



CAREER DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP FOR EDUCATION-FOCUSED ACADEMICS

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Overview

The workshop will give an overview of recent developments in education-focused academic career pathways, with specific reference to engineering disciplines. Workshop participants will discuss strategies for developing their academic careers through teaching excellence, Engineering Education Research (EER) and SOTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning), and leadership in Engineering Education. The workshop will also discuss how engineering schools can improve the support they offer to their education-focused academics.

Background and rationale

The number of academics in the UK (United Kingdom) employed on education/teaching-only contracts (as opposed to joint research and teaching contracts) has increased steadily since the turn of the century. In 2020/21, 32 percent of all UK academics were on teaching-only contracts [1]. The growth in the number of academics on teaching-only contracts appears to be part of an international trend within Europe, Northern America, and Australia driven by changes in the higher education environment such as the massification of higher education, cuts to higher education funding, research funding selectivity, and marketisation of higher education. These changes have led to institutions restructuring and adopting new strategies to ensure survival, including the increased casualisation of academic staff, and the introduction of separate academic contracts for research, education, and research and education [2].

The introduction of teaching-only academic contracts has led to the development of education-focused career pathways with opportunities for promotion to senior academic roles based on teaching excellence, scholarship, professional practice, and education leadership. However, the newness of such pathways means that there is a shortage of education-focused senior academics to provide role models and mentoring for junior academics seeking promotion to senior grades. This is further compounded by uncertainty and lack of consensus on what counts as evidence of good education practice, particularly when considering promotion to senior grades [3, 4].

The SEFI conference brings together academics of all levels and contracts with an interest in Engineering Education, including academics on education-focused career pathways. The workshop seeks to take advantage of this by bringing together these individuals, with those among us who hold senior leadership roles, to discuss and share ideas, experiences, and insights into developing successful education-focused academic careers. It is hoped that this workshop will help participants to establish supportive networks that will continue to exist beyond the conference.

Audience

Engineering academics on education-focused career pathways, and senior academics with line management for such academics and/or educational leadership and career promotion responsibilities within higher education institutions.

Timeline

Education-focused Academic Career Pathways – 10 minutes

Content outline:

- Discuss the unbundling of the academic role into specialised functions focussing on research, education (teaching and learning) and service (to include a brief overview of the underlying factors driving this change).



- Identify the emergence of education-focused distinct academic career pathways in individual universities
- Highlight the challenges and opportunities for establishing an equitable career progression for education-focused academics in different universities and countries.
- Discuss similarities and difference of the academic profession in various countries.

Career Progression through Excellence in Education Practice - 10 minutes

Content outline:

- Discuss the contested concept of teaching/education excellence in higher education
- Discuss national frameworks for recognising teaching/education excellence, e.g., the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF).
- Discuss the use of teaching/education excellence frameworks in developing institutional teaching-based promotion criteria for academic staff

Establishing an EER and Scholarship Career – Strategies, Challenges & Opportunities - 10 minutes

Content outline:

- Discuss how EER (and SOTL) is defined and supported within individual higher education institutions and national higher education systems
- Identify and discuss challenges in developing and supporting EER (and SOTL) for promotion and recognition
- Discuss and propose strategies for evidencing EER attainments in institutional promotional criteria

Establishing an Education Leadership Career- Strategies, Challenges & Opportunities - 10 minutes

- Discuss the extent to which education (teaching and learning) leadership is recognised as a valid form of academic leadership within higher education institutions, and within engineering disciplines
- Discuss current institutional promotion policies and criteria with respect to promoting and rewarding those who teach and lead on education
- Discuss emerging “good practices” in relation to promoting and rewarding education leaders within higher education institutions, and, specifically, within engineering disciplines

How Engineering Schools can support education-focused academics – 10 minutes

Discuss institutional and departmental policies and practices that support career development, promotion, and recognition for education-focused academics, including:

- Fostering an inclusive academic culture that supports and encourages academics to play to their own strengths
- Continuing professional development opportunities for education-focused academics
- Promoting parity of esteem at all levels of the career ladder between education-focused academics and mainstream (research and teaching track) academics.

Wrap-up and closing comments – 10 minutes

Acknowledge emerging good practice in promoting and rewarding education-focused academics and identifying areas for collaborative research in this area.



Workshop organisation

The workshop will be organised as an interactive session in which participants are invited to actively contribute their experiences and insights in all the workshop segments. The workshop is intended to stimulate discussion amongst the workshop participants, with the hope of initiating collaborative research on academic careers and practices within engineering education.

References

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