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Insider Research and Impact on an Institution (University).

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Insider Research and Impact on an Institution (University)

Universities as institutions impact on their doctoral candidates through the programmes they offer, and work based professional doctorate (PD) programmes set out to guide their candidates to extend or develop aspects of the range of institutions they work in. For the internal staff of a university, work based PD candidate institutional impact is therefore complimentary. The university's programme impacts on the candidate, and the candidate impacts on the university. This institutional case study explores this exceptional situation.

The Doctorate in Professional Studies (Education) (DProf Ed) programme at the University of Westminster (UoW) is a part-time, work based PD programme that caters for Higher Education professionals. Candidates from a variety of discipline backgrounds progress from modules that provide Higher Education Academy professional teacher status through a planning a practitioner research and development phase, to a work based project that is designed to research and develop knowledge that is able to make an organisational and professional impact. The programme aims to develop HE practitioners knowledge of themselves, their context and its practices, and to find ways to utilise these in order to develop productive policies and practices within their organization. Wider professional impact is also expected.

Several candidates on the programme are employed by the UoW, and this set of three posters illustrates their insider research projects, which are designed to impact upon one organization; the UoW. The doctorate was developed in 2012 in order to meet the need for a doctoral qualification that enabled high-level professional practice in HE. This was to be made available externally, but also internally to enhance the university's cultural capital in teaching and learning. The programme was therefore designed to utilise doctoral level research strategically to enhance development focused in the organisation's core area of activity; learning and teaching. This concentration therefore has the potential to support strategic organizational development and promote research impact.

Development was intended for the individual candidates and at an organizational level, including underlining the importance of teaching and learning, and encouraging pedagogic research. It was hoped that this would support the development of the university's teaching and learning practices and overall performance, and encourage a university community of practice focused on pedagogic research. Existing pedagogic researchers and insider doctoral researchers across the university could cohere to develop knowledge, practice and a reputation for pedagogic research nationally and then internationally. Thus, institutional impact was expected.

The posters show some of areas researched and the discrete, planned changes that each project has begun making.

- Developing Mindfulness at the University of Westminster: Professional Practice, Teaching and Research. Jenni Nowlan
- Undergraduate Progression: lessons learned from a study in a Faculty of architecture and building. Anna Haworth
- Feeling our way: An investigation of university staff experiences of participation in learning and development programmes of the 'soft skills' variety. Alison Fixsen
- Building Capacity for Student Engagement through a Staff-Student Partnership Approach. Rosin Curran

The methodologies (ethnography and living theory/action research) focus on attaining a deep personal understanding of the organisation and exploring the insider struggles that influence the opportunities for taking knowledge forward. This highlights the potentially 'disruptive' nature of work based insider research, which may also be experienced by UoW candidates on PD programmes outside of the UoW. However, candidates on the DProf Ed, as a UoW validated programme, may consider that there is tacit organisational acceptance of this challenging, change focused approach for their research. While the programme has a 'learning agreement' signed by the candidates, the university as provider of the programme and the university as the workplace

where the research and development will take place, the importance of strategically placed support for developments has become clear.

A number of considerations with internal staffs' insider research and translating findings into institutional impact have emerged. Firstly, the position of the doctoral programme within the university; is it situated to integrate knowledge and practice and enable organizational development? Secondly, the positionality of the candidates in the university; what status does their candidature of the doctorate and their named role within the organization bring to their ability to make organizational change? Thirdly, how are changing organizational priorities managed for and by candidates undertaking lengthy projects that may affect their research, their role and their ability to effect change. These issues have resonance for any insider research, but the impetus derived from working, studying in and potentially changing the same institution may heighten both the positive and negative influences of these issues for this group.

The posters tentatively outline the outcomes candidates feel they have made to date. Ultimately, personal gains are likely to be measured by candidates' eventual success in passing their doctorate. Organizational impact is likely to be influenced by the foregoing issues and may be more difficult to effect than professional impact, more conventionally assessed on one level by e.g. journal articles. PD research impact could be intensified by the kind of university/organizational focus discussed here, but the extent of the impact on the university may rely on defined, integrated, longstanding strategic support for the doctoral programme.