

Different contexts, same challenges in European Higher Education

The Role of the Head of Administration

Survey Report

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humane

Europe's international network for higher education professionals

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Introduction

HUMANE (Heads of University Management and Administration Network in Europe) is Europe's international network of higher education professionals founded in 1997 as a membership association. It currently has 172 member universities in 26 countries.

HUMANE brings together Heads of Administration and senior managers of professional services in higher education institutions to share knowledge and experiences. The network also helps managers take up more senior roles in higher education through a wide portfolio of Leadership & Management Development Programmes.

This Survey was initiated from the understanding that the position of Head of Administration was undergoing profound changes in higher education. Over the years the HUMANE membership became more diverse and colleagues more often moving (or being "removed") from what had traditionally been a position almost "for life". National associations of Heads of Administration associated to HUMANE also reported changes on the way the position was evolving.

The aim of the Survey was to gain a better understanding of the nature of change in the position, beyond the conversations between members during HUMANE events. The Survey was structured in a desk research phase, an online questionnaire and a series of individual interviews. Both HUMANE members and non-member Heads of Administration completed the Survey and responded to our questions during interviews.

Dr Paul Greatrix, Registrar, University of Nottingham (United Kingdom) chaired the Survey Advisory Board made up of Dr Giuseppe Colpani (Director General, National Research Council, CNR, Italy), Dr Marcin Dąbrowski (Chancellor, School of Economics Warsaw, Poland) Dr Ana Maduro (Administrator, University of Lisbon, Portugal), Caroline Sjöberg (University Director, Uppsala University, Sweden).

The Survey Team consisted of Cécile Chicoye (former Head of Administration, Toulouse Capitole University and currently consultant in higher education), Nadine Burquel (HUMANE Residential School Director) and Cecilia Heidelberger (HUMANE Residential School Coordinator).

We would like to thank the HUMANE Chair, the Executive Committee and the HUMANE Secretariat for their support for this Survey. Our thanks also to HUMANE members and respondents for completing the online Survey and for the valuable time of those who shared their insights with the Survey Team during the interview phase. Finally, we thank the HUMANE members who assisted us with the final validation of the country profiles in the report.

Executive Summary

A Changing context...

Major transformations have taken place in Europe in the governance of public higher education institutions in the last decades. The relation between the state and its institutions has shifted quite significantly with the introduction of new national framework laws. These have often granted more autonomy to universities to set their own strategic agendas, to decide on their governance structure and to manage their own affairs. Yet this newly gained autonomy has been accompanied by new forms of quality control and performance contracts under which the state is demanding accountability and responsibility from its universities.

New public management approaches have emerged in higher education with new types of customer-oriented (or rather stakeholder) approaches to deliver more efficiently on national priorities (for education, research and innovation, employment and labour market needs) with clearer institutional strategic agendas.

Universities have come under increased pressure for funding in more competitive national higher education systems. They compete for the best students and talents at the national and international levels. National and international drives for excellence and pressures from rankings have resulted in the need to enhance the strategic positioning of institutions. This has required new governance models and types of senior leadership teams to drive strategic agendas.

...that impacts on the balance in governance systems...

Senior academic leaders have gained power and responsibilities to lead on institutional strategic agendas. In many countries this has

happened under the scrutiny of supervisory boards made either largely (or completely) of external stakeholders (also regularly appointed by the state itself). Such shifts have impacted on Heads of Administration who have seen their role strengthened (as in the case of France or the United Kingdom), changed (as in the Netherlands) or lose visibility (as in some German universities).

Heads of Administration advise University Boards and manage administrative and operational services, either the traditional missions of compliance and core services, all (or most) professional services. Surprisingly this sometimes excludes important areas such as the management of the IT infrastructure.

Our Survey has identified three broad categories of Heads of Administration, i.e. the traditional Head of Administration in charge of compliance and daily operations, the Head of Administration second only to the Rector (who supports the university governance in strategy formulation and implementation), and the Head of Administration who is on equal terms to others in the senior leadership teams, yet with a role limited to administrative (non-academic) matters.

Very often and whatever their position the Head of Administration has three jobs in one: chief of staff, secretary to the board and head of operations.

...and highlights the relationship between the Executive Head and the Head of Administration.

The pressure to deliver on complex strategic agendas requires effective interactions between individuals in senior leadership teams. The relation between the Rector (President or

Executive Summary

Vice-Chancellor) and the Head of Administration is of key importance. From a position that was often “for life”, today Heads of Administration generally stay in position for shorter periods of time, when it is not compulsory by law for them to leave as is the case in France.

A change of Rector/President may mean a new “difficult relationship” and the Head of Administration is asked to leave, or they understand the need to look for a new position elsewhere. Besides, what seems frequently to be an almost chronic “us and them” relationship (or vice-versa) between “the central administration and the faculties”, and between “academics and managers of professional services” leads to patterns that constantly repeat themselves. At times decentralisation approaches are adopted, granting more power to faculties, then some responsibilities are again taken back centrally. At other times more managerial approaches are adopted, then are reviewed when academia “no longer recognises” the core values of education and research in what is seen as overadministrative and bureaucratic processes. This can be one of the reasons to explain why some institutions have abolished the position of Head of Administration, redistributing the roles and responsibilities to Vice-Rectors/Presidents and academics who deal directly with operational services and are given administrative duties.

The need for the professionalisation of management

Despite the removal of some Heads of Administration, more strategic approaches to university management and the professionalisation of administrative structures are here to stay to deal with increasingly complex environments and strategic agendas. These all require agile leadership, people and change management, as well as high level of expertise, be it in ICT, talent management, the management of large externally funded research grants, GDPR or security matters.

The recruitment of professional staff

Staff are recruited from the private sector for middle level management positions in universities, yet it is still extremely rare to find a Head of Administration recruited directly from the private sector. Most are recruited from within the public or the higher education sector or they grow into the position from within their own university. Their career paths may take them to larger institutions or to new positions in the public sector. In our sample the highest salaries were found among respondents in Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, often related to salary scales of academic leaders.

European and international activity

Our final set of questions in the online questionnaire prompted respondents on their engagement in international higher education networks and their broad understanding of EU-wide policies and initiatives in education and research. These have implications on the provision of support services if one thinks for example of the EU Horizon Europe or the Erasmus+ Programme. Overall, about half of Heads of Administration reported such participation at European and international levels. Responses highlighted the value of international networking and the sharing of practices which is also at the heart of what HUMANE offers in the network.

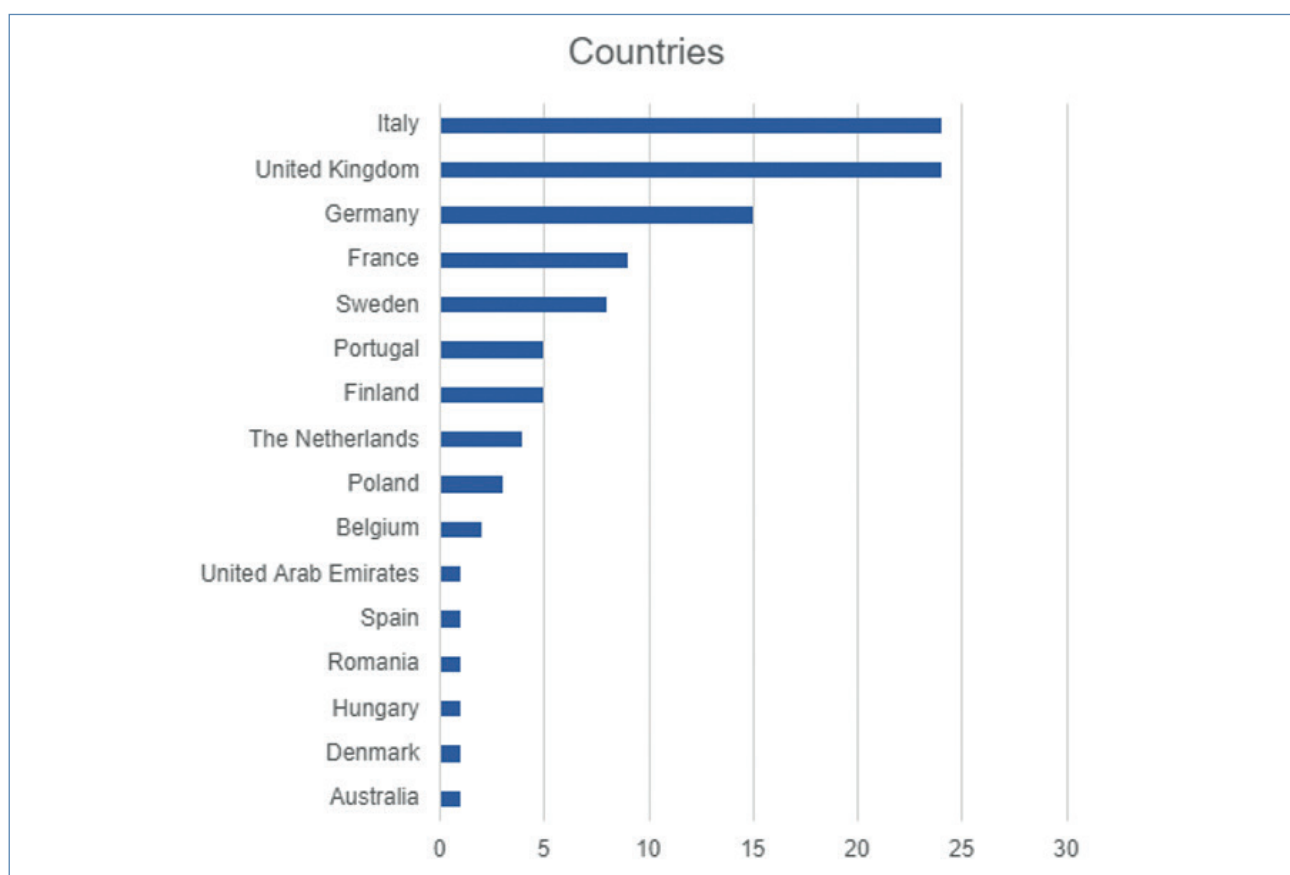
Methodological Approach

Heads of Administration profiles were researched on university websites, LinkedIn and Google to capture additional information on the nature of the position and their roles in and beyond the organisation. In many cases Heads of Administration are not very visible on the websites of their institutions.

1. Online Questionnaire

On 26 May 2021 HUMANE gave access to the online Survey to its members and to national associations of Heads of Administration closely related to the network. The Advisory Board was also instrumental in approaching individual Heads of Administration in their country for the Survey and targeted interviews. The online Survey was closed on 30 June 2021.

Within a month, HUMANE received responses from 105 Heads of Administration accounting for 103¹ universities in 16 countries mainly in Europe. HUMANE received 55% responses from non-HUMANE members demonstrating the great interest in the way the position of Head of Administration is evolving across the sector. The graph below is based on our sample. It is not proportionate of the number of universities in each country.



¹ Two replies were considered from two institutions and seen as equally relevant (i.e. incoming and outgoing Head of Administration and in another institution both the University Secretary and the Chief Operating Officer replied).

Methodological Approach

Our response sample is made of large comprehensive universities, more traditional and technical universities, mid-range and specialised institutions, offering a rich diversity of the higher education landscape in which Heads of Administration are pursuing their career.

The Survey was structured in thematic areas on the academic and professional backgrounds of Heads of Administration, their current career, their role, challenges and future needs.

2. Individual Interviews

21 interviews were carried out in the period August to November 2021 for qualitative conversations on the nature and type of relations that Heads of Administration experience in senior management teams.

A short review of the recent literature on governance, leadership and management in higher education was carried out. Some national associations of Heads of Administration provided the Survey Team with reports of their recent work.

Key findings are presented in the following thematic sections of this report. Country findings were validated by HUMANE representatives from these countries.



Changing Governance in Higher Education

This section provides an overview on general trends and shifts in university governance based on a review of key literature (as in Annex 2) and further insights gathered from interviews of Heads of Administration. It describes the context in which Heads of Administration operate in senior management teams in their institutions and notes that the nature of the relations with senior academic leaders can be a challenging one.

European higher education is characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity reflected in the organisation, governance and operational management of universities. The changing relationship between the state and its institutions and the shift towards increased institutional autonomy has been growing in the last decades, taking place through significant legislative changes and reforms. Overall governance and management structures have grown in complexity due to the increasing challenges in organisational and governmental relationships.

1. Legal Frameworks

In many European countries the laws on higher education have become framework laws, providing general guidelines for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), yet leaving significant room for manoeuvre for “own choices” and decisions, in matters that used to be decided exclusively by the state. Such framework laws were for example introduced in 1993 in the Netherlands, in Austria in 2002 (where universities became independent legal entities within the context of the public law on higher education), in Denmark in 2003, in France in 2007, in 2013 in Italy and in Finland in 2010.

This enhanced institutional autonomy has nevertheless come with a higher degree of accountability and tighter quality assurance, at state and institutional levels, which is often referred to as “the rise of the evaluative state”² linked to significant monitoring and reporting by and in institutions. Besides, universities have had to define new ways of demonstrating performance to their multiple stakeholders and of the way they contribute to societal relevance.

The literature on university governance, leadership and management mainly focuses on academic leadership, with very little analysis on the role of the Head of Administration.

As a result, new leadership and management styles have emerged, requiring new modes of interaction with and reports by the faculties, schools, institutes, departments, in order to guarantee the quality of education and research. The nature of the position of the Head of Administration has been impacted by these developments. Professional services have grown in size to support the new requirements and processes. New expertise is constantly asked for, while at the same time support services are required to operate more efficiently and in leaner ways. Considerable attention has been given to the adoption of more market-type mechanisms and modern types of governance in the context of new public management approaches.

² Magalhães A., Veiga A. (2018) The Evaluative State, Higher Education. In: Teixeira P., Shin J. (eds) Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions. Springer, Dordrecht. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9553-1_150-1, [accessed 30.11.2021].

2. Governing Structures

In a recent article related to its 2017 Autonomy Scoreboard³ EUA highlights that “When comparing the information on the characteristics of university governing bodies as stated in the law and the distribution of responsibilities and the dynamics (when there is no single governing structure), it is possible to establish a typology of governance models and thus cluster higher education systems accordingly”. EUA distinguishes between unitary governance models in which one governing body has the decision-making powers, either a Senate⁴ (usually large in size and academically focused) or a Board (smaller in size and responsible for strategic institutional decisions). In the dual governance model both the Senate and the Board share the decision-making powers.

Universities in Estonia, Ireland and Poland are said to use Senate-type bodies as the only decision-making structure. Denmark, Iceland and Portugal make it compulsory for universities to have a Senate although the Senate does not have any significant decision-making power. Except for Finland, all Nordic systems have unitary governance models structured around Board-type bodies. Some Swedish universities also have a Senate. Dual governance models are more frequent (about 2/3 of the 22 systems in the EUA Scoreboard), with usually the Board playing a more significant role in the decision-making process and the Senate being more focused on purely academic matters.

External members who participate in institutional decisions come from public authorities, they may be seen as a way for the state to regain greater influence over internal decision-making processes (thus reducing institutional autonomy), or as a practical way to clear potential challenges. In France, external members have gained fully equal rights with

internal members and have played a key role in the election process of the President. In most Northern European countries, universities are allowed to select their external members. Students are now also increasingly taking part in various levels of the university governance. Heads of Administration interact with these multiple internal stakeholders.

In Denmark and the United Kingdom, supervisory boards have a majority of external members. The role of the supervisory body can be separated from the executive’s role (such as in the Netherlands) or it can have clear decision-making powers (such as in Ireland, Sweden or Norway). Supervisory bodies are generally seen to safeguard the interests of the institution and to ensure that the institution complies with national laws and regulations.

In Poland the New Higher Education law in 2019 made it compulsory to have a supervisory board made of seven people (one student, 50% internal members and 50% external people). The senior management in Polish universities is made of the Rector, Vice-Rectors, Head of Administration/deputy Head of Administration and the bursar (the key person responsible for finances, distinct from the Head of Administration). Some Polish universities also have a Vice-Rector responsible for strategic HR and finances.

In all universities the institutional governance usually consists of the supervisory (and/or the governing) Board, the Executive Head (the Rector/President) or a senior leadership team (the Rector/President/Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Rectors/Presidents). Interactions between the senior leadership team, faculty deans and heads of departments usually take place at different levels. The Head of Administration is associated formally or in an advisory role to the Rector/President and the senior management team.

In most European countries, external members participate in key institutional decisions.

³ Bennetot Pruvot E., Estermann T. (2018) University Governance: Autonomy, Structures and Inclusiveness. In: Curaj A., Deca L., Pricopie R. (eds) European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77407-7_37, [accessed: 30.11.2021].

⁴ EUA uses a terminology specific to its own study, which does not reflect all national terminologies.

3. Selection of Executive Leaders⁵

Executive leaders are selected differently in institutions. In Denmark and the United Kingdom they are usually appointed by the Governing Board or the Council. In Austria and in the Netherlands the appointment is made by a Supervisory Board that consists exclusively of external members.

In the Netherlands more academics have been appointed President in recent years than 10 years ago when the trend was to appoint Presidents from outside. The Executive Board is made of a President, a Rector and a third person (who is not the Secretary to the University/the Head of Administration). In some countries the Executive Head is appointed by the Ministry of Education, or the institution needs ministerial approval for its candidate. In some continental countries, the President is elected by a Board whose members are often elected by internal stakeholders (academic staff, administrative staff and students), thus showing an election rather than a recruitment process.

Traditional collegial and consensus-based decision-making has come under pressure in the last decades, with new approaches to management developing, a growing participation of external stakeholders in internal governance and a professionalisation of administrative structures to deal with more challenging environments which have also impacted on the role and responsibilities of Heads of Administration.

State control has generally given way to more institutional steering, with the aim to enhance institutional efficiency and responsiveness to society's diverse needs, accompanied by new accountability processes.



⁵“Executive Leaders”: this terminology is used by EUA to cover a range of titles: Vice-Chancellors, Rectors, Presidents.

Our findings

1. Diversity of Titles

For this report the term *Head of Administration* has been used as the generic title HUMANE uses in the network since its foundation. It refers to many different titles used in the different institutions and countries in our sample, yet this generic term is hardly used.

Some titles refer to women in the position yet there is a great gender imbalance in the top position of Head of Administration even if HUMANE has over the years seen more women taking up the position, most notably in Scandinavian countries. A report on the position of Heads of Administration produced in 2020 in France noted the lack of women as General Directors in leading universities.

Country	Title (in local language)	Country	Title (in local language)
Australia	Chief Operating Officer	Poland	<i>Kanclerz</i>
Belgium	<i>Algemeen directeur/beheerder (Flanders)</i> <i>Administrateur (Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles)</i>	Portugal	<i>Administrador</i>
Denmark	<i>Universitetsdirektør</i>	Romania	<i>Director General Administrativ</i>
Finland	<i>Talous-ja rahoitusjohtaja, hallintojohtaja</i>	Spain	Gerente
France	<i>Directeur/trice Général/e des Services ; directeur général délégué (One case)</i>	Sweden	<i>Universitetsdirektör (or Högskoledirektör, Förvaltningschef)</i>
Germany	<i>Kanzler (mainly); Vizepräsident (Two cases)</i>	The Netherlands	<i>Secretaris van de universiteit/van het College van bestuur; Algemeen directeur (Bestuursdienst)</i>
Hungary	<i>Kancellár</i>	United Arab Emirates	Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer
Italy	<i>Direttore Generale (mainly)/amministrativo (Two cases), consigliere delegato (One case)</i>	United Kingdom	(University) Registrar (and/or Secretary; in one case - Secretary and General Counsel), University Clerk, Chief Operating Officer (or Chief Resource Officer), Vice-Principal Governance

The title Head of Administration in different languages

Beyond the semantics in the titles and the local languages, the small nuances reveal different perceptions, roles and positions (e.g. *general director, manager or administrator*) as well as geographical trends, with clusters for Central and Eastern Europe, Southern European or Nordic countries adopting similar titles, respectively *Kanzler* or “something around administrative”. In some countries (Italy, France) the title is either regulated by law, or regulations reflect governance changes that have occurred in the last 20 years.

In general, there is great uniformity with the title “within countries” in Italy, Germany, France, The Netherlands or Sweden. The United Kingdom is an exception, showing a great diversity of titles (or combinations of titles), most likely reflecting different governance models. Still, in most cases the terms *Registrar, Secretary or Clerk to the Governing Body* are used.

Worth noting is the case of Germany where the term Vice-President (often in relation to specific services) is sometimes used, a term that used to be reserved to academic senior leaders. Today it sometimes replaces the term *Kanzler* that was traditionally used. This seems to reflect a process under which Vice-Presidents are elected by a Board, compared to a usual process of appointment (and not election) for the *Kanzler*. One Flemish respondent from a University of Applied Sciences also added the term President to his position and a Danish respondent referred to *Executive Vice-President*.

The review of the literature, questionnaires and interviews have highlighted two main approaches adopted by different countries.

The changes with the semantics usually reflect changes with the roles: the traditional secretary general who was in charge of everyday operations and compliance to the higher education law is giving room to a position as “top executive” who participates actively in the institution’s strategy formulation and delivery. HEIs throughout Europe have been faced

with national competition (through initiatives such as the Excellence Initiative in Germany or similar initiatives in France) and international competition (among others triggered by international rankings and the need to position the institution’s educational and research portfolio, attract students, academic talents, staff and resources). This has resulted in the need for more corporate governance structures.

Our sample indicates that the term *Chief Operating officer (COO)* is still rare in higher education, more frequently used in private sector companies to describe the second-highest C-suite executive rank after the CEO who oversees all business operations. Yet beyond our Survey, one can observe that the term is increasingly used in the United Kingdom, reflecting a conception of higher education that embraces business norms.

2. The Role and Position of the Head of Administration in the Senior Management Team⁶

2.1. The Formal/Legal Positioning of Heads of Administration in the Governance Structure

The review of the literature, questionnaires and interviews have highlighted two main approaches adopted by different countries.

In one group of countries the status of the Head of Administration results from regulations (national or regional laws or decrees, such as in French-speaking Belgium, France, Germany or Italy). In a second group of countries their status depends on the university regulations.

In France the role of the Head of Administration has been defined by law and decree. It is made explicit in a reference document negotiated between the Ministry of Education and the Conference of University Presidents (CPU). In Italy the Head of Administration is one of the five governance bodies of the University. In these two cases Heads of Administration are mostly civil servants, holding a position for life yet it does not mean that they cannot be dismissed. However, when this happens, they are entitled to another position in public administrations.

⁶ The senior management team covers the executive leader, the Vice-Presidents, Provosts etc. and the Head of Administration.

The formal positioning of the Head of Administration also depends on the authority that formally appoints him/her, and our Survey shows the following patterns:

- In most cases (43 respondents) the appointment is made by the Executive Head
- 13 respondents indicate that they were appointed by the Board
- Some are appointed by an outside authority (the national or a regional Ministry of Education, as is the case in Germany where the *Länder* appoint the *Kanzlers*), most often on the proposal of the Executive Head or the Board.
- In some cases, the Head of Administration is appointed both by the Executive Head and by the Board. A University in the United Kingdom provides an interesting example in which the Head of Administration is appointed by the Board (for a role as permanent secretary to the governing body), and at the same time by the Vice-Chancellor (for the role in the senior management).
- In French-speaking Belgium the Heads of Administration of public universities, i.e. the *administrateurs* is elected by the Board and has voting powers. Their election is accompanied by a “letter of appointment” which serves as the basis for the future examination of their potential renewal. It can happen (although it is rare) that the elected *administrateur* is not the one that would have been chosen by the Executive Head, which can lead to a difficult relationship and uncomfortable daily cooperation.

As stated in the section above on the changing governance in higher education, in recent years Higher Education Institutions have been adopting new governance and management models to transform and deliver on their strategic agenda for education and research. The shift towards more autonomy from state control as reported in the EUA Autonomy scorecards⁷ has occurred in many countries in response to external changes, new demands for societal relevance and often significant public funding cuts.

2.2. The Link between the Head of Administration and the Governing Structure

This section results from a review of current literature, the outcomes of the online questionnaire and the interviews.

In its recent Survey NEWLEAD “Institutional Transformation and Leadership Development at Universities” (2021), EUA found that “Heads of Administration, Director Generals and chief operating officers are considered part of the leadership team by two thirds of all institutional respondents (65%, i.e. 143 respondents). Interestingly, this percentage goes up to 77% if the institutional answers from Poland are discarded, pointing to lower recognition of administrative roles in Polish universities. In fact, over a third of all respondents from Eastern Europe do not include such administrative and managerial profiles in the top management at their universities. At the other end of the spectrum, Scandinavia and Nordic countries, together with Ireland and the

UK universally consider senior management and administrative positions to be part of the formal senior leadership. With some exceptions (about 13% of the sample), respondents from Southern Europe include these profiles in the senior leadership team”.

In this changing context, the role of the Head of Administration can be very focused on governance as it mainly focuses on providing support to governing bodies and associated activities as the main task. In other cases, the Head of Administration has broader managerial roles, leading the professional services in their institutions.

The Survey highlights that Heads of Administration sit on Boards, either in attendance status (26% in our sample), or they enjoy full participation with voting power (48% in our sample). The “*in attendance status*” does not mean that the Heads of Administration do not participate actively in all strategic bodies and advise the senior academic leadership (Rector, President, Vice-Chancellor). However, they have no voting power to vote in favour or against a decision. In Germany, the Heads of Administration have voting powers and are allowed to vote against a decision that in their opinion endangers the institution’s financial situation. As such they can refuse to implement it. Even if according to some interviewees this is not common, it does happen, putting the Head of Administration in an awkward situation. The following trends have been highlighted in national reports and articles that the Survey Team has reviewed.

⁷ EUA: University Autonomy in Europe: <https://www.university-autonomy.eu/>, [accessed: 29.11.2021].

Finland

Finland seems to be experiencing the “extinction” of the generalist Head of Administration. Since the 2010 reform that gave freedom of organisation to higher education institutions, the number of Heads of Administration positions has significantly decreased: only two universities have maintained an organisation with a generalist manager who has authority over all administrative staff. In other universities the coordination role is provided directly by the Rector (who usually answers to a Board made of external people). Specialists in HR, ICT and sometimes a Chief Financial Officer report directly to the Rector. This shift raises the question of the respective role of Rectors, Heads of Administration and the external Board.

France

The French practice is more common around Europe: until 2010 the Head of Administration was a “*secretary general*”, an official in charge of checking the compliance of decisions taken by the University and its governing bodies. The 2007 law and the following 2010 decree transformed the position into one of “*directeur général des services*” (general director of services), implying a more important management role and participation in strategy shaping, thus effectively recognising their importance. This gradual shift is still continuing. A recent report by the Court of Audit, the French *Cour des Comptes*, “*Les universités à l’horizon 2030: plus de libertés, plus de responsabilités*” (October 2021) states that “Directors General of Services (DGS) are the essential links in an enlightened governance, yet they are still too often relegated to a subordinate role and their status remains precarious”. The report concludes to the continuing (and growing) tendency of University Presidents to use Directors General as a “*circuit breaker*” in case of internal strife. This opinion by the *Cour des Comptes* may be harsh and not completely true especially in the recently merged institutions. However it reflects the difficult adaptation to a more competitive environment and the long transition from one role to a different one. The French Association of Heads of Administration (ADGS) and the French Conference of University Presidents (CPU) are currently looking into the issue to try to improve the situation and the general level of recruitment of the Directors General.

Germany

Today the Head of Administration (the *Kanzler*) has a wide management role including voting powers in the Board and – in most Länder – personal financial responsibility. Yet interview results highlighted that although they are appointed by the *Land Minister*, their visibility as “a key power figure” in the institution has decreased in the last 20 years in favour of the Rector. Governance structures in German universities have become more aligned to international models and practices.

Italy

The Italian situation is very comparable to the French one, notwithstanding a position confirmed by law that the General Director is one of the five key governance bodies of the University. The election of the Rector by the Board implies a strong relationship between the Rectors and the Heads of Administration. As Rectors change, they may also wish to have a new Head of Administration. However, as is the case for the German *Kanzler*, the Italian General Directors have specific responsibilities for financial matters that can lead them to refuse the implementation of a decision if they are of the opinion that it will have negative financial consequences for the institution.



The Netherlands

In the Netherlands “relationship management” is a key feature in the role of the Secretary (*or Secretary to the Board*)/*General Director*) as described in the article “*Goed Bestuur & Toezicht*” (Good governance and oversight) (2017, Vunderink). The article describes how the role has shifted in the last 40 years. Until 1992 (when the law changed), the function was fully described in the law, and the Head of Administration was appointed by the Crown. In reality, the role was to manage non-academic staff and all tasks related to the functioning of the Board. Heads of Administration grew into the position from within the University and retired from the position.

After 1992 a new type of decision-makers came into universities. University Supervisory Boards were made entirely of external people and some administrative services fell under the direct responsibility of the Executive Board (the University President, Rector and a third person). The Head of Administration is not part of the Executive Board. This created more complex situations and sets of relationships for the Secretary. The position shifted to one of strategic support to the leadership. The person is required to “fit with” the senior leadership. A Secretary that has significant knowledge can be seen as overpowering and threatening, while the more silent one as lacking visibility. They can be Secretary to the Executive Board or Secretary to the University and as such have access to significant knowledge, making them potentially very powerful and influential through its permanent position (while Boards have limited mandates). The position is far less well defined than it used to be years ago.

There is often an overlap in responsibilities between those of “the third person” and the Secretary since their portfolio may include common fields, yet one focusing more on strategic directions (e.g. for HR or finances) and the other on the operational implementation. This can lead to complex relations and result in administrative services reporting to multiple senior leaders, with only a few cases of Dutch universities where all administrative services still all report to the Head of Administration.



United Kingdom

In its report in 2018 *Never a Dull Moment: The role of the Registrar*, AHUA, the Association of Heads of Administration in the UK referred to two extremes: “at one end of the spectrum some roles are highly governance-focused, with providing support for the governing body and associated activities forming a fundamental core of duties. At the other end some Registrars have very broad, often all-encompassing, managerial roles which see them leading all professional services. These latter posts were somewhat more common a generation ago but are now increasingly unusual. Most Registrars though occupy the space in between these two extremes and enjoy a wide range of duties (...)”.⁸ The role is today one of relationship management between multiple stakeholders, to “manage upwards”, and to form the crucial link between the top-level leadership and to operational staff.

⁸ AHUA. *Never a Dull Moment: The role of the registrar*. AHUA, 2018. Available at: <https://www.ahua.ac.uk/resources/never-a-dull-moment-the-role-of-the-registrar-june-2018/>, p.3 [accessed: 29.11.2021].

Two main models exist of the executive leadership and the position of the Head of Administration:

- The Executive leadership can be very centralised with an “all powerful Rector/President”, whose Head of Administration is the faithful second. In other examples more people are involved. This is the case in the Dutch model with a triumvirate in the Executive Board (the Rector, President, third person) where the Head of Administration is sometimes referred to as “the fourth person” but is not formally a member of the Executive Board. In other countries the executive governance includes several Vice-Presidents or Pro-Vice-Chancellors. In Finland and most British institutions the Executive Head does not chair the University Board. In Germany the *Kanzler* is not supposed to answer to the Rector since he is “in theory” at the same level as he is appointed by the Land Ministry. However recent trends tend to put the *Kanzler* in a comparable situation to other European countries in a role that is less prominent than in the past.
- The Heads of Administration often manage all administrative staff (74% of the respondents), including staff in the faculties and departments. In other cases they are only responsible for some central services. In rare cases there is a Chief Financial Officer at the same level who reports directly to the Rector/President.

2.3 The Relationship between the Head of Administration, the Rector/President, Vice-Rectors/Vice-Presidents

Despite the co-existence of very different governance and management models in Europe, a convergence can be observed on the role of senior administrative managers and their perception of challenges in all the national systems.

Interviews highlighted that whatever the governance structure, the strong link between the Rector/President/Vice-Chancellor and the Head of Administration is essential. In other words, if the Heads of Administration do not share the Executive leader’s strategy, they will often have to leave. As Heads of Administration are today more involved in strategy formulation (either in a formal or an advisory role), shared views with the Executive Leader on strategic developments are key to effective governance and management. This can lead to instability in the position, something that was exceptional a few years ago even when the position is permanent such as in Sweden, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom. In the case of changes (such as Rectors’ elections) the close relation has to be rebuilt with the new incoming Executive Head.

Besides, when external Boards exist, interviewees indicate that a complex relationship can emerge

when Board members are eager to connect closely within the institution and at times “forget” the strategic nature of their position to focus on small details in response to an issue that may have emerged. Cases of such micro- (instead of strategic) management are also highlighted in reports such as the 2021 IGESR report in France⁹.

Quotes

From the 2021 report by the French IGESR on Heads of Administration: In the most positive relationships, the Head of Administration is described by one President for example, as the “sparring partner of the President”.

From the AHUA report (June 2018), Never a dull moment: the role of the registrar:

“My biggest challenge is understanding what the Vice-Chancellors and Governors want, and trying to stop them from micromanaging the organisation.”¹⁰

Question to a German *Kanzler* about “his boss” in an interview:

“The Minister of my Land”.

A Dutch interviewee:

“My formal employer is the University President, but I am also Secretary to the University Executive Board which can be a complex dual role”.

⁹ Bonhotal, Jean-Pascal. Engel, Olivier. Marcerou, Philippe. Mioche, Antoine, Vagner-Shaw, Laure. L’encadrement administratif supérieur des universités: les directeurs généraux des services. Paris, IGESR, 2021. Available at: https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/imported_files/documents/igesr-rapport-2021-107-encadrement-administratif-superieur-universites-directeurs-generaux-services-pdf-89885_1412334.pdf, p. 54, [accessed: 29.11.2021].

¹⁰ AHUA. Never a Dull Moment: The role of the registrar. AHUA, 2018. Available at: <https://www.ahua.ac.uk/resources/never-a-dull-moment-the-role-of-the-registrar-june-2018/>, p.9, [accessed: 29.11.2021].

Our findings

The results of the questionnaires clearly show that the length of stay in a position seems to be decreasing, independently of the existence of a formal mandate. Most interviewees admit that this is linked to governance changes in their institution that leads to higher turnover as is exemplified by a few countries with the highest response rates in our questionnaire:

- In Germany out of the 15 respondents: eight indicate that they have held their position less than five years, six between five and 10 years and one for more than 10 years
- In Italy out of 24 respondents: 16 have held their position for less than five years, six between five and 10 years and two for more than 10 years
- In the United Kingdom out of 23 respondents: 11 refer to less than five years in the position, nine to five to 10 years and three to more than 10 years
- In France no Head of Administration is allowed by law to stay in the position and in the same institution for more than eight years

The legal or statutory existence of a mandate with a fixed duration does not seem to impact on the nature of the role and the position of the Head of Administration. When a formal mandate exists (mainly in France and in Germany), the length is between three to maximum 12 years (accounting for two mandates). The term is often renewable once, with one respondent indicating that his mandate can be renewed several times.

Only three people out of the 105 respondents hold a 10-year mandate while most hold a mandate between three to six years, i.e. 32 respondents (30%). 57 respondents (54%) indicate that they hold no mandate (mainly in the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries).

There is no length of mandate in Poland, yet the relationship with the Rector will determine whether somebody will stay in the position as it is also the case in other countries. In France the mandate is non-renewable after eight years (2 x 4 years), requiring the Head of Administration to search for a new position either in another university or in most cases in the national or local administration. France seems to have the most restrictive mandates, with

the aim to encourage mobility and to synchronise with the President's mandate, even if in reality the two mandates are not always coordinated. In some cases (some universities in Germany and in French-speaking Belgium) the Head of Administration is subject to an evaluation process which impacts on the renewal process, with or without open competition.

The traditional view that Heads of Administration are "permanent features" in Higher Education Institutions, while Executive Heads "come and go" is today more often an exception than a common trend. The above changes clearly point to this shift.

2.4. Responsibilities for Operational Management

Most respondents cover several administrative services including student services and the research administration. However, in some countries there seem to be new developments towards an organisational structure that gives the Head of Administration authority on all support services. At the same time these are placed under the strategic responsibility of a Vice-Rector/President for Research, a Vice-Rector/President for Education (or a Provost covering both), with the Rector/President providing overall coordination. In Finland this trend is very common with only two out of the thirteen universities still having a "generalist" Head of Administration. A similar trend can be observed in the Netherlands, in the French "Grandes Ecoles" and it is developing in Germany.

The responsibilities of the Head of Administration are usually a mixture of a role focusing significantly on governance issues and of an operational role (77 respondents, 73%). The role rarely focuses only on governance (6%).

Most respondents are responsible for the overall operational management to implement the academic strategy, in compliance with the higher education law, regulations and procedures. They are responsible for a range of different services described in many different clusters and "mix of services" by each respondent in our questionnaire.

Core support services



- Human Resources
 - Finances
 - Information Technology
 - Property and facilities (including student accommodation and sport infrastructure)
-

Front office services



- Academic regulation management
 - Student services (including admission and student appeals)
 - Research administration
-

Transversal services



- Quality assurance and accreditation
 - Strategic planning
 - Risk management
-

External partnerships/outreach



- International Relations
 - Communication and marketing
 - Corporate relations and outreach
 - Alumni relations and philanthropy
-

Services dealing with compliance to regulations



- Health and safety
 - Legal services (including data protection)
 - Data governance
-

Online Questionnaire Analysis

None of the 105 respondents to the online questionnaire refers to a responsibility for all the services described above. Only one respondent describes her role as follows: "I cover everything but the central Library".

- 27 respondents constitute a core that covers the following services: Strategic planning, HR, Finance, IT, Legal services (including data protection), Academic regulations management, Student services (including admission), Quality Assurance and accreditation, Research administration, Property and facilities, corporate relations and outreach.
- 91 respondents cover HR, 80 respondents include finances (which also mean that many do not cover finances directly), 68 include property and facilities and 67 respondents also have IT in their portfolio.

The responses clearly highlight that most Heads of Administration have authority on core services (although in some cases there is also a Chief Financial Officer who reports directly to the Rector/President). They also cover transversal services such as strategic planning (58 respondents) and quality assurance and accreditation (52 respondents). Communication, international relations, alumni or corporate relations may be attached directly to the Rector or to an academic in the senior leadership team.

Regarding front office services, 47 respondents cover academic regulation management and student services and 44 respondents research administration (44 respondents cover both at the same time). This also reflects a situation where front office services are run by a Provost or an equivalent position. Finally, 46 respondents also cover corporate relations and outreach departments. Compliance seems to be the responsibility of most Heads of Administration (94 out of 106 respondents include legal services in their responsibilities). GDPR and data protection have created a brand-new field of competence for Heads of Administration; Health and Safety have taken a new dimension with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, it is interesting to note that most Heads of Administration (70%) have authority on all administrative staff including those placed in faculties and departments. One interviewee admitted though that *"this authority was best used when not used"*.

Overall, it seems that there are two broad categories of institutions, i.e. those in which the Heads of Administration cover traditional compliance tasks (including recent developments like data protection) and traditional core services (with IT surprisingly often excluded), and those institutions in which Heads of Administration cover all (or most) professional services. The relatively small number of Heads of Administration covering “strategic planning” raises a question on what is understood under the term.

It has not been possible to find a correlation between different national systems and the portfolio of professional services under the responsibility of the Head of Administration. Even in more regulated systems on university governance there are significant differences between institutions. This often reflects structures inherited from the past and often limited interest in carrying out in-depth reforms of administrative structures and professional services. Patchy and small scale adaptations can often be observed instead of large-scale transformations to increase overall efficiency. Further reflections may be needed to understand more clearly the underlying reasons.

2.5. Towards a Typology of Heads of Administration

Three profiles of Heads of Administration seem to emerge from our Survey if one looks at roles, responsibilities and interactions in Executive Teams:

- The traditional “secretary general” in charge of daily operations and compliance to national regulations (with compliance taking a broader focus today through the need to develop new expertise on GDPR and privacy in response to new legislation)
- The Head of Administration second only to the Rector (President or Vice-Chancellor) who provides support in strategy formulation and implementation
- The Head of Administration on equal terms with senior academics in the senior leadership team and more collective governance and leadership structures. The academic leaders are responsible for academic affairs (education and research) and the Head of Administration as a non-academic

leader has narrower responsibilities limited to administrative matters

Tensions have emerged in some countries in the sometimes difficult transition from the first to the second and third types, requiring profile renewal and further professional development and training. The first type is still present in countries such as Portugal or Poland but also changing under external pressures. The second type is the most common and the third type is developing but is still fairly limited. In *“La grande course des universités”* (2017), Christine Musselin recommends the third type to instil a more collective governance type in universities with a clearer distribution of responsibilities.

This broad typology can be crossed with another one if one looks at the descriptions of the position as they emerged in the responses to the questionnaire and in the interviews. It can be summarised under three main roles:

- Chief of Staff for the Executive Head
- Secretary to the Board
- Head of Operations

Some interviewees reported on playing these three roles and indicated that the workload had become such that there was an urgent need to split these into three separate jobs. Some added that they also had become “entrepreneurs” required to actively seek additional sources of funding for the institution to supplement the national funding.

3. Current and Future Skills

Strategic skills, leadership and communication come first as the top skills that Heads of Administration mention to perform effectively in their positions. These are followed by diplomacy, financial skills and decision-making.

PROBLEM SOLVING KNOWLEDGE
LEGAL COMMUNICATION FINANCIAL
MANAGEMENT **STRATEGIC** DECISION MAKING
DIPLOMACY **LEADERSHIP**

During the interviews the importance of people management was very often cited as well as empathy and negotiation skills.

Perhaps not surprisingly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, respondents mention IT & Digital as the top skill they will need in the future, not as a technical skill but an understanding of digitalization for its potential to transform the delivery of professional services, education and research. Well behind innovation, flexibility, leadership and data management are mentioned.

CREATIVITY RESILIENCE COMPLIANCE DATA
INNOVATION **IT & DIGITAL** FLEXIBILITY
COMMUNICATION **LEADERSHIP** OPENESS

The digital transformation of education, research and administrative services also requires new (change management) skills. Beyond the information that emerged from the questionnaires, interviewees clearly pointed out that they would need new skills in the future related to data management, Open Science, fundraising, supporting researchers (ethical issues, addressing GDPR and societal impact issues in EU large research grants).



4. Where do they come from and how did they enter universities?

4.1. Education Level and Academic Background

Most respondents hold postgraduate degrees (80%), at the Master's or PhD level, while 15% of Heads of Administration hold an undergraduate level degree (the examples are from France, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK). This may point to a situation where some Heads of Administration entered the public sector with an initial degree at the Bachelor level then went through national competitions and examinations to grow into senior positions.

Heads of Administration are mainly from the broader field of economics, business administration, management and accountancy (22%), law (12%) and language and literature (6%). Many other disciplines are mentioned by individual respondents (architecture, biology, life sciences, geography, health care, history, mathematics, mechanical engineering, philosophy, political sciences). However, a high proportion of respondents (29%) did not indicate any specific discipline, which does not allow us to draw robust conclusions on the question of their academic backgrounds.

4.2. Career Background of Heads of Administration

Heads of Administration have mainly a background in the public sector (93%) and from the private sector (7%). 25% out of the 93% also have a background in the private sector.

In the public sector, Heads of Administration come from other universities (78%), publicly funded research organisations (7%), public funding bodies (2%), national governments or ministries (19%), public local authorities (17%) and other organisations in the public sector (21%). Some respondents indicate multiple responses. More specifically their background is from operations and policy (49%), legal or quasi-legal services (22%), academic teaching or research (13%) and others (16%).

When Heads of Administration have had previous experiences in the private sector they tend to come from many different professions (42%), legal services (20%), finances (18%) and HR (6%). Some respondents did not provide any answer.

When they have been in the private sector it seems that Heads of Administration started in junior positions then through promotion going up the career ladder in universities. As far as the Survey Team can understand there are very few cases of people being recruited directly from the private sector as Heads of Administration.

I started in the university hospital; I had a lawyer career before coming to the university; I worked in local authorities

4.3. Recruitment Process

In our sample 90% of respondents indicate that recruitment processes are institution-specific yet conducted in line with national regulations (64%), when the higher education institution belongs to the public sector.

The pool of candidates is almost always open to internal and external candidates (89%) and only in 47% to other public sector employees.

In most cases (52%) there is competitive process with a jury. An ad-hoc selection committee is put in place (57%) and the process involves a formal interview and related processes.

Recruitment is rarely from an international pool of candidates (22%). Exceptions are from HEIs in Australia, Finland (one case), Germany (two cases), Italy (private HEIs) and several HEIs in the UK.

The formal appointment is made in the name of the Rector/President (60%), the university board/senate (54%). Some respondents provided multiple answers. In the case of France the Head of Administration is formally appointed by the Minister for Higher Education and Research on the proposal of the President. In Germany the appointment is either made or validated by the Land Ministry.

Approaches to recruitment Some examples

- Executive search firms are occasionally involved
- There is a preselection through an assessment centre
- The Rector plays a key role and is assisted by a headhunting firm
- An appointment committee is created
- There is some student involvement

4.4. Career Pathways and Future Plans

Only 30% of respondents are mid-term in their careers while the remainder 70% are not. The next step in the career is to remain in their institution for 52% of respondents; 48% intend to move to another institution. Equally respondents do not intend to move outside the university sector to another public or private organisation (52%). It is difficult to analyse these data considering the nature of the sample and the fact that the Survey did not inquire about the respondent age group.

What are the next steps in your career?

- “The question depends on age and personal ambitions; ending a career as a registrar in a large institution is quite normal”
- “I may consider moving to a larger institution”

The length of mandate as described in the previous section impacts on career pathways for Heads of Administration. A majority (75 respondents, 71%) do not have a long career inside their university but have progressed through several universities and 89 respondents (85%) have progressed through education, science and related ministries but not through other ministries either (87 replies, 83%). A general conclusion that can be drawn from the answers to the questionnaire and from the interviews is that a position of Head of Administration in a large university is most often seen as an end of career position while others consider moving upwards from a small or medium sized institution to a larger one.

4.5. Salary Levels

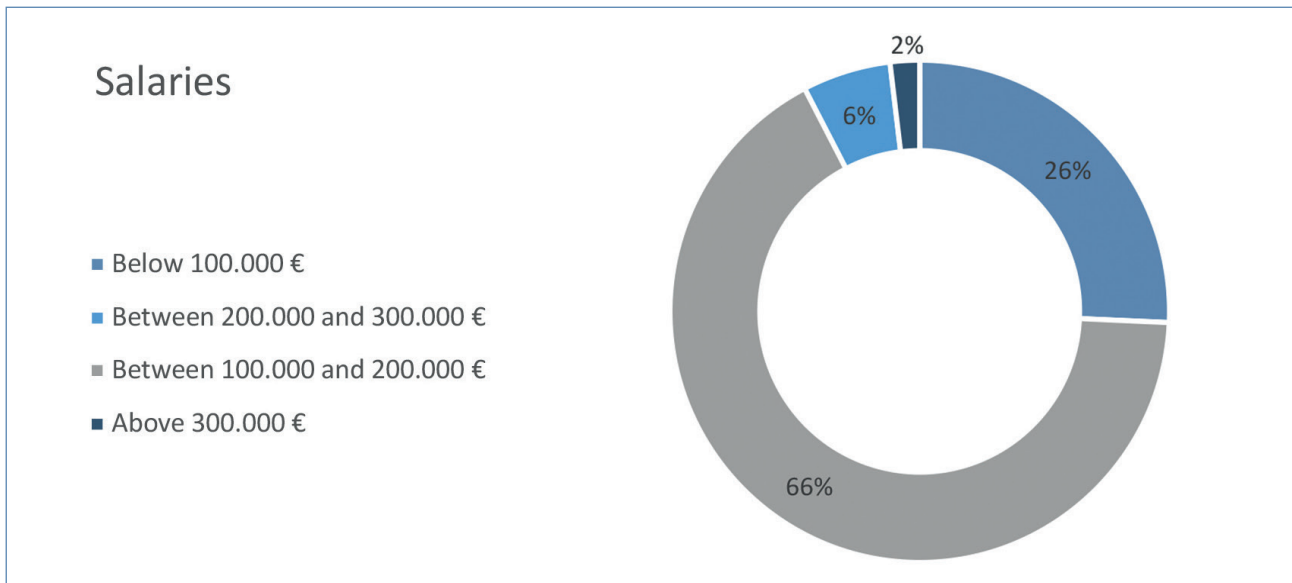
Salaries are almost equally set by the state (48%) or not (52%). Information on salary scales is said to be widely available in the public domain (77%). Very few respondents indicate that salaries may depend on the university size (in France and Italy salaries are set by national regulations). Universities have the discretion to add fringe benefits and incentives in 56% of the cases.

67% of Heads of Administration indicate an annual gross salary between 100 and 200 000€ while 26% have a gross salary below 100 000€. This should not be taken as a reflection of the general situation: for e.g. a French report by the Inspection of Higher Education on the role of Directors-General (2020) notes that the average gross salary of *directeurs généraux* in the Higher Education Institutions is 110 000€. A very small number of respondents has a gross annual salary over 300 000€.

The overall responses hide disparities between countries and national systems, from those more closely linked to public sector standard practices and salary scales to those with more flexibility to differentiate salaries. Salary levels also depend on the respondents' age and seniority. In our sample the highest salaries were found in Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom.

As mentioned earlier in this report, these findings should not be interpreted as a scientific result of an exhaustive research. They are only indicative to some trends based on our sample. The one comment that emerged from the interviews and the literature review is that salary levels are closely linked to Rectors' salary levels or the highest paid professor positions. Considering the salary levels of Vice-Chancellors in the UK it is therefore logical that some of the most highly paid Heads of Administration are from the United Kingdom. An interesting comment was made in some interviews about the fact that one could not imagine the Head of Administration to be paid more than a senior academic.

Our findings



5. European and International activity

46 respondents (43%) indicate that they interact with international higher education networks. They are less involved in international initiatives beyond Europe (e.g., with the OECD or UN-related agencies).

The extent of this activity should be taken with caution since there is the perception that in some cases respondents have referred to their university participation in these networks and not to the Head of Administration.

Quote from a respondent

I would love to have more international engagement

Participation in European and international higher education networks

ASTP, Alliance of Technology Transfer Professionals

COIMBRA, Coimbra Group Universities

EAIE, European Association of International Education

EAIR, the European Higher Education Society

ECIU, European Consortium of Innovative Universities

EUA, European University Association

HUMANE, Heads of University Management and Administration Network in Europe

IAU, International Association of Universities

IREG, Observatory of Rankings

LERU, League of European Research Universities

YUFE, Young Universities for Europe

UNICA, the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe

UNA Europa, the Network of Eight European Research Universities

Our findings

Heads of Administration are also involved in EU-wide initiatives and EU-funded programmes. These initiatives are:

- **European University Alliances:** There are fairly similar levels of participation reported by respondents (48% participate) and non-participation (52%)
- **KICs (Knowledge and Innovation Communities) in the EIT (European Institute of Innovation and Technology):** Only very few respondents (16%) indicate their participation
- **The Erasmus+ Programme:** participation stands at 54%
- **Horizon Europe:** Most respondents (44%) indicate that they are involved

Under the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility¹¹ each EU Member State is required to submit a national plan for its post-pandemic recovery for which significant EU funding is available. Education and Training development plans, in the context of EU policies on skills, upskilling and reskilling can be a major component of such a national plan. The question in the online questionnaire was testing the awareness of Heads of Administration on this EU policy. Only a few (28%) indicate some involvement.

The effect on Brexit on transnational European cooperation in higher education should not be underestimated. Continental and British universities are looking for different partnership models and/or for new partner universities.



¹¹ The Recovery and Resilience Facility: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en [accessed: 29.11.2021].

Conclusions

Our Survey on the role and position of Heads of Administration started from the implicit assumption that very clear differences would be found between countries and national governance systems. Yet more similarities than differences were found. Differences are more visible in institutional contexts than affecting the position of Head of Administration itself.

On the other hand, in all the countries in our sample and whatever the governance system, Heads of Administration have been increasingly required to become “one-person bands”: a chief of staff, permanent secretary to the board and head of operations, and to develop a capacity for strategic thinking and entrepreneurship. Needless to say that the transition from the traditional figure to an all embracing “super manager” may be a difficult one, requiring either initial or further professional development and training. The importance of the relation between the executive leader and the Head of Administration has been increasing in the last few years. In every country this “pairing” seems to be a condition for the smooth running of the institution.

It is striking to see that to the question “What skills do you think are important in your position”, diplomacy, flexibility, the ability to listen come at the top, clearly showing that the position of the Head of Administration is as interesting as it is varied and unstable. “Never a dull moment” is the title of our British colleagues’ Survey in 2018. It is certainly still true, all the more since the Covid-19 crisis.

Another finding is that there is no typical organisational model: the professional services under the responsibility of the Head of Administration vary as well as the extent of their authority on central services and professional services in faculties and departments. Within

countries there are large differences between institutions. These also reflect the importance of the historical background of every institution, and often the more limited interest in the administrative dimensions of higher education management. Most of the literature on the subject deals with the overall institutional governance and academic leadership.

Yet the one certain conclusion that can be reached is that the old stereotypes about Heads of Administration no longer apply in most countries:

- The secretary general is no longer a “permanent feature” in a changing environment, with executive heads “coming and going”
- The Head of Administration is no longer a subservient to “the boss”: they must participate in the formulation of the institution’s strategy, which requires a capacity to propose and innovate, not only to implement, even if implementation always follows

There is nonetheless a growing shift towards systems in which there are fewer “generalist” Heads of Administration, the coordination and leadership role being provided directly by the Executive Head with the help of some Vice-Presidents and professional managers. Although not common, it raises the question of the relevance of the most common model in Europe, especially when it is compared with North American models that are very different.

Should European universities be rethinking their governance structure and management models? Should the Head of Administration play a different role in the future? HUMANE will continue to look into these issues and address these across its portfolio of activities.

Annex 1

Country Profiles of Selected Countries

Denmark



General context

The Danish higher education system underwent significant reforms in 2003 when universities became independent institutions, under the public sector administration, and supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

The reform aimed for greater openness, increased academic self-determination and institutional freedom for universities to decide on their internal organisation, finances and human resource management. Danish universities now operate under performance contracts with the Ministry that focus on strategic priorities and developmental goals. They gained significant autonomy, yet at the same time new forms of control have been introduced.

University Internal Governance model

The new University Act in 2003 established a (Supervisory) Board as the supreme university authority to safeguard the interests of the institution and determine guidelines for its organisation and developments.

Most Board members must come from the outside, including the Chair; the Board must also include students, academic and administrative staff. The law stipulates that university leaders and managers should be appointed for their scientific and managerial skills.

The 2003 Act required to go from elected to appointed leaders (Rectors, Vice-Rectors, Deans, Heads of Departments and Study Directors), leading to universities establishing Executive Management teams (Rector, Vice-Rector, Deans and the Head of Administration).

Role and position: Head of Administration

The Head of Administration is formally on equal levels to other senior management team members. Traditionally the position strongly focused on (basic) compliance, HR and finances, IT, research support and real estate. It currently requires new (change management) skills and skills in more complex areas of legal compliance, GDPR, the use or misuse of technology, data management, open science and sophisticated support to researchers for large and complex international research initiatives.

Annex 1



Career Background: Head of Administration

Most respondents come from the public sector, either from within the university, another university or a public administration.

Salary Scale

The sample of our Survey is too small to draw any conclusion.

Recruitment and appointment

The Heads of Administration are appointed by the Rector but officially approved by the University Board. They have a limited contract of up to six years with the institution, with an option to be extended for a further three years before the position needs to be readvertised.

Finland



General context

Finland has 13 universities. The University reform in 2010 increased the autonomy of universities granting them with full responsibility and detaching them from the state. This put an end to the public agency and civil servant status.

University Internal Governance model

Two types of universities exist: public institutions and private foundations. Both have a university board with an external chair. The Board appoints the Rector.

Role and position: Head of Administration

Most universities except two have chosen not to have a generalist Head of Administration. They have instead several directors reporting either directly to the Rector, or to Vice-Rectors. In some cases, a Chief Financial Officer has a role that is closer to the one of a Head of Administration, but with more limited responsibilities.

Career Background: Head of Administration

Most respondents to the Survey indicate that they come from the public sector with one exception from a private company. This is less often the case for university directors/managers at other levels.

Salary Scale

The general salary system is negotiated by the universities' employer association with the labour unions. Salary scales are public but individual performance appraisals, and the final salary are not. For the Head of Administration, the salary is negotiated.

Recruitment and appointment

The recruitment is institution-specific but all recruitments follow a public open process or headhunting processes. In most cases the appointment requires the approval of the board.

France



General context

The French higher education system is made of universities (that provide education and research), and of “*Grandes Ecoles*” and “*Ecoles Polytechniques*”, i.e. technical universities and business schools that provide elite professional education.

The higher education system is largely controlled by the state, yet HEIs have been granted increased institutional autonomy since the major higher education reform in 2007. As an example, new governance models were implemented such as four-year performance contracts (including financial targets) between the Ministry and universities. The higher education system is largely controlled by the government, yet the relationship between the state and HEIs has shifted towards increased institutional autonomy through the management of a global budget allocation allowing for institutional policy choices. A strong movement towards institutional mergers has taken place in the last 10 years.

University Internal Governance model

In France, university governance structures changed with the implementation of a new Act in 2013 that changed the distribution of responsibilities among governing bodies. The board was to focus on strategic matters while other bodies were reshaped into two committees respectively for education and research, which jointly form the “academic council”. The President is elected by a board: in universities 60 % of board members are elected (including students and administrative staff); in the “*Grandes Ecoles*”, up to 60 % of the board is external. In both cases students and staff participate in the election of the President or Director.

Role and position: Head of Administration

Art 2 of the 2017 regulation states that “Heads of Administration of public higher education institutions contribute to the development of institutional policies and ensure their operational implementation. They design, implement and monitor the institution’s performance indicators in the fields of administrative, financial and property management, human resources and information systems. They contribute to the definition of the institution’s strategies and development projects and are responsible for their implementation. They are responsible for the management of all administrative, technical, social and health personnel assigned to the institution”.



Career Background: Head of Administration

Most are civil servants and have an employment contract for life, coming from other education institutions (from the central or faculty level), occasionally from the central administration and in some cases from local authorities or hospitals. In some rare cases they come from the private higher education sector.

Salary Scale

National frameworks exist that define four groups of institutions based on their size. Local margins can be applied for additional fringe benefits. A recent report refers to an average gross salary of 110 000 €.

Recruitment and appointment

Recruitment is an open process with an advisory committee in most cases, occasionally with external people. The appointment is made by the Minister of Higher Education on the proposal of the President. The mandate is limited to 2 x 4 years in the same institution.

Germany



General context

The period of 1995 to 2005 saw significant changes in the governance of the German higher education system. The reforms that were introduced aimed at developing more entrepreneurial and international universities working with performance-based funding.

The implementation of these reforms differed between the sixteen States/*Länder*. The federal system introduced some competition between the *Länder* which led to every state developing its own approach, documented in various Acts related to higher education.

Most *Länder* broadly followed the same trend to strengthen the autonomy of universities, with a shift of operational decision-making (from ministries to universities), jointly negotiated agreements (on objectives), and performance-based funding. External stakeholders increased their influence on universities (industry, local policymakers and society), and a system of private accreditation agencies for higher education emerged.

The German Universities Excellence Initiative was launched in 2005 to strengthen research in German universities, enhance their global competitiveness and attractiveness.



University Internal Governance model

Through the reforms University Presidents/Rectors increased their leadership and power. At the level of faculties, the authority of the deans also increased. Yet in many cases their influence remains limited due to their short term of office, a lack of sufficient academic leadership skills, funding and staff in faculties.

Bodies like the senates, councils and faculty boards lost a lot of power and influence. Governing boards were introduced with their power ranging from being purely advisory to taking over supervisory functions from the *Länder*-ministries.

Role and position: Head of Administration

The Heads of Administration are usually in charge of all administrative services including those based in faculties and departments. They have a wide field of competence and have voting powers in the board. Notwithstanding there is increasingly the perception that the time has gone when the *Kanzler* was seen as “the incarnation of the institution” towards external actors. The more competitive national and international environment has shifted this role to the academic leaders in the institution (i.e. the President or the Rector).

Career Background: Head of Administration

Heads of Administration mainly come from other universities. Most have a legal background or were in operational management.

Salary Scale

Most respondents (80%) indicate a gross salary between 100 and 200 000 €, while 20% indicate a salary below 100 000 €.

Recruitment and appointment

The *Kanzler* is usually nominated by the *Land* Minister and proposed by the President/Rector, with or without the board’s approval.

Italy



General context

Italian higher education is made mainly of public universities. A few private universities are officially recognised by the Italian Ministry of Education.

University Internal Governance model

Law 240/2010 reformed the university governance: the duration of the Rector's mandate became limited to eight years and the university board was to include 40 % of external members, the remainder being elected members. The Rector is elected among the professors and an academic senate. The position of Head of Administration is now explicitly mentioned in the law (*Direttore Generale*).

Role and position: Head of Administration

The *Direttori Generali* are responsible for the administration and the management of the institution. Depending on the institution their mandates are usually fixed by the statutes, lasting mainly from three to four years and renewable. They are in attendance to the board with no voting power but are associated to all strategic bodies. They have a personal responsibility for financial matters independently from the governance.

Career Background: Head of Administration

Most respondents come from the public sector even if they often began their career in the private sector. They have often worked in other institutions before being appointed as Head of Administration in their university. Some have spent some time in a national higher education administration; Most respondents in our Survey are mid-career, come from management and plan to progress in their career by moving to a larger institution.

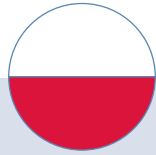
Salary Scale

National regulations set up a framework that each institution can adapt: salary levels that emerged from the Survey is rather wide: one reported a gross salary below 100 000 €; most salaries are reported to be between 100-200 000 €; a few are slightly above and one salary is reported as being above 300 000 € (in the case of a private university). In public universities the maximum salary is around 240 000 €. The salary level is directly dependent on the size of the institution (students and staff), perceived "complexity levels" (e.g. a university with a faculty of medicine), overall turnover of the institution (including the level of public funding).

Recruitment and appointment

The process is an Open Call for candidates in most cases, with a selection committee. The appointment authority depends on the regulations in each university, either the Rector or the board. By law the Head of Administration can also be selected "on trust".

Poland



General context

Universities have a medium level of autonomy. They may decide on student numbers and set admission criteria at all levels. They may introduce new Bachelor's and Master's programmes but there are some restrictions to introduce new doctoral degree programmes. Public funds represent around 81-82% in higher education budgets (OECD, 2020).

University Internal Governance model

A new Higher Education law in 2019 made it compulsory to have a supervisory board made of seven people (One student, 50% internal members and 50% external people). The senior management is made of the Rector, Vice-Rectors, Heads of Administration/deputy Heads of Administration and the bursar (the key person in the university responsible for finances). Some universities also have a Vice-Rector responsible for strategic HR and finances.

Role and position: Head of Administration

There is no mandate in terms of a limited time in office yet the nature of the relationship with the Rector will determine whether somebody stays a long time or not.

Career Background: Head of Administration

Heads of Administration come from within the university sector, often from within the same university.

Salary Scale

The sample is too small to draw any conclusions.

Recruitment and appointment

The recruitment process is specific to institutions.

Portugal



General context

Universities can define their own mission and strategy within the national policy framework for higher education and national legislation.

There have been no recent reforms that have affected the position of Head of Administration.

University Internal Governance model

Key internal decision-making (Rectors/Presidents and various Councils at institutional and faculty levels) have their composition and powers set in legislation. HEIs have increased autonomy for their governance and management. There is considerable variation in the degree of autonomy of faculties across institutions.



Role and position: Head of Administration

There is no general trend on the division of labour in the senior management team, nor on the relation between the Rector and the Head of Administration.

Heads of Administration are always in a supporting role, not as an equal e.g. to a Vice-Rector (who may be responsible for some administrative tasks). They are often associated to strategy formulation (but not always).

Career Background: Head of Administration

All Heads of Administration come from within the public sector and universities. Respondents in our Survey equally indicate a legal background and one in academia/research.

Salary Scale

Respondents indicate a gross salary below 100 000 €.

Recruitment and appointment

Recruitment takes place according to national regulations.

Sweden



General context

A major reform in 1993 resulted in increased autonomy for universities to determine their internal governance and resource allocation. Yet new government regulations have also been introduced on the right to launch new study programmes, teacher training and quality assurance.

Stakeholder involvement has increased in governance through government-appointed chairpersons in university boards and an emphasis on the third mission of universities. There has been no recent reform. The Higher Education sector is relatively stable, with sufficient resources.

University Internal Governance model

The institutional leadership (the Vice-Chancellor and the board) drive strategic developments, in consultation with various internal bodies.

The roles of the Board, the Vice-Chancellor, faculty Boards and Programme Committees are prescribed by Law. Little has changed since 1993.

Since 1998 the Chair of the Board is no longer the Vice-Chancellor, but a lay person appointed by Government.

The senior management team is made of the Vice-Chancellor/Rector, Vice-Rectors and the Head of Administration.



Role and position: Head of Administration

The Head of Administration is involved in strategic discussions and is responsible for administrative services.

They have a lifetime contract. Most Heads of Administration stay in their position for a long time.

Prior to the 1993 reform, the Head of Administration was appointed by the government to ensure compliance and implementation of regulations.

Today universities hire and appoint the Head of Administration themselves. They can decide not to have a Head of Administration, giving stronger roles to Directors of Units (HR, Academic Affairs). In some cases Pro Vice-Chancellors for HR, Academic Affairs who liaise directly with the Directors of Units are appointed. This can lead to complex relationship issues with the Head of Administration.

In most cases the appointment is made by the Vice-Chancellor and in few cases by the university board.

The responsibilities of academic leaders (e.g. the Vice-Chancellor) have increased significantly, including on compliance issues. The formal decision-making power of the Head of Administration has decreased.

Career Background: Head of Administration

The Heads of Administration usually come from within the higher education sector. They equally have a background in teaching, research or in operations.

Salary Scale

Respondents indicate a gross salary between 100 and 200 000 € (2/3) while 1/3 of respondents indicate a salary below 100 000 €.

Recruitment and appointment

Recruitment is a competitive process according to national regulations.



The Netherlands

General context

The national Act on Higher Education, i.e. the Higher Education and Research Act (WhW) entered into force in 1993. Since then, additional changes in the WhW focused on quality assurance, funding, real estate, human resource management and internal governance.

A new internal governance structure was introduced in 1997 with the 'Modernisation of the University Governing Structure' (i.e. the MUB). It aimed at optimising the governance of universities, improving the quality of their teaching and research, whilst granting them more autonomy. It led to strengthened executive powers at the institutional and middle management level, at the expense of the formal powers of representative bodies. The Supervisory Board was introduced as new governing body, made up entirely of external stakeholders.

The Strengthening Administrative Power Act was introduced in 2017 to enhance good governance culture. The role of the employee representation has been expanded in the appointment and dismissal of board members; committees have been introduced as new employee participation bodies.

University Internal Governance model

The institutional strategy is defined by the Executive Board (three people including the President, the Rector and a third person). It is approved by the Supervisory Board (five external stakeholders appointed by the Minister, with the exception of two originally private universities of religious origin where the Supervisory Board is appointed by the bishops or a Council of Members).

The University Council (represented by staff and students) and the faculty deans play an advisory role to the Executive Board and have powers such as approving the main budget lines, advisory rights in reorganisations and right of approval in important decisions.

The Supervisory Board supervises the Executive Board, approves strategic plans, budgets and long-term financial planning, annual accounts, executive regulations and the decision-making structure. It appoints (and can dismiss) the three members of the Executive Board.

The Executive Board is fully responsible for the university, for income generation, internal resource allocation, the quality of education and research.



Role and position: Head of Administration

There are different models across Dutch institutions. Heads of Administration hold several roles as Secretary to the Board (or to the University) and general director of all (or most) administrative services. Yet some members of the Executive Board may also have strategic responsibility on some areas such as HR, estates or IT, leading to complex sets of relationships.

Career Background: Head of Administration

All respondents to our Survey indicate having a career in policy and operations from the public sector or in universities.

Salary Scale

Respondents indicate a gross salary between 100 and 200 000€

Recruitment and appointment

Recruitment is mainly a competitive process, not linked to national regulations but specific to institutions. The Head of Administration is appointed by the Executive Board.

United Kingdom



General context

Higher Education Institutions have a strong level of autonomy either as non-profit organisations or private organisations. There has been a significant decrease of almost 70 % in public funding and student tuition fees increases. The remaining public funding is subject to strong pressures in research (through the requirements of the Research Excellence Framework) and teaching (through the Teaching Excellence Framework and significant student regulations). Universities operate in a highly competitive national environment.

University Internal Governance model

There is a great variety of models but most institutions have an external board with a Vice-Chancellor selected by the board. Heads of Administration are recruited according to the regulations of each institution. Titles vary from registrar to secretary or secretary to the board.



Role and position: Head of Administration

The role varies but mostly covers all support services as well as the administration of teaching and research; the Head of Administration has authority on all staff not only the central services but also faculties and departments (for more than half of the respondents).

Variations: some have authority only on central services, in some cases there is a Chief Financial Officer who reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

Career Background: Head of Administration

Heads of Administration mostly come from other universities and they progress in their career through the higher education system. Very few come from the private sector. Most hold a Master's degree and have different academic backgrounds although business, law and history are the most common.

Salary Scale

Each institution sets its salary level with or without fringe benefits (the smaller the institution the lower the fringe benefits).

Among the respondents a large majority is in a gross salary band between 100 000 and 200 000 € a year; 15 indicate that information on salaries is largely transparent.

Recruitment and appointment

No national rules exist but there is mostly an open recruitment process, in many cases open to non-nationals, with a full recruitment committee and a selection process. In some rare cases the process includes staff and students. Less than half are appointed by the Vice-Chancellor while the remainder is appointed by the board, upon proposal by the Vice-Chancellor or the recruitment committee (when there is one).

Annex 2

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