

## **Academic Drift Evaluated: A Staff Perspective**

### **Introduction**

Academic drift is a concept used to describe academisation processes of non-university educational institutions. Although it has a longer and wider tradition (Neave, 1978, 1979), the concept of academic drift was used to analyse the tendency of the Polytechnics in the United Kingdom to develop activities comparable to traditional universities at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by various comparable developments in other European countries (Kyvik, 2009; Teichler, 2008). The Bologna Declaration in 1999 resulted in changed demands on the professionals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and a more uniform system of qualifications between university and non-university higher education (Teichler, 2008). As a result, in several European countries, non-university institutions of higher education were expected to become hybrid institutions of research and teaching. Formally, the new research activities introduced the non-university institutions of higher education into the domain of the traditional universities (Kyvik, 2004; Kyvik and Skodvin, 2003; Mudde, 2005; Teichler, 2008; Witte, et al, 2008). In this process, the Dutch traditional universities showed a territorial attitude, thinking these new activities could result in the end of the binary system of higher education as well as the end of their monopoly of the research grants of the government (Huisman and Kaiser, 2001; Lepori and Kyvik, 2010). The non-university institutions, acted from a strategy of accentuating their differences from the traditional universities, while striving for equal status (Lepori and Kyvik, 2010; Teichler, 2008).

This study empirically investigates the potential for academic drift at the staff level in the Dutch non-university institutions of higher education by studying the preferences of lecturers as well as managers regarding the aims for research at their institutions. And even

though individual research preferences and organizational or teaching actions are only loosely related (see also Visser-Wijnveen, et al., 2009), the preferences of lecturers and managers may indicate the orientation for institutions of non-university higher education.

### **Academic Drift in Dutch Non-University Institutions**

The concept of academic drift is mostly described as the attempt of non-university institutions to strive for an academic status, recognition, and rights associated with university institutions in an upward movement to resemble the university (Christensen and Erno-Kjølhed, 2011; Kyvik, 2007; Teichler, 2008). Based on a division by Neave (1979) into three analytic levels of academic drift, Kyvik (2007) describes six different, though related, academic processes: student drift, staff drift, programme drift, institutional drift, sector drift, and policy drift. The remainder of this section describes the Dutch situation and its debate on academic drift in non-university education through the six processes of academic drift defined by Kyvik (2007). These six processes are described for the Dutch non-university institutes. Then the empirical study focuses on one: staff drift.

### **Method**

This study evaluates academic drift of Dutch *hogescholen* by looking at the preferences of lecturers and managers for the direction of research by their institutions. The Dutch non-university institutions received a three-goal task with the legal space in which to conduct research: (a) an educational goal; (b) a theoretical goal; and (c) an external goal. Following Harwood (2010), the more ‘science-oriented’ aims are considered to imply a higher potential of academic drift on the staff level, while being more ‘practice-oriented’ implies a lower potential of academic drift.

### **Research Questions**

What are the preferences of lecturers and managers concerning the three aims for research of non-university higher education (indicating degree of potential academic drift on

the staff level)? What effects do they perceive of research activities (indicating actual academic drift)? What are the differences between lecturers and managers in this respect?

### **Sample**

Preferences concerning research aims of lecturers (teaching staff) and managers (non-teaching staff related to the primary process) have been gathered through an extensive survey among staff of six institutes for non-university higher education (N=1,826, lecturers' N=1,435).

### **Measures**

Respondents were asked to react to 10 statements regarding the aims of research at the *hogescholen* ('very important'=4; 'not important'=1). Based on these 10 items, three scales have been constructed in accordance with the means of the separate items. These three scales are in line with the three tasks given to the new professors by national policy: (a) educational task (2 items, Cronbach's alpha=.72); (b) theoretical task (4 items, Cronbach's alpha=.75); and (c) external task (4 items, Cronbach's alpha=.73).

Based on another set of 10 statements, data on the effects of research that the respondents perceive in their own institutions were gathered, out of which three scales have been constructed: (a) educational effects (2 items, Cronbach's alpha=.85); (b) theoretical effects (4 items, Cronbach's alpha=.86); and (c) external effects (4 items, Cronbach's alpha=.86).

A single item indicates whether the respondents feel research activities in general belong at the *hogescholen* (Likert-4). Further, the researchers requested several personal variables.

### **Analysis**

The analyses were based on descriptive analysis, student's t-tests of individual items and the aforementioned scales, and lecturers' and managers' have been compared based on

several ANCOVA's (SPSS18). Due to the unbalanced design with different  $n$  for lecturers and managers, SSTYPE1 is used. A more conservative probability level of  $\alpha=.01$  will be used to avoid the risk of the Family Wise Error Rate (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

In general, both lecturers and managers are positive about research belonging at the *hogescholen*, although managers are significantly more positive. Nevertheless, thinking that research activities belong at the *hogescholen*, as such, does not necessarily indicate academic drift since the direction of research activities (being 'more practical' or 'more scientific') is not specified.

Both lecturers and managers consider all three organizational aims for research important. Thus a moderate indication of potential for academic drift can be seen, since all aims received positive scores, including the more 'scientific' theoretical aim. However, ordering the scales shows that education was and is still the main aim of the *hogescholen* in the eyes of both lecturers and managers.

Lecturers and managers have less uniform perceptions of effects of research activities. The managers perceive a larger extension than do lecturers of the traditional teaching aims towards innovating in the professional field through research.

Since there is no difference in how the lecturers perceive the research effects on educational quality or external innovation, one can say that this equality also indicates an extension of the teaching aim, due to the newness of the latter.

Furthermore, at best a small indication of actual academic drift in the perceived effects of research activities can be seen with all theoretical aspects scoring around the midpoint of the scale.

Finally, striving to achieve the activities and status of traditional universities is considered central in academic drift (Christensen and Erno-Kjølhed, 2011; Edwards and

Miller, 2008; Harwood, 2010; Neave, 1979). When the results of this study are considered, a moderate indication of potential for staff drift has been found for both lecturers and managers of Dutch *hogescholen*. Managers are more positive on all aspects and show more potential for academic drift than do lecturers, but both groups consider education to be their main activity when aims for research are considered. Limitations and implications are discussed.

### Selection of references

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