The Academic Profession in the UK and other English-speaking countries: Thinking about ‘attractiveness’ from the perspectives of different career stages and trajectories

William Locke and Alice Bennion

Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI)
The Open University, UK
Introduction and outline

• UK context
• Key management challenges
• CAP findings
• Discussion
• Conclusions
• Implications for policy and practice
The UK context

• Legal independence of HEIs, albeit in a highly regulated environment
• Increased vulnerability to the market and the privatisation of activities
• Increased competition for highly skilled professionals from other knowledge-based industries
• Greater diversity, including in the terms and conditions of employment of academics and other professional staff
• Enduring inequalities in employment conditions and career prospects (especially gender and race)
Key management challenges

• Leadership and governance: (re-)engaging academics in strategic decision-making
• Managing diversity in the workforce and in the activities of the academic enterprise
• Attracting and developing talent: introducing flexibility in employment without creating unfairness
## Analysis of CAP findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Young (under 40 yrs)</th>
<th>Mature, recent (40+ &lt;10yrs)</th>
<th>Older, established (40+ &gt;10yrs)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>421 (36%)</td>
<td>380 (32%)</td>
<td>373 (32%)</td>
<td>1174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>293 (30%)</td>
<td>369 (38%)</td>
<td>319 (33%)</td>
<td>981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>204 (18%)</td>
<td>401 (36%)</td>
<td>525 (46%)</td>
<td>1130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>277 (29%)</td>
<td>252 (27%)</td>
<td>413 (44%)</td>
<td>942</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall satisfaction with current job

The diagram shows the percentage of people satisfied or highly satisfied with their current job in different countries: UK, Australia, Canada, and US. The satisfaction levels are categorized by age groups: Young, Mature, recent, and Older, established.

- **UK**: Young group has a higher satisfaction rate compared to the other age groups. Mature, recent, and Older, established groups have similar satisfaction levels.
- **Australia**: Young group shows lower satisfaction compared to the other age groups. Mature, recent, and Older, established groups have similar satisfaction levels.
- **Canada**: Young group has the highest satisfaction rate. Mature, recent, and Older, established groups also have high satisfaction rates, but slightly lower than the Young group.
- **US**: Young group has lower satisfaction compared to the other age groups. Mature, recent, and Older, established groups have similar satisfaction levels.

The diagram indicates that younger people tend to be less satisfied with their current job compared to older, established groups across all countries.
Attitudes to the academic career, UK only

This is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field
If I had to do it over again, I would not become an academic
My job is a source of considerable strain

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70
% agreeing or strongly agreeing

- Young
- Mature, recent
- Older, established

This is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career in my field
If I had to do it over again, I would not become an academic
My job is a source of considerable strain
Personal influence, UK only

% stating important or very important

- Department
- Faculty
- Institution

Categories:
- Young
- Mature, recent
- Older, established
Views on management of own institution, UK only

- A top-down management style
- A cumbersome administrative process
- A strong performance orientation
- A strong emphasis on institution's mission
- Professional development for administrative/management duties for individual faculty
- A supportive attitude of administrative staff towards teaching activities
- A supportive attitude of administrative staff towards research activities
- Good communication between management and academics
- Collegiality in decision-making processes

% agreeing or strongly agreeing
Views on administration and faculty involvement, UK only

1. Lack of faculty involvement is a real problem
2. The administration supports academic freedom
3. I am kept informed about what is going on at this institution
4. Students should have a stronger voice in determining policy that affects them
5. Top-level administrators are providing competent leadership

% agreeing or strongly agreeing

- Older, established
- Mature, recent
- Young
Evaluation of facilities, resources or personnel needed to support individual work, UK only

% agreeing or strongly agreeing

- Library facilities
- Telecommunications
- Your office space
- Computer facilities
- Laboratories
- Technology for teaching
- Teaching support staff
- Classrooms
- Research equipment
- Secretarial support
- Research support staff
- Research funding

Older, established
Mature, recent
Young
Working conditions in higher education

% believe working conditions in higher education have improved

Young Mature, recent Older, established

UK Australia Canada US

[Bar chart showing the percentage of workers in UK, Australia, Canada, and US who believe working conditions have improved, with categories of Young, Mature, Recent, and Older, Established.]
Discussion

• Different attractions: maintaining young academics’ satisfaction and commitment
• Job security, professional development and career progression
• New demands, new structures, new roles
• Demonstrating the positive influence of management and leadership
• Encouraging and supporting new academic managers and leaders
Conclusions

• The academic profession is not homogeneous
• Motivations, expectations and aspirations differ
• Attractiveness is variegated
• Understanding this is key to addressing the management challenges
Implications for policy & practice

• Leadership and governance: (re-)engaging academics in strategic decision-making
• Managing diversity in the workforce and in the activities of the academic enterprise
• Attracting and developing talent: introducing flexibility in employment without creating unfairness