

# University Governance in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Japan

## *Autonomy and shared governance after New Public Management reforms*

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### 1 Rationale and aim of paper

Increased demands on universities<sup>1</sup> due to the rise of the knowledge society lead to ‘mission stretch’ (Enders & de Boer, 2009). Many have argued that therefore, universities must become more responsive, more autonomous, and more flexible. ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) was touted among decision makers as the means to do so. Here, I analyse how NPM affected academic governance in higher education.

### 2 Selection of Countries

To compare with Japan, two European countries are selected that introduced managerially-oriented governance reforms early, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. From each country, only publicly-financed, doctoral-granting universities are compared (in Japan: national university corporations).

### 3 Concept and method

*Governance* is defined as ‘a set of general postures, assumptions and guidelines that appear to be followed when a government, without necessarily excluding other stakeholders..., steers the decisions and actions of specific societal actors according to the objectives the government has set and by using instruments the government has at its disposal’ (van Vught & de Boer, 2015, p. 38). Using a governance perspective ‘provides a general analytical framework for studying all kinds of coordination problems among actors’ (de Boer, Enders, & Schimank, 2010, p. 138).

The amount of options open to an agent under the governance of a government define *autonomy*. A first instrument for its analysis is the *governance equalizer* (de Boer et al., 2010), which distinguishes five coordination mechanisms: state regulation, stakeholder guidance, managerial self-regulation, academic self-regulation and competition. Each coordination mechanism can be present at different levels of intensity, thus leading to different balances.

For effective comparison, my analysis will be refined by applying a multi-dimensional *autonomy scorecard*. It mapped institutional autonomy in 29 European higher education systems ([www.university-autonomy.eu](http://www.university-autonomy.eu); Estermann, Nokkala, & Steinel, 2011). Mapping according to the same indicators for Japan is done by the author.<sup>1</sup>

For the governance equalizer applied within the university, information was collected on two issues of strategic importance: appointment of leadership, and quality control of education.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term ‘university’ as a shorthand for any type of higher education institution.

## 4 Findings

Summarised graphically (Fig. 1), at the level of whole dimensions the UK and Japan dominate<sup>2</sup> the Netherlands regarding staffing autonomy. On organisation and academic autonomy, the UK dominates. Within this dimension, Japan dominates the Netherlands on student admission indicators and quality assurance. Concerning programme design and language of instruction the situation is reversed. On financial autonomy, both European countries dominate Japan. Drilling down to indicators, the UK proves most autonomous regarding tuition fees; the Netherlands dominates on the other financial indicators.

What happened to shared governance under NPM with its stress on management? In the three countries, managerial power has increased to the detriment of academic self-governance in procedural matters. In substantive matters, Japanese academics have retained more power than their European colleagues; traditions apparently live stronger in Japan. In the UK, management dominates also in substantive matters; in the Netherlands, external stakeholder guidance has intensified concerning substantive control.

## 5 Conclusion

British universities continue as the most autonomous in the comparison. A new class of powerful managers has arisen there, reducing academic self-governance. The Netherlands exemplifies a mixed approach to NPM, with strong network governance tendencies (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The Netherlands' mixed picture in the autonomy scorecard resembles Japan's 'post-NPM' (Christensen, 2011) situation of strong autonomy in parts of areas together with state control through regulation (perhaps more in Japan) or external stakeholder guidance (perhaps more in the Netherlands, though the Mid-Term Plans show its presence in Japan too). At the cost of bureaucratisation of internal management, Japanese academics have retained more of their previous academic self-governance than Dutch and British colleagues.

Academic self-governance, or shared governance (Shattock, 2002), is portrayed as the ideal for long-term beneficial development of higher education. Governance reform is often based on (admittedly highly relevant!) short-term desires regarding knowledge transfer for innovation and education for employment. It has been shown here that shared governance has deteriorated in all three countries after such reforms, while managerial self-guidance tended to increase and external stakeholder guidance partly replaced governmental regulation but also made inroads on academic self-governance.

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<sup>2</sup> In ordinal comparison, (weak) dominance of A over B is defined as A scoring higher than B on at least one indicator and equal to B on all others.

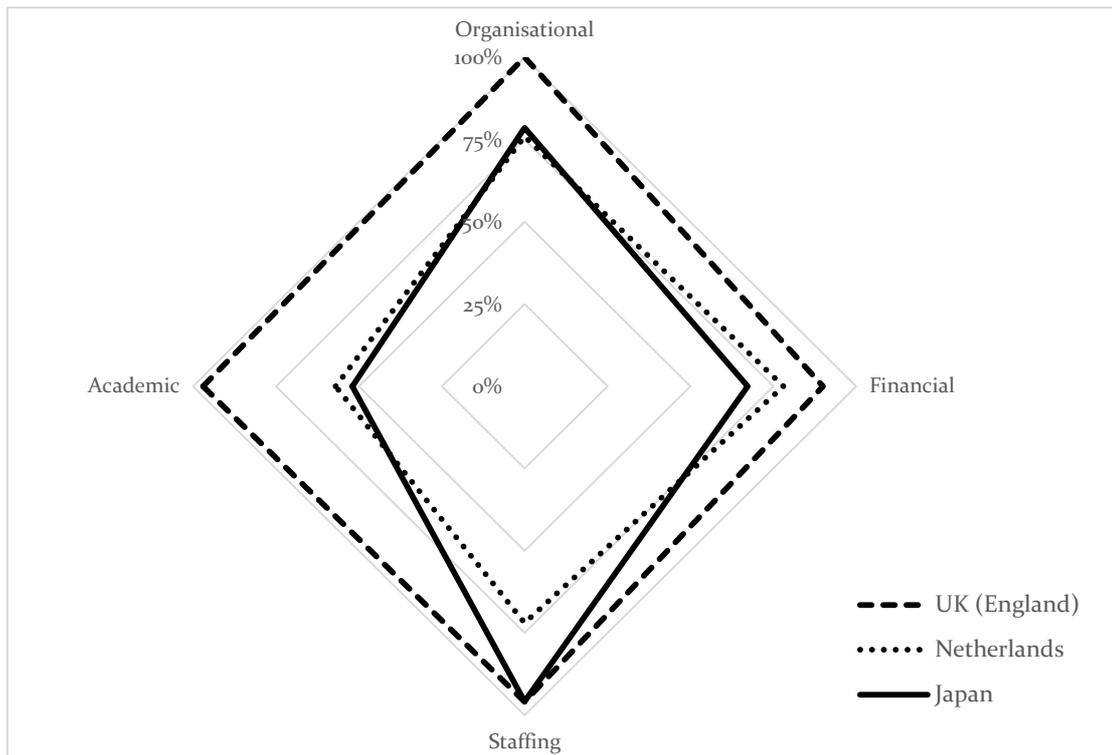


Fig. 1 Comparison of autonomy by dimensions

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