The role of professionals in doctoral education

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The Binary divide!

Academics (Supervisors, Heads of Dept, Deans, Senior Management)

Support staff (Administrators, Professional Services)

Some Key dividers

Institutions value academics more highly than support staff

Academics get paid more than support staff, get more opportunity to develop themselves and promote themselves externally

Typically support staff have not had the professional qualifications commensurate with what academics/managers value

Can this ever change? Should it change??

University values

What defines a "Good University"
- Humboldtian definition of a University
  - Teaching and research combined

Senior management become obsessed by Reputation, League Tables, Financial prosperity.

Output defines quality
- Papers, citations, research rating, research income, numbers of PhD students, Noble Prize winning staff. (Tangible and measureable)

Academic Freedom – what does this mean?

University values

People

◦ A University is a collection of people and buildings (+ facilities)

◦ The quality of the staff the University employs, their motivations and their actions and outputs, end up defining the quality of the institution

Reinforcing "Good Behaviours"

HR departments in Universities are responsible for encouraging staff to reinforce good behaviours that reinforce or improve the quality of the institution.

◦ Annual appraisals

◦ Targets & expectations

This has to begin during the initial training of new academic staff – starting during the PhD

What are the "Good Behaviours"?

Conducting research in an ethical way
- Complying with codes of conduct
- Not cheating or falsifying results

Communicating your findings
- Publishing
  - Understanding the hierarchy of Journal Impacts and targeting publications to High Impact Journals
- Conference presentations
- Networking with people researching the same area as you
- Teaching others about your work

Seeking funding to conduct new research

What actually does the institution value?

Conducting research in an ethical way
◦ Complying with codes of conduct
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Communicating your findings
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  ◦ Understanding the hierarchy of Journal Impacts and targeting publications to High Impact Journals
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Seeking funding to conduct new research

But there is a big but!

Most PhDs in developed economies are not going to become Academics – at best only about 20% will

Whereas in developing economies it is the other way around and more than 80% will

This poses a dilemma

In Universities where there is a high proportion of international students eg in many research ambitious Universities – these are attractive to international sponsors

Need to recognise this and tailor training and support accordingly

The past, present and future

Past
- ◦ The supervisor is Everything

Present
- ◦ Good supervisors are still vital
- ◦ The training environment is important
- ◦ The support staff who support the training environment are important

Future
- ◦ ???? Do we need a new paradigm?

What does it take to get from enquiry to registration to graduation with a PhD

Tenacity

Good mental health

Persistence

Organisation

Being able to think and analyse

Being able to write

Meeting the right people (networking)

Luck? "The harder I work the luckier I get!"

What do PhD professional staff contribute to the process?

Enquiries – facilitating entry/offer letter

Registration

Induction – making candidates feel welcomed

Training – Skills development

Clarify regulations

Give support outside of supervision team

The friendly face of the institution

What do supervisors actually contribute to the process?

Academic judgement

Role models

Support when it is needed – often outside of normal working hours (evenings, weekends, during holidays)

The good PhD student No 1

Can achieve the outcome (good PhD thesis + 5+publications) without much input from the supervisor or anyone else?

Reinforcing an individualistic set of characteristics – the lone academic?

Cannot deny their brilliance – but probably not the best future academic!

The good PhD student No 2

Listens to advice and acts upon it

Applies themselves to solving problems and issues rather waiting to be told what to do

Networks with others (academic and professional staff alike)

Willing and able to communicate and enjoys it

Understands the value of research and what constitutes originality

Can write at the appropriate academic level

The good PhD student No 2 requires support and training

Becomes a more rounded individual

Is more likely to be a employable academic

Has many of the skills that employers outside of academia also value

The good doctoral training environment

Increasingly the good PhD environment is being defined by funders, Departments and Universities

It includes a cohort of students, training, support, ownership of space (desk), social facilities, academic structures (seminars, networking, conferences, academic exchange)

It is expensive – but it is worth it

Many institutions aspire to it – but often compromise in one way or another!

Professional staff on Supervisory Teams

Should supervisory teams have a member of professional staff on the team?

Can a role be defined that is beyond the purely administrative?

How many supervisory sessions would they be expected to attend?
- ◦ 2/3/4 per year?

Would need to be in the Role description of the post and the workload

How many could one person cope with in such a role?
- ◦ 5/10/50/100???

What do professional service staff need to professionalise them?

Qudos
- ◦ The institution needs to show that it values them – rewards and recognition

Reward
- ◦ Good salaries with clear expectations of what the post demands

Involvement beyond administration
- ◦ Face to face contact

An external Professional association
- ◦ Support from the institution to attend meetings, seminars and development sessions

What do Universities have to do to facilitate

1. Recognise the issue

2. Agree with the need for change

3. Instigate change

4. Value what the change brings

Can they do this just for Professional staff working with Doctoral Schools?

Probably not! because it can lead to eliteism

If you cannot get change within!

Seek support, value, Qudos outside of your institution

Encourage staff to participate in Professional organisations (EUA-CDE, UKCGE, ARMA) and facilitate attendance

Staff will feel the same belonging to a like-minded group that academics feel when they attend a subject conference – "if you can change it, emulate it"

Thank You

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