

PROFESSIONAL STRIPPING: THE EDUCATION FOCUSSED ACADEMIC ROLE IN THE SCIENCES

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Background and context

Higher education and academics are under pressure to perform and transform the student experience. While research still maintains primal position in universities; academic roles are differentiating and expectations around the educational component of an academic role are changing. Increased demands on academic time have seen a much smaller proportion of academics finding the time to do original research and writing. Even those academics aspiring to a research career now spend most of their time doing teaching. There has been on-going contention around whether an academic role and career structure based on science research meets the operational needs of the current higher education environment. Early on in the debate, several universities responded to increased student numbers and diversity by creating education focused roles, where the expectation was to focus on scholarly teaching and education research. In contrast, other universities responded by deciding that education focused academics no longer met operational needs and offered redundancies. What is the place of education focused Science academics in higher education? How do we better prepare Science academics in higher education?

Purpose of the study

This presentation will report on conceptions of the academic role as a result of conversations with academics in education focused roles in science in higher education as part of National Teaching Fellowship funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching.

Results and Conclusions

There was variation in the level of satisfaction among education focused academics in terms of performance and progression. Some academics expressed considerable success while others expressed feelings of disillusionment and being stripped of skills and connections. In general academics commented on differences in an academic role focused in education in terms of expertise, scholarship, connections, progress, reputation, research funding, mobility and the uncertainty of promotion success and stability of a career. Several expressed the difficulty of building a career in science education without the professional development and support required to transition from disciplinary to education research. The future of education focused Science academics in higher education has become a wicked problem. Re-visiting the conception of research in higher education appears to be the path forward.

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