

# ‘University Ltd?’

Compared Experiences and Reflexions  
on the Academic Job Market in the UK

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# Today's seminar

- An old idea from E.P. Thompson (1970)
- A newer, but already old idea from the European Sociological Forum, Barcelona, *early* September 2008
- Presentation:
  - Universities: European and UK diversities
  - Academic career
  - Practicalities: CV, interviews
  - Bright and dark sides
  - Comparative remarks
- Space for questions and comments

# Let's start from the CV, actually

1988-93 Degree in Politics from *this* university

- Third sector's enterprise, half-failed

1995 MA (DEA) in Sociology at EHESS, Paris

- *Allocation de recherche* offered, and withdrawn

1996,98 Internships at Warsaw University, 1996 & 1998  
(Ministry of Foreign Affairs grants)

- Position offered, but for 800PLN (200€)/month

1996-99 PhD, European University Institute, Florence

- EU & Italy: little perspective

1999-? Lecturer (than Senior Lecturer, than Reader), University of  
Warwick (top in my small field)

- Visiting Fellowships/Professorships in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, plus guest lectures in China, Ireland, Austria, plus research/conferences around the world
- A 'natural' comparator
- Career is a retrospective exercise

# Universities in Europe

- French (+Italy, +Spain) 'statist' system
  - Academics as civil servants
  - State research centres, centralisation, tenure
- German (+Eastern Europe) 'public' system
  - Academics as civil servants, but not tenured
  - 'Habilitation'
  - University autonomy, but ministry approval
- UK 'market' system:
  - Academics employed on private contracts
  - High incidence of private money (students + industry)
  - 140 independent universities, of which:
    - 20 'Russel' group: research-intensive
    - 40 'new' Universities (pre-92 Polytechnics): teaching-intensive
- Note: all systems are being reformed

# Is variety an opportunity?

- In theory, variety should increase academic mobility (comparative advantages)
- But:
  - Little transparency
  - Social embeddedness
  - Recruitment chains

⇒ Formal, informal and natural barriers to mobility
- See: C. Musselin, 'Towards a European academic labour market?' *Higher Education* 48 (2004)

# Common trends

- Governance: from academics to professional management
- Growing number of 'atypical' employment
- Gradual erosion of academic remuneration

# Academic career in the UK

1. PhD
2. (post-doc: research-council, not university sponsored)
3. Temporary contracts (teaching or research fellows)
4. 'Tenure':
  1. Lecturer
  2. Senior Lecturer
  3. Reader (only in research-intensive universities)
  4. Professor
5. Retirement at 65 (or earlier if your pension fund performs well)
  - But: some universities have moved to US titles (Assistant/Associate/Full Professors), but applied differently
  - Non comparability of titles between universities
  - 150k employed academics, of whom 20% teaching-only and 25% research-only
  - 75k 'casual' (hourly-paid) staff

# The pay

- Nationally-agreed pay scale (but implemented differently university by university)
- Research/Teaching Fellows: from £23.5k
- Lecturers: from £30k
- Senior Lecturers: from £35k
- Readers: from £45k
- Professors: from £55k

(source: UCU)

# Pay specificities

- Possibility of individual negotiation (at start of contract)
- Possibility of retention or specific attraction payments
- Individual determination of professors' pay
- UK specificities:
  - Low income taxes, social contributions ( $<1/3$ )
  - Very low state pension => professional pension (USS) requiring extra contributions (6.5+13%)
- Overall: 33% below USA, slightly below Western European average, but very varied

# Working conditions

- Lecturers in research-intensive institutions:
  - Approx. 2 days research, 2 days teaching, 1 day administration
  - 5h teaching/week (30 weeks)
  - 1/7 sabbatical trimesters
  - Conference fund, research funds, libraries, laboratories etc.
- Lecturers in teaching-intensive institutions:
  - 15-18 contact teaching hours/week
  - No (or very little) conference funds, sabbatical, research support
  - Very difficult to apply for research grants
- Research fellows:
  - Temporary (average 3-year contracts)
  - No sabbatical, often no conference fund
- Teaching fellows:
  - Temporary or permanent
  - 67%/100% more teaching than lecturers
  - No research support
  - Little promotion chances

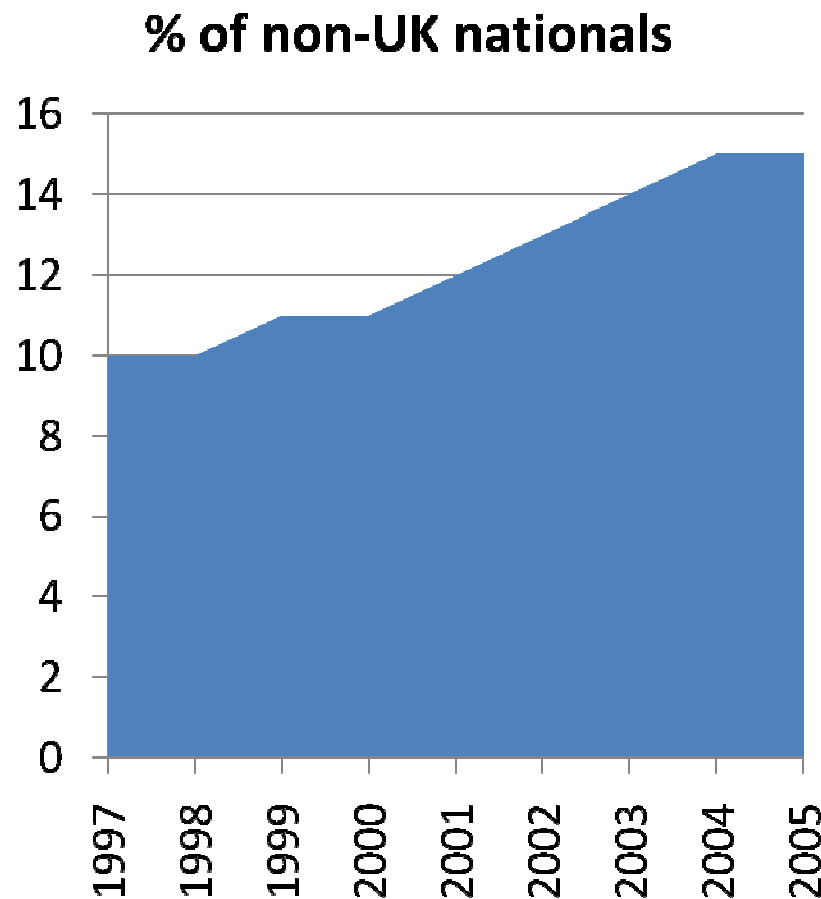
# The problem of 'casualisation'

- Temporary research contract:
  - expectation that you apply for further grants to fund your own job
  - problems with mortgages
  - problems with long-term research co-operation
- EU regulations: if contract renewed, after 4 year contract become open-ended (in some universities: after 3 years)
  - But: in the UK open-ended contracts are not permanent (possibility of dismissals)
- Importance of union advice/representation (University and Colleges Union: [www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk) )

# The UK academic labour market

- 1995-2005: 20% increase
  - Pre-crisis projection: need for 25% increase in next five years
  - Why? Increase in national (50% target) and especially foreign students (paying higher fees)
  - 40% female, but only 13% of professors, 86% pay gap
  - Before crisis: very difficult to attract young Brits
  - Labour shortages in some fields, esp. social policy, engineering, biology, medicine
- (source: HEFCE Higher Education Workforce Report 2006)

# An immigrant's job?



Predominant nationalities:

1) China

2) USA

3) Ireland

50% in research jobs

Concentrated in engineering,  
maths, business

2009: migration point system:  
difficult to recruit from  
outside the EU

But also: 'brain drain' towards  
USA (+Australia, New  
Zealand)

# Practicalities: job search

- [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk)
- (Guardian Education Supplement, THS)
- Important networking, esp. conferences
- Little scope for supervisor's involvement (unlike in USA)

# The application

- CV:
  - No need for pictures, DOB
  - Include all publications & research presentation
  - Include info on teaching, communication skills, collegiality
- References:
  - Distinction testimonials/references
  - Very important, but must know you well, and be known

# The interview

- Frequent request of teaching and/or research presentation (Powerpoint), possibly attended by local faculty
- Interviews: mostly questions outside the cv, varying for research/teaching posts
- Interview panel: 2-4 academics, including dean (pro-vice chancellors for senior jobs), and often 1 external, one HR manager
- FAQ: collegiality, plans/potential, independence, commitment

# If you're lucky: the contract

- Individual salary negotiation (with HR manager, confidential)
- Written contract
- It should include all conditions

# Comparative perspective

- Bright sides of the UK:
  - Openness
  - Not too high language requirement
  - Early entry into permanent jobs
  - No 'feudal' distinctions of status (e.g. on research funding)
- Dark sides of the UK:
  - Managerial governance
  - Paradox of bureaucracy
  - Academic freedom threats
  - High levels of stress
  - Barriers to student access
  - Distortions of research assessment and subject funding