RECONCEPTUALISING AND EVALUATING THE ACADEMIC ROLE IN THE SCIENCES

Pauline Ross[a], Hamish Coates[b], Philip Poronnik[c]

Presenting Author: Pauline Ross (pm.ross@uws.edu.au)
[a]School of Science and Health, University of Western Sydney, Sydney NSW 2751, Australia
[b]Centre for the Study of Higher Education , University of Melbourne, Melbourne Victoria 3010, Australia
[c]School of Medical Sciences, University of Sydney, Sydney NSW 2006, Australia

KEYWORDS: academic role, sciences, research, differentiation, education, evaluation

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Higher education and academics are under pressure to transform. Key pressures include the rise of performance based funding in both research and teaching, disruptive technologies changing both pedagogy and curricula, and stronger controls regulating quality and standards in a way which was previously thought untenable. Academics appointed because of research track record are becoming increasingly less relevant in this reconfiguring higher education context. It is reasonable to contend that the current conceptualisation of the academic role and career structure based on research no longer meets the operational needs of the current higher education environment. The academic role which has been remarkably stretchable needs to change and differentiate. Such differentiation frees academics to structure more freely their careers allowing conceptions of academic roles which move flexibly between research, teaching and administration. The lack of differentiation in the academic role is being felt acutely by the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics disciplines (STEM) where the pervasive emphasis has been on research. Declining enrolments and perceived falling standards of STEM graduates, both nationally and internationally, raise concerns about the future pipeline of STEM graduates and a public who are well disposed towards science. Although various projects have been launched in an attempt to evaluate the academic role, most of these dichotomise the academic career into either research or teaching.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will report on the conceptions of the academic role from a range of senior leaders in higher education. It will present a preliminary evaluative metric of the academic role including education focussed positions as part of the outcomes of a National Teaching Fellowship funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

While we have metrics which evaluate research in terms of journal rankings and grant successes, and criteria and standards which separately evaluate teaching, we have limited metrics which holistically evaluate the academic role and build the flexibility we need for the future. This presentation will showcase a metric to more holistically and flexibly evaluate the academic role in STEM. We need flexibility in the academic role if we are to ensure Australia has excellent researchers and academic teachers of STEM in the future.

Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, Curtin University, Sept 30th to Oct 1st, 2015, page 63, ISBN Number 978-0-9871834-4-6.