

Human resources and autonomy

The emphasis of European concern with higher education has been heavily focused on autonomy. Our partner EUA is working hard on developing an instrument to measure the degree of autonomy of higher education institutions.

Although financial independence and the form of governance have been considered as being at the heart of autonomy many other factors play an important role in defining autonomy or are considerably influenced by the degree of autonomy.

One of these factors is human resources.

In its report on university autonomy the EUA mentioned three key issues and findings:

- involvement of public authorities in staffing issues ranges from determining the salaries directly or indirectly to being direct employer of university staff
- while universities are in most cases able to determine their overall costs, they are rarely able to set staff salary levels freely
- although there is a trend to reduce civil servant status, there is still a large number of countries where either all or a large number of employees have this status

These are very general conclusions and these issues are changing rapidly.

The fact that a human resources policy has to differ depending on the governance structure cannot be denied. The differences between state universities and private universities in many countries are a point in case.

An example of the difficulties that brings with it is France where for a number of institutions the amount of autonomy they have will change drastically.

Another example are the new European countries where a complete turnaround takes place and where we see the enormous growth in the number of private universities and the impact that has on higher education in general in these countries.

Another case could be Flanders (Belgium) where within the 5 universities it counts there are three different governance regimes together however with strict legislation and control.