

Serial number 0246
Title THE PROFESSORiate'S LONG-RUNNING BALANCING ACT: snapshots of how well professors since the 16th century have met students', society's and stakeholders' expectations
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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This paper draws upon four funded studies, carried out over the last five years, of UK-based university professors. Three were empirical studies focused on professors as academic leaders (one study examined the perceptions of professors themselves, while another examined those of non-professorial academics on the receiving end of professors' academic leadership), and on professors' preparation and development for professorship. The fourth was a library-based scoping study of the origins and history of professors and professorship in the UK.

With data gathered, collectively, from over 2,000 questionnaire respondents and almost 100 interviewees, the three empirical studies have contributed towards augmenting what is identified (by, for example, Macfarlane, 2011, 2012a & b; Rayner et al., 2010; Evans, 2015 a & b; Evans et al., 2013; Tight, 2002) as an emaciated research-informed knowledge base on professors and professorship, which have received scant attention from researchers. These studies revealed, *inter alia*, professors' attitudes to their work, and what underpins them, and features of their professionalism, as well as the nature of professorship and being a professor in the 21st century UK university, and experiences of negotiating pathways to professorship. They also uncovered expectations that non-professorial academics hold of professors, and the extent to which these are met. These studies' findings will be outlined in the SRHE conference paper.

Yet the paper's main focus is the comparison between professorship in the 21st century, and throughout history, as it has evolved since its inception in the 16th century. To make this comparison the paper will present findings from the recently completed library-based scoping study of the origins and history of professors and professorship, in order to address the following questions, which reflect the SRHE 2017 conference theme:

- What parts played by professors in meeting the expectations of students, society and stakeholders are evident a) in the 21st century, and b) throughout history?
- What differences and similarities are evident between a) and b), above, and what accounts for them?

THE SCOPING STUDY: OUTLINE OF DESIGN AND METHOD

The scoping study generated around 15,000 words of notes made from data gathered from almost forty historical sources (books, articles and websites). The following research questions guided data collection:

1. What are the origins of professorship and the professoriate in the UK?
 - a. When and where was the title ‘professor’ first used?
2. What purposes or roles were the earliest professors expected to carry out?
 - a. What was the nature of their work?
3. What is the relationship between the work of early professors and scientific, epistemological, societal, and political development?
 - a. To what extent (if at all) – and in what ways – have these developments (directly or indirectly) influenced, or been influenced by, professors?
4. In what ways, and with what consequences, has professorship evolved over the centuries?

The notes then fed into a literature review (which was the format of final report requested by the funders), and a website - intended for both academic and ‘lay’ audiences - that presents information on professors and professorship that is in line with the research questions above. (It is intended that the website will feature peripherally in the presentation at Celtic Manor.)

Below is a brief outline that conveys a flavour of the kinds of findings to be presented – and which, in the conference presentation, will be supplemented by illustrative quotes.

THE FINDINGS: PROFESSORS' LONG-RUNNING BALANCING ACT

Whilst, in the UK, the 21st century professoriate was found to be defined by heterogeneity that stems from the varied nature of the HE system, a common thread emerged: professors, for the most part, are very keen to meet people's expectations of them. This is explained by, *inter alia*, social identity theory – by their wanting to be recognised as worthy, *bona fide*, members of the professoriate – and by Evans's (2015) theoretical perspectives on professionalism, which explains that what she calls 'demanded' or 'requested' professionalism often becomes reified into 'enacted' professionalism through people's adjusting their professionalism to meet the expectations of others.

Yet the perspectives of non-professorial academics revealed cases of professorial academic leadership's falling short of meeting expectations held of students, society and stakeholders, through, for example, professors' shirking their responsibilities, acting aggressively, or failing to perform. This perceived feature of professors' enacted professionalism is by no means confined to the 21st century academy, for the scoping study revealed cases of professors throughout history who were named and shamed for failing to meet various expectations of them (Collinson, et al., 2003; Evans, 2013), such as: failing to give any lectures (even though, in the 16th century, lecturing was professors' principal role); accepting their stipends but doing no work; lecturing very badly (or in Latin) – so that no students attended their lectures; acting immorally; or producing no scholarly outputs. One explanation of such apparent fecklessness is that for many professors their academic posts were sidelines to their 'main' jobs as senior clergymen, for, with medieval universities serving as annexes to the church (Brockliss, 2016), professorship in the 16th century was a

considerably much less prestigious and less lucrative line of work than was being a bishop. There were also many examples, throughout various periods of English and Scottish history, of professors who, by their contemporary standards failed to meet society's and stakeholders' expectations in ways that, by today's standards, would be considered unacceptably unjust and an affront to academic freedom, for history uncovers the cruelty of norms and hegemonies that prevailed, but are now passé, and that led to the exclusion from professorship of scholars who undoubtedly deserved the title, but were of the 'wrong' gender, class, or political or religious persuasion.

The other side of this historical analytical coin, however, reveals many cases of what were presented as professors, from the 16th to the 21st century, who did meet expectations of them. Yet what the studies also uncovered was the enormous toll that trying to please everyone takes on professors. Many 21st century professors reported wearing themselves out, trying to be the 'all singing, all dancing' professors that the neoliberal university seems to want them to be, and many suffered from performance angst. Yet, again, similar such cases were also evident throughout history – the scoping study uncovered examples of 16th and 17th century professors who wrote letters of complaint about being overburdened, asking to be relieved of some of their duties. There are also cases of medieval professors who were actively engaged in what, today, are called funding capture, entrepreneurialism and impact activities.

THE EVOLVING PROFESSORSHIP: IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Professorship may well be something of a smokescreen; what it connotes, even today, when academics' status in society is perceived to have been diluted and eroded, is probably much greater than what it actually *is*. 'Professor' is, at the end of the day, a title – an academic grade. In response to external circumstances, professorship has evolved, and it will continue

to evolve. The scoping study uncovered some of the fascinating features of that evolution. Above all, it revealed that the issues that preoccupy us today, and that we problematise and lament as signs of the times, are in fact nothing of the sort; they have always been evident – at times prominent; at times lurking menacingly in the background. Though the contexts that frame them may have changed, such issues are enduring features of academic life that have persisted for centuries, and that academics have, at various points throughout history, had to contend with. There is nothing new under the sun.

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