

What is Higher Education For? Shared and Contested Ambitions**Theme: Management, Leadership, Governance and Quality****Title**

The implications of diversifying institutional agendas for staffing models and practices

Paper***Background/context***

Institutions are under pressure to consider more flexible staffing models because of an increasing range of institutional agendas, enhanced student expectations (HEFCE, 2009; 2010a, b; 2012; UCEA, 2006; UUK, 2007; Scottish Government, 2012), and more varied staffing profiles (Dowd and Kaplan, 2005; Henkel, 2009; Coates and Goedegebuure, 2010; Enders and de Weert, 2009; Gordon and Whitchurch, 2010). These factors have impacted on, for instance, traditional full-time, open-ended contracts; balanced portfolios of teaching, research and third leg activity; and unilinear careers. Tensions can arise, therefore, between the ability of institutions to respond to external pressures, the aspirations of significant groupings of staff, and the development of appropriate models and practices. A key element in addressing these tensions is the development of the psychological contract with staff by local managers such as heads of department and programme leaders, and the relationship between this and formal contracts of employment.

Theoretical approach/method

The session will draw on institutional case studies and interviews with institutional respondents and system commentators, conducted as part of a project funded by the UK Leadership Foundation for Higher Education on *Staffing Models and Institutional Flexibility* between August 2011 and May 2012. Three models, the *integrated model*, the *partnership model* and the *private sector model*, which are not mutually exclusive, provide an overarching frame for developments that were identified:

- The *integrated model* is characterised by an employment proposition closely related to institutional development, which is clearly communicated to staff and seeks to align the contribution of individuals with institutional mission and values.
- The *partnership model* is based on negotiating common agendas with partners, internal or external, around the added value of collaboration in relation to specific activities.
- The *private sector model* is characterised by an employment proposition that represents more of a transactional relationship between an institution and its staff, based on a *quid pro quo* around competitive advantage.

Within these models there is a balance to be struck between achieving consistency, transparency, and recognition of circumstances in which individual solutions may be required. They will be used to illustrate how institutions are seeking to develop a positive psychological contract and offer a supportive environment in which academic activity can take place.

Results

Significant innovation and adaptation of staffing models is taking place as institutions seek to achieve an optimal relationship between institutional interests and those of their staff. Although these developments are influenced by the recommendations of national policy agencies, there is a sense that the system, and individual institutions, are now so complex that 'one-size-fits-all' solutions are unlikely to be appropriate. Institutions are therefore responding according to their circumstances, and a range of variables such as academic profile, student mix, locale, and, not least, local relationships with staff and unions. In doing so, they are drawing on approaches from both public and private sectors.

Examples of specific mechanisms being used to support greater flexibility across the three models include:

- Contractual arrangements such as annualised hours that provide secure horizons for individuals at the same time as enabling institutions to meet peaks and troughs in demand.
- Benefit packages that offer financial and other types of reward to meet specific needs including, for instance, flexi-hours, off-campus working arrangements, and the possibility of trade-offs between pay and leave entitlement.
- The development of teams with individuals who can teach across a range of programmes in ways that are cost effective and also benefit students.
- The adoption of career and progression routes that can accommodate teaching, research, scholarship and third leg activity in different proportions, according to an individual's interests and strengths, so as to allow a focus on different activities at different stages of a career, with the possibility of crossover at appropriate points.
- A broadening of criteria for promotion to include, for instance, teaching and scholarship, pedagogical research, innovation and links with professional practice, and the use of titles such as associate professor or teaching fellow to reflect this.
- Discretionary use of workload models to accommodate the balance of activity at departmental as well as at individual levels.
- The development of governance structures and processes that can respond rapidly to change, at the same time as protecting individual and institutional interests and allowing time for appropriate consultation; recognising the need for consistency and transparency, but also that individual solutions may be required.
- Acknowledgement that a range of models may be needed for different types of activity, particularly around the periphery, whilst maintaining transparency about these.

Implications

The study has implications for ways in which employment packages might be used to accommodate and value a wider range of staff, at the same time as progressing multiple agendas at an institutional level and attracting and retaining staff who will contribute to more broadly based institutional missions. Although frameworks and models may provide guiding templates, the study suggests that their successful implementation depends on discretionary and qualitative factors, including local relationships. Whichever model is pursued, therefore, it is the interpretation of a formal contract of employment, rather than the contract itself, that forms the basis of the psychological contract, and this involves establishing reciprocal expectations. Increasing attention is being paid, therefore, to what one respondent referred to as developing “mature” relationships with staff, individually and collectively. Cumulatively, the mechanisms described above are enabling institutions to make adjustments on an evolutionary basis, although tipping points may occur when major change takes place, such as a restructuring or merger. Furthermore, local managers have a key role to play in interpreting formal contracts of employment, and in assessing at what point arrangements might be optimal for individuals as well as for their department or school. These managers need to be supported in working constructively with staff in local settings, where necessary on a case-by-case basis, in ways that help to develop a positive psychological contract. The ability to act quickly in relation to such cases could be critical, not least in minimising stress levels for the staff concerned.

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