

Chapter 2

The Changing Context of Higher Education and Its Impact on Academic Jobs and Academic Work

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Abstract

This chapter is focussed on the macro context of higher education and describes the historical developments in higher education and how these developments affect academic jobs and academic work. When we sketch the development of higher education with a few broad strokes of the pen, we see (1) a development from a small-scale elite institution to broad training (and research) institutes; (2) a struggle over control of higher education; and (3) a movement in which higher education is professionalized and increasingly assigned a societal task, with a series of consequences for education, research and impact. These developments contribute to a field of tension in which old traditions of academic behaviour must be reconciled with demands that are placed on higher education by society. This makes talent management, both on an individual and collective level, no easy task.

Keywords: Historical context higher education; socialization of higher education; new public management; professionalization of higher education; academic labour market; open science; talent management; higher education

Talent Management in Higher Education, 19–36



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Introduction

When it comes to talent management, organizations in higher education have a double function. On the one hand, they are faced with the question of how they ‘manage’ the talent of the employees of their own organizations. On the other hand, they are pre-eminently part of the chain in society that aims to develop the talent of the young generations. While the rest of this book is mainly devoted to how universities deal with the talent of their staff within their organizations, this chapter also focusses on the question of the role of higher educated people in the labour market and within society as a whole. This role also determines which questions and assignments higher education institutions receive in fulfilling their tasks. Moreover, it also determines what society is ready to make available in financial terms for educating young people and how society in a broader sense looks at universities and those who work there. In this chapter, we therefore examine ‘the environment’ of the university in a broad sense, the increasing importance of human capital in the modern economy and on the labour market and the changing composition of the population of students and staff who populate the university. Of course, this ‘environment’ does not look the same in all countries of Europe or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and each country has its own development and associated peculiarities. That does not alter the fact that a number of recognizable patterns can be sketched that can be seen as a kind of greatest common denominator of development in many (especially) Western countries. When we sketch the development of higher education with a few broad strokes of the pen, we see (1) a development from a small-scale elite institution to broad training (and research) institutes; (2) a struggle over control of higher education; and (3) a movement in which higher education is professionalized and increasingly assigned a societal task, with a series of consequences for education, research and impact. In the remainder of this chapter, we will reflect on each of these developments. Before that, we will pay attention to the growing role of knowledge and academic skills in society and the need for workers with an academic background. This chapter will mainly focus on Europe, although it does not even remotely pretend to discuss all the – often very different – developments on this continent (see for a somewhat broader and more general description [Van der Zwaan, 2017](#), especially part I. See also [Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015](#); [Van den Brink et al., 2013](#)).

The Growing Significance of Knowledge

Until well into the second millennium, the lives of most citizens were simple and orderly. Whether they worked on the land or practised a craft, the necessary knowledge and skills were passed on from father to son or from mother to daughter. Precepts about what to do and what not to do (not to steal, not to divorce, but to show solidarity with your neighbour and to atone for your sins, to name a few) were handed out by members of the clergy. They long had a monopoly on reading and writing and ‘scientific’ discussions, which were often related to matters that

also touched faith in one way or another (like discussions on the origin of the earth, the sun, the stars and the planets).

Halfway through that second millennium, this status quo changes. Without pretending to want to discuss the entire history of the second half of the second millennium here in a nutshell, we can conclude that a number of developments contribute to a sharp increase in the role of knowledge in the labour market and within society. In any case, the Reformation should be mentioned, which contributes to the fact that more and more individuals want to be able to read their Bible themselves. The process of state formation and centralization within states is also important. A well-functioning army needs knowledge of the latest insights in the field of military science, and a well-functioning state needs well-trained civil servants, mostly lawyers. Above all, it is technical development that – with England leading the way from the 18th century and continental countries such as Belgium, France and Germany as followers – increases the importance of human capital in industrial production processes. Working with steam engines, the construction of railways and its necessary infrastructure - it would all have been impossible without knowledge and skills that exceed the basics like reading, arithmetic and writing.

We see the different steps of this broad development reflected in the focus of the activities of universities. In addition to the first university courses that were mainly concerned with theology, law and humanities, we are gradually seeing a proliferation of education and research in other scientific fields, such as medicine and the natural sciences. Many of the institutions that currently make up the League of European Research Universities (LERU) were founded in the 15th to the 17th centuries, often with the consent or on the initiative of the monarch. In several countries, they are also at the forefront of higher education institutions, in various cases (such as the universities of Strasbourg, Utrecht and Helsinki, among others) arising from what we would today call gymnasias or other forms of upper secondary education (Rudy, 1984).

How small-scale university education was initially is illustrated by data from the University of Zurich, which at its start in 1833 had 161 students and 55 instructors (a guidance standard that many in contemporary education will envy). The 161 students are divided into four faculties: Theology – 16, Law – 26, Medicine – 98 and Arts – 21. This modest design also characterizes the research. Still around 1870, during his studies at Leiden University, the later Nobel Prize winner Hendrik Antoon Lorentz had to conclude that the new school type Higher Civic School (HBS) created by the Dutch government, which was intended to provide the business community and the government with well-educated young people in order to boost the economy, was better equipped for doing physics experiments than the university at the time. Despite the fact that Newton's gravitation law dates back to 1687, Europe is still in its infancy when it comes to experimental physics almost two centuries later.

In the 19th century, studying was still mainly something for the 'happy few'. Apart from the fact that the 'happy few' in most European countries consist exclusively of men until the 20th century, it is mainly sons of the social elite for whom studying is an option. Where this social elite was initially mainly formed

by the nobility, in later times, the administrative and economic elite were also added. Students are supported by their parents and hire members of the locals of university towns to do chores for them. In most university cities, they form a separate and privileged group. However, the biography of the aforementioned later physicist Lorentz also shows a different story (Berends & Van Delft, 2020). That of a talented boy of simple origin who, with the support of his environment (sometimes parents who turned over every dime to let their son study, sometimes a committed teacher who encouraged such a boy to apply for a scholarship) and with many sacrifices, manages to penetrate the university environment. Often years of hardship (studying in a cold room, barely enough money for food and certainly no parties or other social pleasures) precede this. Higher education is certainly not yet an emancipation machine.

Even at that time, universities trained more graduates or PhD students than they themselves needed for scientific education and research. PhD candidates found their way to (public) administrative positions, politics and the judiciary, but also, for example, to secondary education. Especially when that was expanded in the course of the 19th century, it was not uncommon for a teacher with a PhD-degree to stand in front of the class.

Growing Need for Higher Educated People

In addition to smart people developing new knowledge at universities, other smart people are throwing themselves into the application of this new knowledge, for example, by developing new products and services or improving the infrastructure of society. Over time, and starting in the 19th century, this results in a rapidly growing demand for workers who are able to make things or do things based on scientific knowledge. Think of the work of engineers or doctors. They do not need to develop scientific knowledge themselves, but they do need to understand how certain processes work in order to deliver good work. With the rise of disciplines in the 20th century such as psychology, marketing, political science, educational science – and only a few have been mentioned – companies and governments also felt the need for employees who were trained at university level in such fields. In all kinds of research areas, in the alpha, beta and gamma sciences, far-reaching specialization occurred, which found its counterpart in education and on the work floor in factories and companies. Specialized technical universities arose in various countries where, in addition to specializations such as civil engineering, engineering and electrical engineering, training is also provided in the field of industrial engineering and design, computer and data science, chemical engineering and aerospace engineering. But then, we are already well into the 20th century. Other disciplines also received specialized institutions for scientific education and research, such as the London School of Economics, the Agricultural University of Wageningen and the University for Humanistic Studies in the Netherlands. In addition to the traditional universities, we also see the emergence of institutions for higher vocational education (sometimes known as Polytechnics or Fachhochschule), where education has a stronger practical component than at most universities. Discussions regularly arise as to whether such institutions should also have a research task and to what extent they should also

be regarded as ‘real’ universities. Different countries make different choices at different times (Kyvik, 2004).

So, the growth of the nation-state in the 16th and 17th centuries gave a first impetus to the foundation of universities, and the industrial revolution led to a growth of vocational education at a secondary level in the 18th and 19th centuries; economic growth in the 20th century contributed significantly to the further growth of the demand for more people with vocational higher education. The largest growth there is seen in the last quarter of the 20th century. Given the aforementioned causes of the increasing growth towards higher educated people, it is logical that we see large differences between countries in the development of higher education. Whether it is nation-building or the start of the industrial revolution, these processes vary widely between countries. Before we discuss this growth further, we first pay attention to one of the most important growth spurts: the student revolts of the late 1960s.

Student Demonstration Time: Who Has Control Over Higher Education?

Although the growth of higher education is a gradual process that is faster in one country and slower in another, the history of higher education in Europe has an important marker and that is the Paris student revolt of May 1968. After the ‘summer of love’ of 1967 (‘be sure to wear a flower in your hair’) and the accompanying sense of freedom and liberation, large-scale protests arose here and there in various countries by (especially) young people against traditional institutions that showed no affinity with the modern sense of life and the need of young people to be heard and to voice their opinion. In many cities, universities – sometimes hundreds of years old – were located in old, dusty buildings, where a small group of seated professors with often conservative ideas ruled the roost, pre-eminently the symbol of traditional society. In different cities and countries, different problems predominated. For example, Italian students protested against the fact that higher education had long since reached its capacity limits (Van Osta, 2020), while in the Netherlands, where new campuses had been built in the years before, the resistance was rather the regent mentality of the administrators. Certainly in countries where university education had a strong theoretical character, under the influence of the increasing number of students (see the next section), doubts arose whether – in the words of Van Osta (2020) – the university would ‘instead of a breeding ground of the elite become a parking lot for an “intellectual proletariat” with no future prospects’. Although the demands differed here and there, democratization in all senses of the word was a common thread in the protest. Young people wanted more opportunities for ‘ordinary people’, for those who did not belong to the social upper class by birth. They also wanted more control over the content and organization of education, including space for the discussion of non-traditional (in those years often Marxist, but later on also feminist) insights and ideas. Lecturers who read the same story from their own prescribed book year after year had to be told. Why could students – often adults – not have an equal say in administrative and financial matters of the universities?

Often the call for university reforms mixed with protests against, among other things, the American involvement in the war in Vietnam, the nuclear threat posed by the cold war, the racial segregation between whites and blacks and the deprivation of the population from (former) colonial areas. Sometimes groups of workers joined in. Here and there, the nature and intensity of the protest differed, as well as the reaction of the authorities. Sometimes they used the national guard and police to put an end to the protests. In other countries, the authorities re-joined and students' demands were (in part) met. Often the domination of the traditional administrators, mostly professors of a certain age, came to an end. Although 'ordinary' teachers and students in some countries were given certain forms of participation (as a discussion partner of the control), the result of the student revolts was not that the universities have become a paradise of 'workers' self-management'. Rather, the traditional administrators gave way to new, mainly government-appointed administrators and managers who became responsible for ensuring that the public money that flowed more and more lavishly benefitted the growing flows of students and the quality of education in an efficient way.

A Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education

Almost everywhere one can notice (a) a substantial growth in the number of students in higher education; (b) broadening of the accessibility of higher education for students from what was previously referred to as 'the lower classes', even though students from academic families remain overrepresented (Kivinen et al., 2007); and (c) a huge increase of women in higher education (initially mainly among students, but later also among staff), even though gender differences remain (Lörz et al., 2011). Incidentally, the strong growth in the number of students since the mid-sixties is not only due to the democratization movement. Two – even more important causes – should be mentioned. First, this growth simply has its origins in the baby boom in the first decade after the Second World War: because the birth cohorts of those years are more extensive, after almost 20 years more young people also report to the gates of the universities. But that is only part of the story. Second, due to the rising prosperity and the rise of the welfare state in various (mainly European) countries, higher education is within the reach of large groups of citizens, who want to give their children the opportunities that they themselves did not get. This means that it is not only larger cohorts that deliver more potential students but also a higher educational participation per cohort. This development can be seen to varying degrees in different countries and continues from the mid-1960s to the present day (see Fig. 2.1). As a result, higher education is developing into an important part of the emancipation machine that was previously mainly formed by primary and – to a lesser extent – secondary education (Trow, 1973).

Fig. 2.1 shows for a selection of countries that in all of these countries, the share of the population between the ages of 25 and 35 with a degree in higher education has increased considerably. In some countries (the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and UK), this percentage will even be slightly above 50% in 2020. In



Fig. 2.1. Population with Tertiary Education, 25- to 34-Year-Olds (%), Selected Countries, 1987–2020. *Source:* OECD (2022).

a number of countries, such as Italy, Hungary, Germany and Turkey, however, even the 40% is not achieved. To a large extent, these are real differences; for another, smaller part, it has to do with definition differences.¹ Some countries, such as Poland and Turkey, show a relatively late but very fast growth, while a country like Finland already had a share of almost 40% tertiary educated people in this age group at the turn of the century, and this share has hardly risen in 20 years.

How big the difference is with older generations is illustrated by Fig. 2.2. Fig. 2.2 shows the proportion of people with tertiary education for 25- to 35-year-olds, on the one hand, and for 55- to 65-year-olds, on the other hand. The greater the distance between the diamond and the sphere per country, the greater the educational level of the population has risen: after all, the series of diamonds indicates how large the proportion of the then young, but now older generations that completed higher education was. The series of spheres does that for the youngest generations. We see that almost all countries show an increase in the share of people with a degree in tertiary education. The biggest difference we find for the countries that turned out to be the fast risers in Fig. 2.1: Poland and Turkey. For Finland, there is hardly any difference between the younger and the older cohorts.

Although the transfer to higher and particularly university education is certainly not yet easy or self-evident for all groups in society, an enormous democratization of higher education has taken place since the 1960s and 1970s of the last century. The university is no longer a place where mainly young people of which one or both parents have already followed higher education study. Many students

¹This is particularly important for Germany and Belgium.

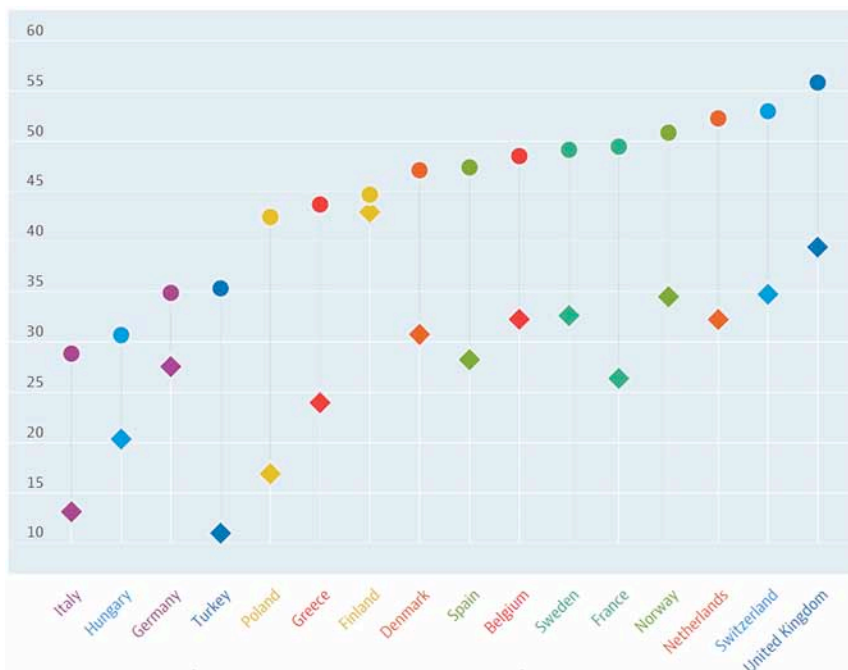


Fig. 2.2. Population with Tertiary Education, 25- to 34-Year-Olds (Spheres)/55- to 64-Year-Olds (Diamonds) (%), Selected Countries, 2020. *Source:* OECD (2022). Population with tertiary education (indicator). <https://doi.org/10.1787/0b8f90e9-en> (accessed on 21 June 2022).

of the past 50 years are first-generation students (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). On the one hand, they did not always have an easy time adapting to university traditions and mastering existing customs and mores (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). On the other hand, these traditions and mores also changed under the influence of the influx of a large group of ‘newcomers’ (Bronner, 2012). In some countries, changes were more prominent than elsewhere, partly depending on the prevailing culture in a country. For example, it is still tradition at some universities that the students stand up when their professor enters the room at the beginning of the lecture. Elsewhere, this does not occur to the students and the lecturer must very emphatically ask for silence before the lecture can start.

With the increase in the number of students, the entire system of higher education expanded (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Existing institutions started new programmes or specializations within existing programmes. On the one hand, this development reflected the growth of available scientific knowledge. As a professor of economics in the first half of the 20th century, you could still keep up with what was written in all areas of the profession, with the development of new ideas, theories and the emergence of increasingly advanced empirical research on increasingly rich data, that gradually became impossible. Generalists – whether

in economics, law, physics or biology – gave way to specialists, who not only had their own field of research but also liked to teach about it, sometimes for a few but sometimes – if it was also useful knowledge in practice – for large groups of students. On the other hand, regularly, the industry or the government advocated new training based on the need for specialist knowledge. Think, for example, of oil companies that need knowledge about drilling techniques and seismic conditions where they want to drill or international governments that need the development of international legal rules. New institutions were added that also absorbed part of the growing student population. Of course, this growth also translated into an increase in the number of staff employed by universities and colleges, with a sharp increase in the share of employees who were the first in their families to have a job in higher education. In this way, not only the students but also their lecturers ensured far-reaching ‘socialization’ of the university. Some students and teachers can be found in their free time in the stands of a football club from the highest national league and others you will find at a ballet or concert performance. Some read a liberal newspaper and vote for a liberal party, while others seek their information and salvation from a communist- or nationalist-oriented newspaper or political party, respectively. Students and teachers form a more diverse population than in the past, even though they certainly do not make up a complete reflection of the rest of the population. Most countries show a serious underrepresentation of migrant students among their university population and often an even stronger underrepresentation of migrant teachers and researchers among their staff.

Growing Influence of Government and Society: New Public Management and Counting the Numbers

Although in many countries the government has always played a role in determining the course of universities – previously we saw that in some countries, it was the monarch himself who took the initiative to found a university – we see, although not everywhere to the same extent, with the expansion of higher education and the increase in student numbers overall an increase in the involvement of the government. If the aforementioned Lorentz had to write begging letters to the minister of education in the 19th century to get equipment for his laboratory financed, with the advance of technological innovation, research (and education) in the beta-medical sphere in particular has become so expensive that most universities cannot survive without government funding. And that often also applies to the student-rich programmes in the alpha–gamma domain. Here, it is not the cost of equipment and installations that causes the high cost but the labour costs of the teachers to provide education for all these students. Underneath lies the political choice that is made in many countries not to let students pay the full cost of their education. If that were the case, higher education would never have been able to achieve the proliferation it has today. In the view of many politicians, higher education is a ‘merit good’, that is, a ‘product’ whose social benefits exceed the private benefits. In other words, not only the individual benefits from following a course in higher education in order to realize interesting work and a

high reward during the rest of his/her life course. Society also benefits from large numbers of citizens who have completed higher education, for example, because these citizens are more productive in the labour market and their human capital is an important natural resource for the country in which they live. Many countries therefore subsidize the following of education. This often starts with ‘free’ education at an elementary or intermediate level but in many countries also extends to higher education, with some countries even going so far as to fully subsidize that as well. Other countries then choose to have students (or their parents) pay a substantial personal contribution because of the considerable individual benefits of higher education.

At this point, it is worth reflecting on an important difference between countries. Some countries have almost exclusively publicly funded universities that operate – regardless of any autonomy for the administrators – within a system that is entirely regulated by the government. Other countries have a mixed system from publicly funded universities and universities that raise their own financial resources (from tuition fees, donations and fundraisers) and where the government mainly supervises a number of minimum standards for the quality of education. Yet – despite the neoliberal revolution of the 1980s and 1990s of the last century – we see hardly any countries where higher education is completely left to the market. Apparently, governments consider (also) higher education so important that they like to keep a finger in the pie (Lynch, 2006; Olszen & Peters, 2005).

In many cases, this government funding from the universities is not provided ‘free of charge’ and without conditions. Society, often represented by the Minister of Higher Education or a body of experts set up by the government, makes all kinds of demands against funding. In most countries, these relate at least to the quality of education and research. These can be very global requirements, but in some countries, more detailed requirements are chosen.

Partly driven by insights from modern scientists who want to materialize their public responsibility, but sometimes also inspired by public demands, we see the emergence of a new movement called Open Science (see, among others, Hessels et al., 2021; Miedema, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). This movement covers various aspects of scientific practice and seems to have conquered a strong bridgehead, especially in the Netherlands. Within this movement, attention is being drawn to transparency from science to society, to open access of publications (so recent knowledge will no longer be hidden behind a paywall), to more attention to teamwork versus the strongly flourished individualism within science (cooperation instead of competition) and therefore also to other assessment and selection criteria within higher education. Although this movement is certainly not yet commonplace everywhere in academic circles, it finds a lot of resonance here and there, though there is also opposition. Even if not all components are translated equally everywhere, it is still a movement that will have major consequences for talent management within higher education, especially because it is a movement that originated to a large extent from science itself. Later in this book, for example, in Chapter 3 of this book by De Haan et al. (2024), the significance of this movement for talent management will be discussed in more detail.

Research

With regard to research, in addition to sufficient publications in a quantitative sense, the quality requirements have also been increased here and there in the sense that publishing in international peer-reviewed journals has increasingly become the norm. This development was supported by the enormous growth of a commercial market for scientific journals that followed the expansion of the research volume at universities worldwide (Van der Zwaan, 2017). Funding from public funds (directly by the government or through national research councils) became increasingly dependent on (easily measured) output. This way, government intervention with representatives of ‘new public management’ at the helm stimulated competition between scientists and between universities, at the expense of cooperation (Bryson et al., 2014). Within the European Union (EU), a country like the Netherlands was quite at the forefront of this and Belgian, German or Italian colleagues were surprised by the strict requirements of the Dutch system. Gradually, more countries adopted these stricter requirements and Dutch, Danish and Italian scientists are all busy meeting their national publication requirements. In the wake of this, they are all increasingly complaining about the increasing workload. Sometimes, the demands on the part of the government go further and the funding is linked, for example, to a certain degree of division of tasks between the institutions in order to prevent too much fragmentation of research and the associated inefficiency according to the policymakers. Of more recent date are requirements that relate to creating social impact with the research and the research results. From the perspective that ‘it’s all tax payers’ money’, the idea is gaining ground that society may see something in return for all the financial efforts with which it enables the ever-growing army of researchers to exercise their ‘hobby’ every day. A superlative form of this approach is that the funding of research is linked to the extent to which research actually addresses important social issues and works on solving the grand challenges that society increasingly faces. This is a development that we see not only at the national level, but also, for example, at the EU level in programmes such as Horizon Europe. We will come back to this development in our concluding section.

This conditionality of research funding touches on a theme that is often hotly debated among scientists and between scientists and policymakers: the increasing need to acquire grants – in competition – for conducting research. This system, which some (especially Anglo-Saxon countries) have known for a long time, has found its way into more and more European countries and also dominates the funding of research funded by the EU, for example, through programmes such as Horizon Europe. For many, obtaining grants is a sine qua non for the continuation of their appointment at a university: (part of) their salary must be paid. Moreover, in the highly competitive world of science, it has also become to a large extent a measure of academic success. That is why many university researchers – in addition to their substantive research – are also constantly drawing up research proposals, sometimes for one and then for the other potential funder. Although resources are limited and therefore the chances of success are small, it is not an option for many not to participate in this race: their academic existence depends

on it. This creates an enormous overproduction of research proposals of which only a limited part is awarded funding, but the drafting of which in the meantime leads to an enormous workload and a lot of frustration among the authors.

More than other segments, the labour market for scientific research shows a relatively large degree of international mobility. It is not exceptional for a Swiss student to do her bachelor's in Zürich, take a master's in Paris, write her PhD in Utrecht and continue her career as a postdoc in Oxford. Finally, she may end up as a professor in Munich. Often this is fun, but often, it also places high demands on the individual researchers, the receiving institutions and the people who work there. Employees from different cultures and traditions need to feel at home in order to be productive. Especially, if an appointment includes both research and teaching tasks, a match is not self-evident. Where research methods and traditions often have similarities between countries, this is to a much smaller extent the case for education systems. So, over the years, international mobility has become a challenge for more and more universities who want to keep up with their fellow institutions. But attention for international mobility is not necessarily an element of talent management everywhere.

All this together implies that careers of contemporary scientists at the university often look very different now than those of, for example, half a century ago. Ignoring all kinds of nuances and differences, going to work at the university in the 1960s or 1970s of the last century meant for many accepting a permanent job for the rest of life. Now almost all young scientists start with a series of successive temporary positions in which they try to distinguish themselves from their colleagues in order to be eligible for the next position. They often approach the age of 40 before being eligible for a first permanent job. And even then that is rarely – as for many of their predecessors – a relaxed job: education, under the influence of the socialization of universities, also increasingly places demands on lecturers and the support staff that makes that education possible.

Teaching

The idea advocated by some during the revolt of 1968 that students should henceforth be allowed to compose their own curriculum and dismiss professors who did not sufficiently meet their wishes and desires has not become a reality. However, in most European countries – here too we see variation – educational curricula are no longer a matter of a club of professors who together call the shots and divide the tasks among themselves. For example, many countries have review procedures not only for research but also for education, in which external experts or other stakeholders visit the universities once in a while to assess the quality of education. A multitude of aspects of education can be discussed, ranging from the quality of the teachers, the attainment targets of education, the number of contact hours between students and teachers, the educational design of teaching programmes, the supervision of starting students, programmes for the integration of foreign exchange students to the procedures that are followed in case of cross-border behaviour of a teacher towards a student or between students themselves. Apart from these review procedures, you could say that education is highly

professionalized. Whereas in the past you were allowed to teach at the university on the basis of your own scientific qualities, but no one wondered whether you could also transfer your own rich knowledge to different groups of students in an effective and inspiring way, it is now increasingly true that – just as in primary and secondary education – in university education requirements are set for the didactic abilities of lecturers. In some countries, teachers have to submit student evaluations of previous courses when applying for applications, in other countries you have to obtain a certificate of didactic competence, and so, there are different routes to ensure that educational skills are not simply taken for granted. Just as in healthcare, government-imposed quality requirements in education require the use of all kinds of protocols, the reporting of all kinds of quantitative data about education and the setting of check marks. All with the necessary workload as a result. Given the massiveness and the many procedural regulations, various stakeholders describe the university today as an ‘educational factory’, in which college students are ‘processed’ into young academics in the most efficient way possible and of which the ideal of ‘Bildung’ as propagated by [Von Humboldt \(1810\)](#) is little left ([Flikkema, 2016](#); [Lauer, 2017](#)).

Say and Worker/Student Participation

Apart from the fact that the ‘outside world’, often in the form of a controlling government agency, interferes much more than before with the quality of education and research, in various countries, the control relationships in today’s university have changed considerably compared to those before the great democratization movement. The situation in the Netherlands is an interesting example of this. At every administrative layer within the university (university – faculty – institute/programme) in addition to the board that has control, there is also a form of participation in which a joint body of staff and students not only controls the board but must agree to certain board proposals on a number of essential points before they can actually be implemented. This applies, for example, to the Strategic Plan that each university must draw up once every four years but also to the main lines of the annual budget plan. These rights of participation are laid down in law in the Netherlands, but within some institutions, the board and participation have agreed to extend the rights of participation and, for example, to give participation control over the range of courses offered by the institution. Furthermore, according to Dutch law, employee participation plays a role in the appointment of directors and the supervisory authorities appointed by the government. This Dutch approach is certainly not standard in Europe, but it does show that the context in which university employees – be they scientific or support staff – has changed considerably under the influence of the growth and socialization of the academic world ([Christensen & Eyring, 2011](#)).

Impact

As far as we haven’t realized, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us once again how much science is sometimes at the centre of the public debate. Whether you

watch the Belgian current affairs programme ‘Ter Zake’ or the weekly discussion programme ‘Anne Will’ on the German ARD, on all kinds of topics – the pandemic, the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, increasing obesity or the monetary policy of the European Union – a highly educated person is asked for his (and fortunately also increasingly: her) opinion (and sometimes also firmly put to the test). The time when scientists could lead an isolated life, far away from everyday reality, hidden in their ivory tower is far behind us. Society demands the participation of science in the social debate and more and more scientists want to play a role in this, even if they do not always have a popular message. Here too we see that in terms of staff, the university is increasingly populated by ‘ordinary’ people, who also have a grandmother who finds it difficult to make ends meet from her retirement pension, a neighbour boy with a speech disorder or a fellow member in the choir who is worried about the future of her children. They are aware that it is not self-evident that they have the opportunity to conduct groundbreaking scientific research – to a large extent with public money – but rather a privilege. And when they travel together on the train to their hometown, they can still be genuinely surprised that they are amply paid for being able to work day in and day out on what they like to do best.

What the Covid-19 pandemic has also shown is that the authority of ‘science’ is waning. For many critics, science – even if it comes from top researchers – represents ‘just another opinion’. Whoever meets the professor on Saturday along the line at his daughter’s football league or then at the takeaway Chinese sees him primarily as a fellow citizen and fellow villager and therefore looks at him primarily from that perspective on Monday, even though he may speak *ex cathedra* and on the basis of his professional insights. While this may be the price that society should bear for non-elitist science and non-elitist scientists, among politicians who do not find critical science particularly well, there is almost a hotchpotch and incitement of public opinion against those scientific insights that show, on the basis of facts and figures, that these politicians are wrong. In the Netherlands, among others, this has now led to the establishment of a hotline for endangered scientists, but also in a country like Belgium, a well-known virologist has been in hiding for some weeks at the time of the heaviest Covid-19 measures. In this situation, it is not primarily about the impact of, but about the impact on, science and those who are committed to it.

Concluding Remarks

If we try to summarize the picture of the changed context of higher education outlined in this chapter in a few concepts, ‘growth’ and ‘socialization’ seem to be the most appropriate, with socialization being a more or less logical consequence of the growth inspired by population and prosperity development. If you want to add another one, you will soon end up with professionalization (and the associated bureaucratization). In some ways – think, for example, of the real estate portfolio of some universities and the huge amounts of money that go into it each year in terms of staff salaries – the university has become a business, similar to a hospital or a ministry. At the same time, this has led to a new form of

distance between university and society. The world of education and research, the procedures and funding streams are such a world in itself that outsiders, but also politicians who are supposed to bear responsibility for what happens to the large amount of money for higher education, actually have no idea what buttons you can turn if you want to change or even adjust something. Where professors are less in an ivory tower than half a century ago, this is now often the case for professional administrators: he/she consults with other administrators, with the Ministry of Education, with policy officers, with faculty deans and institute directors, but is often not a scientist himself or has long since left the practice of teaching and doing research behind. In addition, it should be noted that the socialization of research is proceeding faster than the socialization of university education. Students – with exceptions – all too often consume relatively resigned to the education that is presented to them. Certainly in countries such as the Netherlands, where questions from citizens and, for example, patient organizations penetrate the agenda of renowned research groups and institutes fairly directly via the Dutch National Research Agenda (in Dutch: Nationale Wetenschapsagenda – NWA), research on this point is well ahead of education. The question of the content of educational programmes, what can and cannot be dealt with is rarely the subject of public discussion but remains mainly a discussion among specialists and insiders.

The question is to what extent a movement such as Open Science, which we already mentioned, that is highly welcome in itself will also bring about change here (Boon et al., 2021). So far, the discussion within this movement about the relationship between science/universities and society seems to focus mainly on research. Among other things, very relevant issues are discussed, such as the relationship between fundamental and applied knowledge and the question to what extent knowledge and insights obtained with public funds should also be freely available to society. The practical consequences of the answers to such questions have been clearly underlined by the corona crisis. Anyone who realizes that universities (and universities of applied sciences) primarily derive their *raison d'être* from educating young and increasingly older citizens – through lifelong learning (Schippers, 2018), hopefully also recognizes the need for stakeholder engagement in education as an important dimension of Open Science. In (secondary) vocational education, we already have forms of stakeholder management through the involvement of employers, but in university circles, the concept of 'academic freedom' is quickly waved to keep difficult stakeholders out. Established science knows what is good for you or society.

This critical observation does not alter the fact that at the same time, most of the work that is done within the walls of the university has a high dose of idealism: whether it is about education or research, most lecturers and researchers do it not because of the money (the payment is roughly decent, but you get really rich in business) but from intrinsic motivation. This brings us to a final point of discussion and uncertainty: a number of trend-based developments in the labour market. The first of these concerns dejuvenation and ageing, which together lead to increasing staff shortages. This scarcity primarily affects those sectors in a country that are already ageing strongly and will therefore have high staff

turnover and a high demand for replacements in the coming years. In some EU countries, this also applies to a large extent to scientific education and research. More generally, the shortage on the labour market will mean that universities will have to behave more in line with the market in terms of pay and other working conditions than has been the case so far. A university employee can still be so intrinsically motivated, every (wo)man has his (her) price, and if the remuneration is too out of step with other sectors, the universities risk emptying out. Moreover, the scarcity of staff will increasingly require choices, both outside and within universities. For which tasks do we as a society want to use manpower and human talent? And at university level, for which disciplines and sub-areas within a discipline do we want to deploy our scarce people?

These scarce people will have to take into account that their work is also subject to change in the coming decades. Artificial intelligence (AI) is advancing throughout society and education and research will not escape this. Covid-19 has helped us take a big step towards the (partial) digitization of education and at the same time made us wiser (and sadder) with regard to the dark sides or the preconditions to be observed. Only good and challenging education attracts students to the lecture hall, while AI puts the position of the teacher as the pivot within the education that everything revolves around in perspective. On the research side, on the one hand, we see the emergence of data science as a new field. On the other hand, we see that with new techniques (see, e.g., ChatGTP, but also think of all kinds of statistical tools) ‘anyone can fabricate (all kinds of) everything’ in analyses and reports, can put together beautiful courses and spread all this with the greatest ease all over the world. However, that is no guarantee that it will be good. The fight against fake news and false information will become more important and will also have to be waged by the teachers and scientists of the future. They themselves will have to meet high ethical standards, both in their scientific work and in their dealings with colleagues and students.

Together, all these developments contribute to a field of tension in which old traditions of academic behaviour must be reconciled with demands that are placed on higher education by society (Van der Zwaan, 2017). This makes talent management, both on an individual and collective level, no easy task. This presents the question: who is responsible for what? Of course, every responsible scientist must keep an eye on his/her own development. But where should the responsibility lie at the collective level? At the scientific peers, at the faculty, the university or the ministry? The further away from the individual, the smaller the chance of good substantive management. At the same time, the greater the chance that socially important values will also be given a place in talent management. Developments in the gender composition of university staff have taught us that more diversity may be a necessary condition for change but not automatically a sufficient one. Despite more female students, more female PhD students and more (but not nearly enough) female professors and administrators, the university is still a male chauvinist stronghold in many respects, although the sharp edges may be gone. Undoubtedly, diversity – also in terms of social and ethnic origin – will increase further in the coming years. But we are far from there. The challenges facing higher education require a form of talent management that focusses on those

people and those competencies that can continue and complete the movement towards social higher education and communicate clearly about it. At the same time, they must be people who do not blow with all the winds and who clearly have the awareness and ability to convey that science is something other than ‘just an opinion’, a scientific article is something other than a journalistic product and a university education imparts different knowledge and skills than an internet course compiled by a skilled coach. Hopefully, it will help to continuously keep an eye on the institutional, historical and social context in which universities have to fulfil their tasks.

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