

Summary

Universities occupy a highly important position in society. Thus, the structure of these institutions, like how they are governed, funded, and run, is of interest to both scholars and society at large. In recent decades both universities and academics – the most important group working in universities – has experienced substantial changes. One example is how funding has changed towards being allocated based on performance. Additionally, academics are increasingly expected to turn to external sources for funding. A related change is the expansion of evaluation schemes, where academics are evaluated based on different types of performance criteria, like the number of citations they receive for their published work, or how many (and where) their articles are published.

These developments are by many scholars linked to managerial and neoliberal ideals of governance: Classical governance forms, such as collegiality and self-governance, are argued to diminish or disappear – paving the way for new public management-inspired steering. However, the rationale behind these developments, and the consequence of them, are viewed quite differently by scholars. One line of argumentation suggests that universities and academics need to be steered in a way that benefits society at large – through mechanisms like performance incentives. The idea is that universities can be steered in similar ways as private companies, where the universities should be able to, for example, “prove their worth” through demonstrating how they make use of their public funds. A different perspective questions how suitable this kind of steering and rationale of “return on investment” is for public institutions – like universities. In this line of argumentation, universities and academics should be granted funding, without having to account for how this funding is utilised – in line with the ideal of a state and other organisations of society keeping their distance to universities, so academics can make use of their academic freedom.

Importantly, these two positions, represent substantially different views of what the university is, and should be. In this thesis, I argue that different understandings of the governance of academics can be linked with a classical discussion within the sociology of science and the adjacent fields – namely the distinction between internalism and externalism. This distinction was highly popular for years; utilised to highlight how different influences shape and affect knowledge production. Making use of this distinction has, however, been highly controversial and disputed amongst scholars. A major theoretical point of this thesis is to unpack this

discussion, illustrating how newer conceptualisations of the academe also grapple with this distinction – making it still viable.

Empirically, this thesis is based on interviews with 40 academics working within three different disciplinary fields (biology, philosophy and economics), at a Norwegian university. The aim of the thesis is to answer the overarching research question: *How are new structures of governance shaping academics' work and autonomy – and are there differences across disciplinary fields?* In the vast landscape of possible steering mechanisms, I look at some distinct practises and structures – such as metrics, time-management systems and external funding schemes – and analyse how these mechanisms shape academics' work. The analysis is presented through three chapters of analysis. The first chapter of analysis looks at how and why the academics make use of metrics in their work. Here, I find four ideal typical ways of relating to metrics, which highlight different motivations for trying to comply with assessment metrics and different perceptions on what these metrics represent.

In the second chapter of analysis, I explore how a system of time management and practises of buyouts through project funds shape academic work and collegiality. Here, I find that certain aspects of the academic job are indeed governed outside of the academic's own control. However, I also find that both the time-management system and the system for buyouts through project funding is used to several of the informants as a way to get out of tasks they are less motivated to do. In the last chapter of analysis, I ask in what way external funding shapes knowledge production and academic work, especially focusing on freedom and steering of research. Here, important disciplinary differences come to the fore – where the biologist perceives being steered towards certain types of research projects, with many arguing that funders demand utility and applied research.

This thesis illustrates, more broadly, that an analysis of governance of academics benefits from being conducted at a micro level – illustrating how the people positioned at the core of the academic institution, namely academics, perceive changes in governance, and how this affects their autonomy and room for maneuver. Moreover, an important finding from this thesis, is how similar governance mechanisms can make different disciplinary field more alike. Also, an important implication of the study, is how it shows a quite hierarchical academic structure, in some ways challenging both a unity between teaching and research, and ideals of collegiality – two ideals that have been important in shaping Norwegian academia.