Made in Britain or Made in Germany?

A Comparison of the British and the German Higher Education Systems

My Own “Academic Management” Experience

- 2013-2016 University of Kent (Canterbury), Head of Department, Deputy Head of School, Deputy Dean
- 2016-2018 University of Reading, Head of School
- 2018-2022 University of Bristol, Dean of Arts
- Since October 2022 President and VC of the University of Tübingen (State of Baden-Württemberg, Germany)
- Ideal of the scholar-administrator: academic values not at odds with managerial principles but the latter should support the former

16 German Länder

Shared historical background of British and German universities

- 529 Closure of the Platonic Academy in Athens by Emperor Justinian and founding of a monastery on the Monte Cassino by Benedict of Nursia
- 1088 University of Bologna, 1150/70 Paris
- 1167 University of Oxford, 1209 University of Cambridge
- 1348 University of Prague, 1365 University of Vienna
- 1386 University of Heidelberg, 1410/13 St Andrews, 1460 University of Freiburg, 1477 Universities of Tübingen/Uppsala/Mainz
- British College System influenced by the cenobitic monastic ideal, i.e. living and working together of male scholars in close communities
- In Germany domination of model established by Wilhelm von Humboldt (d. 1835): “unity of teaching and research”

Preliminary remarks

- Indicative, not exhaustive overview
- Based on my own experiences
- No overreliance on numbers and statistics (comparative categories sometimes problematic)
- Things are currently changing
- David Willetts, *A University Education* (OUP, 2018)

Legal Regulations in GB

- Department for Education (DfE), Office for Students (OfS) and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) as Regulating Bodies
- “mild federalism”: England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland
- University Council as overseeing body
- Statutes and Ordinances as self-given constitution of the universities
- British Employment Law (no civil servants)
- Almost complete financial autonomy (including international fees, but regulated UG Home Fees) and ownership of buildings
- Pressures of inflation
- Strikes

Legal Regulations in Germany

- Cultural Federalism (16 Federal Ministries of HE) vs State Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF in Berlin); each Land has got their own legal framework (LHG)
- double system of civil servants and employees
- no strikes by civil servants
- Very high employment security
- Ownership of university buildings predominantly with the state
- Far smaller group of permanent lecturers and senior lecturers
- Not an overall financial budget but legally fixed “plan of positions” which are financially fully covered regarding inflation (not in case of positions financed by external grants)
- Hardly any study fees (current exceptions: international students Ba-Wü and Technical University of Munich)
- Personalrat (representative body of academic-related staff<9

Structure of Universities

GB

- Non-governmental Charity
- System of departments
- Line Management
- VC as CEO
- Great **flexibility**, ability to change and adapt quickly
- High internationality
- Golden Triangle, Russell Group Universities
- Good rankings, great research success and reputation, strong Alumni engagement
- Self-directed teaching and research after PhD

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- State institution
- System of professorial chairs
- “group university”
- VC as *prima inter pares*
- **Stability**
- Non-university Research institutes
- Less internationality
- German university alliances U15, TU9
- Germany regards GB (and USA) as a role-model
- State contracts (concordats) with Catholic and Protestant Churches about teaching and research in Theology at HEIs

Challenges

GB

- Study fees/high debts for students
- Grade inflation
- Lowering of educational standards?
- Rising dropout rate
- BREXIT
- Inflation and less support by state accompanied by increasing regulation

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- Rising living costs for students
- Schoolification, performance pressure
- insufficient transferable skills
- Higher dropout rate for international students
- High percentage of fixed-term positions
- Recording of working time

University, Politics and the Public

GB

- Until the 70ties relatively leisurely, collegiate sense of self-determination, strong Faculties and Senate, only one professorship per discipline, ‘reverse snobbism’
- Since the 80ties personal professorships, stronger professionalisation and regulation
- Public and politicians generally suspicious of value of HEI despite (or because of?) high percentage of students per year
- Threat of new providers

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- Despite greater “autonomy” of universities still relatively high dependence on Ministry of HE
- Potential tension between Senate/Faculties and University Council
- Generally greater acceptance and appreciation of universities by public and politicians, but threat of loss of clear and unique profile (teaching at applied universities, research at non-university institutes)

Research

GB

- Research Excellence Framework (REF)
- Evaluation of each university per discipline, no visitations
- Flexible research leave
- Relatively flexible teaching reductions
- Flexible possibilities for research stays abroad
- Emphasis on societal and economic benefit

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- Excellence Strategy
- Excellence Clusters und Excellence Universities
- Legally determined research leave
- Legally controlled teaching reductions
- High teaching load internationally not competitive
- Generous “equipment” of chairs
- Emphasis on societal and educational (“formative”) benefit

Teaching

GB

- Lectures delivered by all academic colleagues
- Tutorials
- Fewer seminars and workshops?
- Individual feedback and consultation important
- Staff-Student Ratio
- Disadvantaged students
- Student Support, including Mental Health
- Online versus in-person teaching

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- *Venia legendi*, “professorial” teaching as legal category
- Hardly any tutorials
- Seminars and workshops
- “Kapazitätenberechnung”
- First Generation Students
- German language support; English as an alternative
- Online versus in-person teaching

Universities and Women

- Zurich: Nadezda Suslova 1867 first woman with PhD (in Medicine) in Europe
- Cambridge: Girton 1869, Newnham 1871
- Oxford: Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville 1878
- UCL: Sophie Bryant 1884 first woman to achieve a DSc in England
- Tübingen: Maria von Linden 1895 first woman with PhD (Zoology) in Germany
- Currently at most universities in Germany and in GB over 50% female students (first degree), then dramatic ‘leakage’ in higher academic degrees and positions

Some Figures

Category	GB/D
Open-ended contracts	70%/ca. 30%
International staff	33%/17,5%
Female professors	30%/28%

	University of Bristol	University of Tübingen
Staff Total	8,285/100%	7,932/100%
Academic Staff	3,595/43,4%	5,530/70%
Non-academic Staff	4,690/56,6%	2,402/30%

Bureaucracy in GB

Bureaucracy in Germany

Further Similarities

- Good cooperation between academic and academic-related parts of university very important
- Stronger emphasis on interdisciplinarity, including between Humanities and the Natural Sciences (AI!), essential
- More teamwork also in the Humanities
- Increase in intra- and interinstitutional cooperations
- Public Engagement, Innovation, and Transfer/Translation gain increasing importance (R&D)
- Dependence on demographic and (geo-)political developments
- Threat of underfunding
- Importance of student employability (transferable skills), purpose (“sense”) of a HE degree

Conclusion

The whole of a university must be greater than the sum of its parts


Auf die Vision kommt's an.
Ich behaue einen Stein.
Ich arbeite an einem Spitzbogen-fenster.
Ich baue eine Kathedrale!