of a binary model of tertiary education, with seven Universities, 14 Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and over 20 other third level educational institutions. The overall student enrolment numbers (undergraduate and postgraduate, full time and part time) for the 2013-2014 academic term was 211,633. Of these enrolments, 53% attended a university, 42% attended an institute of technology and 5% attended a college (HEA 2014). This represents a very significant increase of 37% in student enrolments compared to 10 years previous 2003-2004. Meeting this growing demand for access to higher education will be a significant challenge.

Historically, the Universities provided degree and postgraduate education. Since the late 1960s, Regional Technical Colleges (now IoTs) were established to provide sub-degree programmes. Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) emerged independently of the regional system. The focus of these colleges was on skills-based vocational and technical training in areas such as business, engineering, electronics, science and food technology (but also containing from an early time elements of music, art, languages, media studies, social science and child care). From the 1990s,

the clear division between degree providing universities and sub-degree providing colleges became blurred. Irish higher education is governed by a number of legislative provisions, which include the Irish Universities Act, (1908); the Higher Education Authority Act, (1971); [University of Limerick Act (1989) Dublin City University Act (1989). Under this legislation the National Institutes for Higher Education in Limerick and Dublin were designated as universities], the Universities Act (1997); Vocational Education Acts (1930; Amendment Acts, 1936; 1944; 1970; 2001); Dublin Institute of Technology Act (1992); Regional Technical Colleges Act (1992); Regional Technical Colleges Amendment Acts (1994, 1999) and the Institutes of Technology Act (2006). In February 2014, the General Scheme for Legislation on Technological Universities was published by the Government, which outlined the legislative provisions for technological universities, including specifics on a merger amongst Dublin IoTs<sup>9</sup> and more general merger provisions for other IoTs considering applying<sup>10</sup> for re-designation.

### **3.3 University education 1922-1997**

During the period since the foundation of the state in 1922 and 1945, there were serious problems in university accommodation, problems of overcrowding and unsatisfactory facilities (Hyland and Milne, 1992). Little by way of investment or policy development occurred within the higher education sector during this period. In 1957, a Commission on Accommodation Needs of the NUI Colleges was appointed by the Minister for Education and chaired by Mr Justice Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh. It published its final report in 1959 and was severely critical of the neglect that had taken place in relation to higher education (Hyland and Milne, 1992). One of the recommendations suggested that a University Development Committee be established to advise the government on higher education. This

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<sup>9</sup>Included in this proposed merger are the Dublin Institute of Technology, Tallaght Institute of Technology and the Blandardstown Institute of Technology.

<sup>10</sup>There are four stages within the application process for technological university status. Two applications (Dublin and Munster) received conditional approval from the HEA in 2014 to move to stage 4 of the process which includes the merging of institutes. The South East project consisting of Carlow and Waterford institutes has not submitted a Stage 3 application. Difficulties arose between the two institutes and the Minister for Education and Skills appointed a mediator to consult with both institutes in 2015. Academic staff in three institutes (Cork, Tralee and Waterford) have balloted for industrial action in opposition to forced mergers.

proposal was not accepted. Hyland and Milne (1992) argue that it may have been influential in prompting the establishment of a Commission on Higher Education, which was established in 1960. This provided the first major opportunity for an in-depth study of all aspects of Irish higher education and future needs. The report, which was not published until 1967 (Hyland and Milne, 1992) was critical of the lack of unity and lack of planning within the system in general. Individual institutions were also criticised in relation to this. It was also acknowledged that higher education outside the universities was also underdeveloped. The Commission reiterated the view that the universities were under-financed, under-staffed and poorly equipped (Hyland and Milne, 1992).

### ***3.3.1 Higher Education Authority Act 1971***

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) was set up on an ad hoc basis in 1968 and was established on a statutory basis in 1971. Since the introduction of the Higher Education Authority Act of 1971, funding and policy advisory responsibility have been vested in the HEA. Relevant legislation assigning function to the HEA includes the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971, the Irish Universities Act 1997 and the Institutes of Technology Act 2006<sup>11</sup>. The HEA is the statutory funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and a number of other designated institutions and is the advisory body to the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to the higher education sector. The principal functions are:

- To allocate the moneys provided by the Oireachtas to publicly funded institutions;
- To assist in the co-ordination of State investment in higher education and the preparation of proposals for such investment;
- To further the development of higher education;
- To promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education;

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<sup>11</sup>Prior to the introduction of the IoT Act 2006 the Department of Education and Skills had responsibility for the Institutes of Technology sector. The HEA took over responsibility for the sector in 2007.

- To promote the democratisation of structure in higher education;
- To conduct reviews of the strategic plans, equality policies and the quality assurance procedures of the universities, and to publish the reports of such reviews (Irish Universities Act, 1997);
- To promote the attainment and maintenance of excellence in learning, teaching and research in higher education (Institutes of Technology Act, 2006<sup>12</sup>).

One function of the authority is to ensure that national objectives are aligned with institutional objectives. Funding is allocated based on performance measurements against the achievement of these objectives. Apart from control of salaries, the universities have autonomy of operation within the overall budgetary framework (HEA, 2012). The passing of the Universities Act (1997) represented a significant shift in government policy relating to Irish higher education.

The Universities Act (1997) outlines a comprehensive set of objectives for the Irish universities. The concept of a university espoused by the Act has at its heart a community of scholars composed of students and academics engaged in teaching, scholarly research and scientific investigation. The Act makes reference to its roles in the social and cultural life (in particular, with regard to Irish culture), in the realisation of national and social development, the dissemination of knowledge and the development of independent critical thinking among its students. The primary purpose of the universities in Ireland is to educate, foster and pass on a body of knowledge to students (IFUT, 2005). Academic freedom is also recognised under Section 14 of the Act:

A member of the academic staff of a university shall have the freedom, within the law, in his or her teaching, research and any other activities either in or outside the university, to question and test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas and to state controversial or unpopular opinions and shall not be disadvantaged, or subject to less favourable treatment by the university, for the exercise of that freedom.

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<sup>12</sup>For further details see <http://www.hea.ie/en/policy/policy-development/legislation-relevant-to-hea>

Table 4 lists the universities and the year they opened.

**Table 4**  
**HEI recognised under the Universities Act 1997**

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Opened</b>
National University of Ireland	NUI	1909
University College Cork	UCC	1845
University College Dublin	UCD	1854
National University of Ireland, Galway	NUIG	1845
National University of Ireland, Maynooth	NUIM	1795
Trinity College Dublin	TCD	1592
University of Limerick	UL	1989
Dublin City University	DCU	1989

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The National University of Ireland, (NUI) is a federal university comprising the largest element of the Irish university system at the present time. The NUI sees its role as providing a supportive framework for its confederate institutions, to promote the objects of the University, thus contributing to educational, cultural, social and economic advancement. The NUI currently comprises four Constituent Universities, (UCC, UCD, NUI, Maynooth and NUI, Galway); five Recognised Colleges and one College of a Constituent University. Each institution within the NUI federation has its own Governing Authority; the overall Governing Authority of the university is the NUI Senate and headed by the Chancellor<sup>13</sup>.

### **3.4 Institutes of Technology sector**

In 1963, the Government decided to establish Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) and appointed a steering committee to oversee that process. The Report of the Steering Committee on Technical Education was published in 1967. It set out a broad role for the colleges and nine regional technical colleges opened in 1970 under the control of the existing Vocational Education Committees (VECs).

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<sup>13</sup>For details see <http://www.nui.ie/about/structure.asp>

The Institutes of Technology operated under the Vocational Education Acts from 1970 until 1992 as special sub-committees of the Vocational Education Committees. Under the Regional Technical Colleges Act (1992) they were placed on an independent basis. In the late 1990s, all of these colleges were upgraded to Institute of Technology status (Institute of Technology Act 1998). Additionally, they were given delegated authority to confer their own awards.<sup>14</sup> The Institutes of Technology Act (2006) further amended the law with respect to the institutions. The Regional Technical Colleges Acts 1992 to 2001 were proactive in setting out a framework of accountability for the effective governance of Institutes of Technology. The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 set out the autonomy of Institutes of Technology, particularly in section 7, which amended the 1992 Act by inserting a new section 5A, subsection (1), which provides that an Institute of Technology shall:

have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs.

In general, the IoTs offer programmes at levels 6 to 9 of the national framework of qualifications. Some institutes such as Dublin, Waterford and Cork also offer level 10 programmes. The programme types include; apprenticeship, undergraduate programmes leading to higher certificate awards, Ordinary Bachelor degrees, Honours Bachelor degrees and postgraduate awards, both taught and by research, leading to Masters and Doctoral degrees in a wide variety of subjects. Institutes provide a comprehensive range of apprenticeship programmes and industrial focused Continuous Professional Development courses. Most institutes have schools of Science, Engineering, Construction, Technology and Business. In addition, many of the institutes have developed special programmes in areas such as Humanities & Languages, Paramedical Studies and Healthcare, Art & Design, and Tourism. Table 5 lists the 14 institutes of technology and the year they opened.

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<sup>14</sup>Under the 1999 Qualifications, Education and Training Act, the DIT became an awarding body in its own right, offering awards from level 6 to level 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications. The other institutes of technology had to apply to the Higher Education Training Awards Council (HETAC) for designated awarding authority. From 2013 both HETAC and FETAC have been replaced by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) <http://www.qqi.ie/>.

**Table 5**  
**IoT's designated under the RTC Act 1992**  
**as amended 1998**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Opened</b>
Athlone Institute of Technology	AIT	1970
Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown	ITB	2000
Institute of Technology, Carlow	ITC	1970
Cork Institute of Technology	CIT	1974
Dublin Institute of Technology	DIT	1992
Dundalk Institute of Technology	DkIT	1970
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.	IADT	1997
Institute of Technology, Sligo	ITS	1970
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology	GMIT	1972
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	LYIT	1971
Limerick Institute of Technology	LIT	1993
Institute of Technology, Tallaght	ITT Dublin	1992
Institute of Technology, Tralee	IT Tralee	1977
Waterford Institute of Technology	WIT	1970

### **3.5 Impact of the economic recession on higher education**

Since the 1990s, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), in line with other government departments has begun to focus on priorities within and between expenditure programmes and commenced the Expenditure Review Initiative in 1997. This became known as the Value for Money Policy Review in 2006 (DES 2007) and has resulted in more focused decision-making on matters of educational expenditure with consequent altered approaches to policy formation by the DES. This is reflected in recent educational discourse and has been noted by various authors dealing with the area (Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin, 2009). Policy decisions are influenced by both the global, and more importantly the European context.

This is evident in the language employed by the DES in policy documents, which reflects what pertains in international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, the OECD and the EU in policy documents (Seery, 2008). The EU Lisbon Agenda (2000), in particular and the introduction of National Reform Programmes in 2005 under the revised Lisbon Agenda resulted in the Irish government identifying major policy areas such as education and training; lifelong learning and the development of a high-skilled, innovative and adaptable workforce for the knowledge economy (Government of Ireland, 2007). Enrolment in third level increased rapidly from the 1970s to 2010 (Delaney and Healy, 2014) and based on projected numbers, this trend is expected to continue. This is attributed to higher numbers entering higher education after secondary school, students remaining longer in studies and increased numbers of mature students attending higher education (Delaney and Healy, 2014). Table 6 presents data on student enrolments (full-time and part-time) into the state aided third level sector (universities and IoTs) from 2008 to 2014. From a review of the enrolment data obtained from the DES (2015), there is evidence that both sectors have experienced steady annual growth. In comparison between 2008 and 2014 enrolments in the university sector have experienced an increase of 14% (n=15,346) whilst the IoT sector has witnessed an increase of 19% (n=16,294). Both sectors combined showed an increase of 16% (n=31,640). While the higher education sector has managed to cater for the significant increase in demand it is questionable whether it can continue to sustain increased demand under the current austerity policy climate agenda.

Whilst the higher education sector has experienced a significant rise in the number of student enrolments, the numbers of academic staff teaching these students has reduced. In 2009, the Government imposed a policy of reducing the numbers of staff employed in the public sector. The main enforcement mechanism was the Employment Control Framework (ECF), which established annual staff reduction targets. Each year, the HEA received staffing reduction targets from the Government by means of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). From a review of the annual staff returns submitted by higher education institutions to the HEA, it is evident from 2007 to 2014 academic staff numbers have reduced significantly. Table 7 presents the annual data for universities, IoTs and Colleges for academic and research staff. This data comprises of units

**Table 6**  
**Number of enrolments, aided higher education**  
**institutes 2008-2014**

<b>Enrolments third level public funded higher education institutes</b>							
<b>Year of enrolment</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
University sector							
Full-time	78577	82298	87623	89273	89928	90341	93023
Part-time	14647	14703	13936	13915	15767	16834	15547
Total	93224	97001	101559	103188	105695	107175	108570
Institute of technology sector							
Full-time	51572	54464	59832	62885	63874	65039	66490
Part-time	15909	15025	15450	15495	15050	15866	17285
Total	67481	69489	75282	78380	78924	80905	83775
Total both sectors	160705	166490	176841	181568	184619	188080	192345

Source HEA 2014

based on whole-time equivalents (WTE). These units do not present actual numbers of staff. Rather, the approach combines the hours of staff who work for less than the full hours until a WTE unit is reached. This type of calculation approach masks the true extent of casual part-time and fixed term labour. However, from the data it is evident that there has been a 7% (697.63 WTE) reduction in academic staff working in the higher education sector from 2007-2014. Comparing the reductions in academic staff per sector, the higher percentage cut was experienced by the colleges with a reduction of 7% (92.8 WTE), followed by the IoTs with a reduction of 7% (343.73 WTE) and the universities at 3% (97.3 WTE). While there was a significant reduction in academic staff numbers from 2007-2014 the same was not the case for all research staff. There was an increase in the numbers of research staff in the university sector, up 13% (383 WTE). The IoT sector experienced an increase of 24% (117.13 WTE). However, the Colleges witnessed a reduction of 70% (20.7 WTE).

The global recession has had a significant impact on the Republic of Ireland, which is a small open economy. However, the impact of the Irish sovereign debt and the ensuing financial crisis had much more serious repercussions on the country. The funding of higher education in 2014 must be viewed in the context of this recession and the consequent economic reforms mandated under the National Recovery Plan 2011-2014, as well as the Programme of Financial Support for Ireland, which the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided for Ireland (Clarke and Killeavy, 2013).

Ireland's investment in its education system in 2004 was lower than the OECD average. In public expenditure, it ranked only 25th out of 30 OECD countries and, with private expenditure added to public, 23rd out of 27 countries for which data is available in 2004 (OECD, 2004). Public expenditure declined from 5% to 4% as a proportion of a rapidly growing GDP between 1995 and 2000 (OECD, 2004). In his Exchequer Budget speech, (2011), the Minister for Education and Skills referred to a 2% real funding reduction for the higher education sector, comprising a 5% reduction in State funding and a parallel €250 increase in Student Contribution from 2012/13. The Minister signalled a further 2% funding reduction in 2013, and 1% in each of 2014 and 2015. The government's allocated budget for education in Ireland in 2012 was €8.242 billion. Third

**Table 7**  
**Number of academic & research**  
**staff employed, higher education sectors 2007 -2014**

Year	Universities			IoTs			Colleges		
	Academic	Researchers	Total	Academic	Researchers	Total	Academic	Researchers	Total
2007	4433.86	2626.26	7060.12	4799.56	375.01	5174.57	466.93	29.5	496.43
2008	4728.11	2916.83	7644.94	4845.01	512.5	5357.51	444.81	37.25	482.06
2009	4500.78	3076.71	7577.49	4842.55	424.91	5267.46	426.79	21	447.79
2010	4381.66	2793.44	7175.1	4759.4	373.23	5132.63	419.54	17.3	436.84
2011	4286.75	2881.4	7168.15	4480.63	180.94	4661.57	414.04	2.3	416.34
2012	4435.66	3179.38	7615.04	4481.63	235.32	4716.95	399.35	2.3	401.65
2013	4215.77	2850.84	7066.61	4448.75	375.23	4823.98	388.43	8.2	396.63
2014*	4239.79	3009.26	7249.05	4338.7	492.14	4830.84	424.13	8.8	432.93

Source HEA 2014

level education accounts for €1.6 billion of which €1.1 billion relates to recurrent provision to institutions (Hyland, 2012; Government of Ireland, 2012).

In addition to staff reductions, higher education institutions have experienced significant cuts to their core budgets from 2007-2014. The government sets the funding grant for the sector on an annual basis. The HEA has the responsibility for allocation of the exchequer funds to the sector. The two primary mechanisms for distribution of funds are; Core Grant allocation and Tuition Fees. In addition, higher education institutions may seek other sources of funding such as; research funding applications, innovation projects with industry and/or philanthropy. Table 8 lists the annual Government-imposed cuts to grants allocated to the higher education sector. The sector as a whole experienced a 29% reduction (€385,688,801.00) from 2007 to 2014. When the funding is disaggregated per sector the cuts experienced are; Colleges 24% (-€14,358,919.00), Universities 26% (-€200,610,172.00) and IoTs 32% (-€170,719,711.00). It is very reasonable to question how higher education institutions are managing to continue offering a quality service under the unsustainable burden of budget cuts, staffing cuts and increased student demand.

Capital budgets have also been affected by the funding cuts. Delaney and Healy (2014) found that in the university sector, almost 130,000 square metres of building space was over 100 years old and 18% of space in the higher education sector in general was more than 50 years old. Higher education institutions have increasingly relied on private investment to support capital projects. It is estimated that between 2005 and 2008 total private investment (including philanthropic) accounted for 50% of total capital investment in higher education (Delaney and Healy, 2014).

The direct financial implications of current austerity policies are contributing to the lower rankings of Irish universities in recent years, particularly through increases in staff–student ratios. All Irish higher education institutions fell in their academic reputation ranking (HEA, 2012). This decline was particularly noticeable in the areas of science, engineering and technology (HEA, 2012). The impact of Irish research is regarded highly but this is undermined by declining income levels,

**Table 8**  
**State Expenditure on Higher**  
**Education Institutions 2007-2014**

<b>Total stated funding to higher education per sector</b>					
<b>Universities</b>		<b>IoTs</b>		<b>Colleges</b>	
2007	€722,825,131	2007	€524,853,100	2007	€58,482,102
2008	€765,469,029	2008	€542,077,150	2008	€64,404,670
2009	€725,330,762	2009	€511,551,000	2009	€55,972,963
2010	€654,348,822	2010	€461,844,382	2010	€57,690,936
2011	€608,667,747	2011	€429,541,402	2011	€53,114,970
2012	€577,500,733	2012	€406,635,185	2012	€50,613,581
2013	€526,691,397	2013	€384,839,820	2013	€44,316,679
2014	€522,214,959	2014	€354,133,389	2014	€44,123,184

Source: HEA 2014

increases in staff–student ratios and the weakened reputation of teaching and research. The HEA (2012) concluded that it would be regrettable if the advances made in Irish higher education in the past decade due to institutional effort and public investment were now reversed due to unsustainability in funding.

### **3.6 Policy directions in higher education in Ireland**

A Higher Education Strategy Group was appointed in 2008 to examine higher education in Ireland. Its report published in 2011 entitled National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 was endorsed by the Government as the future blueprint for the sector. The report identified three overarching challenges faced by the higher education system: higher future enrolments of students with diverse profiles, the impact of the global environment on research performance and changing patterns of work with the accompanying need for lifelong access to develop knowledge based skills. Subsequent to the acceptance of the National Strategy, the HEA

published a series of reports, which focused on different aspects of the higher education sector including:

- Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape (2012a);
- Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland (HEA 2012b);
- Review of the Provision of Creative Arts and Media Programmes in Dublin (HEA 2012c);
- Process and Criteria for Designation as a Technological University (2012d);
- Report to Minister for Education and Skills on system reconfiguration, inter-institutional collaboration and system governance (2013a);
- Review of Funding Model for Higher Education Institutions: Consultation Document; Completing the Landscape Process for Irish Higher Education (2013b);
- Towards a Performance evaluation framework: Profiling Irish higher education (HEA, Dec 2013c).

Through these publications it emerged that the higher education sector should reduce the number of higher education institutions, thereby creating greater critical mass. The HEA suggested that this could be achieved by focusing on regional clusters to provide for coordinated provision; the development of strategic alliances between institutions; the development of thematic clusters facilitating collaboration on areas of national and international importance; the creation of technological universities through merging IoTs and the imposition of performance targets on institutions with a view to achieving national objectives. The DES outlined its national priorities and the key system objectives for higher education and this has been translated into a comprehensive system performance framework aligned with performance funding (Ó Foghlú, 2014). Institutional performance compacts are currently being finalised between the public higher education institutions and the HEA where each institution agrees their strategic fit and contribution within the system as a whole (Ó Foghlú, 2014)<sup>15</sup>. This has marked a new direction in policy development for higher education. Harkin and Hazelcorn (2014) argue that between 2011 and the present, the restructuring aspects of the higher education strategy highlight

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<sup>15</sup> See DES press release (<http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Speeches/2014-Speeches/SP14-04-11.html#sthash.m4S6bHed.dpuf>).

a more centralised approach to restructuring than had previously been the case.

It is widely recognised internationally that the most appropriate governance system for higher education is one that supports institutional autonomy within a clear accountability framework and this is the basis underlying the main statutory frameworks for Irish higher education: the Universities Act of 1997 and the Institutes of Technology Acts 1992 to 2006. A key development was the introduction and strengthening of a formal Code of Governance, which was adopted by the Higher Education Authority and the universities in 2003 and 2007. As well as setting out the main regulatory provisions that apply to Irish universities, it outlined principles of good governance. Institutes of Technology have a strong track record in relation to governance and accountability. The Regional Technical Colleges Acts 1992 to 2001 were proactive in setting out a framework of accountability for effective governance. The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 underscores the autonomy of Institutes of Technology particularly in section 7 provides that an Institute of Technology shall “have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs” (IOT, 2012). In 2004, the OECD in its review of higher education Review of Higher Education in Ireland Examiners Report recommended enhanced coordination within the system, more collaboration between institutions through funding mechanisms in research, first degree and postgraduate degree work and more emphasis to be placed on widening access and lifelong learning (OECD, 2004). The economic recession in the latter part of the first decade of the 21st century impacted negatively on the higher education system.

### **3.7 National wage agreements and emergency legislation**

Since 1987, many issues affecting Public Service workers in Ireland, including wages and conditions, were decided within a process termed ‘social partnership’. This involved a series of tripartite agreements reached between the Government, representatives of the business community and the trades unions. This process came to an end in 2009 and was replaced by social dialogue and the use of draconian emergency powers.

The financial crisis of 2008 led to a sudden and sharp decline in funds available to the Irish exchequer. According to a report in 2014 by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER<sup>16</sup>) *Cost of the Public Sector* the financial crisis of 2008 resulted in: GDP dropping by 7% from 2008-2009, tax revenue fell by €9 billion from 2008-2010, unemployment rose from 5% to 14% 2008-2010 which combined with the support provided to the Irish banking system, resulted in a GDP deficit of 30% in 2010. In 2010, the Government entered into a bailout agreement (valued at €152.5 billion) with the International Monetary Fund and the European Financial Stability Facility fund. In addition, the Government allocated €17.5 billion from the National Pensions Reserve Fund to the cost of the bailout.

The Government at the time (2008) imposed a pay freeze for the public sector and considered reducing costs by means of redundancies. It utilised Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI<sup>17</sup>) legislation to cut pensions by 7.5% in 2008. The second FEMPI Act was applied in 2009 to unilaterally cut pay of the public sector workers. Within this context, the public sector trade unions sought a negotiated process with a view to protecting their members' security of employment. The Labour Relations Commission (LRC<sup>18</sup>) facilitated intensive negotiations between the Government and the public sector trade unions, which resulted in the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 (also referred to as the Croke Park Agreement<sup>19</sup>). The Irish Congress of Trade Union (ICTU<sup>20</sup>) Public Service Committee (PSC) voted to accept this new agreement. It provided an

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<sup>16</sup>DPER was established in July 2011 under Statutory Instrument No.418 of 2011, which transferred the function of the Department of Finance to DPER. DPER's mission is 'To serve the country, its people and the Government by delivering well-managed and well-targeted public spending, through modernised, effective and accountable public services'.

<sup>17</sup>The previous and current Government utilised FEMPI legislation on five occasions to reduce pay and pensions of public sector workers; 2008 7.5% pension levy, 2009 6.5% pay cut, 2010 cut to pensions of retired Ministers, 2011 cut to pay and pensions of Judges and 2013 cut to pay and increment freezes.

<sup>18</sup>The LRC was established in 1991 under the Industrial relations Act 1990. The LRC provides services to trade unions, employers and workers for conciliation, advisory, mediation and joint labour committees. In 2015 the LRC will be replaced by the Workplace Relations Commission.

<sup>19</sup>The media refer to the Public Service Agreement as the 'Croke Park' Agreement arising from the name of the venue which was used for the negotiations.

<sup>20</sup>ICTU is an affiliation of 55 trade unions who organise in Ireland, The ICTU PSC comprises of 19 affiliated trade unions who organise and represent members in the public sector such as; TUI, IFUT, ASTI, INTO, Impact, CPSU, SIPTU, TEEU, INMO, PSEU, POA, MSLA, VOA, BATU, IMO, OPASTI, UCATT, AHCPS.

assurance against compulsory redundancies in return for a reduction in pay, increased productivity and a commitment to reform. The agreement recognised that the public sector had already contributed €3 billion in savings from 2008-2010. The Government had set a target of €1.2 billion in savings in the public sector expenditure for 2014.

In 2013, the Government announced that additional savings were required from the public sector expenditure bill. The LRC sought to broker a second Croke Park Agreement, however this was rejected by ballot of members of public sector unions. The Government commenced the enactment of the third FEMPI legislation for pay cuts. During this time, the LRC facilitated negotiations between public sector trade unions and Government, which resulted in the Haddington Road Agreement 2012-2016. This comprised of a scaled reduction in pay, increment freeze, increased productivity and reform measures. Unlike the previous Croke Park Agreement 2010-2014, the Haddington Road Agreement 2014-16 did not require the Public Service Committee of ICTU to vote on the agreement, rather the decision was left to individual unions to ballot their members. Unions who accepted the agreement had to register with the LRC, which gave their members protection from the full effects of the FEMPI (2013) legislation.

Arising from the above emergency legislation and agreements, the total estimated cost reduction in public sector expenditure from 2008-2013 was €7.8 billion (DPER, 2014), of which reduction in public sector pay accounted for €3 billion. During the same period, staffing numbers in the public sector reduced by 10% (32,000). This was achieved through a variety of means; embargo on recruitment, normal retirements, early retirements, incentivised career break, voluntary redundancy and the non-renewal of part-time and fixed-term contracts. Table 9 provides a comparison between staff numbers in the education sectors in 2008 and 2013. Staff numbers were reduced by 4,500 from 2008-2013, although an additional 1,000 Primary teachers and 100 SNAs were recruited to meet the increased demand arising from demographic trends. The Third Level sector did not get the same consideration. Even with the increase in student numbers, staffing levels were reduced by 3,500.

**Table 9**  
**Education sectors staff numbers 2008-2013**

<b>Staff reduction education sectors 2008-2013</b>				
	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>%</b>
Primary teachers	32000	33000	1000	+ 3%
SNAs I 0600	10700	100	+1%	
Second level teachers	28300	27800	-500	- 2%
Third level grades	20900	17400	-3500	- 17%
Support staff	3200	2700	-500	- 16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95000</b>	<b>91600</b>	<b>-3400</b>	<b>- 4%</b>

Source: DPER 2014

### 3.8 Summary

Ireland's economic crisis had a major impact on the higher education sector. The sector as a whole experienced a 29% reduction in funding during the period 2007-14. The IoT sector endured the most severe cuts at 32% followed by the university sector at 26% and the Colleges at 24%. Staff numbers in the education sector were reduced by 4,500 in the period 2008-2013, although an additional 1,000 Primary teachers and 100 Special Needs Assistances (SNAs)<sup>21</sup> were recruited to meet the increased demand arising from demographic trends. The Third Level sector did not get the same consideration. Even with the increase in student numbers, staffing levels were, reduced by 3,500 (DPER, 2014). The calculation of staffing in the higher education sector is problematic. Whole-time equivalents (WTE) are units, which combines the hours of staff who work for less than the full hours until a WTE unit is reached. This type of approach masks the true extent of casual part-time and fixed term contracts. From the existing data there has been a 7% (697.63 WTE) reduction in academic staff working in the higher education sector from 2007-2014. Comparing the reductions in

<sup>21</sup>The SNAs scheme was introduced in 2001, according to the most recent Department of Education and Skills Circular Letter 0030/2014 the purpose of the scheme is to support teachers in meeting the care needs of some children with special educational needs, arising from a disability. The scheme operates in primary schools, community & comprehensive schools and school in the Education and Training Boards.

academic staff per sector the higher percentage cut was experienced by the colleges with a reduction of 7% (92.8 WTE), followed by the IoTs with a reduction of 7% (343.73 WTE) and the universities at 3% (97.3 WTE). There was an increase in the numbers of research staff in the university sector up 13% (383 WTE) and the IoT sector experienced an increase of 24% (117.13 WTE).

There is evidence that the higher education sector has experienced steady annual growth. Between 2008 and 2014 enrolments in the university sector experienced an increase of 14% (n=15,346) whilst the IoT sector witnessed an increase of 19% (n=16,294). Both sectors combined showed an increase of 16% (n=31,640). The impact of the economic recession on higher education has placed institutions across the sector under severe strain.

## **CHAPTER 4: SURVEY FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the sampled academic population. The years of continuous employment in various institutions and the range and type of employment contracts are examined. The current working conditions of participants are explored with reference to changes in their work context and job satisfaction. The chapter also examines academics' perceptions of support for teaching and research within their institutional contexts. The expectations and regulatory expectations set by institutions are assessed and their attitudes to a range of teaching and research issues are examined. Participants' views about communication, management styles, decision-making processes and their level of influence within the organisational structure of their institution are presented.

### **4.2 Contract Status**

In terms of employment status, 978 (84%) stated that they were employed full-time, 73 (6%) were on a part-time contract and 10% declined to respond. Of these, 72% reported being employed on a 'permanent contract', 9% on 'fixed-term contracts and 9% stating 'other'. In relation to undertaking paid work beyond their main place of employment, this was acknowledged by 16% of participants. Table 10 illustrates the distribution of contract duration by employment status.

Most (80%) of the participants were on full-time contracts of a permanent duration, with only small proportions on fixed-term contracts; either full-time or part-time. Tables 11 and 12, show the number of other places of employment, both higher education and non-higher education, for which the participants reported having worked. There was no correlation between age and the number of higher education institutions in which they previously worked ( $r = .041, p = .227$ ).

**Table 10**  
**Contract Status and Employment Contract (%)**

<b>Duration of current employment contract</b>				
<b>Contract Status</b>	<b>Permanent</b>	<b>Fixed-term contract</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total (n)</b>
Full-time	80% (816)	7% (74)	7% (68)	958
Part-time	2% (25)	2% (18)	2% (23)	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>82% (841)</b>	<b>9% (92)</b>	<b>9% (91)</b>	<b>1024</b>

**Table 11**  
**Number of HEI previously worked in**

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>(%)</b>
1	471	43
2	302	28
3	176	16
4	68	6
5	42	4
6	30	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1089</b>	<b>100</b>

Over a quarter (28%) of respondents had worked in two higher education institutions prior to securing their current position, over fifteen percent (16%) had worked in three or more institutions. Three in ten respondents (32%) had worked in at least one non HEI institution or were self-employed prior to taking up a position in higher education. Over a quarter (26%) had worked in two non-HEI institutions. Table 12 presents the data.

**Table 12**  
**Number of non-HEI (or self-employment)**  
**previously worked in**

Institutions	N	(%)
1	196	32
2	159	26
3	98	16
4	70	11
5	44	7
6	46	8
Total	613	100

The same proportion of males to females reported having been employed in the same number of workplaces, both higher and non-higher education settings. Table 13 presents the data.

**Table 13**  
**Number of HEIs worked in previously by Gender**

Number of Workplaces	1	2	3	4	5	6>	Total
Male	(217)	(141)	(74)	(24)	(18)	(14)	(488)
	25	16	8	3	2	1	55
Female	(172)	(104)	(67)	(30)	(13)	(8)	(394)
	20	12	7	3	2	1	45
Total	(389)	(245)	(141)	(54)	(31)	22	882
	44	28	16	6	4	2	100

In terms of duration in employment in higher education (Table 14), almost half (50%) of respondents indicated that they had worked in higher education for between 11 and 20 years. Slightly less than a quarter (24%) had been in higher education for less than 10 years and almost one fifth (19%) had been employed for between 21 and 30 years. A very small proportion (7%) reported being employed for more than 31 years.

**Table 14**  
**Length of time worked in academia**

<b>Duration</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than one year	3	0
1-5	52	5
6-10	198	19
11-15	306	29
16-20	216	21
21-25	122	12
26-30	72	7
31-35	53	5
36-40	23	2
More than 40 years	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1048</b>	<b>100</b>

Very few people reported having undertaken a career break. Six percent (n=51) of the 859 had taken a career break of one year. Of this small group, 20 were male and 31 were female. A further 48 people had breaks of between 2 to 4 years (18 males and 30 females) and 18 people had taking breaks between 5 and 10 years (13 females and 5 males).

Only a small proportion (14%) of respondents indicated that they had engaged in paid work outside of their main place of employment. Of this group, 5% said they ‘also worked in another research or higher education institute’, 5% said they were ‘self-employed’, 2% worked for a ‘non-profit organisation’ and 1% a ‘business organisation’. There was a statistically significant association between gender working outside of the institution

( $\chi^2 = 10.4$ ,  $p = .030$ ). More males (100 or 60% of this group) reported undertaking outside-work in comparison to 39% (40) females. In relation to contract status, a higher proportion (36%) of those on fixed term contracts reported outside working than those on permanent contracts (17%). The same proportions are also evident for those working part-time (31%) and those who are full-time (16%).

### 4.3 Qualifications

In relation to the highest qualifications held by the participants,  $n=1,127$  held ‘Bachelors or equivalent’,  $n=921$  ‘Masters’,  $n=563$  a ‘doctorate’ and  $n=65$  ‘post-doctoral’. Table 15 illustrates the data.

**Table 15**  
**Qualifications of respondents per sector**

<b>Qualifications of respondents per sector</b>				
	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Masters</b>	<b>Doctoral</b>	
	%	%	%	N
IoT	94	80	33	718
University	92	70	82	290
College	95	87	67	40

In terms of gender, more males ( $n=374$ ) than females ( $n=325$ ) held masters, but this was fairly equal for doctorates:  $n=219$  males and  $n=213$  females. A third of respondents (33%) in the IoT sector had doctoral degrees, compared to over three quarters (82%) in the university sector. The majority of respondents earned each of their qualifications in Ireland, 78% bachelor’s qualification, 73% master’s degrees and 64% doctorates.

### 4.4 Disciplines

With reference to their disciplinary backgrounds, 48% were from the sciences, 19% arts and humanities and one third (33%) were from the social sciences including law, education and business. Table 16 illustrates the data.

**Table 16**  
**Disciplinary background per highest degree attained**

	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Education/Teacher training	126	12
Humanities and Arts	213	19
Social and Behavioural sciences	100	9
Business and administration, economics	115	10
Law	18	2
Life sciences	67	6
Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Computer Sciences	224	20
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Architecture	164	15
Agriculture/Veterinary Medicine	6	1
Medical sciences, Health sciences	67	6

There was some ‘movement’ in terms of people reporting what their current location was (i.e. School or Department and teaching areas) vis-à-vis their educational background. For example, of the 67 people who said their highest degree was in the ‘life sciences’, 56 stated that they were still working in this area. Of the 213 with a background in the ‘Humanities and Arts’, 170 said they were teaching in this area. Table 17 shows the distribution of disciplines/academic area by gender.

There was a statistically significant difference with reference to gender and academic discipline ( $\chi^2 = 105.37$   $p = .05$ ). A higher proportion of males were present in the ‘physical sciences’ (68% V 32%) and ‘engineering’ (85% V 15%) and a higher proportion of females were present in the ‘humanities’ (61% V 39%) and the ‘life sciences’ (53% V 47%).

#### **4.5 Levels of workplace satisfaction**

Participants were asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction with their current job (1 being ‘very low’ and 5 being ‘very high’). Table 18 shows their responses cross-tabulated by gender. Over a fifth of respondents (21%) (both male and female) rated their job satisfaction as low. Half of

participants (50%) were satisfied with their current job while over a quarter (29%) held a ‘middle’ view. The differences across gender were quite small, though the proportion of male respondents (27%) expressed higher levels of satisfaction compared to their female colleagues (23%).

**Table 17**  
**Distribution of disciplines/academic area by gender**

	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Education/Teacher training	42	43	56	57
Humanities and Arts	67	39	105	61
Social and Behavioural sciences	24	33	52	68
Business and Administration, Economics	49	56	38	44
Law	3	20.	12	80
Life sciences	25	47.	28	53
Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Computer sciences	125	68	60	32
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Architecture	120	85	22	15
Agriculture/Veterinary Medicine	6	100	0	0
Medical Sciences, Health Sciences	12	24	37	76

**Table 18**  
**Job Satisfaction by Gender (%)**

	Scale; 1 = Very low – 5 = Very high					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Male	5	8	16	21	6	56% (493)
Female	2	6	13	18	5	44% (400)
Total	7	14	29	39	11	100% (893)

Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they considered that their working conditions in their institutions had changed since they had started working there (1 = very much deteriorated, 5 = very much improved). Table 19 illustrates their responses to this statement cross-tabulated by gender. Over two thirds of respondents (72%) indicated that their working conditions had deteriorated. A statistically significant association emerged between gender and perception of work conditions ( $\chi^2 = 26.03, p = .000$ ), a higher proportion of males (42%) were of the view that conditions had deteriorated compared to their female colleagues (39%).

**Table 19**  
**Work Conditions by Gender (%)**

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Scale; 1 = very much deteriorated – 5 = very much improved

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Male	20	22	9	3	1	55 (494)
Female	12	17	12	3	1	45 (402)
Total	32	39	21	6	2	100. (896)

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In relation to the type of institution and changes in working conditions (Table 20), a statistically significant association emerged ( $\chi^2 = 11.2, p = .020$ ). This, however, needs to be interpreted quite carefully, as it masks a similar distribution of responses across the categories. In looking at category ‘1’, proportionately more of those who work in the IoT sector stated that their work conditions had deteriorated, but the other categories are not too dissimilar. In terms of age, there is a very weak negative correlation ( $\rho = -.052$ ), which was not significant ( $p = .065$ ).

#### **4.6 Resources and facilities**

Participants were asked to rate their working environment with reference to the physical environment and the quality of resources such as library and laboratory facilities. Tables 21 and 22 illustrate some of the selected items (1=poor – 5=Excellent).

**Table 20**  
**Work Conditions by Institution (%)**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Total</b>
University	24	42	24	7	3	100
IoT	31	41	20	6	2	100
Totals	(310)	(401)	(197)	(59)	(21)	(988)

**Table 21**  
**Evaluation of Facilities, Resources & Personnel (%)**

	Scale; 1 = Poor – 5 = Excellent					<b>N</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
Classroom conditions	8	23	33	28	8	1,037
Technology for teaching	5	19	31	36	9	1,035
Library facilities and services	6	13	27	40	14	1,020
Your office space	19	20	21	28	12	1,037
Funding for teaching activities	26	37	27	8	2	994
Administrative support	19	24	23	25	9	1,029
Teaching support staff	27	24	27	17	5	964

Over a third of participants (36%) viewed classroom conditions positively, a third (33%) offered no opinion and just over a third (31%) rated classroom conditions poorly. Over three fifths (63%) viewed teaching activities as poorly funded. Over half of respondents (54%) viewed ‘library facilities and services’ quite positively. Technology for teaching was well regarded by over two fifths (45%). Over two fifths (43%) of participants viewed administrative support as being inadequate in their institutions. Table 22 shows the responses to those items (scale 1=Poor – 5=Excellent), which captured views about research facilities and supports.

**Table 22**  
**Evaluation of Facilities, Resources & Personnel (%)**

	Scale; 1 = Poor – 5 = Excellent					N
	1	2	3	4	5	
Laboratories	6	22	37	27	8	864
Research equipment and instruments	13	25	37	20	5	855
Research funding	36	31	23	2	8	949
Telecommunications (Internet, networks, and telephones)	4	12	24	40	20	1,026
Research support staff	34	24	25	13	4	912

Over two thirds (67%) of participants viewed research funding as inadequate. Research equipment was not rated highly by over a third (38%) of participants. Telecommunications was quite well regarded by three fifths (60%) of participants. Table 23 shows a correlation between the participants’ reported level of overall job satisfaction and the items pertaining to ‘facilities and resources’. Most of the correlations were relatively weak i.e. between .155 and .283 and statistically significant. Even though participants rated their level of overall job satisfaction relatively highly, it does not appear to be conditional upon these aspects of their working environments.

**Table 23**  
**Correlation Satisfaction - Facilities – Resources**

	<b>Rho</b>	<b>Sig</b>	<b>N</b>
Research equipment and instruments	.283	.000	812
Funding for teaching activities	.286	.000	937
Library facilities and services	.259	.000	960
Your office space	.247	.000	976
Administrative/secretarial support	.249	.000	967
Telecommunications (Internet, networks, and telephones)	.155	.000	967
Teaching support staff	.291	.000	908
Research support staff	.253	.000	860
Research funding	.189	.000	895

#### 4.7 Teaching and research

Participants were asked about their levels of involvement in teaching and research indicating the number of hours that they spent on a range of activities when classes were and were not in session. Table 24 shows their responses organised around the reported minimum and maximum hours expended, as well the average (arithmetical mean) for each activity.

**Table 24**  
**Hours per week on activities, classes in session**  
**(classes not in session)**

	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>N</b>
Teaching	80 (100)	28 (12)	905 (865)
Research	80 (80)	8 (15)	855 (837)
Services	35 (40)	3 (3)	686 (635)
Administration	50 (70)	7 (8)	676 (844)

The average number of hours spent on teaching when classes were in session was 28 and when classes were not in session it was 12. In relation to research, the average number of hours spent on this activity per week when classes were in session was 8 and when classes were not in session was 15. Three hours per week was the average that respondents devoted to service activities. There was very little difference in the average number of hours spent on administration, 7 hours per week when class was in session and 8 hours per week when classes were not in session. When asked if their institution provided ‘adequate opportunities’ for study leave, for either ‘research or teaching purposes’, over a quarter (29%) of participants ‘strongly disagreed’, while 13% ‘agreed’ with the statement.

Respondents were asked to indicate if their institution was supportive of teaching activities. Table 25 illustrates the data.

**Table 25**  
**Institutional support for Teaching (%)**

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Scale; 1 = strongly disagree – 5 = strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
At my institution there are adequate training courses for enhancing teaching quality	14	25	33	22	6
My institution supports my research activities to inform my teaching	27	27	27	14	5

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There were mixed views about the quality of courses within their institutions that focused on teaching support. Over a third (39%) did not rate these courses highly, a third (33%) did not offer a view and over a quarter (28%) felt that the courses were adequate. Over half of participants (54%) expressed the view that their institutions did not support research led teaching. Participants were asked to reflect on a number of issues that focused specifically on the teaching aspect of their role. Table 26 illustrates the findings.

**Table 26**  
**Statements relating to learning,**  
**teaching & development**

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Scale; 1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
I spend more time than I would like teaching basic skills due to student deficiencies	6	13	27	28	26
I am encouraged to improve my instructional skills in response to teaching evaluations	22	20	32	21	5
At my institution there are adequate training courses for enhancing teaching quality [For example language]	14	24	33	22	7
In my courses I am supported by my institution to emphasise international perspectives or content	22	26	32	14	6
Since I started teaching, the diversity of students has increased	4	7	16	31	42
Currently, most of my graduate students are international	38	29	22	6	5
My institution supports my research activities to inform my teaching	27	27	27	14	5
My service activities are supported by my institution (services to clients and/or patients, unpaid consulting, public or voluntary services) inform my teaching	30	24	32	11	3

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Almost three quarters (73%) indicated that the student cohort was more diverse now than when they had started lecturing. Over half (54%) felt that they spent too much time teaching basic skills to students. Almost half (48%) of respondents indicated that their institution did not offer support with reference to emphasising international perspectives or content.

Over half of respondents (54%) indicated that their institution did not support research led teaching. An equal proportion (54%) were of the view that the institution did not view their service work as a basis for informing their teaching. Just over a quarter (26%) indicated that they were encouraged to improve their teaching as a result of student evaluations. A minority of participants (14%) had worked abroad in the previous two years. Over a third (36%) attributed an increase in workload to the Bologna process, while two fifths (43%) did not express a view.

Participants were asked to consider institutional supports and demands in relation to their research activities. Table 27 presents the data. Over half (53%) of respondents agreed that the pressure to raise external research funds had increased since their appointment. Over half of participants (55%) ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that publications and citations influenced career progression. Half of respondents (51%) indicated that there was increased pressure to publish in international high-ranking journals. A quarter (25%) viewed the supports available to attend national and international conferences as inadequate.

**Table 27**  
**Support for Publishing, Research and Conferences (%)**

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Scale; 1 = strongly agree - 5 = strongly disagree

<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
The pressure to raise external research funds has increased since my first appointment	37	16	21	11	15
There is increased pressure to publish in international high ranked journals	32	19	24	14	11
Publications and citations influence career progression	36	19	15	14	16
I am provided with adequate supports to attend national and international conferences	10	15	25	21	29

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Tables 28 and 29 show participants' responses disaggregated by the IoT and university sectors.

**Table 28**  
**IoT Sector, Supports for**  
**Publishing Research Conferences (%)**

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Scale; 1 = strongly agree - 5 = strongly disagree

<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Restrictions on the publication of results from my privately-funded research have increased since my first appointment	8	8	62	9	13
External sponsors or clients have no influence over my research activities	17	12	45	14	12
The pressure to raise external research funds has increased since my first appointment	28	18	27	13	14
Interdisciplinary research is emphasised at my institution	13	19	34	16	18
There is increased pressure to publish in international high ranked journals	20	21	32	16	11
Publications and citations influence career progression.	26	20	21	17	16
I am provided with adequate supports to facilitate my publications.	8	12	27	19	34
I am provided with adequate supports to attend national and international conferences	11	15	26	19	29

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**Table 29**  
**University Sector Support for Publishing,  
Research and Conferences**

Scale; 1 = strongly agree - 5 = strongly disagree

<b>Statement</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Restrictions on the publication of results from my privately-funded research have increased since my first appointment	8	9	48	13	22
External sponsors or clients have no influence over my research activities	30	19	22	16	13
The pressure to raise external research funds has increased since my first appointment	52	12	10	8	18
Interdisciplinary research is emphasised at my institution	16	26	31	16	11
There is increased pressure to publish in international high ranked journals	55	15	7	9	14
Publications and citations influence career progression.	59	13	4	10	14
I am provided with adequate supports to facilitate my publications.	6	14	26	24	30
I am provided with adequate supports to attend national and international conferences	8	14	21	25	33

Those who worked in the university sector (70%) reported that there was a 'greater pressure to publish in international high ranked journals' in comparison to those in the IoT sector (41%). The same proportions were observable across the item 'publications and citations influence career progression': 72% for the university sector and 46% for the IoT sector.

#### **4.8 Decision making and control**

The ability to exercise control and influence in the workplace, either by others (e.g. departmental managers, students, external stakeholders) or by the participants themselves was addressed. Table 30 illustrates the data, which offers an interesting set of insights across a range of activities. What is striking is the extent to which control of most of the activities, apart from 'evaluating teaching' and a lesser extent 'evaluating research', was perceived to be concentrated within management at institutional level. Over three quarters (77%) of participants were of the view that institutional managers were responsible for selecting key administrators. Over two thirds (68%) indicated that institutional managers were responsible for tenure/promotional decisions and budgets. Over half of respondents (51%) attributed decision-making around admission standards and the approval of new programmes (52%) to institutional managers. Over a third (36%) identified School Department managers as being responsible for workload allocation. Just under a third (31%) viewed the School Department manager as playing a role in promotion and tenure decisions. The roles of external bodies, although not as influential relative to other groups, were nonetheless regarded as exerting authority over some of the activities listed, such as allocation of workload (18%) and setting entry standards (15%) for undergraduates. A fifth (20%) of respondents felt that they had control over the evaluation of teaching and research.

Participants were asked to consider the extent to which they personally shaped academic policies. Table 31 presents the data.

Whilst a very small percentage of the participants (13%) saw themselves as being 'very influential', the majority were of the view that they had a fairly limited capacity to shape policy. Over three quarters (76%) felt that they had some degree of influence at departmental level. Over half (56%) indicated that they had some degree of influence within the faculty. Over two thirds (68%) were of the view that they had no influence in the wider institutional context. Participants were asked if trade unions were recognised as partners in the decision-making process. Over a quarter (27%) of participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' whereas over two fifths (45%) 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement. Over a quarter (28%) did not express a view.

**Table 30**  
**Groups who exert influence**  
**over decision-making**

	Government or external stakeholders	Institutional managers	School/ Dept. managers	Faculty committees & boards	Individual academic staff	Students
Selecting key administrators	6	77	14	2	1	0
Making promotion and tenure decisions	3	68	19	9	1	0
Determining budget priorities	16	68	13	3	0	0
Determining the overall teaching load of faculty	18	41	36	4	1	0
Setting admission standards for undergraduate students	15	51	18	13	2	1
Approving new academic programs	8	52	16	23	1	0
Evaluating teaching	5	20	31	6	20	18
Evaluating research	13	37	20	10	20	0

**Table 31**  
**Sense of personal influence in**  
**shaping academic polices (%)**

<b>Locus of Influence</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Influential</b>	<b>Very Influential</b>
Department	21	25	23	19	9
Faculty	40	25	19	9	3
Institutional	68	14	8	3	1

#### **4.9 Institutional management**

Participants were asked about the influence of institutional evaluation procedures and practices on their own development as academics. Table 32 shows responses to the statement, ‘In your career in higher education evaluation procedures contributed to your development’.

**Table 32**  
**HE evaluation procedures contributed**  
**to your development**

Scale; 1 = strongly agree – 5 = strongly disagree						
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Total</b>
N	62	96	239	179	305	881
%	7	11	27	20	35	100

Over half (55%) of the participants did not feel that evaluation procedures in their HEI had contributed to their development. Less than one in five (18%) ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’. This seems to suggest that evaluation processes were not considered helpful vis-à-vis career development. Participants were asked to identify the various groups that contributed to the assessment of their work. Table 33 presents the data.

**Table 33**  
**Groups involved in the**  
**assessment of your work**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Your teaching</b>	<b>Your Research</b>	<b>Your Administration</b>	<b>Total</b>
Your peers in your department or unit	64 (257)	44 (175)	49 (197)	401
The head of your department or unit	58 (348)	33 (199)	73 (442)	604
Members of other departments or units at your institution	30 (58)	47 (90)	42 (81)	192
Senior administrative staff at your institution	21 (63)	28 (85)	76 (226)	298
Your students	98 (688)	7 (48)	13 (88)	696
External reviewers	57 (334)	55 (322)	19 (110)	585
Yourself (formal self-assessment)	93 (514)	52 (289)	44 (243)	554
No one at or outside my institution	48 (131)	59 (160)	60 (163)	271

In relation to the key or dominant groups involved in the assessment of the different activities for ‘teaching’, a majority of respondents (98%) identified students, followed by academics themselves (93%) and peers (64%). Just over one fifth of respondents (21%) identified academics from outside their department as playing a role. Over half of participants (59%) did not identify anyone as evaluating their research. Over two fifths (47%) identified academics in ‘other departments’ and (44%) identified ‘peers’ as being involved in the assessment process. Over three quarters (76%) believed that the assessment of their administrative work was undertaken by senior administrators. Almost three quarters (73%) attributed the assessment of administrative function to rest with the ‘heads of department’.

Participants were asked about their perceptions of management in their institutions. Table 34 illustrates the data (scale 1 = strongly agree – 5 = strongly disagree).

**Table 34**  
**Evaluation of role of**  
**institutional management**

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Scale; 1 = strongly agree - 5 = strongly disagree

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Top-level management are providing competent leadership	5	15	21	23	36
I am kept informed with what is going on at this institution	6	16	27	26	25
Lack of staff involvement in decision making is a real problem	36	20	19	12	13
Top-level management supports academic freedom	7	14	31	22	26
Students should have a stronger voice in determining policy affecting them	13	26	39	15	7

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**Table 35**  
**Evaluation of relationship between academics and management**

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Scale; 1 = strongly agree - 5 = strongly disagree

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
There is a strong emphasis on the institution's mission	16	23	31	15	15
There is good communication between management and academics	6	11	16	26	41
There is a top-down management style	55	18	9	7	11
There is collegiality & participation in decision-making processes	5	10	21	25	39
There is a strong performance orientation	12	17	34	18	19
There is a burdensome administrative process	43	25	13	11	8
There is a supportive attitude of management towards teaching activities	8	14	23	23	32
There is a supportive attitude of management towards research activities	7	21	26	20	26

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Over half (59%) of participants did not think that top-level management in their institution provided competent leadership. The lack of staff involvement in decision-making was considered a real problem by over half (56%) of participants. Just over half (51%) of participants did not think that they were kept informed about what was going on in their institution. Almost half of participants (48%) did not believe that top-level management supported academic freedom. Over a third (39%) were of

the view that students should have a stronger voice in determining policy affecting them, while an equal proportion (39%) did not express a view.

The data in Table 35 (scale 1 = strongly agree – 5 = strongly disagree) reflected a similar level of discontent with the management on a number of other related areas and activities. There was a strong sense that management techniques and processes were hierarchical and exclusionary. Almost three quarters (73%) of participants were of the view that top-down management style existed in their institutions. Over two thirds (67%) of participants did not agree that there was good communication between academics and management. Administrative processes were perceived as burdensome by over two thirds (68%) of respondents. A lack of collegiality and participation in decision-making processes was noted by over two thirds (64%) of participants. The support for what was regarded as key institutional activities such as teaching and research was also perceived to be lacking. Over half (55%) did not agree that management in their institution was supportive of teaching and over two fifths (46%) did not believe that management supported research.

Over half of respondents (56%) indicated they were not encouraged to engage in service or entrepreneurial activities outside of their institution and over two fifths (43%) did not agree that businesses or foundations were encouraged to contribute to higher education. Table 36 illustrates the data.

**Table 36**  
**Institutional emphasis on**  
**service related activities**

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Scale; 1 = not at all - 5 = very much

	1	2	3	4	5
Encouraging academics to adopt service activities/entrepreneurial activities outside the institution	33	23	28	13	3
Encouraging individuals, businesses, foundations etc. to contribute more to higher education	19	24	33	17	7

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#### **4.10 Summary**

Many academics perceived a deterioration in their working conditions since the start of their career and attributed this to increased administrative responsibilities and uncertainty around contracts. Participants felt that they required administrative support to perform their academic duties, whereas they found themselves involved in administration that was unproductive with reference to their academic work. The majority were satisfied with their jobs but this could not be attributed to existing facilities and supports in their current work contexts.

A majority of academics surveyed were of the view that teaching activities in general were under-funded, that there was a lack of teaching support staff and more administrative support for teaching-related activities was required. The majority of participants believed that management in their institution was not supportive of the teaching aspects of their work.

Academics in this study did not view the training provided for teaching as being adequate. The evaluation of teaching was regarded as a bureaucratic process that did not focus on developing teacher quality and a majority of participants across countries were of the view that they were not encouraged to improve the quality of their teaching as a result of evaluations. Academics in this study did not believe that the evaluation of teaching was taken seriously by their institutions as it was not valued in terms of career development or progression.

Academics did not believe that institutions supported research activities that informed teaching. There was a general acknowledgement that academics encountered a more diverse group of students who presented with a range of needs and who required on-going support. A minority of participants attributed increased workload to the Bologna Process.

Participants did not feel adequately supported to attend conferences and viewed the availability of research funding as inadequate. It was acknowledged that there was increased pressure to raise external research funds; and that there was increased pressure to publish in international high ranked journals within the universities. Academics were of the view that publications and citations influenced career progression.

Communication between management and academics was viewed as being poor. Academics did not feel that they were kept adequately informed about what was going at institutional level. Institutional managers were viewed as incompetent, lacking leadership and not defending academic freedom. Participants were of the view that they were not involved in decision-making processes with reference to the determination of budgets; the selection of key administrators; choosing new faculty, promotion and tenure. Participants did not feel that they were influential at faculty or in a wider institutional context. Many participants were of the view that decision-making processes were not collegial. Academics viewed the lack of involvement of staff in decision-making processes as a real problem.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE ACADEMIC WORK CONTEXT**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Academics identified a number of changes that had occurred in their work contexts as a result of government policies. These included a decrease in funding allocated to the sector and increased teaching and administrative workloads. A corporate approach to management was viewed as contributing to a lack of consultation. More students with diverse needs were now attending higher education and this required new teaching and supportive processes. All of these issues impacted on the daily working contexts of academics.

### **5.2 Major influences**

Academics identified a number of influences that shape their working contexts. Government policies in relation to the sector and the response by HEIs to the national policy context were the two identified that had the most impact on the working environment. The cuts to public service pay and numbers accompanied by negative rhetoric about the public service in general also impacted on those who work in higher education institutions. One academic commented:

I feel the national picture means that I feel personally under pressure to demonstrate my working. I think, well, we are in the public sector and there is a lot of negative public sector rhetoric that comes back to the defensive feeling that we have to show ourselves to be contributing to society that we have to show ourselves to be working hard and working harder maybe than we should be in order to justify our existence. I think there is a lot of academics personally feel we need to show that we are available or show that we are accessible, that we are doing our

job, mainly 24 hours which I think is not a good culture. (L1 Uni)  
The manner in which the national wage agreement ‘Croke Park’ was applied to the sector was viewed as inappropriate. For academics in the IoT sector in particular, the resultant increase in teaching hours to 18 and 20 per week demonstrated a lack of understanding on the part of the Government about the nature of higher education:

Croke Park hours was a moment that I think, you know, I think it sort of spoke volumes to staff about – they kind of said right, it just speaks very badly about what the profession is considered by government or whoever is making these rules, that people think a third level lecturing job can be done in 18-20 hours a week (HoD 1 IoT).

Policy reports were viewed as playing an important role in shaping the sector:

the Institute has to respond to issues around national policy so there are reports produced and the whole structure of higher education has been laid out in national reports, in our case the Hunt Report. We also see other areas like apprenticeship now has been reviewed and again the national report has been produced there so we have to work within the confines of those national reports and policies, again our efficiencies and all that are monitored through the funding agencies so some of what we do, nonetheless, within we still have a certain amount of autonomy where we can work but there are limits as to how far we can go. (HoS 3 IoT)

Then in terms of mergers and technological universities and trying to attain technological university status, those seem to be driving an awful lot of issues. (HoS 5 IoT)

The cuts to funding emerged as a major issue for academics and this impacted on the working environment in different ways. Their work context was directed by dealing with financial difficulties at institutional level and finding ways to generate new funding through the recruitment of students and research income streams:

the drivers are funding, funding, costing, bums on seats and I am sure no matter who you talk to in the sector, this is what we are all facing. I suppose we are one of the institutes that are having financial problems and to try and to work our way out of those financial difficulties is extremely difficult, extremely difficult and we are getting no support from the HEA (HoS5 IoT)

I think it is completely money driven; decisions are made solely on bottom line. (L3 IoT)

Some academics suggested that national policy decisions ensured that available funding was directed to specific subject areas such as the sciences to the exclusion of others in the humanities and social sciences:

I think through funding decisions etc., certain, obviously bureaucrats decide on the funding of the institutions and the funding of disciplines etc. – I suppose you know in this country, bureaucratic decisions are channelled resources towards kind of hard science disciplines particularly applied hard sciences in particular, and things like humanities and social sciences where I work have you know been very much the poor relations... (L2 Uni)

...there is definitely a big drive to get students in to recruit students in the different areas, but I do think there is a big drive I suppose by the Institute in how they appear to drive it, rather than necessarily looking at the nitty gritty of how they are driving it... (L5 IoT)

However another academic suggested that there was not enough funding to support technology based subjects due to the financial constraints imposed on higher education institutions in the IoT sector:

...I wouldn't like to be the financial controller in the institute sector that is a difficult one so it is because of the way the finances are at the moment, like you go asking for monies, it's always 'no' and 'what part of no do you not understand' and yet in a discipline area such as the technologies and science, we need monies to buy materials for projects to service equipment... (HoS 4 IoT)

Academics were of the view that HEIs adopted policies within their institutions as a response to decisions imposed on the sector by outside agencies. The focus on internal finances and rationalisation was attributed to the impact of national policy:

...we are dictated very much from outside now which we wouldn't – well again I have been in management I suppose a long time now, but from my early days in management in the mid-90s, I was not aware of the external influence in what we did in terms of internal mechanisms inside the college but now you are so much more guided by what's happening externally – these external bodies such as the HEA, the Department of Education, you are somewhat geared, you are so much governed by them that they are nearly as I say running the show to a certain extent, (HoS 4 IoT)

I think we have gone through a lot of change and rationalisation and I think that's really what has consumed a lot of our energy and time in recent years so we've had, I mean there was a time where we had distinct autonomy in budget in which to purchase and where – now it's regulated at every level, you are limited to the suppliers you can purchase from and you are very limited in what you can buy... (HoS2 IoT)

One academic suggested that the context of financial restraint favoured those working in administration and management whose concern was to balance budgets, generate extra funding and manage finances. This resulted in tensions between academics and university administrators:

...essentially universities are currently driven by, are managed and driven essentially by people with a career in university management and administration and what's driving them is essentially bums on seats and money taking in. They are not – I see very little evidence in the third level sector as I am aware of it in terms of scholarship, the people driving the universities are not particularly interested in scholarship...

...there are increasing attempts to you know for example if I raise funds, there will be bureaucrats within the institution who will try

and tell me how to spend the funds so I spend a lot of time having fights about that kind of stuff. (L2 Uni)

The recurrent changes introduced into the higher education sector had contributed to a climate of distrust and poor communication between staff in HEIs:

I think there is more control that has crept in and I see that with my junior colleagues who might be on contract posts – they won't speak out in the way that tenured staff would speak out because they are trying to keep their contracts or to have their posts renewed. I think there are commercial things that are driving the managers of the universities and that is totally at odds with the academic's conviction, which leads them to do research where they can make a change to the world. (L5 Uni)

if we want to get something approved, we have got to go through a Head of School, a Head of Faculty and Finance in order to get the necessary approval, but when finance or HR want information from us, they contact the level directly so they are not going to trouble the head of faculty or the head of school to find out the information from us. We are often caught in rows between faculty and central administration and finance...I think we are not getting the trust centrally as academic leaders of our disciplines... (HoD 1 IoT)

It goes back to the basics; before change, there needs to be information and consultation, right now they keep talking about restructuring within the Institute but we don't get any information about it, we probably won't be consulted about it, so then you know various areas get siphoned off into other areas, we never know what's going on – it's like working in a, it's like working in a place that is always on a tilt, you never know which way the wind is going to blow. (L2 IoT)

... one of the problems with the drivers of academia is that every 2 or 3 years, the measures change... (L1 Uni)

...there is a sort of an agenda being pursued from the top down and the people at the top are not really listening to what the people at the bottom are saying to them. (L2 Uni)

I'd say if there is any control it would be a management control, I don't but maybe the managers are controlled by the bureaucrats. (L3 IoT)

One academic felt that HEIs now promoted a market-driven approach to higher education that did not focus on the needs of students:

I believe there is far too much control which is market-driven. Education/teaching of students has almost become a secondary function rather than a priority even for the institute. (L1 IoT)

Academics in general lacked confidence in the agencies responsible for the higher education sector and were of the view that the autonomy of HEIs was being eroded:

The more control is given to, to the external bureaucrats and making a particular thing about who the external bureaucrats are in this case is the HEA. A lot of power was given to HEA over the universities and they are trying to resist it as best they can and even some of the policies from the HEA absolutely make no sense in University, the role in universities and but in my own particular case, it so happens that one of the favourite subjects for the HEA is computer science so we are one of the favoured schools relative to other schools in the universities. (HoD 1 Uni)

I think on one level it is controlled from bureaucrats outside I think the allocation of research funding by the HEA and so on is controlled to a degree by the national interests and this, the people, the bureaucrats behind aspects of this have priorities which can be sometimes quite crude so I think it can, it does affect research funding in particular. (L4 Uni)

### **5.3 The academic role**

Academics in this study identified three primary duties within their role, which included; teaching, research and administration. The amount of time that they devoted to each aspect varied throughout the academic year and was dependent on the nature of the position that they held.

Most of the academics interviewed discussed their workload in percentage

terms. For lecturers, the percentage time allocated to the various dimensions of their role comprised of; teaching 60%-75% (average 70%), research 10%-25% (average 20%) and administration 20%-5% (average 10%). A variety of examples emerged:

Ok, I would say, I'd say about 70% of my time is given to teaching and I'd say about 5% to outreach, 10% actually because I am in a research centre so 10% to outreach programmes, that leaves me 20%, I do my research – it depends on what time of year it is. So the percentages are inverted in the vacation period... (L5 Uni)

Right, probably about a third, probably 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% administration. (L2 Uni)

I got employed as a Lecturer and it was supposed to be 50-50 research and teaching but that didn't really happen so it is predominantly teaching with research... actually you could change teaching to 60%, research to 20 and the other 20 is administration I would say.(L3 IoT)

Ok, I suppose on teaching it is probably 70%, administration 25 and if I get a chance, I get to spend 5 on research. (L5 IoT)

One academic worked in a variety of departments and this resulted in a higher teaching load compared to other colleagues:

I teach in a variety of different departments but I'm not actually officially belonging to any of them and that means that my workload is I do a substantial amount of teaching relative to colleagues, I do say 5-6 modules per year of 36 hours but I do relatively little administration except what I volunteer to do. (L2 Uni)

Lecturers reported that they were assigned a set number of teaching hours for the academic year. In the university sector it ranged from 172 to 216 hours, compared to one lecturer in the IoT sector who reported 560 teaching

hours as the yearly average. Lecturers from the university sector in this study were timetabled between 6 to 8 teaching hours a week. One university academic pointed to the tensions that existed when trying to reconcile each aspect of the academic role:

everybody has to do a set number of hours of teaching, 172 hours per year, so you must do that and you must do adequate preparation for that. You must do research and I don't know academics who don't do research and then you must do a large amount of admin as well even if you don't have an administrative role...I believe that most people are like myself, that they work 60-70 hours per week and they would work more if they could and I think that's not acceptable. It is not acceptable to require of people that they work in all 3 areas while refusing to count the number of hours that they work. (L4 Uni)

Lecturers from the IoT sector reported that they were timetabled to teach 18 hours a week during the academic terms. This high teaching commitment greatly reduced the time available for research. One academic in this sector calculated the annual teaching hours at 560:

I have a full timetable of hours; 33 weeks with 16 hours. I then have to do marking and on the 11th week I need to be available as if I was timetabled to do theory, drawing or practicals. This is effectively 560 hours. (L1 IoT)

The administrative burden on IoT lecturers was also evident. One academic felt that the time allocated was neither adequate nor well organised. This academic had one day a week to engage in research but this meant that the other days were devoted to teaching only in order to fulfil timetabling requirements:

Well here at the Institute we are allowed with regard to admin, if you are one of the course management team, either a year tutor or a course leader, you are given time off of your contract pursuing to local agreement so I have 2 hours a week for admin which doesn't cover all the admin but at least it helps because I

am a course leader. With regard to research, the only thing that I have been afforded is what is called a research day where I am free from lecturing but that means that I have heavier days because we are now on 18 hours per week so I have much heavier days (L2 IoT)

Academics who had managerial responsibilities, such as the Head of School role, found it difficult to balance each aspect of their role. The time spent on various tasks could not be predicted. One Head of School reflected the general view in the following comment:

I have a teaching requirement and a research requirement and administrative requirement. We are expected to carry out what we call our academic administration functions within whatever time it takes, so that can be I mean if we have to attend an exam board meeting, obviously that's a very clear one, but if you have to prepare documentation or you have to go to a meeting, that always has to happen so it's to an extent, an elastic situation but ever increasing. (HoS 2 IoT)

In the IoT sector, Heads of School allocated most of their time to administrative functions with limited time for either teaching or research:

Well I would say that administration would consume roughly 80% of my time and then teaching about 10%, research about 10%, but it can vary from time to time during the year depending on ongoing activities. (HoS 3 IoT)

I was just thinking of a 35 hour week but that's only notional because my week is usually in excess of 45 but the teaching is taking 3 hours on average per week and that's we'll say after preparation is coming to 6 hours. (HoD1 IoT)

In the university sector, Heads of School tended to engage in more teaching than research or administration:

Well I thought about this myself and I would say that at the moment I wouldn't be doing as much research as I should be doing so I would say that it would be almost 50-40-10; 50% teaching, 40% administration and 10% research. (HoD1 Uni)

There was general agreement that the administrative burdens had increased. One Head of School who taught 8 hours per week felt that it was important to try and get a balance within the professional role:

it is part of my responsibility as a professional in the role to ensure that I am actually making, bringing balance to the work that I do and that if for instance, if I am teaching quite a lot, I need to have a look at that and see if I am teaching an amount that is actually militating against me being able to do research and vice versa. The, I do think that the administrative dimension of the work has certainly increased ...I would have lectured about somewhere in the vicinity of about 8 hours per week which at university level is actually a significant amount, the majority of that would have been at postgraduate level...I would say probably about 60% of my time would have been spent between teaching and associated activities to do with teaching; preparing, correcting, assigning, those kinds of things. I probably would have spent about another 20% in terms of administration. (HoD 3 Uni)

For the majority of academics, teaching and research are viewed as the key components of their role. They were asked to reflect on a number of factors that impacted upon their teaching role.

#### **5.4 Teaching**

Academics taught a variety of subjects and in a range of disciplines. For some, academics, subjects were allocated by their Head of School, and they did not have autonomy with reference to the content that they were expected to teach. They did, however, have autonomy over the pedagogical approaches that they employed. One Head of School who had a teaching role commented:

I have very little autonomy over what I teach. I have one module as I say “that I own” for the past few years and I take that in the first semester and usually what happens is that I end up taking the bits and pieces that nobody wants (HoD 1 IoT)

One university academic indicated that while the Head of Department set out the teaching duties, but the academic in question had an input into curriculum design:

For my teaching duties, again I have to teach what I am told but I can shape my final year options and have an input into the curriculum design. But really the decision as to what I teach is taken by the Head of Department. (L6 Uni)

It was recognised that learning outcomes and module content had to be outlined very clearly:

I would see increasing things, like you know, needing to write learning outcomes for instance, needing to be very clear upfront about what students would be taught and how they will learn... (HoD 3 Uni)

For others, the situation was different as they did have autonomy over both the content of the subject and the teaching approaches adopted. One academic taught students from a variety of academic backgrounds and as it was an elective programme the content was designed by the academic:

I am very much left to myself to teach what I want; it's almost like I am filling an allocation of hours, but I mean, I teach in my structure is what is called electives so I get students from all sorts of different departments. (L2 Uni)

Academics in this study viewed the relationship between research and teaching as very important.

#### ***5.4.1 Research led teaching***

Academics in this study were committed to research led teaching. One academic was of the view that these areas should be indistinguishable in order to develop new methodologies and approaches, thereby generating new knowledge:

I think they should be fused, I think that it is best if your research does inform your teaching to a greater or lesser degree and it is certainly possible because universities have to be leading a new generation or new methodologies. (L5 Uni)

Another academic suggested that there was a direct relationship between teaching and research, particularly at postgraduate level:

Well I think there should be a direct relationship between some of your teaching and research; I think teaching should be research-driven, particularly at postgraduate level. (L4 Uni)

Reference was made to developments in new technologies that could be utilised in the classroom context:

new technologies etc. that I can then utilise in a classroom environment for my undergraduate teaching (L3 IoT)

On a personal level, one academic commented that it would be very hard to engage in research only without having the teaching component and it would be very difficult to teach without engaging research as teaching would then become a 'rote' exercise:

I found it very difficult to maintain an interest in pure research without any teaching. On the other hand, if, I also find it very difficult to teach without a research element because then the teaching becomes rote and you're not on top of the material... (L2 Uni)

Another academic argued that there should be a relationship between teaching and research, but hinted that it was not possible in current working contexts:

I think that, in a perfect world, there should be a relationship between research and teaching. (L2, IoT)

A number of constraints were identified that limited the capacity to engage in research led teaching. For one academic, while it was encouraged at school level to adopt this approach, the working context militated against this. The increasing number of students and the diversity of the student cohort made it very difficult:

We recently had a school review and we were encouraged to be research led, to engage in research led teaching and ideally that would be what you would do, we have the number of students

taking my subject has increased over the years and at the same time it is a subject within an arts degree and the points of the arts degree have fallen so we have more a less well equipped students taking our subjects. (L1 Uni)

Fears were expressed that curricular provision was quickly becoming outdated due to excessive teaching commitments that eroded time to engage with new developments in subject areas:

...we need to be on top of the research in that area, they really do because there is no point in us teaching stuff that is out of date but then how do you marry delivering 20 hours a week or 18 hours a week and doing research? (HoS 4 IoT)

This view was echoed by a Head of School who indicated that staff did not have time to apply for research grants due to excessive teaching loads, yet they were expected to be up-to-date with new developments in subject areas like computing and science:

Like to even encourage staff to apply for grants for research funding, they wouldn't even have the time to do that with their teaching load. Yet we are supposed to be at the forefront of where various things are, particularly in the likes of science, computing where times are changing rapidly. (HoS 4 IoT)

One academic attributed the lack of engagement with research led teaching to the fact that teaching across a number of different areas did not allow for this approach:

Well, I suppose, ideally I would like to do more research to inform my teaching but in that sense you are really teaching in a specialised area and in the IoTs you are not necessarily. You don't have the luxury with the amount hours you teach to be able to teach in a specialised area so there has to be a compromise as a result. (L5 IoT)

Achieving synergies between teaching and research was viewed as a challenge, particularly in contexts where separate teaching and separate

research contracts existed:

I can see that people are being appointed into research positions who don't have any teaching remit and the vice versa because of increased teaching loads, people are finding it more difficult to do research and because of contractual arrangements, people who maybe now are doing research can't carry out teaching but I think we try in our institution to get synergies between the two but maybe for individuals, it can be a challenge alright to you know to be active in both areas. (HoS3 IoT)

## **5.5 Research**

Academics in this study were conscious of the various national and institutional pressures that impacted on the research aspect of their role in their working contexts. While national and international priorities influenced the research agenda of many institutions, having academic freedom was viewed as being important:

I think there are always national and international priorities around research – there are always areas where business or industry may have an interest in particular, research in particular areas...academic freedom does allow us the privilege of being able to research the things that are of interest to us (HoD 3 Uni).

One academic suggested that there were a number of choices that could be made with reference to the research aspect of the academic role. Academics can make decisions to engage in research that they found interesting, they could employ a research strategy that would be personally beneficial from a career point of view or pursue research that was of benefit to the wider society. Each of these choices had implications:

I would see myself as being very free to do that, but again I think that in doing that I have to be conscious of the potential impact of that decision and if I elaborate on that point for you – it would be in relation to things like promotions or things like bringing in research funding, which of course can be linked into promotion as well. So I suppose within, within any research that you do, you have got to take a decision yourself as to whether this is something you are really interested in or not, whether there is

something you think will be of benefit not just to you but also to a wider society, to a wider group than just yourself. (HoD 3 Uni)

Some academics made personal choices around their research approach, though this was discouraged at institutional level:

In terms of research, I work completely autonomously and I chose my own research area and I as I said I decide whether I want to be involved in research or not (L3 IoT)

To a great extent I find that publishing on the net, actually is the freest of all of the types of publishing that I can do and involves the least amount of outside interference in what I publish. My institution, this is the point of the question – my institution does not sit over me and try and order me around as to what I publish, although they have tried, but not to any great effective way, they have tried to say wouldn't it be much better if you research this or that ... (L2 Uni)

Another academic felt constrained by the strategy of the institution around research:

the fact that you can't do what you want because you must align your PhD, you are not going to get a PhD student unless your research is aligned with the Institute strategy you know so I think in that respect the Institute needs to kind of be a little bit more flexible (HoD 1 IoT)

Academics from both sectors indicated that securing funded research was an important institutional priority. It was acknowledged that funded research bids required academics to work in teams on a group activity and this did not suit individuals who worked in certain areas:

... In general I feel people are free to research what they want to do. But in whether getting funding for the research will depend on one responding – doing research in the areas that are now constituted largely – I mean research is constituted largely as a group activity and as an activity that to a large degree, do not suit individuals who are working in the humanities (L4 Uni)

It was also recognised that it was difficult to conduct research within a team environment due to different approaches adopted by academics from different disciplines:

...the overall School of Business is on a research kind of journey, how can we all do research together and I slightly battled with that one because we did it for a couple of years but it never sits comfortably because our research methods are quite different to how somebody maybe in accountancy would undertake research...(HoD 6 IoT)

One academic viewed working in research teams positively and appreciated the support having colleagues working in a similar area:

As I said, they identified within the Institute thematic areas that they want to promote, so you would have a certain amount of freedom but it is good to say within those thematic areas in terms of support from other colleagues working in that research area. (L3 IoT)

Academics acknowledged that HEIs encouraged research that linked with national priorities and industry:

I suppose definitely as an industry based focused institute, we look at the need of industry like at the moment obviously we are developing more towards the big data thing at the moment... (HoD 1 IoT)

I suppose the knowledge, if it is acknowledged and generated in different ways I think a lot of what we do and the trend we tend to follow would be to support local enterprise industry so I think that's a big driver effect. The other drivers would be where national research funding has been oriented and I mean the funding in Ireland has largely been diverted towards the ICT, the bio tech industries... (HoS 3 IoT)

Certain areas attracted funding to the exclusion of others and this impacted upon career progression and promotion:

if you want to get funding, you have to operate in certain areas, if you want to operate in those areas, you are going to have to do without external funding and that will knock on them to say your career prospects, promotional, if you are going to get promotion from one grade to another so you know that's definitely the case... (L2 Uni)

Academics acknowledged that their institutions emphasised research outputs and publications. This was also linked to career and promotional prospects. The emphasis on publications was perceived as unfair as some areas were perceived as more conducive to producing research papers than others:

Well it's one metric at the moment for all departments but that metric is not fair because even say in applied maths, it is easier to get published than in pure maths, that sort of thing you know. It could be, for example, you could be writing a paper, certain areas seem to be more amenable to producing research papers and they all count as one paper so like you can't say like my colleague who got published in the journal of algebra say, which is an international journal, that counts the same as we'll say one paper for the Royal Irish Academy or one paper for the Hospitality Institute, do you know what I mean? (HoD 1 IoT)

For one academic, the level of publication output expected for promotions exceeded that required by international universities:

Publication, publication, publication so we would be essentially publication and I think and in that respect, we in my institution I know for a fact because of having applied for promotions and having referees on the senior promotions committee at Cambridge that we are perhaps more demanding than Cambridge... (L5 Uni)

## **5.6 Changes in the work context**

Academics pointed to many changes that had occurred in their workplace context since their appointment. Changes in relation to workload was a recurring theme in all of the interviews. Increasing numbers of students,

combined with a reduction in staff numbers was identified as a major change. This resulted in an increased teaching workload and increased administration:

The big change is more students and fewer staff, from where I am sitting and not everyone has more students but we do, we have a lot more students and we have a lot fewer staff and so we have you know consequently much higher teaching workload and much higher administration workload because you can decrease the number of classes you offer if you have so many students but you can't decrease the amount of administration each student produces. (L1 Uni)

One academic referred to the challenges faced by young academics starting a career:

Well the main change as I was saying to you is the increasing overburden of administering academics, also the reduction in the working conditions, particularly for young academics that it now takes young academics coming into it, possibly 20 years or 25 years to achieve to get to the top of their scale. (HoS2 IoT)

A number of academics referred to an erosion of collegiality in the working environment. Colleagues did not have time to discuss issues together due to increased teaching hours and the time that was necessary to engage in research:

The role has completely changed – the camaraderie that used to be among staff is gone because everyone is frantically trying to catch up. We have 12 weeks which in itself doesn't particularly bother me – I come from a background of semesterisation modularisation but the mere number of hours that we teach across a range of courses causes everyone to constantly be under pressure... (L2 IoT)

...you have to teach and you have to make sure you cover all this and it is such an intense time that staff don't have time to discuss stuff which is always to the betterment of staff, well I do this and maybe I'll do that and get ideas from each other – they don't have

the opportunity to do that so there's not the collegiality there that used to be... (L5 IoT)

The lack of engagement among staff is huge and I think it's probably as a result of the increase in hours and the expectation of staff to engage in research... (HoD 6 IoT)

The changed relationship between management and staff was referred to. A corporate approach to management, was identified specifically the appointment of more non-teaching staff. Academics indicated that there was less consultation, more emphasis on control and oversight, and a decline in the autonomy of individual departments and academics in the wider institutional context:

The enforced corporate spirit imposed at the managerial level, we never used to call the Provosts and such things managers, but now we have seen a reinforcement of a corporate mode, management style, far less consultation with the academics... I get a sense that there is a lack of accountability at this managerial level, at the managerial level of the universities, that they are becoming increasingly money making machines, they are seeking to over-expand and that seems to be going against what the consensus of the academics is. (L5 Uni)

The idea of oversight by managerial and human resources oversight has massively increased I think, as well in a way that I don't think, I think it's too heavy handed... (L4 Uni)

One last point is that significant aspect too has been the growth of the non-teaching related staff in all organisations – they have grown dramatically in various functions without a commensurate improvement in anything. (HoS 2 IoT)

I think the growing size and growing intrusiveness of sort, of management and surveillance structures within the university. You know a lot of the autonomy that departments had to organise themselves has been stripped away and sort of pared away at really over time. And you know this kind of managerial business type culture has come in on top of academics that has created a different working environment which I think alienates a lot of academic work... (L2 Uni)

One academic viewed the lack of security for academics as a major change. This led to divisions between academics who were permanent and those who were not. Academics on contracts were not in a position to express their views freely:

Well I think the casualisation of work is – there is this division between the relatively secure, longer established people and the younger precariously employed people – I think that has really come dramatically sort of increased, I mean it was always there to an extent but its importance and its magnitude has greatly swelled over the last number of years. In terms of academic life, the main problem is the lack of security for academics and if, if academics do not have a permanent job, they are working to please rather than exploring with a sense of independence and that again has a huge knock on effect on the quality of what they are doing and the independency. (L2 Uni)

The student body had also changed and was recognised as being more diverse. Students who were recruited onto courses with lower points than in previous years required support with basic skills. An increasing number of students coming from abroad with language levels not appropriate to the programmes to which they were recruited was also viewed as a new challenge:

...the points for a lot of the students has dropped to try and increase the numbers of students into each course. In some cases we'll say particularly engineering regular courses. So what it has meant is that you are spending an awful lot of time doing basic stuff and you can't actually get to, you can't produce the graduates with the knowledge that they need, all you are doing is kind of covering basic things or introducing topics. (L5 IoT)

I hate to be that blunt but that is what it has gotten down to, it's all about money. We have brought students in from outside of Europe that cannot speak English and basically staff are being told pass them even though they are supposed to come in with required – international students it's horrendous what they have done to those students. (L2 IoT)

For academics in the IoT sector, the introduction of modularisation meant that material had to be covered very quickly and many students found that challenging. Student retention was viewed as an important issue and was identified as another change in the academic work context:

We basically get students with a lower level of points but as a result of financial constraints lab-work, practicals have been cut-back. There's also an increase in student numbers and the introduction of semesterisation has led to the situation where there are insufficient hours for our type of student. (L1 IoT)

I suppose, as I said, our whole area of modularised delivery has been the biggest change I mean that has impacted then on the rate of which the intensity of which the material is delivered. I suppose we see the changes, it's not fair to students the changes they just accept the system the way it is. (HoS3 IoT)

I would say retention, keeping students there whether or not they should be on that particular course seems to be terribly important, so it means in some instances the grade point averages they get from one year to the next have been reduced and I think there is a lot of willingness on management to allow students to progress to the next year in a way they may not have in the past. (L3 IoT)

## **5.7 Summary**

Academics in this study viewed Government policy in relation to higher education and cuts to funding, combined with the responses of HEIs, as the major drivers in higher education. The impact of austerity and the cuts to public servants' pay impacted negatively on academics. The cuts to funding for the sector had a number of implications. HEIs responded by engaging in rationalisation within their organisations. This, in turn, led to a climate of distrust between management and academics. Academics were of the view that HEIs had adopted a market-driven approach to generating extra income through the recruitment of extra students and research funding. Academics in this study suggested that, as a result of Government policy, some subjects were better placed to receive funding particularly those in the science and technology areas. Academics working in other disciplines did not have access to the funding that was available.

There was little confidence in the thrust of national policy for the sector and in the agencies responsible for policy development.

Academics pointed to the tensions that existed with reference to their teaching, research and administrative roles. For those who worked in the IoT sector, the high teaching workload left very little time to engage in research. Those who had managerial responsibilities experienced difficulties when trying to balance the teaching, research and administrative aspects. Some academics had autonomy over the content of what they taught while others did not. All participants were committed to research led teaching but experienced a number of constraints. These included increased student numbers and a diverse student cohort. Some academics did not have enough time to research new developments in their subjects due to the pressures of current workloads. The trend towards research only and teaching only contracts was viewed as a further challenge to the promotion of research led teaching. Research was regarded as being very important both to the HEIs and to individual academics. Academics had a number of choices when it came to conducting research, pursuing personal research interests, engaging in research that secured funding and working in multidisciplinary teams. It was recognised that each choice had implications for career progression as institutions tended to support research initiatives that aligned with national priorities and that secured funding.

A number of changes were identified in the academic working context. These included a more corporate approach to management, a decline in collegiality and a greater number of students who had diverse needs. A reduction in staff numbers accompanied by increased teaching and administrative workloads were also viewed as major changes.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS**

The economic crisis had a major impact on the higher education sector. The sector as a whole experienced a 29% reduction in funding from 2007 to 2014. During the same period, staffing numbers in the public sector were reduced by 10% (32,000). Staff numbers in the education sector were reduced by 4,500 in the period 2008-2013. During the same period enrolments in the university sector experienced an increase of 14% (n=15,346) whilst the IoT sector witnessed an increase of 19% (n=16,294). This has clearly led to academics experiencing increased workloads to meet the growing students demand with a reduced academic workforce.

Almost three quarters of academics (72%) in this study believed that their working conditions had deteriorated. They were under pressure to teach more students and they worked longer hours. The lack of administrative support was referred to frequently. Many viewed administrative work as being unproductive and time consuming.

The development of positive work experiences is connected to having a wide variety of relationships within the workplace. This is especially true for mid-career academics. Change, greater student diversity and new educational applications of technology are challenges faced by those in the mid career phase. They are expected to meet new demands and performance expectations while at the same time serving critical instructional, leadership, administrative and mentoring roles within their programmes and institutions. The introduction of modular teaching, the restructuring of academic units, mergers of different departments, schools and faculties have also contributed to the distance that has emerged between staff at the periphery and staff at the centre of the institution.

Studies have shown quite consistently that excessive workloads and ambiguous or conflicting role demands can lead to negative work

experiences. Academics derive their identities from both their teaching and research roles and require support in each of these areas. For academics, the teaching aspect of their work is very important and a key element of their identity.

Academics in this study were of the view that teaching-related activities were not adequately funded in their institutions. Over half of respondents (55%) did not consider that management in their institutions supported the teaching aspects of their role. It is now an accepted feature of the higher education landscape that there is greater student heterogeneity. This has implications for both teaching and cultural engagement (Freudenberg & Samarkovski, 2014). Almost three quarters (73%) of academics in this study indicated that student diversity had increased since they had started working. They identified a number of challenges that this context presented. Students were now coming to higher education not having basic skills, particularly writing skills. It was also noted that students presented with a greater variety of needs, which in turn increased the pastoral aspect of academics' work. Many academics have no training in this area and require greater supports to be effective in this kind of role.

Changes in approaches to pedagogy is an area where academics require continued support (Clarke et al. 2015). Over a third (39%) of academics expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of pedagogical support to which they had access. As part of developing a positive identity, academics require continued support in developing their pedagogical skills. Over half of academics (54%) were of the view that their higher education institution did not support research led teaching. It also emerged that, for many, teaching was not valued by the institution when it came to career progression. Over a quarter (25%) of academics indicated that they were not encouraged to improve their instructional skills in response to teaching evaluations. The perception was that HEIs viewed the evaluation of teaching as a bureaucratic exercise. This type of approach will not enhance the teaching experience for students or academics.

For academics, the opportunity to engage in research is a key element of their professional identity. Participating in academic and professional networks, both nationally and internationally, is very important for academics in terms of their work and their identity. A quarter of

respondents (25%) did not feel adequately supported by their institutions to attend national and international conferences.

The research area has become very complex. Over half of respondents (53%) indicated that there was increased institutional pressure to raise external research funding since the time of their appointment. Academics feel pressured to access funding streams frequently (Drennan et al., 2013). However, there are limits to the amount of research funding that can be secured. Over two thirds (67%) of respondents considered the availability of research funding to be inadequate. This lack of funding has resulted in academics vying for grants, making it a pressured experience. Academics are now required to be accountable and make explicit their research work, including how it is funded, conducted and disseminated (Drennan et al., 2013). Research areas which are not funded tend to be neglected, thus having a negative impact on knowledge generation and on the careers of academics who work in those less popular areas.

Publications are a very important part of the academic working environment and are linked to tenure and promotion. Over half (55%) of academics in the study agreed that publications and citations influenced career progression. Citations are important for institutional international rankings and securing research funding. The growing pressure to publish in high profile journals has meant that academics must conform to publication criteria and interests.

The creation of a supportive working environment is dependent on how individuals view themselves and their role in their organisation. The affirmation of an employee's identity by others results in higher levels of connectedness on the part of the employee to the organisation (Swann et al, 2000). For academics, the areas of influence and recognition starts with their own department/school, faculty level and in the broader institutional context. There were mixed views with reference to being influential within their individual department/school. Over three quarters (76%) of academics felt that they were influential at departmental level. Over half (56%) of academics felt that they were influential at faculty level. Over two thirds (68%) felt that they were not influential in the wider institutional context.

Trust and respect are significant characteristics of positive relationships at work (Dutton et al., 2010). In relation to management style within HEIs, almost three quarters (73%) of the academics in this study were of the view that a top-down approach predominated in their institution. This was attributed to the restructuring processes in higher education. Over two thirds of academics (67%) in this study viewed the communication processes in their institutions as being inadequate. Over half (59%) of academics did not regard senior management in their institutions as providing competent leadership.

The active participation of academics in the decision-making processes of higher education institutions is central to the success of these organisations, yet academics in this study did not feel that they were a part of the decision-making processes. It emerged that over two thirds (64%) of academics in this study experienced a lack of collegiality and participation in decision-making within their institutions. Over two fifths of participants (45%) did not view trade unions as recognised partners in the decision-making processes. Over two thirds (68%) of academics viewed institutional managers as the main decision-makers with reference to budgets and promotions.

The data from this study suggests that higher education institutions in Ireland need to focus on the creation of supportive working environments. Academics and students deserve a context where they can focus on the key areas of teaching, learning and research. If efforts are not made to create supportive work contexts in higher education, the Irish higher education system will not be able to cope with future challenges.

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## APPENDICES

### I. Copy of Survey Invitation email

#### THE BELOW INVITATION WAS DISTRIBUTED BY EMAIL TO SAMPLE GROUP DECEMBER 2013.

Dear Colleagues,

Education International is coordinating a major research project exploring academic work in higher education institutes within Europe. The research project will utilise both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to produce country reports for comparative analysis.

IFUT and TUI are cooperating in the gathering and analysis of data for the Irish country report. Both unions are requesting members to participate in this online survey by clicking the following URL link and completing the questionnaire. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/EI-Survey>

It should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete the survey. All responses are anonymous. The deadline for receipt of completed questionnaires is Monday the 13th of January 2013. The findings of the survey will be published in the country report which will be circulated to members in either April or May 2014.

Thank you for your assistance in this important piece of research. For further information please contact either;

Marie Clarke IFUT  
marie.clarke@ucd.ie

Aidan Kenny TUI  
akenny@tui.ie



## **2. Copy of Interview Guide/Schedule**

### **CREATING AND MAINTAINING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### **Major theme: Creating and Maintaining Supportive Environments in Higher Education**

##### ***Rationale***

A dominant view in literature on the changing role of academics is that the professional autonomy of academics has been undermined with the influence of managerialist principles. These, it is argued, represent a move away from the focus on the individual professional and accord primacy to organisational goals over and above individual intellectual interests (ideally serving the greater good). The outcome, it is proposed, is the erosion of professional academic autonomy and freedom by turning academics into skilled entrepreneurs who are able expected to compete in the academic marketplace. In response to the outcry about the reduction in the professional power of academics is a counterargument that the increase in control over academics has largely been exercised from within their own ranks.

Empirical studies indicate that managerialism has neither been wholeheartedly rejected nor accepted by academics, but rather has been received in a more fluid and haphazard way. It has also been acknowledged that there are variations in how managerialism has rolled out in terms of its timing, pace, and extent, in different social locations. Even within the same country, cultural variations may be observed across universities, individual departments, and in the attitudes of individual faculty. It has also been noted in the literature that ‘within variance’ may be greater than ‘between variance’, that is, those working in the same country or institution may construct and experience managerialism more differently from one another than do those across countries. The proposed research will address this issue with specific reference to creating and maintaining supportive environments for academics in higher education.

##### ***Interview guide***

Tell me about the division of labour in your work (i.e. distribution of time

spent on research, teaching and administration/contribution)? How did this division of labour come about? To what extent did you shape this yourself? Is this usual in your discipline? Has this division of labour changed over the course of your career? What do you think about the relationship between teaching and research?

How much autonomy do you have over what you teach/research/administration? What is the main influence on this? What else is influencing this? Have you ever felt like resisting outside pressures? Have you acted on this? In what way? What was the consequence? Can you think of specific examples of situations that you were in to illustrate the point? Is your work evaluated and if so in what way? Can you come and go as you please? To what extent are you free to work at home or go to conferences? What are your views on accountability in academia and in relation to your role?

What do you think drives the work of this university/institution nowadays? Was it always like this? Tell me about what has changed, and what has stayed the same? Do you see yourself as being on an 'academic assembly line' as some people call it? To what extent do you think that the needs of the organisation have taken precedence over and above individual intellectual interests, ideally serving the greater good? Has the role really changed on a day-to-day level for you over time?

Tell me about the changes (if any) that you have witnessed since you started your career in academia. What changes have taken place in relation to your specific discipline? To what extent do you think that changes in other disciplines have affected the role of academics in your field?

To what extent do you think your role is controlled by bureaucrats from outside? Do you feel supported in your role, if so how and if not why not? What should the institution do to support you more?

Do you think that the knowledge that is developed within your discipline is shaped by particular interests, and if so, in what way? How free are you to research what you like? What counts in your organisation in terms of research outputs? What do you think are the consequences of this for you professionally and society more generally?

### **3. Copy of Interview Consent Form**

#### **CREATING AND MAINTAINING SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

##### *Informed Consent Form for Individual Interviews*

###### ***Introduction***

A research team from Education International is undertaking a programme of research on creating and maintaining supportive environments in higher education.

###### ***Description:***

In the next 45 minutes to 1 hour you will be asked questions regarding your perceptions of governance, academic careers and supports as they pertain to your role as an academic in the higher education system. Your comments will be recorded to maintain the utmost accuracy in your statements. Your name as a participant in this interview will be held in strict confidence by the investigator. Comments will not be attributed to any one individual. You or your name will not be connected with any statement. The recordings will be stored under lock and key in the office of the researcher until completion of the interview analysis. Upon completion of analysis recordings will be destroyed. Recordings will be used to clarify and illuminate the notes. It is possible that specific comments will be reported if they illuminate a particular theme. Real names will not be tied to these comments. If, at any point, you are concerned about a comment that you have made please contact me at e-mail **akenny@tui.ie** and your comment will be erased from all records if you so choose. There are no foreseeable risks to your participation in this interview.

###### ***Please Note***

1. I understand the scope, aims, and purposes of this research project and the procedures to be followed and the expected duration of my participation.
2. I understand that if I consent to participate in this research, I may decline to answer any question or discontinue my participation at any time.
3. I confirm that no coercion of any kind was used in seeking my participation in this research project.

4. I understand that if I have any questions pertaining to the research I can contact Aidan Kenny.
5. I certify that I have read and fully understand the purpose of this research project and the risks and benefits it presents to me as stated above.

Please sign below:

I **CONSENT/AGREE** to participate in this research project

\_\_\_\_\_

I **REFUSE/DO NOT AGREE** to participate in this research project

\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

## **4. Text Bucharest Communiqué 2012**

### **Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area Bucharest Communiqué 26-27 April 2012 FINAL VERSION**

We, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the 47 countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have met in Bucharest, on 26 and 27 April 2012, to take stock of the achievements of the Bologna Process and agree on the future priorities of the EHEA.

Investing in higher education for the future Europe is undergoing an economic and financial crisis with damaging societal effects. Within the field of higher education, the crisis is affecting the availability of adequate funding and making graduates' job prospects more uncertain.

Higher education is an important part of the solution to our current difficulties. Strong and accountable higher education systems provide the foundations for thriving knowledge societies. Higher education should be at the heart of our efforts to overcome the crisis – now more than ever.

With this in mind, we commit to securing the highest possible level of public funding for higher education and drawing on other appropriate sources, as an investment in our future. We will support our institutions in the education of creative, innovative, critically thinking and responsible graduates needed for economic growth and the sustainable development of our democracies. We are dedicated to working together in this way to reduce youth unemployment.

The EHEA yesterday, today and tomorrow

The Bologna reforms have changed the face of higher education across Europe, thanks to the involvement and dedication of higher education institutions, staff and students.

Higher education structures in Europe are now more compatible and comparable. Quality assurance systems contribute to building trust, higher education qualifications are more recognisable across borders and participation in higher education has widened. Students today benefit from a wider variety of educational opportunities and are increasingly mobile. The vision of an integrated EHEA is within reach.

However, as the report on the implementation of the Bologna Process shows, we must make further efforts to consolidate and build on progress. We will strive for more coherence between our policies, especially in completing the transition to the three cycle system, the use of ECTS credits, the issuing of Diploma Supplements, the enhancement of quality assurance and the implementation of qualifications frameworks, including the definition and evaluation of learning outcomes.

We will pursue the following goals: to provide quality higher education for all, to enhance graduates' employability and to strengthen mobility as a means for better learning.

Our actions towards these goals will be underpinned by constant efforts to align national practices with the objectives and policies of the EHEA, while addressing those policy areas where further work is needed. For 2012-2015, we will especially concentrate on fully supporting our higher education institutions and stakeholders in their efforts to deliver meaningful changes and to further the comprehensive implementation of all Bologna action lines.

Providing quality higher education for all

Widening access to higher education is a precondition for societal progress and economic development. We agree to adopt national measures for widening overall access to quality higher education. We will work to raise completion rates and ensure timely progression in higher education in all EHEA countries.

The student body entering and graduating from higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations. We will step up our efforts towards underrepresented groups to develop the social dimension of higher education, reduce inequalities and provide adequate

student support services, counselling and guidance, flexible learning paths and alternative access routes, including recognition of prior learning. We encourage the use of peer learning on the social dimension and aim to monitor progress in this area.

We reiterate our commitment to promote student-centred learning in higher education, characterised by innovative methods of teaching that involve students as active participants in their own learning. Together with institutions, students and staff, we will facilitate a supportive and inspiring working and learning environment.

Higher education should be an open process in which students develop intellectual independence and personal self-assuredness alongside disciplinary knowledge and skills. Through the pursuit of academic learning and research, students should acquire the ability confidently to assess situations and ground their actions in critical thought.

Quality assurance is essential for building trust and to reinforce the attractiveness of the EHEA's offerings, including in the provision of cross-border education. We commit to both maintaining the public responsibility for quality assurance and to actively involve a wide range of stakeholders in this development. We acknowledge the ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (the E4 group) report on the implementation and application of the "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance" (ESG)<sup>1</sup>. We will revise the ESG to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope. The revision will be based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which will be submitted to the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

- 1 European Association for Quality Assurance (2011): "Mapping the Implementation and application of the ESG";
- 2 European University Association (2010): "Salzburg II Recommendations";

We welcome the external evaluation of EQAR and we encourage quality

assurance agencies to apply for registration. We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.

We confirm our commitment to maintaining public responsibility for higher education and acknowledge the need to open a dialogue on funding and governance of higher education. We recognise the importance of further developing appropriate funding instruments to pursue our common goals. Furthermore, we stress the importance of developing more efficient governance and managerial structures at higher education institutions. We commit to supporting the engagement of students and staff in governance structures at all levels and reiterate our commitment to autonomous and accountable higher education institutions that embrace academic freedom.

### Enhancing employability to serve Europe's needs

Today's graduates need to combine transversal, multidisciplinary and innovation skills and competences with up-to-date subject-specific knowledge so as to be able to contribute to the wider needs of society and the labour market. We aim to enhance the employability and personal and professional development of graduates throughout their careers. We will achieve this by improving cooperation between employers, students and higher education institutions, especially in the development of study programmes that help increase the innovation, entrepreneurial and research potential of graduates. Lifelong learning is one of the important factors in meeting the needs of a changing labour market, and higher education institutions play a central role in transferring knowledge and strengthening regional development, including by the continuous development of competences and reinforcement of knowledge alliances.

Our societies need higher education institutions to contribute innovatively to sustainable development and therefore, higher education must ensure a stronger link between research, teaching and learning at all levels. Study programmes must reflect changing research priorities and emerging disciplines, and research should underpin teaching and learning. In this

respect, we will sustain a diversity of doctoral programmes. Taking into account the “Salzburg II recommendations”<sup>2</sup> and the Principles for Innovative

Doctoral Training,<sup>3</sup> we will explore how to promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle, as the education and training of doctoral candidates has a particular role in bridging the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA). Next to doctoral training, high quality second cycle programmes are a necessary precondition for the success of linking teaching, learning and research. Keeping wide diversity and simultaneously increasing readability, we might also explore further possible common principles for master programmes in the EHEA, taking account of previous work<sup>4</sup>.

- 3 European Commission (2011): “Report of Mapping Exercise on Doctoral Training in Europe – Towards a common approach”;
- 4 European University Association (2009): “Survey of Master Degrees in Europe”;
- 5 European Commission (2009): “ECTS Users’ Guide”;
- 6 Bucharest Ministerial Conference (2012): “Mobility for Better Learning. Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)”;

To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed. The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance – all of which are interdependent. We call on institutions to further link study credits with both learning outcomes and student workload, and to include the attainment of learning outcomes in assessment procedures. We will work to ensure that the ECTS Users’ Guide<sup>5</sup> fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning.

We welcome the progress in developing qualifications frameworks; they improve transparency and will enable higher education systems to be more

open and flexible. We acknowledge that realising the full benefits of qualifications frameworks can in practice be more challenging than developing the structures. The development of qualifications frameworks must continue so that they become an everyday reality for students, staff and employers. Meanwhile, some countries face challenges in finalising national frameworks and in self-certifying compatibility with the framework of qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA) by the end of 2012. These countries need to redouble their efforts and to take advantage of the support and experience of others in order to achieve this goal.

A common understanding of the levels of our qualifications frameworks is essential to recognition for both academic and professional purposes. School leaving qualifications giving access to higher education will be considered as being of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 4, or equivalent levels for countries not bound by the EQF, where they are included in National Qualifications Frameworks. We further commit to referencing first, second and third cycle qualifications against EQF levels 6, 7 and 8 respectively, or against equivalent levels for countries not bound by the EQF. We will explore how the QF-EHEA could take account of short cycle qualifications (EQF level 5) and encourage countries to use the QF-EHEA for referencing these qualifications in national contexts where they exist. We ask the Council of Europe and the European Commission to continue to coordinate efforts to make the respective qualifications frameworks work well in practice.

We welcome the clear reference to ECTS, to the European Qualifications Framework and to learning outcomes in the European Commission's proposal for a revision of the EU Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications. We underline the importance of taking appropriate account of these elements in recognition decisions.

### Strengthening mobility for better learning

Learning mobility is essential to ensure the quality of higher education, enhance students' employability and expand cross-border collaboration within the EHEA and beyond. We adopt the strategy "Mobility for Better Learning"<sup>6</sup> as an addendum, including its mobility target, as an integral part of our efforts to promote an element of internationalisation in all of

higher education.

Sufficient financial support to students is essential in ensuring equal access and mobility opportunities. We reiterate our commitment to full portability of national grants and loans across the EHEA and call on the European Union to underpin this endeavour through its policies.

Fair academic and professional recognition, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning, is at the core of the EHEA. It is a direct benefit for students' academic mobility, it improves graduates' chances of professional mobility and it represents an accurate measure of the degree of convergence and trust attained. We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA. We therefore commit to reviewing our national legislation to comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>7</sup>. We welcome the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual<sup>8</sup> and recommend its use as a set of guidelines for recognition of foreign qualifications and a compendium of good practices, as well as encourage higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess institutional recognition procedures in internal and external quality assurance.

- 7 Council of Europe/UNESCO (1997): "Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region";
- 8 NUFFIC, Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in higher education (2012): "European Area of Recognition Manual";
- 9 London Ministerial Conference (2007): "European Higher Education in a Global Setting. A Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process".

We strive for open higher education systems and better balanced mobility in the EHEA. If mobility imbalances between EHEA countries are deemed unsustainable by at least one party, we encourage the countries involved to jointly seek a solution, in line with the EHEA Mobility Strategy.

We encourage higher education institutions to further develop joint programmes and degrees as part of a wider EHEA approach. We will examine national rules and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation and mobility embedded in national contexts.

Cooperation with other regions of the world and international openness are key factors to the development of the EHEA. We commit to further exploring the global understanding of the EHEA goals and principles in line with the strategic priorities set by the 2007 strategy for “the EHEA in a Global Setting”<sup>9</sup>. We will evaluate the strategy’s implementation by 2015 with the aim to provide guidelines for further internationalisation developments. The Bologna Policy Forum will continue as an opportunity for dialogue and its format will be further developed with our global partners.

Improvement of data collection and transparency to underpin political goals

We welcome the improved quality of data and information on higher education. We ask for more targeted data collection and referencing against common indicators, particularly on employability, the social dimension, lifelong learning, internationalisation, portability of grants/loans, and student and staff mobility. We ask Eurostat, Eurydice and Eurostudent to monitor the implementation of the reforms and to report back in 2015.

We will encourage the development of a system of voluntary peer learning and reviewing in countries that request it. This will help to assess the level of implementation of Bologna reforms and promote good practices as a dynamic way of addressing the challenges facing European higher education.

We will strive to make higher education systems easier to understand for the public, and especially for students and employers. We will support the improvement of current and developing transparency tools in order to make them more user-driven and to ground them on empirical evidence. We aim to reach an agreement on common guidelines for transparency by 2015.

## Setting out priorities for 2012-2015

Having outlined the main EHEA goals in the coming years, we set out the following priorities for action by 2015.

At the national level, together with the relevant stakeholders, and especially with higher education institutions, we will:

- Reflect thoroughly on the findings of the 2012 Bologna Implementation Report and take into account its conclusions and recommendations;
- Strengthen policies of widening overall access and raising completion rates, including measures targeting the increased participation of underrepresented groups;
- Establish conditions that foster student-centred learning, innovative teaching methods and a supportive and inspiring working and learning environment, while continuing to involve students and staff in governance structures at all levels;
- Allow EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements;
- Work to enhance employability, lifelong learning, problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills through improved cooperation with employers, especially in the development of educational programmes;
- Ensure that qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementation is based on learning outcomes;
- Invite countries that cannot finalise the implementation of national qualifications frameworks compatible with QF-EHEA by the end of 2012 to redouble their efforts and submit a revised roadmap for this task;
- Implement the recommendations of the strategy “Mobility for better learning” and work towards full portability of national grants and loans across the EHEA;

- Review national legislation to fully comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and promote the use of the EAR-manual to advance recognition practices;
- Encourage knowledge-based alliances in the EHEA, focusing on research and technology.

At the European level, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference in 2015 and together with relevant stakeholders, we will:

- Ask Eurostat, Eurydice and Eurostudent to monitor progress in the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms and the strategy “Mobility for better learning”;
- Develop a system of voluntary peer learning and reviewing by 2013 in countries which request it and initiate a pilot project to promote peer learning on the social dimension of higher education;
- Develop a proposal for a revised version of the ESG for adoption;
- Promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle, while also building additional bridges between the EHEA and the ERA;
- Work to ensure that the ECTS Users’ Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning;
- Coordinate the work of ensuring that qualifications frameworks work in practice, emphasising their link to learning outcomes and explore how the QF-EHEA could take account of short cycle qualifications in national contexts;
- Support the work of a pathfinder group of countries exploring ways to achieve the automatic academic recognition of comparable degrees;
- Examine national legislation and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation and mobility embedded in national contexts;

- Evaluate the implementation of the “EHEA in a Global Setting” Strategy;
- Develop EHEA guidelines for transparency policies and continue to monitor current and developing transparency tools.

The next EHEA Ministerial Conference will take place in Yerevan, Armenia in 2015, where the progress on the priorities set above will be reviewed.







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