

An Institutional Review of the Course Leader Role

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Project background

- Widespread acceptance across HE/FE sector that the role of the course leader is pivotal in delivering a high quality student experience
- BUT!!!!!! We have overlooked the support structures required to help course leaders deliver this
- The project therefore represents a commitment to creating improvements to the environment in which course leaders operate

Aims

1. To enable and empower course leaders to excel in their role
2. To ensure a consistent standard of good practice across the University
3. To develop a course leader role description
4. To develop a support structure and training programme for course leaders
5. To improve lines of communication and flows of information across the university, which have an impact on course leaders
6. To create and maintain a repository of information relating to course leaders

What is expected of a Course Leader in a UK University?

To manage...To effectively lead...To actively communicate...To assist in the development and mentoring...To foster...To demonstrate...To actively engage...To support...To interrogate data...To ensure...To monitor and assureTo audit...To chair...To liaise...To oversee...To produce...To network and build... *Oh, and to teach....*

“And how... do you expect me to do that?”

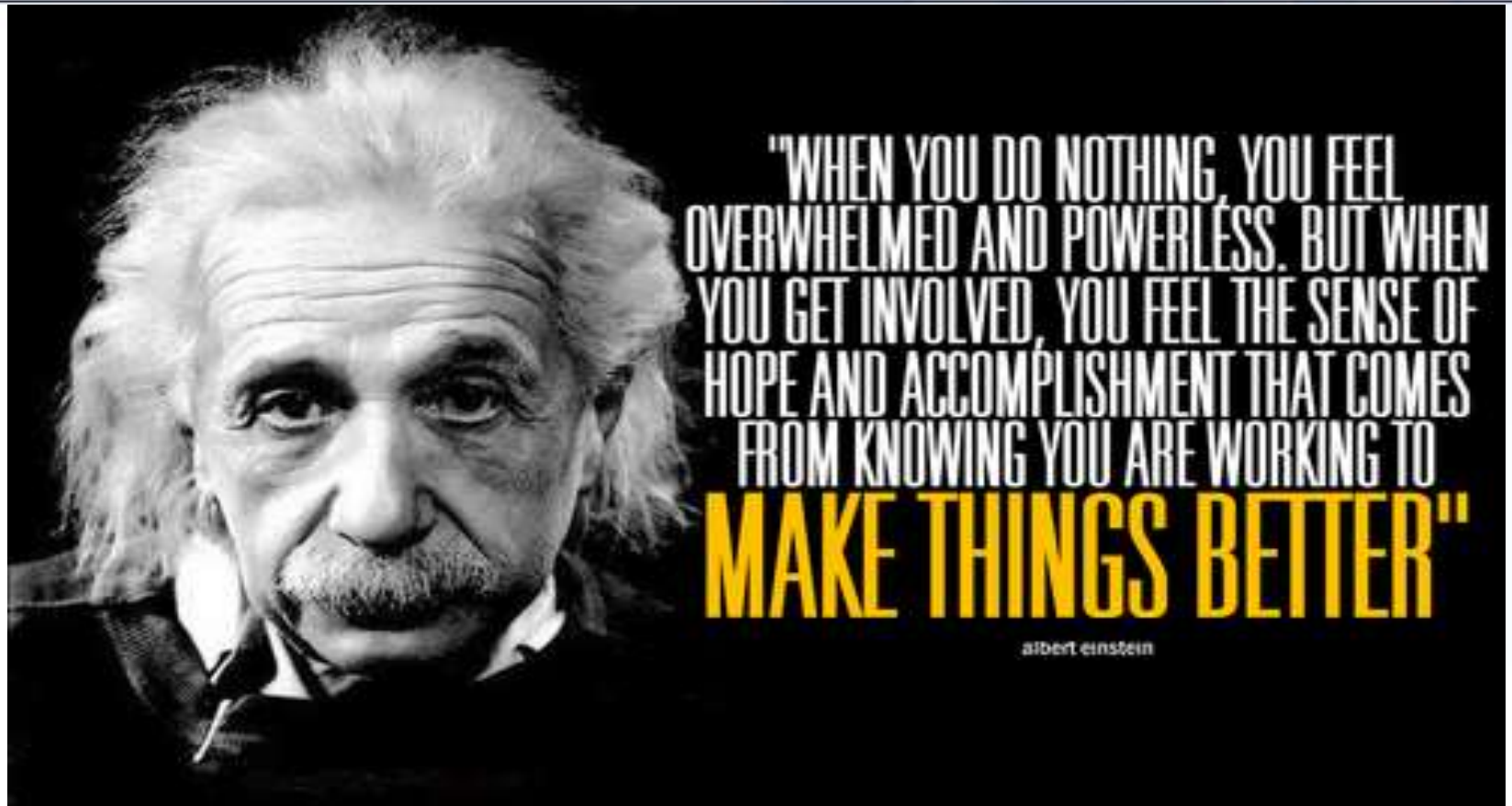
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OVERWHELMED

SURE, I CAN HANDLE THE LOAD. NO PROBLEM.

So we resolved to try and do this



The project in numbers

- 149 Course Leaders leading 220 courses
- 6 Institutes + 8 professional/service depts.
- Project leadership team = 9 staff
- Steering group = 17 staff
- 5 work streams (areas of work)

Assumptions prior to survey

- Role broadly understood, however responsibilities not always clearly defined
- Personal motivation high
- Student engagement a priority
- Administrative duties overly burdensome
- Resource allocations variable across the University
- Overworked and undervalued
- Reward and recognition a key factor

Project themes

- 3 primary areas of focus:
 - Role and responsibilities
 - Support mechanisms
 - Personal satisfaction
- Outcomes linked to key work packages:
 - Developmental leadership
 - Role and responsibility
 - Quality enhancement
 - Administrative support
 - Recruitment and marketing

Consultative Survey

- Designed survey as a consultative questionnaire
- Administered online using the EvaSys survey management software (www.evasys.co.uk)
- All responses confidential – staff not obliged to complete and were given the option to withhold information that they felt may identify them (e.g. size of course in combination with department and length of service)

Response Rate

- Total number of courses (under/post graduate):
N = **220** (24+40+25+20+29+82)
- Total of number of course leaders:
N = **149** (14+14+20+20+37+44)
- Total number of respondents: N = **89**
- Response rate as a percentage: = **59.73%**

Emerging Themes/Issues for *'Role and Responsibility'*

- Staff report very high levels of motivation to enhance the course (5/6 Institutes = 100%)
- Staff reported relatively high levels of agreement that they understood the role (range = 64.29% - 87.50%)
- But far lower levels of agreement about having been set clear objectives (15.38% - 66.67%)

Emerging Themes/Issues for '*Support Mechanisms*'

- Very few CLs said that they were given a formal induction or allocated a mentor
- Staff development (awareness of and engagement in) variable – most aware, but far fewer have attended
- Constructive feedback from line manager very variable by Institute (28.57% -93.33%)
- Admin support appears to be adequate in 3 Institutes (average = 60%), far less so in the others (average =25%)

Emerging Themes/Issues for '*Personal Satisfaction*'

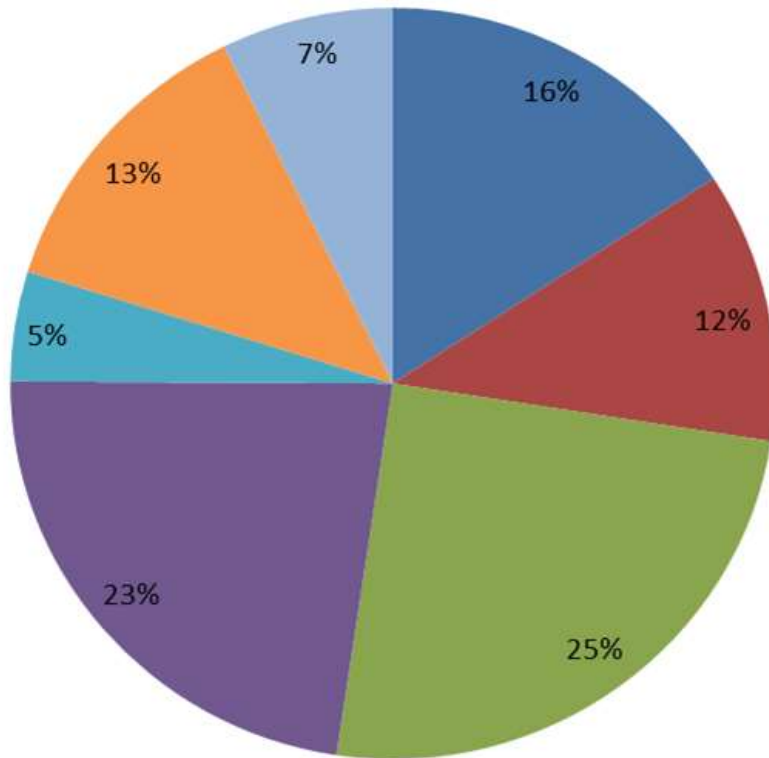
- Positive contribution to student learning – (all institutes > 85.71%)
- Course leadership as career progression – huge range (28.57 - 80%)
- Reward and recognition – Low scores all round (11.11% - 46.67)
- Even lower for overall support – (7.14% - 40.00%)
- Overall satisfaction – 3 institutes high levels (80% av.), others much lower (40% av.)

Qualitative responses

6 key themes were identified:

1. Role and objectives
2. Training and staff development
3. Administrative support
4. Academic and curriculum development
5. Reporting and data
6. Career development/reward and recognition
7. Other

Summary of qualitative responses by theme



- 1. Role and objectives
- 2. Training and staff development (to include mentoring etc)
- 3. Administrative support
- 4. Academic development and curriculum enhancement
- 5. Reporting and data
- 6. Career development/reward and recognition
- 7. Other

Next steps

- Finalise and implement key areas of improvement
 - Clear role description and review of admin support available to support CLS
 - Staff development sessions (bespoke programme for new CLs and introduction of University-wide CL forum)
- Establish central repository of resources for CLs
- Pilot new approach to better support CLs in writing action plans
- Review via briefing sessions and undertake evaluation survey

Literature in the field

- Johnston V and Westwood J (2007) *Academic leadership: Developing a Framework for the Professional Development of Programme Leaders*,
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/johnstonv_and_we_stwoodj_academic_leadership_developing_a_framework_summary_3.pdf
- Mitchell R., “If there is a job description I don’t think I’ve read one” : A case study of programme leadership in a UK pre-1992 University, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, (Vol: 39:5, 713-732,)
- Bolden, R., et al, (2015) *Developing and Sustaining Shared Leadership in Higher Education*,
<http://www.lhmartininstitute.edu.au/documents/publications/lfhespboldenfinal.pdf>

Thank you

Questions?

Very happy to receive requests for further
information:

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