

## Changing Academic Promotion Criteria for Third Stream Activity: A Review of the UK literature and institutional practices (0305)

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Universities are increasingly challenged to become more socially and economically relevant institutions, with recent policy emphasis upon the need for the ‘third stream activity,’ sitting alongside the two core functions of teaching and research. Recent years have witnessed a growing literature on the new roles of the university, exemplified by a number of academic concepts such as the ‘entrepreneurial university’ (Clark, 1998), the ‘service university’ (Cummings, 1998) and the ‘engaged university’ (Bridger and Alter, 2006) and more specifically addressing institutional strategies, management and policy issues concerning the emerging third stream activity, including academic entrepreneurship and community and civic engagement. While universities in the US seems to have built experiences of engagement and entrepreneurship in their own historical and institutional contexts, governments such as the UK, Australia, Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Japan have introduced policy measures to encourage universities to develop their ‘third stream activity’. Each government has responded differently. The UK government has approached this by policy discourses of ‘usefulness’, supported by a series of sizeable funding streams (Nedeva, 2008).

The motivation of individual academics for engaging in third stream activity is influenced by “the value system of academics”. This is, arguably, conditioned by the institutional strategic mission for third stream activity and decisions and investment made by the leadership, including promotions criteria and rewards mechanisms (PACEC/CBR, 2009, p.102). However, quite often individual academics engage in third stream activity as voluntary activity in their own time rather than as part of the university ‘work’, or it is done as individual commercial or consultancy activity. Literature indicates that academic motivation in general is not always well understood (Balckmore and Kandico, 2009). Whether or not individual activities should be recognised and rewarded as part of the university’s official promotion criteria is a complex issue and sometimes affects individual motivation in pursuing these activities, in both positive and negative ways.

Third stream activity broadly refers to “knowledge-based interactions between HEIs and organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors, and wider society” (HEFCE 2009). However, the conceptualisation of the term ‘third stream activity’ is somewhat contested (Slowey, 2004). There are different conceptions and interpretations of ‘third stream activity’ of the university, particularly, in terms of its relationship to the core missions of teaching and research. Whether ‘third stream activity’ should be promoted separately from teaching and research is a complex issue. With the widening scope of academic entrepreneurship, wider social and economic interactions, services and public engagement, it is argued that balancing core activities of teaching, research and wider social and economic service needs to be ‘optimally achieved’ (Watson, 2000). The question is how synergies between different domains of activities can be created and sustained with an institutional structure. Each university has its own history, culture, strengths, relationships, mission and geographic locality. Different universities will embrace various values and different dimensions of teaching, research and third stream activities to different degrees, and different disciplines will interpret such values differently. Arguably, at least, from university’s institutional management point of view, the balance between teaching, research and ‘third stream’ activity depends on the mission of each university, and it is the responsibility of individual universities to strategically decide their missions, identify their resources and implement their missions through their strategies, in relation to the stakeholders and wider society.

There has been significant investment in higher education to modernise HR practices (Guest and Clinton, 2007), and authors note emerging new ‘academic identities’ (Henkel, 2000) and blurred boundaries within the diversified higher education system in the UK. There is a growing recognition in the sector that appropriate human resource development strategies and incentive mechanisms including academic promotion criteria, reward and recognition structures would influence the motivation of academics to undertake certain activities.

The criteria by which academics are promoted and assessed provide a good indicator of the culture that the HEI *would like* to develop in relation to different types of activities. These criteria provide a powerful indication and

incentive to academics of the values that senior management places on each activity within the portfolio (PACEC/CBR, 2009, p.103-4).

However, academic promotion criteria are often more implicit than explicit, which creates difficulties for the group decision making process itself. It is also difficult for the academic staff who seeks guidance concerning the ways in which the emphases are given to different activities in their professional work and development (Lonsdale, 1985).

In both academic literature and public documents, existing research specifically focusing on academic promotion criteria for third stream is very limited. Based on an extensive literature survey, mainly on the UK publication, and also several other national contexts including literature in the US and Australia, the present paper examines national trends in institutional reward, recognition and academic promotion criteria for third stream activities.

This is supplemented by a limited number of institutional case studies in the UK by examining institutional missions, and institutional reforms in structures and human resource strategies, illustrating how third stream activity is embedded within the wider institutional structure. The sources of case studies are mostly limited to web-based research, therefore only covers information available in the public domain. However, these may still illustrate issues and challenges not expressly captured in existing publications. In analysing ‘what actually happens on the ground’ regarding academic promotion criteria for third stream activity, it seems useful to make two distinctions:

- a) between university’s ‘official business’ and individual’s activities (Slowey, 2004), which depends on the varying degrees of ‘autonomy’ of individual academics at each institution; and
- b) between university’s official statement/strategies of academic promotion criteria and actual practices of academic promotion committee (including, *who actually decides promotion?*).

There are a number of universities which have incorporated third stream activity into their academic promotion policy and criteria. Each university has different priorities and emphases, and the way in which promotion policy is implemented differs from

one institution to the other, as well as there being differences in implementation from one Faculty, School or Department to another within a university.

Various institutional practices show different ways of embedding third stream activity into the institutional structures, changing procedures, and the value systems of the institution. Both formal and informal recognition and reward, and local support within the faculty/department appear to be important. Issues of promotion also relate to staff recruiting, and career mobility and development across academia and outside academia (Metcalf, et al., 2005). A limited number of institutions presented in this synthesis show different ways in which universities *embed* third stream activity in their institutional architectures. Celebrating success stories, recognising required skills, and sharing and developing experiences for third stream activity is also part of 'reward and recognition'. Some institutions are developing systematic approaches to identify the value of different contributions of academics and to link it to performance and development review. However, it remains to be seen whether or not these institutional practices would ultimately lead to behavioural changes of academics. The paper concludes by identifying gaps in existing knowledge and implications for national and institutional policy development.

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