

Some Implications of Diversifying Identities in Higher Education 0127)

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This session will explore the implications of a diversifying higher education workforce (Gordon and Whitchurch, 2010) so that, in practice, a binary division between 'academic' and 'non-academic' roles and activities in higher education (Peters, 2004; Deem, Hillyard and Reed, 2007; Kogan and Teichler, 2007; Enders and de Weert, 2009) is no longer clear-cut. Significant numbers of professional staff on 'non-academic' contracts have academic credentials and experience (Whitchurch 2008; 2009), and academic staff increasingly have 'people' responsibilities in relation to multi-professional projects and teams. Such changes are reflected in the incorporation of practitioner subjects such as health and social care; individuals with specialist expertise in curriculum innovation and new methods of learning delivery; and professionals who support the development of, for instance, partnerships with external agencies. However, such individuals may only be "partially recognised in formal organisational structures" (Bolden, Petrov and Gosling, 2007: 78).

As a result of these developments, what Whitchurch has referred to as *Third Space* environments have emerged between academic and professional spheres of activity. New spaces and working practices are being created in disciplines that have strong professional traditions from outwith higher education, and in expanding areas such as web-enabled learning, outreach, and community and business partnership. In this context, new forms of "blended" role have developed (Whitchurch 2009). Such changes are reflected in Dowd and Kaplan's (2005) concept of "boundaryless" individuals who take a more freewheeling approach to academic work, and Deem's (2010) suggestion that "The development of a shared 'third space'... in which academics and administrators work together supporting and developing creative research could give a fresh impetus to research-game wearied academics". Thus, notwithstanding formal structures and processes, institutions are beginning to recognize that a diversifying workforce is creating a more complex set of identities and working practices, and that the situation is more dynamic than suggested by fixed organisation charts and job descriptions.

Consideration will be given to the perceptions and preferences of academic and professional staff who work in *Third Space* environments, and the variables that are likely to influence these perceptions and preferences. A number of questions arise as to the opportunities and challenges they may face; what might be enabling and constraining factors; how relationships are constructed between academic, professional, and other colleagues; how new forms of knowledge are used; and how new working practices might be legitimised institutionally. Suggestions will be made as to what extent such working environments are determined by the identities of individuals working in them and/or institutional variables, such as a critical mass of individuals or the nature of organisational structures. Consideration will also be given to ways in which institutional policies might be developed and used to support diversifying identities, for instance, by assessing and using the potential for flexibility. Thus, opportunities may be available in relation to the nature of appointments, workload models, grading structures, job titles and reward and recognition processes, within a framework such as Strike's "Career Climbing Frame" (Strike, 2010), to allow for the co-existence of academic and professional commitments, and to deal with issues of comparability vis-a-vis progression and promotion. Devolved responsibility might also be accorded to schools and faculties to make recommendations within such a framework.

Even when procedures and structures have been adapted, there remains the issue of achieving ownership by key stakeholders, including staff themselves. Fora for discussion may need to be

broadened, with improved information about the implications of new ways of working. More attention may be required to briefing members of decision-making bodies, as well as to clarity about the devolution of authority to local levels, and communication channels for decisions about rewards and career progression. Institutional discussion around these issues is likely to be discursive, and while formal organisational structures may be flatter, the reach of informal networks is likely to be wider and more complex. In turn, these conditions may not fit existing organisational timescales and decision-making structures. The session will, therefore, lead into a discussion of ways in which individuals and institutions might respond to the opportunities and challenges outlined, in ways that might be positive for both.

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