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**Steering of Autonomous Universities:
experiences from the UK.
Presentation for the Conference of the
Austrian Science Board: “steering
autonomous universities – European
perspectives.”**

**Professor Sir David Watson
Vienna, 27 November 2009**

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Centre for Higher
Education Studies
(CHES)



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Governance, leadership and management in HE: some international dilemmas

Competition, collaboration and complementarity

Mission differentiation

Reputation and quality

The “world-class” mirage

World-classness

What counts

- Research
- Media interest
- Graduate destinations
- Infrastructure
- International “executive” recruitment

What doesn't count

- Teaching quality
- Social mobility
- Services to business and the community
- Rural interests
- Other public services
- Collaboration
- The public interest

UK exceptionalism

- **History and diversity**
- **Late C20th and early C21st political activism**
- **A “controlled reputational range”**
- **Governance, leadership and management**
- **Hard questions**

UK “types” of university (after Scott, 1995)

1. Oxford and Cambridge
2. University of London
3. Victorian/Edwardian Civics
4. Redbricks
5. Isolates: e.g. Durham and Keele
6. Technological (ex CAT)
7. Open University
8. Specialised/monotechnic
9. Old new (1960s)
10. New new (1992)
11. New new new (2004)
12. Mixed economy (HE in FE)
13. Private: Buckingham
14. For profit

UK HE: political milestones

- **1988 - “incorporation” of public sector institutions**
- **1992 - end of the binary line; “territorial” devolution**
- **1997 - the Dearing Report and means-tested fees**
- **2004 - conditional “deregulation” of fees; the Graduate Contribution Scheme**
- **2009-2010 - further review of fees; a new “framework” for HE**



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Teaching quality: a “controlled reputational range.”

Historical framework of teaching quality assurance

The legacy (from 1836)

- Validating and awarding universities
- Professional and statutory bodies
- External Examiners
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)
- Robbins "academic advisory committees"
- Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) (1961-92)

The "quality wars" (from 1992)

- The Academic Audit Unit (1989-92)
- The Further and Higher Education Act (1992): assessment by the Funding Councils, audit by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC, 1992-97)
- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA since 1997)
- Audit wins (2001) - "the lighter touch"



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Governance

Leadership

Management

Governance

***Governance* is mainly about stewardship or trusteeship. This entails safeguarding the assets of the institution, including not only money and property but also values and intellectual capital. Above all governors exist to provide reassurance – inside and outside the university – about the rationality and security of the mission.**

Leadership

***Leadership* is subtly different from governance. It involves extending the vision of the university and pressing its performance, so that the university is as good as it can be. It is exercised at all levels of the institution, but in an especially visible way by the senior management team. They have to get the balance right between “ambition and realism;” to challenge the members of the institution, but also to retain their confidence.**



Management

***Management* is about making the systems work. This is not just about low-level functions (although they matter). It is about having high quality, responsive systems for academic programmes, for research projects, for people, for finance, and for facilities and estates (to name just a few).**

Dilemmas for chairs and CEOs

The “A” list:

understanding the performance of the institution compared with that of others in the sector;
managing reputational risk;
the boundaries between governance and management;
Governors’ responsibility for senior appointments;
succession;
crisis management; and
balancing institutional and public interests.

The “B” list:

managing disagreement;
dealing with a divided Board;
presenting the partnership to the Board and the institution;
offering genuine strategic choice and leadership;
relative responsibilities for “representing” the institution;
relationships with multiple communities.

The UK experience: some hard questions

- **The use and abuse of autonomy**
- **Balancing obligations to civil society and the state**
- **The sense of a sector**
- **The university and its communities**
- **Behaving well - the ethical idea of the university**

Conclusion: who “steers” the university?



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