The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession in International Comparative Perspective 20

Kathryn A. Sutherland

Early Career Academics in New Zealand: Challenges and Prospects in Comparative Perspective

Springer

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Scope of the series

The landscape of higher education has in recent years undergone significant change. This has been particular the case for research training, academic life, employment, working conditions and entrepreneurial activities of universities around the globe. The academy is expected to be more professional in teaching, more productive in research and more entrepreneurial in everything. Some of the changes involved have raised questions about the attractiveness of an academic career for today's graduates. At the same time, knowledge has come to be identified as the most vital resource of contemporary societies.

The Changing Academy series examines the nature and extent of the changes experienced by the academic profession. It aims to address these changes from an international comparative perspective, focusing at both the higher education system level as well as the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in particular. It explores both the reasons for and the consequences of these changes.

The series considers the implications of the changes for the attractiveness of the academic profession as a career and for the ability of the academic community to contribute to the further development of knowledge societies and the attainment of national goals. It provides analyses on these matters drawing initially on available data-sets and qualitative research studies with special emphasis on the international studies of the Changing Academic Profession and the national surveys in STEM fields. Among the themes featured will be:

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- Research, development and technology policies with regards to STEM
- Internationalization of the academy governance and management
- The new generation in the academic profession – the doctoral graduates

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The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession in International Comparative Perspective
ISBN 978-3-319-61829-6 ISBN 978-3-319-61830-2 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-61830-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017945673

Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgements

This book began life as a report for Ako Aotearoa, New Zealand's National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, who funded my research on early career academics in New Zealand universities through their National Project Fund research and implementation project stream (Ref: RI10-023). I am grateful that Ako Aotearoa saw fit to fund research on the academic profession in New Zealand, recognising that what academics do has a significant bearing on the student learning experience.

I also wish to thank the following people and places: Professor Leo Goedegebuure for discerning that the report had scope to become a book; the two international reviewers and the series editors, whose recommendations and suggestions have vastly improved the final version; my two colleagues, Marc Wilson and Meegan Hall, who contributed to Chaps. 5 and 7, respectively (kia ora ki a kōrua for your wisdom, collegiality, and friendship); my reference group members at each university who helped to spread the word; my research assistants who contributed to the data collection, analysis, and editing phases, especially Pam Williams, Liz Chinlund and Jon Preston; the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Victoria University of Wellington who funded a period of research leave from my role as associate dean; my writing group colleagues, retreat buddies, and academic friends who have propped me up through this entire process and/or given me incredibly valuable feedback on draft chapters, especially Sally Hill, Sarah Leggott, John Randal, Christian Schott, Lizzie Towl, and Paul Warren; and the cafes who kept me caffeinated, especially the Crazy Rabbit, Greta Point Cafe, Adelaide Trading Company, and Milk and Honey. To Régis and the rest of my family and friends, from whom this book stole many an evening and weekend, thank you for your patience and support. Finally, the research for this book could not have been conducted without the willing participation of all the academic respondents; I hope you can hear your voices through these pages.

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List of Abbreviations

Ako Aotearoa	National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence
AUS	Association of University Staff
AUT	Auckland University of Technology
CAP	Changing Academic Profession
DMA	Doctor of Musical Arts
DIY	Do-it-yourself
ECA	Early-career academic
EdD	Doctor of Education
EFTSs	Equivalent full-time students
ERA	Excellence in Research for Australia
FTE	Full-time equivalent
Go8	Group of Eight research-intensive universities in Australia
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HoD	Head of Department
HR	Human resources
ITOs	Industry training organisations
ITPs	Institutes of technology and polytechnics
LittD	Doctor of Literature
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
NZAS	New Zealand Association of Scientists
PBRF	Performance Based Research Fund
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy degree
Post-docs	Post-doctoral fellows/positions
PD	Professional development
PTEs	Private training establishments
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise (UK)
REF	Research Excellence Framework (UK)
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission

TEOs	Tertiary education organisations
TES	Tertiary Education Strategy
TEU	Tertiary Education Union
UGC	University Grants Committee
UK	United Kingdom
UNZ	Universities New Zealand
US	United States
WIL	Women in Leadership

Chapter 1
Introduction

Setting the Scene

New Zealand is not a big country. A nation of just four and a half million people, we are geographically a long way from all other countries (even Australia – with whom we are commonly mistaken or conflated – is a minimum three-hour flight away). Sometimes this geographical distance can leave us feeling a little neglected, especially when we get left off maps, as seems to happen regularly.[1] So when I was asked to contribute a volume to this series on the Changing Academic Profession, I wondered what the New Zealand perspective could possibly add to an already impressive collection of international studies. It turns out that, in comparison with what is happening elsewhere, this little country might have a few useful ideas about the academic profession, especially from the perspective of those just starting out on their academic careers.

As well as being a small country, we are a young country – the 'new' in our English name hints at that. We haven't had a lot of time to make a big entrance on the world stage. But we are proud of our accomplishments, in all arenas of life. Sir Edmund Hillary, the great mountaineer, was a New Zealander. The splitting of the atom couldn't have happened without the scientific work of Ernest Rutherford. One of the world's great opera singers, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, is a New Zealander, and we boast some of the world's finest authors – Katherine Mansfield back in the early twentieth-century and Man Booker prize winner in 2013, Eleanor Catton, to name just two. World-famous movie director Sir Peter Jackson is one of ours, and we're well known for our nuclear-free stance. We were the first country in the world to allow women to vote in 1893, and the first country in the then British Empire to award a Bachelor of Arts degree to a woman (in 1877, to Kate Edger). You could say

[1] There is even a website dedicated to identifying maps without New Zealand: http://worldmapswithout.nz/

K.A. Sutherland, *Early Career Academics in New Zealand: Challenges and Prospects in Comparative Perspective*, The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession in International Comparative Perspective 20,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-61830-2_1

that we 'punch above our weight'. As many of my colleagues will tell you, I am not a fan of violent imagery – impact is one of my least favourite words (see Sutherland 2015) – but this boxing metaphor fits the story this book will tell in more ways than one.

The twenty-first century has ushered in an era of global competition for higher education, with universities jostling for students against one another on various world ranking systems. Much like the sport of boxing, which awards "World Champion" titles through at least four sanctioning bodies,[2] universities are fighting in a global ring in several different competitions: the QS World University Rankings, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, U-Multirank, and SCImago Institutions Rankings, to name a few. In this global ring, New Zealand is a bantamweight battling against heavyweights. Yet, we hold our own. We pack a mean punch, in fact. We are the only country in the world with all its universities in the top 500 (that is, the top 3%) in the world (Universities New Zealand 2016a). We are one of the most 'international' higher education systems in the world (Universities New Zealand 2016b). We have high participation rates in tertiary education (Crossan 2015). We rank second among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for total public expenditure on tertiary education (Joyce and Parata 2015), although statistics are open to interpretation. Another view is that we spend US$1000 less per student on tertiary education than the OECD average, and US$3000 less per student on tertiary education than Australia (Grey 2016).

All of this is information you can find in any quick Google search or glance at OECD statistics (see for example, OECD 2016). What you'll find in this book is, instead, the insiders' take on being an academic in this system. What does it mean to be starting an academic career in New Zealand in the twenty-first century? And, in a globalised world, how does that career look in comparison to what others are experiencing elsewhere? This book will offer some examples of how New Zealand academics and universities 'punch above their weight' even though some may often feel they're 'against the ropes'.

Challenges for Academia

New Zealand universities have come a long way since the establishment of the four colonial university colleges of the University of New Zealand in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Staffed by imported Professors, attended by (mostly) young, wealthy men, and sending examination scripts back to the UK for marking, these university colleges fought against an anti-intellectualism that pervaded the new colony. Eventually, though, New Zealand ended up with a dynamic, growing, and integrated tertiary sector that now includes eight universities, three *wānanga* (Māori

[2] The most notable of these are the IBF (International Boxing Federation), the WBA (World Boxing Association), the WBC (World Boxing Council), and the WBO (World Boxing Organisation).

tertiary organisations), 16 institutes of technology and polytechnics, and many industry training organisations and private training establishments. Vast changes have been occurring in the New Zealand higher education system over the last three decades (described in more detail in Chap. 2). Like many higher education systems around the world, New Zealand universities face mounting pressures and challenges, all of which filter down to affect the lives of academic staff already within or contemplating becoming a part of the academy.

Key trends in higher education around the English-speaking world that are also evident in the New Zealand context include: a diverse and growing student population; changing technologies; internationalisation of the student body and the curriculum (all encouraged and exacerbated by the more and more prominent aforementioned international ranking schemes); and increasing government intervention with accompanying calls for accountability and competition. In their volume on the future of the university, Shin and Teichler (2014) identify the modern university as moving through three phases, from an elite system, to massification, and now to post-massification. In the elite system, they argue, knowledge production held sway and students did not require much effort to teach (coming as they did from similar backgrounds as their professors). With massification, teaching became more important in light of the need to teach a broader range of people who were less well-prepared for university study. Now, in what Shin and Teichler describe as the post-massification era, academics must be good at both research and teaching, in order to respond to increasing government expectations *and* changing student populations.

New Zealand universities are not immune to these changes on the global scene, even if we are comparatively well-protected from the worst of what some countries are undergoing in higher education. For example, New Zealand universities have not encountered the kinds of terror attacks experienced in Kenya in 2015 and Pakistan in 2016.[3] Nor is individual and institutional academic freedom severely curtailed in New Zealand in the way it has been in places like Turkey.[4] Women are able to participate as students and staff in New Zealand higher education in ways they are not elsewhere (Morley and Crossouard 2014). Still, our staff: student ratio is bad (see Chap. 3), attrition among both staff and students is troubling, overall funding is decreasing, and women are still not well represented at senior levels in New Zealand universities.

Furthermore, academic staff worldwide are reported to suffer significantly higher levels of stress than other workers (Bentley et al. 2014; Winefield et al. 2008) and New Zealand academics, it seems, are also at risk. Wilf Malcolm, a former Vice Chancellor of Waikato University and Nicholas Tarling, a Professor of History, declare that they detect "among staff, academic as well as general, a feeling of helplessness, of alienation, even at times of fear, that seems to us utterly alien to the proper spirit of a university, and utterly incompatible with its proper aspirations"

[3] These terror attacks occurred at Garissa University College in Kenya, where 148 people lost their lives in April 2015, and at Bacha Khan University in Pakistan in January 2016 that left 21 dead.

[4] http://monitoring.academicfreedom.info/reports/2016-01-11-various-institutions

(Malcolm and Tarling 2007, p. 219). Similarly, a group of researchers at Lincoln University discovered that the breakdown of what they refer to as academics' "psychological contracts" with the universities in which they work, is causing problems due to "'changes and pressures associated with marketization and creeping managerialism" (Tipples et al. 2007, p. 32).

Such changes and stressors are both global and local. In New Zealand, for example, the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) has shifted the focus of many institutions, and individual academics, to a more intense concentration on research output and performance than ever before. This has brought with it varying responses from academics, and a different environment into which early career academics are being socialised than the system their academic managers and leaders came through. As changes such as massification and marketisation happen globally, it is important to consider how they affect academics locally. In their important work on the early career paths and employment conditions of academics in 17 countries, Bennion and Locke (2010) remind us that national perspectives are important in an expanding and globalising world: we must "begin to assess the balance of national particularities and global trends, of similarities and differences as experienced by academics in these systems and, in some cases, when moving between them" (p. S27). Therefore, in this book I look at early career academics in one national system (New Zealand) but draw comparisons with other similar systems. I focus on the experiences of early career academics and the challenges and prospects they face as they are socialised into the academic profession.

While this book will not address *all* of the changes and challenges facing New Zealand higher education, I pick up on several that affect early career academics directly. In particular, I look at academic staff activities in terms of the core teaching and research missions of the university, as well as at work-life balance, the influence of performance-based funding, and the internationalisation of the academic profession in New Zealand, a phenomenon that has a longer history than elsewhere. I also demonstrate how New Zealand was one of the first countries in the world to implement a broad sweeping system change to higher education modelled on neoliberal principles of competition, marketisation and managerialism, in the 1980s, and how those changes continued through into the twenty-first century with deep effect.

Why Concentrate on *Early Career* Academics?

Newcomers entering the academic workforce in twenty-first century New Zealand clearly face a different environment from the one in which their academic leaders trained and served. It is important, then, to find out just what has changed and how these changes are being experienced. Investigating satisfaction levels and job experiences will help us determine what will be needed to attract new academics to an aging profession from which many workers are likely to retire in the coming decade (Nana et al. 2010). Moreover, uncovering the developmental paths, career aspirations, and socialisation experiences of *early career* academics, in particular, will

enable us to discover how and why they choose to stay or leave, what keeps them engaged in their work, and what support they need to get up to speed as quickly as possible (Hemmings 2012). Such research may also reveal how we might attract more academics to the profession who come from similar backgrounds and experiences as the diverse and historically underrepresented students that are increasingly joining our institutions (Austin 2003; Lindholm 2004).

With often limited power, fewer resources, and widely varying expectations in regard to teaching, research, and service activities, early career academics require both our attention and our support. As Teichler et al. (2013) have noted in their research on the changing academic profession worldwide, studies of those they label "junior academics" are vitally important because they help us to understand how academics learn about their profession and what we can do to support them in their double functions of learning and productive work during the formative years of their careers. Furthermore, if, as much of the research on doctoral student socialisation suggests (Austin 2002; Weidman and Stein 2003), academic staff are instrumental in the adequate preparation of doctoral students for a future academic career, we need to make sure that those academic staff have themselves been well supported, socialised and prepared.

Socialisation and the Interaction of Structure and Agency

In theoretical terms, this book is framed by the idea that socialisation happens in the interaction between structure and agency (Archer 2007, 2008; Bandura 2001; Billett 2006; Edwards 2005; Kahn 2009; Neumann et al. 2006; Trowler 1998), and that we need to recognise structure and agency as relationally interdependent. Below, I give explanations for how I view these three key terms: structure, agency, and socialisation.

Structure relates to "the properties which give coherence and relative permanence to social practices in different times and locales" (Trowler and Knight 1999, p. 182). In academia, such structures include but are not confined to disciplines, departments, and universities. Some have ventured that the discipline represents the first community "in which individual academics engage in the project of identity building" (Henkel 2002, p. 138), followed by the university. Others argue that too much weight has been given to the structural influences of academic disciplines, and that more consideration needs to be given to the wider cultural practices and preferences that shape academic professional communities (Trowler 1998). Either way, in this book I subscribe to a social theory approach, which acknowledges that individuals both learn from *and* influence the various academic communities with which they identify, and that structure and agency are "interdependent and mutually causative" (Trowler 1998, p. 137).

Agency refers to the capacity that individuals have for acting on and changing the world around them: "To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (Bandura 2001, p. 2). Central to this agentic action are intentionality

(Bandura 2001; Archer 2007; Neumann et al. 2006) and reflexivity (Archer 2007; Luckett and Luckett 2009). That is, individual agency requires a person to act with intention and to develop the capability of reflecting on the success or otherwise of that action, particularly in relation to the structure in which the action occurred. In terms of being socialised into the academic career, we can argue that individual academics work, and exert their agency, within the context of structures over which they may have limited or no control, and which present various opportunities and constraints (Austin 2003; Henkel 2002, 2005; Neumann et al. 2006; Reybold 2008; Tierney 1997). These interactions therefore strongly influence the socialisation process.

Socialisation involves newcomers to an organisation (or discipline, or department) learning about and interacting with structural norms, values and cultures in both agentic and passive ways. Academics learn how to be academics by observing and being involved in the "microscopic aspects of the culture of their organizations" (Tierney 1997, p. 12). A norm might be, for example, that everyone in the new academic's department works long hours and over the weekend. A value might be that research is given more prominence than teaching in the promotions system within the university. A culture might be that peer reviews of research submissions to scholarly journals are always anonymous. All of these examples have counterparts, of course: where long hours are the norm in one department, there will be no such expectation in another; where one university privileges research, another will favour teaching; and where one discipline expects anonymous reviews, another encourages the nomination of potential reviewers by the authors themselves. These are aspects of academia that new academics encounter, absorb, and in some instances, resist, during their graduate school or doctoral degree experience (Austin 2002; Gardner 2010) in what has been described as an apprenticeship-type model (Reybold 2008) or "anticipatory socialisation" (Tierney 1997). New academics then move on to an "organisational socialisation" process provided from within their institution (Reybold 2008; Tierney 1997) in their first years in a postdoctoral or academic position. For many, however, as Chap. 3 will show, this anticipatory and organisational socialisation happens simultaneously, as people complete their graduate degrees on the job, or a long time apart, because many academics enter the profession from other careers.

Tierney (1997) outlines two views of this socialisation experience. One view posits that new recruits are expected to assimilate the organisational norms and cultures with little room for diverse responses or for the possibility of the newcomer themselves influencing or changing the culture. Another perspective involves a more reciprocal relationship between individual agency and the cultures, norms, and values encountered during the socialisation process. This view holds that academics are influenced by and make sense of their institution/career at the same time as actively participating in "the re-creation rather than merely the discovery of a culture" (Tierney 1997, p. 16). As various researchers have argued, the ability of individuals to exert their agency and reflect upon their developing identity/ies as they experience the socialisation process can lead to the potential transformation of both the individual *and* the workplace (Billett et al. 2005; Kahn 2009; McAlpine

et al. 2013). So, it is important for us to consider both the perspectives of the early career academics themselves, as well as looking at the structures in which they are working, and the expectations (their own and those of their universities) under which they operate.

Some researchers have argued that too much research on higher education in the twentieth century privileges the views and experiences of "high-status" academics and disciplines (Trowler 1998) and that more diverse voices are needed in research on academia. It is therefore important that we listen to the voices of those early in their academic careers. Furthermore, recent research on academic staff has focused on the loss of an idealised collegial past (Mathieson 2011; Tight 2010), highlighting the effect of work intensification and degradation (Trowler 1998) and pointing out the encroaching expectations of accountability to government and relevance to industry (Leišytė and Dee 2012). Yet, for early career academics beginning their careers in the twenty-first century, theirs is not an environment experienced through the "lens of loss" but the "only reality they know" (Mathieson 2011, p. 243). We must not assume that our memories and experiences of entering the academic profession will necessarily resonate with what our new colleagues are experiencing, nor that we will be able to anticipate what they need. The new generation of academics is diverse, with varying prior experiences, "biographies, expectations, self-image and dispositions" (Knight 2002, p. 13), and is working within dynamic structures. The socialisation processes that earlier generations experienced may not be relevant, appropriate, or sufficient for twenty-first century academics.

The Research Itself

In light of these differences between generations, disciplines, contexts, and countries, this book offers the voices of early career academics from New Zealand to the conversation. The project on which this book is based investigated the work experiences and socialisation of early career academics at all eight New Zealand universities in the year following the completion of the most recent national Performance Based Research Fund assessment exercise. In 2012, I conducted a survey on the experiences of early career academics in all New Zealand universities, with funding from Ako Aotearoa: the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence (Sutherland et al. 2013). Many of the questions in the survey followed the phrasing of questions used in the international Changing Academic Profession (CAP) questionnaire.[5] The research reported in this book offers a comparative perspective, from the New Zealand context, of the experiences of early career academics.

[5] Readers can find out more about the overall CAP project in Teichler et al. (2013). The most recent iteration of the CAP questionnaire was conducted in 18 countries in 2007 and has been reported on in Springer's series of books on the changing academic profession, of which this volume now forms a part. New Zealand was not one of the countries included in the CAP survey in 2007, but will be included (along with at least nine other new countries) from 2017.