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## **Governing the academic subject: Foucault, governmentality and the performing university**

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Drawing on research conducted at National University of Ireland, Galway, this paper explores how senior managers at an Irish university are seeking to measure and facilitate academic performance in the context of national and global competitiveness and a higher education landscape that appears firmly inflected by neoliberal ideas of rankings, benchmarking and productivity. I draw upon Michel Foucault's writings on governmentality and biopower, in particular, and I utilise findings from a range of in-depth interviews with central university managers, with a view to critically interrogating the envisioning of what is undoubtedly a new academic subjectivity in the Irish higher education sector – a subjectivity that is being progressively planned for and regulated.

**Keywords:** Academic performance; neoliberal university; Foucault; governmentality; subjectivity

### **Introduction: fashioning and securing the performing academic**

In the extensive canon of Michel Foucault's writings, there is perhaps surprisingly no exclusively focused exploration of the history of education, its practices and politics, despite the fact that it has variously been concerned with broader questions of the production and practice of knowledge. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* has arguably been most frequently drawn upon in critical examinations of education. In it, Foucault outlines the normalising technique of the examination, which 'detects, measures and classifies the deviations of an individual, and of individual development, from a norm' (Gordon, 2009, p. xvii). Foucault had the institutional context of a teaching hospital in mind when he considered the normalising and individualising practices of the examination, but in this paper I want use the example of National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) to argue that performance measurement in universities today relies upon very similar practices. I argue in particular that the practices of performance measurement and management being established at NUI Galway centrally rest upon neoliberal notions of individualisation and competitiveness, and are chiefly concerned with defining and framing the parameters of an optimally productive, performing subject. I make the case too that the regulatory measures being enacted have much in common

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with Foucault's later thinking on governmentality and biopower – the governmental strategies of fashioning and securing the subjectivities of distinct populations. To this end, I draw in particular in the paper on Foucault's recently translated lectures *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault, 2007, 2008). Both form the backdrop to many of the paper's key theoretical concerns, which I outline briefly below.

In terms of the empirical evidence, the paper derives from research undertaken for a master's thesis submitted as part of an MA in Academic Practice at the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at NUI Galway (Morrissey, 2012). The thesis explores the managerial envisioning of emergent performance measurement structures in the university (where I am a lecturer in Geography).<sup>1</sup> In comparative terms, one could argue that Irish higher education has only now systematically begun to embrace the kinds of neoliberal education policies that have been adopted in the UK, US and elsewhere in recent decades. For this reason, NUI Galway is a good example, I think, of how Irish universities are situating themselves, and responding to, our contemporary more competitive and globalised higher education landscape – in terms of planning for and modelling academic and institutional performance. NUI Galway is state-funded through the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA). Indeed, all seven universities in Ireland are state-funded through the HEA, which means, of course, that there is also considerable competition internally within Irish higher education. The evidence I cite below divulges an anxious urge at NUI Galway to demonstrate an accountable performing institution, which is not surprising given the broader governmental funding concerns in a country with an imposing and shackling fiscal deficit. The research findings are drawn from in-depth interviews carried out with each of the main university managers, including the President, the Registrar, the Vice-President for Innovation and Performance, the Director of Quality, the Institutional Research Officer, the Director of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, the Dean of the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies, and the Executive Director of Operations.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, I also interviewed the Principal Officer of the HEA.

### **Foucault and the academic subject: governmentality in the contemporary academy**

In seeking to critically examine the emergence of performance management at NUI Galway, I want to firstly outline some core theoretical concerns drawn from the work of Michel Foucault that I believe are helpful in aiding our understanding of the practices through which contemporary academic life is being increasingly managed. For Foucault, administering 'power over life' (what he called 'biopower') centrally involved governmental practices

designed to fashion and secure governable subjects (Foucault, 2007, 2008). He termed this ‘governmentality’, which, in the contemporary university context, can be seen in the managerial practices of performance evaluation and efforts to frame, regulate and optimise academic life.<sup>3</sup> Governmentality for Foucault is defined as an assemblage of ‘institutions, procedures [...] calculations, and tactics’ that capacitate a form of power that ‘has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 108); and the endgame is the making of governable subjects. Such an envisioning of a world in which subjectivities are fashioned and regulated (what Judith Butler calls ‘subjection’; Butler, 1997) speaks on various levels to the functioning governmentality that I want to argue is evident at NUI Galway, but I want to mention four specifically, which I return to at various points in the paper.

First, the measuring and regulating of academic performance at NUI Galway equates to the management of what Foucault calls a ‘target population’ – in this case, university academics – where management centrally involves delineating what is a normative optimal performing subject. Secondly, this normative subjectivity of individual academics is intrinsically linked to the notion of universities today being part of a competitive neoliberal political economy in which higher education is marketed, sold and profited from. And at NUI Galway, as elsewhere, this logic has been reinforced in recent years by a dominant discourse that repeatedly scripts a language of economic emergency. In this sense, securing academic outputs and efficiency can be read as part of a broader neoliberalism that regulates for the good of national economies or so-called ‘smart economies’; the latter phrase being a recurring theme in contemporary discourse on the Irish economy more broadly.

Thirdly, Foucault’s envisaged ‘society of security’ is a society dominated by security concerns and governmental measures to plan for future uncertainty and threat. Foucault calls this ‘anticipating the aleatory’ – planning for the uncertain, in other words. As I hope to show with NUI Galway below, this is especially helpful in thinking through how managerial practices of the contemporary university are orientated to plan for increasingly uncertain and competitive times. And, finally, Foucault’s notion of the ‘milieu’ is useful in considering the managerial practices deployed in contemporary higher education to set out and regulate what is a normative performing academic. In this sense, Foucault’s ‘milieu’ for university managers at NUI Galway and elsewhere can be envisaged as a ‘field of intervention’ in which they are seeking to ‘affect, precisely, a population’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 21). As Michael Dillon (2007a, p. 12) points out, you ‘cannot secure anything unless you know what it is’, and

therefore planning for uncertainty means that populations must be ‘transformed into epistemic objects’; in other words, their productions must be coded, ascribed value and quantified. And in universities today, I argue that it is this underlying urge to plan for uncertainty and optimise productivity in an increasingly competitive neoliberal economy that underpins the prevalence of ‘key performance indicators’ and a prevailing performance management culture that seeks to enable, regulate and ultimately govern the contemporary academic subject.

### **Envisioning the performing subject at NUI Galway**

Over the course of the past decade, senior university managers on every continent have been increasingly tasked with framing and calibrating academic performance and new forms of academic subjectivity. This has coincided with a number of important critiques of contemporary university life that have variously shown how neoliberal policies have become increasingly routed and enacted at national and institutional levels in a hegemonic manner (Peters, 2001, 2003; Doherty, 2006; Simons, 2006, 2007; Weber & Maurer, 2006; Peters & Besley, 2007; Peters *et al.*, 2009).<sup>4</sup> In deconstructing the contemporary higher education landscape as primarily ‘neoliberal’ in character, many have employed the term quite broadly, but most commentators have used it to capture the consequences of what they see as an open, nationally and globally competitive environment in which universities are increasingly attendant to rankings, benchmarking and competitiveness. Maarten Simons has highlighted, for instance, the impact of neoliberal registers in higher education policy at the European scale, underlining the dominant ‘learning as investment’ economic ideology (Simons, 2006). And such concerns, of course, echo a range of similar anxieties voiced since the mid-1990s (Ball, 1994; McNair, 1997; Trowler, 1998; Doring, 2002; Lynch, 2006; Bastalich, 2010).

Certainly, the drive to enable performance evaluation at NUI Galway is driven by a strong desire to be competitive, productive and ultimately accountable to the ‘outside’ in an open neoliberal economy, as one senior manager explains:

Now everything is numbered and measured and ranked and that has an influence on our staff, on our uptake of students, on our graduates. And over time it’s really important that we have a strong vision and that the university will look after itself, and that we try to get the best out of everybody, recognising that the best means that the individual measures him or herself is against peers outside.

Others paint a similar inescapable scenario:

whether we like it or not, we are now in a competitive international market for the best students, the best graduate students, the best staff, funding opportunities and so on. To be competitive in those environments means that you have to have a measured performance culture that is reflected in things like league tables [...] so we need to be able to position ourselves as effectively as we can for the division of national resources and for the division of international resources. So, it's about competitiveness for the institution.

One could argue, of course, that notions of competitiveness, productivity and accountability are distinctly different matters, arguably artificially united by neoliberal thought and practice. In the world of education, does one have to be in a benchmarked competitive environment in order to be productive and accountable? Can we reason and insist upon other ways of being accountable and productive? At NUI Galway, the envisioning of competitiveness is happening via a long-established liberal register of individual competitiveness in the service of a performing university in a broader open-market economy. And what Foucault (2007) variously terms 'mechanisms' or 'apparatuses' of security – the tools of management in this case – to secure that end are unproblematically acknowledged:

If you accept that in some way we are an organisation, then if organisations are to succeed, then they need to understand what they are trying to achieve, they need to apply the 'science of management' if you will, and amongst other things, that means understanding in a fairly disciplined way what you are trying to achieve, and assessing whether you've achieved it, and looking at how you can improve it. And when you start using that language, then you unlock access to the tools of management.

There appears no conceptual challenge here in applying the 'science of management' to measure the values and outputs of higher education:

My job is about performance, my job is about simplification and standardisation, and the 'science of management'. The templates are part of that: this is how you do an operational plan; this is how you justify your existence; and this is how you demonstrate you've made improvements year on year. And I think those ideas transplant perfectly reasonably [...] into the academic environment.

This unproblematic championing of how the 'science of management' can optimise academic productivity reflects, I think, an implicit surrendering to an increasingly accepted rationale for effectively governing academics in what could perhaps be best described as the 'managerial' or 'bureaucratic' university.

NUI Galway's embracing of a performance management system for its academic staff, in which individual subjectivity and performance are repeatedly measured, modelled and normalised, can be explained by the sheer omnipresence and implicit acceptance of neoliberal discourses of individualisation and competitiveness in the broader academy today. Certainly, managing individual talent and linking 'individual performance' to 'university performance' is a central vision of NUI Galway's management team, and builds upon a well-established liberal discourse, comprising notions of autonomy and individualism, about how best to be optimally governed (Grant, 1997). One senior manager, for example, argues that performance measurement is effectively 'a compromise between what the university is trying to do, what the individual is trying to do, and to what extent we can marry those two together for the mutual benefit of both, because, after all, if the individual staff members are succeeding, then the chances are the university is succeeding'. And others set out the intended connectivity of 'university' strategic plans, 'school' operational plans and 'individual' work plans:

You have to make sure those things connect, and the connection should really be the operational plan, because the operational plan for the school should be contributing to the overall university strategy, and the individual work plans should be contributing to the operational plan of the school. So, if the individual work plans are contributing to the school, it is achieving its operational targets for the year, and then they should be helping the university achieve its overall targets, and the way we measure that is through the key performance indicators.

Many authors have pointed out how it is globally competitive university rankings that are driving much of the emergent performance evaluation culture in universities today (Peters, 2001; Doherty, 2006; Simons, 2006; Peters *et al.*, 2009).<sup>5</sup> How they are viewed at NUI Galway is perhaps typical. The senior university managers are quick to point out the flawed nature of the ranking systems but nevertheless the double-bind of having no choice but to engage with them:

There are very few senior people, I think, who actually believe the rankings are a good thing. They're there, they're being used and being used badly – and everybody, I think (except for maybe some journalists) is aware that they are intrinsically flawed and limited. The difficulty is shaking them off. So, I think, some people think that the best strategy to do is to address them [...] The broader reputational thing, where they just ask people what's your opinion or have you ever heard of any universities, is not something that you can easily change. But what they do is, because some of the figures are publications per member of staff, is identify numerically what they could target. The

problem is, of course, the more they do that the more they validate the rankings they don't believe are a good thing.

Despite reservations concerning the broader neoliberal architecture of university rankings, NUI Galway is committed to playing what it sees as the only game in town. And this, of course, appears to be evidently the case in a much wider context. Maarten Simons (2007) has shown the extent of what he calls 'euro-governmentality' typifying the European higher education landscape today, and this scalar argument is useful in considering what he terms the operation of 'synoptical power' in which the many observe the few – with the governmental gaze focused on multiple levels from member states through to universities, schools and academics.

One senior manager at NUI Galway concedes that in our contemporary competitive higher education landscape there are 'only two measures of research output, and this is putting it absolutely crudely: publications and PhDs to completion'. Some managerial colleagues, however, do appear to be cognisant of calls from Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences academics, in particular, for a more variegated identification of publication outputs – to recognise the substantive qualitative difference between, for example, a multi-authored paper and a single-authored monograph, and to underline more broadly how measuring research outputs is heavily biased towards the Sciences:

The total indexed publications from the ISI Web of Science is what we are measured on internationally through rankings. That's also what we're measured on by the HEA. A lot of people weren't happy with that at the time because obviously it didn't represent the Arts and Humanities very well, so that's why we've moved on now and we're trying to gather that information.

That said, as another senior manager makes clear, the endgame of the 'science of performances management' is still measurement:

The first order issue is, are you doing your job well, are you doing the things you say you are going to do, are you doing the things which we've said are valuable to do, and if we've said it's valuable to write monographs, it's valuable to have people in Humanities studying Italian or whatever, and that means it will take them ten years to write the Irish-Italian dictionary, then so be it, if we've said that's academically valuable, if that's defensible as an academic priority, then just do it well, and apply performance management. And yes, as a second order thing, you might need to be creative about exactly what the performance metrics are, but it's a second order thing. But the first order thing is to get the performance measurement in place.



To this end, the disciplinary aspect of performance management is also clear from another senior manager's comments: 'some particular people within the system had incredible amounts of power at their disposal because there was no lineation of responsibility'. And as another managerial colleague remarks, 'underperformance is an issue, underperformance is a legitimate issue – and it's quite true that those same tools [of performance management] can be used, and should be used to identify underperformance'.

### **Fostering improvement and planning for uncertain futures**

NUI Galway's efforts to implement performance management structures do not appear to be for the primary purpose of checking underperformance, however. The bigger imperative of 'fostering improvement' is the cited endgame for most managers interviewed. One manager outlines the broad vision of accountability:

there is an expectation that the person would commit to certain outputs. I don't mean a formal contract, but more of an understanding that over two or three years the average output would be the following, and if that wasn't achieved, then you'd have to worry. You don't need an inspectorial regime, where you have a supervisor, but you do need people to understand what is appropriate, what is the level expected. And that's also a duty of care to the staff member.

One could argue that it is quite therapeutic to allay fears of an invasive 'Big Brother-type' university performance management system, insisting instead upon the primacy of participatory performance management happening at the discipline and school level. But this can also be read as nevertheless submitting to a normalised architecture of governmentality that is operational to affect an expected, benchmarked and ultimately regulated academic subjectivity. It is this false abstracting of the absence of interventionism which is one of the hallmarks of neoliberal governmentality – and perhaps why it is so challenging to precisely illuminate and critique:

It has to happen at the level of the school and the discipline. It has to happen there. We cannot, in this office, sit down with an individual and say 'this is what you should be doing'. We don't even care. When the workload models came in, I insisted very strongly that it was none of my business what particular work profiles were. My business is to ensure that the head of school has signed off on it, and that when I get a set of data for that school that I know what the profile of the school is. The individual's profile is a matter for the head of school or the head of discipline, but it's not the central university's business.

Through the governmental cascading described above, it is, of course, very much the central university's business. Foucault's concept of 'psychagogy' is perhaps useful to draw upon here. He first used the phrase in his 1982 lectures, defining it (in contrast to 'pedagogy') as 'the transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow the individual subject with aptitudes, but to modify that subject's mode of being' (cited in Gordon, 2009, p. xii). One could certainly argue that performance measurement/management has both a pedagogic and psychagogic function, in which the evaluative gaze acquires a formative power of subjection. The emergence of prevailing, templated evaluative practices of performance institutionalise powerful pedagogic and psychagogic structures in universities that increasingly set the limits of academic subjectivity.

Setting the limits of academic subjectivity becomes even more important in a future scripted as 'aleatory' or uncertain (Foucault, 2007). As Foucault made clear, the aleatory is a powerful discursive register underscoring the forms of neoliberal governmentality that he saw as typifying our 'society of security' (2007, p. 11). In essence, the notion of the aleatory references the potential uncertainty of the future to legitimise and enact pre-emptive practices in the present. Anticipating and indeed pre-empting national governmental directives is foremost on the minds of many at NUI Galway, as one senior manager explains:

I think a lot of these plans, these operational plans, strategic plans and workload models, are being driven internally by the institutions, but they have not as of yet been mandated by the Department of Education or the HEA. They're now becoming things that they're looking for and expecting, but there is almost a sense that some of the institutions have been trying to pre-empt the imposition of these kinds of structures [...] You hear a lot of this: 'we need to do this or otherwise a much more overtly, dictatorial system will be imposed upon us'.

NUI Galway's efforts to plan for an aleatory Irish higher education landscape seem to be validated by recent pronouncements on the import of economically interconnected 'strategic dialogue' by HEA CEO, Tom Boland. Boland (2011a, 2011b) underlines the key national objective of a functioning strategic dialogue to ensure 'alignment of institutional plans and performance targets with overall national priorities':

Institution level strategic dialogue will be complemented by strategic dialogue at system level to create a coherent, well-coordinated system of higher education institutions capable of meeting the social and economic needs of the country.

He expands on what is meant by ‘strategic dialogue at system level’, pointing to what is evidently driving much of the thinking behind NUI Galway’s efforts to secure a strategically conceived performance measurement culture:

Strategic dialogue at system level involves an engagement between the HEA and each institution, individually and collectively, that achieves a clear blueprint for future HE landscape and an operational environment where each institution knows where it, making the greatest impact, can fit into meeting overall national objectives (Boland, 2011b).

### **An ascendant neoliberalism?**

When Michel Foucault reflected in the late 1970s that we would increasingly live in a ‘society of security’, he had in mind what he saw as a world defined by regulated political, economic and social subjectivity. Many see the dominant subjectivity in our contemporary moment to be directly relational to an ascendant ideology of neoliberalism. And across the social sciences and humanities in recent years, various key contributions have divulged how ascendant neoliberal discourses function centrally in the governing modalities of our world today (Beck, 1992; Dean, 1999; O’Malley, 2004; Mythen and Walklate, 2006; Neocleous, 2008; Dalby, 2009; Marshall, 2009; Neal, 2010).

At NUI Galway, neoliberalism underscores much of contemporary university life, which appears increasingly typified by economic logics of capitalist production. By the late 1990s, as Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie point out, ‘academic capitalism’ was fully enabled in a ‘global marketplace’ – and particularly so in the broad fields of ‘science and technology’ (1997, p. 23). Many of the resulting developments – especially the burgeoning and diversified interactions with the industry and technology sectors and more generally the private sector – have clearly made for more opportunities, more funding streams and more potential for specialisation and innovation. Certainly, they have made for broader funding and network opportunities for research and development collaborations. And, as some have argued, they have evidently had an impact too on the oft-cited *laissez-faire* research productivity of so-called ‘ivory tower’ academics who appear to have been more firmly regulated in recent years (Jauhiainen *et al.*, 2009).

The dangers, however, of neoliberal interventionary practices being deployed in the academy in the name of competitiveness are multiple, as many have pointed out (Peters, 2001; Lynch, 2006; Marshall, 2009; Tuchman, 2009). In the wider context, Robert Doherty has critiqued what he sees as the prevailing, shackling characteristic of higher education

policy under neoliberal capitalism: 'its unremitting disposition to fix the limits and possibilities of national projects of education at the regional, state and supranational level' (2006, p. 51). And at the institutional and individual levels, the fear for many is that the limits and possibilities of academic productiveness today (and, by extension, the broader values and functions of higher education) are being overly determined by primarily economic delineations of productivity, which miss out on broader civic, political and social educational values (Giroux, 2002; Bastalich, 2010).

Neoliberalism, as Jacques Donzelot (2009, p. 31) points out, has always demanded 'intervention at the service of competition'. Therefore, we should not be surprised to increasingly see interventionary practices of performance management in the academy, promising efficiencies and increased productivity (and this, of course, also mirrors the broader 'new public management' discourse of the Irish public sector today). Universities, after all, find themselves part of competitive national and global marketplaces. One of the key consequences, as I have argued here, is that new forms of academic subjectivity are being fashioned accordingly. Returning to Doherty, his critical policy analysis of higher education under contemporary neoliberal capitalism more generally shows how it crucially 'sets out administrative arrangements, endorses sets of practices and forms of knowledge, and authoritatively allocates resources' (2006, p. 51). And as an array of authors have variously argued, pre-scripting academic subjectivity today relies upon a set of hegemonic and templated delineations of performance and productivity that mirror neoliberal ideals of how best to be optimally governed (Weber & Maurer, 2006; Peters & Besley, 2007; Fimyar, 2008; Peters *et al.*, 2009).

For Colin Gordon, 'how to be governed' is ultimately the 'educational subject par excellence' (2009, p. xxii). Gordon correctly rejects the notion of the neoliberal university being independent of interventionary, doctrinal and state forms of governmentality, arguing, on the contrary, that it is 'the place of production of normalising knowledges' (2009, p. xxii). If one of the functions of the neoliberal university is, as he argues, to formulate the 'governability of society' – how to be governed – that extends too to the immediate subjects of the university. And this is why it is useful to consider the interventionary and anticipatory practices of performance management in universities today in the context of governmentality.

Before concluding on what I believe is an ascendant neoliberal governmentality operative at NUI Galway today, I want to caveat that I do not believe academics are powerless in resisting templated forms of academic subjectivity and conditioned agency in line with optimal delineations of productivity. Although not the focus of this paper, I think there are

hugely important practices of alternative subjectivity, self-identity, ethics, leadership and academic citizenship, which can and must inflect what many term the contemporary neoliberal university (MacFarlane, 2007a, 2007b, 2011, 2012). I take this up centrally in a forthcoming paper, where the focus is on the challenge for academics of authoring and articulating alternatives in seeking to shape practices of performance management in universities today (Morrissey, forthcoming 2014).

### **Conclusion: neoliberal governmentality in the contemporary academy**

In *Security, Territory, Population*, Michel Foucault outlined what he calls the ‘mechanisms of security’ in modern society whose endgame is the identification and regulation of populations and their subjectivities (Foucault, 2007, p. 11). He termed this governmentality. The concept is particularly instructive, I think, in considering the implementation of academic performance models in universities today. At NUI Galway, a neoliberal governmentality is increasingly seeking to anticipate and regulate the subjectivity of academic life. The resultant emerging culture of performance measurement and management at NUI Galway reflects a neoliberal form of interventionism that seeks to affect, rather than coerce, normative subjectivity.

The emergence of anticipatory performance management practices at NUI Galway today rests upon an ascendant neoliberal and new public management discourse which envisages them as necessary in competitive economic times. There seems no doubt that in recent years universities everywhere have been progressively drawn into this thinking. Certainly, this appears to be the case at NUI Galway, which can be read as an illustrative example of how Irish universities today have become increasingly defined and governmentally organised with primary reference to national and globalised competitive metrics. This has resulted in the materialisation of managerial and bureaucratic governmentalities that have permeated university life and resulted in the envisioning of new forms of academic subjectivity defined by a relational productiveness to a benchmarked performing institution.

At NUI Galway, the mechanisms of governmentality – what one senior manager calls the ‘tools of management’ – are only now being envisaged and planned for, so it has not been possible in this paper to deconstruct the specific strategies, templates and work plans that will be increasingly utilised to ensure academic and institutional performance. The thinking behind the new forms of academic subjectivity being envisaged, however, is clear, and the danger is that the emergent performance measurement culture will be locked into neoliberal and bureaucratic delineations of research and educational productivity – a regime of truth, in a sense, about academic performance. This, of course, behoves us in the academy to both

debate and author as much as possible the increasingly modelled academic subjectivity that is being anticipated and measured. We need to insist, in other words, upon the values and measure of a performing academic and a performing university. And we need to write these in to work plans, strategic plans and key performance indicators. In the final analysis, responding to neoliberal forms of governmentality in the academy must involve our critically thinking through how to enact alternative subjectivities. This ultimately requires our taking seriously the key challenge of authoring and convincingly insisting upon the responsibilities, functions and values of contemporary higher education – within our own institutions and collectively to our broader publics.

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### **Notes on contributor**

John Morrissey is a political and cultural geographer at National University of Ireland, Galway. His research is primarily focused on questions of imperialism, geopolitics and resistance. He is the author of *Negotiating Colonialism* (HGRG, Royal Geographical Society 2003), co-author of *Key Concepts in Historical Geography* (Sage 2013) and co-editor of *Spatial Justice and the Irish Crisis* (Royal Irish Academy 2014). In recently completing a Masters in Academic Practice at the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at NUI Galway, he has developed a broader interest in higher education research. His MA thesis involved a critique of performance management and governmentality in the neoliberal university. At NUI Galway, he is programme director of the MA in Environment, Society and Development and cluster leader of the Geopolitics and Justice Research Cluster. In 2011, he

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## Endnotes

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1. The research emanating from this thesis forms the basis of two papers: this one, and another forthcoming in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, entitled 'Regimes of performance: Practices of the normalised self in the neoliberal university', where the focus is on the challenge for academics of authorship and articulating alternatives in engaging, resisting or seeking to shape practices of performance management.
2. As I was an 'insider' in the research, I did consider the attendant issues of positionality. The challenges of 'insider research' in educational institutions are, as Justine Mercer (2007, p. 2) observes, 'under-researched'. She outlines how 'small-scale case studies' and 'in-depth interviews' are best 'as a means of constructing participative knowledge', though there is always the question of 'what to tell colleagues, both before and after they participate in the research' (Mercer, 2007, p. 11). My own inclination was to not unduly 'pre-script', as David Silverman (2000, p. 200) warns. I tend to disagree, however, with Silverman's assessment of 'validation' of data with interviewees as 'a flawed method' (2000, p. 177). Once transcribed, I made my interview transcripts available to each of my interviewees. This was prompted largely by professional courtesy. All interviewees confirmed they were happy with the transcripts, and four made minor adjustments, including asking for some comments to be 'off the record'. The collective outcome was that I drew on the transcript material with full confidence. In carrying out my interviews, I drew upon a range of other useful readings, including: Cohen and Morrison, 2007; Valentine, 2005; and Anderson and Jones, 2000.
3. Although the terms 'biopower' and also 'biopolitics' are variously deployed academically, a key focus of inquiry has been on the politics through which 'life' is constituted and governed; in other words, how life is increasingly incorporated into modern forms of governmentality (Dillon, 2007a, 2007b; Donzelot, 2008).
4. Many of these critiques fall broadly into the category of governmentality studies of higher education (Peters *et al.*, 2009).
5. It is important to point out that although global university rankings are an important manifestation of neoliberalism in the academy and a key focus for institutional managements, they are not the only driving force for the prevailing performance culture evident in universities today. On a national policy level in Ireland, for instance, a key concern of the HEA is public expenditure efficiencies and demonstrating performance and value for money across the higher education sector.