A report on the locations and identity construction of academic developers

Findings from a sector wide survey as part of the ExILED (Exploring the Identities and Locations of Educational Developers) project

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ABSTRACT

This enquiry explores the identity construction and locations of those working in academic development, which we have defined broadly to include educational development, academic practice, higher education research and e-learning. Using an online survey and interviews, we asked people about their journeys into their current role, their locations, the type of work they do, and the pleasures and challenges of their work. Themes considered include location and impact, the nature and orientation of the role, career progression and development, factors in identity construction, networks, pleasures of the role and challenges.

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1.0 Introduction

Established in the late 1980s, academic development in UK higher education expanded rapidly in the 1990s and early 21st century, supported by numerous sector-funded initiatives (for example, Enterprise in Higher Education and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund) and an increased investment by universities in the development of teaching (Turner et al. 2013). The number of posts across the sector continued to grow as institutions established postgraduate certificates in teaching and learning in higher education and as the need to support continuous professional development (CPD) more broadly in learning and teaching across the sector was recognized. The Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) was established in 1993.

Similarly, as the use of technology became more prominent in university teaching, e-learning as an area of activity grew rapidly and with it, the number of posts across the sector. Increasingly, these two areas of activity overlap - with e-learning involving pedagogic practice and academic development encompassing work with learning technologies. In recognition of this growing intersection, we have invited people working in either or both areas to participate in this study.

This enquiry is focused on the identity construction and locations of those working in academic development, which we have defined broadly to include academic practice, higher education research and e-learning. Using an online survey and interviews, we have asked people about their journeys into their current role, their locations, the type of work they do, and the pleasures and challenges of their job. Throughout the report, we use the term 'academic development' as a shorthand phrase and we intend it to encompass the variety of roles that we set out above.

In this report, we describe the research context for this enquiry (section 2), followed by a description of the project and the methodology for the study (section 3). Demographic information about participants (section 4) is followed by a thematic analysis of the data (sections 5-11). Themes addressed include

- location and impact,
- nature and orientation of the role
- career progression and development
- factors in identity construction
- networks
- pleasures of the role
- challenges
- metaphors

Section 12 offers further data analysis and the conclusion (section 13) is a synthesis of the different strands of the work. Throughout direct quotes from survey respondents are identified by 'R' and interviewee quotes are signaled by 'I'.

2.0 Background

2.1 Recent work on identity construction

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in identity formation of those working within the HE sector, particularly staff involved with learning and teaching and educational development. (See, for example Barnett and Napoli, 2008; Clegg, 2009; Gosling, 2009; Land, 2001, 2004, 2008; Little and Green, 2012; and Smith, 2010, among others). Researchers have explored the extent to which academic development is 'academic' (Fraser and Ling, 2013), the impact of organisational cultures on this type of work (Land 2001), and whether a 'field' of

academic development exists and what shared set of values, if any, is in operation (Harland and Staniforth, 2008). More recently the very notion of 'development' in the context of 'academic development' has been called into question by Boud and Brew (2013).

Furthermore, Clegg (2009), analysing publications by those working in the field, considers the extent to which narratives about identity construction, particularly as they appear in texts authored by academic developers, signify a struggle for legitimacy of the very project of academic development.

2.2 Identities complex and mutable

As Barnett and Napoli (2008) observe, identity formation is a dynamic, contested process. Just as universities are in a state of flux – strategically, politically and financially - so, too, is academic development, particularly as new policies and structures for teaching and learning are enacted across the sector.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the professional identities of those working in academic development are complex and mutable. Handal (2008) argues that the varied contexts in which educational developers are located and their diverse formative backgrounds means that they may lack a single 'unifying professional identity'. Additionally, Land (2008) speaks of the paradoxical identity of the educational developer who engages in both 'domestication and critique' and can be seen as simultaneously 'powerful and powerless' within the institution.

2.3 Perceived changes in the nature of academic development

Commentators have recently argued that the 'project' of academic development is itself undergoing change. Boud and Brew (2013) and Clegg (2009) suggest that within academic development there has recently been a shift in focus from working with individuals to engagement with strategic initiatives. Boud and Brew advocate a reconceptualization of academic development and urge a move away from the 'development' of individuals and towards a consideration of cultures and practices.

Lee et al. (2010) document the histories of experienced academic developers in Australia and explore links between values, activism and academic development and examine the 'struggle to establish a scholarly ethos'. They conclude that the 'field' is changing and is increasingly aligned with institutional management and a neoliberal agenda.

Similarly, Fraser and Ling (2013) consider to what extent academic development is 'academic' work and they argue that newly established academic development posts are increasingly positioned on professional scales rather than academic pathways. They conclude that the research component of the academic developer's job is on the wane internationally, and particularly in the UK (citing Jones and Wisker, 2012).

2.4 Building on existing research:

We have tried to build on the previous work or help fill gaps in the following ways:

2.4.1 Using metaphor as a means of exploring orientation towards role

Building on work by Handal (2008), Ashford et al. (2004) and, particularly Kinash and Wood (2011), we have drawn on metaphor to help understand respondents' conceptualisations of their role. While we have not included a typology or framework of 'roles' occupied by study respondents here, we have been alert to participants' stated orientations to colleagues (for example, the role of the 'fosterer' occurs repeatedly) and we have made explicit use of metaphor exploration in the interviews. See section 11.0 for a full discussion.

2.4.2 Casting the net more widely

In order to incorporate a broad range of views and experiences, we have sought to engage people working in

- diverse spaces including outside the walls of the institution and in subject departments
- educational research, and
- learning technology.

The views of specialists in learning technology have tended not to be prominent in the literature on academic development; observations about their locations and role within academic development are addressed in section 5.3.3.

2.4.3 Enquiring into the shift in focus towards more strategic/policy working

Drawing particularly on Boud and Brew (2013) and Clegg (2009), we aimed to explore whether those working in academic development are moving away from one to one work with academics and more towards institution-wide activities. Specifically, to what extent are those working in academic development involved in strategy and policy?

2.4.4 Research and writing as identity work

Following Fraser and Ling's (2013) suggestion that the research component of the role is diminishing, we have addressed this question by asking about the nature of contracts and the significance of research and publishing for respondents.

Throughout, we view 'identity' as multiple, complex and ongoing.

3.0 Methodology and research questions

3.1 Methods

We began with a review of the literature on academic development and identity construction and, subsequently, revised our research questions. We then drafted and piloted an online survey using the Survey Monkey platform. After feedback and revisions, we sent requests for participation to a number of email lists including those hosted by SEDA, Improving Student Learning, and the Association of Learning Technologists. The message and survey link were also circulated in the EDIN (Educational Developers in Ireland network) online newsletter. Additionally, we encouraged people to forward or share the link with other potential participants.

Potential interviewees who were identified from survey respondents. We attempted to ensure that our interview pool was varied according to institution type, location, role (academic developer, educational researcher, learning technologist, senior manager), gender and length of experience.

14 interviews were conducted, mainly by phone or Skype, and transcribed in full. The qualitative data from the survey and interviews were coded and analysed and the most prominent thematic findings are set out in sections 5 to 10 below. Relevant findings from the interview data are reported here; however, some topics emerging from the interview data analysis are addressed more fully in the e-book which is an additional output from the project.

Ethics approval was granted by the Institute of Education Research Ethics committee.

3.2 Research questions

Below are the broad research questions that guided this research:

1. How do educational developers define and construct their identity/ies?
2. How do educational developers describe their journeys?
3. Do educational developers still experience the 'identity paradox' described by Land (2008) and, if so, how do they manage it?
4. Where (and how) are educational developers located

    - within (and beyond) institutions?
    - in relation to other disciplines/other professional services?

5. What is the role of broader networks, communities, and social media in identity formation for educational developers?
6. What are the implications of this research for career progression and institutional/sector policy?

4.0 Demographic information

4.1 Survey logistics

The survey ran from November 2013 to December 2013 and 214 people participated.

4.2 Experience in higher education

The majority of respondents (91 %) had worked in higher education generally for 6 or more years, with over half (53%) having been employed in the sector for over 16 years. (See Figure 1.)

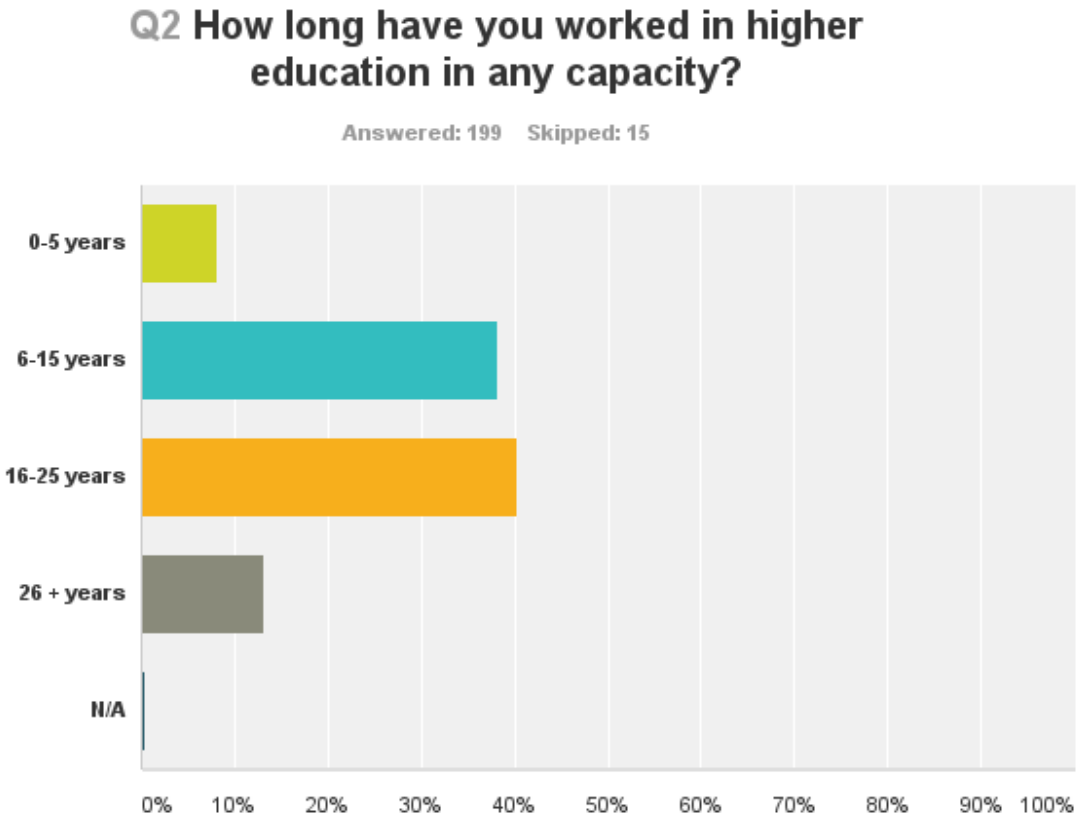

Figure 1: Length of time in HE

4.3 Length of time working in academic development

Respondents had worked in academic development for varying lengths of time with a quarter having been in the area for 0-5 years, half 6-15 years and 18 % for 16-25 years. (See Figure 2.)

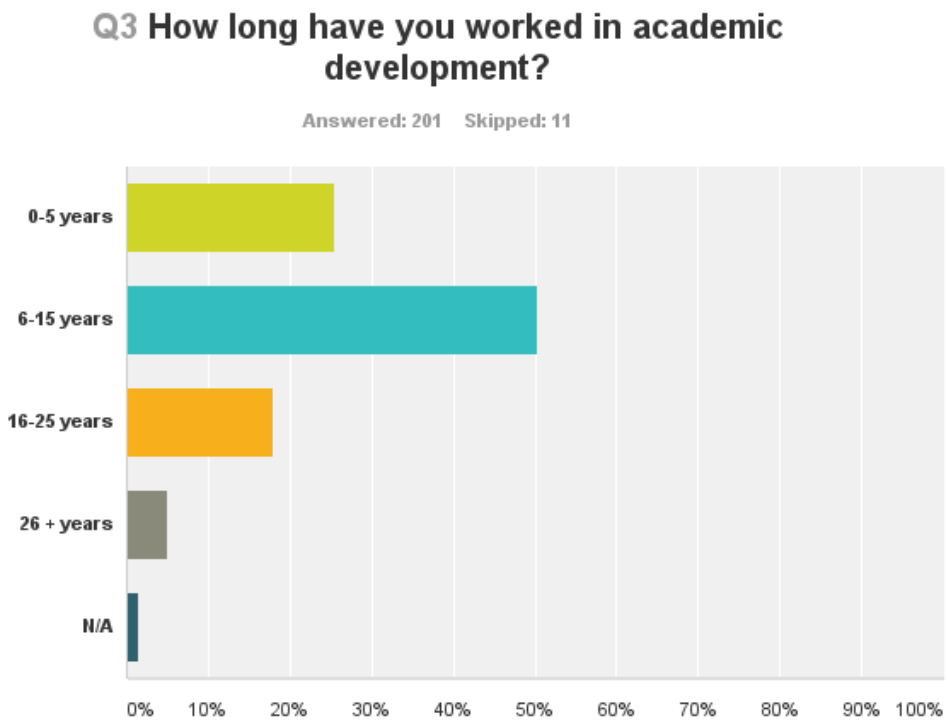

Figure 2: Length of time working in academic development

4.4 Place of work

The vast majority of respondents were employed by HEIs (88%). 6% were employed by an educational organization within the UK (such as the Higher Education Academy), 4 % were employed within the FE sector, and 7 % classified themselves as independent or freelance. 12 % of respondents were located outside of the UK. (See Figure 3.)

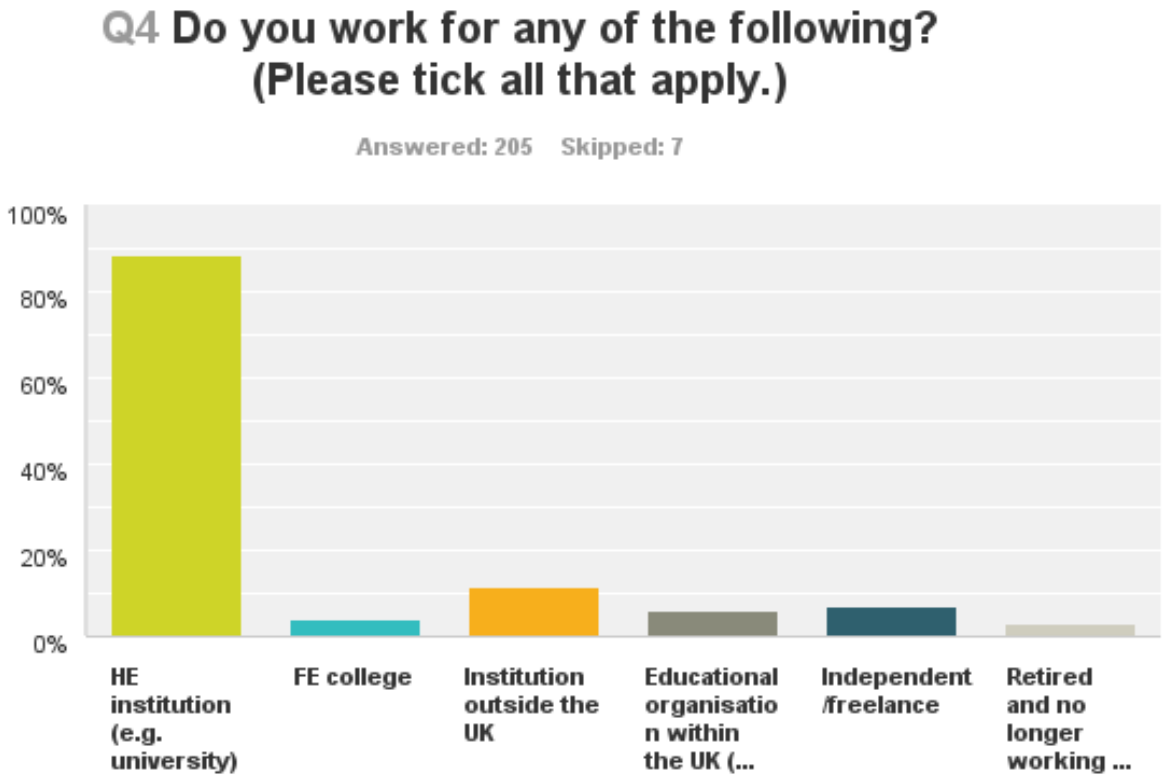

Figure 3: Type of workplace

Of those respondents employed by HEIs, there was a fairly even split between post-1992 institutions (28 %) and Russell Group universities (25%). Other groups represented included University Alliance (7 %), 1994 Group (6%), Guild HE (5 %), Million plus Group (4%). 11% of respondent were unaffiliated. (See Figure 4.)

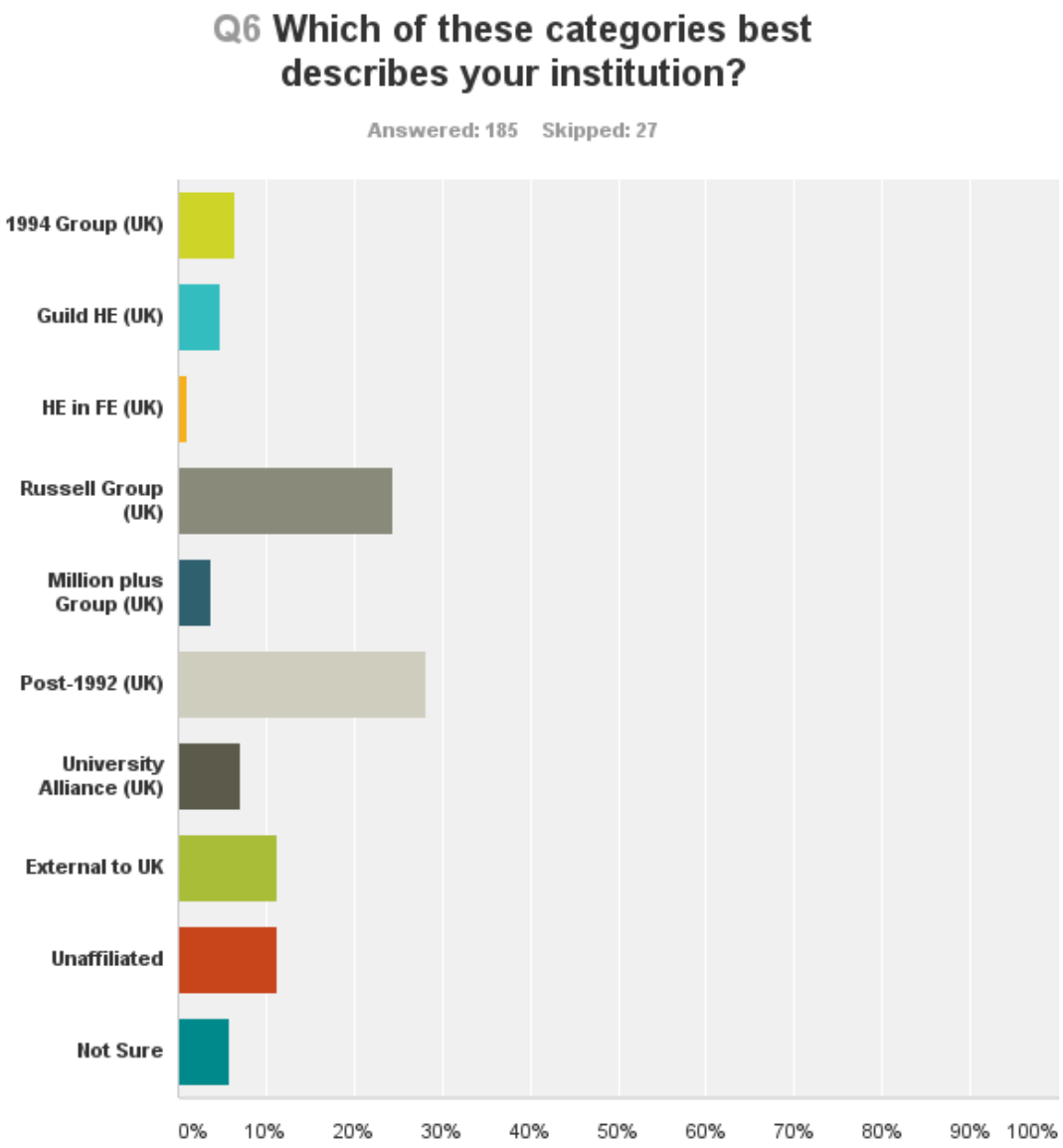

Figure 4: Type of institution

5.0 Location and impact

5.1 Institutional location

A principal aim of the study was to learn more about where participants are located, both physically and structurally, within institutions (and beyond) and what, if any, impact location had on their practices.

The majority of respondents employed by institutions were situated in academic development units (62 %) with others in education departments (13%), subject departments - other than education (12 %), learning technology units (12 %) or human resources units (7 %) . 5 % of respondents were located in the senior management team and other areas identified were libraries (3%), language centres (3%) and quality assurance offices (3 %). (See Figure 6.)

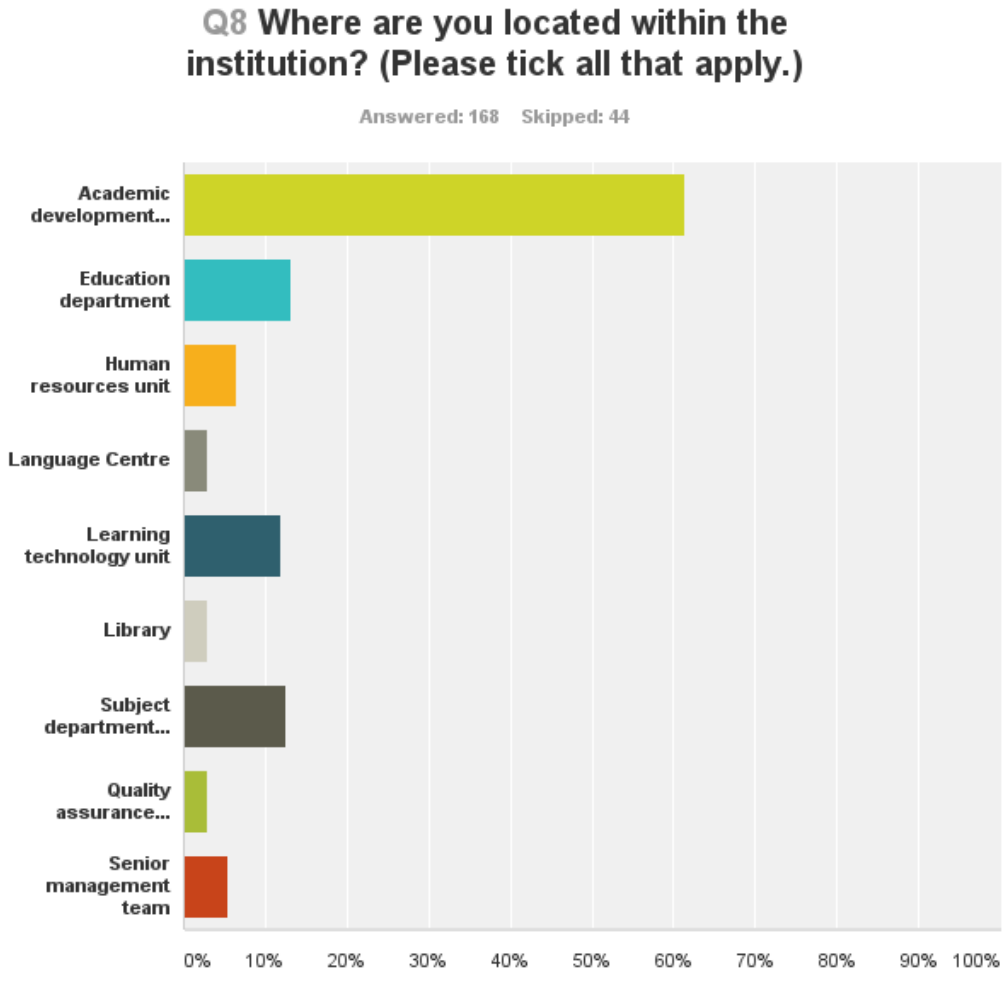

Figure 6: Location within institutions

The majority of respondents felt that their location had an impact on their ability to perform their job with 60 % of respondents (111) responded yes with 25 % (47) saying No and 15 % (28) 'Not Sure'. (See Figure 7.)

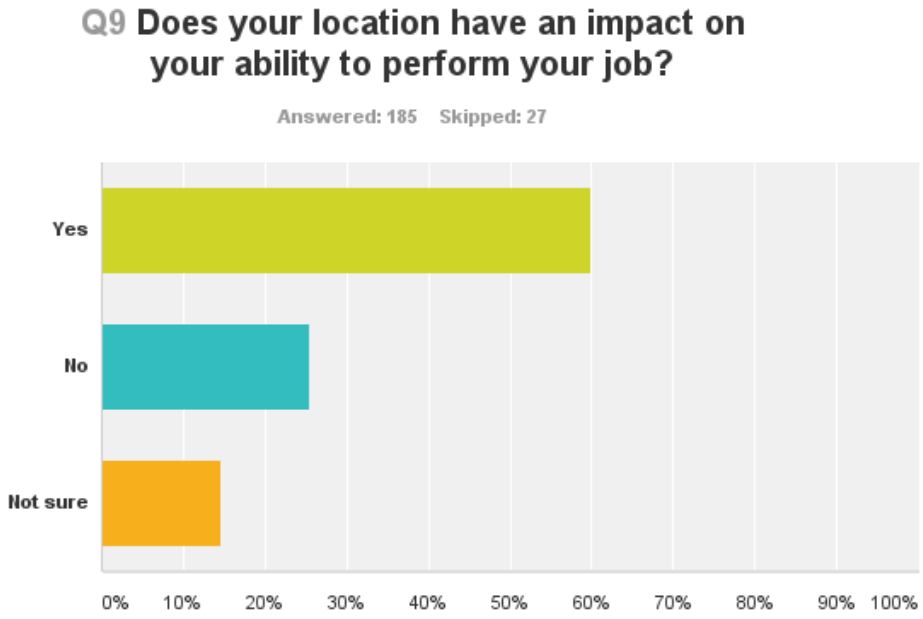

Figure 7: Does your location have an impact on your ability to do your job?

More than half of respondents (n=107) offered further, free text information about how they experienced location, an analysis of which follows.

5.2 Geographical and physical location of respondents

The importance of being in a central, accessible geographical location within an institution was mentioned frequently by respondents as was the challenge of working in institutions distributed across multiple sites.

Physical access and the impact of spatial layout were also cited. Participants commented on colleagues' access (or lack thereof) to their offices, and they mentioned architectural design and decoration of their workspace and the extent to which these physical attributes enabled or inhibited interaction, teaching and networking.

> 'Physically – we are in a locked building, so drop-in is simply out of the question. Perception is an issue too – we are in the 'Admin Building', which puts people off from the start and links us with the admin function, which sits uneasily with what we do. Similarly we have no teaching space of our own and are only allowed to book space from the central teaching pool once our academic schools have had space allocated for teaching, hence we tend to get second-rate space that no one else wants – again

> leading to the perception by staff attending that this activity is somehow of lower priority to the University.' (R 99)

In this instance, the lack of control over how space is used and how it is presented means that academic development can be spatially and visually codified in certain ways, and the physical location can dictate, to a degree, whether it has a corporate feel or an academic atmosphere. Additionally, one interviewee spoke of how a unit's move into the institution's main administrative centre and the changed access arrangements, open plan office and lack of an academic atmosphere (including, for example, the lack of bookshelves) altered the perception of her work: 'for me the space is crucial and has affected things hugely.' (IE) This potentially marginalizing quality of location is commensurate with findings of Cox et al. 2012 who explore the relationship between campus location and identity construction amongst new lecturers.

5.3 Structural location

The majority of comments on location were related to the impact of structural location on the ability of respondents to do their job. These observations fell into three main categories:

- central location vs sites in department or faculties;
- being situated within (or closely aligned to) Human Resources or Quality Assurance;
- structural links with decision makers and/or senior management.

5.3.1 Central vs faculty or department-based

The majority of participants expressed a preference for being centrally located rather being situated in a department or faculty. A significant minority, however, felt that being in academic departments offered better support for research and scholarship and helped sustain a connection to academic practice, particularly teaching, that could otherwise be lost:

> '[academic development] works best centrally but needs strength in subject discipline for credibility with colleagues' (R 85)

> 'we transferred from an interfaculty institute to a unit within a Faculty. We are careful that people in other faculties see us as independent consultants… As far as I can see, it works. And on the other hand, being part of a Faculty means closer cooperation with the Department of Education which is a positive influence'. (R 118)

> 'marginality can be interesting and stimulating, but it's a hard place to be powerful from. For real change it helps to have a centrally understood role' (R 115)

The affordances and disadvantages of a more marginal location expressed in this final comment were addressed several times in open responses and interviews. There was a sense that being on the structural periphery can enable a certain freedom in terms of the way that the job is undertaken, but that it often lacks the mandate that a centrally located placement, particularly in terms of institutional organizational structure, can confer.

However, even among those who signaled a preference for a central location, there was a strong expression that those working in academic development should be 'independent of management and bureaucracy' (I 17).

There were contradictory views expressed about whether or not academic development work should be situated within an Education department. A group of respondents felt that academic development *should* be linked to an Education department where possible. However, a small minority of participants indicated strongly that education was '*the one place you should not be'* (IG). The ambivalence around location within an Education department was articulated by one respondent:

> 'In a School of Education, most people are concerned with T & L so it is nice to be surrounded by like-minded people, but it limits interactions across the university.' (R 111)

5.3.2 *Association with HR and Quality Assurance*

A number of respondents expressed concern about the impact of being structurally located within an HR unit, particularly in terms of the messages that this location conveyed about their purpose and role:

> 'Association with HR presents boundary issues (e.g. potential for association with grievance/disciplinary, being seen as management stooge, etc') (R 38)

> 'HR is seen as a compliance function, and related to training, and not seen by academics as a natural home for teaching issues. Also, HR systems can become obstacles and barriers to our work as they operate in a very different culture.' (R 41)

A similar number of respondents made comments about the limitations of being co-located with Quality Assurance, particularly in terms of perceptions of academic peers:

> 'It is essential that staff feel your focus is development rather than judgement against a set of standards. I want people to be comfortable telling me when they think an aspect of their practice could be enhanced without them thinking I will be judging them'. (R 18)

> 'We are not located alongside or with any external teaching staff (ie there are staff who teach within the unit but there are not other teaching staff). This means there is less informal contact with teaching staff which means it is harder to make contact, to be aware of issues, new issues etc. We are located with quality assurance staff which is useful but adds to the perception that we are the centre telling staff what to do. (R 88)

> 'I think we are regarded as academics advising colleagues on curriculum enhancement and I think it helps being in a separate unit to the quality office.' (R 213)

One interviewee expressed satisfaction with being located in HR; however, the success of this location was contingent on the director of HR understanding the purpose of the academic development unit. The majority of respondents indicated strong resistance to being situated within HR and/or Quality Assurance units. Issues such as dress code, lack of academic colleagues and, as mentioned in section 5.2, decoration of the space (bland, corporate) and lack of private office space and appropriate meeting/teaching rooms were raised.

5.3.3 Access to and links with colleagues

Other aspects of structural location mentioned by respondents included

- the desirability of having easy access to colleagues with related or relevant responsibilities
- structural links to decision makers/senior managers.

The first point above was repeatedly raised by respondents who work in learning technology and who indicated that they would prefer closer association with academic development units:

> 'would like to be more closely linked with our colleagues in the educational development team – they are in a quite separate part of the institution. Also we are now physically based slightly apart from the rest of the institution which can lead to a feeling of disconnectedness.' (R 32)

> 'In the many years I have worked in this area, the variously-acronymed units I have worked for have come and gone – sometimes bringing together academic staff development and learning technologies, and sometimes separating them. I think they do need to be integrated; we all now work and study in a technological environment – it is part of the furniture, not a special add-on' (R 24)

> 'It would perhaps be a good idea to involve I and my team more fully in strategy development. I also think that stronger personal associations between technologists and schools… will eventually lead to improved deployment of technology.' (R 19)

> 'In our institution as in many others, learning technologists are not necessarily recognized as academic developers… Within this institution we strive for recognition and grading appropriate to the real responsibilities of learning technologists…' (R 3)

The relationship between learning technology and academic development more broadly was also addressed by an interviewee (not someone who considered themselves an 'educational technologist') who suggested that the distinction between the roles was blurring:

> 'I'm not sure that the distinction between learning technologist and educational developer will continue. I think it may almost disappear,

> because you cannot do the job without a good understanding of technology.' (IA)

To return to the second point above, a challenge that was raised across the survey and with interviewees was the need for those working in academic development to have strong links via the university's organizational structure to senior managers responsible for teaching and learning. This issue is addressed further in section 10.6 below.

5.3.4 Location and academic identity

Finally, several respondents made links between location and professional identity, suggesting that it was difficult to be 'academic' when located in a non-academic site:

> 'The Unit I work within is not an academic one. Not having an academic focus means I experience challenges in both my working week and also in managing my academic career. There is not the same support for research and scholarship that peers have nor is there support for appropriate development. My Doctoral studies, for example, are seen as something that is personal and not part of my role as an academic. Any work I do on this is expected to be in my personal time.' (R 144)

This theme, particularly in relation to research, was common amongst interviewees, too, and it is discussed further in section 6.3.

5.3.5 Sites of practice

When asked 'where do you do your work?', study participants reported working in a wide range of places both across and beyond university campuses. Core sites of practice were offices, central institutional spaces, department teaching/meeting rooms, home and online environments – all of which were identified by around 70 % of respondents.

Around half of respondents worked in other departments and in classrooms with subject teaching in session. Approximately 40 % used spaces external to the institution (such as coffee bars) to conduct their work and an equal number indicated boardrooms were a site of practice. Around a quarter indicated computer labs and library. Science laboratories were used by only 8 % and other sites mentioned included hospitals, campus coffee bars, hotel seminar rooms and mobile working. (See Figure 8. Figures add up to more than 100 because respondents were asked to select all that applied.)

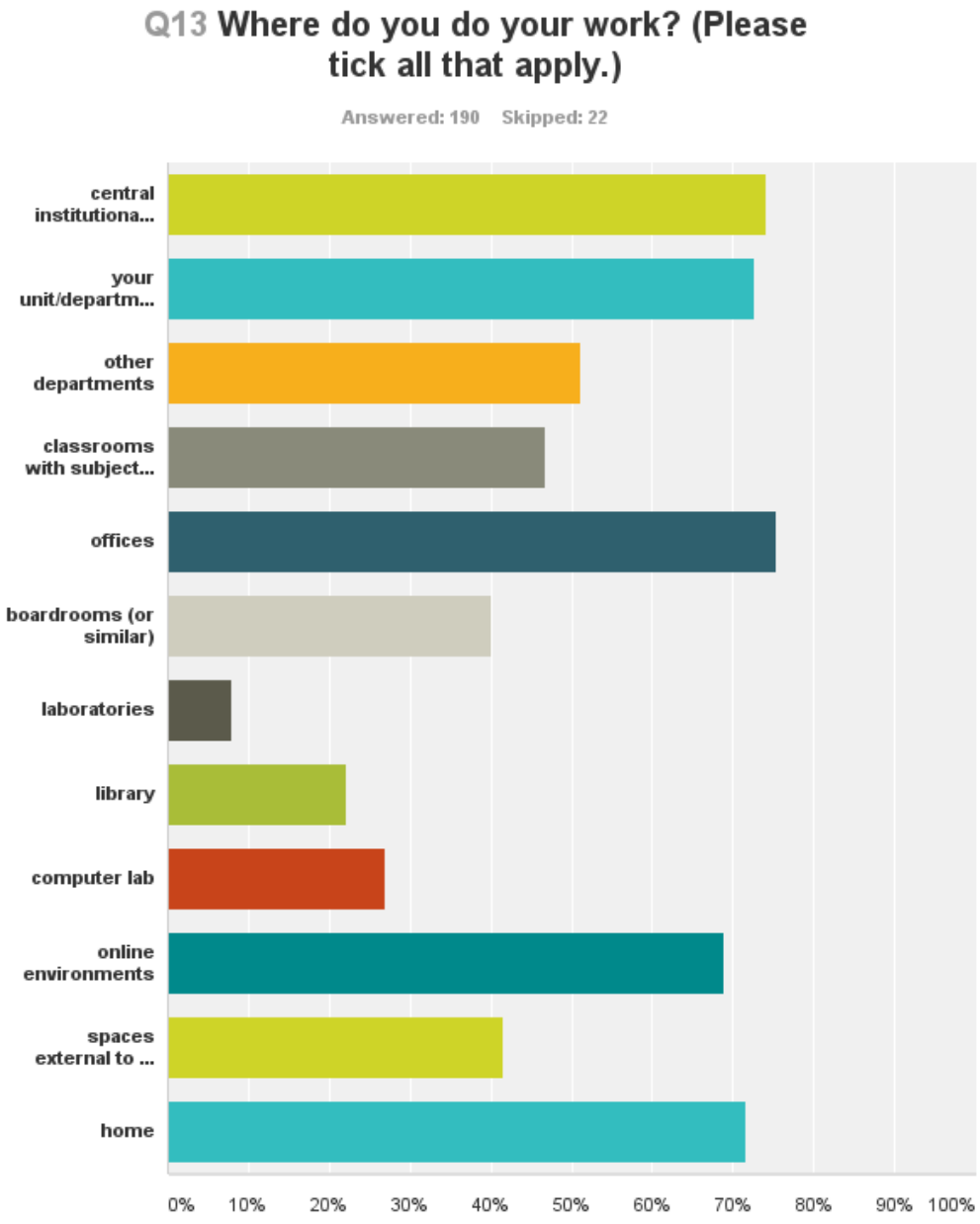

Figure 8: Sites of practice

So, in conclusion, geographic and structural location matter, particularly the signals they send about the university's sense of the function of academic development. For example,

- Is it an academic endeavour?
- Is it primarily concerned with ensuring compliance?
- Does it directly inform institutional strategy and policy?

60% of respondents indicated that location had an impact on their ability to perform their jobs. Access to colleagues was a key consideration by respondents when discussing location and many preferred to have a central, easily accessed site both in terms of the campus geography and structural organization. A recurrent theme from participants who specialized in e-learning was a desire to be co-located with colleagues from academic development. Furthermore, respondents wanted to be in a structural location that allowed them to influence policy.

The significance of space in higher education is relatively under-researched in comparison with identity construction (Cox et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the findings here accord with recent research into the ways in which space is experienced by new lecturers and students (Cox et al., 2012; Jessop et al. 2012). Furthermore, as Hillier and Hanson argue, spaces are ultimately invested with meaning through human interaction: '… the ordering of space in buildings is really about the ordering of relations between people' (Hillier and Hanson, 1984, in Jessop et al. 2012).

6.0 Nature of the role: strategy, research and teaching

This section explores findings from a set of questions about the nature of the role(s) of those working in academic development, addressing, particularly, the extent to which respondents' work entailed

- strategy and policy making,
- institution-wide responsibilities,
- research, and
- teaching.

Orientation to the role, including attitudes towards change management and criticality, is also addressed.

6.1 Strategy and policy making

The first of these questions asked 'Does your role involve any of the following in relation to teaching and learning?

a) institutional strategic planning
b) policy implementation
c) responsibility for quality processes

d) supporting engagement with professional standards frameworks' (See Figure 9.)

The rationale for this item (in concert with the following 2 questions) was to shed light on the breadth of the work undertaken by those working in academic development, and to explore the extent to which respondents had strategic, institution-wide oversight for issues related to teaching and learning. For each element of the question, respondents were asked to indicate whether the item played a formal, informal or no part of the role.

In terms of *formal* responsibilities, policy implementation (54%) and supporting engagement with professional frameworks (e.g. UKPSF) (57%) were the most frequently cited components of participants' jobs. 38% reported taking part in institutional planning and the same percentage reported having responsibility for quality processes. When we take into account those who report having '*informal*' involvement in these areas of activity, the numbers grow significantly: 43% (85% total) report involvement with strategic planning; 34% (88% total) with policy implementation; 39% (77% total) quality processes and 22 % (77 % total) engagement with professional frameworks. (See Figure 9.)

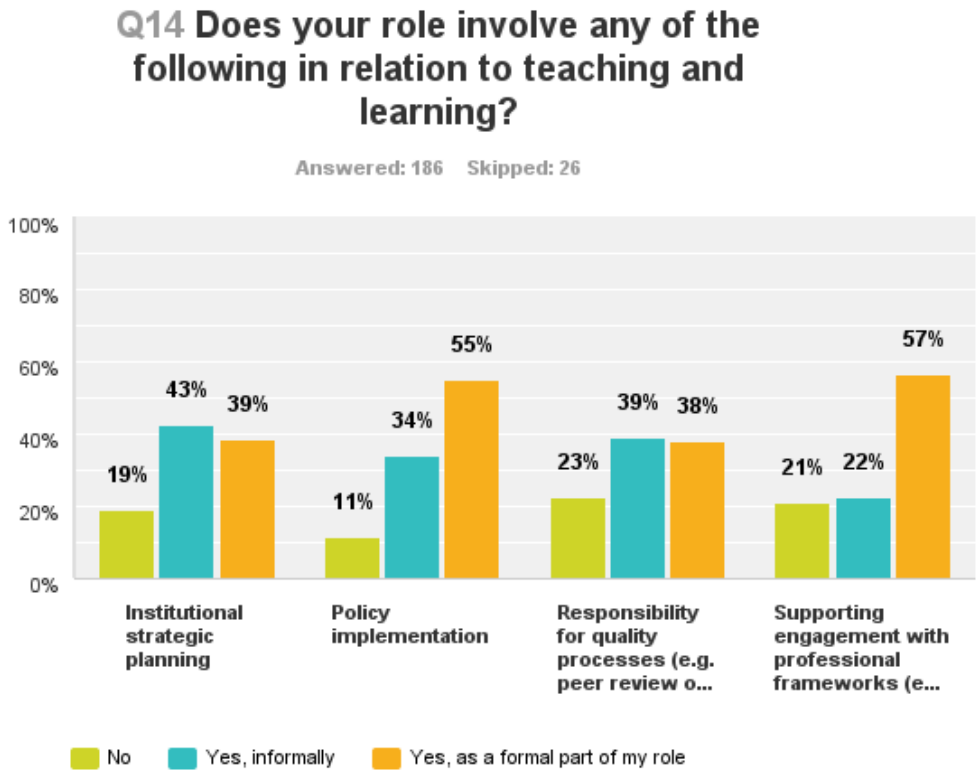

Figure 9: Strategy and policy

6.2 Change and criticality

When asked whether they saw 'supporting change' as a part of their role, the majority of respondents, 80%, indicated 'yes' or 'yes, greatly'.

Adopting a critical perspective was also viewed as a feature of the role by most participants. In relation to the statement: 'Adopting a critical stance toward practice is important in my work' 85% of respondents said 'yes' or 'yes, greatly'. When the emphasis turned to policy, 79 % of respondents indicated that 'adopting a critical stance towards policy' is important in their work. (See Figure 10.) We discuss this further, in relation to work by Clegg (2009) and others in section 12.3.

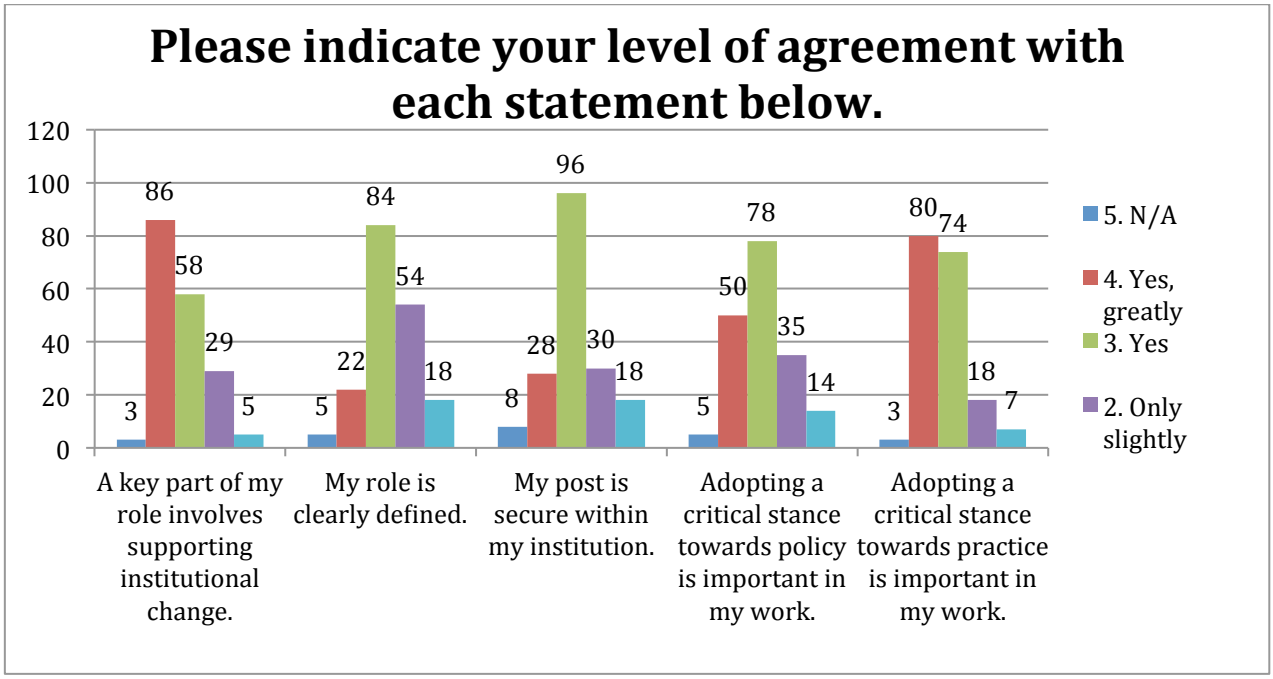

Figure 10: Nature of the role

A prominent theme in the free text comments was the tension between respondents' wishes to engage critically and the extent to which a critical stance was appreciated or acknowledged by senior managers:

> Adopting a critical stance is very important but I have learned over the years that it is not always welcomed so I have toned it down - hence I chose response 3. A critical stance towards practice is also vital but needs to be handled VERY sensitively and not appear like a critical stance. (R 197)

> Whilst adopting a critical stance towards policy is important to me in my role, my job title is 'adviser' - more than once it has been noted that I only advise and don't drive policy. (R 116)

> Critical stances are actively discouraged, which is particularly unfortunate. (R 77)

> As I said, there's a tension - service to the University and policy support vs. critical educational research and practice. But I think we manage it reasonably well and have considerably more freedom than some people in the field. (R 109)
>
> I do take a critical stance but I feel my role is about compliance - and colleagues in Schools see this as the case. I was told by colleagues in one School that I was a maverick for suggesting a different approach from received wisdom! (R 94)
>
> I see a key part of my role as supporting institutional change but I must stress this might not be the institutional change that is demanded in the University's policies! As an academic and a teacher educator I feel the need to be a public intellectual both within and without the institution and this includes instigating change whenever possible. (R 71)
>
> I'd say a critical stance towards both policy and practice were crucial. (This is why I've resigned!) (R 25)

The above responses suggest that Land's 'identity paradox' in which academic developers frequently find themselves engaging in both 'domestication and critique' (2008) still obtains: in this case critique, although valued as a pursuit by respondents, is frequently reported as being unwelcomed. This tension between wishing to adopt a critical orientation to academic work and the perception that this stance is not desired also emerges in section 10 below, on the challenges of the role.

6.3 Research

The topic of research and its role in identity construction repeatedly arose in the survey and interviews. Survey question 15 asked about research as a formal element of respondents' roles. In terms of *formal* responsibilities, 27 % said that applying for grants and awards was part of their job; 32 % undertake educational research; 27% support institutional colleagues in applying for grants and 33 % say that publishing research texts is part of their role. (See Figure 11.)

These figures are lower than either of the other two broad categories investigated in questions 14 and 16: institution-wide initiatives and teaching-related activities. (See Figures 9 and 12). However, a substantial number of respondents saw research activity as an *informal* part of their job: 38 % apply for grants (66% total); 50 % undertake educational research (82 % total); 50 % support colleagues in applying for grants (77 % total) and 48 % (80% total) report publishing, all as an informal part of the role.

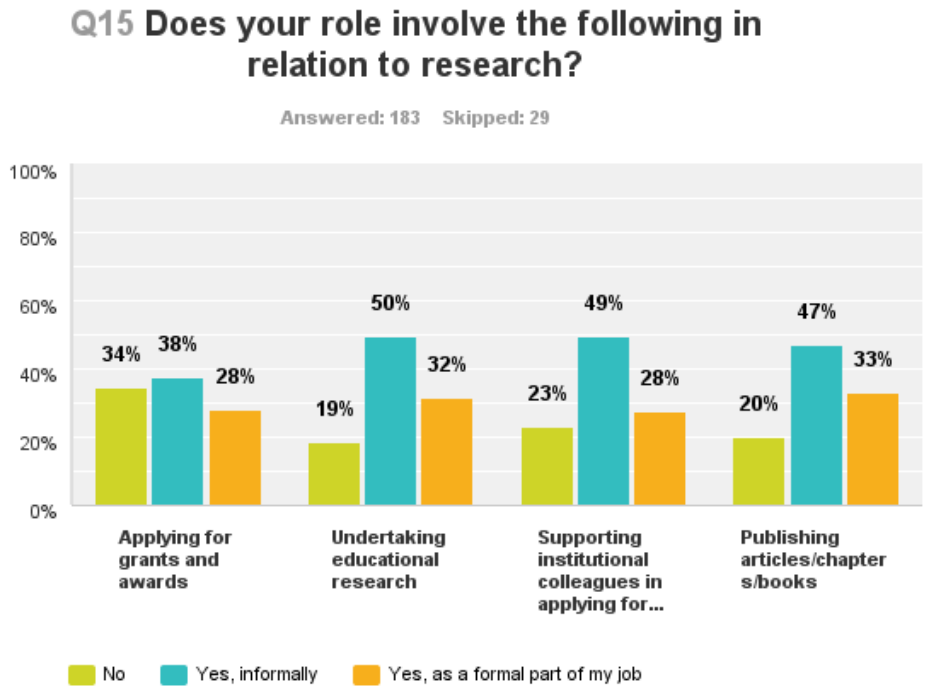

Figure 11: Role and research

The open responses identified additional research activity, including

- other types of research respondents carried out (including PhD supervision, undergraduate research schemes and journal editing);
- participants' own PhD research
- supporting subject colleagues to undertake research in learning and teaching.

They also cited

- the ambition (often thwarted) to have research credited as part of the role; and
- restrictions on carrying out research during regular working hours.

Of the 28 respondents who offered optional comments, nearly half expressed a wish to conduct research in the role but found they were either explicitly or implicitly discouraged from doing so. One respondent referred to research as a 'subversive act' :

> 'Until now, this has been officially prohibited, but because I did some in my own time it has now been recognized as part of the REF and I have a 1 year, 20% secondment to do more.' (R 93)
>
> 'I WISH this was part of my role and am having to try and do action research and think about publishing as a kind of subversive act. It is totally crazy that we do not all publish as just part of what we do. All that knowledge and experience remains locked up in individuals and small teams … it is very interesting to think about why we don't do this… [R 177]
>
> 'We are planning to get the research element of our work formalized. Our contracts currently specify 'scholarship' but not research.' (R 183)
>
> 'The job description mentioned research (which is partly why I decide to take it, even thought it's a non-academic role) but actually there is neither time nor support for it, and it's so clearly not of interest to my line managers that I actually do all my research in my spare time.' (R 190)

The topic also arose in interviews, where participants linked research to credibility and identity:

> 'Our desire to do research is an important part of our credibility with our academic colleagues […] (IA)
>
> 'If we didn't have masters students and PhD students, we would lose an important amount of credibility with colleagues as well as part of our own identity' (IA)
>
> I think it [research] has all helped our reputation in the institution, and of course the institution always likes in a bid or whatever to throw in that [unit name] is part of the institution when it suits them. (IG)

6.4 Teaching activities

Question 16 (Figure 12) addressed the types of teaching activities in which respondents engaged. Generally, the work described here was much more likely to be a core element of participants' role with 78 % indicating that 'leading workshops in teaching and learning' was a *formal* part of their job, with an additional 13% (total = 91%) saying it was an informal aspect of their work. 62% said that 'designing/delivering accredited courses in teaching and learning' was a formal part of their job (15 % said informal; total = 77); promoting or championing learning and teaching was identified as a formal part of the role by 64 % with another 28 % suggesting they did this informally (92% in total). Finally working directly with students was undertaken officially by 38 % with a further 29 % doing this work informally.

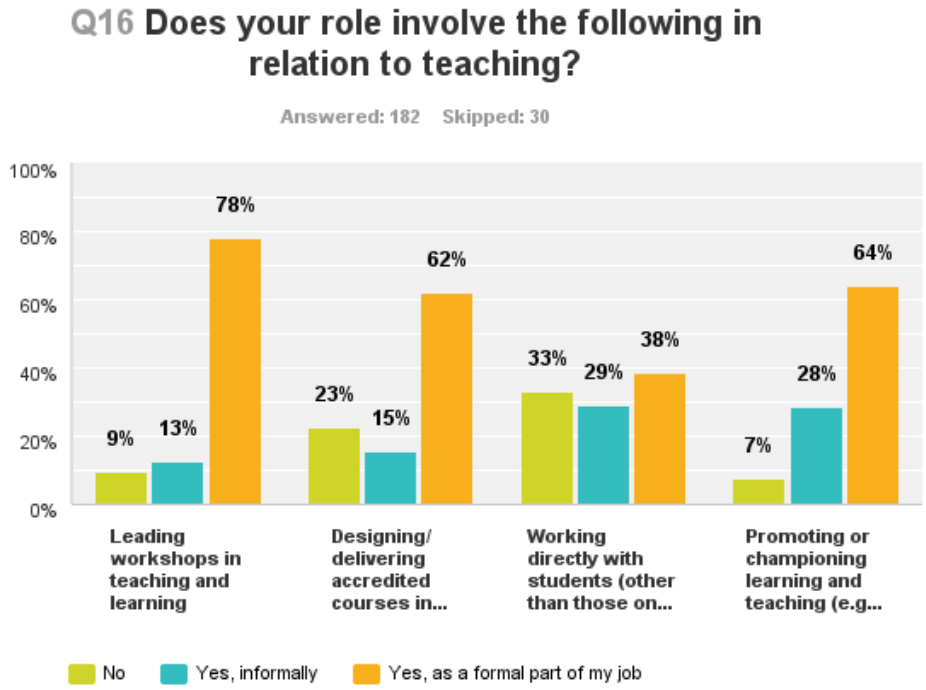

Figure 12: Teaching as part of role

The 28 free text responses for this question, cited additional work including consulting with individual academics and departments, leading training for support colleagues and carrying out work for the HEA, such as supporting UKPSF accreditation.

Several respondents mentioned the importance of continuing to work directly with students (other than those on PGCerts and similar courses) which helped sustain direct teaching experience and maintain credibility with colleagues:

> 'I still teach one course for 'real' students each year as part of my contract and to maintain credibility with academics.' (R 173)

In this broad set of responses addressing the nature of their work, participants reported that the teaching/training oriented activities suggested in Q16 are more likely to be part of people's 'formal role' than the strategic or research-related responsibilities set out in Q 14 and Q15. However, the disparity is less marked when the 'informal' category is taken into account.

Without baseline data with which to compare these, it is difficult to make firm claims about the changing nature of academic development work. However, the perception amongst some interviewees (particularly more experienced ones) is that the role tends to involve more strategic oversight than it did previously.

7.0 Career progression/development

Career progression and opportunities for development were addressed directly in Q 11 in the survey and in the interviews. Additionally, these themes arose repeatedly in the free text responses.

Of the 182 people who answered the question 'Are there career progression opportunities in your institution for someone in your role?', 36% said 'yes', 45% said 'No' and 20% answered 'Not sure' (Figure 13).

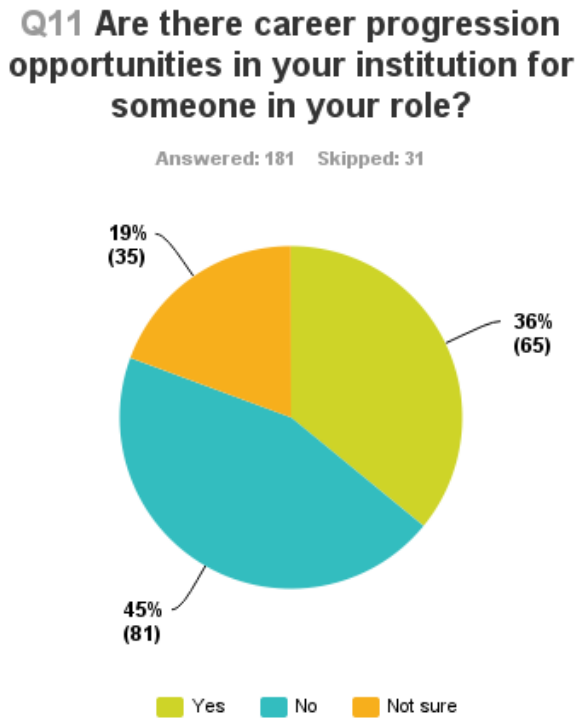

Figure 13: Career progression opportunities

7.1 Professional services contracts

Of the 68 optional comments on career progression, the dominant response was that there are limited opportunities, particularly for those on professional services contracts, largely because there are few promoted posts for academic developers to move into and frequently no career structure for progression beyond a given professional services position; unlike staff in academic posts, those on a professional services contract typically have to move into a new job to be promoted:

> 'I head up the education development team and essentially have nowhere to go; equally my team colleagues have only my job to aspire to. Many other admin roles in the university are closed to us, often due to inaccurate preconception of what we do, or because we want to continue in the field and the only way to do this is to move to another institution.' (R 196)

> 'Not really – the only advancement would be to the head of unit and obviously that is only one post and management anyway. I have been doing pretty much the same role since I arrived here [over 15 years ago].' (R 41)

The qualitative data suggest that for those not on academic posts, to achieve promotion generally requires a move into a more managerial role, often head of a unit, of which there is generally only 1 per institution.

7.2 Academic contracts

For those on academic contracts, the opportunities for promotion are theoretically available, but a number of respondents observed that it is often difficult to meet the criteria because the opportunities and support for research, often a key criterion for academic promotion, tend to be limited:

> 'Yes, to an extent, probably the highest I could go through promotion is Senior Lecturer (unless I am able to focus on research much more in my future career)' (R 142)

> 'Yes but probably not as good as other academic colleagues who are School based.' (R 169)

> 'For academic staff in my unit, promotion is possible and several people have been successful. For professional staff, progression means moving to a different, often non-specialist or managerial role.' (R 17)

> In terms of development, […] because we're academics in a professional services unit … we don't have access to the types of activities that would enable us to get promotion. So we are pretty much stuck, because we can't join into the wider activities of a school for example or a faculty, college, whatever you have, which would enable them to demonstrate that they can [work] at a different level. So we're pretty much tied, unless we go out of an institution, to our place within the structure. (IJ)

A small number of respondents on academic contracts indicated that they could, theoretically, progress to professor, and, a few participants either had themselves or knew someone who had been promoted to a chair; however there were only a handful of examples of this type of promotion cited:

> 'Potentially I could become a professor in teaching and learning but this is as yet an unproved pathway. I intend to be the first to make it happen.' (R 131)

> 'We are on the academic pay spine, so theoretically progress up to professor.' (R 185)

There was also some evidence, particularly from respondents in research-intensive universities, that roles are shifting away from academic to professional services contracts:

> I came to the university on an academic contract - an old style academic contract – and the university has never got round to changing that. Whereas in fact, I'm now in a service unit, and my colleagues that are brought into this unit, doing the same job . . . are largely brought [in] on academic-related contracts . . .

> Because the teaching and scholarship route has been relatively recently established, I have a nasty feeling that if my colleagues really want to progress, they'll have to do it through the standard professional services criteria of management roles and so on. (IA)

Finally, one interviewee observed that although opportunities for advancement were limited in her institution, there were other, less tangible development opportunities in the role that she found satisfying:

> 'There isn't really any route in terms of moving through official structures in the university. I think there's lots of personal and intellectual development opportunities that are very satisfying and very rich. They don't necessarily correlate to increased external status or pay or role but … there's certainly lots of chances for enrichment. […] I do think that the non-material is quite an appealing part of this job. … it is quite satisfying - personal professional development rather than routes to status advancement or development.' (ID)

These less easily measurable opportunities and intellectual rewards are discussed further in section 9, and career progression and development opportunities are further addressed in section 10.9 below.

8.0 Identity construction

In many ways, all of the questions analysed in this report contribute to identity construction. In this section, we consider answers to questions that specifically address this topic and we draw on qualitative responses that directly articulated issues associated with identity, such as the significance of professional networks, the orientations of respondents towards their roles, perceptions of colleagues and the nature of academic development work described by respondents.

8.1 Networks:

Being involved with professional organisations was seen as significant to respondents with 78% answering 'Yes' or "yes, greatly' to the statement 'Being a member of a professional organization (e.g. SEDA, ALT, SRHE) is important to me'. A similar percentage of respondents (72%) indicated that being *accredited* by a professional organization was important to them. (See Figure 14.)

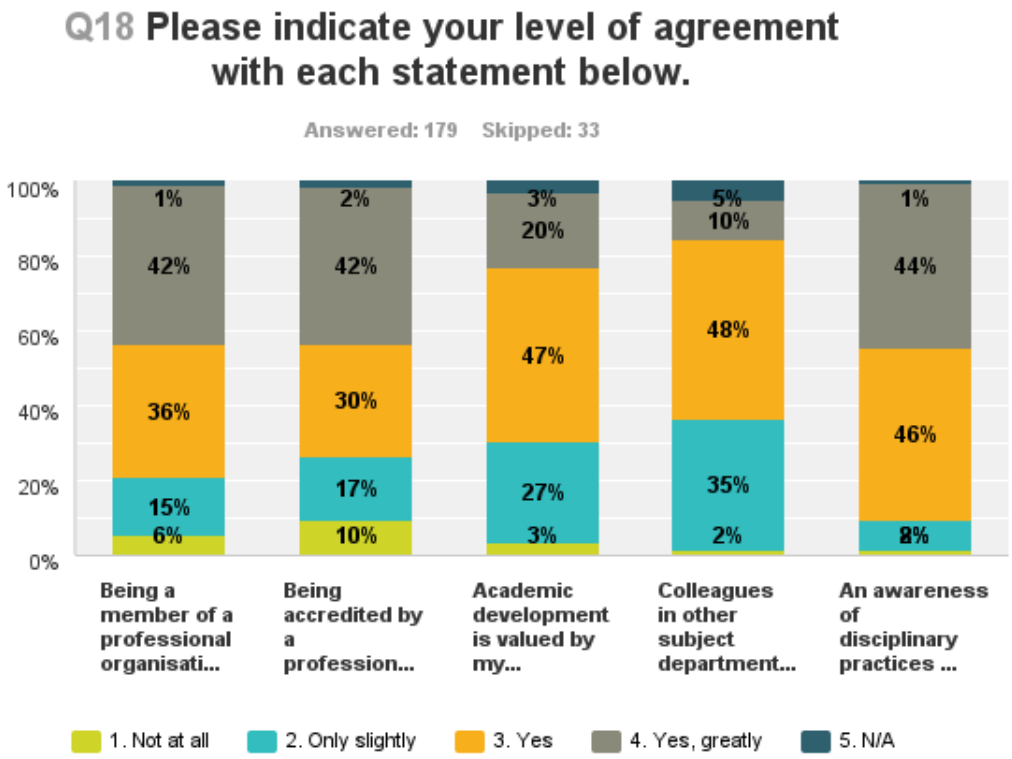

Figure 14: Organisational membership and features of the role that are valued

Similarly, for interviewees, conferences and network events were considered to be 'a big part of my learning' (IM) and associations such as SEDA, HEDG and the SRHE were cited as particularly productive organisations to belong to in terms of making contacts, entering a community of practice and generally learning about the area. It was observed that SEDA, in particular, has supported those new to academic development:

'I've only been in SEDA for the last little while… And what I found has been absolutely fantastic. I mean the emails are worth their weight in gold… I think it has made me a lot more hopeful about things' (IL).

'I found them [SEDA events] invaluable when I started and … I can't believe why that wouldn't be similarly true today. Anyone who's making the transition into [academic development] … because there isn't a route, people come from all sorts of different places. I think in order to get the identity ... it's the good old community of practice theory… I mean to get the jargon, the language, to know the territory, the literature… to try to do that on your own would be so difficult ... compared with the opportunities that you get through going to a SEDA conference, getting the newsletter… I think that as you become senior, I guess, that SEDA maybe becomes less valuable and HEDG becomes more potentially important… I think there may be room for more coordinated CPD for senior people' (IG).

'… because I'm new here, you know I can't draw upon personal networks … So membership in things like SEDA, SRHE and then in [this country] we have one called EDIN … [has] really been invaluable with connecting me with the literature, but also a way to make personal connections when I go to events with people to share.' (IO).

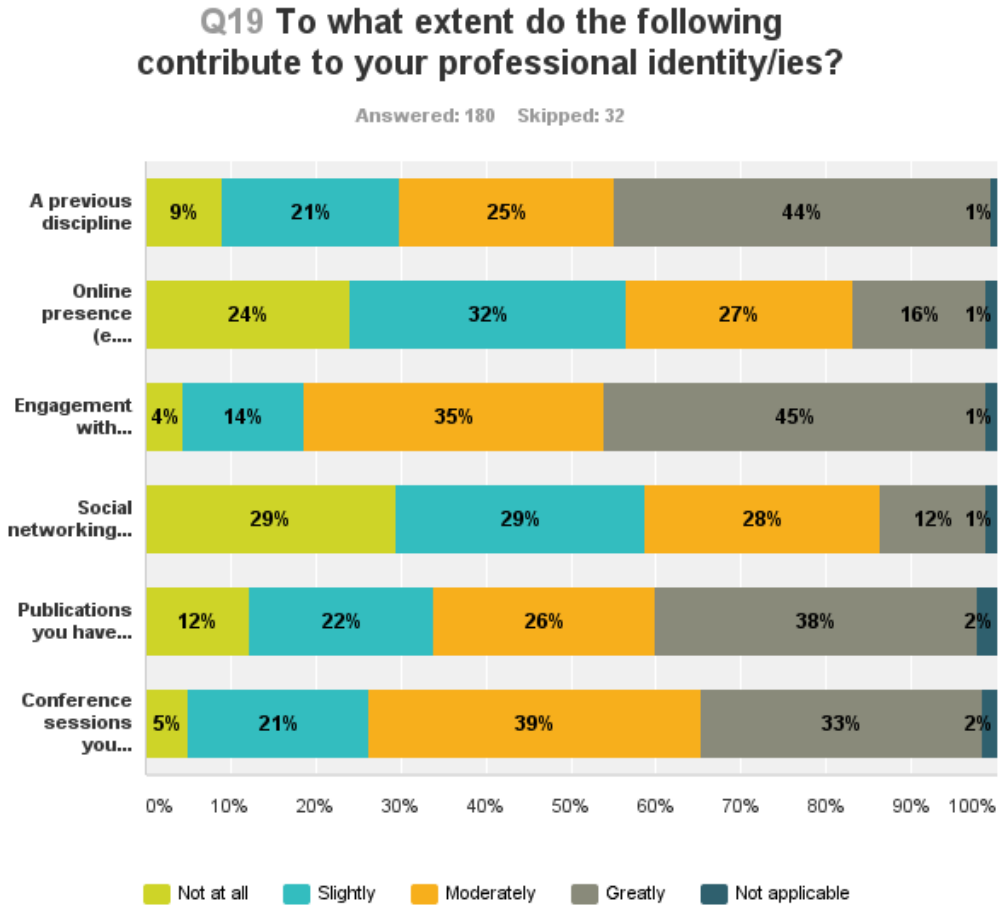

Figure 15: Factors contributing to professional identity construction

8.2 Other contributors to identity construction

Other factors that contributed to identity construction were a prior discipline (44 % said 'greatly' and 25 % said 'moderately') and (as suggested above) engagement with professional organisations (45 % said 'greatly' and 35 % said 'moderately').

Perhaps not surprisingly, research-related activities were viewed as important contributors to identity construction. Conference presenting was seen as a significant form of identity work with (33 % indicating 'greatly' and 39 % 'moderately') and publishing was seen as 'greatly' contributing to professional identity for 26 % of respondents and 'moderately so' for 38 %.

An online presence was seen as less important with 56% of respondents suggesting that it was 'not at all' (24%) or 'slightly' (32%) contributory. Social networking was similarly rated with 58% suggesting it was 'not at all' or 'slightly' contributory to professional identity, 28% 'moderately' so and only 12% suggested it 'greatly 'contributed. (See Figure 15.) Several interviewees suggested that Twitter was something they intend to engage with more actively in the future. The reading of relevant blogs was also mentioned as a potential source of information and to enable 'conversations with people outside the institution' (IJ).

Other, related themes that emerged across the survey included

- viewing the role as one of 'fostering others',
- the dislocation between respondents' perception of themselves as 'academic' and an institutional view of their work as non-academic,
- the desire for a research or evidence base for academic development and
- the extent to which participants were visible within and beyond their institution.

These themes are discussed in more depth in sections 9, 10 and 11.

9.0 Pleasures of the Role

When asked in an open question to identify the 'pleasures' of their role, respondents recorded a number of features ranging from colleagues to the nature of the work and the influence their work has on practice and, to a lesser extent, policy. Many of the responses here reprise themes and issues described in the preceding sections. The most frequently cited 'pleasures' by respondents were

9.1 Colleagues

Enjoyment of **colleagues** – particularly subject-based colleagues who were keen to engage with learning and teaching development - was the most frequently cited attribute (N= 47). Similarly, there were many references (N= 27) to valuing the diversity and variety of colleagues encountered in cross-institutional work:

> ‘Meeting almost everyone in the University in my work. Seeing a cross section of university life. Learning everyday from brilliant people.’ (R 195)

9.2 Fostering

Related to the previous item, there were nearly 30 references to what could be called **‘fostering’**: the supporting of a peer, normally a disciplinary colleague, to develop in their role and/or realize their potential as a teacher:

> ‘supporting individuals to be the best teachers or researchers they can be, modeling good practice.’ (R 37)

> ‘Watching staff engage with teaching and learning and seeing them develop professionally as teachers as well as practitioners/academics.’ (R 44)

This expression of pleasure in supporting the achievement of colleagues aligns with Land’s ‘Romantic (ecological humanist)’ category (Land, 2001) and it is discussed further in section 12.1 below.

9.3 Impact

Linked to this observation is the pleasure taken in having an **impact** (N= 32) and developing others’ learning and teaching practice more broadly (N = 8):

> ‘Students – particularly when I can take them on a long enough journey (a whole M.Ed module) to enable them to have real impact – and that means I am having real impact.’ (R 156)

> ‘Collaborating with academics and seeing their successful implementation of an educational innovation I have championed.’ (R 24)

> ‘knowing I’ve made a difference’ (R 66)

9.3 Working with students

Another frequently cited pleasure was **working with students** both in terms of teaching, such as PG Cert teaching, or other student-facing work. Engaging with students was mentioned 30 times. Similarly, a broader sense of enhancing the student experience was identified (N=20):

> ‘working with students is also a pleasure in the sense that their input is now starting to influence our policies and practices.’ (R 154)

'Teaching – i.e. delivering development sessions to PGs and academic colleagues – is the part I enjoy most. I feel I am really contributing to something and making a difference in a way that previously (as an academic) I only felt occasionally. I have only started recently, but I have a greater sense of professional identity, optimism and satisfaction than I did in a teaching-only academic role. I think we could be seeing the start of a very positive moment for teaching in HE, and a shift in values that will reunite the spheres of research and teaching, and I feel I'm contributing to that.' (R 194)

9.4 Freedom and flexibility

Freedom and flexibility in terms of working autonomously, making decisions about what type of activities to pursue and managing respondents' own programmes of work were cited as positive aspects of the role (N= 18). Linked to this was a certain intellectual freedom and capacity to be creative (N = 7). 14 respondents cited the constant learning required of them to meet the changing nature of the role as a pleasure:

'Freedom to develop things I think are important.' (R 160)

'Freedom and time to question, read, think deeply and come to grips with some of the enduring problems in higher education assessment, contributing to new and valid ways to conceptualise and do it, and getting cited!' (R 36).

9.4 Scholarship

As suggested in section 6.3, research was signalled as a desirable feature of participants' work. **Engaging in scholarship** was mentioned regularly (N=13) with respondents citing engaging in educational research, writing, publishing work, and being viewed as an authority as specific examples:

'Seeing my work in print and getting feedback and recognition.' (R 70)

'Writing. Developing a strong research culture in my team.' (R 105)

9.5 Other pleasures

Other areas cited were enhancing the use of learning technology, doing work that aligned with personal and professional values, leading projects, being part of networks – internal and external to an institution, being involved in strategy making and/or management, providing solutions to problems (conceptual and more logistic), being thanked or acknowledged, running workshops, curriculum design, and programme review.

Of course, as a number of the responses indicate, these 'pleasures' of the role are frequently interrelated as the following participant indicates:

> 'I take pleasure in seeing values and practices changing in teaching and learning, through an initiative that I've started but subject areas have taken on and made their own. I am thrilled when I've supported great teaching teams and individual teachers to make a case and they achieve the recognition and reward that they deserve. I love working with a creative, hard working and service oriented team of people who have their own eccentricities but who all have a sense of humour. I strongly value working in higher education where we can make a difference to students' lives and to social justice in society. As David Lodge wrote, it is 'nice work' and is still a privilege.' (R 17)

10.0 Challenges of the role

159 people responded to the open question 'what are the challenges of your role?' and, as with the previous section, a number of themes are reprised here. The most common areas mentioned were

- insufficient institutional support (n=42)
- difficulty in engaging colleagues (n=38)
- high workload (n=30)
- others' (mis)perceptions of the respondent's role (usually academic developer or learning technologist) (n=24)
- wide ranging, unfocussed nature of the role (n=19)
- insufficient resourcing (n=18)

There were responses clustered around research and scholarship (n= 14) and the related difficulty of developing and sustaining an academic identity (n=5).

Other areas identified included

- Responding to/ caught between internal and external agendas (n=14)
- Job security and career development and progression (n=8)
- Tensions within teams and line management: (n=14)
    - challenges of working in teams and
    - issues associated with managing teams
    - being managed by people with insufficient understanding of learning and teaching
- Location – physical or structural (n= 9)
- Institutional policies and initiatives (n=7)
- Pace of change – institutional and technological (n=8)

10.1 Institutional support

When writing about challenges associated with **institutional support**, the most frequent observation was the perception that teaching was not valued, institutionally, as much as research and that therefore it was harder for those tasked with supporting learning and teaching to perform their roles; additionally, respondents cited insufficient senior management commitment; a lack of institutional representation at senior management level and lack of institutional memory in relation to learning and teaching:

> 'having to fight the Learning and Teaching fight in a research-intensive institution.' (R 79)

> 'without firm institutional commitment, it's difficult to outline long term goals, a bit of directionless floundering ensues occasionally' (R 101)

10.2 Engaging colleagues

The difficulties and complexities about **engaging colleagues** were centred around the challenges of motivating colleagues who were either juggling a high workload or unconvinced of the merits of devoting time to teaching and learning activities and/or e-learning. 'Change fatigue' and the fact that 'no one wants to be 'developed' (I 89) were also mentioned:

> 'not having an 'official' mandate for some of the new things I do so having to spend a great deal of time persuading people to engage' (R 108)

> 'reaching the hard to reach' (R 88)

> 'Dealing with 'change fatigue' within the institution which has existed for the past 18 months. Trying to sell the importance of some of our projects and initiatives to staff who are already busy with teaching, administration and possibly research.' (IR 154)

In many ways, the observations here are linked with those in the previous section on institutional support.

10.3 Workload

The discussion about **workload** included comments about the difficulty to find time for reflection, not wasting time on futile projects and meetings, having too many commitments and struggling with work/life balance. In some cases these observations were related to other frequently cited issues including **resourcing** and the **wide ranging nature of the role** occupied by respondents:

> 'They mostly seem to be challenges of balance: balancing time and priorities; balancing top-down policy and systems that are often necessary for external quality assurance or risk management, with flexibility and encouragement of grassroots adaptation and innovation. There are also the challenges of scarce resources, academic overwork, strong prioritizing of research by many discipline heads…' (R 17)

> 'Our academic development department suffers I think from being spread a bit too thin, and not having enough focus. So, challenges around handling multiple (often superficial) pieces of work, which even if they do

> get finished on time, can feel a bit pointless in the scheme of things.' (R 155)
>
> 'Juggling operational with management/strategic activities. Not always having the opportunity to strategically plan as things just keep getting thrown at my team.' (R 168)

10.4 Others' perceptions of role

Another frequently cited challenge was coping with **others' perceptions of the role**. Comments were made about colleagues not seeing the 'value' of the respondent's role and finding that their work went unrewarded and unrecognized. Additionally, respondents cited invisibility, being seen as just 'trainers', and maintaining credibility as challenges relating to colleagues' perceptions.

> 'I am invisible in my department and am becoming invisible in my institution. I am better known and appreciated externally. It is very sad and very stressful and very hard to feel confident.' (R 156)
>
> 'Making sure that all staff across the institution (particularly in senior management) are aware of the services provided by my unit and the scope of my role.' (R 95)
>
> 'Lack of recognition or understanding of academic development here, lack of an academic approach, lack of representation at senior level'. (R 83)

10.5 Pace of change

The **pace of change** (including the area of academic practice itself), the changing context within an institution and, particularly, technological changes that influence learning and teaching was another area of discussion:

> 'The digital world has outstripped our ability to transform fast enough and we are still inventing essential new pedagogies'. (R 151)

10.6 Lack of time and valuing of scholarship of learning and teaching

There were a number of comments relating to the scholarship of learning and teaching, particularly around finding time or a mandate for doing research. There were repeated mentions of senior managers' lack of awareness of the body of scholarship in teaching and learning, and a lack of critical reflection surrounding learning and teaching more broadly. Related to this area of discussion were the comments about the difficulty of developing or sustaining an academic identity by some respondents:

> 'Perceptions of what my role is: academic or 'non-academic'? I value conducting research, publishing, but I don't think this is always in line with my role.' (R 112)
>
> 'Lack of critical discussion around Learning and Teaching' (R 121)

> ‘Lack of awareness/support for scholarly work in academic development, lack of criticality’ (R 142)

10.7 External/internal agenda and impact

Respondents also observed that academic development units can often find themselves responding to external and internal agendas, and the resulting ‘bureaucracy’ can impede professional goals. Having to support engagement with the UKPSF came in for criticism from 4 respondents:

> ‘Balancing the demands/accountabilities of external agencies and internal governance structures with creating a truly engaging and stimulating learning and teaching environment’ (R 187)
>
> ‘

Similarly, **Impact** – both measuring and ‘making it’ – was cited. Respondents spoke of the challenge of moving from idea or concept to implementation and the difficulty of measuring and demonstrating the value of their work.

10.8 Location

In common with findings reported in section 5, location, both physical and, more frequently, structural was mentioned in response to this question. Respondents spoke of not being embedded in the academic environment and having limited influence on decision making with reference to teaching:

> ‘I sit in no man’s land, in a space between everyone and the senior management team. This leads to challenges in my ability to influence strategic direction although I believe that’s what they want me to do but I don’t have a seat at that table in a formal sense although I might be there in the … words I write.’ (R 153)

10.9 Lack of opportunities for career progression

Finally, building on the consderation of career progression in section 7.2 above, there was some discussion about the lack of opportunities for career development and progression and job security. Additionally, some respondents (n=6) mentioned the challenges of working in teams and cited difficulties with management – either the management of others or, more frequently, reporting to managers who did not understand the significance of academic development and educational research.

11.0 Metaphor as a means of exploring identity construction

Academic developer ‘identity’ has been described and conceptualised in a range of ways. Handal (2008) speaks of the educational developer as ‘critical friend’; Ashford et al. (2004) have drawn metaphorical comparisons such as ‘midwife’

and ‘jester’; and Land (2001, 2004, 2008) has set out a widely cited and adapted framework of orientations for academic development. Kinash and Wood (2011) explore metaphor (bridges, swimming) to describe their role and suggest that academic developers’ sense of who they are is often bound up with others’ identities (for example, subject-based colleagues.)

Building on this research, we asked interviewees about metaphors they would use to describe their work. Some of those who offered metaphors described their experience of working in their role as being like,

- ‘pushing jelly uphill’,
- ‘walking through fog’, ‘
- ‘turning the juggernaut’
- ‘a balancing act’.

These all involve an element of engaging with a difficult task.

Geographic metaphors were also invoked. One interviewee characterized her/himself as a ‘A nomad that visits other people's territories’. Yet, another is ‘an experienced map reader’, who ‘knows the territory’. The academic as traveller is compelling and aligns with many of the more literal discussions of place explored within this study. There is also an acknowledgement of Becher’s work here.

More broadly and with a nod towards a creative angle was the interviewee who considered her/himself to be ‘a designer, a designer of learning environments’.

Other metaphors described relationships with others in the institution, with the academic developer being a ‘translator’, or ‘the heart’ in the circulation system, ‘pushing blood to the brain’ - senior management - and to ‘the extremities’ - staff with teaching responsibilities.

Others presented a vision of their role or mission: ‘freeing people from shackles’, or nurturing ‘a fire’.

An awareness of audience and expectations was evident in these responses, too, with two interviewees distinguishing between metaphors (above) that described their actual situation and those that described what was expected of them: to be ‘a bridge’, ‘links in a chain’ or ‘spokes in a wheel’, connecting the centre with the outer edges.

Finally, there were references to organic, insect metaphors: ‘beehive’ and ‘spider’s web’.

Examples of Metaphors from interviewees

'... The metaphor that I like for myself is this whole notion of like a fire, the whole notion that people want to develop learning and teaching on the whole, and you just need to be able to place some ideas very lightly, and nurture the fire. The thing is you have [to] sort of hold the space I think, because you can't ... if you put loads of your own logs on it then it just squashes everything and people then think they can't develop it themselves. But if you don't do anything then the whole thing dies [...] cos it takes an awful lot to keep going in this day and age when learning and teaching isn't valued so much [...] I like to try and create the energy in the situation so that they can develop their ideas.' (IL)

' [...] For me – some of the key things are being able to think outside the box and allow yourself and allow others to be creative in thinking. It's freeing them from the shackles … it's … because educational development now is more about efficiency and effectiveness. There's this huge layer of accountability over everything. And sometimes you have to free yourself from stuff to be able to think about different ways of doing it. [...]it's about freeing yourself from the way you're doing things and what you're trying to do to get that clarity and think well are there different ways you can do this.' (IB)

'I think that if I have a metaphor about what I feel that I do, and what skills I have to offer when I'm working with an outside group, I design learning environments. You can think of what a designer does in the world of art and architecture and so on. And you can make parallels because there's, there's a creative, almost an aesthetic element about it. But also it's a craft. You have to know the tools you can use. And you have to know the limitations of the environment that you're designing. It kind of fits, because you design for a particular environment.' (IA)

'There is no bridge, if you know what I mean […] I can't be the bridge. I'm just the person on the other side of the bridge. They need to build that bridge (IO)

This description offers a flavour of the way in which metaphor was invoked and a fuller discussion of the use of metaphor in this study is included in the e-book, another output from the project.

12.0 Discussion

12.1 Tensions related to being 'academic'

A recurring tension when considering both location and identity construction is that between an academic orientation towards the role occupied by respondents and their perception of a more service-oriented, compliant conceptualization of the role frequently held by institutions and colleagues. In this sense, as suggested above in section 9.2, Land's (2008) identity paradox of the academic developer who is engaged in both 'domestication and critique' still obtains for many, according to our findings, and this tension emerged particularly in relation to discussions surrounding research and in participants' responses to questions about the extent to which their roles involve 'critique'.

The location of respondents, particularly when sited in HR or QA units, contributes to this tension and would seem to heighten the gap between being academically focused on one hand but being positioned as an enforcer of policy or regulation on the other. Along with location, perceived institutional attitudes towards the role, such as those suggested in section 10.4 reinforce this paradox. Many respondents indicate a desire to engage in research and writing and to adopt a critical perspective, but for a significant number, this part of their role is not supported. This is in keeping with findings of Lee et al. (2010) and their observations about the tension between research and service experienced by academic developers.

12.2 Shifting landscapes

The unfixed nature of the location of academic developers was another recurring theme and we learned of many examples of frequent restructuring and repositioning as university managers struggled to situate this area of work within institutions. The majority of interviewees told of recent or impending reorganisations of their units.

Additionally, the location of academic development work matters. The physical characteristics of the sites of practice can signal a perception of the ways in which an institution conceptualizes the work. As one interviewee described

> 'we're now in a building … [which] is much more systematized, there's a reception area … you book in … you go and you visit the space and then you go away again. And because it's shared [with other central university functions] … there are no opportunities for us to do anything with the space to make it *feel* like educational development. (IE)

The structural location of the academic developers can have a strong influence on how they carry out their role and the extent to which they are able to influence strategy and policy.

12.3 Nature of the role

Clegg (2009) suggests that academic developers tend to identify themselves as agents of change, and our study broadly confirms that. 80 % of survey respondents indicated that supporting institutional change was a key part of

their role, and interviewees expressed a similar sense that change was central to their work: 'from the educational development work that I do … To me the fundamentals of it are about supporting change'. (IB)

However, we found less evidence of the teacher-deficit model in operation that others have indicated is prominent in the discourse of academic development (for ex. Boud and Brew, 2013, and Clegg, 2009). Indeed, interviewees were more likely to credit university colleagues with a rich awareness of academic practice: 'I think people in the sector have a far greater understanding of teaching and learning than they ever had'. (IB)

We also explored the assertion that there has been a shift in the foci away from working with individuals, towards more strategic initiatives (Clegg 2009, Boud and Brew, 2013). A general trend here is that strategic involvement is *desired* by academic developers and that a number of respondents engage in strategic work as either a formal or informal part of their role. (See section 6.1.)

However, there was also a perceived disruption in reporting lines, with a number of participants feeling that their unit/work was insufficiently represented at senior management level, and additionally, that senior managers often did not understand or value the work. Just under a third (30%) of respondents felt that academic development was not valued by their institution. Additionally, career progression is not straightforward for many in the role and it would seem that the lack of opportunities for promotion (in contrast, in theory at least, to those who are on academic contracts) potentially thwarts possibilities for engaging in strategy and policy making.

So, while many report that their jobs are 'secure' (69%), avenues for development and progression for people working in the role are frequently unclear.

Related to this, 68 % indicate that their role is 'clearly defined'. Nonetheless, a number of respondents reported on the hybrid nature of the role and the fact that the role is not fixed but highly changeable and often so wide ranging as to be unfocused. Additionally, as suggested above, participants indicated that the units themselves were subject to being moved around within the university structure and reconstituted. One respondent suggested that the unfixed nature was 'uncomfortable' but that it 'goes with the territory' (R20). As another said 'Everywhere I have worked as an academic developer, the units/divisions have been in a state of perpetual restructuring. This must be reducing the impact we could have but are perhaps just characteristic of the relative novelty of the work'. (R77)

12.4 Visibility

Another theme in relation to identity construction was that of visibility: respondents might be barely visible in their own institution but frequently enjoy a high profile across the sector more broadly:

> 'As an academic developer in a small institution my disciplinary 'tribe' is almost entirely located outside my institution. The professional network

is an absolutely essential component in my reflective practice therefore.' (R 116)

'I would say that my external reputation and standing externally is greater than that in my institution but that I need this to be the case to have any credibility at all.' (R 120)

The allusion to Becher here appears to be another way of legitimating academic development as a discipline and also returns us to the idea of *network* as significant.

Finally, it is worth noting that not all participants felt that 'academic development' was or should be seen as a 'discipline'. One interviewee argued that there already is a research discipline for this work – education: 'I was always puzzled, coming as I did from education why academic development wanted to distinguish itself from education. I always thought that was really, really strange….' (IF). The contested nature of what constitutes the epistemological base of academic development is in line with research by Harland and Staniforth (2008).

12.5 Research

However, epistemological disputes aside, the act of engaging in research is a powerful marker of identity and for many respondents, research and publishing was viewed an important form of identity work, but one that they struggle to find space, time and a mandate for doing. On the one hand, respondents tended to suggest that being research active gave them credibility with peers and offered an evidence base for the work they did. However, they frequently reported being discouraged from committing time to research and just under a third of respondents said that doing educational research was a formal part of their role. 64% reported that publishing either 'greatly' or 'moderately' contributed to their professional identity/ies. 72% said the same about conference presentations. So it would seem that there is a dislocation between what is formally part of the role and the activities that those in the role value as part of their professional identity construction. This is broadly commensurate with findings of Fraser and Ling (2013) who argue that research in this area is diminishing as an institutional priority.

12.6 Disciplinarity

There was a strong sense in which being alert to disciplinarity, both of one's own and that of colleagues, featured across the study. Firstly it was felt to be important part of engaging with colleagues: 90 % agreed with the statement 'An awareness of disciplinary practices is important in my work' and comments like this one were common: 'an understanding of subject discipline cultures is vital to avoid a "one size fits all" approach which almost never works' (R 86).

Additionally, respondents indicated that a prior discipline (or in some cases a still current, additional, discipline) was important in identity construction with 69 % suggesting it either moderately or greatly contributed to their current professional identity. Additionally, having a discipline identity (in addition to

that of academic development) was valuable in terms of building relationships and credibility with colleagues. This general orientation towards discipline considerations is linked to the discussions about research in sections 6.3, 9.4 and 10.6..

Lastly, one respondent, drawing on the 'hashtag altac movement' which has emerged in the field of digital humanities, argues for an alternative framing of the academic development role in such a way that it is more closely aligned with disciplinary work while also offering a career pathway:

> The 'alternative academic' or hashtag altac movement has been important to me in shifting my identity from an academic to academic-related professional role. I hope this will become a more common and valued career pathway, and that the distinction between disciplinary academics and those involved in educational development will diminish. We need more academics who think innovatively and seriously about education, and more educational developers who understand disciplinary pressures and priorities. I think it is important for academic developers to maintain subject-related identities and to be able to inhabit multiple and shifting roles.' (R 194)

'

The 'hashatag altac' approach was only mentioned by one respondent but the comment aligns with a frequent theme in this work of the constraints on the professional development that participants experience as a result of the ways in which their posts are configured, particularly those who are not in academic roles. Explicit here, too, is the impact on identity formation of the way in which the role is framed and the extent to which it allows for the expression of 'subject-related identities'.

Perhaps a future research project could investigate further the ways in which posts within universities are being reshaped.

13.0 Conclusion and key findings

Key findings are that

- Location (structural and geographic) is perceived to have a significant impact on the ability of those working in academic practice to perform their role.
- The physical location – geographical, architectural, internal design and layout – as a site of practice has implications for working both in terms of access and the meanings that such spaces convey (collegial, corporate, academic, non-academic, shared, open, etc).
- Posts with little opportunity for progression seem prevalent and are perceived to limit the scope of work that is formally undertaken. They also contribute to the tensions cited above and have an impact on professional identity. A recommendation would be for institutions to

review career pathways available to those working in the area, regardless of contract type.

- Networks, particularly those external to the institution, are invaluable for offering visibility, learning, sharing practice and reputation building.
- Those working in learning technology frequently suggest that they would prefer to be more closely aligned with academic development in their institution.
- There is a perception that academic developers are increasingly engaged with policy and strategy development but, for many, this work represents an *informal* part of the role.
- Engaging in research and scholarship is valued, particularly as a form of identity construction and for maintaining credibility with colleagues. However, many respondents felt unsupported in this aspect of their work and, as above, pursued this area informally.
- As academic developers become more experienced, additional opportunities for advanced CPD would be welcomed.

We have begun to enquire into sites of practice for academic developers and the impact of how they are accessed, designed, decorated and configured. A further, perhaps ethnographic study could probe more deeply into this aspect of location.

Future work might probe more deeply into the *informal* work carried out by academic developers, particularly in relation to questions set out in section 6.

Finally, this survey provides a set of baseline data about the type of work undertaken and indicators of participants' orientation to their work that could be re-examined in the future to help understand further shifts in the area of academic development.

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