New to HE: processes of professional learning for new teachers with dual roles and identities. (0431)

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Context

UK Higher Education has experienced major changes in recent decades, based on contested ideas about the purposes of Higher Education.   Successive policies evidence a trend towards external control '*… steering at a distance.*' (Brennan, Locke, Naidoo 2007:164) and scrutiny of universities' offer and performance through various metrics: Key Information Sets, National Student Survey, QAA audit, REF, TEF, and regulated by (most recently) the Office for Students. League tables chart universities' positioning and prestige (e.g. Blackmore 2015) in relation to both research and teaching based on specific metrics (see, for example, Ashwin 2016 for a critique of this approach) and viewed through a value-for-money lens e.g Belfield *et al* (2018).

This context fosters a climate of stratification, a discourse of institutional winners and losers and pressure on individual members of staff navigating a complex environment with myriad and potentially competing expectations.   It poses challenges in respect of the nature of academic work, which is likely to differ depending on the mission and priorities of different universities, reflected both in the kinds of work academic and teaching staff are expected to undertake and the curricula they develop and/or teach. For example, there may be an increasing emphasis on workplace preparation through integrating work placements or workplace-like activity into HE programmes, or creating opportunities for students to travel, live or study abroad.   Postgraduate education increasingly integrates opportunities for postgraduate research students to gain teaching experience and/or qualifications, a possible boost for those aspiring to an academic post in the future. This environment can offer both challenges and opportunities.

Research project overview

The research is grounded in a conceptual framework of communities of practice, positing that academic identity is created through multiple aspects of participation: in both disciplinary and other professional or career-stage communities, in an institution, with colleagues and students. The paper builds on previous research (Harvey & Luzia 2013; AUTHOR 2017) on factors which enable or hinder the integration of part-time staff and evidence suggesting that they experience a tangential relationship with HEIs in which they work. This paper focuses on the implications of their environment for two specific groups of early career academics:

    (i)   GTAs as aspiring academics
         and
    (ii)   those employed as HE teachers specifically bringing industry expertise from their first profession (.g. Performing Arts, Law, Engineering), hereafter termed dual professionals.

These groups of staff have been selected because they are both new into HE teaching and have previous or parallel identities in other roles (GTAs as doctoral students and dual professionals as industry specialists) which may affect how they see themselves in relation to the academy.   Each brings different educational, cultural and life experiences which may impact on their approach to learning about the nature of academic life and work (Fanghanel 2011; Teichler *et al* 2013; Wohrer 2014) and their beliefs about teaching in the disciplines

(Quinlan et al 2017). This paper contributes new knowledge to the field by illuminating the transition *process* rather than dual professionals' *response*s (see for example Gourlay 2011), and the extent to which the process of involvement in multiple communities of practice shapes their beliefs.

(How) do universities identify and address the challenges of integrating these two groups of staff? Are there discernible differences of approach between HEIs which are research-intensive, teaching-intensive or specialist institutions? Is there a gap between what institutions say they are and do and the lived experiences of their staff? How do these staff make sense of the expectations of this new environment? What do they believe it means to be a university teacher? How are these beliefs formed? What factors affect integration into (or distance from) their new environment and individual beliefs?

The project, through document analysis and interviews, explores the contextual challenges for these staff, their process of transition and the implications for those responsible for their professional development and integration and the processes.

Research questions
1) What proactive strategies do universities use to support early career staff in their teaching role and what is the rationale for the approach adopted?
2) Have leaders of institutional professional development provision identified specific issues in relation to GTAs and dual professionals?
3) To what extent (if any) has this led to institutions taking a different approach in relation to GTAs and dual professionals?
4) Are there significant differences in approaches to professional development in different kinds of institutions?
5) Is there a gap between what universities say they do and the lived experience of these groups of staff?

Process
Data gathering (March – October 2018) from
- institutional websites (document analysis)
- interviews with PGCert (or similar) course leaders
- interviews with representatives from both groups (GTAs and dual professionals)

Key findings
Data collection began in Spring 2018 and will continue till October 2018. A fuller analysis of the data and discussion of the findings from the different kinds of HEIs will be available in December 2018. Initial findings to date indicate that external drivers such as TEF contribute to institutional strategy, for example in relation to staff qualifications; how institutions communicate expectations varies, as do GTAs' and dual professionals' experience of access to relevant professional development; those directly responsible for professional development frame their approach in terms both of being developmental for individuals and mindful of policy drivers; those in specialist (and frequently smaller) institutions are more aware of the transition challenges for dual professionals, many of whom have either not attended university or did so a long time ago, and frame professional development as being both acculturation into HE and acknowledging people's professional contexts and expertise. These preliminary findings will be carefully interrogated as more extensive data is gathered.

944 words.

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