

# Rewarding Educators and Education Leaders in Research-intensive Universities. (0277)

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## Introduction

Globally, the 'teaching' or 'education' dimension of academic roles in research-intensive universities has come under greater scrutiny in recent years (Land and Gordon, 2015). In the UK, league tables with teaching quality metrics, the introduction of student fees in England and Wales, and the government's discussions of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) have all contributed to this new focus.

The UK Russell Group institutions declare a commitment to 'maintaining the very best research' and also to 'an outstanding teaching and learning experience' (Russell Group, 2015), and many have been reviewing their policies and practices in relation to rewarding and promoting staff who teach and who lead on education. This has potential benefits both for individual staff members and for the institution as a whole (Olsson and Roxå, 2013). Such a review is challenging, however. Defining the notion of 'teaching excellence' and how to evidence it as part of a fair, transparent promotions and reward culture is a complex enough task (Cashmore and Ramsden, 2009; Cashmore et al., 2013; Gunn and Fisk, 2013; Higher Education Academy, 2013 and 2014). Changing a culture in which the esteem economy has long favoured research over teaching or education is arguably a much greater undertaking.

Within this context, this study addresses the following research questions with respect to Russell Group institutions:

1. What do current promotion policies and criteria in research-intensive institutions say with respect to promoting and rewarding those who teach and lead on education ('teaching and learning'), and how are these changing?
2. To what extent is professional recognition via the UK Professional Standards Framework feeding into current policies and processes?
3. What do staff in research intensive institutions consider to be 'good practice' in relation to rewarding educators and education leaders in the modern era?

## Methodology

To gain a rounded picture of the ways in which the work of educators and education leaders is rewarded and recognised in research-intensive universities, we pursued a mixed-methods, multi-level approach to data collection. We began with focus groups with Heads of Education Development, who work across strategic and operational levels in Russell Group institutions, to gather illustrative examples of institutional cultures and current institutional developments. We then conducted semi-structured

interviews with 10 Pro-Vice Chancellors (or equivalent) of Russell Group universities, to gain the perspectives of senior academic leaders responsible for education in their institutions. We analysed current policy statements and promotion criteria in relation to education-focused staff from each of the 24 institutions. Further focus groups for early career staff and Heads of Department are also underway. Our findings are derived from the systematic analysis and triangulation of these diverse data sets.

## **Emergent Findings**

There is a wide variety of organisational and management structures, variable lines of authority and accountability, and often high levels of devolution to sub-groupings in the Russell Group institutions. In addition job 'families' (for example, education-focused roles can be full academic 'lecturer' posts, or categorised under professional services), career grades and titles are differently named and configured. In some institutions, variable practices operate across disciplinary areas.

Job roles, promotion policies and criteria are, however, being reviewed by most institutions. The expressed aim is to increase the importance and the clarity of criteria, which relate to teaching and, at more senior levels, education leadership. The majority of institutions (18 of 24) have introduced a full professorial grade for education-focused staff, while a minority still prioritise research excellence as the key factor in any professorial appointment. Of course the question of how these revised criteria are being translated in practice merits further investigation.

The UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) is having a considerable impact upon some Russell Group universities, and little or none in others. For some, an institutional Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme which can offer Fellowship awards in different categories, through Higher Education Academy accreditation, is providing opportunities for peer-reviewed evidence of effective practice to be presented to promotion panels. For others – a minority - there is little or no appetite for this way of framing teaching-related academic work, although early career staff are typically encouraged, and may be required, to gain a Fellowship or equivalent qualification while on probation.

The notion of 'good practice' in this area of reward and recognition is multi-faceted. Typically institutions are seeking a transparent process, both through clearly worded, inclusive criteria and fair selection processes which provide equality of opportunity for all staff. There is an awareness in a number of institutions that the processes for supporting staff in their education-related development, for example through annual Personal Development Review or appraisal, needs to be improved.

Data analysis suggests that institutions today need an agile workforce; there is benefit in enabling individuals to focus on, and be rewarded for, different elements of academic practice at different times in their career. Interviews with PVCs evidence a desire for greater flexibility, and some institutions have introduced one broad academic pathway, which includes those whose main or only focus is on teaching and/or education leadership. Where universities are foregrounding the importance

of linking education with research through 'research-led teaching' or 'research-based education' models, this appears to be particularly powerful.

## Conclusions

Despite the continuing importance of research, there are many reasons to be optimistic. There is a consistent pattern of institutions improving their approaches to the reward and recognition of education and educational leadership including reviewing promotion criteria and processes.

However, a number of institutional issues still need further consideration. Key questions arising include:

- Do the titles, workloads and grade profiles of academic/teaching roles share parity of esteem with research-focused academic posts? Can a more holistic and inclusive definition of 'academics' enable institutions to meet their multi-dimensional missions more effectively, in a competitive global landscape?
- Are processes, including annual appraisals and selection panel processes, supportive, transparent and consistently fair?
- Can changing language used in relation to teaching/education – for example, characterising 'education leadership' not as an administrative sideline but as a highly valued dimension of academic practice and impact - help to raise the perceived value of the educational mission?

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