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## The Impact of Recent Reforms on the Institutional Governance of French Universities

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7 It is usual to identify France as a latecomer in New Public Management (NPM).  
8 As stressed by P. Bezes (2003 and 2009), while the *souci de soi* of the French  
9 state has always been present and the reform of the management of French  
10 public administration has been a recurrent objective during the Fifth Republic,  
11 it is only in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s that the NPM doc-  
12 trine really diffused into the French public system. The important transforma-  
13 tions experienced by the higher education system until then (Musselin 2001  
14 [2004]) could therefore not be analysed as a consequence of NPM (Musselin  
15 and Paradeise 2009).

16 The introduction of NPM methods and solutions in French administra-  
17 tion, now in place for a decade, first reached universities in mid-2000 when  
18 the new budgetary process that was introduced into French public administra-  
19 tion (the LOLF, *Loi organique sur les lois de finances*) was also implemented in  
20 public higher education institutions. In order to negotiate their budget, they  
21 now have to set objectives and indicators that will then be used to measure the  
22 achievement of these objectives a year later, when they will write a report about  
23 the past year. Further major changes, which will be described below, were  
24 introduced after 2005. They not only brought in new instruments and devices  
25 to the management of French universities (more competitive processes, per-  
26 formance-based allocation of resources, empowerment of university leaders,  
27 etc.), but more broadly affected some of the principles on which the French  
28 university system was built and, in particular, the egalitarian principles that  
29 maintained a rather low differentiation among French academics and among  
30 French universities and the grades they delivered.

31 The aim of this chapter is, therefore, primarily to describe the governance  
32 of French universities after the introduction of the recent reforms and answer  
33 the following questions: did these changes affect the governance of French uni-  
34 versities or did they resist the transformations that aimed at strengthening the

1 presidents, increasing project-based research and providing them with more  
2 autonomy and responsibility?

3 In order to answer these questions, we will draw on research carried out  
4 in France in 2011. It consists of two studies, one (Musselin 2012) based on  
5 interviews (around 100) in three French universities (ScienceUni, HSSUni  
6 and MultiUni<sup>1</sup>), and the other (Chatelain-Ponroy *et al.* 2012) resulting from  
7 a survey addressed to all universities: we received 2,600 answers, a response  
8 rate of around 22 per cent. In both cases, our sample included the presidents,  
9 vice-presidents, the registrars and their main collaborators, members of the  
10 councils, deans, heads of department and of research units and their main  
11 administrative support. The survey mostly consists of Likert scales from 1 to 7  
12 (average at 4) that can be translated into percentage (the per cent of 'pro' is  
13 obtained by adding all those who chose 5, 6 or 7; the per cent of 'anti' by adding  
14 all those who chose 1, 2 or 3).

15 Because of the empirical emphasis these studies put on academic and  
16 administrative managers of French universities, our aim is not to say whether  
17 the reforms deeply and really affected academic activities. Our focus will be on  
18 changes in governance and on the reactions and behaviours of those in charge  
19 of implementing the reforms and managing universities.

20 In the first section, we will describe the main characteristics of the French  
21 higher education system and of universities within this system. We will then  
22 present the recent reforms and their main objectives. Three main evolutions  
23 will then be observed. First, it will be shown that the reforms were used by  
24 presidents but also by managers of the university administration to central-  
25 ise decision-making and information processes. Second, reforms justified  
26 and favoured the collection and production of data and indicators, as well as  
27 the recruitment of internal auditors, but until now the use of this informa-  
28 tion remains rather limited. Finally, we will stress the role of the reforms in  
29 giving priority to research and research performance and how this increased  
30 the impact of external providers of evaluation on the governance of French  
31 universities.

## 32 **French Universities: a Recent Institutional Re-birth**

33 Each national university system is specific, strongly embedded in national  
34 institutional settings and results from a specific history. This is especially  
35 true for the French system because of the particularly disrupted trajectory of  
36 French universities (Renaut 1995). Their suppression by the French Revolu-  
37 tion<sup>2</sup> in 1793 had been a crucial step because Napoleon in 1806 re-created the  
38 discipline-based faculties (*Facultés*) but not the universities. He installed a  
39 unique Imperial University for all France, steered from Paris, and composed of  
40 the *lycées* and the faculties. This had far-reaching consequences for the French  
41 university system.

1 First, and despite the fact that the 1896 Act administratively re-formed uni-  
2 versities about a century after their suppression, the discipline-based *facultés*  
3 have long been the main pillars of the French system and the natural inter-  
4 locutors of the Ministry. This vertical discipline-based structure of the higher  
5 education system led to rather differentiated careers and status from one type  
6 of discipline to another, and to the early specialisation of students within a  
7 discipline. When universities were finally rebuilt in 1968 the aim of the reform-  
8 ers was to destroy the *facultés* and create multidisciplinary institutions organ-  
9 ised around UER (*Unités d'enseignement et de recherche*) – large departments  
10 responsible for teaching and research. They also provided the new universities  
11 with administrative, budgetary and pedagogical autonomy and a stronger and  
12 more legitimate type of governance: they should be led by presidents who are  
13 elected by and from among academics; university bodies consisted of elected  
14 representatives from the academic staff, the administrative staff, and students  
15 but also from representatives of stakeholders (*personnalités extérieures*). While  
16 the Ministry in fact rapidly regained the autonomy granted by the law (Cohen  
17 1978), the multidisciplinary project also failed in most big cities (Paris of  
18 course but also in Bordeaux, Grenoble, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Strasbourg, Tou-  
19 louse, etc.) where the former *facultés* engaged in negotiations that led to the  
20 creation of two or three new universities that each only covered a limited span  
21 of disciplines. In Paris, for instance, the former Sorbonne (that is the *facultés*  
22 of Law, Medicine, Science and Humanities) split into seven new universities  
23 (from Paris 1 to Paris 7), combining parts of two or three of the five main  
24 families of disciplines but never all of them. Thus, the new universities created  
25 from the former *facultés* remained often dominated by a prominent discipli-  
26 nary orientation<sup>3</sup> and only small metropolises have ‘complete’ universities.

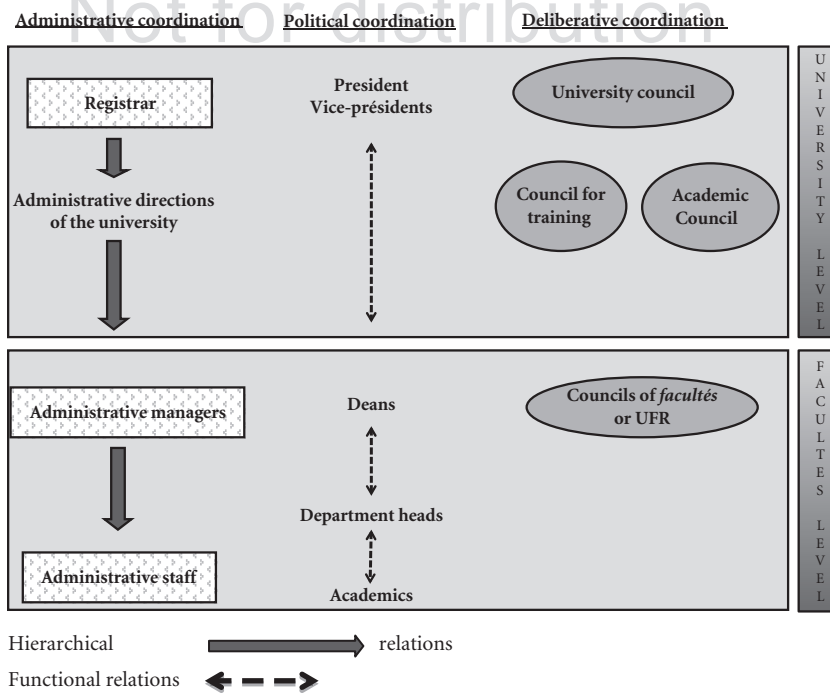
27 The reform of governance was more successful (in the sense that it has been  
28 implemented and maintained) but it took time to work out. During the first  
29 years, the new bodies had to learn how to work and in many places strong ideo-  
30 logical conflicts arose. The French intellectual René Rémond, who served as the  
31 first president of the University of Nanterre, clearly described his experience  
32 (Rémond 1979) in a book where he showed how difficult and tumultuous the  
33 first years had been. Moreover, during the first decade, it was difficult for the  
34 new presidents to really exercise their new functions while the deans remained  
35 the main interlocutors of the Ministry and were behaving and recognised as  
36 *primus inter pares* in their new *facultés* (UER).

37 As a result, the new Act of 1984 and the more recent Act of 2007, both of  
38 which aimed at reforming university governance, were still strongly oriented  
39 towards the empowerment of the university president *vis-à-vis* the ‘new *facul-*  
40 *tés*’ (now called UFR, *Unités de Formation et de Recherche*) and their deans, in  
41 order to strengthen the university’s governance.

42 Nevertheless, since 1968, whatever the reforms, some principles have never  
43 been affected. First, the fact that deans and presidents are elected by their peers

1 was never discussed, nor changed. Since 2007, all members of the university  
 2 councils<sup>4</sup>, except the stakeholders, elect the president for a four-year period  
 3 that can be renewed once. The governance of French universities thus results  
 4 from three channels of coordination: the administrative, the ‘political’<sup>5</sup> and the  
 5 deliberative one (see Table 5.1). Second, the presence of stakeholders sitting in  
 6 university councils was also always maintained and even reinforced in 2007.  
 7 But it has never been very effective: university councils are very much involved  
 8 in micro-management and their meetings last so long that stakeholders are  
 9 quickly discouraged from attending. Thirdly, and because the president, the  
 10 vice-presidents and the deans are elected, they are not considered as part of the  
 11 administrative staff: they are first of all academics, even if they exercise leader-  
 12 ship functions. Therefore, they usually<sup>6</sup> go back to their department after their  
 13 term. Their career is still run by academic bodies and they are, from this point  
 14 of view, clearly distinct from the administrative staff who have a different status  
 15 and different career paths within the French civil service. The latter are called  
 16 the administration or the central administration while the elected academic  
 17 leaders are often called ‘the policy-makers’ (*les politiques*).  
 18 A second consequence of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Impe-  
 19 rial University has to do with the weak differentiation between the secondary

Table 5.1 Hierarchical and functional relationships in French universities



1 and the higher education systems. *Facultés* in the nineteenth century first and  
2 foremost delivered grades but offered few classes. It changed with the reforms  
3 at the end of the nineteenth century, but many of the *grandes écoles* with the  
4 greatest prestige today were already created, were engaged in a more vocational  
5 style of training and some were already aimed at training the French elites. The  
6 steady increase in students attending classes at the university, which happened  
7 from the beginning of the twentieth century, did not change the main function  
8 of French universities which was the training professors and future academics  
9 but also preparing students for intermediary jobs in the public administration.  
10 This led to a curious, and French-specific, situation where universities were  
11 never the most prestigious higher education institutions.

12 A third consequence of the Napoleonic conception, in strong contrast with  
13 the Humboldtian one, is that it did not consider research as a core mission of  
14 universities. The reforms at the end of the nineteenth century aimed to pro-  
15 mote research in universities but they failed. This led to the creation in 1936  
16 of a new institution entirely dedicated to research, the CNRS (*Centre National*  
17 *de la Recherche Scientifique*), and many others (INRA for agricultural research,  
18 INSERM for life sciences, etc.) in the next decades. Nevertheless, in the mid-  
19 1960s the teaching-research divide installed by this institutional division of  
20 work was criticised and more interactions between universities and national  
21 research institutions were expected. The CNRS selected some high perform-  
22 ing university research units that became associated both with their university  
23 and with the CNRS, and this provided them with funding and CNRS human  
24 resources. At the workshop level, almost 50 years later, the CNRS-university  
25 divide is therefore blurred but, at the institutional level, universities and the  
26 CNRS have remained separate institutions. It is only recently that they both  
27 entertain more cooperative relationships and co-determine the scientific policy  
28 of universities; previously the CNRS wanted to impose its views on universities.

29 The trajectory of French universities is thus marked by the recent creation  
30 of the contemporaneous universities, the more prestigious reputation of the  
31 *grandes écoles* and the institutional divide between teaching and research.

### 32 A Bouquet of Reforms Since 2006

33 This inherited institutional setting has been challenged by two major acts  
34 passed within the last seven years. The first one, called the LOPRI (*Loi pour*  
35 *la recherche et l'innovation* [Law for Research and Innovation]) was passed in  
36 2006. Three major institutional transformations were introduced and some  
37 tasks, previously carried out by the Ministry, were delegated to new agencies.

38 First, an agency was created to centralise the budgets dedicated to project-  
39 based research<sup>7</sup>. The ANR (*Agence Nationale de la Recherche*) became responsi-  
40 ble for launching calls for research proposals, for all disciplines, that are either  
41 thematic or 'blue sky'. The centralisation of funding and the increase in budgets

1 from which this agency benefited, made project-based research more central  
2 than it used to be, while the rather high selectivity of this agency (around 20 per  
3 cent) increased the prestige, the reputation and the material capacity of those  
4 who were successful.

5 Second, another agency, AERES (*Agence d'évaluation de la Recherche et de*  
6 *l'Enseignement Supérieur*) was created to centralise<sup>8</sup>, formalise and standard-  
7 ise the evaluation of the French higher education system. It did not radically  
8 change the scope of evaluation in France but led to developing the same evalua-  
9 tion procedure for all kinds of research units (whatever their status), all types of  
10 teaching programmes, and all kinds of higher education and/or research insti-  
11 tutions. Benchmarking became much easier as these evaluations are published  
12 on the Agency's website and are therefore accessible to all: public actors, col-  
13 leagues, media, students and their families. Furthermore, these results became  
14 more linked to the allocation of budgets than in the past.

15 A third major change has to be mentioned in relation to the LOPRI, even if  
16 this chapter will not describe it in detail. It built on the idea that the French uni-  
17 versity landscape was too complicated and unreadable, so that a larger univer-  
18 sity entity (called PRES, *Pôle de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*) should be  
19 formed by joining together universities, or universities and *grandes écoles* located  
20 in the same region, in order to better coordinate their strategies and training and  
21 research activities, mutualise some of their tasks and possibly adopt the same  
22 institutional signature. In some places, these new collaborative synergies led to  
23 mergers: for example, the forthcoming merger of ~~Musselin and Dif-Pradalier~~,  
24 Strasbourg since January 2009, Marseille and the University of Lorraine since  
25 January 2012; and the New University of Bordeaux to be created in January 2014.

26 One year after the LOPRI and a few weeks after the election of Nicolas  
27 Sarkozy as the head of France in August 2007, another act, the LRU (*Libertés et*  
28 *Responsibilités des Universités*), was passed, which aimed to transform the inter-  
29 nal governance of French universities. The main orientation of this act was to  
30 provide more formal power to university presidents, but the most revolution-  
31 ary consequence was the devolution of the payroll to French universities (this is  
32 the RCE process, *Responsibilités et Compétences Elargies*). Before this, university  
33 presidents only managed the operating budget: positions were managed at the  
34 government level and universities were only in charge of the administrative  
35 management of their personnel. Now they manage the budget for payroll. As  
36 the payroll represented a significant proportion of university expenditure their  
37 overall budget often multiplied by three or four times.

38 As clearly shown by this brief summary of the main targets and contents of the  
39 2006 and 2007 acts, the formal changes that were introduced were quite impor-  
40 tant. They were all the more so because, over the same period, two major ideolog-  
41 ical changes also occurred. First the, in principle<sup>9</sup>, very egalitarian French system  
42 was challenged by the smooth but nevertheless real link that was introduced by  
43 the linking of budgets with the results of evaluation. Inputs (numbers of students

1 for instance) are still very important in the formula calculating the budget of each  
2 university, but outputs are now playing a small role in SYMPA (the name of the  
3 new formula that was introduced after 2007). Some moves from equality to equity  
4 and merit happened. Second, the idea of a relatively equilibrated landscape across  
5 France, as well as the idea that when imbalances exist they should be reduced,  
6 were abandoned in favour of a much more differentiated orientation that was  
7 first reflected in the high selectivity of the ANR and then by the concentration of  
8 resources on some institutions and major scientific clusters that resulted from the  
9 calls for projects of excellence for the Investing for the Future policy<sup>10</sup>.

### 10 **Reforms as an Opportunity to Centralise Information** 11 **and Decision-making**

12 While the LRU focused on the presidents and provided them with more deci-  
13 sion-making power, the two studies make it clear that they were not the only  
14 beneficiary of this measure: the LRU, and even more the RCE, have been used  
15 to fight against the decentralisation of French universities and the autonomy of  
16 the *facultés*. In the survey 72 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the idea  
17 that ‘over the last few years, their university experienced more decentralisation’.

#### 18 *A Reinforced Central Administration*

19 In order to cope with the new functions, but also with the increase in respon-  
20 sibility in terms of budget and human resources, most universities either  
21 recruited new staff and did their best to attract new profiles or increased the  
22 level of competences and qualifications of their administrative staff by trans-  
23 forming low-skill positions into less numerous but more qualified positions.  
24 This led to a quantitative but initially to a qualitative strengthening of the cen-  
25 tral administration. New functions were also created in order to improve the  
26 systems of information, promote internal auditing, develop managerial prac-  
27 tices and introduce new software.

#### 28 *A Clearer but also Stronger Relationship between the Presidential Team* 29 *and the Central Administration*

30 The divide between the elected university leaders (president and vice-presi-  
31 dents) and the administration that was a traditional issue in French universities  
32 before the reforms (Musselin 1987, Mignot-Gérard 2006) was also affected. As  
33 stressed by Stéphanie Mignot-Gérard (2006), building on the typology pro-  
34 posed by Stéphane Dion (1986) about the relationships between the adminis-  
35 trative and technical services and the elected members in municipalities, three  
36 main cases prevailed. In the first, called the technocratic model, the central  
37 administration takes the lead in the university over the academic leaders. In

Table 5.2 Relationships with vice-presidents



How would you qualify the relationships between your service and the vice-president in charge of the same domain?	They are cooperative	They are conflicting	In case of problems, the vice-president has the last word
Administrative staff	5.33	3.02	4.93

1 this case for most of the time: the presence of the president is not much felt;  
 2 the vice-presidents are isolated from one another and responsible for their own  
 3 domain (budget for one, human resources for the other, etc.); having less technical  
 4 expertise than their administrative counterparts (the director for finance,  
 5 the director for human resources, etc.), they follow the decisions suggested  
 6 by the latter or resist and enter into conflicts. In the second case, called the  
 7 functional politicisation, the presidential team is strong, cohesive and shares  
 8 a political objective that they impose on the administration by bypassing the  
 9 registrar and acting as managers of each specific administrative director. The  
 10 first two models were the more common even if the third one, called ‘dual hier-  
 11 archy’, (the president manages the vice-presidents, and the registrar manages  
 12 the administration) was sometimes observed.

13 In recent years, it seems that this last model has become more and more  
 14 common. We observed it in the three universities where we carried out inter-  
 15 views. This does not seem to be just a question of chance in the choice of these  
 16 universities because one of the questions asked in the quantitative survey indi-  
 17 cates that most administrative staff do not have difficult relationships with  
 18 their vice-presidents, even if they also recognise that when they disagree on a  
 19 question, the vice-presidents have the final power of decision (Table 5.2).

20 In the three universities under examination the dual hierarchy model pre-  
 21 vailed and worked on a similar basis. On the one hand, each of the leaders is  
 22 managing his/her team. The president animates his/her team of vice-presidents  
 23 and develops cohesive relationships with them, while the registrar is doing the  
 24 same with the team of administrative directors. On the other hand, the presi-  
 25 dent and the registrar work closely together and thus coordinate the elected  
 26 and the administrative hierarchy.

27 Concretely, I work very closely with the President. We see each other at  
 28 least two times a day, quite early in the morning at 7:45 to take stock of the  
 29 current issues and then in the evening, when I bring him documents for  
 30 signature. We see each other for a short or long time, but at least twice a  
 31 day. Often more. We work quite a lot on the projects exchange information.  
 32 (Registrar, ScienceUni)



1 As a result, each administrative director is working with the vice-president in  
2 charge of the same domain (for instance, the vice-president for human resources  
3 with the administrative director for human resources) but not in a hierarchical  
4 way. The vice-presidents do not bypass the authority of the registrar.

5 My role as a vice-president is to work with the service in their mission for  
6 the management of human resources, and to facilitate things with the aca-  
7 demic and administrative personnel in order to spread the message of the  
8 president and of the university council. My role is to be a facilitator at all  
9 levels: facilitator for all the decisions made and, before they are made, to  
10 accompany the decision-making process.

11 (Vice-president for Human Resources, MultiUni)

12 It seems as if the respective roles of the different actors were clear and easy to  
13 respect. This is reinforced by the fact that they all often stress that there is a  
14 clear divide between the roles of the decision-makers (the '*politiques*' as the  
15 elected university leaders are called) and the administration. The former are  
16 supposed to define the orientations and the latter to implement them.

17 The vice-president didn't know anything before he was chosen. It was a wish  
18 of the president. He wanted his vice-president for finance to play a political,  
19 not a technical role. The vice-president refuses to acquire a certain level of  
20 technics. For this, there are the director for finance, the accounting agency,  
21 internal auditors, etc. These people have competencies because it is their  
22 job. It is not his job. He does not have to recalculate after them. The presi-  
23 dent wanted him to be able to give orientations and to make others work.

24 (LettresUni)

25 Things are often more complex and many concrete examples show that  
26 the borderline between the political and the administrative roles is not that  
27 straightforward. But it is interesting to observe that the divide between strategy  
28 and execution, which is so often presented as a managerial rule for an efficient  
29 public management, is appropriated by the French senior managers.

30 *The Dual Hierarchy is perceived as a Central Player in most*  
31 *Decision-making Processes*

32 The role played by the central level of French universities not only relies on a  
33 strengthened central administration and the development of a dual, but coop-  
34 erative, hierarchy. It is also perceived as central by those who answered our  
35 survey.

36 We identified six different domains of decisions (see Table 5.3) and, for each  
37 of them, we asked which levels played the more important role in the decisions

1 made (academics, directors of labs, deans, university bodies, central admin-  
2 istration, the presidential team, the PRES). Only two levels (the presidential  
3 team and the university bodies) are considered as being significantly influential  
4 over five domains (all but the teaching domain). The presidential team is even  
5 considered as the most influential on these five domains.

6 In the interviews, many respondents also stressed that the introduction of  
7 the RCE has been an occasion to redefine who is responsible for what and, in  
8 many cases, to relocate decisions and domains in the central administration  
9 that were previously left to the faculties. For instance, the management of the  
10 research budgets is now centralised in one central budget unit.

11 The introduction of new financial software accentuated this trend. Our  
12 interviewees from the university administrations argued that this software  
13 (SIFAC) was much more complex than the previous one and that training all  
14 the administrative staff would be first, expensive, and second, inefficient, as  
15 many would not use it very often (because it is only partly relevant to their job)  
16 and they would therefore forget how to use it. They therefore decided to give  
17 the possibility of access to SIFAC to a limited number of 'qualified' individuals,  
18 while others would only be able to consult the information posted on SIFAC.

19 *The Traditional Divide between the Centre and the Periphery*  
20 *remains Strong and Marked*

21 The strengthened relationships between the dual hierarchy at the top of the  
22 university, the centralisation of decisions, the transfer of competences and  
23 tasks from the faculties to the central administration, all speak in favour of  
24 more centralised and therefore also more governed universities. As a result,  
25 the traditional divide observed in French universities (Friedberg and Musselin  
26 1989; Mignot-Gérard and Musselin 2002 and Mignot-Gérard 2006) between  
27 the centre and the periphery (the *facultés* or UFR) has been reinforced by the  
28 reforms.

29 First, the deans<sup>12</sup> feel that their situation worsened over the last years. As  
30 argued in the first part of the paper, this situation is not new and has to be  
31 linked to the very specific history of French universities. After the re-creation  
32 of universities in 1968, the deans were progressively deprived of some of their  
33 prerogatives. First, they always competed with the directors of labs on the defi-  
34 nition of the research priorities and the latter, especially when they run a lab  
35 associated with one of the national research institutions (CNRS or INSERM for  
36 instance), receive enough resources from outside in order not to feel depen-  
37 dent on the dean. Second, in the 1990s the decision was made to create gradu-  
38 ate schools. This deprived the deans of their responsibility for doctoral level  
39 study. Third, the implementation of the Bologna process sometimes led to  
40 the creation of trans-faculty masters programmes, thus blurring the respon-  
41 sibilities of individual deans and often producing tensions between the deans.

*Table 5.3* The relative influence of decision-makers

For each of the following domains, which are the actors (more than one answer is possible) who according to you have a significant or very significant influence in your university? (N = 2 252 – 2 328)<sup>11</sup>

	Academics	Director of labs	Directors of schools or dept.	Councils at the university level	Admin directors	Team of the President	The PRES
Identifying the research priorities.	28%	68%	14%	45%	6%	71%	23%
Constructing the training offer.	47%	6%	66%	54%	7%	58%	9%
Allocating the budget for research.	4%	35%	19%	55%	17%	80%	6%
Allocating other kinds of budgets.	2%	4%	39%	40%	35%	85%	3%
Allocating academic positions.	16%	44%	55%	45%	9%	73%	4%
Allocating administrative positions.	2%	11%	38%	22%	58%	77%	3%

1 Today, the centralisation of decision-making and information processes have  
2 further accentuated the trend and increased deans' unease.

3 (Question: Do you mean the famous centralised budget unit for research?)  
4 Yes, indeed. It means I do not have the signature for these expenses. At the  
5 level of the *faculté*, I am only responsible for the training programmes and  
6 the day-to-day management. Now, the directors of labs are signing. I can-  
7 not be responsible for this money anymore. All research contracts are man-  
8 aged by the university. (...) We still have a local scientific council but if we  
9 want to develop our research, it is the role of the university. Of course the  
10 *faculté* is associated, but we are no more... While before, I was in charge...  
11 With the agreement of the president of course.

12 (Dean, ScienceUni)

13 Therefore they are more and more confined to the management of the bach-  
14 elor level and the day-to-day micro-management tasks (grating doors, water  
15 leaks..., etc.). They feel they cannot exercise strategic influence and that their  
16 mission is increasingly similar to the mission of their administrative head.

17 This should be a more political function as we are elected. But for the  
18 moment, I do not see which political ambition I could have, except renew-  
19 ing this building... or very concrete services to my colleagues. But, if we  
20 speak of university policy, of training programmes, or research policy, the  
21 dean is no longer a central actor (...). I feel like a link in the university  
22 chain.

23 (Dean, HSSUni)

24 More broadly than the deans, there is a feeling of disconnection between the  
25 top of the university, its strategy and its decisions and the rest of the university.  
26 As if the head was thinking by itself while the rest of the body would just follow.  
27 By contrast with those working in the central administration, most of those  
28 working in the periphery do not agree that the top of the university listens to  
29 them, and they think there is some decoupling between the discourse of the top  
30 and its actions. They are also more often convinced than those in the central  
31 administration that the top makes decisions without informing staff and that it  
32 is cut off from the rest of the university (see Figure 5.1).

33 As in many other countries where the institutional autonomy and the stra-  
34 tegic span of universities has been increased, French higher education institu-  
35 tions experienced an increase in the centralisation of the power of decision and  
36 of the information processes (Braun and Merrien 1999; Kehm and Lanzendorf  
37 2006; Deem *et al.* 2007; de Boer *et al.* 2007). But, unlike the other countries,  
38 this was not accompanied by more responsibilities and decision-making pow-  
39 ers being delegated to the intermediary levels (the deans in France). On the

Would you say that... (N = 2 003 - 2 035)

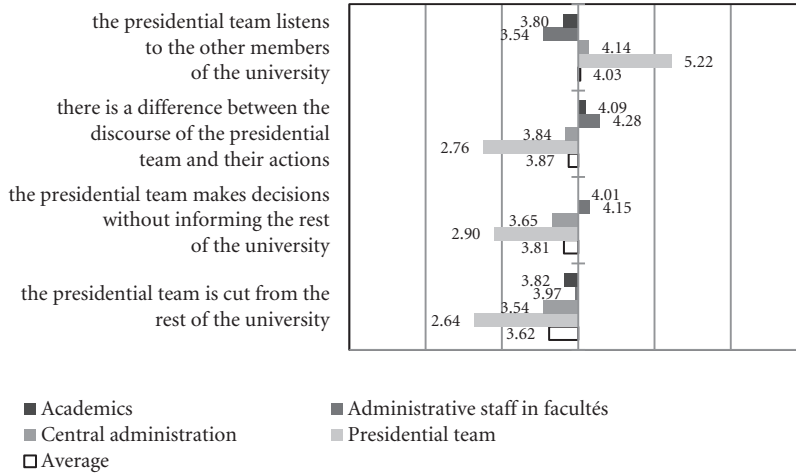


Figure 5.1 Communication and relations between the presidential team and the rest of the university

1 contrary, the already existing gap and the rather suspicious relationships that  
 2 prevailed in French universities were maintained, if not strengthened, by  
 3 the recent reforms, thus increasing the distance between the administrative  
 4 and academic managers of these universities and those they are supposed to  
 5 manage.

6 **The Development of Internal Auditors and their Impact**

7 Another important trend concerns the development of systems of auditing and  
 8 the recruitment of auditors, but also the increased production of data.

9 *The Development of Internal Auditing*

10 It would be misleading to think that the development of auditing is a com-  
 11 pletely recent trend (Solle 2001). By the beginning of the 1990s, when four-year  
 12 contracts were introduced between the Ministry and each French university  
 13 and when the first strategic plans had to be written, many universities discov-  
 14 ered and became conscious that they had no information about themselves  
 15 and that they needed to produce data. Some auditing services started to flour-  
 16 ish in order to prepare the four-year contracts but some disappeared or were  
 17 put aside by the president after the contractual exercise was over. Nevertheless,  
 18 some auditing services developed over time. By the beginning of the 2000s,  
 19 the introduction of the LOLF, the new budgetary system for the French public

1 sector (to which French universities belong), made such services more neces-  
2 sary to meet data needs, particularly as they are now annual and not every four  
3 years. In a survey they undertook in 2006 Stéphanie Chatelain-Ponroy and  
4 Samuel Sponem (2007) concluded that about 65 per cent of French universi-  
5 ties have such a service. In our 2011 survey, the response reached 86 per cent  
6 and everybody concluded that this trend was expanding (Carassus *et al.* 2011).

#### 7 *Much more information is now available*

8 In this more recent survey, we also tried to identify what data was available and  
9 looked more precisely at data on teaching and research.

10 If we consider teaching, the more easily available data are the rates of success  
11 of students (75 per cent of universities) and the drop-out rates (70 per cent)  
12 while data on the average salary for the students' first job is available for only 53  
13 per cent of universities and data on the evaluation of teaching by the students<sup>13</sup>  
14 for only 51 per cent. Those working in the central administration are far less  
15 well informed about this latter data and they also deplore having very little  
16 information about the number of teaching hours required from academics. On  
17 the other hand, faculty members are not well informed about the jobs found  
18 by their students. Therefore, there are not only differences in terms of the data  
19 that are collected, but also discrepancies in access to the collected data accord-  
20 ing to the functions that are performed.

21 We came to similar conclusions about the data available on research but, as  
22 a whole, these data are less accessible than those on teaching. Only 54 per cent  
23 of universities say they have data on scientific publications, only 42 per cent on  
24 research contracts and on their income and expenditure. On each of the five  
25 items we identified for data on research, it is remarkable that the presidential  
26 team usually declared themselves to be better informed than the others say  
27 they are.

#### 28 *The use of Information and Data remains Limited*

29 Attention paid to data seems rather different according to who is concerned.  
30 The presidential team (president, vice-presidents, registrar and directors of the  
31 administration) pay more attention to data on budgets but less to those on  
32 teaching. Attention paid to research is higher by academics and the presidential  
33 team. But what is the information used for?

34 In the literature on the use of indicators, some authors like Simons (1995)  
35 distinguished between diagnosis and interaction/learning processes while oth-  
36 ers like Cavalluzzo and Ittner (2004) distinguished between reporting and  
37 steering or making decisions. Building on this literature, we proposed items in  
38 our survey aimed at measuring whether data were used for reporting, that is,  
39 producing data and distributing it in order to provide information to others

1 (Ministry, regions, etc.) and thus obtain legitimacy by being accountable or  
2 whether these data were used in order to encourage interaction and debate  
3 within the university, whether they are a basis for evaluating and making diag-  
4 noses and, finally, whether they are used in order to act, make decisions or  
5 define strategies.

6 We therefore asked groups of questions aimed at discovering whether the  
7 data on teaching, research and the budget were used for reporting, evaluation  
8 or making decisions. We observed that data on teaching are considered first  
9 as a method of accountability and to dialogue with other partners. They may  
10 be used also to evaluate the teaching offer of the whole university or negotiate  
11 with the faculties, but they are rarely seen as a way of steering the university,  
12 assigning objectives to the different units or discussing training programmes.  
13 This is also the case for data about budgets. They are used for accountability  
14 and to interact with the main partners of the university. They are rarely consid-  
15 ered as a way to set objectives.

16 It is quite different if one looks at the use of data about research. They are  
17 first of all used in order to evaluate research production at the university level,  
18 but also at the level of the units and of individuals. They allow for comparison  
19 among units, for allocating budgets and for identifying research priorities. Of  
20 course they are also used for reporting but their evaluative role is nevertheless  
21 stronger.

22 With the introduction of new budget processes like the LOLF, but also the  
23 devolution of more competencies and responsibilities to universities, more  
24 information is produced and internal auditors have been recruited to meet the  
25 demands of university managers. But, until now, these data are more often  
26 used to meet external requirements than to introduce change within universi-  
27 ties. Nevertheless, a more strategic use of these data seems unavoidable, as can  
28 be expected from the central role attributed to internal auditing by university  
29 presidents.

### 30 **From Higher Education Institutions to ‘Research Operators’** 31 **Organisations?**

32 The attention paid to data on research is highly compatible with and relevant  
33 to the fact that research has become a major factor in French universities. This  
34 might be related to the discourse held by Valérie Pécresse, the Minister for  
35 Higher Education from 2007 to 2011. She steadily repeated that she wanted  
36 to ‘bring universities back to the centre of the higher education and research  
37 system’ and thus to end the divide between national institutions of research  
38 (CNRS, INSERM, etc.) and universities. This recognition of universities as cen-  
39 tral research providers was encouraged by policy instruments (Hood 1991; Le  
40 Galès and Lascoumes 2004) that pushed universities to develop their research  
41 activity. Two policies were particularly mobilising; the assessment of research

1 units by the AERES and the fact that grades were made public on the one side  
2 and the multiplication of highly selective calls for proposals on the other side.

### 3 *The Importance of Research Performance*

4 Research performance has become a major objective for all universities. The  
5 main reason for this is the level of resource which research generates, while  
6 the ANR accentuated project-based research and lump sum budgets decreased  
7 (Barrier 2011). Large budgets were also involved in the highly selective calls  
8 launched through a public bond and the Investment for the Future policy. Uni-  
9 versities therefore pushed their academics to answer calls for research propos-  
10 als; the administration in charge of research distributes information about the  
11 calls and is expected to help those answering them. But beyond these invita-  
12 tions to apply for grants, university managers have themselves been very active  
13 in positioning their institutions within the highly selective calls that have been  
14 launched at the national level. They decide which they will support and provide  
15 extra services to increase the chance of success. For instance, one of the ‘excel-  
16 lent labs’ put forward by MultiUni benefitted from the help of a consulting  
17 firm in order to prepare its project.

18 The persons I mentioned before were helped by a consulting firm, XXX.  
19 We funded... The university and the pole for competitiveness YYY funded  
20 the input of this consulting firm that very much helped us preparing the  
21 dossier. We were able to show our strengths, where we wanted to go (...).  
22 On formal aspects, they helped us a lot.

23 (A lab director, MultiUni)


24 In parallel, the level of performance-based budgets has increased. Not only is  
25 publicity given to the results of the AERES evaluations but the results are used  
26 in the new formula for budget allocation introduced by the Ministry. There-  
27 fore, winning good grades from the AERES has become a major goal. Some  
28 universities try to be better prepared for this review by organising mock evalu-  
29 ations before the AERES comes.

30 We did our best to meet the expectations of the evaluation led by the  
31 AERES. We had a two-step process. My university, MultiUni, imposed a  
32 mock evaluation led by their own... what they called in English a ‘visiting  
33 committee’ with a former expert of the AERES.

34 (A lab director, MultiUni)

35 Incentives aimed at improving the number of publications and decreasing  
36 the share of research-passive faculty members were introduced. Some labs  
37 asked research-passive academics to become only affiliated (to no longer be



1 permanent members of their lab). Others  those who do not publish suf-  
2 ficiently to become co-authors of more research-active colleagues, while in one  
3 of the three universities specific budgets were allocated to research-passive aca-  
4 demics to incentivise them to come back to research and prepare publications.

5 Many also see a marketing issue in AERES evaluations. The grades and the  
6 evaluation reports are available on the AERES website, as well as the response of  
7 the evaluated units. Some universities pay a lot of attention to these responses,  
8 less to contest the reviews than to promote their image by emphasising their  
9 *plus* or to announce new objectives or reforms.

10 Finally, one can read the impact of research through the decisions made to  
11 reward those who are doing well or to modify the weakest structures. Since the  
12 introduction of the RCE, universities are in charge of allocating the research  
13 budget attributed by the Ministry among the research labs.<sup>14</sup> In the three uni-  
14 versities being studied, the results achieved by the labs in the AERES evalua-  
15 tion were taken into account to weight the distribution. The previous budgets  
16 of research units were multiplied by a coefficient that varied according to the  
17 grades achieved and was different from one university to another. These evalua-  
18 tions are also used when decisions are made about the filling of staff vacancies.

19 (Question: What are the best arguments to get a position? Rather teaching  
20 or rather research?) Both of course. But you are right to say ‘rather’. Every-  
21 body knows that we miss positions for teaching. So it does not help to say it  
22 again and, since the new act [2007], research is more important. (...) There  
23 will be no position for a lab that is not well evaluated. It is evident. That is  
24 what we say to defend the labs that got an A+.

25 (Dean, ScienceUni)

26 Research results are also used to justify restructuring, such as closing a lab,  
27 merging research teams or transferring a research team to another lab. Research  
28 is therefore a major goal but it is also used to introduce change and justify new  
29 orientations.

30 *External Evaluations are Simultaneously Criticised*  
31 *and used as a Management Tool*

32 The choice of the scientific projects to support and present for the national calls  
33 for proposals, the identification of the labs to reward with an increased budget  
34 or the resolutions to merge or suppress research units are, most of the time,  
35 legitimated by the evaluation or decisions made by the new national agencies  
36 created by the LOPRI. It is therefore obvious that the increase of interest in  
37 research has increased the role of funding and evaluation agencies such as the  
38 ANR and the AERES in different ways. First of all, because the reviews pro-  
39 duced by these agencies are peer-review based, the academics participating in

1 the evaluation processes play a very important role and constitute a power-  
2 ful academic elite. Secondly, their role is not only central because they pro-  
3 duce advice that has an impact on university resources, but also because they  
4 define the norms about what is 'good' research, a 'good' project, or a 'good'  
5 publication.

6 Although peer-review based, this increasing role for external evaluation  
7 has provoked many critics because it increases competition among academics,  
8 increases differentiation between colleagues and between institutions, but also  
9 weakens the role of unions' representatives who were previously members of  
10 the former evaluation bodies<sup>15</sup>. The new norms that are introduced and the  
11 fact that they are more formalised, rather standardised and organised into tem-  
12 plates are also often criticised by those who denounce the idea of evaluation as  
13 well as the recourse to a selective allocation of resources.

14 At the institutional level, an important consequence of this evolution is the  
15 combination of, rather than opposition between, managerial and academic  
16 control. The external peer-reviews produced by the AERES and the ANR rein-  
17 force the institutional leadership of French universities by providing them  
18 with evaluations that are used by university managers as a management tool  
19 to introduce change, to selectively allocate funding, and to legitimate decisions  
20 (Musselin 2013).

## 21 **Conclusion**

22 Although France has long been rather impermeable to the implementation  
23 of NPM devices, the recent reforms (the LOPRI in 2006 and the LRU in  
24 2007), without putting to the forefront the reference to NPM, silently intro-  
25 duced some of its instruments; a reinforcement of the role of the managers,  
26 the creation of agencies responsible for competencies previously exercised  
27 by the Ministry, the increase in competition and the development of selec-  
28 tive funding and performance-based budgets. Two main consequences in  
29 the governance of French universities were stressed by our interviewees and  
30 in the survey. First, this created an opportunity for the presidential teams  
31 and the central administration to push for more centralisation and further  
32 construct universities into organisations (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersonn  
33 2000; Musselin 2006; Krücken and Meier 2006; Whitley 2008). Second, more  
34 emphasis was put on research and research performance, which became a  
35 major goal as well as a tool for steering. The increasing production of data  
36 and information could be seen as a third consequence but we observed that,  
37 until now, these data are not often used to make decisions affecting uni-  
38 versities. University managers rely much more on the peer-review-based  
39 decisions made by evaluation and funding agencies than on internal data to  
40 introduce change, modify the allocation of funding or suggest new forms of  
41 organisati

1 Part of the academic profession, even if critical of this evolution, coped with  
 2 it and ‘played the game’, that is accepted the need to compete for funding,  
 3 answered calls for proposals, tried to get good evaluations from the AERES;  
 4 others were more reluctant and critical. Nevertheless the LOPRI and the LRU  
 5 did not put students and academics on the street, until the end of 2008 when  
 6 the Ministry launched a reform of university training programmes for teachers  
 7 and high school teachers and a reform of academic duties and careers. Between  
 8 the autumn of 2008 to the end of the first semester of 2009 demonstrations and  
 9 protests developed but did not succeed in obtaining major changes.

10 After the election of François Hollande, a national consultation of the mem-  
 11 bers and stakeholders of the French higher education system was organised  
 12 (*Assises Nationales de l’enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche*) as a catharsis  
 13 exercise (allowing the public and recognised expression of criticism of the past  
 14 reforms), but also as a diagnosis of the problems they raised in order to prepare  
 15 a new act. It was passed in July 2013 and amended rather than withdrew the  
 16 former reforms. The main change<sup>16</sup> introduced probably concerns the formalis-  
 17 sation of about 30 main higher education *poles* in France and thus a further  
 18 push into the development of formal coordination among the higher education  
 19 institutions, including the *grandes écoles* located in the same region, through  
 20 the constitution of ‘university community’ (*communautés d’universités*) that  
 21 can take different forms (from a confederation of institutions to a merger) and  
 22 replace the PRES.

23 If these *communautés d’universités* become, as expected by this new law, the  
 24 central actors of the French higher education system, their governance will  
 25 become a major issue. It will also become a major issue for higher education  
 26 analysts.

## 27 Notes

- 28 1 We chose one university with a dominant orientation in science (ScienceUni), one with a  
 29 dominant orientation in Humanities and social sciences (HSSUni) and one with all disci-  
 30 plines (MultiUni).  
 31 2 At that time, universities were corporations and the Convention during the French Revolu-  
 32 tion suppressed all corporations.  
 33 3 In a few cases, like in Marseille, some disciplines were present in the three universities that  
 34 were created after the suppression of the University of Marseille. Most of the time, the dis-  
 35 tribution of academics among the different universities of the same city followed political  
 36 preferences rather than pure intellectual or scientific logic.  
 37 4 With the stakeholders, and the elected representatives of students, administrative staff and  
 38 academics, the university councils – *conseil d’administration* in French – could reach up to 30  
 39 members. A scientific council and a council for training and student affairs are also elected  
 40 at the university level and make decisions that are afterwards confirmed or rejected by the  
 41 university council.  
 42 5 It is so called because it is made up of academics who have been elected.  
 43 6 This is less true for the presidents. Many of them engaged in administrative careers after their  
 44 term, either at the ministry or as rector of academy.

- 1 7 They were previously in the hands of the CNRS and other national research institutions, but  
2 also the Ministry for Higher Education, etc.
- 3 8 Before the evaluation of universities was led by the CNE (National Committee for the Evalu-  
4 ation of universities), research units were evaluated by the scientific council of a national  
5 research institution if they were recognised by one, or by the academic experts designated by  
6 the Ministry. Training programmes were evaluated by academics designated by the Ministry.
- 7 9 The French higher education system was already more differentiated than one would expect  
8 according to French egalitarian principles: the reputation of French universities varied from  
9 place to place.
- 10 10 The French government launched a government bond that was largely used to fund research  
11 and innovation. Different calls were launched to allocate these funds selectively. Some were  
12 very close to the calls launched in Germany by the *Exzellenzinitiative* and aimed at identify-  
13 ing excellent labs (LABEX), excellent scientific equipment (EQUIPEX) and excellent institu-  
14 tional projects (IDEX).
- 15 11 We calculated how many times (X) each level has been cited as significant or highly sig-  
16 nificant for an item N and divided X by N. We highlighted in pale blue the levels reaching  
17 between 40 and 50 per cent, in blue those reaching 50 to 70 per cent and in dark blue those  
18 over 70 per cent.
- 19 12 In France, the departments do not always exist and are not a strongly recognised structure,  
20 therefore the main intermediary interlocutors are the deans, not the head of departments.
- 21 13 This shows that the evaluation of teaching by the students is still not very developed, although  
22 since 1997 it was supposed to be compulsory when the then minister, François Bayrou,  
23 imposed it.
- 24 14 Before the RCE, the ministry directly allocated these budgets to the labs. The university could  
25 withdraw up to 15 per cent of the total amount of the allocated resources in order to fund  
26 their own research policy, which they usually did. This withdrawal, often called BQR (Bonus  
27 Quality Research), was used to fund seminars, conferences or seed money for new projects.  
28 Now universities receive the whole research budget and can allocate it.
- 29 15 In the new act that should be promulgated in July or August 2013, the AERES was suppressed.  
30 But it is a kind of symbolic tribute paid to the more critical academics because it will be re-  
31 placed by a *Haut Conseil de l'Évaluation de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche* whose  
32 tasks, responsibilities and operating processes are very close to those of the AERES.
- 33 16 Another notable change concerns the elections of university presidents: all members (includ-  
34 ing the stakeholders) of the university council, that is now a little bit larger than previously,  
35 elect the president.

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