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## **Academic leadership**

Developing a framework for the professional development of programme leaders

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## **Resources for professional developers**

Resources to support the development of programme leaders can be found at:

[www.napier.ac.uk/placademicleadership](http://www.napier.ac.uk/placademicleadership).

[Please note that the resources provided online as an outcome of this project are designed for you to use, as you feel appropriate, with your new and experienced programme leaders. They are deliberately produced in formats such as Word and PowerPoint to make them easily customisable into versions that suit both you and your programme leaders.]

# Academic leadership: Developing a framework for the professional development of programme leaders

## Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2 Literature review</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Defining academic leadership	13
2.2 Models of leadership applied to the academic context	15
2.3 Leadership learning and development	20
2.3.1 What should programme leaders learn?	20
2.3.1.1 The implications and demands of context	21
2.3.1.2 The importance of empowering self and others	21
2.3.1.3 The link between leadership learning and doing	22
2.4 Conclusions from the literature	23
<b>3 Sector scan of the programme leader role</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 Introduction	24
3.2 Aims and objectives	24
3.3 Methodology	24
3.3.1 Sector scan survey	24
3.3.2 Focus groups	26
3.4 Results from the UK sector scan survey	26
3.4.1 Terms and titles for the programme leader role	26
3.4.2 Models of leadership	26
3.4.3 Provision of role descriptors	26
3.4.4 Functions of the programme leader	27
3.4.5 Summary of the programme leader role descriptors	29
3.4.6 Access to time allowance to undertake programme leader duties	30
3.4.7 Developmental needs of <i>new</i> and <i>experienced</i> programme leaders	30
3.5 Outcomes of the focus groups at a new higher education institution in central England	32
3.6 Conclusions	35
<b>4 Programme leadership at one new university</b>	<b>38</b>
4.1 Outcomes of the programme leader survey	38
4.1.1 Methodology	38
4.1.2 Respondents' current roles	39
4.1.3 Availability of agreed role descriptors	39
4.1.4 Functions of the programme leader	39
4.1.4.1 Administrative functions	39
4.1.4.2 Student support functions	40
4.1.4.3 Recruitment and admissions functions	41
4.1.4.4 Academic leadership functions	41
4.1.4.5 Quality enhancement and assurance functions	42
4.1.4.6 Additional functions of programme leaders	42
4.1.4.7 Overview of the functions undertaken by programme leaders	43
4.1.5 Experience of professional development	44
4.1.6 Access to time allowance to undertake programme leader duties	44

4.1.7	Developmental needs for new programme leaders	44
4.1.8	Developmental needs for experienced programme leaders	45
4.2	Outcomes of programme leader interviews	46
4.2.1	How individuals became programme leaders	46
4.2.2	What programme leaders liked about their role	46
4.2.3	What programme leaders disliked most about their role	47
4.2.4	Characteristics, skills and attributes of the effective programme leader	48
4.2.5	Examples of effective programme leadership	49
4.2.6	Challenges faced by programme leaders	51
4.2.7	Professional development and support for programme leaders	51
4.2.7.1	Mentoring	52
4.2.7.2	Guidance on regulations, procedures, policies and structures	52
4.2.7.3	Clarification of roles and responsibilities	53
4.2.7.4	Programme development and validation	53
4.2.7.5	Development of academic leadership skills	53
4.2.7.6	Professional development for experienced programme leaders	54
4.2.7.7	Other professional development needs	54
4.2.7.8	Structures and approaches that would support programme leader professional development	54
4.3	Reflections from the senior management interviews	54
4.3.1	Themes from the senior management interviews	54
4.3.2	The senior management perspective on the professional development needs of programme leaders	55
4.4	Conclusions	56
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Recommendations for professional developers and institutional policy makers</b>	<b>66</b>
6.1	Recommendations for professional developers	66
6.2	Recommendations for institutional policy makers	68
<b>7</b>	<b>References</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Appendices</b>	<b>74</b>
Appendix A	UK institutional survey questionnaire and covering email	74
Appendix B	Institutional questionnaire and covering email	79
Appendix C	Interview questions for programme leaders	84

## Tables and Figures

### Tables

#### Section 3

Table 3.1:	Does your institution operate different models of programme/course leadership?	26
Table 3.2:	Is/are there agreed programme/course leader role descriptors either institutionally, or in any part of the university?	27
Table 3.3:	Functions of a programme leader ordered by the number of responses that state the function is always done by programme leaders	28
Table 3.4:	Functions of a programme leader extracted from role descriptors	29
Table 3.5:	Is there any agreed time allowance?	30
Table 3.6:	Developmental needs of new programme leaders	31
Table 3.7:	Developmental needs of experienced programme leaders	31

#### Section 4

Table 4.1:	Response by school	38
Table 4.2:	Roles undertaken by the respondents	39
Table 4.3:	Distribution of multiple roles	39
Table 4.4:	Provision of role descriptors	39
Table 4.5:	Administrative functions	40
Table 4.6:	Student support functions	40
Table 4.7:	Recruitment and admissions functions	41
Table 4.8:	Academic leadership functions	42
Table 4.9:	Quality functions	42
Table 4.10:	Functions of a programme leader ordered by number of respondents stating the function is always done by programme leaders	43
Table 4.11:	Professional development	44
Table 4.12:	Time allowance	44
Table 4.13:	Areas of development for new programme leaders	45
Table 4.14:	Areas of development for experienced programme leaders	45
Table 4.15:	Characteristics, skills and attributes of effective programme leaders	49
Table 4.16:	Examples of challenges facing programme leaders	51

### Figures

Figure 1:	Professional development framework for programme leaders	9, 60
Figure 2:	Framework for professional development in Month One	62
Figure 3:	Framework for professional development in Months Two to Three	63
Figure 4:	Framework for professional development in Months 6 to 12	63
Figure 5:	Framework for professional development in Months 12+	64

## **Executive summary**

### **1. Background**

This publication reports on the outcomes of research undertaken as the first part of a project to create professional development resources for programme leaders (course organisers) in the higher education sector. A programme leader is defined here as 'an academic member of staff who has primary responsibility for the (re)design, delivery, monitoring and review of one or more programmes of study (course) within a higher education institution'.

The research was undertaken in response to a perception that, while the programme leader role is an essential academic leadership role:

- it was largely ill-defined and unsupported within higher education
- there was little in the way of formal professional development to support programme leaders
- for many, it was a role that they were conscripted to, rather than had volunteered for.

This report is accompanied by a range of fully customisable resources for professional developers and others with responsibility for supporting and developing programme leaders. These can be found at [www.napier.ac.uk/placademicleadership](http://www.napier.ac.uk/placademicleadership).

### **2. Aims**

The aims of this phase of the research project were to:

1. Analyse how existing models of academic leadership and academic identity contribute to our understanding of the programme leader role.
2. Explore the roles and responsibilities of programme leaders. In particular to:
  - identify programme leadership models that are currently used
  - investigate how the role is defined and supported in relation to resources and time allowances
  - gain an indication of the key functions, areas of responsibility and influences
  - investigate current professional development and the perceived development needs for both new and experienced staff.
3. Investigate programme leaders' conceptions of their role, their views of academic leadership and their professional development needs in order to manage programmes and programme teams effectively.
4. Develop a professional development framework for programme leaders and a set of associated recommendations for professional developers and higher education policy makers.

### **3. Methods**

Three main strands of background research were undertaken:

- a review of published literature on academic leadership and models of leadership in order to further understanding of the programme leader role and its associated academic identity
- a scan of the sector as to the role of the programme leader in order to gain insight into similarities and differences within higher education institutions (this includes holding focus groups with programme leaders at one new university in central England)
- questionnaires and interviews with programme leaders and senior managers at one Scottish university in order to further explore functions and activities, perceptions of effective leadership qualities required for the role and professional development needs.

### **4. Results**

There is relatively little published literature that specifically addresses either the programme leader role or their professional development needs. What exists, however, concludes that learning appropriate leadership skills is desirable and brings with it personal and organisational benefits. The literature identifies themes that professional development should aim to reflect, namely the:

- full scope of the role and its responsibilities
- complexity of the role
- tension inherent in the managerial and academic leadership aspects of the role that involve dealing creatively with opposing forces
- importance of the context in which the programme leader operates
- importance of motivating and empowering both the programme leader and the team with which they work
- importance of linking learning with doing, so that programme leaders are supported through real work experiences and have opportunities to practice learning.

The sector scan revealed relatively few formal programme leader role descriptors or inductions. Time allocation for programme leaders varied widely with no standard approach to determining how much remittance a programme leader receives. Programme leaders reported considerable challenges in their role, feeling that there is often little in the way of support, and experiencing evident confusion regarding from where support is available. The key functions of programme leaders (based on the primary research) can be summarised as:

- programme management and administration
- academic leadership activity
- quality enhancement and assurance activity
- student induction activity
- recruitment activity
- co-ordinating personal tutor activity.

The precise nature and balance of those functions depends, however, upon institutional culture, process and procedures, as well as school structures and imperatives. Consequently, any professional development requires substantial local and individual tailoring.

Effective programme leaders were considered to demonstrate: good communication, motivational and interpersonal skills; accountability and availability; a commitment to, and a belief in, a subject area; positivity; and having a vision. In addition, effective programme leaders demonstrate enthusiasm, a commitment to students, a caring empathetic attitude, sound administration skills, and academic authority and leadership.

The professional development needs of individuals were identified as:

- access to mentoring from an experienced colleague in the first year of taking on the role
- guidance on regulations, procedures, policies and structures
- clarification of roles, responsibilities and where authority lies. This was particularly linked to gaining an understanding of what to do, when to do it and how to prepare for it
- guidance on programme development and validation processes
- development of academic leadership skills.

In addition, there were several structural support needs identified including:

- a structured induction process for new programme leaders to develop an underpinning of essential knowledge of their latest role
- ongoing tailored support for experienced programme leaders to refresh knowledge of their role and responsibilities, plug associated gaps, further develop academic leadership skills and equip them to deal with appropriate curricula issues
- formal reward and promotion routes for undertaking the role
- support for administrative tasks
- transparent allocation of time allowances
- the development of a programme leader handbook
- appropriate fora for sharing good practice.

These results have shaped the resources that have been developed to help educational developers meet the needs of their programme leaders, as specified in the professional development framework (see Figure 1). The resources have been produced in formats, such as Word and PowerPoint, that make them easy to customise for local use.

## **5. Conclusions**

Programme leadership is often discussed with regard to the frustrations associated with the role, mainly in relation to the transition from academic to academic leader (Gmelch 2002b). However, programme leadership also brings considerable intrinsic rewards, particularly regarding the personal satisfaction that comes with:

- being able to shape and drive the student experience
- overseeing student progress, experience and success
- shaping the programme curricula, ethos and direction
- general student interaction and helping to resolve problems
- leading a team and developing a team ethos.

It is these intrinsic rewards, plus the professionalism of individuals, that have ensured that programmes continue to be designed, delivered and managed.

Based on the research, a professional development framework for programme leaders has been developed. There are three strands with linked but distinct aims and curricula:

- supporting new programme development
- supporting the transition of new programme leaders
- supporting the ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) of experienced programme leaders.

Critically, the framework includes both formal mentorship and peer support as an essential route to ensuring that programme leaders have access to both good practice and timely advice based on experience. The proposed framework is *not* a fixed programme of activity to be undertaken in its entirety. The curriculum should be viewed as a menu from which institutions, departments and individuals select the most appropriate elements.

**Figure 1: Professional development framework for programme leaders**

Supporting the Development of New Programmes	Supporting the Transition of New Programme Leaders	Supporting the CPD of Experienced Programme Leaders
Key Support: LTA Mentor	Key Support: Experienced PL Mentor	Key Support: PL Forum
Development of Professional Portfolio of Practice		
<p><b>Curriculum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design &amp; agreement of curriculum, culture &amp; ethos</li> <li>• Core pedagogical principles</li> <li>• LT&amp;A policies</li> <li>• Designing appropriate and effective curricula and learning activities</li> <li>• Developing effective learning environments including technologies</li> <li>• Developing effective student support environments</li> <li>• Market research &amp; sector analysis</li> <li>• Programme validation process &amp; procedures</li> <li>• Planning for evaluation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Curriculum</b></p> <p>Month 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underpinning knowledge of institutional infrastructure, regulations, policies &amp; quality processes</li> <li>• Responsibilities &amp; authority</li> <li>• Implications of changed role</li> <li>• Expected outcomes in first year</li> </ul> <p>Months 2-3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing the student experience</li> <li>• Review processes</li> <li>• Challenges of role</li> <li>• Committee chairing and functioning</li> </ul> <p>Months 6 -12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing academic leadership</li> <li>• Managing performance &amp; benchmarking</li> </ul>	<p><b>Curriculum</b></p> <p>Months 12+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refresher opportunities</li> <li>• Maintaining programme currency &amp; relevancy</li> <li>• Maintaining sector awareness</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Ongoing exploration of relevant curriculum issues</li> <li>• Ongoing enhancement of student experience</li> </ul>

## 6. Recommendations

The three-stranded professional development framework presents considerable challenges regarding how to translate it into a meaningful and engaging set of activities and support that facilitate:

- effective programme leadership
- meaningful personal and professional development planning, including learning and development alongside doing

- the identification of the professional development needs of individuals and choice in how to address those needs
- the development of capable, coping and motivated staff
- continuously enhanced curriculum design and delivery, including the promotion of well-designed and engaging programmes of study
- action-orientated formal and informal individual and team activities
- enhanced student learning, experience and performance
- institutional learning and sharing of good practice.

Consequently, there are recommendations for both professional developers, who are expected to take the lead in developing leadership programmes, and higher education policy makers who shape the context within which the programme leader role operates.

### **6.1 Recommendations for professional developers**

The design and delivery of professional development for programme leaders should:

- reflect and be sensitive to both local and institutional ethos, culture and priorities
- be customisable to the development needs of individuals as far as possible, including the core transition from the role of academic to academic leader
- promote ongoing development opportunities that allow staff to demonstrate their strengths as well as identify their needs
- be used strategically to meet institutional and local needs
- emphasise the value of developing motivated and high-performing teams of staff who recognise their role, including the relationship with student learning, experience and performance
- provide a variety of training and development opportunities to meet a range of preferred learning modes and styles
- be supported by a comprehensive *Programme Leader Resource*, which brings together a range of activities that will contribute to required underpinning knowledge and understanding
- promote the sharing of good practice opportunities for discussion
- provide opportunities for certification and/or accreditation for the professional activities undertaken wherever possible.

### **6.2 Recommendations for institutional policy makers**

In supporting the role of programme leader at institutional level, policy makers should:

- create structures that reward and value programme leadership
- establish and adhere to programme leader role descriptors
- embed ongoing CPD for programme leaders into mainstream institutional activities
- create meaningful and clearly defined programme teams
- recognise that different skill sets are required for programme development and programme management or administration.

## 1. Introduction

This document reports on the outcomes of primary and secondary research undertaken as part of a Higher Education Academy funded project to create professional development resources for programme leaders (course organisers) in the higher education sector.

A programme leader is defined here as ‘an academic member of staff who has primary responsibility for the (re)design, delivery, monitoring and review of one or more programmes of study (course) within a higher education institution’. The programme leader (PL) may have one of a large range of possible titles reflecting institutional culture and history (see Section 3.4.1). However, for the purposes of this report, they will be referred to collectively as programme leaders (PLs).

The project was undertaken in response to a perception that, while the PL role is an essential leadership role, it was largely ill-defined and unsupported within higher education. It was the experience of the authors that there was little in the way of formal professional development to support PLs, and that for many it was a role that they were conscripted to rather than had volunteered for.

Three main strands of background research were undertaken:

- a review of published literature on academic leadership and models of leadership in order to further understanding of the PL role and its associated academic identity
- a sector scan of the PL role in order to gain insight into similarities and differences within higher education institutions
- questionnaires and interviews with PLs and senior managers at one institution in order to further explore functions and activities, perceptions of effective leadership qualities required for the role and professional development needs.

The outcomes of this work are set out in Sections 2 to 4.

Section 5 sets out the conclusions of the research and presents a framework for the professional development of programme leaders. This is followed in Section 6, by recommendations for professional developers and HEI policy makers with respect to designing and delivering rounded, relevant and effective professional development for PLs.

## 2. Literature review

It is clear from a wide-ranging review of published literature that the academic environment is substantively different from corporate environments, and that this impacts on both the nature and experiences of leadership. The review identified a growing body of work on academic leadership (Middlehurst 1993; Mintzberg 1998; Ramsden 1998; Knight & Trowler 2001; Becher & Trowler 2001; Heywood, Sharp & Hides 2001; Martin *et al.* 2003; Barnett & Coate 2005), which discusses the special challenge of leadership within the higher education context. Such challenges include:

- revitalising and energising their colleagues to meet the challenges of tough times (Ramsden 1998)
- the impact of academic identity (Henkel 2005)
- the academic role as an agent of change (Doring 2002)
- setting the tone and emphasis of a programme, and recruiting appropriate colleagues (Heywood *et al.* 2001)
- engaging academics in the development of curriculum matters (Barnett & Coate 2005)
- historical approaches to promotion (Yielder & Codling 2004)
- ambiguity arising from having academic and non-academic personnel in leadership roles within the same organisation (Rowley & Sherman 2003).

There is also literature on the changing policy environment of higher educational institutions, such as Knight & Trowler (2001), who discuss changes in academic conditions, including: longer hours; pressure to publish; more administrative tasks; overmanagement of academics; loss of collegiality; and aging, malaise and marginality, resulting in low self-esteem and confidence. Henkel (2005) also notes the fragmenting and loosening of institutional boundaries, and the changing nature of academia.

Largely, the underpinning tone is one of regret for the increased managerialism and accountability currently experienced by academics, and the negative impacts that flow from it. This sense of disquiet may be the reason that there is very little literature that explores how academic staff might adapt to or cope with their new circumstances. However, without such considerations, academics in leadership roles, such as programme leader, can find themselves in highly stressful situations without the necessary tools to manage either the role or the responsibilities. Professional development offers a way forward to prepare and support PLs, and must be appropriate and sensitive to their needs. As a starting point for developing a framework for professional development resources, the literature review investigated descriptions of the PL role and activities, and also considered:

- definitions of academic leadership
- models of leadership applied to the academic context
- approaches to leadership learning and development.

## 2.1 Defining academic leadership

The majority of academic leadership literature relates to professors or senior management positions such as deans, heads of department (HoDs) and chairs. However, Rowley (1997 p78) reminds us that:

Academic leadership is unquestionably a central component in striving for excellence ... and should not be viewed as the sole preserve of senior managers ... The future of academic institutions depends on the development of effective leadership skills at all levels of the institution.

Trowler & Taylor (cited in Marshal *et al.* 2000 p2) state that:

... all academics are considered to be academic leaders as they are assumed to be at the forefront of their discipline and active in the definition of future directions and strategies within their academic program(s).

Cowan & Heywood (2001 p16) are quite clear that:

Leadership is the transformation of expertise and vision into actions that are judged effective by the led.

Such a definition inevitably requires the role holder to use a wide range of both cognitive and affective skills.

Gmelch & Wolverson (2002 p3), through looking at the role of the dean, see three clear dimensions of the academic leader and put forward the definition:

Academic leadership is the act of building a community of scholars to set direction and achieve common purpose through the empowerment of faculty and staff.

Other literature compares leadership and management. For example, in a study by Yeilder & Codling (2004), based on tertiary education in Australia, and which included subject co-ordinators as well as deans and heads of school, academic leadership is contrasted with managerial leadership. Academic leadership is defined as:

- an authority based on discipline knowledge
- peer/professional recognition
- personal qualities
- team acceptance
- expertise in teaching or research
- (critically) where leadership is vested in the person.

In contrast, managerial leadership is defined as: 'a leader in authority and in a hierarchical position of power with job responsibilities and control and where leadership is vested in the position'. Where an individual holds both positions simultaneously (such as programme leadership), there is an inherent tension because authority is vested by virtue of both subject expertise (academic leadership) and the office held (managerial leadership), without the individual necessarily holding the full range of knowledge and skills supposed or required. For example, a person who is 'an' authority in their subject area, may be promoted to a position of authority for which their expertise is inappropriately matched.

Marshall *et al.* (2006) summarise that 'leaders establish goals' while 'managers manage resources'. Consequently, in academic leadership personal qualities are important, as it is these, and not the position, that establish an individual as credible. However, Scutt (2004) reminds us that developing management skills is equally important as developing leadership skills, if individuals are to be effective.

Kotter (1990), however, makes it very clear that the systems of management and leadership are complementary and necessary for the success of a work area and/or organisation. Kotter suggests that the academic world provides the opportunity to benefit from implementing his strategies of: creating an agenda; developing a human network for achieving such an agenda; carrying out the plan; and achieving desired outcomes.

Definitions of academic leadership are relatively hard to pin down and many are presented in relation to what an academic leader actually does, linked to the abilities or values that are displayed. For example, Ramsden (1998) defines academic leadership as '... a practical and everyday process of supporting, managing, developing and inspiring academic colleagues...' and concludes that academic work is done better when leadership is enabling, coherent, honest, firm and competent, and combines effective management of people and resources with a positive vision for future change. He considers that although management and leadership are equally necessary, the bias can be too far towards management to the detriment of leadership. Ramsden further adds that good academic leaders:

- know when and how to compromise
- manage resources
- question methods
- have planning skills and a sense of direction
- acknowledge good work
- learn from mistakes.

He notes that while all leaders produce change, effective leaders produce 'constructive or adaptive change' to help people survive and grow.

Barnett & Coate (2005) take this further. They describe the need for academic leaders to engage colleagues, not just in matters of teaching and learning, but in curriculum matters themselves, by taking 'a nuanced approach that is prepared to play the long game'. They explain that 'if management is the art of the possible, leadership is the art of the imagination' with 'a triple challenge of imagination – imagination of conception (of curriculum) ... imagination of communication ... and imagination of engagement' (pp161-2).

Debowski & Blake (2004) also combine values and activities to define teaching leadership as effecting:

- alignment of goals and values to support organisational outcomes
- a collaborative and supportive culture that encourages all members to participate
- an environment of trust that enables feedback, mentorship and reflective practice

- effective management of teaching, so that members are clear in their role and participate in effective planning and decision making
- respect for the diversity of the group
- opportunities to share knowledge and expertise, and being a mentor to the less experienced
- effective communication and integration across the years of the programme
- regular reviews to identify problems, solutions and emerging concerns.

Interestingly, Marshall *et al.* (2000) contrast academic leadership from two different perspectives. Their study compared the differing perceptions of senior (principal) lecturers with those of HoDs and professors.

Senior Lecturer perspectives	Professor and HoD perspectives
Encouraging people to achieve goals	Charisma
Co-ordinating a large course unit	Control of resources
Giving support and advice	Stands out from others
Taking an interest in people	Vision
Mentoring younger staff	Being ahead of the game
Leading by example	Trusted
Being available and generous with time and expertise	Quality of excellence
	A role model people can aspire to

The study concludes that the difference in perspective is based on perceptions of whether the primary focus of academic leadership should be on people or on task.

Critically, perceptions of academic leadership appear to shape the context for the learning and teaching environment. Martin *et al.* (2003) compared variations in the experience of leadership of teaching in higher education between heads of academic departments, subject co-ordinators of large first-year subjects and lecturers. They concluded that:

There is a close empirical relationship between the way subject co-ordinators conceive of leadership of teaching, how their subject teachers perceive that leadership, and how those teachers approach their teaching (p258)

thus establishing a link between perceptions of academic leadership and student learning.

## 2.2 Models of leadership applied to the academic context

The literature applies a range of models of leadership to the academic context. Often, however, it is commented that they are limited in their application because of their roots in the corporate experience (Robles 1998; Pounder 1998). The models applied to academic leadership discussed here include:

- transactional leadership
- transformational leadership
- trait theory
- behavioural theory

- style theory and contingency theory leadership
- cybernetic model leadership
- shared leadership.

Two longstanding models of leadership – transactional and transformational – are discussed by Robles (1998, p3):

Transactional leadership is defined as being based on an exchange (bartering) between the leader and the follower [which] takes place within the established framework of the organisation.

The transactional leader tends to be action-orientated and works by creating unambiguous structures whereby it is clear what is required of subordinates and what rewards are received for following orders.

Robles (1998, p3) contrasts transactional leadership with transformational leadership, where in the latter:

the leader aims to change the framework itself and does so by appealing to the higher level needs and intrinsic motivation of followers.

The transformational leader is people-orientated and promotes a vision of the future to excite and convert potential followers. Transformational leaders are visible, careful to create trust and role model the behaviours they favour. They also make continued efforts to motivate and rally their followers and offer a purpose that transcends short-term goals. Robles concludes that the transformational model is required in academic institutions to support the move from a teaching culture to a learning culture.

Ramsden (1998) supports the idea of transformational leadership. He describes six principles that are needed to underpin such leadership, namely that leadership:

- is a dynamic process that involves managing opposing forces
- uses an outcomes-based agenda
- is multi-level in its operation (organisational, departmental and individual)
- is relational, learning from both the leader's and colleagues' experiences
- is about the leader's own learning
- is essentially transformative in several senses:
  - helping "ordinary people to do extraordinary things" (p127)
  - helping the academic community to embrace change with alacrity
  - transforming one's own performance through reflection
  - taking place within an organisation that itself is learning.

Cowan & Heywood's (2001, p14) findings support the transformational model, reminding us that:

Leadership in institutions such as universities is not a hierarchically determined activity.

They emphasise the need for such leadership to be able to move academic colleagues towards taking a more professional approach to their own teaching and learning activities.

The transformational model is also commended by Augustus *et al.* (2005) as

the one which is most likely to turn weak practices into best practice, and by Martin *et al.* (2003) because it encourages transformational teaching, which inspires an approach to supportive student learning. Pounder (1998) concludes that transformational leadership is appropriate for generating and effecting change, although he emphasises this must be distributed through lower levels of leadership, and should involve introspection and self-reflection.

However, despite its ubiquity, the transformational leadership model does have its detractors. Knight & Trowler (2001, pp78-9), for example, are unconvinced by the notion of:

the heroic figure of a (male) charismatic visionary brimming over with leadership qualities and whom others are proud to follow.

They instead introduce the theory of interactional leadership based on directed collegiality and which they describe as:

establishing a climate of negotiation based on trust oriented to, as well as growing from, a developing understanding of the shape of departmental goals.

Trait theory, where leadership is linked to the personal qualities of an individual such as intelligence, charisma, and integrity, has already been touched on in Section 2.1. Overviews are discussed in Marshal *et al.* (2000), Rowley (1997) and Middlehurst (1995), among others. Desirable characteristics of a leader are listed by Rowley (1997) as:

- intelligence
- initiative
- self-assurance
- the helicopter trait of understanding a situation at all levels

and by Gmelch (2002a) as:

- credibility (honest, trustworthy, ethical)
- forward looking (decisive)
- inspiring (dynamic, uplifting, enthusiastic, positive, optimistic)
- competent (capable, productive, efficient).

In a further paper, Gmelch (2002b) links the inspiring focus of leadership with:  
... finding one's voice; credibility and authenticity lies at the heart of good leadership.

Similarly, Williams (1998) in Scutt (2004) lists the characteristics of effective academic leadership as:

- having the ability to create and sustain excellence
- proactivity
- capacity for anticipatory thinking, envisioning and action
- having the ability to recognise innovation and creativity
- having integrative competence and the ability to bring together the strengths of an organisation.

Henderson (1996) further contends that good leadership is based on the trait of leader authenticity – where a leader's action matches their words – and concludes that the relationship between perceived leader authenticity and leader effectiveness is a strong one.

However, Adair (1983) is unconvinced that trait theory forms the basis of good leadership development, although he does state that leadership potential should be identified at selection stage, believing that although certain qualities are necessary, leaders can be trained.

Behavioural theory, where leadership is linked to personal behaviour, is promoted by Gmelch & Wolverson (2002). They describe three dimensions of behaviour that support effective academic leadership:

- building communities
- setting direction
- empowering others.

Bowers & Seashore (1966), as quoted by Marshall, Adams & Cameron (2000, p2) see this theory as characterised by four types of behaviour:

- support that enhances followers' sense of worth
- interactive facilitation that builds close, mutually satisfying group relationships
- goal emphasis that stimulates commitment to achievement of goals, including high levels of performance
- work facilitation activities, such as planning, co-ordination and organisation.

Rowley (1997) provides an overview of style theory and contingency theory leadership. Style theory is based on the premise that leaders adopt a range of styles and that some styles are more effective than others. The style adopted by a leader is influenced by their:

- values and beliefs
- confidence in colleagues' and subordinates' abilities
- tolerance of uncertainty
- own ability to contribute to the task
- experience of stress.

Contingency theory builds on style theory by proposing that the effectiveness of a style is contingent on the context and that managers can learn to modify their style to suit changing circumstance. The most appropriate style at any time is based on four variables: the leader; the led; the task; and ultimately, the context, which is influenced and/or constrained by the wider organisation and environment.

The importance of context and culture on effective leadership is a common theme in leadership literature. Robles (1998) for example, examines the various cultures that are present within a university and recognises four main culture types:

- collegial – finding meaning primarily in (subject) disciplines and tends to select leaders on the basis of personality traits
- managerial – finding meaning primarily in organisation, implementation and goals. Leaders need to be skilful in managing people
- developmental – finding meaning in teaching and learning, mission and

- values. Leaders need to be charismatic and collaborative
- negotiating – finding meaning in equitable and egalitarian policies, values confrontation and bargaining. Leaders tend to be similar to the managerial culture.

Mintzberg (1998) suggests that leadership is exercised generally on three levels:

- the individual level (mentoring, coaching and motivating)
- the group level (building teams and resolving conflict)
- the organisational level (building culture).

In many organisations, these levels are easily identifiable, but drawing on the analogy of a conductor in an orchestra, where hierarchies are very flat and embedded cultures are very strong, leadership is largely about *inspiring* and *energising* individuals. In these cases, leadership is covert or even invisible.

The cybernetic model developed by Birnbaum (1988) is discussed by Middlehurst & Elton (1992). Cybernetic systems are complex, distributed, subject to constant small readjustments and designed to run themselves once direction is established. Middlehurst & Elton contend that higher education institutions are cybernetic in nature, in that their cultures encourage individual autonomy within the overall framework of collective action (i.e. collegiality). This is demonstrated by:

- the development of shared culture, values and mission
- the importance placed on trust between different elements of the organisation and in relationships
- open access to information and feedback
- flattening of management hierarchies.

Consequently, cybernetic leadership builds on the transactional model by extending the leadership function from the senior staff to all staff in the organisation. Through involvement in committees, working groups and task forces, academic staff are both leaders and led. The authors note that enhancements in cybernetic systems require widespread and systematic training of individuals in a range of unfamiliar tasks.

The PL role is one that brings together an emphasis on both leading people and managing tasks. The inherent tension between these two activities is another theme running through leadership literature. In response, Adair (1983) proposes a three circle model of leadership, based on group dynamics: building on the task, the team and the individual. In this model, the leader is always aware of the group and the individual, bringing them together to achieve the common task, thus the circles are always viewed in relation to each other.

Adair sets out his principles of leadership as:

- identifying and communicating a common task
- planning by defining and setting tasks
- briefing in order to motivate and promote teamwork
- controlling to ensure progress and set standards
- evaluating through team appraisal and facing up to the consequences of one's actions

- motivating by making the individual feel valued and given responsibility
- developing and organising.

Yeilder & Codling (2004) take a different approach by proposing a model of shared leadership that separates managerial leadership and academic leadership into two separate but equally valued functions. Acknowledging that the notion of equal value is difficult to achieve in practice, they set out seven principles and supporting requirements that would address this. Specifically, at the programme level, they recommend the formation of programme teams including an academic leader and programme administrator, who can manage both tasks and people together through complementary skill sets.

The team approach to leadership is an interesting one in higher education where 'rugged individualism' has traditionally been prized. It is one, however, that may become more prevalent as universities consider how best to maximise diminishing resource.

### **2.3 Leadership learning and development**

Much of the literature refers, at some point, to the fact that leaders receive little in the way of training and that many have little choice in taking on leadership positions (Adair 1983; Pounder 2001; Yeilder & Codling 2004). However, there is also general agreement that learning appropriate leadership skills is both possible and desirable (Peters & Smith 1998; Ramsden 1998).

The stated benefits of academic leadership learning include:

- enhanced critical reflections on performance, institutional evaluation and competence in an organisation (Middlehurst 1995)
- using their own commitment as a lifelong learner to create an environment where others can learn continually, make best use of their knowledge, solve problems in research and teaching, and feel inspired to overcome the obstacles presented by the continuous change of modern university life (Ramsden 1998)
- the development of effective knowledge, behaviour and interpersonal skills in increasingly complex organisational settings (Scutt 2004)
- organisational growth (Yeilder & Codling 2004)
- alignment, building of a collaborative culture and managing outcomes (Debowski & Blake 2004)
- facilitating social and group learning (Blackmore & Blackwell 2006).

#### **2.3.1 What should programme leaders learn?**

Debowski & Blake (2004) note the limited availability of leadership learning opportunities that are either specifically tailored to the academic context or to leadership roles below that of head of school. However, in a paper that considers the developmental needs of academic leaders at all levels, they list PL (chair) learning needs as being:

- a grounding in core teaching principles, evaluation of programme processes and curricula redevelopment
- the development of generic attributes, teaching and learning policies and adoption of new technologies

- an awareness of marketing and quality processes
- an understanding of how to address performance issues, plagiarism and the student experience
- leadership skills to be able to oversee unit co-ordinators and other colleagues.

Heywood *et al.* (2001) and Barnett & Coates (2005) also emphasise the need for PLs to develop high quality knowledge and skills that prepare them for the complexity of working with others on curriculum issues. These developmental needs reflect the complexity of the programme leader role and include both management and leadership knowledge and skills. The stated needs do not, however, include the management of administrative processes. Programme leaders require training and support in all domains if they are to achieve overall competency.

The literature also points to a number of identifiable themes that professional development should reflect, which are detailed in Sections 2.3.1.1 to 2.3.1.3.

### **2.3.1.1 The implications and demands of context**

Middlehurst (1995) and Trowler *et al.* (2003) stress that leadership development should take cultural features, group dynamics and frameworks into account. Similarly, Marshal *et al.* (2000) contend that any attempt to develop academic leadership needs to encourage people to look outside their own contexts, needs, discontents and concerns. They add that this must also include multiple perspectives that are required to define leadership, and advocate the use of focus groups as a developmental activity. This point of view is validated by Boyett (1996) who stresses:

... the importance of the continuous flexibility of leadership style in order successfully to compensate for changes for any and every organisational or environmental circumstances. (p25)

However, Debowski & Blake (2004) conclude that academic leadership development programmes often fail to identify the needs of individuals and that this often makes such programmes appear irrelevant and burdensome. Generic leadership programmes are clearly not appropriate for programme leaders, who require support in achieving the specifics of an often ill-defined role and who cannot be assumed to hold a particular subset of managerial or leadership skills as a common starting point.

Relevancy can be achieved through explicit links to real work contexts and reward. Motivation through reward is supported by Ramsden (1998), cited in Pounder (2001), who believes in the 'encouragement of reward'.

### **2.3.1.2 The importance of empowering self and others**

Rowley (1997) suggests that leadership learning requires a greater emphasis on empowering activities. For example, Gratton & Pearson (1994) (cited in Rowley) suggest training in the following competencies: management style; delegation; recognition and feedback; interpersonal empathy; and ability to communicate a vision. Goleman *et al.* (2002) (cited in Scutt 2004) highlight the

need to develop emotional intelligence and the competencies required to achieve this, such as: self-awareness; personal strengths; self-management; self-control; transparency; adaptability; initiative; and optimism.

The enhancement of empowerment through supported critical reflection is another theme in the literature (Middlehurst 1995; Ramsden 1998; Denston & Gray 2001; Blackmore & Blackwell 2006). Wolverton *et al.* (2005) discuss the formal development of leadership skills workshops and advocate reflection and personal journaling as a developmental tool to record and explore effective and ineffective practices. Dentico (1999) also advocates the use of reflection through process simulations in which the participants use authentic environments and story-telling to examine decisions and acknowledge any weaknesses. However, Blackmore & Blackwell (2006) suggest that leadership development can also be informal, such as shadowing or personal support.

### **2.3.1.3 The link between leadership learning and doing**

A number of authors comment that leadership cannot be learned simply from a book or a programme of activity, although skills can be enhanced through critical self-reflection and personal development using techniques such as a case study (Ramsden 1998). Peters & Smith (1998) remind the reader that leadership and management do not require the same competencies and that this has profound implications for professional development. They argue that leadership competencies can only be gathered from experience, but that professional development is most effective when experience and learning are intertwined. They further state that the key principles underpinning leadership learning are challenge, recognition and support and that a leadership development programme should support participants to learn how to (among other things):

- get things done within the organisation's cultural and political norms
- confront old patterns and spearhead new ones
- identify the critical problems and ask the right questions
- act with courage in conditions of ambiguity, complexity and risk
- act together with others and know when to act alone.

The merits of action learning are often cited in the literature with respect to professional development. For example, Ramsden (1998) promotes the benefits of learning collaboratively from experience, and Edmonstone (2002) states that action learning is about the 'development of people, solving real problems, in work organisations'. Zuber-Skerrit (2002) defines action learning as 'learning from concrete experience and critical reflection; a process where groups of people address real problems'. He adds that the resulting solutions help the participants become *experts* and *own* the problems and solutions generated, and that action learning is particularly useful where there is a complex shared problem without straightforward answers. Each action learning programme should be distinctive because it is 'dependent on the context, organisation, culture and its purpose'. Marquardt (2000) believes that action learning can enhance leadership attributes by looking at *the big picture* and seeing the connection between events, issues and underlying trends.

## **2.4 Conclusions from the literature**

The literature review has provided a framework for exploring the PL role and the nature of professional development required to support it. In particular, to be appropriate and relevant, professional development should address the:

- full scope of the role and its responsibilities
- tension inherent in the managerial and academic leadership aspects of the role, including the transition from one role to another
- importance of the context in which the programme leader operates
- importance of motivating and empowering both the PL and the team with which they work
- complex and dynamic process of academic leadership that involves dealing creatively with opposing forces
- importance of linking learning with doing, so that PLs can both be supported through real work experiences and have opportunities to practice learning and development.

Consequently, determining what programme leaders actually do is a key element in devising professional development resources. As information in the literature on the programme leader role is limited, the primary research undertaken as part of this project aimed to determine whether there is a core set of responsibilities taken on by programme leaders. This is explored in Section 3.

### **3. Sector scan of the programme leader role**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Initial research of the literature identified very few examples of formal role descriptors. Debowski & Blake (2004) list the main functions of a PL (chair) as being:

- monitoring student outcomes and benchmarking with competitors
- assessing the coverage of key competencies in the overall programme
- monitoring the quality of outcomes across programmes
- ensuring that university policy is reflected within the programme
- providing guidance and direction to tutors, lecturers and unit leaders
- identifying new areas of content to be incorporated
- evaluating the programme for value and efficiency
- involving tutors and lecturers in ongoing review and development of the programme.

Rowley (1997, p80) lists a range of leadership roles within higher education including course leadership, defined as:

...operational management concerned with ensuring that courses are delivered successfully on a day to day basis, and team and leadership and motivation and resource management necessary to facilitate this process.

The paucity of other published role definitions meant that a key element of the higher education sector scan undertaken was to assess the extent to which PL activity is broadly consistent across the sector and the consequent impact for professional development. This section summarises these findings.

#### **3.2 Aims and objectives**

The main aim of this phase of the research project was to explore the roles and responsibilities of the programme leader in UK higher education. In particular to:

- identify models of programme leadership that are currently used
- investigate how the role is defined and supported, in relation to resources and time allowances
- gain an indication of the key functions, areas of responsibility and influences
- investigate current professional development and the perceived development needs for both new and experienced staff.

#### **3.3 Methodology**

Data were collected in two ways: an initial sector scan survey followed by focus groups with programme leaders at one new university in central England.

##### **3.3.1 Sector scan survey**

The data were collected via a questionnaire designed to elicit a *single* institutional response from an individual in that institution who was able to provide a cross-institutional overview. Consequently responses may not be wholly indicative of the institution. The questionnaire and covering email (see

Appendix A) were distributed via a number of JISC mailbases where it was felt that participants would hold posts most able to provide the overview. These were:

- HEDG (Higher Educational Developers Group)
- ISL (Improving Student Learning)
- SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association).

In addition, a further 54 questionnaires were sent to human resource managers, and a number of hard-copy questionnaires were made available at a HEDG meeting early in 2007. The questionnaire aimed to elicit:

- the nature of PL roles and responsibilities
- variations within the role across institutions and departments
- variations in the titles used for the PL
- models of programme leadership operating within institutions
- support available to staff taking on the role
- perceived developmental needs for new and experienced PLs.

The survey elicited 16 completed institutional survey responses from:

- Heriot-Watt University
- Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire (IADT)
- Liverpool John Moores University
- London School of Economics
- London South Bank University
- Napier University, Edinburgh
- Roehampton University
- University of Chester
- University of Derby
- University of Dundee
- University of Kent
- University of Leeds
- University of Liverpool
- University of Northumbria
- University of Plymouth
- University of Sunderland.

Additional related information was received from:

- University of Bournemouth
- University of East London
- University of Westminster
- University of Ulster.

Not all the returned questionnaires were fully completed. In addition, the section relating to the specifics of the PL role allowed multiple responses to facilitate the collection of data where institutions operated a number of different models of programme leadership. Six survey respondents attached examples of PL role descriptions and two institutions sent role descriptors in lieu of completing the survey. Additional information sent included: a PL information pack; a guide to module management; and information on a 20 credit part-time Masters level module in Programme Management and a SEDA recognised module in

leadership in HE. The results are discussed in Section 3.4.

### 3.3.2 Focus groups

Two focus groups were held in May 2007 with a total of nine PLs from a single post-92 university in central England. The groups were organised by the institution's Centre for Learning and Teaching and included a cross-section of new and experienced PLs. The aim was to investigate the PL role at an institution that had formal PL structures. The PL role was undergoing some revision at the time of interview, and so participant comments reflect the nature of the role at that point, rather than how it might develop in the future. The outcomes of the focus group discussions are summarised in Section 3.5.

## 3.4 Results from the UK sector scan survey

The following section outlines the questions and the responses from the survey.

### 3.4.1 Terms and titles for the programme leader role

The role titles reported varied greatly and included: course director; programme convenor; programme director/course leader; educational developer; subject leader; cohort leader; route leader; director of studies; module co-ordinator; programme co-ordinator; and programme leader. Programme leader was the most common term, used solely by five institutions, and four institutions used the term programme director. Few institutions had a single title for their programme leaders. Most reported to having a number of titles; for example, one institution uses all of the following: programme manager; programme leader; programme co-ordinator; and programme director.

### 3.4.2 Models of leadership

Table 3.1 illustrates that ten of the 16 institutions operate different models of programme leadership. Some respondents pointed out that role variation caused difficulty in job evaluation. Two respondents stated that all their programmes have a course convenor who has responsibility for quality, design and delivery of the course. One respondent stated that their institution operated the same model, but went on to describe different models.

**Table 3.1: Does your institution operate different models of programme/course leadership?**

Response	N
Yes	10
No	4
Don't know	1
No response	1

### 3.4.3 Provision of role descriptors

Six of the 16 respondents stated that role descriptors existed (see Table 3.2), while four respondents gave no response, and six institutions reported that they did not provide a role descriptor or were not aware of one.

**Table 3.2: Is/are there agreed programme/course leader role descriptors either institutionally, or in any part of the university?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>
Yes	6
No	5
Don't know	1
No response	4

#### **3.4.4 Functions of the programme leader**

Where a role descriptor did not exist, respondents were asked to consider a checkbox of possible PL functions and to indicate whether each function was either:

- always done by the PL
- mostly done by the PL
- usually done by someone else
- not done.

The functions were divided into five groups: administrative; student support; recruitment and admissions; academic leadership; and quality enhancement and assurance.

There were ten responses (of which two had also included an example role descriptor). Two respondents provided neither a role description nor an exemplar, and a number of respondents ticked two boxes to reflect role variation within an institution. Consequently row totals vary between functions, and it was not possible to present the information as percentages.

To gain an overview of the functions undertaken by the majority of staff in PL roles, the list of possible functions was sorted by the number of institutions indicating that a function was done a) always by PLs and b) mostly by PLs (see Table 3.3). From the ordered list, it is evident that the key functions undertaken by programme leaders across the sector are:

- quality enhancement and assurance activity
- academic leadership activity
- programme management/administration
- induction activity
- overseeing personal tutor activity.

**Table 3.3 Functions of a programme leader ordered by the number of responses that state the function is always done by programme leaders**

Functions	Type of function	Always done by PLs	Mostly done by PLs	Usually done by someone else	Not done
Co-ordinating the preparation for validation and review	QE & QA	9	2	0	0
Identifying, liaising with and responding to external examiners	QE & QA	9	1	0	0
Regular review of programme performance	QE & QA	8	3	0	0
Leading programme/course development including ensuring relevance and currency	Academic leadership	8	2	0	0
Liaising with other academics and administrators within the department to ensure the smooth running of the programme	Administration	7	4	0	0
Providing guidance and direction to programme/course team and/or module leaders	Academic leadership	7	3	0	0
Advising on programme/course resource requirements	QE & QA	7	3	1	0
Co-ordinating induction to the programme	Recruitment & admissions	6	5	1	0
Ensuring the maintenance and updating of programme/course documentation	Administration	6	4	0	0
Collection and use of programme-based formal and informal student feedback	QE & QA	6	3	1	0
Ensuring university policy is reflected in the programme/course	Academic leadership	6	2	1	1
Co-ordinating and allocating personal tutors	Student support	6	0	4	1
Monitoring and responding to student attendance	Student support	5	3	3	
Co-ordinating of documentation for recognition of prior learning	Recruitment & admissions	4	3	2	1
Recruitment activity including open days etc	Recruitment & admissions	3	5	3	0
Providing curriculum guidance/advice to institutional managers	Academic leadership	3	5	1	1
Timetabling	Administration	3	4	4	1
Activity and/or paperwork related to student appeals	Administration	3	4	4	0
Providing students with academic and/or pastoral support	Student support	3	4	4	0
Leading process for agreeing student achievement and progression	Administration	3	3	4	0
Co-ordinating dissertation supervision	Student support	2	5	3	0
Marketing the programme	Recruitment & admissions	2	2	8	0
Admissions activity	Recruitment & admissions	2	2	6	1
Leading work around equal opportunities, disability etc	Student support	1	3	6	1
Leading work around identifying and addressing plagiarism	Student support	1	2	7	0
Ensuring maintenance of student records	Administration	0	3	6	1

### 3.4.5 Summary of the programme leader role descriptors

In addition to the checkbox section of the questionnaire, eight institutions provided nine role descriptors. These were analysed using the previous PL function framework in order to compare both across role descriptors and with the checkbox exercise undertaken by the other institutions (see Table 3.4). It should be stressed that this analysis can only be used as a comparison to the sector survey results in the broadest terms, as it was not always possible to be certain that categories matched exactly or that the role descriptors listed everything that the PL is actually responsible for or does. However, the analysis did give a flavour of, firstly, how variable the role across institutions is, and secondly, the areas of greatest commonality.

**Table 3.4 Functions of a programme leader extracted from role descriptors**

Functions of a programme leader	Function type	No. of role descriptors
Liaising with other academics and administrators within the dept to ensure the smooth running of the programme	Administration	9
Regular review of programme performance	QE & QA	8
Providing students with academic and/or pastoral support	Student support	7
Recruitment activity including open days etc	Recruitment & admissions	7
Providing guidance and direction to programme/course team and/or module leaders	Academic leadership	7
Leading programme/course development including ensuring relevance and currency	Academic leadership	7
Collection and use of programme-based formal and informal student feedback	QE & QA	7
Ensuring the maintenance and updating of programme/course documentation	Administration	6
Leading process for agreeing student achievement and progression	Administration	6
Identifying, liaising with and responding to external examiners	QE & QA	5
Co-ordinating the preparation for validation and review	QE & QA	5
Advising on programme/course resource requirements	QE & QA	5
Marketing the programme	Recruitment & admissions	4
Admissions activity	Recruitment & admissions	4
Co-ordinating induction to the programme	Recruitment & admissions	3
Ensuring university policy is reflected in the programme/course	Academic leadership	3
Activity and/or paperwork related to student appeals	Administration	3
Ensuring maintenance of student records	Administration	2
Co-ordinating and allocating personal tutors	Student support	2
Timetabling	Administration	1
Monitoring and responding to student attendance	Student support	1
Leading work around identifying and addressing plagiarism	Student support	1
Providing curriculum guidance/advice to institutional managers	Academic leadership	1
Co-ordinating dissertation supervision	Student support	0
Leading work around equal opportunities, disability etc	Student support	0
Co-ordinating of documentation for recognition of prior learning	Recruitment & admissions	0

Using this framework, PL role descriptors appear to be dominated by academic leadership, quality enhancement and assurance, and programme management and administration activity. However, the role descriptors were much more likely to allude to responsibilities for the academic and/or pastoral support of students and recruitment activity including open days than were the respondents to the sector scan. The difference in emphasis may be related to the frequency of undertaking any particular function and the evident priorities of senior managers.

Role descriptors also frequently included specific committee responsibilities (both chairing and membership) and liaison with employers and professional bodies. Although these activities are implied in the survey function list above, they are not explicitly referenced.

It is interesting that only three role descriptors identify the responsibility of ensuring university policy was reflected in the programme, and only one descriptor references providing curriculum guidance and advice to institutional managers. While acknowledging that role descriptors will not capture all aspects of a PL's work, the absence of these functions may reflect a lack of explicitness around the strategic link between policy and practice inherent in the programme leader role.

### **3.4.6 Access to time allowance to undertake programme leader duties**

Five responding institutions (see Table 3.5) have centrally agreed time allocations to enable them to undertake programme leader duties. This was variously described as:

- a modified teaching timetable
- considerable remission off their timetable
- the equivalent of one module and 150 hours per academic year.

Of those 11 who reported having no centrally agreed time allowance, eight said there was some form of local time allowance. This appears to vary from being individually negotiated, to being decided at school level, to workload allocation models. However, local time allowance was not necessarily available in all schools in a single institution. Three institutions did not appear to have any time allowance.

**Table 3.5: Is there any agreed time allowance?**

<b>Time allowance</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Centrally agreed	5	11
Locally agreed	8	3

### **3.4.7 Developmental needs of *new* and *experienced* programme leaders**

Respondents were asked to identify the three main developmental needs for new and experienced programme leaders. A summary of the open responses is shown for new PLs in Table 3.6 and for experienced PLs in Table 3.7.

**Table 3.6: Developmental needs of new programme leaders**

<b>Developmental needs</b>	<b>N</b>
Induction to policy and systems	9
Induction into the QA responsibilities and framework including writing annual reports and operating boards of studies	8
Clarification of the role and responsibilities of the programme leader	6
Existence of a support system	5
Guidance on managing module leaders/staff	5
Course design principles, approaches to assessment and curriculum development	4
Mentoring or shadowing	2
Team working - leading and developing teams	2
Communication skills	1

**Table 3.7: Developmental needs of experienced programme leaders**

<b>Developmental needs</b>	<b>N</b>
Programme design, development and review processes	11
Managing and motivating others	7
Enhancing learning, teaching and assessment approaches	5
Programme, resource and time management	4
Sector awareness and benchmarking	2
Work/life balance	2
Career development	1
Advice on personal tutoring	1
Support	1

The key developmental needs identified for new PLs were: induction into the policies, systems and practices of the institution as pertained to the role; clarification of the scope of the role; and skills development in academic leadership. For experienced PLs, the emphasis was on: enhancing programme design; development and review processes; and managing and motivating others.

The sector scan identified five higher education institutions with either existing or planned professional development programmes to support new programme leadership. Although not all present in each curriculum, the broad elements of these programmes include:

- discussion around the purpose, aims and responsibilities of the programme leader role
- discussion of the broader higher education context in which programme leadership operates
- clarification of university infrastructures, regulations and key individuals
- introductions to administrative functions such as managing assessment, recordkeeping and financial and resource management
- introductions to specific academic leadership functions, such as programme development and managing committees
- introductions to quality assurance and enhancement activities, such as programme management and review, and gathering and using student feedback
- introductions to student management, including induction processes and student support resources.

Two staff development programmes (one of which was credit rated) more explicitly referenced the development of academic leadership skills through elements such as:

- leadership style and theories
- dealing with conflict
- the art of delegation
- influencing skills
- action-centred leadership
- creative problem solving
- management vs. leadership
- self-evaluation
- leading change.

There were no staff development programmes identified specifically to support experienced programme leaders. This may be linked to the individual nature of the support required leading to insufficient critical mass to warrant the development of formal programmes.

### **3.5 Outcomes of the focus groups at a new higher education institution in central England**

The researchers had felt it would be useful to talk in more depth to some experienced programme leaders who were working in an institution that had formal programme leader structures in place, and chose to do this at a post-92 institution in central England.

There were a number of interesting and unusual features regarding how the programme leader role operated at the chosen institution. Firstly, programme leadership was a three-year appointment for which there was a salary enhancement. Consequently, the role was regarded as a promotion and part of their general development as academics. Time allowances were negotiated individually with a line manager and were dependent on the balance of other duties. The three-year period created a natural point of review for individuals to take stock of how they wish their career to progress. Secondly, an extended handover between old and new PL was systematically designed into the process in order to facilitate the smooth running of the programme. Thirdly, in the revised system, pastoral care was being taken out of the PL remit, to be controlled centrally within a department, while academic support was remaining.

Key themes to emerge from the focus group discussions included:

- a) the importance of consulting with and listening to PLs on proposals for institutional changes in order to ensure that any such changes are workable in practice:

There are changes going on for the last five or six years with the programme, the calendar and all those kind of things and [programme leaders] do need to be consulted because they are the ones who are going to have to organise the work for them.

- b) the importance of keeping PLs informed of cross-institutional matters and 'the bigger picture':

Within our department we do try to have weekly meetings with the Head of Department ... that means anything coming from 'above' comes to the Head of Department. He can then keep us in the loop and we can talk to our people.

- c) the job satisfaction associated with student interaction:

Close contact with students has been the best thing and from a teaching point of view and from a pastoral point of view and from a strategic and a quality point of view. I think it is seeing how the students fit into that and helping them to do that because they are interesting not just customers.

The graduation ceremonies are wonderful things. To see these people walking across the stage, who in their first year had completely messed up their programme.

- d) the frustrations associated with workload and juggling competing demands, and the personal qualities associated with being effective:

The thing I don't like is you have so many other things to do and something has to give. So I spent two hours with a student and I was thinking there has to be a better way of doing this because I've got other things I need to do. At the end of the two hours I had got him sorted, but it's that thing about being pulled in four different directions at once that I didn't like.

In terms of personal attributes I think [programme leaders] need to be relatively calm and very organised. Have to be able to keep lots of plates spinning and when the odd one falls you have to be calm enough to pick that one up again as opposed to run away.

- e) the importance of being meticulous with administration:

Write down what you say to students. Write down decisions you have made so you have a way of going back because one of the things about doing so many different things is you don't remember what you did two weeks ago or what you said.

You need to recognise how organised you are. You have to be quite systematic. Some people work well in a crisis. I had a role of sharing the [programme] leadership reviews for a couple of years so there were joint [programme] leaders in the same programme and inevitably things got missed because we both assumed the other person did it. If you are not organised, I would definitely say to try to schedule the week as much as you can and set time aside specifically for specific tasks. Part of this is checking your emails but part of it is

saying 'I've got some documents to prepare. I'm going to do that on Wednesday morning'. You won't actually keep to it but it is a good start.

f) the importance of formal mentorship when taking on the PL role:  
It was X who took me under his wing who said: do this; don't do that; don't panic about that. The one thing that I was petrified of doing was chairing meetings because there was absolutely no way I could run a meeting. Suddenly, I was the one controlling the meeting... From having previously been a heckler, I was suddenly in charge. But, again that was about me practising the one thing I was concerned about doing, as I didn't think I had the authority to chair a meeting and to take charge of senior colleagues at the time. So it was something that I had to go and do. If it hadn't been for the mentor and me raising my own fears I wonder what would have been done?

g) the challenges of academic leadership:  
Although we haven't got line management responsibility, you have to manage people. With people you class as friends, you could ask for help. People that you don't have much contact with ... you have to try and find your way around working with them. So I used a variety of skills depending who I was dealing with. Communicating in different ways, for different people. And that's a really hard thing to do because they are people who in every other way you see as senior to yourself that you are asking for their module mark, chasing up their second mark .... They keep putting you off and you are thinking, how far can I do this before I turn to the line manager? You have to be careful how you do things, find your own way.

It's learning how to cajole and motivate people, making a judgement on what motivates people.

h) the importance of induction to the PL role:  
I think the important thing is within induction where you need to know when things need to be done, how important relatively things are and what order things should be done. As long as you know the landscape, you can work within that. Your own personal scope should allow you to do that, but it is the blundering around at the start you need to avoid, because that snowballs into a lack of confidence in your ability to do the job.

The ideal induction session would be, 'These are the procedures, in terms of the undergraduate module scheme, postgraduate etc. This is what you have to do and this is when you have to do it' interspersed with the real world from a [programme] leader who is experienced, who can tell you that

this one is going to take two months to do, this one will take two days and another will be half an hour. That is of great value and I think you can get that over quickly and give people the confidence to get things running.

... part of the induction should be: this is at the end of the year, what should I have achieved? It wasn't until I got to write my first annual report, we used the October [programme] board to cover everything I said was in the action plan and you realise ... at the end of the year I might have done it but hadn't evidenced it and it hasn't been through the right processes. To have that retrospective look at the start, would save a lot of problems and it's important to know where you are heading. I probably had no concept because I couldn't see it from the [programme leader's] point of view when I took over the job. I had no concept of where I was heading and I think that is a really valuable experience.

- j) the importance of having back-up from the head of the academic department:

Occasionally you come across someone who just won't do what you need them to do – it's important that you have someone who will back you up. Sometimes it's a matter of helping them with their priorities and sometimes it needs something more.

It's the Head of Department that's in charge of the resources. It's only them that can redistribute them. I had a Head of Department that wasn't willing to help – it was a nightmare!

Overall, the focus group participants were enthusiastic about their role and the career development opportunity that it presented. They generally felt supported and valued, and the importance of this aspect came across strongly in the discussion. The role was not without its frustrations, however, but these appeared to be manageable even if challenging.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

This strand of the research aimed to:

- identify models of programme leadership that are currently used across the higher education sector
- investigate how the role is defined and supported, in relation to resources and time allowances
- gain an indication of the key functions, areas of responsibility and influences
- investigate current professional development and the perceived development needs for both new and experienced staff.

From the sector scan undertaken, it would appear at first glance that there is some commonality in the findings. However, what was noticeable was that the specifics vary quite considerably. It became clear that the PL role varies

greatly both between and within higher education institutions. This is reflected in the wide range of titles used and the time allowances made available. Lack of role clarity is further evident by the common absence of agreed job descriptions.

However, despite these variations, common scope and responsibilities are apparent. These are:

- academic leadership activity
- quality enhancement and assurance activity
- programme management/administration
- induction activity
- recruitment activity
- management of certain aspects of pastoral support.

The framework within which the role operates has a clear impact on PL attitudes. The experience of the programme leaders at a central England university emphasised that supportive structures lead to a positive experience overall. However, even where mentoring is available, professional development is still required to ease the transition of staff new to the role.

The sector scan demonstrated limited availability of specific professional development for PLs, although good practice does exist in pockets. The development needs of new PLs are identified as being primarily:

- induction to institutional policy and systems
- induction into the institution's quality framework and subsequent PL responsibilities
- clarification of the PL role and its associated responsibilities.

The emphasis here is on providing the individual with the knowledge and understanding to be able to take up the reins quickly and do the job effectively.

The development needs of experienced PLs are identified as being primarily:

- greater facility with the institution's programme design, development and review processes
- managing and motivating others
- enhancing learning, teaching and assessment approaches.

This signals a clear shift in the developmental needs of programme leaders, as they grow in experience, away from simply accessing knowledge and understanding towards applying that knowledge and understanding. This, in turn, strengthens the leadership aspect of their role.

An important point to note, however, is that there was one main difference between what was identified within the literature and what was flagged up in the sector scan. Whereas several authors (Ramsden 1998; Heywood *et al.* 2001; Heywood & Murray 2005; Barnett & Coate 2005) had highlighted curriculum issues – including pedagogical considerations – as a desirable role for high quality academic leadership, this was not at all apparent in this sector scan.

Section 4 investigates the nature of programme leader role in more detail at one post-92 university in Scotland.

## 4. Programme leadership at one new university

Section 3 reported on the outcomes of a broad sector scan of the PL role. The main objective of the research strand discussed here, was to gain greater insight into the development needs of PLs at one institution, and in particular to identify:

- the scope of PL roles across a range of departments;
- how the role is supported
- professional development needs of new and experienced PLs.

Data were collected in three ways:

- a survey of PLs
- interviews with a representative cross-institutional subset of respondents to the PL survey
- interviews with senior managers.

The outcomes of each are discussed separately in Sections 4.1 to 4.3.

### 4.1 Outcomes of the programme leader survey

#### 4.1.1 Methodology

In order to facilitate comparability, the questionnaire used was very similar to the institutional survey discussed in Section 3. It was distributed electronically in January 2007 to all staff as an email attachment and with a covering email marked for the attention of PLs (see Appendix B) and redistributed a second time two weeks later using the same method. Individual PLs were then targeted during March and June 2007 to increase response rates. Overall, there were 28 responses. Table 4.1 outlines the number of responses by school. Twenty-six were PLs, one a module leader (who was about to take on the programme leader role) and one a facility administrator. The responses from the module leader and administrator were not discarded, as, after inspection, they provided an interesting and informed perspective from experienced staff.

**Table 4.1: Response by school**

School	N	School	N
Creative Industries	7	Marketing, Tourism & Languages	2
Engineering & Built Environment	5	Life Sciences	1
Computing	2	Health & Social Sciences	5
Accounting, Economics & Statistics	2	Nursing, Midwifery & Social Care	0
Management & Law	4	Customised Programmes	0

A limitation of the questionnaire was that there was no option to select a shared task and, as tasks were often shared, this led to some respondents ticking both the 'always done by programme leaders' and 'done by someone else' boxes. This was addressed in the analysis by creating a new category of 'shared function'.

#### 4.1.2 Respondents' current roles

Table 4.2 lists the roles of the respondents and Table 4.3 outlines the distribution of their multiple roles. The majority of PLs (82%) were also module leaders. Only six PLs were also senior lecturers.

**Table 4.2: Roles undertaken by the respondents**

Role	N (%)
Module Leader (ML)	24 (86)
Programme Leader (PL)	26 (93)
Personal Development Tutor (PDT)	14 (50)
Senior Lecturer (SL)	6 (21)
Programme Director (PD)	1 (4)
Other	1 (4)

**Table 4.3: Distribution of multiple roles**

Role	N
ML+PL	23
ML+PL+ PDT	13
ML+PL+SL	6
ML+PD	1
ML+PL+PD	1
ML+PL+PD+PDT	1

The length of time in the PL role varied between two months and 19 years. Eight had been in the role for less than one year, and 11 had been in the role between two and seven years.

#### 4.1.3 Availability of agreed role descriptors

Only four respondents identified an agreed PL role descriptor in their school (see Table 4.4). Not all respondents from the same school recognised the existence of an agreed role descriptor, indicating that either the descriptors are not universally used within the school (perhaps as a consequence of earlier institutional restructuring that combined previously separate academic areas) or that individuals had not been made aware of their existence.

**Table 4.4: Provision of role descriptors**

Response	N (%)
No	19 (68)
Yes	4 (14)
Not sure	4 (14)
No response	1 (4)

#### 4.1.4 Functions of the programme leader

The functions were again divided into five groups: administrative; student support; recruitment and admissions; academic leadership; and quality enhancement and assurance.

##### 4.1.4.1 Administrative functions

All respondents considered that PLs either led or shared the function of 'liaising

with other academics and administrators to ensure the smooth running of the programme' (see Table 4.5). The majority were also responsible for maintaining and updating programme documentation and leading the process for agreeing student achievement and progression. Only a minority had responsibility for timetabling or ensuring the maintenance of student records, reflecting a move within the institution to centralised recordkeeping and timetabling systems.

**Table 4.5: Administrative functions**

Function	Always done by PLs	Shared	Usually done by someone else	Not sure or (no response)	Other contributors to function
Liaising with other academics and administrators within the dept to ensure the smooth running of the programme	22	5	0	1	Unspecified
Ensuring the maintenance and updating of programme documentation	18	3	7	0	Administrators
Leading process for agreeing student achievement and progression	17	3	4	4	Deputes, Administrators, Subject Group Leader
Activity and/or paperwork related to student appeals	11	5	6	(2)	Head of School, Module Leaders, Administrators
Timetabling	7	2	19	0	Administrators
Ensuring maintenance of student records	1	6	16	3 (2)	Administrators

Unsurprisingly, administrators were frequently cited as contributors in either sharing or leading administrative tasks not led by PLs. However, with respect to student appeals, responsibility was also shared with the head of school.

#### 4.1.4.2 Student support functions

**Table 4.6: Student support functions**

Function	Always done by PLs	Shared	Usually done by someone else	Not sure or (no response)	Other contributors to function
Providing students with academic and/or pastoral support	19	5	4	0	Personal Tutors, Module Leaders, Year Tutors
Co-ordinating and allocating personal development tutors	14	10	0	3 (1)	Head of School, Administrators, Faculty Assistant Manager
Monitoring and responding to student attendance	12	3	11	1 (1)	Programme Leader, Deputes, Module Leaders, Year Tutors, Administrator, Personal Tutors
Leading work around identifying and addressing plagiarism	8	1	19	5 (1)	Plagiarism Officer, School Quality Committee, a designated Senior Lecturer, Module Leader, Year Tutor
Co-ordinating dissertation supervision	6	2	18	1 (1)	Dissertation Module Leader, Dissertation Co-ordinator
Leading work around equal opportunities, disability etc	0	0	0	0	Disability Support, Administrator, a designated member of staff

Twenty-four respondents said that PLs led or shared the functions of 'providing students with academic and/or pastoral support' and 'co-ordinating and allocating personal development tutors' (see Table 4.6). However, PLs were unlikely to be leading work around plagiarism, co-ordinating dissertation work or equal opportunities. Student support functions were shared with, or undertaken by, a much greater range of contributors than were administrative functions. This variation in perceived loci of responsibility may contribute to some of the role confusion identified in Section 2.

#### 4.1.4.3 Recruitment and admissions functions

PLs mostly either led or shared responsibility for four out of the five recruitment and admissions functions listed (see Table 4.7). The exception was 'co-ordinating of documentation for recognition of prior learning', where only nine PLs led in this area. Contributors to recruitment and admissions functions were largely other academics with support from the institution's recruitment and registry professionals.

**Table 4.7: Recruitment and admissions functions**

Function	Always done by PLs	Shared	Usually done by someone else	Not sure or (no response)	Other contributors to functions
Co-ordinating induction to the programme	21	5	1	0 (1)	Registry, Programme Leader Deputes, Programme Director
Marketing the programme	17	8	2	1	Programme team
Recruitment activity including open days etc	15	12	0	1	Recruitment Office
Admissions activity	14	9	2	0 (3)	Admissions Officer, Programme Leader Deputes, Senior Lecturer, Registry, Administrators
Co-ordinating of documentation for recognition of prior learning	9	5	7	5 (2)	Recruitment team, Administrators, Senior Lecturer

#### 4.1.4.4 Academic leadership functions

Academic leadership has been identified in Sections 2 and 3 as a key part of the PL role. Table 4.8 confirms the importance of the academic leadership function, but it is interesting that:

- fourteen respondents (50%) were not sure who provided curriculum guidance/advice to institutional managers
- seven (25%) were not sure who ensured that university policy was reflected in the programme
- five respondents (18%) were not sure who provided guidance and direction to the programme team and/or module leaders.

This may indicate that the academic leadership function may be the area least defined. Contributors to academic leadership functions were identified generally as academic colleagues, including subject group leaders.

**Table 4.8: Academic leadership functions**

Function	Always done by PLs	Shared	Usually done by someone else	Not sure or (no response)	Other contributors to function
Leading programme/course development including ensuring relevance and currency	21	4	2	1	Subject Group Leader or colleagues
Providing guidance and direction to programme team and/or module leaders	19	4	0	5	Subject Group Leader
Ensuring university policy is reflected in the programme	18	2	1	7	Subject Group Leader or colleagues
Providing curriculum guidance/ advice to institutional managers	12	1	1	14	Undefined

**4.1.4.5 Quality enhancement and assurance functions**

Quality enhancement and assurance were also identified in the sector scan as key functions, and this is reflected in the survey responses summarised in Table 4.9. Contributors to quality functions are generally other academic colleagues who might be considered part of a programme team such as programme deputes, subject area senior lecturers and module leaders. Administrators also supported the collection and use of student feedback.

**Table 4.9: Quality functions**

Function	Always done by PLs	Shared	Usually done by someone else	Not sure or (no response)	Other contributors to function
Co-ordinating the preparation for validation and review	23	3	0	2	Subject area Senior Lecturer, Programme Leader Deputes
Regular review of programme performance	22	3	1	2	Board of Studies Members, subject area Senior Lecturer
Advising on programme resource requirements	20	4	1	2 (1)	Module Leaders, subject area Senior Lecturer
Collection and use of programme-based formal and informal student feedback	20	1	5	2	Module Leaders, Administrators
Identifying, liaising with and responding to external examiners	18	7	0	2 (1)	Module Leaders, Board of Studies Members, subject area Senior Lecturer

**4.1.4.6 Additional functions of programme leaders**

Respondents were given the opportunity to add functions of their role that had not been already identified on the given list. Responses given include:

Relationship building with students and interaction with the wider business community in order to facilitate reputation and gain work experience for the students and also writing student references. In addition, also liaison with support services, careers; delivering letters to students for central departments such as registry and dealing with queries from potential customers.

Teaching, contact with industry and external bodies.

Financial management.

Covering every other job no one else will do and keeping everybody happy.

#### 4.1.4.7 Overview of the functions undertaken by programme leaders

The list of possible functions was sorted by the number of PLs indicating that a function was done a) always by PLs and b) a shared function with others (see Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10: Functions of a programme leader ordered by number of respondents stating the function is always done by programme leaders**

Function	Type of Function	Always done by PLs	Shared	Usually done by someone else	Not sure or (no response)
Co-ordinating the preparation for validation and review	QE & QA	23	3	0	2
Liaising with other academics and administrators within the department to ensure the smooth running of the programme	Administration	22	5	0	0 (2)
Regular review of programme performance	QE & QA	22	3	1	2
Co-ordinating induction to the programme	Recruitment & admissions	21	5	1	0 (1)
Leading programme/course development including ensuring relevance and currency	Academic leadership	21	4	2	1
Advising on programme resource requirements	QE & QA	20	4	1	2 (1)
Collection and use of programme-based formal and informal student feedback	QE & QA	20	1	5	2
Providing students with academic and/or pastoral support	Student support	19	5	4	3 (1)
Providing guidance and direction to programme team and/or module leaders	Academic leadership	19	4	0	5
Identifying, liaising with and responding to external examiners	QE & QA	18	7	0	2 (1)
Ensuring the maintenance and updating of programme documentation	Administration	18	3	7	0
Ensuring university policy is reflected in the programme	Academic leadership	18	2	1	7
Marketing the programme	Recruitment & admissions	17	8	2	1
Leading process for agreeing student achievement and progression	Administration	17	3	4	1
Recruitment activity including open days etc	Recruitment & admissions	15	12	0	1
Co-ordinating and allocating personal development tutors	Student support	14	10	0	1 (1)
Admissions activity	Recruitment & admissions	14	9	2	0 (3)
Monitoring and responding to student attendance	Student support	12	3	11	1 (1)
Providing curriculum guidance/advice to institutional managers	Academic leadership	12	1	1	14
Activity and/or paperwork related to student appeals	Administration	11	5	6	0
Co-ordinating of documentation for recognition of prior learning	Recruitment & admissions	9	5	7	5 (2)
Leading work around identifying and addressing plagiarism	Student support	8	1	19	0
Timetabling	Administration	7	2	19	3 (2)
Co-ordinating dissertation supervision	Student support	6	2	18	5 (1)
Ensuring maintenance of student records	Administration	1	6	16	4
Leading work around equal opportunities, disability etc	Student support	0	0	0	0

It is evident from the ordered list that the functions most common to programme leadership in this institution are:

- quality enhancement and assurance activity
- academic leadership activity
- programme management/administration
- induction activity
- the nature of academic/pastoral support for students.

#### 4.1.5 Experience of professional development

A minority of respondents (18%) had been offered professional development and support (see Table 4.11). What existed was limited, and of those who had received support, this was identified as a two-hour postgraduate programme leaders event. However, one respondent – a brand new PL – had had access to formal peer-support, and workshops on chairing meetings and writing annual reports.

**Table 4.11: Professional development**

Response	N (%)
No	21 (75)
Yes	5 (18)
Not applicable	1 (4)
No response	1 (4)

#### 4.1.6 Access to time allowance to undertake programme leader duties

Twenty-three respondents had time allowance to facilitate PL duties (see Table 4.12), although its nature varied greatly. Allowances included:

- 80 hours per academic year
- 5% of contract
- two days per week
- 120 hours per academic year
- four person weeks
- six hours per week.

In some departments, there was evidence of workload models operating based on factors such as the number of students on the programme.

**Table 4.12: Time allowance**

Response	N (%)
No	3 (11)
Yes	23 (82)
Not applicable	1 (4)
No response	1 (4)

#### 4.1.7 Developmental needs for new programme leaders

The largest category (n=25) of developmental needs suggested for new PLs was that of gaining an underpinning knowledge of university systems and processes, resources available and context in which the PL role operated. This included gaining greater knowledge of recordkeeping, the operation of programme boards, student representation and quality assurance processes. The second largest category (n=14) was training around the specifics of how to

go about administrative tasks, including details of what to do, when to do it and how to do it. This was linked to role clarification, but was more focused on the consequence of responsibility rather than the responsibility itself. For example, PLs may be responsible for writing a reflective programme annual report, but new PLs may not know what this translates into in practice, how to go about it or how to use it for programme enhancement.

Eleven respondents identified a need for role clarification, both for themselves and for others with whom they work, in order to understand who can provide support and how responsibilities and authority link between the various roles. Eleven identified a need for specific support in the form of mentoring and shadowing, particularly if it included a handover briefing.

**Table 4.13: Areas of development for new programme leaders**

<b>Areas of development identified</b>	<b>N</b>
Underpinning knowledge of systems, resources and context	25
Training on what to do and when/how to do it	14
Role clarification for self and others	11
Specific support/mentoring/shadowing	11
Managing programme teams and peers	4
Programme design and LTA	2
Handling liaison with externals	1
Implications of student recruitment and retention	1

The lack of a central resource for PLs was also identified, meaning that each PL had to find things out for themselves.

#### **4.1.8 Developmental needs for experienced programme leaders**

Whereas respondents to the question about the development needs of new PLs were largely in accord, there was much greater variation in the opinions of the needs of experienced PLs, and 11 of those who completed the survey did not respond to this question at all. Table 4.14 summarises the responses.

**Table 4.14: Areas of development for experienced programme leaders**

<b>Areas of development identified</b>	<b>N</b>
Refreshers in underpinning knowledge of systems, resources and context	6
Better communication and consultation on changes in practice	5
Help with the administrative burden	5
Time and time management skills	4
Help with dealing with students and how to support students	4
Training and involvement in resource management	3
Role clarification for self and others	2
Managing programme teams and peers	2
Programme design and LTA	2
Help with preparing for validation and review	2
Help with marketing and sector awareness	2
Specific support/mentoring/shadowing	1

## **4.2 Outcomes of programme leader interviews**

The main objectives of the interviews were to gain a better understanding of:

- perceptions of the various competences and characteristics that contribute to effective programme leadership
- challenges faced, and the methods used to cope
- areas where professional development could benefit both new and experienced PLs.

In total, fourteen interviews lasting approximately one hour were carried out. Those who took part came from across the disciplines, although not all schools were represented. The collective experience of interviewees was extensive. Overall they had been PLs for between 12 months and 20 years, and some had been a PL more than once in their careers. Most felt part of a programme team, which variously included module leaders, PL deputies, full-time and part-time lecturers, technicians, administrators, and members of the Board of Studies

### **4.2.1 How individuals became programme leaders**

The majority of interviewees had been asked to take on the role, rather than having volunteered, typically when the previous PL had either left or resigned the role after having done their share of service. Common remarks included:

You usually get painted into a corner to become a PL.

[T]he job is an important job but nobody wants to do it.

It was by default – every member of the team was asked if they wanted to take on the role, and everyone else refused, so I got it.

Three interviewees became PLs because they had originally developed the programme, and one took on the job when they started work at the university and was asked to do it as part of their development.

### **4.2.2 What programme leaders liked about the role**

PLs were asked to identify what they liked about their role. Their responses tended to be both unequivocal and similar. The most rewarding element of the role related to students – such as representing students and solving problems associated with them. Statements included:

Contact with students.

Making sure that the student perspective is addressed.

Influencing students' careers.

Seeing a successful student, and their families, at the graduation ceremony.

One interviewee reflected that contact with the students through programme leadership is different to teaching. Another remarked that, in a sense, their students belonged to them, and they enjoyed seeing them fulfil their potential.

Another enjoyable part of the role was having a team ethos; building and being part of a team, bringing the team together, and having responsibility for the programme:

Being a programme leader has allowed me to build a team and build an identity.

The challenges involved in the role and a sense of responsibility over the programme were also perceived as worthwhile:

Being a programme leader is a big challenge, and for me a big responsibility, but I also think it's good for the School, (and) for the School reputation.

Other interviewees felt that steering the direction of the programme was the most rewarding part of the role:

The ability to direct the course design and being in control of a programme.

Being able to make a difference to how that programme works, so the programme is as robust as possible and the students are able to progress and get jobs at the end of it.

I just enjoy having that responsibility, that control over the programme; the way it goes, the shape of it, what happens in it and just being in touch with everything, being responsible for everything that goes on around it.

#### **4.2.3 What programme leaders disliked most about the role**

The area of work most disliked by PLs was the amount of administration involved, for which they perceived a lack of support. Some interviewees suggested that an administrative model could be adopted, or that administrative staff should take on many of the tasks that PLs undertake at the moment, to free their time for academic duties:

The cost of me sitting doing basic things for six hours a week doesn't bear thinking about!

Three interviewees highlighted challenges to the PL's role that arose from being given additional responsibilities without increased authority. A PL was not necessarily in a promoted post, such as being a senior lecturer, and often did not have the authority of being a line manager over other staff while still being responsible for the work of their team. Consequently, the interviewees felt they had to rely on the goodwill of team members and their own motivational or diplomatic skills to achieve goals, rather than being able to make use of the authority that accompanies an acknowledged senior status:

At best you're a project manager, you know, where you've got to rely on goodwill and the timely completion of jobs by other people ... I don't have any line management authority to expect them to do things by a certain date.

Another felt that the validation and scrutiny process was the worst part of the

role due to the perceived difficulty of the task and lack of transparency around expectations.

One PL, however, had found that while he did not have the status of a promoted post, the authority of the PL's role had given him:

... a standing within the school, within the faculty and even within the university.

A related issue, brought up by a member of staff who was about to take up the role of PL, was around the ill-defined boundaries of authority and responsibility for PLs. The example given was around whose responsibility it was to decide whether late submissions of student work should be accepted. Clearer guidance was needed for PLs on such matters, since responsibility for various issues could lie with PLs, the module leader or the school.

Do I have the authority to say that's what we're doing on this programme, or can I only make strong recommendations?

Authority was further blurred because it was felt that there were many aspects of programme management for which PLs were held responsible but which were outwith their control – such as budgets and timetabling problems. This sense of powerlessness was seen as an essential downside to the role.

There was also a strong perception among some PLs that programme leadership is undervalued, or at least not valued in the same way as research:

[P]rogramme leadership isn't something that's really looked upon as something that's of real value to your academic career.

There also seemed to be a lack of recognition and reward. This was highlighted by three respondents who felt that the role of PL should bring additional reward to recognise the extra duties and responsibilities:

I think more people would be more willing to take on the job if there was some sort of reward for it.

The University should make sure that:

... staff are rewarded for being a good PL, especially staff that are not involved in research.

However, one interviewee felt that an automatic pecuniary reward for programme leadership could discourage valuable research or consultancy activity:

It shouldn't come with every programme leadership ... [it should be] something you should have to apply for, those doing exceptional work.

#### **4.2.4 Characteristics, skills and attributes of the effective programme leader**

The complexity and importance of the role were highlighted many times in the interviewees' responses. It was also felt that programme leadership at postgraduate level was different to that at undergraduate level, perhaps requiring different skills. One respondent summed up the attributes and

qualities of an effective PL as “part-tyrant, part-administrator and part-friend”. Overall, the three most frequently discussed themes (see Table 4.15) of effective leadership were:

- organisation
- leadership
- communication.

**Table 4.15: Characteristics, skills and attributes of effective programme leaders**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Communication</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administratively sound</li> <li>• Proactive</li> <li>• Familiar with regulations</li> <li>• Good attention to detail</li> <li>• Ability to meet deadlines</li> <li>• Good attitude to quality (standards and procedures)</li> <li>• Reliable</li> <li>• Experienced with university systems</li> <li>• Efficient (particularly combined with collegiality)</li> <li>• Willingness to put in the time to do things properly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to take hard decisions</li> <li>• Vision and ability to carry it out</li> <li>• Academic authority</li> <li>• Good attention to detail</li> <li>• Proactive</li> <li>• Effective decision making</li> <li>• People management skills</li> <li>• Fair</li> <li>• Objective</li> <li>• Honest</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Enthusiastic/motivating</li> <li>• Interested in the programme</li> <li>• Creative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to listen</li> <li>• Team worker</li> <li>• Approachable</li> <li>• Good with relationships</li> <li>• Empathetic</li> </ul>

#### **4.2.5 Examples of effective programme leadership**

Interviewees were asked to think of an effective PL that they either work with now or have worked with in the past, and to consider what it was about this person that made them good in the role. One interview reported a PL who had been:

... a terrific role model ... she’s enthusiastic, she knows her subject, she’s good at getting the students into the programme and keeping them there; her retention rates are very good because she spends a lot of time on her students and she does all that without losing sight of the bigger picture. You know, she’s a lecturer, she’s a researcher, and she’s a writer and she still manages to keep all of those things going while being a good programme leader.

Another example cited was of a PL who:

... is very good at lobbying for students – will get out there and speak to people and really try to change things that need changed for the students’ benefit. That sometimes takes a lot of effort ... as a programme leader you have got to fight your corner sometimes and people that do that ... are among the best programme leaders.

The important characteristics identified by the interviewee from this example included:

... caring about the students; being interested them as people as well as students, and ....doing everything they can to bring people in, you know, with different views and experiences and different skills.

This PL was also:

...very good on the development side... it's very easy for programme leaders to sit back and think we will wait for programme review and then we'll change everything. But I think a good programme leader will do that on an ongoing basis.

A third interviewee spoke of:

... one guy who had a really good rapport with the students, they were full-time students and they did turn to him if they had issues and problems. He was on the whole able to sort things out. I think, more specifically, he got things done... he made every effort to get things clarified, even if he couldn't do anything about it, he would at least raise it.

A fourth example related to a PL's handling of a significant problem – a high failure rate on a module:

To be quite frank – it was a mess. The programme leader was prepared to accept that things had gone wrong but there was no blame attached. They said, let's sit down together and do something about it; they were prepared to share the burden and give advice and there was no blame. That was their big strength – when things got tough they were prepared to stand by you.

A fifth PL had an appreciation of, and was:

... able to implement, quality framework and university regulations. They had them in their head and that's what they did. They knew it like the back of their hand really. [They] knew what they were talking about so when it came to getting things, changes to the programme or changing any modules, there was never any hassle about procedural stuff, they just did it.

Specific examples of effective programme leaders included:

Someone who takes ownership and addresses the issues that come up around their programme and who thinks of a solution.

People who are effective in their role ... are people who clarify issues, you know, sort out university regulations, sort out exam board's indiscretions, because sometimes they can make different decisions. ... it comes down to organisation: somebody who sees a problem, thinks about how they can actually resolve it, and then does it.

The person must be very much enthusiastic, and must be pushing hard and try hard to be eager to push this programme further forward and make it successful.

They've combined efficiency and collegiality, and I would say the best ones have got a real subject background, and therefore have a stake in the survival of the programme.

The students have got to have access to the programme leader. There's no point in turning up at induction, and saying 'I'm your programme leader – goodbye.' There has got to be access. The availability of the programme leader, I think, is fundamental to the success of a good programme.

#### 4.2.6 Challenges faced by programme leaders

Interviewees were asked to identify challenges they had encountered in their role and to describe how they dealt with these situations. Challenging situations broadly fell into three categories (see Table 4.16):

- dealing with difficult students and colleagues
- leadership and management
- administration.

Although some of these were rare occurrences rather than everyday challenges, there were many situations in which it was felt professional development would be valuable.

**Table 4.16: Examples of challenges facing programme leaders**

<b>Dealing with students and colleagues</b>	<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Administration</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advising a student who is failing: being knowledgeable about the student's academic record and the options available to them</li> <li>• Counselling depressed or distressed students</li> <li>• Encouraging positive teamwork and good team dynamics</li> <li>• Dealing with grievances within a team: requiring guidance and support from university and management</li> <li>• A piece of student coursework going missing: balancing the reliability of the submission system against peoples' honesty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving teaching quality</li> <li>• Knowing when responsibility lies with the PL and when elsewhere in the university</li> <li>• Developing a new programme and encouraging colleagues to have confidence and to engage with it</li> <li>• Recruiting for a new programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with paperwork and quality processes</li> <li>• Paperwork relating to the validation of a new programme</li> <li>• Keeping up with changes to regulations</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.7 Professional development and support for programme leaders

Interviewees were asked what sort of support or professional development they thought would be useful for new PLs and for experienced PLs. Overall, respondents acknowledged a real need for the professional development of PLs, but suggested that the major inhibitor was time:

There just isn't time to undertake professional development and I think that is just one of the biggest problems.

##### 4.2.7.1 Mentoring

The most requested support for new PLs was mentoring by an experience PL (or shadowing). This was proposed by eight respondents as an introduction to

the role that they had either found helpful or would have found helpful. One method could be shadowing an existing PL; a period of one year has been suggested so that all aspects of the academic year would be covered:

Mentoring from another programme leader would help. For some people that would be really useful ... just to talk to somebody about the difficulties you were experiencing.

It would be really good for new programme leaders to have a mentor; somebody who has been a programme leader who they can go to for help.

Having the previous incumbent is the most important thing. Having him always as a mentor and just a pool of knowledge is the most important thing; and that can't be replicated by some course.

#### **4.2.7.2 Guidance on regulations, procedures, policies and structures**

The most common area in which respondents felt in need of advice was surrounding the University's academic regulations. Six respondents stated a need for clarification on aspects of the regulations (including how to apply them, and updates or changes) and related quality and administrative procedures:

...rules and regulations, policy and procedure and maybe a training course on the main aspects of that.

I don't think there are enough programme leaders and module leaders who know enough about the basic university rules and regulations.

Something similar to a student handbook was suggested, including how to deal with student progression, discipline, and plagiarism:

What they basically need is a handbook. ... something that pulls together everything and maybe lists what you're expected to do: induction, and liaison with the external examiners and that sort of thing.

Other PLs cited a need for information regarding:

- embedding personal and professional development planning into programmes
- the functions of Registry, Finance and Student Support Services
- the implications of the widening participation framework
- quality processes and procedures
- processes for overseas programmes and related policies and procedures
- budgets and the financial implications of running a programme.

Two respondents felt that the whole process of programme leadership needed to be set out clearly in an orientation programme including annual activities.

#### **4.2.7.3 Clarification of roles and responsibilities**

PLs frequently referred to the need for clarification of their and other colleagues' roles, responsibilities and authority:

The role needs properly defined in the first place. I don't know what a programme leader is meant to do and what he's not meant to do.

It was also felt to be helpful if there could be a central resource listing all the PLs in the university.

#### **4.2.7.4 Programme development and validation**

Five interviewees reported the development and validation of a new programme as being particularly challenging. Respondents would like to see more guidance on curriculum design, validation processes and how to write the documentation:

I would have liked to have sat with somebody from quality assurance and gone over their [validation document] template and talked through what was expected.

There are various stages along the path of developing a new programme [along] which you're supposed to go, and some of these I just stumbled upon, and so I could have had quite a bit more guidance.

Support in developing effective approaches to curriculum development was highlighted by another PL:

The whole background to curriculum development and the kind of things you should be considering would be very ... helpful right now for programme leaders.

Being invited to workshops on new innovations... [educational development] do that, but there should be some sort of requirement to attend certain things.

This was echoed by two other PLs who requested:

- support in developing online learning and teaching ability
- workshops on new innovations and developments
- innovative approaches to module development.

#### **4.2.7.5 Development of academic leadership skills**

A range of academic leadership skills development was discussed including:

- a leadership course or a certified course in programme leadership
- teamwork - team leadership and team building, including understanding the dynamics of a team
- negotiation skills
- assertiveness training
- time management
- decision making
- managing external examiners.

#### **4.2.7.6 Professional development for experienced programme leaders**

The needs of experienced PLs were also perceived to include:

A forum that would allow them to share with their peer group of

experienced people, what they actually do and don't know, in a safe environment.

Updates on things that are being required out there and ... having an impact on us. I think that would be helpful – about twice a year.

Even with very experienced programme leaders there are certain things that they don't know that they have to do. ... Over the years the role has gradually evolved. People just have their own ways of doing things and it's not necessarily the best way.

#### **4.2.7.7 Other professional development needs**

Other topics for professional development relating to programme leadership and management included:

- marketing and student recruitment strategies, e.g. how to tap into the local market (especially for overseas)
- life coaching
- stress management.

#### **4.2.7.8 Structures and approaches that would support programme leader professional development**

Suggestions here included:

- good administrative support or dedicated secretarial support
- time allowed for programme leading work
- informal sessions/forums for contact with other programme leaders to discuss ideas and challenges
- a programme leaders' conference
- good practice fora
- role-play situations to help programme leaders cope with difficult people or situations.

### **4.3 Reflections from the senior management interviews**

Interviews were conducted with two current HoDs, one previous HoD and an Associate Dean (of Quality and Customer Care). The aim was to elicit a management perspective on the PL role relating to aspirations and functions.

#### **4.3.1 Themes from the senior management interviews**

The views of senior managers were not dissimilar to those of the PLs. Effective programme leadership was associated with student focus, organisation, administrative expertise, meeting deadlines, problem solving, enthusiasm, empathy, communication skills and authority. In addition, they acknowledged the:

- inherent complexity of the role
- challenge of finding individuals who were willing both to take on the role and possessing the entire range of skills and attributes needed
- challenge of using PL time effectively and to best purpose
- need for clarity with respect to the responsibilities within programme teams
- challenge of authority versus responsibility

- lack of value associated with having taken on the PL role when promotion decisions were being taken
- tensions that exist between balancing resource efficiency and curriculum-driven imperatives.

However, despite the general agreement, some interesting perspectives did emerge:

- The skills and attributes associated with programme leadership change with the life-cycle stage of the programme. The skills and attributes that might make for excellence in programme design and development are not the same as those required for maintaining and enhancing established programmes. This adds further complexity to identifying suitable individuals who could manage the transition.
- There was ambivalence within parts of the organisation with respect to agreeing clear and transparent PL job descriptions because of concerns that clarity may lead to individuals refusing to undertake any task not specifically within the remit. This ambivalence could be found at different levels and had blocked previous attempts at agreeing job descriptions.
- While a student-focused approach was a very important part of programme leadership, it could be overplayed to the detriment of the strategic, administrative and quality elements of the role.
- Individuals who were difficult to manage could still be highly effective programme leaders.
- Ways of rewarding PLs had to be found if value was to be attached to the role and for good members of staff to be willing to take the role on. As the university did not generally reward PLs through promotion, senior managers were looking to other rewards such as CPD and international travel opportunities.
- Structures to encourage communication and the sharing of good practice between PLs were critical to both the development of individuals and the effective and efficient functioning of the organisation.
- Authority could be conferred to PLs through the HoD and academic champions, such as professors. However, for this to work, challenges to authority had to be addressed and promptly dealt with.

#### **4.3.2 The senior management perspective on the professional development needs of programme leaders**

The senior managers interviewed also suggested the following as elements of professional development for programme leaders:

- expectations and responsibilities of the role
- academic infrastructures and understanding of how the institution works
- key underpinning knowledge such as regulations, mitigating circumstances, quality frameworks and personal and professional development planning. This should be linked to an understanding of the consequences of operating outside the systems and structures
- team leadership
- project management
- operations management
- influencing and negotiating skills

- working with ambiguity
- guidance with respect to programme development
- motivating self and others.

#### **4.4 Conclusions**

This research strand aimed to elicit greater insight into the development needs of PLs at one institution, and in particular to identify:

- the scope of the programme leader role
- how the role is supported
- loci of authority, responsibility and influence
- professional development needs of both new and experienced programme leaders.

Overall, the PL survey at this institution indicates that there are identifiable similarities in the key functions undertaken by role holders, but that considerable variations exist in the full range of functions undertaken by individual programme leaders both across and between departments. The key functions are:

- quality enhancement and assurance activity
- academic leadership activity
- programme management/administration
- induction activity
- academic/pastoral support for students.

As most respondents reported having no role descriptor and little, or no, induction, the variation may be partly due to lack of clarity at any level within the school regarding what the programme leader is exactly responsible for, leading to individuals filling apparent vacuums as they encounter them. It is also possible that, as individuals carry out a number of roles (for example, PL and personal tutor), lack of role descriptors may lead to lack of clarity regarding which functions are specific to which role.

Time allocation for programme leaders also varies widely. There appears to be no standard approach to determining how much remittance a PL receives. In addition, programme leaders face considerable challenges in their role, and feel that there is often little in the way of support, and evident confusion regarding from where support is available.

Interviewees reflected on the characteristics, skills and attributes of effective programme leaders and considered that these to be:

- good interpersonal skills
- being accountable and available
- a commitment to, and a belief in, a subject area
- being positive and having a vision.

In addition, effective programme leaders demonstrate:

- enthusiasm
- a caring empathetic attitude
- being administratively sound

- academic authority.

Ineffective PLs, however, were seen to be unwilling and disinterested in the programme, as people who just do not get involved enough, or who do not care and who are not interested in the students. Ineffectiveness also springs from being afraid to make a decision, not communicating or avoiding serious issues.

Interviewees described typical challenges they had faced and considered what professional development would have helped them cope. These were identified as:

- access to mentoring from an experienced colleague in the first year of taking on the role
- guidance on regulations, procedures, policies and structures
- clarification of roles, responsibilities and where authority lies (this is particularly linked to gaining an understanding of what to do, when to do it and how to prepare for it)
- clarification of programme development and validation processes
- development of academic leadership skills including:
  - team building
  - dealing with difficult people and situations
  - coping with the fact that not everyone will do what is asked of them.

Structural support needs identified included:

- a structured induction process for new programme leaders in order to develop an underpinning of essential knowledge
- tailored support for experienced PLs in order to refresh knowledge, plug gaps and further develop academic leadership skills
- formal reward and promotion routes for undertaking the role
- support for administrative tasks
- transparent allocation of time allowances
- the development of a programme leaders' handbook
- fora for sharing good practice.

Section 5 provides an overview of the functions undertaken and support required by programme leaders to effectively lead and manage programmes and programme teams, based on all the findings discussed in Sections 2 to 4.

## 5. Conclusions

This research has confirmed the authors' original perception that programme leadership is an essential and complex leadership role that is largely ill-defined and unsupported across the higher education sector. The research also illustrates that programme leadership is often discussed in relation to negatives:

- the administrative burdens
- lack of explicit reward and career structure
- frustrations associated lack of role clarity
- tensions between responsibility and loci of authority.

However, it is important to remember that programme leadership is also seen to bring with it considerable intrinsic rewards, particularly in relation to the personal satisfaction that comes with:

- being able to shape and drive the student experience within HE
- overseeing student progress and success
- shaping the programme curriculum and programme ethos and direction
- general student interaction and helping to resolve problems
- leading a team and developing a team culture and ethos.

It is these intrinsic rewards, plus the professionalism of individuals, that have ensured that programmes continue to be (re)designed, delivered and managed despite the many and various challenges faced by programme leaders.

However, it remains curious that individuals who have such power to influence the quality of the student experience, student learning, programme quality and efficiency, should receive so little support in developing a suitable skill set for the role. Yeilder & Codling (2004) remind us that academic subject expertise is a far from sufficient preparation for the rigours of leadership and management. Consequently, it is predominately the personal qualities of individuals (such as resilience, organisational skills, initiative, credibility, vision etc) that determine whether they sink or swim in the role. Why does the higher education sector, the ultimate in learning organisations, leave so much to chance?

There can be no doubt that the programme leader role is a substantive one. In a business context, PLs might be considered to be the equivalent of brand managers, driving product development and ensuring that the product remains valuable for its customers. The literature review identified only one detailed published description of programme leader functions (Debowski & Blake 2004). However, the surveys discussed in Sections 3 and 4, identified a much broader range of activity, adding such functions as: team leadership with respect to the development of a fully functioning team; curriculum design and delivery; administration; co-ordination of student induction; advising on programme resource requirements; collection and use of student feedback; and provision of academic/pastoral support – all requiring very different skill sets.

Overall, the key functions of programme leaders can be summarised as:

- programme management and administration
- academic leadership activity - including both the development of a fully

- functioning team and of curriculum (re)design and delivery
- quality enhancement and assurance activity
- student induction activity
- co-ordinating personal tutor activity.

These activities reflect Adair's leadership model (1983), where effective leadership is supported through the adoption of a 'heli-view' of task, team and individual and the bringing together of the team and the individual, in order to achieve common tasks.

The precise nature and balance of these activities will, however, depend upon institutional culture, process and procedures, as well as school structures and imperatives. Consequently, any professional development will require substantial local and individual tailoring. To be appropriate and relevant, the professional development of PLs must address the:

- full scope of the role and its responsibilities and consequences
- complexity of the role
- tensions inherent in transition from academic to academic leader and in the managerial and academic leadership aspects of the PL role
- context in which an individual PL operates and acknowledge their skills and knowledge base
- motivation and empowerment of both the PL and the team with which they work
- link between learning with doing, so that PLs can both be supported through real work experiences and have opportunities to practice learning.

For the professional development to be effective, leadership skills development must incorporate three approaches:

- conceptual
- skill building
- reflective practice (Gmelch 2002a).

Several authors (for example, Ramsden 1998; Heywood *et al.* 2001; Barnett & Coate 2005) draw the attention of readers to the need for academic leaders at all levels – including that of programme leader – to be able to engage themselves and others with meaningful curricula issues.

From their work at the University of Salford, Cowan & Heywood (2001) have usefully drawn up a conceptual model (p11) that presents the 'development and renewal of the curriculum' as a continuum that moves through three distinct – though inevitably overlapping – components:

- informal processes
- transitional processes
- formal processes.

This work and the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (2006) have been useful for this project when drawing up a professional development framework for PLs, based on the situations in which they are likely to find themselves.

The authors have also been mindful of Blackmore & Blackwell's (2006) work around strategic leadership in academic leadership, which reminds academic developers to take a holistic academic practice approach in order 'to work with the grain of preferred faculty self-identity' (p380). Specifically that:

Leadership in academic development requires an understanding of research, teaching, management, consultancy and a range of other aspects of academic work, and of how they do and might interrelate...a generic approach that assumes that all have the same concerns and motivations, and that these are unchanging over a career, is not likely to be successful.

The proposed professional development framework for PLs is presented below. There are three strands with linked but distinct curricula:

- supporting new programme development
- supporting the transition of new PLs, usually onto existing programmes
- supporting the ongoing continuing professional development of experienced PLs.

Critically, the framework includes formal mentorship, peer support and reflection on practice. Based on the research carried out, it is the authors' view that these are essential elements of any effective professional development for PLs to ensure that they have a clear route to both good practice and timely advice based on experience. In all strands of development, PLs should be encouraged to develop a professional portfolio of practice (paper or electronic) to explore and record their learning and development. In institutions that are planning to develop some sort of professional accreditation and/or recognition for the role of PL, this portfolio could play a key role.

**Figure 1: Professional development framework for programme leaders**

<b>Supporting the Development of New Programmes</b>	<b>Supporting the Transition of New Programme Leaders</b>	<b>Supporting the CPD of Experienced Programme Leaders</b>
<b>Key Support: LTA Mentor</b>	<b>Key Support: Experienced PL Mentor</b>	<b>Key Support: PL Forum</b>
<b>Development of Professional Portfolio of Practice</b>		
<b>Curriculum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design &amp; agreement of curriculum, culture &amp; ethos</li> <li>• Core pedagogical principles</li> <li>• LT&amp;A policies</li> <li>• Designing appropriate and effective curricula and learning activities</li> <li>• Developing effective learning environments including technologies</li> <li>• Developing effective student support environments</li> <li>• Market research &amp; sector analysis</li> <li>• Programme validation process &amp; procedures</li> <li>• Planning for evaluation</li> </ul>	<b>Curriculum</b> <p>Month 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underpinning knowledge of institutional infrastructure, regulations, policies &amp; quality processes</li> <li>• Responsibilities &amp; authority</li> <li>• Implications of changed role</li> <li>• Expected outcomes in first year</li> </ul> <p>Months 2-3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing the student experience</li> <li>• Review processes</li> <li>• Challenges of role</li> <li>• Committee chairing and functioning</li> </ul> <p>Months 6 -12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing academic leadership</li> <li>• Managing performance &amp; benchmarking</li> </ul>	<b>Curriculum</b> <p>Months 12+</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refresher opportunities</li> <li>• Maintaining programme currency &amp; relevancy</li> <li>• Maintaining sector awareness</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Ongoing exploration of relevant curriculum issues</li> <li>• Ongoing enhancement of student experience</li> </ul>

It is also important to stress that the proposed framework is **not** a fixed programme of activity to be undertaken in its entirety. The curriculum elements should be viewed as a menu from which institutions, departments and individuals can select the parts most appropriate to their specific situations (with regard to timing, model and content).

### **Strand 1: Supporting the development of new programmes**

It should be noted that it is the minority of PLs that are involved in new programme development. However, this activity provides an excellent opportunity to engage with academic staff at a point where it is both relevant and immediately useful. Elements of the curriculum to support new programme development will already form an established part of professional development being delivered within any university. However, what is being proposed here is that new programme development should:

- be specifically targeted for formal support by appropriate learning, teaching and assessment expertise
- be used as a lever for exploring, debating and agreeing curriculum issues, including the enhancement of the student experience
- be used as a opportunity for exploring and disseminating good practices and reinforcing quality perspectives
- provide opportunities to expand environmental scanning skills, such as market research and managing risk appropriately.

The provision of a formal Learning Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Mentor at this time is an essential element of support for the PL, to help encourage meaningful consideration of curriculum issues relating to the design, delivery and evaluation of the new programme including the totality of the student experience. The support will be of direct benefit to the individual PL, but will also enhance programme development by strengthening team motivation, review and reflection on how the new programme will (for example):

- promote creativity, innovation and flexibility relating to how teaching and learning is designed, delivered, supported and assessed
- deliver high quality and relevant educational experiences that motivate and enthuse students
- ensure that assessment contributes to student motivation and learning
- prioritise activities that promote social and academic integration
- ensure students receive prompt and constructive feedback on performance and on personal and professional development
- be coherent, structured, challenging and progressive and that the component parts will be appropriate and complementary for all students.

The LTA Mentor's expertise in learning, teaching and assessment is more important than subject specific knowledge, and consequently they could originate from outside the PL's own department. The professional portfolio of practice will be a key component of the development process.

### **Strand 2: Supporting the transition of new programme leaders**

The first year of programme leadership was identified by practitioners as being

particularly stressful to them. The focus of development in this strand is therefore on:

- role clarification
- the speedy accumulation of knowledge
- the beginning of the development of a range of academic leadership skills and understanding.

The mentoring of a new PL by an experienced PL is critical to ensuring the former can function quickly and effectively, and with the minimum of stress. Ideally, institutional structures would enable formal mentoring between an outgoing programme leader and a new programme leader. Where this is not possible, other opportunities for providing mentorship to new PLs within the same department should be created.

The emphasis of professional development in the first month is to build contextual and knowledge underpinning (see Figure 2) and in exploring the core transition from one role to another. Months Two to Three focus on preparing for and managing key duties (see Figure 3). As the time available to attend professional development is always restricted, the creation of a *Programme Leader Resource*, which pulls together much of the key underpinning information, would allow formal development opportunities to focus on key messages, discussion and clarification. Also as individuals will take on the role with very different levels of knowledge and experience, such a resource would allow more targeted attendance at formal development events.

**Figure 2: Framework for professional development in Month One**

Content	Themes
<p><b>Clarification of responsibilities and boundaries of authority (for self and team) and implications of new role</b> Purpose: To identify and agree specific responsibilities and key activities, including reporting mechanisms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role and responsibilities</li> <li>• Reporting structures</li> <li>• Overview of programme</li> <li>• Overview of key activities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Introduction to institutional infrastructure, policies and sources of support</b> Purpose: To clarify context in which programme leader and team are working</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulations</li> <li>• Main committee structures</li> <li>• Key staff</li> <li>• Introduction to administrative functions, such as managing assessment, recordkeeping and finance systems</li> <li>• Induction, academic literacy and plagiarism policies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Understanding of institutional and departmental norms and culture</b> Purpose: To further clarify context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional and departmental ethos, culture and plans</li> </ul>
<p><b>Understanding of quality processes</b> Purpose: To recognise priorities of PL activity and responsibilities and relate these to personal activity scheduling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to key quality activities and purposes</li> <li>• Annual schedule of activity including timescales</li> <li>• Link to other quality processes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Knowledge and understanding of the expected outputs during the first year</b> Purpose: To recognise priorities of PL activity and responsibilities and relate these to personal activity scheduling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information and activities required to produce them</li> <li>• Priorities and time on task</li> <li>• Consequences of non-compliance</li> </ul>

**Figure 3: Framework for professional development in Months Two to Three**

Content	Themes
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<p><b>Managing the student experience</b></p> <p>Purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o to recognise the totality of the student experience</li> <li>o to identify and prioritise key activities and outcomes</li> <li>o to begin to plan future activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key activities and outcomes</li> <li>• Balancing student focus with overall effectiveness</li> <li>• Monitoring student performance</li> <li>• Preparing for and co-ordinating student induction</li> <li>• Academic advising, including knowing when and where to refer students on</li> <li>• Personal and professional development planning</li> <li>• Anticipating student needs</li> <li>• Using student feedback effectively</li> </ul>
<p><b>Review processes</b></p> <p>Purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o to identify the intentions and benefits of all review processes</li> <li>o to relate these to the scheduling and prioritising own activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review procedures and timescales, including annual reporting</li> <li>• Working of the external examining system</li> <li>• Gathering and using meaningful student feedback</li> </ul>
<p><b>Challenges of new role</b></p> <p>Purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o to explore the challenges in the transition from academic to academic leader</li> <li>o to build individualised strategies to address challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of academic leadership</li> <li>• Changing roles</li> <li>• Managing and motivating people</li> </ul>
<p><b>Committee chairing and functioning</b></p> <p>Purpose: To identify the key activities involved in both running and participating in relevant programme committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee remits</li> <li>• Purpose of committee membership</li> <li>• Committee chairing</li> <li>• Committee reporting</li> </ul>

The emphasis of professional development in the second six months is on applying new knowledge and developing academic leadership skills (see Figure 4). The latter is not proposed for the first six months because of the intense acquisition of knowledge during this period. In addition, the early months provide limited experience of team management and the particular challenges it may hold for individuals.

**Figure 4: Framework for professional development in Months 6 to 12**

Content	Themes
<p><b>Developing academic leadership</b></p> <p>Purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o to explore what is involved in academic leadership including what helps and hinders its effectiveness</li> <li>o to relate this understanding to their own activities and behaviours</li> <li>o to apply new knowledge to their own situation and review its effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility vs. authority</li> <li>• Empowering self and others</li> <li>• Models of leadership</li> <li>• Skills and attributes of effective leadership</li> <li>• Management vs. leadership</li> <li>• Managing and motivating individuals and teams</li> <li>• Dealing with ambiguity</li> <li>• Negotiating and influencing</li> <li>• Managing difficult people</li> <li>• Giving feedback</li> <li>• Development of relevant communication and empathy skills</li> <li>• Leading change</li> <li>• Project management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Managing performance and benchmarking</b></p> <p>Purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o to recognise the underpinning benefits of a variety of administrative functions</li> <li>o to apply new knowledge to their own situation and review its effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring student performance</li> <li>• Gathering and using feedback</li> <li>• External examining system</li> <li>• Using and designing performance indicators</li> <li>• Financial management</li> </ul>

The professional portfolio of practice will continue to be a key component of the development process.

### Strand 3: Supporting the continuing professional development of experienced programme leaders

Professional development for experienced PLs is a particular challenge because of inevitable variations in individuals' base knowledge, expertise and development needs. However, experienced PLs as a group represent a formidable storehouse of knowledge and expertise, which can be used to benefit both each other and the wider institution. In addition to becoming mentors to other new PLs within their departments, cross-institutional opportunities should be created for mutual support and the sharing of good practice. This could be achieved through PL fora, away-day events, conferences or informal lunches. The creation of such opportunities also reinforces the importance of the role to the university and creates a route for feeding information upwards into institutional strategy.

**Figure 5: Framework for professional development in Months 12+**

Content	Themes
<p><b>Refresher opportunities</b> Purpose: To update as appropriate to ensure that activities carried out and advice provided are accurate and in line with up-to-date requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updates in systems and processes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Maintaining programme currency and relevancy</b> Purpose: To relate outcomes of review activities to ensure programme is attractive and useful to all stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring student recruitment, performance and feedback from students, colleagues, external examiners, employers, accrediting/professional bodies, and external agencies</li> <li>• Using performance indicators</li> </ul>
<p><b>Further leadership development</b> Purpose: To further develop skills and attributes of an effective academic leader that are relevant to enhancing the role of the programme leader</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models of leadership</li> <li>• Skills and attributes of effective leadership</li> <li>• Management vs. leadership</li> <li>• Managing and motivating individuals and teams</li> <li>• Dealing with ambiguity</li> <li>• Negotiating and influencing</li> <li>• Managing difficult people</li> <li>• Giving feedback</li> <li>• Development of relevant communication and empathy skills</li> <li>• Leading change</li> <li>• Project management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Maintaining sector awareness</b> Purpose: To periodically monitor relevant new activities within both HE and professional area for relevant activities and initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental scanning</li> </ul>
<p><b>Professional development</b> Purpose: To continuously enhance own performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance development review</li> <li>• Ongoing use of a professional portfolio of practice</li> </ul>

The main focus of professional development for experienced PLs is the updating of knowledge, programme enhancement and currency, and further development of academic leadership skills. The professional portfolio of practice will continue to be a key component of the continuous professional development process.

The three-stranded professional development framework proposed here presents considerable challenges relating to how to translate it into a meaningful and engaging set of activities and support that facilitate:

- effective programme leadership
- meaningful personal and professional development planning, including learning and development alongside carrying out relevant tasks
- the identification of the professional development needs of individuals and choice in how to address those needs
- the development of capable, coping and motivated staff
- continuous enhanced curriculum design and delivery, including the promotion of well-designed and engaging programmes of study
- action-orientated formal and informal activities and mechanisms
- enhanced student learning, experience and performance
- institutional learning and sharing of good practices.

These are particular challenges for professional developers within higher education as they design learning. However, the successful translation of the framework also depends on institutions addressing a range of practical, structural and resource issues. Consequently, Section 6 sets out recommendations for both professional developers and institutional policy makers.

## **6. Recommendations for professional developers and institutional policy makers**

Section 5 set out a professional development framework for PLs based on the research discussed in Sections 2 to 4. This section will discuss a number of recommendations for professional developers and institutional policy makers in order to support programme leadership and translate the proposed professional development framework into meaningful, effective and engaging learning.

### **6.1 Recommendations for professional developers**

A key piece of information gained from the environmental scanning undertaken in the course of this work was the number of institutions that were considering developing formal professional development for PLs. In most cases, this work was being led by professional development specialists (both centrally based and locally based within academic departments) and the recommendations listed here are written largely with this group of professionals in mind. However, the authors are mindful that any programme of activity will necessarily bring together content and contributors from a range of specialisms across an institution. Despite this breadth, the recommendations are written from the viewpoint that professional development specialists are most likely to be the co-ordinating and driving force behind the design and development of a formal professional development programme. This does not imply, however, that professional developers are wholly responsible. It is intended to help institutions move towards the more formal end of Cowan & Heywood's (2001) continuum for curriculum development renewal process.

Based on the framework proposed in Section 5, the authors recommend that the design and delivery of programme leader professional development should:

**a) Reflect and be sensitive to both local and institutional ethos, culture and priorities.**

Professional development needs to be able to accommodate intra-university variations in the programme leader role.

**b) Be customisable to the development needs of individuals as far as possible.**

If programme leaders – either experienced or inexperienced – are to want to 'sign up' to any professional development, they need to feel that what is being suggested is relevant to them. It is essential that the challenges faced by staff moving from an academic role to that of programme leader are recognised and supported (Blackmore & Blackwell 2006).

Customisation can be facilitated through mentoring opportunities, action learning approaches and peer-learning activities. Development needs analysis should be facilitated through self-reflection and formal professional review activity within academic departments. It is recognised, however, that customisation may be limited due to resource constraints.

- c) **Promote ongoing development opportunities that allow staff to demonstrate their strengths as well as identify their needs.**  
Professional development should support individuals in gaining self-awareness and well-founded confidence in their skills, attributes and achievements. In turn, this should encourage them to recognise and value enhancement opportunities. Some institutions might develop relevant professional recognition and/or accreditation opportunities (by The Higher Education Academy or SEDA, for example). The professional portfolio of practice is designed to support any such individual and/or institutional strategy.
- d) **Be used strategically in order to meet institutional and local needs.**  
Professional development, for example, should ensure it enhances ongoing programme design/review/redesign through collective problem solving and meaningful consultation.
- e) **Emphasise the value of developing motivated and high performing teams of staff.**  
Professional development needs to encourage a programme leader to understand their role in developing a community of academics who are all clear about the direction in which the programme team is going and feel motivated and supported in carrying out their own role within the team. It is vital that programme leaders recognise that it is the team's responsibility continuously to enhance student learning, experience and performance.
- f) **Provide a variety of training and development opportunities to meet a range of preferred learning modes and styles.**  
This might include any combination of briefings, workshops, seminars, conferences, mentoring/shadowing, individualised learning activities, web-based activities, building professional portfolios of practice, and networking, showcasing and action-research activities.
- g) **Be supported by a comprehensive *Programme Leader Resource*, which brings together a range of required underpinning knowledge.**  
This resource could be used either online or in hard copy, but would act as the first point of reference with respect to how the university operates and what a programme leader does, including key timescales and where to go for help and advice.
- h) **Promote the sharing of good practice opportunities for discussion and relevant action.**  
One of the key considerations from the work of many academic colleagues – such as Ramsden (1998), Cowan & Heywood (2001) and Barnett & Coate (2005) – is the importance of ongoing peer support. Institutions should consider how this could be best done. Suggestions include conventional showcasing of good practices through both formal

and informal fora, as well as encouraging communities of practitioners, both physical and electronic.

**i) Provide opportunities for transparent personal and professional development, including certification and/or accreditation for the professional activities undertaken wherever possible.**

At a time when members of academic staff are being asked to promote PDP with students, it would be an ideal opportunity to encourage staff to feel the benefit of such activities. The encouragement of ongoing use of a professional portfolio (paper or electronic) could well help with this process.

## **6.2 Recommendations for institutional policy makers**

It was apparent in the research that the way in which PLs viewed and approached their role was greatly influenced by the way in which they had taken on the role in the first place. Not surprisingly, PLs were further influenced by the way in which they perceived they were valued and supported by their managers. The authors of this project, therefore, make the following recommendations for institutional policy makers:

**a) Create structures that reward and value programme leadership.**

Careful consideration should be made as to how the role of the PL can be built into an institution's activities in the following areas: reward and recognition, succession planning, career planning, professional development and review, resource allocation and consultation. Effective programme leadership requires motivated and enthusiastic staff who want the role and view it as part of planned career development. Ideally, such formal professional structures should include:

- succession planning and handover periods where at all possible
- salary enhancement
- transparent time allowance
- a recognised 'end of service' point
- promoting a culture of the learning organisation
- opportunities for continuing professional development
- opportunities for good practice sharing with other PLs
- opportunities for collective influence on university policy and practice
- clear routes to promotion and career advancement.

**b) Establish and adhere to programme leader role descriptors.**

The development and agreement of programme leader role descriptors is critical to promoting and monitoring effective programme leadership. Role descriptors do not necessarily have to be identical across an institution, but do need to clarify responsibilities and duties, and the consequences that flow from these. Lack of role clarity leads to frustration, stress and misdirected effort. Role descriptors should also be written in order to:

- reflect the strategic priorities of the institution and academic

department

- promote behaviours and attitudes demonstrated by effective PLs
- clarify loci and boundaries of responsibility and authority of both the PL and those that work within a programme team
- enhance the strategic nature of the role of PL (there is great power in their collective knowledge, which can be better utilised, for example, for meaningful consultation, review and planning purposes).

**c) Embed ongoing CPD for programme leaders into mainstream institutional activities.**

It is important to note that PLs will learn best from ongoing learning by carrying out the role beyond the basic competence level (Ramsden 1998). It is therefore strongly recommended that:

- Mentoring should be an essential element of professional support for new PLs. Ideally there should be a period of a full year of shadowing an existing PL. New PLs are often overwhelmed by the role and do not have the experience to be able to either prioritise or forward plan activity.  
Access to a named mentor would lead to enhanced confidence and accelerated competence.
- The institution's professional development and performance review system should include consideration of the PL role, the role holder's successes, their ongoing development needs and how these can be met.
- Local and institutional networking should be encouraged to help with sharing good practices and collective problem sharing and solving. Institutions might want to consider, for example, an annual PL event that provides an opportunity for updating on relevant changes (e.g. changes to systems, procedures and/or regulations) as well as an opportunity for showcasing and/or for consultation purposes.
- A variety of ongoing professional development opportunities should be offered and/or provided and marketed as being appropriate for PLs, with time to attend (plus its prioritisation) allocated.
- In line with promotion of PDP activity for students, academic colleagues should be encouraged to maintain an ongoing professional portfolio of practice (paper or electronic).

**d) Create meaningful and clearly defined programme teams.**

It was interesting to note that even within one institution there was a noticeable variation in identification of who made up 'the programme team'. It is strongly recommended that programme leaders should be encouraged to:

- promote and engender a strong programme team identity
- include both academic and administrative team members, as appropriate

- make greater use of both academic tutors and administrators to support their workload.
- e) **Recognise that different skill sets are required for programme development and programme management/administration.**
- Some of the work that has been done across the HE sector has identified the fact that the ideal PL will need to have a highly developed range of both cognitive skills alongside affective ones. An individual who excels at one aspect of programme development and programme management/administration may not excel at the other. This may be resolvable through professional development or may require that the two elements of the PL role are undertaken by different individuals.

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## 8. Appendices

### Appendix A: UK institutional survey questionnaire and covering email

Colleagues, can you help?

Our Higher Education Academy project is designed to investigate the role of Programme/Course Leaders and Organisers and develop a range of resources to support them in their roles. As part of this project (see <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4630.htm>) we are investigating what guidance, support or training currently exists in the sector.

We are particularly interested in exploring:

- How the role of Programme/Course Leaders and Organisers is defined in different institutions;
- How the role is supported, including induction/orientation, resources, mentorship, time allowances and training etc.
- Key activities undertaken by Programme/Course Leaders and Organisers including those related to working with Programme Teams;
- Loci of authority, responsibility and influence.

If your institution would be interested in helping with this investigation, we would be very grateful if you could possibly arrange for this institutional survey to be completed and returned to Julia (at [j.buchanan@napier.ac.uk](mailto:j.buchanan@napier.ac.uk)). We recognise that different parts of your institution may organise the programme/course leader role differently. If this is the case, we would be grateful if your institutional response could reflect this variation.

Thanks for your help and support.

Julia Buchanan

On behalf of Veronique Johnston and Jenny Westwood.

**NAPIER UNIVERSITY, EDINBURGH**

**HEA PROJECT- ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR  
PROGRAMME LEADERS**

**Institutional Survey**

**One academic leadership definition:**

“...a practical and everyday *process* of supporting, managing, developing  
and inspiring academic colleagues.”

Ramsden, P. (1998) *Learning to lead in higher education*, London, Routledge (page 4)

Q1. Within your institution, what title(s) are given to your programme/course leaders?

Q2. Within your institution, do different faculties / schools/ departments operate different models of  
programme/course leadership? **NO / YES** (please circle)

If **NO** then **please go to Q3**.

If **YES** please could you provide more information regarding variations in remit and responsibility.

**Please go to Q4**

Q3. Is /are there agreed programme/course leader role descriptors either institutionally or in any part of  
the University? **NO / YES** (please circle)

If **YES** please attach some examples to this survey

If **NO**, please could you comment on the key functions that a programme/ course leader (PL)  
might be expected by the institution to undertake (see overleaf).

**Q3 Continued**

**Always done by PLs** = The programme/course leader is primarily responsible for ensuring this function is undertaken.

**Mostly done by PLs** = The programme/course leader is normally primarily responsible but not in all institutional models

**Usually done by someone else** = This function is normally the responsibility of someone else although the programme/course leader may be involved.

**Not Done** = The function is not generally undertaken within the institution but may happen in pockets.

(Please tick the closest category)

Functions	Always done by PLs	Mostly done by PLs	Usually done by someone else	Not done
<b>Administrative functions related to the programme/course</b>				
Ensuring the maintenance & updating of programme/course documentation				
Timetabling				
Ensuring maintenance of student records				
Leading process for agreeing student achievement & progression				
Liaising with other academics and administrators within the dept to ensure the smooth running of the programme				
Activity and/or paperwork related to student appeals				
<b>Student support</b>				
Providing students with academic &/or pastoral support				
Co-ordinating and allocating personal tutors				
Monitoring and responding to student attendance				
Co-ordinating dissertation supervision				
Leading work around identifying and addressing plagiarism				
Leading work around equal opportunities, disability etc.				
<b>Recruitment &amp; admissions</b>				
Marketing the programme				
Recruitment activity including open days etc				
Admissions activity				
Co-ordinating of documentation for recognition of prior learning				
Co-ordinating induction to the programme				
<b>Academic leadership</b>				
Providing guidance and direction to programme / course team and/or module leaders				
Ensuring university policy is reflected in the programme / course				
Leading programme/course development including ensuring relevance and currency				
Providing curriculum guidance/advice to institutional managers				
<b>Quality enhancement &amp; quality assurance</b>				
Co-ordinating the preparation for validation and review				
Identifying, liaising with and responding to external examiners				
Regular review of programme performance				
Advising on programme/course resource requirements				
Collection and use of programme -based formal and informal student feedback				
<b>Any other key activity?</b>				

Q4. Are the programmes/courses at your institution modularised? (please circle) **No/Yes**

Q5. Is there any **centrally -led** formal professional development for programme/course leaders including induction, orientation and mentorship ? (please circle) **NO / YES**

Q5a) If the answer to Q5 is **YES**, please provide more details below .

Q5b) If the answer to Q5 is **NO**, is there any **local** formal professional development? (please circle ) **NO / YES**

Q5c) If the answer to Q5b is **YES**, please provide more details below .

Q6. Is there any **centrally agreed** time allowance support for the programme/course leader role?  
(please circle) **NO / YES**

If **YES**, please provide more details below

Q6. If there is **NO** centrally agreed time allowance, is there any **local** time allowance given?  
(please circle ) **NO / YES**

If **YES**, please provide more details.

Q7. From your perspective, what are the **3** main developmental needs for :

a) New programme/course leaders:

- 
- 
- 

b) Experienced programme/course leaders:

- 
- 
- 

Thank you for completing this questionnaire – please return it electronically or by mail to Veronique Johnston,  
QES, Napier University, Bevan Villa, Craighouse Road, Edinburgh EH10 5LG or [v.johnston@napier.ac.uk](mailto:v.johnston@napier.ac.uk)

## **Appendix B: Institutional questionnaire and covering email**

Dear Colleagues,

Our Higher Education Academy project is designed to investigate the role of Programme Leaders and Organisers and develop a range of resources to support them in their roles. As part of this project (see <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/4630.htm>) we are investigating what guidance, support or training currently exists in the sector.

We are particularly interested in exploring:

- How the role of Programme Leaders and Organisers is defined;
- How the role is supported, including induction/orientation, resources, mentorship, time allowances and training etc.
- Key activities undertaken by Programme Leaders including those related to working with Programme Teams;
- Loci of authority, responsibility and influence.

If you would be interested in helping with this investigation, we would be very grateful if you could possibly complete this survey and return it to Julia (at [j.buchanan@napier.ac.uk](mailto:j.buchanan@napier.ac.uk)).

Thanks for your help and support.

Julia Buchanan,

On behalf of Veronique Johnston and Jenny Westwood.

**HEA PROJECT  
ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PROGRAMME  
LEADERS**

**One academic leadership definition:**

“...a practical and everyday *process* of supporting, managing, developing and inspiring academic colleagues.”

Ramsden, P.(1998) *Learning to lead in higher education*, London, Routledge (p 4)

Q1. In which School are you employed? (please tick one)

Creative Industries		Marketing, Tourism & Languages	
Engineering & Built Environment		Life Sciences	
Computing		Health & Social Sciences	
Accounting, Economics & Statistics		Nursing, Midwifery & Social Care	
Management & Law		Customised Programmes	

Q2. Which of these roles do you currently have? (please tick as many as apply)

Module Leader	
Programme Leader	
Programme Director	
Personal Development Tutor (or equivalent)	
Senior Lecturer	
Other (please specify)	

Q3. If you are a Programme Leader, how long have you been in this role? \_\_\_\_\_

Q4. If you are a Programme Director, how long have you been in this role? \_\_\_\_\_

Q5. Is /are there agreed Programme Leader or Programme Director role descriptors in your School?  
**YES/ NO (please circle)**

Q6. Please could you comment on the key functions that **Programme Leaders (PL)** in your school are expected to undertake

**Always done by PLs** = *The programme leader is primarily responsible for this function although other people may be involved..*

**Usually done by someone else**= *This function is normally the responsibility of someone else although the programme leader may be involved. (Please indicate which other role in your School would normally be responsible e.g. Administrator, Module Leader, Head of School etc)*

**Not Sure** = *Not sure who is primarily responsible.*

(Please tick the closest category)

<b>Functions</b>	<b>Always done by PLs</b>	<b>Usually done by someone else (Please indicate which role would be primarily responsible)</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
<b>Administrative functions related to the programme/course</b>			
Ensuring the maintenance & updating of programme documentation			
Timetabling			
Ensuring maintenance of student records			
Leading process for agreeing student achievement & progression			
Liaising with other academics and administrators within the dept to ensure the smooth running of the programme			
Activity and/or paperwork related to student appeals			
<b>Student support</b>			
Providing students with academic &/or pastoral support			
Co-ordinating and allocating personal development tutors			
Monitoring and responding to student attendance			
Co-ordinating dissertation supervision			
Leading work around identifying and addressing plagiarism			
Leading work around equal opportunities, disability etc.			
<b>Recruitment &amp; admissions</b>			
Marketing the programme			
Recruitment activity including open days etc			
Admissions activity			
Co-ordinating of documentation for recognition of prior learning			
Co-ordinating induction to the programme			
<b>Academic leadership</b>			
Providing guidance and direction to programme team and/or module leaders			
Ensuring university policy is reflected in the programme			
Leading programme/course development including ensuring relevance and currency			
Providing curriculum guidance/advice to institutional managers			
<b>Quality enhancement &amp; quality assurance</b>			
Co-ordinating the preparation for validation and review			
Identifying, liaising with and responding to external examiners			
Regular review of programme performance			
Advising on programme resource requirements			
Collection and use of programme-based formal and informal student feedback			
<b>Any other key activity?</b>			

Q7) Did you receive any induction /professional development /support/mentoring for your Programme Leader of Programme Director role ?

(please circle )

**NO / YES**

Q8. If the answer to Q7 is **YES** ,please provide more details below .

Q9. Do you get any time allowance for your Programme Leader or Programme Director role ?

(please circle)

**NO / YES**

Q10. If the answer to Q9 is **YES** ,please provide more details below .

**PTO/**

Q11. From your perspective, what are the 3 main developmental needs for :

a) New Programme Leaders:

- 
- 
- 

b) Experienced Programme Leaders:

- 
- 
- 

Q12. If you have any other comments, please use the space below.

As part of our research we are aiming to interview some of the Programme Leaders or Programme Directors who have taken part in the survey. If you are willing to contribute your valuable opinion, please leave your name below.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire – please return it electronically or by mail to J. Buchanan QES, Napier University, Bevan Villa, Craighouse Road, Edinburgh EH10 5LG or [i.buchanan@napier.ac.uk](mailto:i.buchanan@napier.ac.uk)

## **Appendix C: Interview questions for programme leaders**

**NAPIER UNIVERSITY**  
**Higher Education Academy Project:**  
Academic Leadership - Role of the Programme Leader  
Napier Programme Leader Interview Questions

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning/afternoon.

Thank you for taking the time to answer some questions.

1. Can you remind me how long you have been a programme leader?
2. How did you actually become a programme leader?
3. Would you say that you were part of a programme team?  
[If so, who else would you say is involved in the team?]
4. What in particular do you like about being a programme leader?
5. What do you dislike about the role?

### **CHARACTERISTICS, ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS OF THE PROGRAMME LEADER**

6. From your experience in higher education, what do you think characterises an effective programme leader?
7. More specifically – thinking of an effective programme leader that you either work with now or have worked with in the past - what was it about this person that made them good in the role?

[Was there something in particular you admired about the way this person worked?]

[What qualities or characteristics made them a successful programme leader?]

If you find you can't think of someone that was effective, then you might want to think of someone you felt struggled in the role – what characteristics, attributes and/or skills were missing?

8. Can you give a specific example of how they coped either very well or badly with a particular situation or challenge?

9. Considering your own position as programme leader, can you identify a particular challenge that you were faced with - how did you cope with it? What did you actually do?
10. If a friend or colleague found themselves in a similar situation, what advice would you give them to help them cope?
11. Is there any staff development that could have helped you to deal with such a challenge?

#### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR PROGRAMME LEADERS**

12. Thinking with regard to new programme leaders:
  - What kind of support do you think is needed to help them in their role?
  - What do you feel would have helped you when you were new to the role?
13. In thinking of staff development for colleagues - do you think experienced programme leaders would benefit from the support you've just mentioned, or would they require something different?
14. Is there some sort of staff development that you think you would benefit from now? [Please explain your answer.]

#### **CONCLUSION**

15. As part of this project, we have committed to providing anonymised feedback to HE management about what's needed by programme leaders - from your perspective, what one thing would make the programme leader's job easier and/or better?

Thank you.

Julia Buchanan                    )  
 Veronique Johnston            ) Higher Education Academy project team.  
 Jenny Westwood                 )

March/April 2007