

# Research and Development Series

**ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP:**

**CHANGING CONCEPTIONS, IDENTITIES AND  
EXPERIENCES IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION**

## Final Report

Dr Richard Bolden, Professor Jonathan Gosling, Dr Anne O'Brien, Dr Kim Peters,  
Professor Michelle Ryan, and Professor Alex Haslam

With

Dr Luz Longworth, Anna Davidovic and Kathrin Winkleman  
University of Exeter



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**Please note: unless indicated otherwise, views expressed in this report are those of the authors and research participants, not those of the Leadership Foundation and/or its partner organisations.**

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Registered and operational address:

Leadership Foundation for Higher Education  
First Floor, Holborn Gate  
330 High Holborn  
London, WC1V 7QT  
England

Tel: +44 (0)20 7849 6900  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7849 6901  
E-mail: [info@lfhe.ac.uk](mailto:info@lfhe.ac.uk)

**[www.lfhe.ac.uk](http://www.lfhe.ac.uk)**

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## 1. Executive Summary

1. This report presents the findings from a research project on academic leadership in UK higher education. The overall aim of this project was to explore and understand 'academic leadership' that relates directly to the core academic functions of teaching, research and service (including academic administration and outreach), as distinct from managerial aspects of leading higher education institutions (HEIs) such as financial and strategic planning, marketing and human resource management (HRM).
2. The study took a multi-method approach comprising three main phases of data collection: (1) an online survey, (2) a series of 'listening post' discussions, and (3) one-to-one semi-structured interviews. In total, over 350 academics participated in this research, from 23 UK universities and a number of other higher education providers. The sample included a range of perspectives from different institutional types (pre, post 92), mission groups, subject disciplines, seniority of role, gender and age. Data collection was completed between March 2010 and September 2011.
3. Findings reveal a high degree of consistency in perspectives on, and experiences of, academic leadership. In particular it was observed that much of what could be considered as 'academic leadership' is not provided by people in formal managerial roles. Instead, it is largely considered as arising from engagement with influential colleagues within one's own academic discipline, especially those who play a pivotal role in one's transition and acculturation in to academic life. PhD supervisors, former colleagues and key scholars were all described as significant sources of academic leadership, exerting substantial influence throughout one's career, whether or not they were part of the same institution.
4. Alongside recognition of influential others participants expressed a strong desire for professional autonomy within their academic work and, to this extent, suggested that they engaged in 'self-leadership'. Substantial scepticism was expressed about the extent to which HEIs could develop and enhance academic leadership through formal, management-related processes. Instead leadership was seen to involve a process of identity construction related to one's growth and maturation as a fully-fledged academic professional and member of the Academy.
5. This is not to say that people in formal roles do not play an important part in influencing and supporting academic leadership within their institutions. They can be pivotal in setting the tone and providing a facilitative and constructive working environment, as well as offering opportunities for colleagues in non-formal roles to develop and exert their own leadership amongst colleagues, students, and collaborators. The survey findings indicate a perceived relationship between the leadership of role holders such as Head of School, Director/Dean of Research and Director/Dean of Education and institutional performance, as well as one's own aspirations to take on a formal leadership role on behalf of the institution. Whilst it is not suggested that these are causal relationships, it does suggest that where leadership is perceived positively it may be both more effective and attractive.
6. Findings indicate that academics across the sector recognise leadership in actions that (a) provide and protect an environment that enables productive academic work, (b) support and develop a sense of shared academic values and identity, and (c) accomplish 'boundary spanning' on behalf of individuals and work groups. Boundary spanning here refers to the ability to create opportunities for external relatedness, getting things done via institutional administrations, mentoring colleagues into wider spheres of engagement, etc.
7. Individual academics may become regarded as leaders when they are seen to fight for a common cause, offer inspiration, and/or represent exemplary intellectual and professional standards. Leadership is also associated with those who offer patronage and mentoring through their access to resources, contacts and career opportunities. Leadership can also be located in teams, especially where team membership is experienced as affirming and empowering in relation to the factors listed in item 6 above (enabling environment, sense of purpose and boundary spanning).
8. A synthesis of findings across the three phases of the study is presented in a model of academic leadership, in which a distinction is made between 'academic management' and 'academic leadership'. *Academic management*, it is suggested, tends to have an institutional focus and is used in order to frame academic tasks and processes in order to achieve pre-determined outcomes (a utilitarian orientation), whilst *academic leadership* is conceived more broadly and is most significant in terms of its impact upon academic values and identity/ies (a normative orientation).

Together, both processes inform and shape perceptions of purpose and objectives for staff in academic roles and contribute towards the accomplishment of *academic work* through a process of *self-leadership* by autonomous academic professionals.

9. Overall, the findings support a 'social identity' approach to leadership in higher education, whereby people are unlikely to be regarded as leaders unless they are perceived to be working on behalf of the group, helping to frame group identity, and putting in place structures and processes that further the interests of the group. Within a context where 'being an academic' (in the eyes of oneself and others) requires a sense of being able to independently carve out and pursue a particular line of scholarship or enquiry, academic leadership is far more likely to be associated with processes of acculturation into the academic profession than subsequent direction or control of academic work. *Academic leadership*, from the evidence gathered in this project, can be described as a process through which academic values and identities are constructed, promoted and maintained. This can be contrasted with a whole host of activities conducted within institutions, and the sector more widely, to organise and allocate academic tasks and processes, which could be more accurately described as *academic management*. Together these processes create a sense of purpose and define objectives for individual academics which are operationalised through the process of *self-leadership* which is characteristic of academic work.
  
10. The report concludes with a series of implications and recommendations, including the value of: (a) winning hearts and minds; (b) nurturing the next generation and taking the long-view on academic careers; (c) creating space to thrive; (d) stimulating a culture of debate and enquiry; (e) creating and embedding structures and processes that support relevant identities; (f) building a sense of community and encouraging citizenship; (g) providing informal mechanisms for participation and engagement; (h) managing performance by strengthening shared identity; (i) negotiating and engaging with academics as professionals; (j) safeguarding 'membership' of the academic community; and (k) creating opportunities for a collective voice.

## 2. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a research project on academic leadership in UK higher education. It focuses particularly on the experiences of academics in non-formal management and leadership roles and their perceptions of how they are influenced, supported and given a sense of direction in relation to their academic work, including teaching, research and service (including academic administration and outreach). It endeavours to identify the manner in which such staff conceive of 'academic leadership', how these conceptions compare with those of managerial leadership and other forms of influence within the institution, their impact on leadership-related attitudes and behaviours, and the extent to which these conceptions and responses vary across the sector. Key findings are summarised in the Executive Summary in the previous chapter. The research was funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (Leadership Foundation) as part of its Research Programme to support leadership and leadership development in UK HEIs<sup>1</sup>,

In this chapter of the report we outline the broad context of this study through: (a) an overview of the background and context of the project, (b) a summary of the research aims and approach, and (c) outlining the structure and focus of the report.

### 2.1 Background and context of the research

This project was conceived in collaboration with the Leadership Foundation in early 2009 in order to build on from previous research in the sector. The University of Exeter drew together a cross-disciplinary team of researchers from the Centre for Leadership Studies, in the Business School, and the Social, Economic, Environmental and Organisational Research Group in the School of Psychology (now part of the College of Life and Environmental Sciences). The project commenced in November 2009 and lasted for a period of two years, comprising five main stages as outlined below:

1. Scoping, planning and initial literature review (Autumn 2009 – Spring 2010)
2. Phase 1 data collection: survey (Spring – Summer 2010)
3. Phase 2 data collection: listening posts (Autumn 2010 – Spring 2011)
4. Phase 3 data collection: interviews (Spring – Autumn 2011)
5. Final analysis, write up and literature review (Autumn – Winter 2011)

Further detail on the data collection phases is given later in this report, as are key findings. It is important to note, however, that this project was conducted during a significant period of change within UK higher education, including:

- Reform of student funding and announcements on new fee structures – resulting in an annual increase in fees from £3,350 to an average of £7-9k for students in English universities.
- Consultation and planning on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) – including a focus on research impact and PhD completions, and shift away from funding for 2\* research to 3\* and 4\* only.
- Tightening of UK visa arrangements for overseas students – resulting in a decrease in international places for those outside the EU.
- Global recession and Euro zone financial crisis.
- General election and new coalition government in England (May 2010).
- Debate between higher education unions and employers about changes to the university pension scheme (USS), which has resulted in a sustained campaign of industrial action by the University and College Workers Union (UCU) and all out strike action, along with public sector unions, in November 2011.
- High profile student protests about fee rises (November 2010).
- Consultation on the government White Paper on 'Students at the heart of the system' (BIS, 2011) – which proposes the shift to a market-based system of higher education, with increasing competition between established providers, the opportunity for new providers to enter the market, and is regarded by many as a significant step towards the privatisation of UK higher education<sup>2</sup>.

Together, these changes have been associated with a high degree of uncertainty, ambiguity and institutional variations in governance and management practice within UK higher education which, undoubtedly, will have influenced the findings of this research. Whilst we do not believe this to diminish the validity of the project, it is important to consider the findings as contextually situated. Further details on limitations and areas for further investigation are given in section 8.3.

### 2.2 Research aims and approach

The conceptual and empirical background to the project is outlined in the next chapter. In this section we will outline the three main questions that framed this research and give a broad overview of the multi-method approach used.

1 See <http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/research> for details of other projects.

2 See, for example, the 'alternative white paper' by the Campaign for the Public University at <http://publicuniversity.org.uk/2011/09/27/higher-education-white-paper-is-provoking-a-winter-of-discontent/>.



### 1. How do staff within universities<sup>3</sup> conceive of 'academic leadership'?

Given the multi-faceted nature of academic work, there are many different ways in which academics can define themselves and can be defined by others. They may be seen as teachers, researchers, managers, and/or leaders. They can conceive of themselves in terms of their specific research groups, their sub-disciplines, or their area of professional expertise. They can see themselves as members of their Departments and/or Schools or as members of their university or profession more generally. Each of these conceptualisations offers a different and potentially divergent 'social identity' that will influence who they look to for leadership and the degree to which others will want to 'follow' them. These identities, however, are not mutually exclusive, can occur simultaneously, and may be experienced as complementary or conflicting. A key question here is to unveil which identities are important to academics, how they are articulated, and to what degree they are experienced as 'in tension' with one another and/or organisational structures, processes and priorities.

### 2. What is the impact of these conceptions on leadership-related attitudes and behaviours?

As noted above, there are several identities and associated norms and goals that impact on perceptions of leadership in higher education. For example, where academics are defined in terms of research groups or disciplines and where academic goals are related primarily to furthering knowledge, it is likely that academic colleagues will perceive a shared identity with informal academic leaders who exemplify (or 'embody') these values. In these contexts, academic leaders (such as a course or research director) may be able to influence and inspire group members to perform group relevant tasks (like teaching, research and/or administration) without resorting to hierarchical power. In contrast, formal academic managers/leaders (such as Vice-Chancellor (VC) or Dean of Faculty), who may define their role identities in terms of corporate goals associated with profit or productivity, may need to exert the power associated with their control of resources and/or to issue rewards/sanctions in order to get the same outcomes. Such issues are important in defining appropriate and acceptable styles of leadership and of ensuring 'credible', 'trustworthy', 'authentic', and 'inspiring' approaches, and are likely to impact upon the desirability and experience of taking up a leadership role within higher education.

### 3. Are there any contextual variations across the sector?

Given that social identities are dependent on the context in

which they occur, we may expect concepts of what it means to be an academic, and therefore concepts of what it means to be an academic leader, to differ along a number of axes, including: discipline, institution type (e.g. pre/post 1992), mission group (e.g. Russell Group, Million +, etc.), career stage, and/or gender. In each of these categories we expect there to be some distinctive features, but also processes of divergence and convergence, which we seek to uncover and describe in this research. We also expect that academic leadership is likely to be dependent on the specific organisational context, such as history, culture, and current and past performance (financial, student satisfaction, research, league-tables, media coverage, etc.). Indeed, past research suggests that what is expected from leaders in times of crisis is very different from what is needed when all is well.

In this research we took a broad definition of leadership as an influence process that gives rise to *direction*, *alignment* and *commitment* in social groups<sup>4</sup>. Drath and colleagues at the Center for Creative Leadership suggest that at the core of nearly all leadership theories and research is an assumption that it is dependent on the presence of 'leaders', 'followers' and 'shared goals'. In the increasingly complex and contested environments that now exist in organisations and other social groups, they suggest that this 'tripod' severely limits the potential to recognise and develop leadership where leaders, followers and shared goals may not be readily identified yet processes of coordination and change are, nonetheless, taking place. Such a definition was considered appropriate for an higher education context given the prevalence of distributed and emergent approaches to leadership<sup>5</sup> and the preference for collegial and participative governance.

Across each of the research questions, outlined above, there was an attempt to capture both the lived experiences of academics in UK universities, as well as their aspirations and beliefs about the nature and purpose(s) of leadership in this context. Our aim, within this project, was to build up a complex and multi-faceted picture of how the leadership of academic work is conceived, and how it may be changing for different groups within the Academy. From this understanding, our aim was to highlight potential strategies and approaches to the development and support of academic leadership capacity within the sector.

In line with our multi-stakeholder perspective on conceptions of academic leadership, we adopted a multi-methodological approach to the topic. Throughout this work, we aimed

3 Please note that whilst the HE sector includes a variety of institutional types nearly all of the data collected for this study came from non-privately owned universities with a public charter to provide and accredit tertiary education. The focus of this study and report, therefore, is on academic leadership in universities and hence may not be generalisable to other parts of the sector.

4 Drath et al. (2008)

5 Bolden et al. (2008 b, c)

to articulate the experience of 'leading' and 'following' and the factors that influence success. Data collection occurred between March 2010 and September 2011 and comprised three main phases as outlined in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: A three phase methodology**



Over 350 academic staff contributed to this research, from a wide range of roles, disciplines and institutions. Respondents came from a total of 23 different universities and 1 University College, with the vast majority based in England (2 Welsh and 1 Scottish). They were split relatively evenly between pre and post-1992 institutions (13 and 10 respectively), and represented a wide range of higher education mission groups. A summary of institutions is given in Appendix A, along with details of their involvement in the various stages of data collection.

Chapters 4-6 give further detail on the methods and results for each of these phases of the research. In Chapters 7 and 8 the findings from these three phases are drawn together in order to identify common themes, areas of difference, and implications for leadership theory, practice, policy and development in higher education.

### 2.3 Structure and focus of the report

This report is intended to be accessible to practicing managers and leaders in higher education, as well as those responsible for their support and professional development. Whilst a fair degree of detail is given, it is felt that this is appropriate for work such as this, conducted with well-educated professionals with a good understanding of the value and process of empirical research.

Following this introductory chapter, the remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Literature review** - a summary of theory and research that complements and informs this project
- **Phase 1: Leadership and Identity** – a summary of the methodology and findings of the first phase of data collection, the online survey
- **Phase 2: Citizenship and Belonging** - a summary of the methodology and findings of the second phase of data collection, the listening posts.
- **Phase 3: Leadership Perceptions and Experiences** - a summary of the methodology and findings of the third phase of data collection, the semi-structured interviews.
- **Discussion** – an integrative discussion drawing together empirical findings from across the three phases of the study.
- **Conclusions and implications** – summary of key findings and implications.
- A summary version of this report is available on the Leadership Foundation website.

### 3. Literature Review

This chapter gives a summary of recent research on academic leadership within higher education. It is not intended to be a comprehensive review, but rather to help situate the research alongside current thinking in this area. It was compiled via a search for articles published between 2005–2011 in specialist higher education journals as well as a more general review of the field<sup>6</sup>. The chapter begins by reflecting on the changing nature of higher education, before considering research evidence on leadership, identity, influence and citizenship in universities.

#### 3.1 The changing nature of universities and higher education

Recent years have seen substantial changes in the higher education sector within the UK, as elsewhere, in response to factors such as expansion, internationalisation, research funding, student fees and government policy. Such changes have challenged traditional assumptions on the nature and purpose of higher education, as well as its place in society<sup>7</sup>.

The university is amongst the oldest forms of organisation in existence, emerging from 'the cloistered environment of the monastery as the Age of Enlightenment created a demand for and legitimised the public pursuit of knowledge and understanding'<sup>8</sup>. For centuries leadership of the University was predicated on the collegial agreements of the 'community of scholars' and, unlike other organisations that were affected by the industrial revolution in the 19th Century, the university maintained its stable core and its primary purpose of providing an environment for teaching, research and scholarly service<sup>9</sup>.

In his description of organisational types, Mintzberg<sup>10</sup> described the University as an exemplar of the 'professional bureaucracy' in which high levels of control are exerted over the core functions of the organisation by the professionals (academic faculty) working within it. Mintzberg's rationale for identifying the university as the prototypical Professional Bureaucracy was the environmental stability in which it operated, the highly democratic and decentralised processes of decision-making, and the general mistrust of autocratic

leadership. From this perspective, the university was not regarded as an organisation where managerial or hierarchical approaches to leadership would thrive; instead leadership would be better regarded as a responsibility shared amongst organisational members.

Rapid technological advances in the last two decades of the 20th Century and the subsequent demand for skilled workers for the 'knowledge economy' have challenged the notion of the university as an elite institution, and governments, employers and others, have put pressure on higher education providers to produce 'human capital' capable of harnessing these developments<sup>11</sup>. Increasingly, universities have become regarded as engines of the economy, tasked with the dual roles of producing a steady stream of skilled and competent graduates for the workforce as well as high quality research that contributes towards social and organisational innovation and impact<sup>12</sup>. Within the UK, the past three decades have seen a shift in attitudes about university education as the preserve of a select minority to a perceived right of all citizens in a democratic society<sup>13</sup> and the international market and competition for higher education has burgeoned<sup>14</sup>.

Rapid expansion of the higher education sector has inevitably changed public and professional perceptions of universities and the ways in which they are managed and run. Naidoo<sup>15</sup>, Marginson and Sawir<sup>16</sup> and Knight<sup>17</sup> suggest that the globalisation of higher education has transformed a university education into a commodity, and changing fee structures in countries such as the UK have undoubtedly enhanced a perspective in which students are regarded as consumers<sup>18</sup>. The special status of the university has also been eroded by the demand for greater accountability and transparency by government funders<sup>19</sup>. Greater competition between providers, reduced public funding and stronger demand for access to higher education has driven universities to respond in a more market-orientated way and have made collegial leadership and shared decision-making increasingly difficult to sustain<sup>20</sup>.

Most authors consider the laissez-faire approach to managing universities, described by Cohen and March<sup>21</sup> as a process of

6 This review was conducted for the research team by Dr Luz Longworth and this chapter draws mainly on her work. Journals reviewed included: Higher Education, Higher Education Management and Policy, Higher Education Quarterly, Higher Education in Europe, Higher Education Research and Development, Journal of Higher Education and Policy, Studies in Higher Education and Management in Education.

7 Bargh et al. (1996), Beverungen et al. (2008), Deem et al. (2007), Khurana (2007)

8 Albert and Whetten (2004) p107

9 Balderston (1995), Clark (1998)

10 Mintzberg (1979), (1983)

11 Deem et al. (2007), Marginson and Sawir (2006), Middlehurst and Woodfield (2007)

12 See, for example, Appleseed (2003), Thorp and Goldstein (2010), University Alliance (2010)

13 Scott (2010)

14 Altbach (2010)

15 Naidoo (2003), (2007)

16 Marginson and Sawir (2006)

17 Knight (2002)

18 Molesworth et al. (2011)

19 Kezar and Eckel (2002)

20 Davies et al. (2001), Pounder (2001), Turnbull and Edwards (2005), Yelder and Codling (2004)

21 Cohen and March (1974)

'organised anarchy', as outdated and no longer appropriate for organisations of this size and importance. Up to the mid-1980s<sup>22</sup> the management of universities was generally based upon a 'collegial' approach, with decision making in the hands of academic staff with little or no management expertise or training and implemented by a corps of professional administrators who had limited input into the decision making process<sup>23</sup>. Since then, however, there has been a steady trend towards more business-like 'corporate' or 'entrepreneurial' approaches to leadership and management in universities<sup>24</sup>, an accompanying professionalisation of the management and leadership functions<sup>25</sup>, and the growth of hybrid academic-administrative roles<sup>26</sup>.

### 3.2 Research evidence on leadership in higher education

Alongside the changes described above, and the associated drive for transformation of universities and higher education more widely, there has been a rapid expansion of interest in the role of leadership and leaders, in effecting such changes. As a consequence, a moderate amount is now known about formal leadership processes at the institutional level, yet far less is known about informal leadership within academic faculties and departments and, in particular, how this may be changing in response to emerging contexts.

The majority of research on leadership in higher education has focused on the holders of formal academic management roles, such as Vice-Chancellors/Principals, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Deans and Heads of Department<sup>27</sup>. Breakwell and Tytherleigh<sup>28</sup>, for example, studied the leadership of VCs in UK universities, identifying the following characteristics: academic credibility, financial awareness, adaptability, confidence, strong persona, and sense of mission, strategy and/or vision. Goodall's<sup>29</sup> analysis of institutional performance data identified a strong correlation between university ranking and the research profile of the VC, for which she suggests a number of possible explanations, including credibility, expert knowledge, being a standard bearer (an arbiter of quality), and signalling a commitment to research excellence on behalf of the institution<sup>30</sup>. Spendlove<sup>31</sup>, in his study of Pro Vice-Chancellors at 10 UK institutions, concluded that key competencies included: academic credibility, openness, honesty, willingness to consult others, the ability to think broadly and strategically,

and to engage with people. At a departmental level, Bryman<sup>32</sup> identified 13 aspects of effective leadership behaviour from his review of the literature, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Leadership behaviours associated with leadership effectiveness at departmental level (Bryman, 2007: 697)**

1. Clear sense of direction/strategic vision
2. Preparing department arrangements to facilitate the direction set
3. Being considerate
4. Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity
5. Being trustworthy and having personal integrity
6. Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/encouraging open communication
7. Communicating well about the direction the department is going
8. Acting as a role model/having credibility
9. Creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere in the department
10. Advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so
11. Providing feedback on performance
12. Providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research
13. Making academic appointments that enhance department's reputation

Central to most studies of leadership in higher education is the concept of 'academic credibility'. Whilst this clearly has some link to the capability of the 'leader' it is perhaps most significant in terms of how people respond to them – i.e. that academics are more willing to believe and trust someone who has a demonstrated academic track record and hence may be more likely to 'follow' them. Despite the growth of interest in leadership in higher education, however, much of what is published on 'academic leadership' is actually about the leadership of academic institutions rather than leadership of academic work per se<sup>33</sup>. This highlights a potential tension (and confusion within organisational structures) between the concepts of managerial and academic leadership. A process where people in formal academic management roles (such as VC, Pro-VC and Dean) work to influence and align people

22 When the Jarratt Report (1985) on efficiency in UK universities was published.

23 Lauwerys (2008)

24 Clark (1998), McNay (1995)

25 Deem et al. (2007), Henkel (1997)

26 Smith et al. (2007), Whitchurch (2008a)

27 Note that this terminology varies between institutions. Within this report we have used the term VC to refer to the most senior academic manager within an institution, Dean to refer to the academic manager of a faculty or school, and Head of Department to refer to the academic manager at department level.

28 Breakwell and Tytherleigh (2008)

29 Goodall (2009)

30 Although it could just as well be that successful universities are better able to attract and retain someone who represents what they stand for.

31 Spendlove (2007)

32 Bryman (2007)

33 Macfarlane (2011), Middlehurst (2008), Rayner et al. (2010)

towards the delivery of institutional outcomes through the use of organisational mechanisms (such as workload allocation models, performance and development reviews, and research output monitoring) is quite different in approach and orientation from a more informal and emergent process through which academic colleagues and collaborators mentor, inspire and influence one another.

The current higher education environment may be seen as one where there is a constant tension between knowledge processing and business processing<sup>34</sup>, where there is a need to facilitate and support scholarly thought and enquiry alongside institutional performance and productivity. Additionally, the shift of the debate as outlined above from 'collegial' to 'managerial' leadership, has led many researchers and practitioners to the conclusion that academic autonomy and leadership is being eroded and that 'the academy has become a site of struggle between academics and other interest groups for control of matters previously taken for granted as academic prerogative'<sup>35</sup>. There appears to be a struggle for control in the Academy between professional managers and academic staff<sup>36</sup>, where attention is focused on alignment towards institutional goals and outcomes, with other forms of influence characterised as resistance and dissent in need of greater control from the institution<sup>37</sup>.

There is growing evidence, however, that as HEIs evolve and become more adept at dealing with the challenges of competing in a global market, academic and other staff are finding new ways of negotiating their relationships and identities in order to maintain influence within the academy and their institutions<sup>38</sup>. Current literature therefore suggests that a simple dichotomy between managerialism and academic autonomy may be misleading and not capture the complexity and interdependence of such processes<sup>39</sup>.

In their study of the ways in which leadership is distributed within UK universities, for example, Bolden et al.<sup>40</sup> identified five inter-connected dimensions of leadership practice (personal, social, structural, contextual and developmental) which help to account for the multiple 'hybrid configurations'<sup>41</sup> of forms that can be identified. To this extent, leadership practice within higher education can be considered as a 'blend' of vertical, horizontal and emergent influence and direction<sup>42</sup>, rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' phenomenon.

A more systemic perspective on leadership, that considers it as broadly dispersed within an inter-connected network of people and processes, reveals not only the multiplicity of actors but also the significance of context in determining an appropriate leadership approach<sup>43</sup>. In their research on the leadership of teaching in research intensive universities, for example, Gibbs et al.<sup>44</sup> identified nine distinct areas of leadership activity but suggested that their relevance and applicability varied between departments. A similar perspective is conveyed in Ball's<sup>45</sup> study of leadership in research teams, findings of which are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: The view of research leadership (Ball, 2007: 474)**

- Leadership is both formal and informal and varies according to social systems
- Leadership is dispersed
- Self-leadership is a feature of academic researchers
- Leadership is complex and consists of many relationship patterns
- Leadership is concerned with the leadership of people and the leadership of the subject
- Leadership is different from management but there are overlaps
- Each leader possesses different characteristics and offers different services
- Leadership is important to the undertaking of research
- Context of leadership is complicated but is crucial

A systemic perspective also draws attention to the importance of structural and cultural factors in determining the extent to which specific forms of leadership are required and the discursive significance of leadership and associated concepts in making sense of the nature and purpose of academic and managerial work<sup>46</sup>. From such a perspective, a normative or prescriptive approach to leadership in higher education (in which a preferred model is advocated) is unlikely to be well-received by academic professionals<sup>47</sup> and hence unlikely to be effective.

### 3.3 A question of identity

As demand for effective leadership within higher education grows, attention is beginning to shift from a sole focus on those in formal managerial roles to 'academic leadership' in

34 Martin and Marion (2005)

35 Henkel, (2005) pp 163-4

36 Henkel (2005), Macfarlane (2011), Middlehurst (2008), Middlehurst et al. (2009)

37 Zoller and Fairhurst (2007)

38 Bosetti and Walker (2010), Moosemayer (2011)

39 Gibbs et al. (2008), Kolsaker (2008)

40 Bolden et al. (2008 b, c)

41 Gronn (2009), (2010)

42 Bolden et al. (2009), Collinson and Collinson (2009)

43 Middlehurst et al. (2009)

44 Gibbs et al. (2008)

45 Ball (2007)

46 Fairhurst (2009), Gosling et al. (2009)

47 Bryman and Lilley (2009)

its broadest sense. This is partly in response to the increased emphasis on excellence in all spheres of activity (teaching, research, service, etc.) but also to counteract the adverse effects of a perceived conflict between managerialism and academic autonomy.

Articulating a sense of professional identity may be an important way in which informal academic leaders can influence and mobilise others, and is a process that transcends internal and external organisational boundaries. Academics are members of many different groups and communities, and the way(s) in which they conceive of their identity/ies are likely to be influenced by the specific context in which they find themselves (as teacher, colleague, line manager, etc.) and with whom they are interacting<sup>48</sup>. Informed by the social identity approach<sup>49</sup>, Haslam et al.<sup>50</sup> and others have argued that identification with a particular group is not simply a social nicety but a fundamental aspect of leadership. It is suggested that '[...] for true leadership to emerge - that is, for leaders to motivate followers to contribute to the achievement of group goals - leaders and followers must define themselves in terms of a shared social identity'<sup>51</sup>. Affirming social identity is not just a case of articulating who 'we' are but also positioning 'us' vis-à-vis other social groups, and is considered an essential component of effective leadership practice.

The role of identity is particularly significant in a sector such as higher education where professional recognition depends in large part on one's social and intellectual capital as much as one's position within a formal hierarchy<sup>52</sup>. Academics with no formal managerial responsibility within their institution can still exert significant influence by virtue of their research profile, networks and collaborations, funding, teaching activities, membership of professional and policy groups, and/or ability to attract colleagues to work alongside them<sup>53</sup>. Understanding how academics come to be regarded as leaders both within their own organisations, as well as more widely, is essential to appreciating how HEIs can encourage and support them in producing high quality academic work (and supporting others to do so too), and perhaps to take on additional leadership responsibilities. Such activities, it is proposed, are intimately entwined with conceptions of personal, social and professional identities, on behalf of leaders, followers and other stakeholders<sup>54</sup>.

While harnessing identity may be a way in which informal academic leaders can lead and influence others, what it means

to be an academic is complex<sup>55</sup>, and the notion of a shared academic identity is contested. Identities are complex social phenomena, created and sustained by the expectations of a community and defined in the context(s) in which they are embedded. When persuading academics to engage with, or respond to, leadership attention needs to be given to the ways in which their identities are framed and the degree to which these are coherent with the outcomes being sought. Gleeson and Knights<sup>56</sup>, for example, highlight how middle managers in the further education sector may be reluctant to take on formal leadership responsibilities 'because they seek more space and autonomy to stay in touch with their subject, their students, and their own pedagogic values and identities'<sup>57</sup>, and the same argument may well be applied to higher education.

The professionalisation of academic work, associated with the trends outlined in the opening section of this chapter, is unlikely to be achieved through pitching competing social identities against one another but through finding ways of assimilating and integrating the apparently paradoxical demands of different identities. Henkel<sup>58</sup> argues: 'as boundaries have become more permeable and transgressive, academics must operate within more open and contested arenas. They must rely less on assumed rights and more on management of a greater variety of relationships within and beyond the academic world. Autonomy is not a matter of what is given but, as Bauer et al.<sup>59</sup> argue, the extent to which it is "realised".'

An illustration of how academic autonomy may be 'realised' through engagement with managerial processes and external stakeholders is provided by Kolsaker<sup>60</sup> who concludes that rather than destroying academic leadership, managerialist practices such as university rankings and performance management models are often being used by academics to validate their degree of professionalism, thereby enhancing their ability to exert power and authority in their own specialisms. Viewed through a Foucauldian lens, she suggests: 'academics, possessing scientific capital and a well-developed ability to analyse and rationalise, recognise managerialism as a social and political construction. Far from undermining the managerial dialectic, they regard it as a discursive practice in the same mode as the individual's discursive constitution of self.'<sup>61</sup>

Clearly such processes are complex and not self-evident. Whilst some academics may be well placed to turn managerial practices towards their own ends through their control of intellectual, cultural and social capital others, particularly early

48 Gibbs et al. (2008), Henkel (2005)

49 Tajfel and Turner (1979), Turner (1985)

50 Haslam et al. (2003, 2011)

51 Haslam and Platow (2001) p 1471

52 Becher and Trowler (2001)

53 Bolden et al. (2008b), Macfarlane (2012), Middlehurst (1993)

54 Haslam et al. (2012)

55 Mercer, (2009), Smith et al. (2007), Whitchurch (2008b)

56 Gleeson and Knights (2008)

57 Gleeson and Knights (2008) p49

58 Henkel (2005) p 166

59 Bauer et al. (1999)

60 Kolsaker (2008)

61 Kolsaker (2008) p518

career academics and those in disadvantaged groups, have less scope for negotiation. Some degree of control of resources (financial, human, reputational, etc.) may well be a prerequisite for active engagement in leadership processes through the ability it offers to exert a degree of professional independence<sup>62</sup>.

The concept of professionalisation within the academy, therefore, offers an important terrain for debating the balance between the demands of the external regulatory environment as well as the need for academic autonomy and leadership. To prevent the fragmentation of roles, where people compete for control in more and more specialised areas, however, it may be necessary to take a holistic and integrated perspective on the nature of academic work<sup>63</sup>. Lowe and Gayle<sup>64</sup> suggest that this might be achieved through the use of Nixon et al.'s<sup>65</sup> concept of 'professionalism', as described below.

*'[Professionalism] is based first on a theory of "difference", defined as the way in which social or professional groups distinguish themselves through their values, perspectives and vested interests; and second, on "agreement", which is defined as a process of accommodating and integrating these different perspectives to achieve organisational or professional goals in new ways. In this model, management becomes part of a process through which different groups of staff sustain and develop their own professional values through developing new ways to respond to the conflicting and changing demands of students, clients and stakeholders.'*<sup>66</sup>

### 3.4 Informal leadership and influence in universities

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, it has been suggested that emerging leadership in the Academy relies on influence in niche areas and specifically in the development of shared social identities which provide a platform for informal leadership in a specific community. These shared identities are often based on disciplinary leadership, collaboration, mentoring, and influencing values of students and new academics.

The academic discipline emerges as a primary influence on the development of social identity of the academic in much of the literature. While it has already been discussed that academic credibility is considered essential to effective leadership in the university, there is a strong suggestion that this becomes even more pronounced when it comes to informal leadership. Disciplinary leadership is seen as having an important role

to play not only in the exercise of informal leadership within and across institutions, but also in the type of leaders that are developed in different disciplines<sup>67</sup>. Blackmore<sup>68</sup> for example, indicates that differences in research practice across disciplines influence how particular academics lead or prefer to be led. Hence, the predominance of team research in the sciences in contrast to relatively solitary research in the humanities would dictate a different approach to leading in each field.

This point is further reinforced by Smith<sup>69</sup> and Jiang et al.<sup>70</sup> in their research on the acculturation of new academics into the UK University environment. Smith<sup>71</sup> reveals that departments which espouse a leadership culture of collegiality and mentoring develop academics who are more secure in their identities than those with a high level of managerialism and silo-thinking. Interestingly, this was also confirmed in the case of non-UK (Chinese) new academic members of staff in their acculturation into UK universities<sup>72</sup>. In this study, disciplinary identity emerges as the strongest influence in acculturation to university practices and academic citizenship.

*'The disciplinary identity expressed by these academic staff appeared to facilitate the acculturation process. Firstly, it enabled them to "gain entry" to their current position but it also seemed to ensure an immediate common ground in the host group.'*<sup>73</sup>

Thus, the proposition may be made that academics in universities create leadership clusters through mentoring and collegial collaboration. Academic identities are influenced and formed through these activities which have a relationship to the disciplinary community to which the academic belongs.

Academic staff also exercise leadership through the activities of teaching and learning. Influence on students' values, may or may not be an explicit intention of most academics but could well be considered as another facet of leadership in this sector. Moosemayer's<sup>74</sup> research in universities in 13 countries, including the UK, for example, concludes that academics play an important role in shaping social and economic values of students, and through that, the wider society.

The role of social influence is also hinted at when discussing the role of the professoriate. In his research with UK professors, Macfarlane<sup>75</sup> identifies six main roles of the professor as an intellectual leader, as illustrated in Table 3 below<sup>76</sup>.

62 Gosling et al. (2009)

63 Blackmore and Blackwell, (2006)

64 Lowe and Gayle (2010)

65 Nixon et al. (1997)

66 Lowe and Gayle (2010) p4

67 Becher and Trowler, (2001), Blackmore, (2007), Gibbs et al. (2008), Smith (2010)

68 Blackmore (2007)

69 Smith (2010)

70 Jiang et al. (2010)

71 Smith (2010)

72 Jiang et al. (2010)

73 Jiang et al. (2010) p163

74 Moosemayer (2011)

75 Macfarlane (2011)

76 These have subsequently been reframed into four 'duties' of professorial leadership: mentor, guardian, enabler and ambassador (Macfarlane, 2012).

**Table 3: The qualities of the professor as leader (Macfarlane, 2011: 70)**

?	?
<b>Role model</b>	through personal scholarship, teaching, leadership and management, influence within the discipline or profession, publication, grants, awards and other research achievements
<b>Mentor</b>	to less experienced colleagues within and without the institution
<b>Advocate</b>	for the discipline or profession; explaining, arguing, promoting, debating, lobbying, campaigning
<b>Guardian</b>	of standards of scholarship and academic values within the discipline or profession
<b>Acquisitor</b>	of grants, resources, research students, contracts and other commercial opportunities
<b>Ambassador</b>	on behalf of the university in external relations both nationally and Internationally

Macfarlane's findings support the view that although they are sometimes excluded (by wish or design) from formal leadership positions, senior academics may be able to carve out a leadership space in which they can influence practice both within and outside the Academy through their role as professional academics. Despite the significance of the professoriate, however, it is suggested that (apart from the recent work by Macfarlane) 'the subject of professor as leader stands out as an almost Arctic-like area of little or no activity' and that this may be taken as evidence of 'a disappearing emphasis upon intellectual or academic leadership<sup>77</sup> in the university of today or tomorrow'<sup>78</sup>.

### 3.5 Academic citizenship and community

So far in this review we have suggested that leadership within higher education is strongly influenced by academic discipline, context, control of material resources, role and identity. The literature highlights a number of consistent themes, such as the importance of academic credibility (determined largely through a proven track record in teaching and/or research); mentoring and supporting colleagues and students; acting as a role model and ambassador; engaging with internal and external groups and stakeholders; and facilitating collective

decision-making and communication. Together these findings highlight the importance of belonging to, and being seen to belong to, an identifiable academic community. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of 'citizenship' – a concept associated with membership of a community and the rights and responsibilities this incurs.

The notion of academic citizenship can be traced back to the missions of the very first universities and is closely associated with the concept of 'academic freedom', considered to be one of the defining characteristics of the academic profession<sup>79</sup>. It is, however, a concept that is considered under threat through the growth of metrics, performativity and the marketisation of higher education<sup>80</sup>. Macfarlane<sup>81</sup> cites the three dimensions of citizenship identified by Marshall and Bottomore<sup>82</sup> as particularly pertinent within universities. These dimensions (political literacy, community involvement, and social and moral responsibility), he argues, are fundamental aspects of academic work yet have been largely sidelined in recent higher education policy and reform. The service aspect of academic citizenship, he suggests, 'constitute[s] the "glue" that keeps academic communities and the universities they work in going and connected to the world around them. [...] Yet', he continues, 'in the conceptualisation of academic life, the role of service has been, by and large, overlooked or trivialised as little more than "administration" rather than essential to the preservation of community life'<sup>83</sup>.

The diminishing importance placed on academic citizenship is by no means limited to the UK. Milton Greenberg<sup>84</sup>, for example, bemoaned the closure of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) as a sad indictment of the profession and evidence of the lack of attention given to 'teaching, student life, general education, and the academy's responsibility to a changing nation and world'<sup>85</sup>. Academic citizenship, it seems, has become sidelined by concerns about research output, income, workload allocation, and student recruitment. It may, however, lead to a neglect of responsibilities to the wider range of constituencies (including students, colleagues, institutions, disciplines or professions, and the wider society) that universities, and the academics within them, serve<sup>86</sup>.

Central to the notion of academic citizenship is a set of rights, responsibilities and duties that academics are expected to receive and fulfil. Thompson et al. (2005) suggest that core academic rights and responsibilities include: self-governance and self-regulation; academic freedom and tenure; and self-directedness. Associated duties include: serving on governance bodies; maintaining competence; mentoring;

77 Rayner et al. (2010) p620

78 Rayner et al. (2010) p627

79 See, for example, Henkel (2005)

80 Macfarlane (2005), (2007)

81 Macfarlane (2005)

82 Marshall and Bottomore (1992)

83 Macfarlane (2005) p299

84 Greenberg (2006)

85 Greenberg (2006) pB20

86 Macfarlane (2007)



leadership; and promoting the welfare of the collective. Hence, it is suggested that self-governance is a core academic right, but one that carries a responsibility to engage actively within governance and related activities and which has implications for leadership as illustrated in the following quote.

*'Leadership is articulating and working to achieve a progressive future for the institution, one that tracks the changing internal and external realities and finds ways to adjust institutional activities, policies and goals for the benefit of the institution. [...] It is an ongoing responsibility of citizenship and it occurs in all aspects of one's university life since some changes are as local as introducing or promoting pedagogical opportunities and others as large as changing social priorities and conditions. Some can only be responded to by instructors in the context of individual classes, others require the involvement of large numbers of faculty (curricular revision, for example), and yet others require extra-university activities such as negotiating government-university frameworks.'*<sup>87</sup>

In this report we use the concept of citizenship as a means to explore the experiences of academics and to reflect on the implications for leadership in and of higher education in the listening posts discussed in Chapter 5. As Martin Parker<sup>88</sup> argues, management is just one approach to organising:

*'Words like co-ordination, co-operation, barter, participation, collectivity, democracy, community, citizenship, exchange all refer to methods of doing organisation, but they have been increasingly erased, marginalised or co-opted by [...] management. It is almost as if we have resigned ourselves to the idea that only management can do organisation, and that organisation only involves permanent hierarchies of status and reward, the separation of conception from execution, the dominance of a particular form of market and so on.'* (ibid: 11)

'I still believe', he suggests elsewhere, 'that organising (of universities, or anywhere else) can be much more polymorphous than one best way market managerialism might assume.'<sup>89</sup>

### 3.6 Summary and key points

The debate around managerialism in higher education in the UK, and indeed around the world, has identified a problematic relationship between academic management and academic leadership. As the UK and other countries restructure their higher education sectors to deal with the diverse regulatory requirements of governments and the need to compete in a market for tertiary education, the question of whether academic leadership remains a burning one. On the one hand, whilst there is the sense that academics may be happy not to be 'burdened' by the need to take on formal leadership roles, their sense of belonging to an academic community carries with it a commitment to, and expectation for, participative and collective leadership. Whilst much existing literature focuses on leadership of the institution, there is clearly value in considering the nature of informal and emergent leadership in, of and between academic communities, and the role of academic leadership in the acculturation and development of aspiring academics.

87 Macfarlane (2007) p134

88 Parker (2002)

89 Parker (2004) p55

## 4. Phase 1: Leadership and Identity

This chapter presents the method and findings from the first phase of the research – an online survey of academic perspectives on leadership and identity. It explores the perceived qualities of ‘successful’ academic leaders; perceptions of formal leaders (including Dean of School, Director of Research, and Director of Teaching); experiences of informal leadership, mentoring and influence; and peoples’ experiences of their work, academic discipline, and institution.

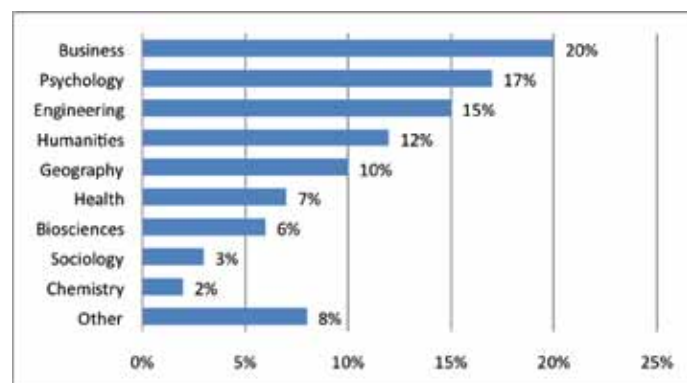
### 4.1 Method and approach

#### 4.1.1 Sample

Participants were 328 academics (average age = 44.27 years; 174 men, 149 women, five did not specify gender), from 16 UK universities, who agreed to complete an online questionnaire in exchange for a small donation to charity. They were approached by a variety of means, including individual emails; mailings to group lists; messages forwarded by colleagues, line managers and/or HR personnel; and links on websites.

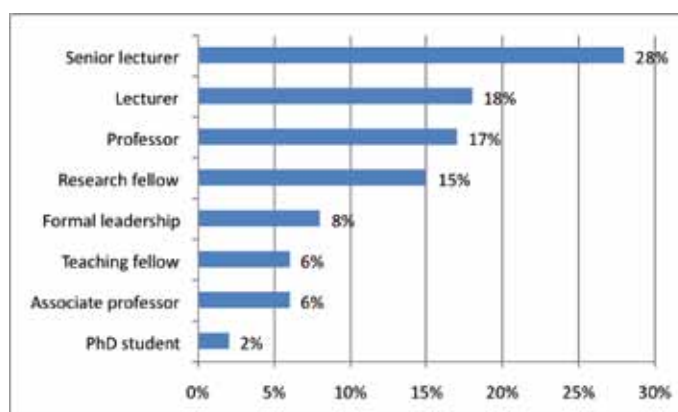
Academics worked in one of 7 post-92 institutions or one of 9 pre-92 institutions (see Appendix A). Six participants did not specify their University. As can be seen in Figure 2, the majority of participants worked in a business school, or in departments of psychology, engineering, humanities, geography, health, biosciences or sociology. The remaining participants worked in chemistry, arts and design, education, sports science, or central administration. As above, six participants did not specify their department. For analytic purposes, participants were classified as working in science (engineering, health, biosciences, chemistry, sport science) social science (business, psychology, geography, sociology or education), or humanities.

Figure 2: Breakdown of participants by discipline



Participants worked at varying levels of seniority. As can be seen in Figure 3, the majority of respondents were Senior Lecturers, Lecturers, Professors and Research Fellows. In addition, a sizeable number occupied formal leadership positions – as Directors, Heads of School or Discipline or Associate Deans. The vast majority of the respondents occupied permanent positions ( $N = 235$ ); the remainder were in fixed term ( $N = 63$ ) or probationary ( $N = 26$ ) positions. Four participants did not indicate their job status.

Figure 3: Breakdown of participants by job role



Participants were also asked to specify whether they had primary responsibility for any of the following activities as part of their job: research, teaching, leadership and/or outreach. 35% of respondents reported having just one of these job functions (of which 47% were responsible for research only, 37% for teaching only and 16% for leadership only); 30% two (of which 78% were responsible for both research and teaching); 24% three (of which 79% were responsible for research, teaching, and leadership), and 11% reported responsibility for all four areas.

#### 4.1.2 Questionnaire

Participants completed an online questionnaire that aimed to understand UK academics’ perspectives on leadership and identity. It comprised four main sections, as detailed below. Further description of the questionnaire content and structure are given in Appendix B, along with details of how scales were constructed from the various variables.

1. **Academic leadership perceptions:** The first section of the questionnaire aimed to understand participants’ *academic leadership perceptions*, by (a) assessing the characteristics of academics who were perceived to have succeeded in their institutions, (b) assessing perceptions of leadership provided by those in formal leadership roles and (c) assessing perceptions of leadership provided by those in informal leadership roles.

2. **Self-leadership perceptions:** The second section of the questionnaire aimed to understand participants' *self-leadership perceptions*, by (a) assessing participants' perceptions of their own influence within their institution and (b) assessing participants' aspirations to rise to a formal leadership position in their institution.
3. **Academic identification:** The third section of the questionnaire aimed to assess participants' *academic identification*, by (a) assessing participants' identification with their institution and by (b) assessing participants' identification with researcher, teacher and administrator roles.
4. **Institutional performance environment:** The final section aimed to assess participants' perceptions of their *institutional performance environment* in relation to research, teaching and outreach.

## 4.2 Findings and analysis

This section is structured into two parts: (1) analysis of perceptions of academic leadership and (2) perceptions of self-leadership. Responses to questions about academic identification and institutional performance are incorporated into these analyses where appropriate.

### 4.2.1 Academic leadership perceptions

In this section, we explore how participants perceived academic leadership by (a) assessing the characteristics of academics who were perceived to have succeeded in their institutions, (b) measuring perceptions of leadership provided by those in formal leadership roles and (c) measuring perceptions of leadership provided by those in informal leadership roles. We will discuss the results of each of these analyses in turn.

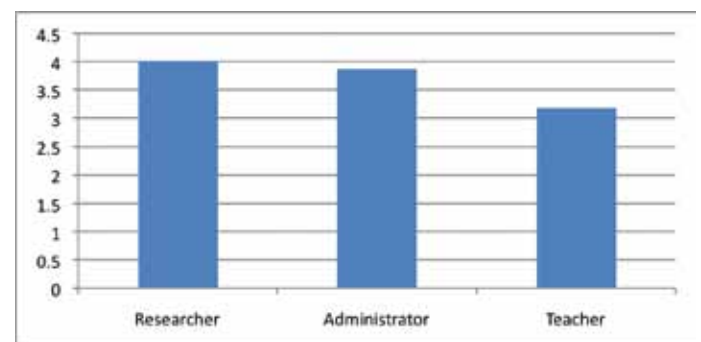
#### a) Characteristics of successful individuals

In order to understand academic leadership perceptions, we first assessed participants' perceptions of the characteristics of those who had succeeded in their institutions. In particular, participants were presented with a list of six trait descriptions that had been previously pilot tested as stereotypical for researchers (analytical, scholarly), teachers (inspirational, trustworthy) and administrators (decisive, diplomatic). For each of these traits, participants were asked to indicate how characteristic they were for academic leaders generally, looking at those who have been successful in their institution. Participants responded on identical 5-point Likert scales (where 1=strong uncharacteristic, 5=strongly characteristic).

Participants were provided with a comment box and asked to list any additional traits or behaviours that they felt described academic leaders.

Repeated measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the extent to which participants perceived that the leading individuals within their institution matched the stereotypical characteristics of a researcher, teacher or administrator. This analysis<sup>90</sup> showed that overall participants perceived individuals who had succeeded within their institution as being most like researchers ( $M=4.02$ ,  $SD=0.90$ )<sup>91</sup>, somewhat like administrators ( $M=3.87$ ,  $SD=0.88$ ), and least like teachers ( $M=3.18$ ,  $SD=1.00$ ) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Perceived level of success relative to nature of role



The extent to which these differences emerged depended on institutional and disciplinary factors: individuals who worked at pre-92 institutions and in science disciplines were slightly more likely to see successful individuals within their institution as matching the stereotype of a researcher ( $r=.19$ ,  $p=.002$ , and  $r=.13$ ,  $p=.030$ , respectively)<sup>92</sup> or an administrator ( $r=.13$ ,  $p=.035$ , and  $r=.12$ ,  $p=.043$ , respectively). In contrast, they were no more (or less) likely to see successful individuals as matching the stereotype of a teacher.

The extent to which individuals perceived leading members (i.e., those perceived to have been successful) of their institution as matching different academic stereotypes also depended on participants' perceptions of their institution's performance. In the first place, respondents who evaluated their institution as doing well in *teaching* and *outreach* had more positive ratings across the board. In particular, these respondents were more likely to say that leading members of the institution matched the stereotype of a researcher ( $r=.28$ ,  $p<.001$ ), a teacher ( $r=.28$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and an administrator ( $r=.26$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In contrast, respondents who evaluated their

90 The analysis was significant,  $F(2, 562)=134.09$ ,  $p<.001$

91 The values in this and subsequent analyses are Mean (M) - the average value across the sample; Standard Deviation (SD) - a measure of the degree of variance around the mean (with a higher value indicating a higher degree of variability); F - the value from an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test; and r - the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient value.

92 The values in this and subsequent analyses are Pearson's r (r) - a measure of the relationship between two interval/ratio variables (a higher value indicating a stronger relationship - with a maximum value of 1) and probability (p) - an indicator of statistical significance (the lower the value, the less likely it is that a relationship has occurred by chance - with a value of .05 generally viewed as the threshold for statistical significance).

institutions as doing well in research were much more likely to say that leading members matched the stereotype of a researcher only ( $r=.30, p<.001$ ).

Finally, the more participants identified with their institution, the more likely they were to say that leading members of the institution matched the stereotypes across the board: researcher stereotype ( $r=.28, p<.001$ ), teacher stereotype ( $r=.30, p<.001$ ) and administrator stereotype ( $r=.23, p<.001$ ).

In sum, then, when participants were asked to think of leading individuals within their institution they were particularly likely to think of a researcher or an administrator, and much less likely to think of a teacher. This tendency was strongest among individuals (a) who worked in pre-92 institutions (rather than post-92 institutions), (b) who worked in the sciences (rather than social sciences or humanities) and (c) who perceived that their institution was succeeding at research.

Interestingly, individuals who perceived their institution to perform highly in teaching and outreach/impact and those who identified highly with their institution rated leading individuals within their institution highly across all the stereotype traits. As all these traits were positive, this could indicate that these individuals have a general tendency to perceive leading members of their institution positively and thus rate them as having any positive trait.

Participants were invited to provide their own additional traits that described leaders in their institutions; 97 respondents did so, representing a cross-section of the sample in terms of the range of institutions that they worked in and their job titles. A word cloud of responses (Figure 5) illustrates the diverse and contested nature of perceptions of leading members of institutions<sup>93</sup>.

**Figure 5: Word cloud of additional characteristics of leading individuals**



Thematic analysis indicated six main categories of response, as illustrated in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Thematic analysis of additional traits**

Category	Characteristic traits/qualities
<b>Strategic</b>	Visionary, inspirational, ambitious, goal orientated
<b>Committed</b>	Self-belief, self-confident, conviction, fair, ethical
<b>Socially adept</b>	Good networkers, communicators, team-workers
<b>Dogmatic</b>	Determined, ruthless, self-serving, individualist, egotistical, lacking integrity, manipulative, controlling, unable to accept criticism
<b>Bureaucratic</b>	Meeting-oriented, paper-pushers, follow directives, afraid of change, reactive, dislike ambiguity, not prepared to rock the boat
<b>Incompetent</b>	A failed academic, inexperienced, ignorant of history, liars

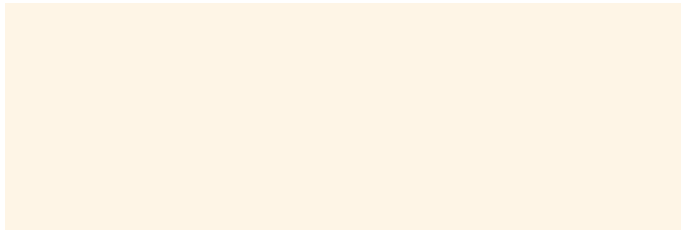
From this, it is clear that whilst there may be some consensus around the characteristics of successful and leading members of academic institutions, there are also substantial variations between them. For instance, whilst some individuals are perceived as socially adept, others (or perhaps the same people in different situations) are considered dogmatic and self-serving. In addition, the extent to which leading members are perceived positively varies a great deal. Whilst many of the characteristics are positively valenced or neutral (e.g., strategic, committed) others are negatively valenced (e.g., bureaucratic, incompetent) and indicate scepticism about academic leaders and/or managers.

### b) Formal leaders' leadership behaviours

Next, we assessed participants' perceptions that formal leaders in their institution provided them with leadership. In particular, participants were asked to rate the extent to which individuals in three formal academic leadership roles (Head of Department/School or equivalent; Director of Research or equivalent; Director of Teaching/Studies or equivalent) engaged in five different leadership behaviours (described in Figure 6). Participants were asked to respond to each statement using identical 7-point Likert scales (1=not at all, 7=very much).

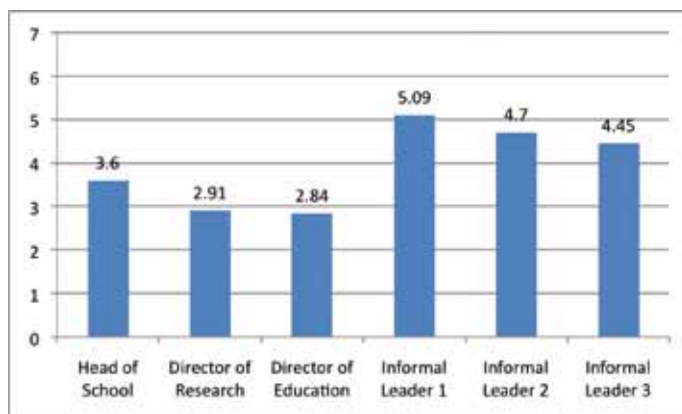
93 This and subsequent word cloud diagrams in this report were produced with Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net>) after tidying and sorting responses into a consistent format. The relative size of words indicates their frequency in relation to others.

**Figure 6: Formal and informal leaders' leadership behaviours**



Overall, formal leaders were not seen to engage highly in the leadership behaviours of structuring, inspiring, representing, mentoring and influencing. In all cases, and as can be seen in Figure 6, the average ratings fell below the scale mid-point of 4 - well below those for informal leaders (see next section for further details). While the Head of School was seen only to engage in these behaviours to a moderate extent ratings were generally lower for the Directors of Research and Education. These ratings were, however, related, which indicated that participants who tended to rate the Head of School as a leader, also tended to rate the Director of Research ( $r=.30$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and Director of Education ( $r=.46$ ,  $p<.001$ ) as leaders. This suggests that participants did not distinguish strongly between the different formal leaders, and either tended to perceive individuals in formal leadership roles as providing leadership or not.

**Figure 7: Perception of formal and informal leaders' leadership behaviours**



The extent to which individuals tended to perceive these formal leaders as providing leadership varied with their identification with the institution. In particular, the more respondents identified with their institution, the more they perceived the Head of School ( $r=.45$ ,  $p<.001$ ), the Director of Education ( $r=.36$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and the Director of Research ( $r=.26$ ,  $p<.001$ ) as providing leadership. In a similar way, the more a respondent evaluated the institution as performing well in teaching and outreach, the more they perceived the Head of School ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.001$ ), Director of Research ( $r=.23$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and Director of Education ( $r=.20$ ,  $p<.001$ ) as providing leadership.

This pattern was present to a lesser extent among respondents who perceived that their institution was performing well in research (Head of School  $r=.16$ ,  $p=.009$ ; Director of Research  $r=.24$ ,  $p<.001$ ; Director of Education  $r=.18$ ,  $p=.003$ ). This may indicate that individuals place less responsibility for research success with formal leaders.

The extent to which participants perceived formal leaders as engaging in leadership behaviours also varied as a function of the traits that they saw as characterising an institution's leading figures (discussed in the preceding section). In particular, the more that respondents saw leaders as matching the stereotypes of teachers ( $r=.23$ ,  $p<.001$ ) or administrators ( $r=.27$ ,  $p<.001$ ), the more they rated the Head of School as providing leadership. In contrast, the more respondents saw leaders as matching the stereotype of a researcher, the more they rated the Director of Research as providing leadership ( $r=.20$ ,  $p=.001$ ). This may indicate that formal leaders who are perceived to act in ways that are consistent with appropriate stereotypes are more likely to be seen as engaging in leadership behaviours than those formal leaders who do not.

There was also evidence that identity factors impacted on perceptions of formal leaders. In particular, respondents who indicated that research was one of their primary functions or who indicated that they identified as researchers were more likely to see the Director of Research as providing leadership ( $r=.14$ ,  $p=.024$ ;  $r=.22$ ,  $p<.001$ , respectively) and less likely to see the Director of Education as providing leadership ( $r=-.30$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $r=-.16$ ,  $p=.013$ , respectively). Respondents who identified their primary work responsibility as leadership and management or who identified as administrators were slightly more likely to see the Director of Education as providing leadership ( $r=.18$ ,  $p=.002$ ;  $r=.13$ ,  $p=.037$ , respectively). This suggests that, in line with the social identity approach to leadership (Haslam et al., 2011), when individuals look for leadership they look towards individuals who reflect their own identity. Consequently, academics are more likely to rate formal leaders as engaging in leadership behaviours when the formal leader represents their job priority and identity. This effect appears to be more marked amongst researchers and administrators than teachers.

In summary, formal leaders are generally seen to provide low levels of leadership. However, these perceptions vary with respondent characteristics. In particular, respondents who identify highly with the institution, or perceive it as performing well, are more likely to perceive formal leaders as engaging in leadership behaviours. Further, there is evidence that respondents are more likely to rate formal leaders as engaging in leadership behaviours when these leaders are seen to match leader stereotypes. Finally, there is evidence that social identity factors come into play such that respondents are

more likely to perceive leadership behaviour among formal leaders who represent their own identity concerns.

**c) Informal leaders’ leadership behaviours**

Following completion of responses for the three formal roles, respondents were invited to identify three informal leaders who exert influence over their academic work. The informal leaders identified by respondents were most frequently their current and/or former colleagues, PhD supervisor, or mentor (see Figure 7). It was rare for respondents to mention a leader who occupied some kind of formal leadership position other than their own immediate line manager or former Head of Department (and indeed of the 483 people described only one was in a senior executive role – VC). This suggests that in the academic context, leadership is commonly enacted through individual relationships that have developed through an ongoing and long-term collaborative engagement. In this context, the PhD supervisor takes on a particularly important role, and may remain a highly important leadership figure throughout an academic’s career. Academic colleagues are also important and may well be people that one continues to collaborate and engage with long after moving to work for different institutions. Consequently, for many academics they will be looking for academic leadership outside their institution.

**Figure 8: Word cloud of most influential persons (other than HoD, DoR or DoE)**



Respondents were then invited to provide comments as to why they chose these particular individuals. People were selected for a range of reasons although research expertise and personal qualities were most commonly cited. Table 5 summarises responses by theme.

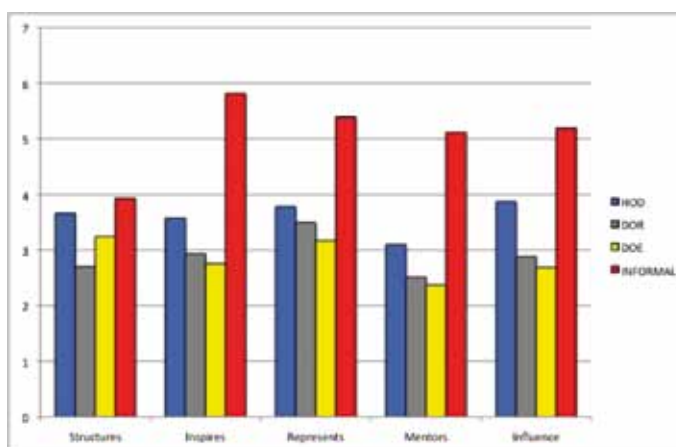
**Table 5: Thematic analysis of qualities of informal leaders**

Category	Characteristic traits/qualities
Energising	Enthusiastic, inspirational, hard working
Competent	High level of expertise, clear sighted, reasoned judgment, knowledgeable, original
Warm	Caring, supportive, good listener, empathetic
Ethical	Fair, non-judgmental, trustworthy, honest, straight-talking, has integrity, courageous
Promoting the group	Works for the benefit of the group
Scholarship	Excellence in research and/or teaching

It is notable that there is little in the way of overlap with the characteristics of formal leaders discussed in the previous section.

Finally, we assessed participants’ perceptions that informal leaders (within, or external to, their institution) provided them with leadership by asking them to rate the extent to which each engaged in the same five leadership behaviours, previously rated for the formal leaders. From Figure 7 it is clear that when compared against formal leaders within their own organisation, these informal leaders are reported to play a more significant role in terms of providing overall leadership functions. Moreover, when responses are compared with respect to each of the five leadership behaviours in turn (structuring, inspiring, representing, mentoring and influencing), respondents’ ratings were significantly higher on all behaviours, except for structuring where ratings of formal and informal leaders did not differ (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Comparison of formal and informal leaders on leadership behaviours**



Interestingly, the findings revealed a positive relationship between respondents' perceptions that formal leaders provided leadership and their perceptions that informal leaders provided leadership (correlations ranged between  $r=.15$  to  $r=.29$ ). This pattern suggests that there are differences at the individual level in academics' tendencies to see others as engaging in leadership behaviours. Individuals who perceive leadership from formal leaders are more likely to perceive leadership from those in informal positions. Thus these individuals may look for leadership and will see it from both formal and informal leaders (although as shown in Figures 7 and 9, informal leaders are likely to be rated higher). Conversely, the lower a respondent's rating of formal leaders, the lower their rating of informal leaders. It is possible that these individuals do not look to others to provide them with leadership or that people judge the effectiveness of formal leaders in terms of their capacity to create structures that allow for informal leadership to take place.

#### 4.2.2 Self-leadership perceptions

In order to understand academics' perceptions of their own leadership we first asked participants to indicate their perceived level of seniority on a 7-point Likert scale (1=very junior, 7=very senior). We then asked them to indicate their self-leadership perceptions, through their agreement with the following 5 statements: "I see myself as a leader at work", "I have the ability to influence junior colleagues", "I have the ability to influence my peers", "I have the ability to influence senior colleagues" and "Generally, I think other colleagues regard me as influential". Participants responded to these five items on 7-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

We next measured participants' ambition to attain a leadership position by asking them to respond to the following two statements: "I am aiming high in my career as an academic" and "I aspire to have a senior leadership role with my university". As above, participants responded on 7-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

Respondents tended to express high levels of current leadership ( $M=4.89$ ,  $SD=1.21$ ) and moderate levels of ambition to achieve a leadership position ( $M=4.23$ ,  $SD=1.71$ ). There was a positive relationship between these two variables, such that the more respondents' perceived themselves to be leaders, the more they expressed ambition to reach the top of their field ( $r=.32$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Unsurprisingly, the more senior the respondents' job title, the more they perceived that they provided leadership ( $r=.53$ ,  $p<.001$ ), although this was unrelated to leadership ambition.

Whether participants had primary responsibility for research or teaching had no impact on current leadership and leadership ambition. In contrast, respondents who felt that they had

primary responsibility for leadership and management were much more likely to indicate that they provided leadership ( $r=.45$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and slightly more likely to express an ambition to become a leader. Similarly, respondents who felt that they had primary responsibility for outreach were slightly more likely to indicate that they provided leadership ( $r=.15$ ,  $p=.009$ ) and to express leadership ambition ( $r=.17$ ,  $p=.008$ ). Women were slightly less likely to say that they provided leadership ( $r=.16$ ,  $p=.004$ ). In addition, younger people were less likely to say that they provided leadership ( $r=-.36$ ,  $p<.001$ ), but were more likely to express leadership ambition ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Identity played a role, such that higher institutional identification predicted higher perceptions of own leadership ( $r=.36$ ,  $p<.004$ ) and higher levels of leadership ambition ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In addition, the more respondents identified as a teacher, the more they perceived that they provided leadership ( $r=.27$ ,  $p<.001$ ); the more they identified as a researcher, the more they expressed leadership ambition ( $r=.26$ ,  $p<.001$ ); the more they identified as administrators, the more they perceived that they provided leadership ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and the higher their leadership ambition ( $r=.15$ ,  $p=.018$ ).

The more participants perceived that they themselves were leaders, the more they perceived the Head of School as providing leadership ( $r=.16$ ,  $p=.008$ ); the more that they expressed leadership ambition, the more that they perceived the Head of School and Director of Research as providing leadership ( $r=.18$ ,  $p=.004$  and  $r=.22$ ,  $p=.004$ , respectively).

In sum, respondents generally perceived that they provided leadership to others in their institution; they also expressed high levels of ambition to attain a leadership position. Individuals who indicated that their primary job responsibility was leadership and management or outreach or those who identified highly with their institution were more likely to indicate that they both provided leadership and had leadership ambitions. Further, in line with previous findings that leading members of an institution matched the researcher stereotype, individuals who identified as researchers expressed higher ambition to rise to a leadership position. Interestingly, individuals who identified more highly as a teacher indicated that they had provided more leadership at this point in time.

#### 4.3 Summary and key points

The survey provides an insight into the perceptions that academics have of leading members of their institutions, of the leadership provided by formal and informal leaders and of their own leadership provision and ambitions. Overall, there is a great deal of consistency in perceptions across the institutions and individuals that were examined - with few exceptions, type of institution (pre- or post-92), discipline, age and gender had little impact on leadership perceptions. In other words, most

individuals perceived leading members of their institution as being more like researchers and administrators than teachers. Most individuals perceived their Head of School as providing more leadership than their Director of Research or Director of Education (and perceived all three formal leaders as providing comparatively little leadership overall). Many individuals looked outside their institution for leadership and guidance — usually towards a formative relationship in their academic career, notably their PhD supervisor but also academic colleagues and collaborators within their discipline area. Most individuals could think of at least three individuals in informal positions who provided them with more leadership than their Head of School. Finally, most respondents felt that they provided a degree of leadership within their institution and aspired to leadership positions in the future.

However, our results did indicate some reliable variations in perceptions. In particular, the more respondents perceived that their institution performed well (especially in teaching and outreach), the more they perceived that leading members of their institution were characterised by the positive traits that are stereotypical for researchers, teachers and administrators. These individuals were also more likely to perceive that their institution's formal leaders engaged in leadership behaviours. A similar pattern of findings was apparent as a function of respondents' institutional identification, as those respondents who identified highly with their institution rated leading members of their institution as possessing the positive stereotypical traits of researchers, teachers and administrators and rated formal leaders as providing higher levels of leadership. These highly identified individuals indicated that they provided higher levels of leadership within the institution and expressed more ambition to rise to leadership positions in the future. In addition, further identity dynamics emerged in ratings of formal leadership behaviours and self-leadership. Participants who were highly identified as researchers, teachers or administrators also tended to see leaders in related formal roles as providing them with higher levels of leadership than leaders in less related formal roles.



## 5. Phase 2: Citizenship and Belonging

Leadership is always in and of a specific population with a shared identity - in this case broadly defined as 'academic'. The second phase of research sought to articulate the role that leadership plays in academics' beliefs about the organisation and functioning of academia. We expressed the question for this phase thus: 'what does it mean to be a citizen of academia?' In using the term 'citizen' we intended to evoke issues of rights, duties, and responsibilities as well as arrangements for distributing authority and obedience.

### 5.1 Method and approach

Listening Posts (LPs) are a methodology developed out of the system psychodynamic approaches pioneered by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in order to explore the concept of 'citizenship in the workplace'<sup>94</sup>. More recently, this approach has been developed by OPUS (Organisation for Promoting Understanding in Society) in order to gain a broader understanding of social dynamics within society<sup>95</sup>. The aims and assumptions are described on the OPUS website thus:

*'The aim of the Listening Post is to enable participants as individual citizens to reflect on their own relatedness to society and to try to develop an understanding of what is happening in society at any given moment [... They] provide an opportunity for participants to share their preoccupations in relation to the various societal roles they may have [...] The dynamics of the group may be such that even a small group may nevertheless act as if it is a microcosm of the large group that is society so that, the themes that emerge through associative dialogue may legitimately be analysed for their societal content.'*<sup>96</sup>

It was with a similar logic that we decided to use this approach to explore the experiences and preoccupations of members of UK universities in order to understand better the dynamics of change and the competing, contested and contrasting experiences, expectations and aspirations of academic staff within the sector. This approach was chosen because of its potential to surface the unconscious assumptions, hopes, anxieties and desires of members of this population in a way that more prescribed and individually-orientated surveys and interviews would be unlikely to reveal.

In total, three LPs were run between September 2010 and February 2011, incorporating the views of 26 people from 12 English universities, one University College and two organisations closely affiliated with higher education (see Appendix A for a summary of institutions represented). Each LP opened with an introduction from the facilitator and started with the following question: 'What is it like to be a citizen of an academic institution in contemporary Britain?'

The first LP was attended by 17 participants plus two external facilitators<sup>97</sup>; the second by 13 participants; and the third by seven. Eight people attended both of the first two events and three attended all three<sup>98</sup>. Participants held different roles (professor, lecturer, researcher, etc.) in different universities. They were not representative of all disciplines or of all kinds of HEI (although there was representation from across a wide range of disciplines, university rankings and pre/post 92 universities) and were predominantly recruited by word of mouth (which resulted in somewhat of a bias towards the social sciences and the South of England). The third LP was convened with the explicit intent of gathering perspectives from academics in scientific disciplines in a single, traditional research-intensive university. To this extent, the sample cannot be considered 'representative' of the whole of English higher education but nonetheless is one that captures substantial knowledge and expertise of the sector. Handwritten notes rather than audio transcripts were taken during the first two LPs in order to maintain confidentiality and to offer a somewhat summarised, rather than verbatim, account of findings. In the third LP, due to the relatively small group size and fast moving conversation, the discussion was recorded and transcribed in full.

The six months from September 2010 to February 2011 was a significant period within higher education policy and practice in England; the first LP occurred shortly before, and the second shortly after, the Browne Review of university funding<sup>99</sup>. This review led to a change in higher education funding arrangements and the subsequent raising of the 'cap' on fees for UK/EU students from £3,350 to £9,000 per year. The third LP occurred following these changes and shortly before universities declared their proposed fee levels<sup>100</sup>. Furthermore, LP2 occurred shortly after a series of high profile student demonstrations against the proposed increase in tuition fees (during which there was some public disorder with students at the forefront) and LP3 occurred in the run-up to a series of national strikes by members of the Universities and College

94 Lawrence (1980)

95 Dartington (2000)

96 OPUS (2010)

97 In fact this event was facilitated by Olya Khaleelee and Tim Dartington - both key players in the development of the listening post methodology at OPUS and the Tavistock Institute. We are very grateful for their contribution to this project.

98 Please note that LP2 and LP3 were facilitated by members of the research team from the University of Exeter however, in each case they also engaged as active participants.

99 Browne (2010)

100 Shortly afterwards universities announced their fee decisions, with over two thirds opting for the maximum fee, despite politicians having suggested that most universities should not charge any more than £6,000.

Workers Union (UCU) over changes to the university pension scheme and working conditions.

## 5.2 Findings and analysis

This section presents the key outcomes of the three LPs. Whilst each evolved in a different way, we have grouped findings according to themes, indicating where possible where there were differences between the issues raised at different LPs and/or by different participants. The findings presented in this section were coded and identified following analysis of the notes/transcripts from each of the LPs. Analysis revealed a number of important themes in relation to how academic staff conceived of themselves in relation to their employing institutions and the academic community more widely, as summarised in Figure 10. Each of these themes will now be described in turn, along with example quotes.

**Figure 10: Summary of themes from the listening posts**



### 1. Ambiguity of emotion and experience

A key theme that emerged within each LP was the notion of academic life as inherently 'bipolar'. This term was introduced by a participant in LP1, and adopted by others, to refer to the sense of being pulled in different directions, and experiencing different emotions, simultaneously. People felt both connected to and disconnected from their academic institutions and disciplines; empowered by their teaching and research abilities, but alienated from power within the institution. A number of participants expressed an almost love-hate relationship with various aspects of their work as illustrated below.

*'You feel you have control over your time and yet a complete lack of control.'* (LP1)

*'I actually really enjoy working at [University X] - there are some brilliant resources that I can draw on better than any university I've ever worked at... having said that I'm actually leaving.'* (LP3)

For some, the citizenship was experienced as the necessity to negotiate competing 'demands',

*'If you go to work you get lumbered with crap for which you don't get rewarded. Other demands are put on me and I don't know how to balance them... you need to balance different demands.'* (LP1)

For others citizenship was imbued with more visceral aspects of power-laden relationships:

*'What is rewarding is the freshness and optimism of the students, which is soon taken off them. I feel like Dracula, drinking from these students, it re-charges me.'* (LP1)

The experience that was referred to as 'bipolarity' in the first LP expressed a sense of dissonance, tension and/or ambiguity between different aspects of academic life, and was expressed most strongly in relation to issues of inclusion and exclusion, the growth of managerialism, and a culture of critique and competition as described under the following headings. For leadership, these are important signals of willingness to align with institutional goals and the contested legitimacy of managerial processes. Although most people described a realistic tussle between individual autonomy and institutional obedience, others described toxic outcomes such as bullying, harassment and stress-related burnout.

### 2. Sense of vulnerability and exclusion in relation to formal managerial processes

If an ideal of citizenship is engagement in legitimate debate and decision-making, we found little expression of this in the experience of LP participants. In each LP there was explicit reference to a feeling of vulnerability associated with a sense of exclusion from key groups and constituencies within the institution. Some of this is associated with the many forms of partial, temporary, casual and probationary employment in universities. A part-time lecturer during LP1, for example, commented:

*'I feel I don't belong anywhere, you are like a wanderer, with professional allegiances and other allegiances, it's hard to find your identity when you are part-time.'* (LP1)

In LP2 a participant explained how at his/her institution the funding of academic posts is tightly linked to specific courses or modules and that there is insufficient training to enable people to develop new teaching repertoires, thereby rendering them vulnerable to redundancy:

*'... it's like being on the factory floor and just being trained to operate one part of the machinery.' (LP2)*

A post-doctoral researcher in LP3 illustrated the particular vulnerability of those on fixed-term research contracts and the ways in which issues of inclusion and exclusion play out within day-to-day power dynamics.

*'They have this enormous army of people on grant money sitting in labs etc. ... doing huge amounts of research, turning over huge amounts of money in research funding and at the end of your tour of duty when everyone's waiting cap in hand saying now where do I go they say "the exit's over that way – we've got six more people waiting for your desk"' (LP3)*

Similar issues were reported in relation to gender, nationality and age, indicating a multiplicity of forms of vulnerability and exclusion, many of which are associated with cultural and power dynamics. A ready interpretation of this experience is that institutional leadership is simply not doing a good job at affirming common cause and commitment. On the other hand, claims that 'we are all in this together' will ring hollow for those in insecure contracts or disadvantaged minorities. Insofar as these structural factors are the most salient features of people's experience of 'being a citizen', one would expect meaningful leadership to be that which speaks to and represents the insecure; but this was not prominent in the LPs – for example, there was little reference to Trade Unions providing leadership.

### **3. A lack of transparency in recognition, promotion and reward processes**

Leadership is dependent on shared belief in the legitimacy of selection processes and the distribution of rewards. Secrecy and exclusive access to information is common in leadership cadres, though in the LPs this was referred to as at least partially illegitimate. Recognition and reward processes for academic staff were felt to be opaque, inconsistent and subject to manipulation.

*'It's a very strange, very prejudiced, very patronising, very opaque system.' (LP3)*

*'It's interesting that so many universities have practices that are not transparent and not open and there's this sense of injustice. It's the same in America where most universities will have these clubs etc. and the advantage it gives you in your career afterwards is not based on your talent in an open way but in your membership of this secret society...' (LP3)*

*'I think most academic appointments are based on nepotism [laughter] - I'd say 80 percent of them and there's a small percentage - let's say generously 20 percent - that may be genuinely based on merit...' (LP3)*

It is likely that universities are no less transparent than any other organisation; and most are small enough and local enough for the myriad formal and informal communication channels to be fairly effective at spreading news and information. Perceptions that they are pathologically opaque or corrupt (to the extent claimed in the preceding quotes) are best read as expressions of concern about the legitimacy of power.

Many participants expressed a sense that staff compete rather than collaborate with one another over limited resources, opportunities and promotion.

*'With the soft funding there is a real sense of competition. Even within my own lab there's competition on a hierarchical structure. The people working on more prestigious funding will be getting the better offices, the bigger desks and the better view... there's this real sense of competition and we've got this class system and everyone needs to know which class they're in and they'll be given resources depending on how well they've done... the difference between fixed term and permanent is that you get very stressed.' (LP3)*

Nonetheless there was common agreement across all three LPs that the main criterion for academic progression and appointments – including to formal leadership roles - is research, with teaching and other activities given far less consideration<sup>101</sup>.

*'It frustrates me greatly that we employ people based purely on research and the funding that they've got, and then make them teach, whether or not they have any interest in teaching or are any good at teaching, and people who are good at teaching are penalised because they haven't done enough research and so we don't want them because they won't bring funding in.' (LP3)*

This quote expresses the dissonance between what academics say they are doing and what they actually do, neither of which might be quite what they want to do. Of course this is commonly expressed by academics, often in opposition to 'management'; and may be labelled 'cynicism'. But it is a serious problem for the authenticity (and therefore trust and authority) of leaders if they are not able to speak to such dissonance, perhaps out of loyalty to unitary definitions of organisational objectives and measures.

<sup>101</sup> This was particularly true in traditional 'research-intensive' universities, but also increasingly the case within post-92, 'teaching focussed' institutions.

In LP2, two older and more senior academics (both heads of schools/departments) reflected on how, despite tenure and experience, they are still assessed according to research outputs. One asked 'at what point did I move from being the "bright young thing" to "another laggard"?' And, following some discussion about whether it is possible to trade power for respect, the other replied by saying that without a strong current research record '... you just become an old person with no publications'.

#### 4. Growing sense of managerialism in academia

The scepticism voiced by participants often alluded to a strong sense that universities were being run more managerially and increasingly targeted towards economic rather than social or scholarly objectives. Within this there was a sense of tension between academic and administrative roles and responsibilities and a sense of shifting allegiances.

*'Academics see themselves as professionals and have a scepticism about management... they leave them to get on with it.'* (LP2)

The role of professional administrators/managers and their relationship to academics were debated and a concern expressed that they may be 'servants turned masters'. It was agreed, however, that academics may be partly responsible for this situation themselves in their tendency to withdraw from governance processes.

*'There is a theme here that people recruit administrators to do the admin work we don't want to do... we start off grateful and then find them creating things for us that we don't want to do... I feel guilty about it but it's a strategy of emotional management... there are hundreds of other people also doing it...'* (LP2)

Alongside the culture of managerialism, however, there was a strong sense that experiences are moderated by line managers/supervisors and the extent to which they support or not the activities of their staff. This was particularly the case for researchers on fixed-term contracts who felt a lack of consistency of approach.

*'... my supervisor that I had for my doctorate who I got on very well with, he unfortunately without asking me got a professorship somewhere else, and you feel that you haven't got a protector now. I'm a bit adrift in that way... There is a lack of sense of justice there and if you haven't got a sense of justice and being treated justly you're not a proper citizen are you?'* (LP3)

Within each LP there were also people who experienced this from the other side – i.e. those who experienced a degree of discretion in how they carry out their work and support junior colleagues. Generally it was felt that those who could thrive in this environment are people who run their own funded centres/projects and can operate largely outside general university systems and processes.

*'You need to create a niche with its own funding/income stream.'* (LP2)

For another participant it meant creating opportunities for the more 'playful' aspects of his job:

*'If thriving means that 80% of your time at work is a positive experience... hold onto the things that nourish and interest you... Maybe it's not so much the work itself but the context in which it's done – a context of surveillance, measurement and control... jumping through hoops militates against thriving.'* (LP2)

#### 5. Concern about the changing nature of higher education

There was a sense across all three LPs that increased competition in the sector is driving out collegiality and collaboration within and between institutions. In consequence, it was suggested that there is a lack of a coherent voice representing the interests of the sector as a whole with each institution and/or mission group pursuing their own ends.

*'There is a civil war in higher education.'* (LP2)

*'There is a lack of leadership of the sector as a whole.'* (LP2)

*'Institutions are fighting against each other in this new landscape – there's no wider discussion about what's going on in higher education.'* (LP2)

This was one of the few instances of a clear call for more leadership, specifically leadership that would represent the sector as a whole. The notion (perhaps a fantasy) that there is such a common ideal is contrasted with the realities of entering a market economy, where a relentless drive for student numbers and research outputs may detract from the core values of education and scholarship. In effect higher education was seen as a money-making factory.

*'There's a real sense that we're a business and our product is research and we sell research to whoever's got money...'* (LP3)

The concept of brand was discussed particularly in LP3, where it was suggested that the reputation of the organisation brings substantial competitive advantage in terms of attracting high-quality students and staff.

*'An institution like [this] is running to an extent on its reputation – the reason our graduates are very good is that our applicants are very good we don't really give them that much in between...'* (LP3)

This summarises the power of reputation as: 'smart people in, smart people out: no damage done'. However there was little reflection in the LPs about the specific roles of academics in this dynamic. They appear to be rather passive in relation to the issues of 'customer focus'. There was certainly no suggestion that any of these issues fall within the orbit of 'academic leadership', but instead were rather firmly the responsibility of institutional management.

#### **6. Desire for a greater sense of citizenship and community**

Within each LP there was much debate about the extent to which participants felt themselves to be 'citizens' of higher education. Many people expressed a sense of disengagement from their own institutions and a lack of clarity around organisation boundaries.

*'I work around the institution, not in it.'* (LP2)

*'What is an organisation anyway... how can you feel allegiance to rules and regulations?'* (LP2)

*'I'm not working on behalf of the institution - I'm working on behalf of me.'* (LP3)

A sense of citizenship was expressed more often in relation to one's academic discipline and/or professional group.

*'Citizenship is determined in relation to my local community... rather than from my own organisation.'* (LP2)

Despite this, there was not a strong sense of citizenship and community across the sector as a whole.

*'Who are you giving to and what are you giving? For the institution it's more about "meeting obligations", but giving is broader than this – it should be two-way.'* (LP2)

In response to the concerns above, it was suggested that academics need to find ways to mobilise more effectively as citizens of higher education in order to give voice and leadership to the sector more widely and in order to confront the many challenges that the sector faces. Such an approach carries both obligations as well as expectations.

*'Why are we withdrawing and disengaging as citizens? [The recent student protests in London were a great example of people taking action]... I want to be able to engage with colleagues and to defend the university because it does things of which I'm proud.'* (LP2)

*'Citizenship is about rights and responsibilities... what are our responsibilities as citizens of UK higher education?'* (LP2)

Differences were noted between the experiences of people in different parts of the sector. For example, someone who spent much of their time working within a Further Education (FE) college stated:

*'I absolutely love my job, it is always evolving... I feel affiliated with [my institution]... perhaps because of its strong vocational basis. There are lots of industry contacts, lots of staff come from industry, there is a shared background to draw on in teaching, research is done out of choice rather than necessity. I feel loyal to [my institution]...'* (LP2)

Similar 'counter views' were expressed by a minority of participants in each LP. Primarily these were people who worked at the periphery of the traditional teaching/research focus of higher education - often those who worked in or ran their own Centres, who had some discretion over budgets and who were less rigorously scrutinised by 'research quality' indices. They often described a certain degree of playfulness and freedom to their work, as described earlier<sup>102</sup>.

#### **5.3 Summary and key points**

To summarise, the LPs solicited rich discussions about the nature of academic life and the experiences of participants. Whilst numerous issues were raised, these have been summarised under six themes: ambiguity of emotion and experience; a sense of vulnerability and exclusion; a lack of transparency in recognition and reward systems; the effects of managerialism; concern about the changing nature of higher education; and citizenship and community.

102 This suggests that some roles and some parts of the system are either free of the dissonance that seems to be endemic elsewhere or that they have the resources to contain it, without being overwhelmed. We suspect that the latter account may be most accurate.

The themes identified may be of little surprise to those who have worked within British universities in recent years and resonate with much prior research in the field. Whilst they paint a rather pessimistic view of the sector they also reveal an undercurrent of genuine passion and commitment to the values and purpose of higher education. Furthermore, examples were evident of participants feeling positive about their roles and the context in which they worked. Participants at each LP demonstrated a real concern about the manner in which their institutions and the sector as a whole appeared to be becoming increasingly fragmented and destructively competitive. They wanted to find ways to have more of a voice and more capacity to engage in active debate about the changes in higher education in ways that stay true to academic and moral values. They also expressed a desire to find ways to engage more actively in the civic life of their institutions and the communities that feed into and support them.

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## 6. Phase 3: Leadership Perceptions and Experiences

This chapter presents findings from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted to explore in greater detail individual perceptions and experiences of academic leadership. Participants were invited to comment on the nature of their role, their sense of identity and belonging in higher education, their experiences of leadership (academic and other), perceived trends and changes in the sector, and key formative experiences. These findings complement the more general quantitative analysis of the survey, and the group discussion of the listening posts, by capturing personal narratives of leadership.

### 6.1 Method and approach

A total of 39 one-to-one interviews were conducted, two thirds of which were with people who had previously completed the online survey. Interviewees came from 11 institutions (see Appendix A); 28 interviews of which were with academics from pre-1992 universities and 11 with academics from post-1992 universities. Of those interviewed 10 were Professors/ Associate Professors, 15 Senior Lecturers, 8 Lecturers, 3 Research Fellows, and 3 Teaching Fellows.

In each case participants were initially approached via email, either where they had left contact details at the end of the survey or been identified through institutional websites and/or networks, and invited to arrange a time and date for the interview. Approximately half of the interviews (20) were conducted face-to-face and half at a distance (18 by phone and 1 by Skype). Four researchers conducted the interviews although the majority were done by two individuals (18 and 12 interviews respectively) and they lasted on average between 45 and 60 minutes.

Prior to the interview, participants received a copy of the interview schedule and a brief description of the aim and scope of the interview (see Appendix C). The semi-structured interview schedule asked questions around four main areas: (1) a description and discussion of one's role in the higher education sector; (2) experiences of academic leadership (who did it come from, what did it involve, and what did it enable?); (3) perceived trends and changes in the higher education sector and the impact of these on one's academic work, aspirations, and career; (4) advice to those looking to support or develop academic leadership within UK universities.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed (using codes rather than names to protect confidentiality) and a thematic analysis

of participants' experiences and expectations of academic leadership was conducted by three of the researchers. The key findings from this analysis are outlined below. Quotes from interviewees' responses are provided to illustrate the identified themes. A respondent number (allowing the reader to identify different quotes by the same interviewee), along with interviewees' gender, academic position, and university type (pre- or post-92) is provided at the end of each quote. Text presented in square brackets and italics within quotes refers to questions/comments made by the researcher conducting the interview.

### 6.2 Findings and analysis

In this section we report findings from the interviews. It has been structured into three parts as follows: (a) one's role in the higher education sector: descriptions of academic selves/ identities, (b) academic leadership: experiences, perceptions and expectations, (c) advice for those looking to support/ develop academic leadership in UK higher education.

#### 6.2.1 One's role in the higher education sector: Descriptions of academic selves/identities

Interviewees' description and discussion of their academic roles provided insight into the way each person conceived of their academic self, and moreover, the academic identities that were central in this context. Such an understanding is critical in helping to interpret interviewees' experiences and expectations of leadership.

Most interviewees described their roles as involving research, teaching, and administration. For those in formal management positions, while administration work was seen as a major part of one's role, engagement in teaching and research activities was also described and discussed as an important part of one's work as an academic. When describing their academic work, little mention was made of outreach activities except for the few respondents whose position and/or role was explicitly linked to such activities (e.g. student recruitment, employee engagement). Thus the interviewees' self-description of their academic roles mirrored the profile of the larger sample of survey respondents.

In accord with way the respondents described themselves in terms of their academic role, they described being part of/feeling like a member of teams and communities that were linked by teaching area and/or research focus. Thus, much of the self-description regarding perceptions of group membership aligned with disciplinary categories. The latter were not always within institutional boundaries but were defined by research interests/focus/expertise.

The importance of disciplinary communities and the multiple levels of group membership is illustrated by the following quote from a senior lecturer (15 years at the university, now currently part-time due to family duties), speaking to the question of what academic groups she feels she is a member of:

*'I think within [my university], very strongly in [disciplinary group]. The [speciality group within discipline] I feel very strongly attached to. A further step out would be the [wider disciplinary group], they'd say the same about me. We have a new division, I don't feel particularly attached to it, it's only been going a year; I don't feel unattached either. We're in a school, I don't feel attached to at all. Full of [names other disciplines] and it's very large and I don't really see what I have in common with a lot of these people. For the institution, I occasionally feel part of the institution, sometimes, not very strongly. In the wider academic community [names research speciality], yes, I do feel part of the community, quite strongly. ....I also feel strongly part of the [names research community where was a PhD student and post-doc]. They would, I assume, count me as part of their group. In some way, that's the strongest group.'* (R09, female, senior lecturer, pre-92)

The importance of one's research group is again illustrated by a lecturer, recently appointed to his post:

*'I would say that it's the people in my research group, everywhere in the world. That would be my strongest sense of community. Of course I have to form my own little community within the university, to feel at home. It would be within my area of research.'* (R07, male, lecturer, pre-92)

A more senior professor who has just returned to academia after working in industry described belonging to many communities:

*'The immediate community I feel a part of is the [name of research centre] and that's a group with a history, a group identity, and common goals. I'm also definitely feel a part of the School [X] because we share common views and these common views become goals so that's an important community. I also feel very much a part of the senior academics at [my university]. So that's within the school; in the larger community – very much my technical areas [mentions areas of expertise].....groups and communities where workshops, conferences, working groups, are going on in each of those areas...that I am part of. Then I suppose the final thing that comes to mind is the group of people who are sort of my technical social peers [names past PhD colleagues, previous research groups].'* (R23, male, professor, pre-92)

As illustrated above, references to institutional identification were made by some respondents; however, overall these were less frequent than references to identity with groups that were teaching and research aligned.

When references to the institution were made with respect to the alignment of values/goals that were enabled in terms of one's academic work, the description was often in terms of a more distant relationship (setting a general direction) rather than one that was up-close and seen as influential. In general, respondents who made reference to more distal relationships with their university seemed satisfied with this distance and mentioned that it enabled autonomy (a valued attribute). However, distance from the institution was seen as problematic when one's own situation or that of one's particular group of academics was seen as vulnerable to threat in the changing higher education context. Illustrations of these differences are provided below in the section on 'academic leadership: forms and stages'.



**6.2.2 Academic leadership: Experiences, perceptions, and expectations**

In terms of academic leadership, a number of key themes emerged (see Table 6). In general, themes were common to both the pre- and post-92 university participants but exceptions to this are included in the following descriptions of each theme.

**Table 6: Key themes identified from the Interviews**

Theme	Aspects/dimensions
<b>1. Leadership: What it is not</b>	Distinction between leadership and supervision/management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is not leadership</li> <li>• Distance from management (positives/negatives)</li> </ul>
<b>2. Academic leadership: Forms and stages</b>	Self-leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom/autonomy</li> <li>• Not looking for leadership from others</li> <li>• Invisibility/irrelevance</li> <li>• Working “off the radar”</li> </ul> Mentoring: A developmental perspective
<b>3. What is looked for from those in formal leadership positions</b>	Holding space/enabling environment Boundary spanning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acculturation</li> <li>• mentoring</li> <li>• external relatedness</li> <li>• setting direction</li> </ul> Working for the group, “translating”
<b>4. Academic leaders: Who and why</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inspiration</li> <li>• exemplary member</li> <li>• intellectual/professional</li> <li>• patronage</li> <li>• a sense of being part of the academic community</li> </ul>
<b>5. Teams/groups: Leadership functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collaboration – being part of a team</li> <li>• sense of isolation/exclusion</li> <li>• situated identity – sense of place</li> </ul>

**1. Leadership: What it is not**

When asked to describe their experiences of academic leadership, a key theme that emerged from the interviews was ambiguity around the experience of leadership. In trying to describe leadership, a frequent distinction was made by the interviewees between leadership and management. A consistent message was that academic management and leadership are not the same, nor, in most cases, provided by the same person.

*‘There are a lot of academic managers but there are very few academic leaders.’ (R18, male, head of division, post-92)*

*‘[In terms of the formal leadership] It’s very transactional, on a day to day basis it’s through emails, it’s through communication and it’s probably through our departmental meetings. I don’t know, it’s difficult to say because I’m not sure that I get much leadership from.... you know, academics or the department as a whole.’ (R24, female, lecturer, pre-92)*

Even those in leadership positions, such as heads of programmes and departments, showed a reluctance to describe their influence as leadership:

*‘...since then, I’ve assumed leadership, if you can call it leadership, of the [XXX programme] in my department.’ (R20, female, principal lecturer, post-92)*

*‘It’s still colleague-based as opposed to managerial; it’s more how to facilitate a discussion than try to get a consensus....I guess it’s a lot more leadership by example or by action.’ (R05, male, Head of Department, pre-92)*

While some interviewees who made the distinction between academic leadership and management did not describe a tension between the two, others perceived the two roles as incompatible or the relationship between the two forms of authority as more contested:

*‘I distinguish academic leadership and academic management very, very strongly. Academic leadership is completely different to academic management. I think if you end up in a management role, that stifles any leadership you can offer, because you end up with the spreadsheets and the counting and the student projections.... [So like] the head of school, he’s just constantly being badgered for student projection numbers and budgets. He’s not in any way, shape, or form, a leader. He’s not someone who turns up and inspires people, He’s someone who keeps the school running. And he does a superb job at it.’ (R03, male, professor, post-92)*

**2. Academic leadership: Forms and stages**

In addition to making a distinction between academic management and leadership, interviewees made reference to two main forms of academic leadership: self-leadership and mentoring (particularly during the early stages in one’s academic career).

**a) Self-leadership**

A key theme that emerged was that many academics were not looking for leadership from others, but instead conceived of academic work as involving, and indeed requiring self-leadership. Such perceptions were in accord with references to the high value placed on autonomy that academics expressed in terms of their academic work.

*'I think I provide my own leadership most of the time. I think in terms of teaching, there are fairly fixed programmes and structures, according to what one teaches and it's more a case of managing the process, and everything that goes with assessments.....and making sure that the students are looked after, rather than real leadership in any sense of the word. In terms of research.....one can to a large extent determine in which areas you think you are doing really well and where you want to submit your grants or try and attract funds from, and which sorts of problems you want to investigate.'* (R18, male, head of division, post-92)

*'I see myself as a senior member of staff so I run my day to day activities, that's my time to do it, That's what I want as long as I'm getting where I should be going... But I don't think I have leadership on a day to day basis really...I'm quite happy leading myself now after 10 years.'* (R32, male, senior research associate, pre-92)

*'So the extent to which I require leading is, you know, very minimal. What I need is people that organise systems so that I could fit into them.'* (R33, male, professor, pre-92)

*'Autonomy. I love how autonomous I can be....on the whole, as long as what I teach in the classroom meets the objectives, I can do it my way... because my course has been so successful I've been left alone...so I can operate under the radar.'* (R17, female, principal lecturer, post-92)

However, whilst distance from the senior management team was described by a few as having benefits (such as enabling autonomy), it also carried negative impacts in certain circumstances. The following quote from a lecturer describes the vulnerability felt from a lack of leadership, as well as the perceived protective function leadership can provide:

*"Within the department [there] is quite almost a deliberate policy of no evidence of leadership, very laissez-faire....the great thing about having the lack of leadership is that you are free to do pretty much what you want within your own field of activity, but from the direction of where the department is going, what's the strategic objectives of the programmes you're on, because sometimes all of a*

*sudden you're just told programmes are closing and you think, hang on a minute, that's my teaching, this is my work, what's happening and you're not involved, you don't see it coming..."* (R01, male, lecturer, post-92)

**b) Mentorship in the early stages of one's academic career**

Interviewees' description of their experience of academic leadership throughout their academic life highlighted the importance of understanding expectations of leadership in terms of one's developmental stage. From this perspective, the notion of what one valued in terms of academic leadership changed from 'early' to 'mature' stages of being an academic. As illustrated by the following quotes, this developmental perspective on academic leadership was frequently expressed in response to the interviewer's question, 'Who provides you with leadership in terms of your academic work?'

*'People I've never met, mostly – some of them dead. Going back to my days as a student, I would say that I had particular teachers who provided me with a sense of leadership and who I remember with great affection. And my supervisor of my doctorate degree as well. Obviously those are your own teachers. As a more mature academic, I've enjoyed working with collaborators. But that's not leadership. I really dislike this concept of leadership, because once you're grown up, you don't want to be led, you want to work as a member of a team.'* (R04, female, senior lecturer, pre-92)

*'I've now got to the point where I would probably say myself...certainly the people I was working with when I was starting out doing my PhD were very important to me, in these wider communities. ....there have been one or two people in that wider community that I can turn to for advice. Literally speaking or emailing or simply looking at what they've done and being inspired by that.'* (R34, male, professor, post-92)

*'Mentors are good for you, when you are developing... There are only 2 people in my life of whom I would say that's been true [names two people early in career, training and first academic job]..... When you get to some sort of equivalence, I guess, then normally someone is your manager, does your PDR, but it's not really like that in terms of leadership because you are part of the same group that provides joined up leadership. So you know, we take on different roles, but yes, I know where to go [if I need help]...I mean, if I wasn't producing the goods, if I didn't get the money and if I didn't write papers that were decent, then I would know who would come knocking on my door and say, "things need to be done about this". In a sense I'm managed in that way. But the curse*

*about leadership, I mean you reach a senior point in an organisation where you don't need to be led. The only reason you got there is that you led yourself.' (R33, male, professor, pre-92)*

### 3. What is looked for from those in formal leadership positions?

#### a) Providing a holding space/enabling environment to facilitate academic work

When asked what was required in terms of academic leadership, many of those interviewed described the need for those in more senior positions to provide a holding space/enabling environment as well as protecting the core/essence of the academic's role.

*'You could say that the pressures are now pulling us far in one extreme in terms of making things efficient making things work properly and so on and to some extent rightly so because of the huge inefficiencies in higher education. However, what makes a university a university is that core integrity and I see my academic leader as someone who provides that core integrity. I think that's really important.' (R35, female, principal lecturer, post-92)*

A similar picture of academic leadership was provided by academic staff in professorial and/or senior management roles:

*'I certainly see myself as leading a department rather than managing, and what I ideally like to do is provide those frameworks in which groups of people can use those frameworks to move forward, to have a sense of direction, to excel, to use their potential fully...' (R08, female, head of department, principal lecturer, post-92)*

*'...but also there's a more formal leadership role in demonstrating to people that if they are going to engage on this slightly different path of not promotions through research but promotion through either teaching or learning or engagement or more broadly what's called the student experience, they can... [in terms of senior position as a professor] I guess that it is sort of leadership... but really it's mentoring and encouragement as much as, come on guys, follow me.' (R03, male, professor, post-92)*

#### b) Boundary-spanning activities

Academic leaders were described, and described themselves as performing boundary-spanning roles. Such roles could take many forms, for example, accessing external resources to enable academic work and/or facilitating knowledge transfer between university and external bodies:

*'At the moment, my role is much more liaison than leadership.' (R18, male, head of division, post-92)*

PhD supervisors were frequently referred to in terms of providing different forms of boundary-spanning activities, facilitating one's entry into, and development within academia. The quotes below illustrate the importance of such leadership in terms of acculturation processes and the development of academic work. Academic leadership was seen to be provided by exemplary members of the academic community in terms of their intellectual and/or technical skills.

*'I certainly had two very, very, very good supervisors. Both of whom one felt one could sort of stake one's career around. I guess I would describe one of the supervisors as a reader, a great reader although his publication record was pretty sound as well. And the other was more on the lines of getting the publications out....both were able to supervise me during my PhD and I certainly found loads of inspiration from both of them... [What was the nature of the inspiration?] ...In terms of my director of studies, he was a very well read person to begin with and I admired that considerably. As a teacher he also had an outstanding talent in that he was able to draw from you things you didn't know you were capable of. Very good at asking the right things at the right time... he and one other are the only [people] I've ever met that could actually help me to think, which is something that I would personally like to achieve with my own students... [The other supervisor?] ...Well, I think that his most use to me was his actual readiness to answer questions about the actual subject itself in a way that didn't make me feel stupid for having asked them. ....he wasn't an ideas sort of person but the sort of pragmatic empirical stuff, putting it together in a way it was meant to be, he was very good for that. And both of them were outstanding at giving me more confidence.' (R20, female, principal lecturer, program head, post-92)*

#### c) Working for the group; "translating"

Describing leadership in terms of getting things done for the group was indicated by a number of academics with formal leadership roles, such as department heads.

*'I felt a responsibility to the rest of the group. We needed somebody doing that kind of, you know, management stuff... there is not really a lot of day to day management... you don't have to tell people what to do, they get on and do it...but you know there is still a fair amount to do... somebody in the group needed to do that and there wasn't anybody else apart from the person who was doing it... doing a great job...so it was an obligation to the group,*

*really.....it is academic but not really research related... from a pure research point of view, I'm not mentoring, I'm not supporting research from a mental capacity. I'm giving people potentially resources or I'm supporting them to go to conferences, or I'm giving them the time to do research.' (R37, male, head of department, associate professor, post-92)*

In addition, direction-setting was often seen as being done with the group as illustrated by a principal lecturer talking about her role as a course leader (7 modules, 4 teaching staff).

*'...we are quite a tight team...I'd say that it is distributed leadership in that there's consultation but in the end people will go with what I decide because I'm the one who's responsible.' (R17, female, principal lecturer, post-92)*

#### 4. Academic leaders: who and why?

For many, academic leadership came from individuals (or groups) that provided inspiration for their academic work. For example, a principal lecturer identified receiving academic leadership from both her students and her university's VC:

*'My students inspire me because they keep in touch, they tell me what they're doing, they open up in classes and tell me what's going on in their work, the university is now giving me direction, it didn't used to but from the new vice-chancellor... I never used to be inspired. The only thing that used to inspire me was my work and my students, I didn't look beyond that at all but now I feel part of something bigger.' (R17, female, principal lecturer, post-92)*

A department head describes being inspired and encouraged in academic work by a former Head of Department...

*'I was supported within that department to start writing... the head of the department... he was definitely a lynch pin in that department and we grew in that department... totally inspiring... leading by example because I think that one of the most important things was that he was a prolific writer.' (R14, female, senior lecturer, post-92)*

The importance of the 'leader-follower' relationship, in terms of a sense of connection and/or closeness was evident in many of the descriptions of academic leadership:

*'The new VC is very different, he's much more consultative. He has some very difficult decisions to make because unless the university cuts down its costs, it's not going to survive, which makes him unpopular in some cases. But whenever I've written to him, and we're a huge university, he's always written back...' (R17, female, principal lecturer, post-92)*

*'One of the things that I think I found is that academics who lead in a positive way for people, they seem to have some sort of a bond so whether it's their research assistants or PhD students or that kind of thing, that's certainly my impression. Whereas if you are in a team or if you have a line manager, director, or whatever, I don't think they lead you. It's quite cliquy in a way; you have to have that kind of relationship with them to lead you.' (R24, female, lecturer, pre-92)*

Academic leaders were described by some to be those who made you feel a valued member of the team, the department, and/or the university, as is evident in the following description of the previous Head of Department:

*'He was just a very warm person who made you feel like he cared about people individually and that he cared about your development or whatever. I don't know how to explain it but it was much more that he did want to support you and make sure you developed academically, that he felt pleased that you were part of the [XXX] department at [XXX] University.' (R24, female, lecturer, pre-92)*

A number of people, however, commented on the vulnerability of a system that depends to a large degree on 'patronage':

*'Having had that initial input from my supervisor, I feel that I can do [what needs to be done] but I think without that, I'm not sure whether I would be in academia or where I am today.' (R24, female, lecturer, pre-92)*

*'As a researcher, I think my main message is that your life in university is very dependent on your line manager as a researcher. If you've got a crap line manager, your life is not going to be great and it's not good for your career progression, and that's essentially that.' (R32, male, senior research associate, pre-92)*

#### 5. Teams/groups: Leadership functions

As the following quotes illustrate, many people talked about how they received and found support for their academic work within their teaching teams and/or within their disciplinary research communities (that often spanned institutional and geographical boundaries).

*'The nice thing about the division of XX is that we are very much a team. We're located together, we all get on well and there's a real sense of being a team....there's very much a sense of us working as a team together to deliver what we have to deliver... over the years we've gotten to know more and more people across the XY school but I guess we're increasingly conscious of this divide between management and academics.....at the division level, there*

*is a strong sense of camaraderie between the academics, but again it's that gap to the management. I think that at the university level it is a big issue...pretty much all of my research is collaborative and most of that is with people in other institutions and quite a bit in other countries.' (R34, male, professor, post-92)*

Others described a collective/shared approach to leadership within teams.

*'But I didn't mobilise them. We've all mobilised each other... It's collective.' (R04, female, senior lecturer, pre-92)*

### 6.2.3 Advice for those supporting and developing academic leadership in universities

At the end of the interview, respondents were asked for their advice to those looking to support or develop academic leadership within UK universities. Below is a selection of quotes which echo the earlier themes reflected in the descriptions of, and expectations for academic leadership:

*'I think the tendency all over the country is to get more and more managerialist... I think, especially at universities, managers have to hold their nerve and trust their staff... looking around, I think most of us are engaged. There's a few who aren't, who've either burnt out or become extremely cynical but I'd say most of us are engaged but we're engaged with the role and with our students, not necessarily with the university. So I think leaders have to work on that because there are times when I was almost alienated from the university and that is not a good thing.' (R17, female, principal lecturer, post-92)*

*'Recruit with integrity. Develop the staff that you've got.' (R14, female, senior lecturer, post-92)*

*'To be quite truthful, I think academic leadership in the UK, in my limited experience, is not where it should be. I think the biggest problem is because at some point, academics did somehow step away from leadership and hand it over to other people...the people who are trying to manage feel frustrated and ineffective because they can't get their job done. The academics feel frustrated and ineffective because they can't get their job done. That is the worst case. The best case is when you have proper managers who support and enable people to get their job done. Getting that into people's mindset and a real national discussion about academic leadership could make a huge difference... I feel that there is something of a competitive mindset between those two roles and it needs to be collaborative, everybody wins and both sides have to give a little bit and recognise that the other side does have something to bring.' (R23, male, professor, pre-92)*

*'I don't think people go into academia for the money. You go for the buzz and how do you encourage people to keep thinking about the buzz while they're there.' (R09, female, senior lecturer, post-92)*

### 6.3 Summary and key points

The picture of academic leadership that emerged from the interviews complemented the findings of the survey and the listening post sessions. Academics described their core academic work as involving teaching and research and for many, administration work that was done on behalf of the group of which they were part. Academics in senior professorial and/or management roles described their work in similar terms. A sense of enthusiasm for, pride in, and commitment to one's academic work was evident in the interviews.

Nevertheless, the picture of academic leadership was not one that closely or, at times, comfortably linked with academic management. Instead, academic leadership was seen to shift from early mentoring relationships with one's research supervisor and early research groups to a form of self-leadership where inspiration and direction came from one's own work, as well as one's teaching team and/or research community (the latter often being located outside one's institution). From this perspective on academic leadership, the role of management was not seen to be one of leadership but instead to provide support, resources and an enabling environment that facilitated, rather than directed, the academic work of others.

## 7. Discussion

The findings from the three phases of this research project paint a rich and varied picture of academic leadership in UK higher education. In this chapter we draw out key themes and issues from the various phases and present a model to articulate the relationship between academic leadership, academic management and self-leadership. The chapter concludes with some reflections on terminology and context.

### 7.1 Synthesis of findings

The survey outlines the extent to which people in formal and informal academic leadership roles are seen to structure, inspire, represent, mentor and influence their academic colleagues. It indicates that ‘informal leaders’, such as current and former colleagues, PhD supervisors and mentors, are perceived to exert substantially greater influence over one’s orientation towards academic work than those in formal roles such as Head of School, Director of Research and Director of Education (with the exception of ‘structuring’ type activities). Whilst this may not be particularly surprising given the significance of disciplinary identity and collegiality for academic life, it illustrates a potential tension between those who are regarded by the institution as academic leaders, and those who are considered by academic staff themselves as leaders. In terms of the qualities associated with concepts of academic leadership, these were most strongly related to perceptions of academics as ‘researchers’ and least strongly to perceptions of them as ‘teachers’, although those who identified most strongly with the notion of themselves as teachers were more likely to consider themselves as actually having leadership responsibilities (perhaps through their role as module and/or programme coordinator). These trends occurred across all disciplines and kinds of institution (pre and post 92).

The listening post discussions help to contextualise the survey findings through consideration of what it means to be a citizen of UK academia at the present time. Participants highlighted a fair degree of disengagement and disillusionment within their institutions – expressing considerable ambivalence, uncertainty, scepticism and concern about the perceived marketisation of the sector and associated increases in managerial control<sup>103</sup>. Underlying these comments, however, was a somewhat implicit desire to (re)engage in debates about the purpose(s) of higher education and to (re)establish a core set of academic values to guide activity within the sector. There was a sense that, as self-directed professionals, academics have both a right and a responsibility to participate in leadership, governance and citizenship within and on behalf of their institutions and communities.

Finally, the interviews drew out rich narratives of individual understandings and experiences of academic leadership. They highlighted the changing needs and expectations experienced throughout an academic career and, in particular, the significant role played by key individuals in acculturation and development within the academic profession. PhD supervisors, colleagues, collaborators, renowned scholars, and even students, all had a significant part to play in shaping the values, direction and sense of commitment to academic work. Those in more formal managerial roles (such as Head of School, Director of Research and Director of Education), whilst acknowledged as playing an important part in the development and application of organisational processes and procedures, were not generally regarded as providing ‘academic leadership’ (within their formal role at least), but rather ‘academic management’ on behalf of the institution. Fundamentally, however, the interviews indicated a desire for ‘self-leadership’ once an individual had become an established member of the academic profession.

Leadership, it seems, plays a part, but not a ubiquitous one, at both institutional and personal levels. Governance of higher education institutions involves leadership, but a lot more than that too. In relation to their personal academic endeavours, the academics in our study identify a number of influences, some of which might be characterised as leadership, and some of which are regarded as most certainly ‘not leadership’.

Academics appear to look for leadership in relation to values and identity; not in the allocation of tasks or the application of processes. From the point of view of ‘the led’, leadership appears to be associated with ideas and influence that infuse both the real and abstract realms in which their academic work is conducted. It is identified in those situations where an academic (as researcher, teacher, practitioner, colleague, etc.) feels him or herself to be connected to a group or community (real or imagined) that brings a sense of meaning and purpose to his/her academic work.

When asked to name influential leaders in one’s academic career and/or institution, respondents tended to nominate people who were seen to exemplify a specific set of values associated with high quality academic work in their discipline. Respondents often referred to people outside their own institution, perhaps those they had worked with earlier in their career or whose scholarly work had proven highly influential on their thinking (sometimes people they had never met, or who they only interacted with very occasionally). Of those who were cited who held some formal supervisory or managerial relationship over the respondent these were most often people with whom they interacted in a formative stage of their career – such as PhD supervisor or line manager

103 Echoing UK findings from the recent ‘Changing Academic Profession’ study (Locke and Bennion, 2010).

as a junior member of faculty. The period of becoming an academic, when a successful outcome is least certain and aspirants are most dependent on supervisors, is closely associated with 'leadership'. Once one has passed through this 'liminal space'<sup>104</sup>, leadership may well be perceived as less pertinent (other than in one's role as a leader of self and others – but not as a 'follower'). So being led, it seems, is associated with a sense of being dependent - a relationship academics expect themselves (and others) to grow out of on the path to becoming a fully functioning professional.

The process of *becoming an academic* requires the support, guidance and inspiration of others, however, once one has *become an academic* one does not, it seems from our findings, usually feel the need to seek leadership from elsewhere (although certain pivotal characters may continue to exert an influence in the same way as parents do once you've become an adult, although usually in a less direct manner). On the other hand, when asked about situations in which they *offer leadership* to others, academics have a wider repertoire. PhD supervision is included, but less prominent; providing the voice of experience, external perspectives and connections, guidance through committees and promotions. To stay with the familial metaphor, it is more avuncular than parental. Few people referred to heads of research projects or academic departments as 'leaders' (other than in their ability to create and sustain an enabling environment) although these are the roles at which leadership development is most often directed and to which the label 'leadership' is increasingly applied by institutions. Whatever skills are deployed in these roles, they are not generally experienced or thought about as 'leadership' by those at the receiving end.

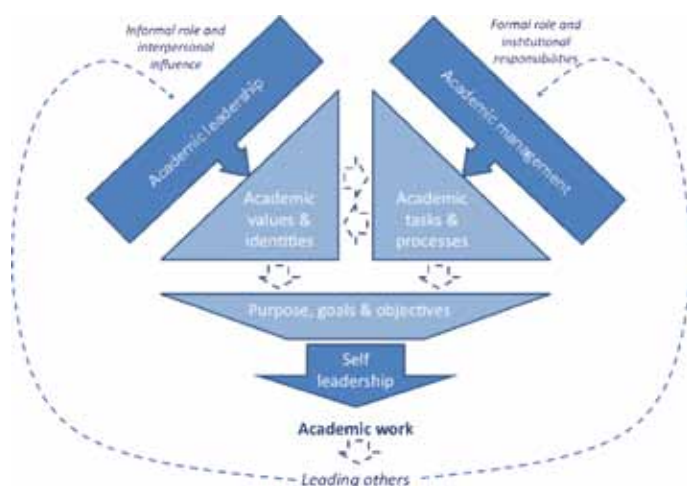
Why is this? One answer might be that the meaning of leadership is so bound up with feelings of dependency that it is precisely the thing to be jettisoned once an individual attains 'adult' status as a mature academic. Relationships with heads of departments and research projects have managerial aspects, but the intellectual work of doing research, writing papers and teaching is intrinsically authorial, expressing one's own voice, one's own authority. Another explanation might be that the managerial and performance management concerns of heads of departments are now so overwhelming that there is simply no time to engage in intellectual leadership; in fact anyone who wants to maintain prominence in an intellectual field may feel it is best to avoid such jobs. Whatever the reason, however, the strength of these opinions across our sample indicates a need to more clearly distinguish between notions of leadership and management in academia and their constitutive processes and outcomes.

## 7.2 A model of academic leadership

Whilst respondents in our study voiced a fair degree of frustration about the formal processes and procedures adopted by institutions to organise and manage academic work, in few cases was there an outright rejection of such activities, nor the efforts made by those in formal roles to fulfil their responsibilities. Rather, there was a sense that the management, governance and/or administration of the institution are different kinds of activity than those of constructing, communicating and disseminating a meaningful sense of academic values and identity. The latter are far more dependent on informal and mostly unmeasurable processes and relationships that may come to be regarded by those reporting them as examples of 'academic leadership'.

The perceived relationship between academic leadership and academic management as observed in the various phases of this study are illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: Academic leadership, academic management and self leadership**



From this figure it can be seen that academic management and academic leadership are not necessarily provided by the same people or processes, and address rather different issues. *Academic management* tends to have an institutional focus and is used in order to frame academic tasks and processes, such as allocation of workload, performance monitoring and assessment, and provision and distribution of resources. *Academic leadership*, on the other hand, is conceived far more broadly than institutional roles and responsibilities, and is most significant in terms of its impact upon academic values and identity/ies. Together academic management and academic leadership, through their impact on tasks and processes, and values and identities, inform and shape perceptions of purpose, goals and objectives for staff in academic roles. Where the tasks and processes framed through academic

104 Defined as "a space of transformation between phases of separation and reincorporation. It represents a period of ambiguity, of marginal and transitional state." (Turner, 1969, cited in Durand, 2009: 26).

management correspond and align with the values and identities framed through academic leadership then it is likely that a relatively clear and coherent sense of purpose and direction will emerge. Where, on the other hand, they conflict with or contradict one another it is likely that clarity of direction and purpose will be harder to achieve. In either case, the manner in which an individual then carries out his or her *academic work* is likely to be conceived of as 'self-leadership' for those who have achieved a certain level of 'professionality'<sup>105</sup>. In time, self-leadership may come to result in the individual exerting a leadership influence on others, either through the example they set to emerging and aspiring academics or a conscious decision to take on a formal or informal leadership role, and so the cycle continues.

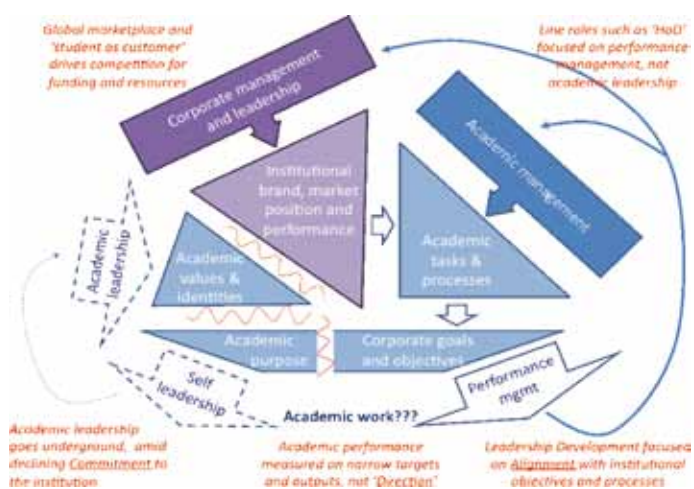
Whilst Figure 11 is clearly a simplification of the complexity present within the findings of our research it draws attention to the fact that academic management and academic leadership are only likely to be perceived of as important by an individual academic to the extent to which they facilitate his/her ability to work as an autonomous professional and, through this perhaps, to subsequently influence and lead others. In other words, a sense of autonomy is central to what it means to be an 'academic'. The capacity of these processes to develop and enhance institutional reputation, efficiency and/or performance, whilst clearly of interest to those charged with formal organisational responsibilities (such as members of the senior executive group, HR, etc.), are far less likely to be perceived of as significant or legitimate concerns with regards to their own academic work (except, of course, where any of these factors may impinge directly on one's ability to carry out such work in the way one chooses).

When considered in relation to the definition of leadership outlined in Section 2.2, it could be suggested that the processes outlined in Figure 11 each play a different role in creating direction, alignment and commitment within universities<sup>106</sup>. 'Academic management' is mostly concerned with *alignment*, 'academic leadership' is mostly concerned with *commitment*, and *direction* is enacted through a process of 'self-leadership'. There is a fine balance to achieve between these three processes in order to generate a leadership and management approach in which individuals, groups and the organisation share a common purpose and pursue mutually compatible goals and objectives. The evidence from our study, however, implies that in many cases such a balance is not achieved – hence the perceived tension, ambiguity and scepticism expressed by many respondents. It is suggested that an important factor contributing to this imbalance is

the growing significance of a corporate agenda in which universities are competing for funding and resources in a global marketplace and responding through the adoption of more 'business-like' approaches to leadership, management and performance.

Corporate and entrepreneurial approaches to leadership and management within universities, whilst present for several decades<sup>107</sup>, have seen a resurgence in the UK with the recent increases in student fees, the growth of international competition<sup>108</sup> and the legitimisation of such approaches by institutional leaders. Within an increasingly competitive environment at institutional level it is likely that universities will attempt to enhance organisational performance and outputs in ways that are aligned with organisational strategy whether or not they match the values, identities and/or aspirations of academics per se – a dynamic that will inevitably put pressure on 'academic leadership'. To this extent, we may conceive of an additional wedge being inserted into the model presented in Figure 11, which is one driven by corporate objectives and financial performance (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12: How academic leadership gets squeezed by managerial priorities**



In this hypothesised model we see how concerns relating to institutional brand, market position and performance may drive academic management in ways that meet 'corporate', rather than 'academic', priorities. Within such a context academics may well feel sidelined in the leadership of academic work, and experience a declining sense of shared purpose, values and identity as highlighted during the listening posts and interviews. A corporate approach to management and leadership in higher education tends to bring with it a focus on the accomplishment of institutional goals and objectives through processes of *alignment* and

105 Nixon et al. (1997), Lowe and Gayle (2010)

106 Drath et al. (2008)

107 Clark (1998), McNay (1995)

108 Molesworth et al. (2011)



a narrowing of what is regarded as high-quality academic work through the application of metrics and performance targets, thereby diminishing opportunities for academics to self-determine their own sense of direction and in so doing undermining their commitment to the institution and the profession.

One obvious concern this raises is that in a sector calling out for more in the way of 'academic leadership' it may well be the very things regarded by academics themselves as 'leadership' that are squeezed out and sidelined within institutional reforms. Such an outcome may well have a long-term detrimental effect on the quality of academic work and the ability of academics to experience a sense of 'self-leadership' and professional autonomy. Some of the implications of such a shift are considered in Chapter 8.

### 7.3 A word about terminology

Throughout this report we have referred to the notion of 'academic leadership' and its relationship to 'academic management'. This is a fairly consistent and accepted approach within the field of higher education, as well as leadership and management studies, yet it is worth reflecting on the extent to which it may or may not resonate with the lived experience of practicing academics.

As the literature review illustrates, both of these concepts are relatively recent additions to discussion and debate about the nature and purpose of universities. Here the current fascination (or obsession) with leadership is closely tied to reform of higher education from an elite to a mass market activity. As demand for higher education has risen, so too has competition between (and within) institutions for limited resources, expertise and reputation. Universities have responded by strengthening and developing their management practices. They have recruited professional managers from outside the sector; reviewed governance structures; developed branding and marketing strategies; and implemented performance management processes for academic staff. Since the turn of the millennium, increasing attention has been paid to leadership development and the professionalisation of academic management processes. The perception of academics assuming formal management roles reluctantly, out of a sense of duty or responsibility to 'take turns', has been described as unsustainable and ineffective in the context of declining public-sector funding and increasing international competition. As good governance and management have become seen as essential requirements of a competitive and profitable HEI, concern has been expressed about the difficulty in achieving the wide-scale cultural

change required to achieve and sustain success against corporate objectives. It is from here, perhaps, that we have seen an increasing emphasis on 'leadership' – in order to win the hearts and minds of academics who, through their social, cultural and intellectual capital, exert substantial power and influence within their institutions and beyond. Academics, however, have often been portrayed as resistant to change and reluctant to engage in leadership and management on behalf of their institutions.

The findings from this study indicate not so much a resistance to change per se, but a tendency for academics to lead and/or influence in ways that do not map neatly onto organisational (or institutional) boundaries and priorities. Whilst universities may be looking for ways to align individual goals and outputs to those of the institution, academics are more likely to seek ways of enhancing their academic discipline, practice and/or values. From an institutional perspective, an attempt to mobilise colleagues to resist, challenge or overturn policies and practices is unlikely to be seen as evidence of leadership. However, from an individual's perspective, this may be exactly what people expect from their academic leaders – especially where it leads to an enhanced sense of identity, values, meaning and/or purpose.

A proviso arising from this work, therefore, is that 'academic leadership' may not necessarily address the interests of the institution, nor be perceived of as 'leadership' by those involved with it (either as leaders, or the led). Indeed, many of the interviewees actively railed against the concept of 'academic leadership' – regarding it largely as managerial rhetoric to encourage greater engagement with and commitment to institutional objectives. In those institutions where people are formally appointed into 'academic leadership' roles they almost inevitably acquire a whole load of 'academic management' responsibilities and may even find themselves disempowered in their ability to exert real academic influence. The cynicism expressed in much of this research, therefore, may well be about the tendency to refer to things as 'leadership' when they are indeed just good old 'management' or 'administration'.

This resonates with findings from Oakley and Selwood<sup>109</sup> who suggest that:

*'The culture of academics is, if anything, distrustful of overt organisational leadership. This appears to be partly about not wanting to swap their professional expertise for what is perceived as the more banal role of management, but also about a more deep-seated resistance to the language of leadership.'*<sup>110</sup>

109 Oakley and Selwood (2010)

110 Oakley and Selwood (2010) p6

Leadership is a contested concept<sup>111</sup> and within the context of UK higher education it would seem that it has acquired somewhat of a negative reputation amongst academic faculty. Within such a context, using the term 'leadership' may well disengage rather than engage the very people one seeks to influence. Within this report we mention, for example, the fact that the PhD supervisory relationship may well be considered later in one's career as a formative academic leadership experience. At the time, however, it is unlikely to be conceived of as such by either supervisor or supervisee and labelling it as such may well have unexpected and undesirable consequences (especially where it becomes associated with an increase in managerial and administrative duties). Likewise the concept of 'self-leadership' emerges from this study almost by default - as an inability or reluctance to identify oneself as 'led' by others rather than an explicit acknowledgement of one's own role as a 'leader'.

The findings within this report, therefore, should be treated with sensitivity to the manner in which concepts and practices are applied. They are intended to help open up one's perspective in order to notice, observe and be curious about processes and practices that may otherwise go unrecognised and dismissed as unimportant. Their potential for implementation and impact, however, requires careful consideration so as not to unwittingly harm the very thing you are trying to nurture or to trigger an adverse and undesirable reaction.

#### 7.4 The significance of context

Whilst we notice a surprising degree of similarity between the ways in which people in this study talk about and identify leadership in higher education there are some significant contextual variations dependent on factors such as career stage, job role, gender, academic discipline, organisational type, etc. A number of these have been explicitly identified in this report, such as: a stronger tendency for those in senior roles and those with a more extensive teaching focus to regard themselves as having leadership influence within their organisations; a weaker tendency for females to describe themselves as having leadership influence; and a preference for 'self-leadership' amongst established academics. Locke and Bennion<sup>112</sup> identify similar differences, including significant variations between countries and staff groups with regards to the experiences and expectations of academics. Their findings suggest that:

*'The academic role itself is being fragmented. Those expected both to teach and research are now in the minority, and their responsibilities may range from simply teaching to also assessing students, leading courses and*

*designing the curriculum, or from basic research to also analysing and interpreting data, managing projects and preparing research proposals.'*<sup>113</sup>

They conclude by highlighting 'the need to consider academics as a heterogeneous collection of groupings structured by a series of interrelated characteristics'<sup>114</sup>. Given the immense variability of academic careers, the rapidly shifting context, and changing perspectives on the nature and purpose of academic work, it would be inadvisable to suggest a 'best practice' approach to academic leadership and management - but rather to nurture the development of a culture that respects and acknowledges the importance of academic values and identities in the accomplishment of academic work. As Locke and Bennion<sup>115</sup> suggest:

*'Academic values and identities are becoming an increasingly contested area which higher education managers and decision-makers need to understand and address in crafting a vision for their institution.'*<sup>116</sup>

The testimonies from our research participants indicate a perceived divide between the interests and aspirations of academic staff and those in managerial and professional services roles. Whilst in an increasingly complex and competitive environment one might suggest the need for greater collaboration and support between functions to ensure the delivery of high quality education and research there is a sense that they are pulling in different directions. In terms of 'student experience', for example, academics tended to emphasise the qualitative aspects of the tutor-student relationship (such as the quality of engagement and enquiry) yet spoke of a predominantly quantitative approach to the management of such issues by their institutions (in terms of student satisfaction scores, feedback periods for assessed work, etc.). Whilst both aspects are clearly important there was an expressed sense that managerial considerations may be overtaking academic concerns - that functions designed to support academic work have begun to dictate what and how such work is done. Whether or not this reflects the reality of what happens in HEIs, or is a generalisable trend across the sector, it highlights the importance of perceptions and identities in the leadership process and the likely obstacles that will be met if management and professional services staff do not carefully consider the concerns of the academic community.

So is leadership in higher education any different from elsewhere? This study points towards *both* the uniqueness and the universality of leadership in an academic context. Universities are subject to the same considerations as other

111 Bolden et al. (2011), Grint (2005)

112 Locke and Bennion (2010a), (2010b)

113 Locke and Bennion, (2010b) p38

114 Locke and Bennion, (2010b) p44

115 Echoing the findings of Winter, 2009.

116 Locke and Bennion (2010b) p37

organisations (in terms of the need to manage and organise finances, personnel, estates, etc.) yet they are also distinct in terms of their purposes and outcomes (as places of learning and transformation). Albert and Whetten<sup>117</sup> suggest they should be considered as ‘dual identity’ organisations - part church, part business. As discussed in Chapter 3, the origin of universities can be traced back to the monasteries, and like churches they carry (vestiges of) an ideological commitment to a set of normative principles and derive their status from the (perceived) quality of their membership.

*‘A common problem in all ideological organisations [however] is assessing effectiveness. How can you measure the effectiveness of a teacher in fostering inquisitiveness, or the effectiveness of a minister in increasing faith? Because it is impossible to arrive at a consensus about how to measure ideological goal fulfilment, there is a tendency in churches and universities to substitute measures of efficiency for measures of effectiveness<sup>118</sup>. Since performance measures have a powerful effect on members’ allocation of time and effort across activities, the natural consequence is that the organisation inevitably becomes means instead of ends orientated.’<sup>119</sup>*

Universities, they argue, also have an identity as utilitarian organisations that provide teaching, research and service that is promoted in terms of its practical use to individuals and society. In recent years, given the rapid expansion of higher education, the pressure on funding and competition has driven an increasingly business-like approach to running universities and an increasing sense of tension between normative and utilitarian objectives.

*‘The requirements for competing successfully in the secular marketplace have resulted in a significant transformation of the academy. Normatively it still clings to its medieval roots as a religious institution, but its reward structure has become increasingly outcome-orientated.’<sup>120</sup>*

The dual nature of organisational identity in universities carries some important implications for attitudes towards leadership and management. Citing Stinchcombe in Etzioni<sup>121</sup>, Albert and Whetten<sup>122</sup> suggest that ‘utilitarian organisations tend to have a multi-level, highly differentiated rank structure’, whilst ‘normative organisations tend not only to be comparatively egalitarian, but also stress the distinction between members and non-members, insiders (“believers”) vs. outsiders (“heretics”), as the central status criterion, over any internal differentiations.’ With regards to the University, they suggest:

*‘Effective leaders of dual identity organisations should personify and support both identities. University presidents who were never professors (ordained members of the priesthood) will always be considered managers, not leaders. This deficiency should impair their effectiveness during retrenchment when they must be perceived as the champion of the normative as well as the utilitarian values of the organisation.’<sup>123</sup>*

These observations may help shed light on some of the complexities and ambiguities identified within the current study – the tendency to regard those who promote and defend the normative values of the group as ‘leaders’ and to label those working towards the utilitarian aims of the organisation as mere ‘managers’. This echoes the distinction made in Figure 11 between ‘academic leadership’ as related to values and identity (a *normative* activity) and ‘academic management’ as related to the allocation of tasks and enactment of institutional processes (a *utilitarian* activity).

The dual identity argument provides support for the multiplicity of leadership forms observed within higher education – a ‘hybrid configuration’<sup>124</sup> of different leadership and management practices and practitioners that may complement or conflict with one another. It also points to the likely challenges of integrating the concerns and activities of different staff groups – of acknowledging the normative concerns and aspirations of academic staff with the utilitarian concerns and aspirations of management and professional services. In higher education, as elsewhere, context is everything and nothing – there are both great differences and similarities between the ways in which leadership is perceived, experienced and enacted. Perceptions of *who* leads, and *why* they lead, are as important as *what* they do, and *how* and *where* they do it. Within universities, sensitivity is required to the discourse(s) surrounding leadership and their meaning(s) to various stakeholders (academics, professional staff, students, employers, policy makers, etc.). Now, perhaps more than ever, leadership is seen to be associated with those who manage to create and promote a compelling and meaningful sense of shared values and identity. This is nothing unique to higher education, but the way in which it is accomplished, is highly context-specific.

The findings from this study bear many similarities to those from outside the higher education sector, such as Kouzes and Posner’s<sup>125</sup> leadership practices inventory and Tamkin et al.’s<sup>126</sup> study on outstanding leadership for the Work Foundation (see Table 7).

117 Albert and Whetten (2004)

118 Whetten (1981)

119 Albert and Whetten (2004) p108

120 Albert and Whetten (2004) p110

121 Etzioni (1975)

122 Albert and Whetten (2004) p112

123 Albert and Whetten (2004) p112

124 Gronn (2009)

125 Kouzes and Posner (2002), (2003)

126 Tamkin et al. (2010)

Table 7 – Leadership practices outside higher education

Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes and Posner, 2002, 2003)	Characteristics of outstanding leadership (Tamkin et al., 2010)
1. Model the way	1. Think systemically and act long term
2. Inspire a shared vision	2. Bring meaning to life
3. Challenge the process	3. Apply the spirit not the letter of the law
4. Enable others to act	4. Grow people through performance
5. Encourage the heart	5. Are self-aware and authentic to leadership first, their own needs second
	6. Understand that talk is work
	7. Give time and space to others
	8. Put 'we' before 'me'
	9. Take deeper breaths and hold them longer

Both of these frameworks are interesting in the extent to which they endeavour to identify the characteristics of exemplary leadership and in the way that they identify a series of practices that can be engaged in by people no matter what their role within the organisation. As Kouzes and Posner<sup>127</sup> state:

*“What we have discovered, and rediscovered, is that leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women. It is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forward the best from themselves and others. What we’ve discovered is that people make extraordinary things happen by liberating the leader within everyone.”<sup>128</sup>*

From this perspective, the kind of academic leadership described in this study that supports and enables people to lead themselves is exactly the kind of thing that universities should be looking to nurture and develop. Whilst at a broad level the *content* of leadership practices may not vary much between contexts, the manner in which they are operationalised by ‘leaders’ and perceived by ‘followers’ most certainly does. As the literature review in Chapter 3 describes, a key criteria within leadership in higher education is the perceived credibility and legitimacy of those people engaged in leadership practices and this, once more, comes back to issues of social identity and trust. Another issue is the debate about the purpose of higher education. Whilst leadership research in primary and secondary education, for example, tends to accept student performance as the key outcome measure, there is far less agreement over what constitutes effectiveness and success in the tertiary sector.

127 Kouzes and Posner (2002)

128 Kouzes and Posner (2002) pxxiii

## 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this final chapter we summarise key findings and reflect on their implications for academic leadership practice and development within UK universities.

### 8.1 The many faces of academic leadership

The literature review in Chapter 3 of this report outlines how changes in the nature and funding of higher education have increased interest in leadership, management and governance processes. Within the UK, since the mid-1980s we have witnessed a massive growth in higher education provision and demand; a trend that has been largely mirrored in higher education systems across the world. Higher education is now undeniably 'big business' and institutions have responded through investment in, and development of, management and related processes. Whilst an increasingly diverse body of expertise has been recruited into the sector to help with marketing, business planning, estates management, information and communication technology, student support, employability, etc. the core nature and purpose of academic work (as perceived by academics themselves) has changed less rapidly. Academic excellence continues to be determined in relation to scholarly rather than financial performance. It is typically considered to be about furthering knowledge and developing students rather than bringing in funding and enhancing efficiency (although the latter have increasingly become core criteria within performance appraisals).

In the face of such change (and continuity) it is unsurprising that HEIs have sought ways to improve the alignment of business and academic processes, and equally unsurprising that this has proved difficult. Previous research continues to show the significance of credibility and legitimacy for those holding formal academic management responsibilities<sup>129</sup> such that this remains one of only a few sectors where full professionalisation of the management line is rare<sup>130</sup>. In higher education, institutions and their leaders have needed to walk a fine line between academic (normative) and corporate (utilitarian) objectives and priorities.

Leadership, as a process of social influence, draws largely on informal as well as formal roles and processes. Such processes are interconnected and interdependent in ways that make it difficult to single out specific contributions. As Bolden et al.<sup>131</sup> suggest, in order to appreciate the complexities of leadership

practice within universities, it is necessary to consider it from a number of levels and perspectives, including personal, social, structural, contextual and developmental. Taking such an approach is likely to reveal areas of tension, conflict and inconsistency – especially those that occur at the boundary/intersection between units, roles, identities, etc. – and demonstrates the value of taking a more systemic perspective on leadership.

The current study complements these findings through a more detailed exploration and analysis of the leadership of academic work. It illustrates how staff in academic roles tend to associate 'academic leadership' with the contribution of influential others towards their sense of academic identity and values. Such people may well have no direct line management responsibility, or even institutional affiliation, to the person recognising their influence, but nonetheless act as a source of inspiration, guidance, support and direction. In many cases these are people who have played a significant role in the acculturation and development of the 'led' into the academic profession and facilitated them in developing reputation and recognition as a member of the academic community. They are people who may well have helped create and maintain an enabling environment for the aspiring/emerging academic; engaged in 'boundary spanning'<sup>132</sup> activities on behalf of individuals and groups; and advocated and articulated what it means to be an active and responsible member of the academic profession.

Such findings support a social identity approach (Haslam, 2004, Haslam et al., 2011) to leadership in higher education, whereby people are unlikely to be regarded as leaders unless they are perceived to be working on behalf of the group, helping to frame group identity, and/or putting in place structures and processes that further the interests of the group. Within a context where '*being an academic*' (in the eyes of oneself and others) requires a sense of being able to independently carve out and pursue a particular line of scholarship and/or enquiry, *academic leadership* is far more likely to be associated with processes of acculturation than direction and/or control. Within higher education, one's social identity/ies may well be expressed in abstract terms (such as a particular orientation towards teaching and/or research) and/or membership of groups and communities that extend well beyond the organisation.

A tension experienced by those people occupying formal academic management roles, therefore, is that in working

<sup>129</sup> Breakwell and Tytherleigh (2008), Bryman (2007), Goodall (2009), Spendlove (2007)

<sup>130</sup> In contrast, for example, to the National Health Service which has allocated organisational management and leadership to professional managers. There are of course, however, variations within the HE sector, with a tendency towards greater professionalisation of management within post-92 institutions.

<sup>131</sup> Bolden et al. (2008b), (2008c)

<sup>132</sup> Ernst and Chrobot-Mason, (2010)

to promote institutional aims and objectives they may (intentionally or unintentionally) challenge or undermine the individual aims and objectives of colleagues whose sense of academic identity is framed in relation to communities other than the department and/or institution. On the other hand, people with no formal relationship to (and possibly even no knowledge of) academics in similar disciplines may exert a disproportionately high level of influence through their representation of some higher ideal and/or sense of what it means to be a 'good academic'<sup>133</sup>.

*Academic leadership*, from the evidence gathered in this project, can be described as a process through which academic values and identities are constructed, promoted and maintained. This can be contrasted with a whole host of activities conducted within institutions, and the sector more widely, to organise and allocate academic tasks and processes, which could be more accurately described as *academic management*. Together these processes shape and inform a sense of purpose and objectives for individual academics which are operationalised through the process of *self-leadership* which is characteristic of academic work (within the UK at least).

Together the findings from this study highlight the value of a 'hybrid'<sup>134</sup> or 'blended'<sup>135</sup> approach to leadership in higher education in which recognition is given to the complementarity of formal, hierarchical processes, and informal, emergent processes (often referred to as 'distributed leadership'). Such an approach draws attention to the importance of context in defining an appropriate leadership and management strategy, and of seeking to nurture and develop mutually beneficial configurations of leadership practice<sup>136</sup>. It suggests that there is no single 'best practice' approach, nor a clearly definable set of 'leadership competencies' for those working in this sector. Instead, it is suggested, different people and processes provide important and essential contributions to the accomplishment of academic work. For some, their influence will come through their capacity to act as a role model, mentor, advocate, guardian, acquirer and/or ambassador for academic colleagues (roles identified by Macfarlane<sup>137</sup>, as central to the intellectual leadership contribution of senior academics in professorial roles). For others, their impact will arise through their contribution to the acculturation of colleagues and students into the academic profession (an extension of Macfarlane's roles that could equally apply to PhD supervisors, academic colleagues and collaborators). For others, their contribution may be one of 'thought leadership',

enacted through their academic work that informs and develops their academic discipline or area of activity. Others may lead through their boundary spanning role in terms of working and collaborating across institutional, disciplinary and professional boundaries – raising profile, attracting resources, impacting policy and practice.

Whilst each of these functions may be carried out by someone in a formal academic management role, it is just as possible for them to be fulfilled by people in roles with no formal responsibility for such activities and, indeed, it would be unusual for the same person to fulfil all of these functions or to provide this contribution to more than a small group of individuals within a particular sub-discipline.

Possession of a formal academic management role does, however, carry a certain set of responsibilities in terms of defining and allocating academic tasks and priorities and implementing organisational processes. This work, sometimes described positively by colleagues (in terms of creating an enabling environment for their pursuit of academic work and reducing their time spent on administration) and sometimes negatively (in terms of managerialism, bureaucracy and undermining core academic values), is almost always regarded as 'not leadership' – a different kind of activity directed towards different aims and outcomes.

Ultimately, our findings reinforce the importance, for HEIs and the sector more widely, of gaining a better appreciation of the processes through which academics develop an internal sense of purpose and direction which informs and shapes the trajectory of their career. Once established as a successful academic professional, it is unlikely that academics will look elsewhere for leadership – preferring, instead, to be self-leading and over time, perhaps, to provide academic leadership to others (such as students, colleagues, peers, etc.). Clearly there are challenges here in terms of achieving alignment and collaboration across academic units and functions within institutions yet it is possible that emphasising 'leadership' within such circumstances may have the opposite effect from that intended – leading to disengagement rather than engagement. Many academics remain, perhaps rightly, sceptical of their institution's attempts to encourage them to align themselves with organisational aims and objectives. Indeed, in a community trained to critique and challenge ideas and assumptions it is hardly surprising that academics are questioning of authority. The solution, as Parker (cited in Chapter 3) suggests, may be to consider and

133 Macfarlane (2010), building on the argument of Merton (1947) and Gouldner (1957), suggests that senior academics are likely to be more influential in their role(s) as 'cosmopolitans' than 'locals' – and indeed, that they may feel actively excluded from taking a more active role as locals.

134 Gronn (2009), (2010)

135 Collinson and Collinson (2009)

136 Gronn, (2009), (2010)

137 Macfarlane (2011)

promote alternative forms of organisation to the increasingly managerial models (based on practices imported from the private sector) now used within many universities: to embrace rather than reject reflexivity and debate.

The implications of these findings will be considered in the next section.

## 8.2 Implications for academic leadership practice and development

In this section of the report we will discuss some of the main implications arising from our work. We will not endeavour to provide detailed recommendations as these are likely to vary substantially between institutions and contexts. However a broad set of issues and principles are described.

### a. Win hearts and minds

The findings of this study highlight the importance of a perceived emotional *and* intellectual connection between academic leaders and those they influence. They are people who resonate with, and reflect, their sense of academic values and identity. When encouraging and supporting people to take on a more substantial academic leadership role attempts should be made to appeal to their sense of academic values and citizenship rather than simply transactional managerial roles and responsibilities. Indeed, the term 'leadership' itself may be off-putting and may be better considered in terms of supervision, mentoring, collegiality, collaboration and/or autonomy. When leading academics it is suggested that an emphasis should be placed on identity and purpose rather than procedures or point scoring. Attention should also be given to the intellectual dimensions of academic leadership as distinct from the managerial concerns of the institution.

### b. Nurture the next generation and take the long-view on academic careers

When identifying influential others, academics most often referred to people who had played a key role in their incorporation and acculturation into the academic profession. These may have been a PhD supervisor, colleague, teacher and/or line manager at a pivotal stage in their academic career. They were often people with whom a long-term relationship was established that moved through various phases (e.g. from supervisor, to collaborator, to colleague, to friend). There are many opportunities for such forms of leadership within higher education although the extent to which they are recognised, or encouraged, is unclear. Indeed, the increasing professionalisation of leadership and management in universities may possibly reduce rather than enhance these opportunities for those in non-formal roles and disrupt the potential of formal leaders to provide such, more subtle, forms of leadership. When encouraging 'academic leadership',

universities would be well advised to adopt a long-term view on the needs and aspirations of academics - supporting and nurturing opportunities for lifelong collaborations, mentoring, role modelling, and patronage. Such relationships often extend well beyond the host institution and may require a reconsideration of what constitutes leadership and professional development. It also seems likely that, for this reason, they are a significant contributor to the reputational status of individual leaders, institutions, and indeed the UK higher education sector as a whole.

### c. Create space to thrive

The expectations placed upon staff in academic roles are complex, varied and demanding. Recent years have seen increases in stress-related absence amongst academic staff and performance monitoring against individual and institutional objectives has become intensified. With the competing demands placed upon them it can be difficult for academic staff to find the mental and physical space to engage in what they consider to be meaningful academic work. When asked about what they look for from people in academic management roles respondents often recognised the value of people and processes that relieve some of these pressures and create an enabling environment in which they can pursue their academic work with fewer interruptions and distractions, a greater sense of playfulness and fun, and for those in teaching roles, an enhanced sense of connection with student learning (rather than feeling like part of an academic production line).

### d. Stimulate a culture of debate and enquiry

Most managerial processes, in universities and elsewhere, seek to encourage conformity to a standardised set of procedures and protocols. Such an approach does not fit well with academic conventions and values regarding critique, debate and freedom of expression. The listening posts and interviews indicated that academics rarely have the opportunity to discuss and reflect on leadership and management processes within their own institution or across the sector as a whole. Greater transparency and openness in such conversations, whilst potentially threatening for institutions (and 'off message' for those actively managing their brand identity), may well lead to greater acceptance of and engagement in such processes and decisions. At the very least, it will help raise awareness amongst those in senior leadership roles of the preoccupations and concerns of those people whose contribution is essential to the success and development of the organisation and could be important in terms of identifying areas of conflict and ambiguity that may need to be addressed. In addition to seeking *alignment*, institutional leaders should consider how to build *commitment* and nurture emergent *direction* within academic groups.

#### e. Create and embed structures and processes that support relevant identities

The findings of this study demonstrate a degree of scepticism about the extent to which managerial practices and processes support, as opposed to undermine, academic work. The growth of professional services to support and complement the work of academics has, in many cases, not been associated with a corresponding increase in opportunities for staff in different groups to engage with one another. Where new practices and processes are implemented, attempts should be made to articulate and optimise the extent to which they are seen to complement and support relevant academic identities. Where staff groups see themselves as separate in terms of their aims and identities they are unlikely to collaborate and support one another. Given the significance of academic values and identities within universities, finding ways of structuring and organising work around academically meaningful activities is likely to enhance cooperation and interaction between people in different roles and functions. A good example of this kind of activity is given by Neary<sup>138</sup> on the involvement of academics in the design of learning spaces.

#### f. Build a sense of community and encourage citizenship

As academic jobs become fragmented, institutions more competitive, and employment contracts vulnerable to changing markets and management practices, we might find more anxiety and therefore also more reference to 'leadership' within universities. The evidence from this study, and other recent research, indicates a growing sense of isolation and exclusion amongst UK academics. Leadership regimes that relentlessly trumpet the up-sides of organisational change will be seen as inauthentic and out of touch; on the other hand, leadership that is able to represent this ambivalence as highly salient to academic life may affirm, rather than control, what it is to be a citizen of academia. As Warren Bennis suggests: 'effective leaders put words to the formless longings and deeply felt needs of others. They create communities out of words'<sup>139</sup>. If they desire academic staff to behave like active and responsible citizens institutional leaders may need to try harder to make them feel like valued and respected members of a recognisable and meaningful community.

#### g. Provide informal mechanisms for participation and engagement

Much leadership, management and governance within higher education is conceived around formal roles and responsibilities, and leadership development initiatives are generally focused on people in line-management roles. But as this research has revealed, these are not always the people looked to for leadership by supposed 'followers'. Rather,

colleagues and partners are more influential. Accordingly if one seeks a culture in which academics are forward thinking, empowered and energetic about their work, more should be done to encourage collegiality. Raelin<sup>140</sup> refers to this as promoting 'leaderful teams' rather than 'leadership', and it requires University management to step back from overly directing and monitoring the work of academics; in short – to keep out of the way in order to enable the emergence of more informal and shared leadership<sup>141</sup>.

#### h. Manage performance by strengthening shared identity

What determines high performance? There are two kinds of answers to this question, falling neatly into the distinction between management and leadership. Close and continuous line management attention to targets, objectives and metrics is one approach, assuming that performance is the effect of managerial determination. An alternative answer is that people perform well because they identify themselves as members of a group for which high performance is a defining feature. This approach recognises that capable people perform well not because they are made to do so by extrinsic control systems, but because they believe it to be intrinsic to who they are. This is not to say that performance management plays no part – far from it. Organisational attention to performance reinforces the salience of high performance; it gives a strong signal that 'we are part of an organisation whose members perform well'. But the relevant function of the performance management system is this signalling, not mechanistic control of what people do (Bolden et al., 2008a). The distinction matches the findings in this research - that academics respond to *leadership* that supports their values and identities. University managers who are anxious to encourage high levels of performance would be best to step back from mechanistic managerial approaches, and to emphasise instead the values associated with academic excellence.

What to do about 'poor performers'? Complicated monitoring and review systems actually send the wrong signals to the majority of people for whom good performance is intrinsic to their professional identities: the message is that 'you are not to be trusted to manage yourself' – precisely counter to the values that underpin academic identities, (because to be an academic is to be autonomous and peer-related in this regard). Meanwhile poor performers have little choice but to play games with the criteria, at which they might succeed for a while, be shunted around, and if they don't find a safe niche are ejected at cost to all concerned. Far more effective would be to strengthen social identities around high performance, in relation to which those who struggle to 'belong' can be helped to move.

138 Neary (2011)

139 Bennis (1996) p160

140 Raelin (2003)

141 Bolden et al. (2009), Oakley and Selwood, (2010), Pearce (2004)



#### **i. Negotiate and engage with academics as professionals**

Managers of HEIs are challenged to offer students (and their parents) a customer-oriented service and to give students a greater role in determining spending and work-load priorities within institutions. From the perspective of university managers, academic staff are a resource to be allocated to best serve 'the student experience'. It is easy to see the challenges posed in manipulating academic staff into the roles and behaviours required by a customer-centric organisation. It is all too easy to approach academics as merely a 'human resource' to be applied to the service of customers and production of research. In some institutions represented in this study, academic staff clearly believe they are seen as 'the problem', resistant to such manipulation and defensive of what managers decry as an outmoded status quo. But the value of academics is their human resourcefulness, which derives from their identification with being an academic. These have very different implications for academic leadership as understood by most academics – the identity-affirming representation of scholarly value and purposes. Where academics are seen as 'human resources' rather than 'members' of the institution, we might expect their leadership to be manifest in more oppositional ways as they seek to represent their interests against the commoditisation of their labour. In this setting, relations between management and academic staff are likely to shift away from consultation and liaison, towards negotiation. This will provide opportunities for more formal representative leadership roles, possibly standing for 'academic values' as much as defending terms and conditions.

#### **j. Safeguard 'membership' of the academic community**

Structural changes in higher education will increase the complexity of factors influencing individual institutions with implications for academic leadership beyond those described in this report. Some of these derive from the inevitable disaggregation of the sector, as institutions position themselves in relation to student demand, research income, rankings, partnerships, mergers and new constellations of 'mission groups'. Although the current research revealed very similar ideas of leadership in pre- and post-92 institutions, these might not withstand splits in the sector that will emerge over the next few years. It is possible that academic careers will be quite different across higher education, and the identity aspirations will likewise diversify; but we think it unlikely. Competition between universities will become characteristic of the sector, driving attempts by management to emphasise academic's loyalty to the institution rather than to their scholarly disciplines and networks. However we should reiterate that we found little sense that academics generally identify with their employing institution. Brand management is therefore seen as largely irrelevant for academic leadership; but our work was conducted mostly prior to the implications

of the 2010 White Paper<sup>142</sup> becoming clear. Another reason for expecting there to be change is the development of new financing options for universities, and the more widespread application of private sector funds. When universities start to raise funds on the bond markets, as some are rumoured to be doing, investors will want to know what they are doing to lock in 'key talent'. A proliferation of personal pay deals, retainers and incentives may alter the salient features of academic identity, for example if 'star status' is associated with obvious material advantage. However there is no guarantee that a more transactional contract between employee and institution will increase loyalty, obedience or productivity.

#### **k. Create opportunities for a collective voice**

Who speaks on behalf of the sector? There are a number of possible answers, but none of them represent the voice of academics as distinct from the managerial concerns of institutions. Universities UK represents universities as managed institutions; the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) speaks for them as employers. The Universities and College Workers Union (UCU) now has such a broad membership that it cannot really speak for academics *per se*, and neither the British Academy or the Royal Society have sought to publicly represent the identity and values of academia. In any case, it is doubtful that academics would recognise any external agency speaking for them: as we have shown in this research, leadership is associated with close collegiality, and not with representative structures. It is more likely that we will see the appearance of 'accidental leaders', people whose personal stories epitomise the predicament, ideals and hopes of academics. Narrative accounts of identifiable characters might carry more force because we can identify with them, and such iconic figures may be allowed to speak for the sector in a charismatic manner. However we have no examples of this at the moment; rather we seem to be in a leadership lacuna at the collective level – leadership is still a very local and personal phenomenon. This, we believe, is a concerning situation for a sector confronting significant challenges to its status, funding and governance – where staff and institutions respond in an individual manner to the challenges, vying for position in a 'global marketplace', and competing for dwindling resources rather than demonstrating solidarity of purpose.

### **8.3 Limitations and suggestions for further investigation**

The findings of this study represent the views of a relatively small sample of participants from a sub-section of UK HEIs. Whilst there is a relatively high degree of consistency of opinion between respondents it is possible that this may not be representative of the UK higher education sector more widely due to sampling bias. Respondents were self-selected,

142 Browne (2010)

with a disproportionate number from schools of business and psychology, almost exclusively employed by English institutions, and almost exclusively universities (rather than other higher education providers). Furthermore, the research was conducted during a period of substantial change and uncertainty within the UK higher education sector (as outlined in section 2.1) which may have impacted on the findings. Despite these limitations, however, the findings from this study are supported through their similarity and resonance with previous research in the sector.

In order to extend and develop on this work a number of further investigations may be advisable, such as:

- A more comprehensive survey of opinions across the sector as a whole, and within specific HEIs.
- A longitudinal evaluation of the impact of recent policy, such as the increase in student fees, on leadership and management practice, as well as organisational performance and effectiveness.
- A more thorough investigation of the perspectives of other key stakeholders, such as students, employers, professional services staff, etc. on the nature and purpose of higher education and the kinds of factors that impact on outcome measures.
- Exploration of cross-functional collaboration between staff in different professional groups and organisations.
- Investigation of formative experiences and acculturation of junior academics.
- Longitudinal evaluation of leadership and organisational development initiatives within HEIs.
- Action research on developing and implementing a sector-wide representation for academics.
- Comparative analysis of academic leadership and management in other countries.

Whatever the outcomes of this and other work, the contextual nature of leadership in higher education indicates the need for ongoing enquiry within institutions to identify, evaluate and promote effective and desirable approaches to leadership, management and governance and the value of a tailored approach to leadership and organisational development.

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## Appendix A: Profile of institutions and respondents

Table A1: Summary of Sample

Institution	Type	Mission Group	Survey sample	Listening posts	Interview Sample
Bangor University	Pre-1992	Unaffiliated	6	N	1
Bournemouth University	Post-1992	University Alliance	9	N	0
City University London	Pre-1992	Unaffiliated	22	Y	5
Cranfield University	Post-1992	Unaffiliated	0	Y	0
Durham University	Pre-1992	1994 Group	11	N	0
Edinburgh University	Pre-1992	Russell Group	31	N	0
Kingston University	Post-1992	Million+	0	Y	0
Lancaster University	Pre-1992	1994 Group	0	Y	0
Leeds Metropolitan University	Post-1992	Million+	1	N	0
London Metropolitan University	Post-1992	Million+	11	Y	1
Manchester Metropolitan University	Post-1992	University Alliance	41	N	6
Nottingham Trent University	Post-1992	University Alliance	3	N	1
Open University	Pre-1992	University Alliance	8	N	1
Portsmouth University	Post-1992	University Alliance	0	N	0
University College Birmingham	University College	Guild HE	20	Y	0
University of Cardiff	Pre-1992	Russell Group	0	N	3
University of Essex	Pre-1992	1994 Group	0	Y	0
University of Exeter	Pre-1992	1994 Group	51	Y	15
University of Greenwich	Post-1992	Million+	0	Y	0
University of Leeds	Pre-1992	Russell Group	32	N	2
University of London	Pre-1992	1994 Group	0	Y	0
University of Oxford	Pre-1992	Russell Group	11	Y	1
University of Plymouth	Post-1992	University Alliance	10	Y	3
University of Warwick	Pre-1992	Russell Group, 1994 Group	0	Y	0



## Appendix B: Questionnaire design and scale construction

### Structure and content of the survey

#### Academic leadership perceptions

In order to understand academic leadership perceptions, we first measured participants' perceptions of the characteristics of those who had succeeded in their institutions. In particular, participants were presented with a list of eight trait descriptions that had been previously pilot tested as characteristic of researchers (analytical, scholarly), teachers (inspirational, trustworthy) and administrators (decisive, diplomatic). For each of these traits, participants were asked to indicate how characteristic they were for academic leaders generally, looking at those who have been successful in their institution. Participants responded on identical 5-point Likert scales (where 1=strong uncharacteristic, 5=strongly characteristic). Participants were provided with a comment box and asked to list any additional traits or behaviours that they felt described academic leaders.

Next, we measured participants' perceptions that formal leaders in their institution provided them with leadership. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which individuals in three formal academic leadership roles (Head of Department/School or equivalent; Director of Research or equivalent; Director of Teaching/Studies or equivalent) engaged in five different leadership behaviours (described in Figure 1). Participants were asked to respond to each statement using identical 7-point Likert scales (1=not at all, 7=very much).

Finally, we measured participants' perceptions that informal leaders (within, or external to, their institution) provided them with leadership. In particular, participants were asked to think of three individuals that they find most *influential* in their work. They were told that this could include individuals in higher education that they do not work with, but that they should not include the formal leaders (Head of Department/School, Director of Research, or Director of Education) mentioned in the previous section of the questionnaire. In each case, participants were asked to describe the individual and their relationship before rating the extent to which this individual engaged in the five different leadership behaviours described above.

#### Self leadership perceptions

In order to understand academics' perceptions of leadership, we first measured their sense of their own leadership using six items. Specifically, we asked participants to indicate their perceived level of seniority on a 7-point Likert scale (1=very junior, 7=very senior). We then asked them to indicate their self leadership perceptions, through their agreement with the following 5 statements: "I see myself as a leader at work", "I have the ability to influence junior colleagues", "I have the ability to influence my peers", "I have the ability to influence senior colleagues" and "Generally, I think other colleagues regard me as influential". Participants responded to these latter items on 7-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

We next measured participants' ambition to attain a leadership position by asking them to respond to the following two statements: "I am aiming high in my career as an academic" and "I aspire to have a senior leadership role with my university". As above, participants responded on 7-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

#### Academic identification

In order to understand academics' identification with different academic social groups, we first measured their identification with three different academic job roles: research, teaching and administration. For instance, researcher identity was measured by asking participants to respond to the following two statements: "I see myself as a researcher", "Conducting research is an important part of who I am". This was followed by four questions of the same form measuring their *teacher identity* and *administrator identity*. Next, we measured their identification with their institution by asking participants to respond to the following five statements: "I identify with my university", "I identify with my department", "For me, this is the best of all possible universities for which to work", "I really care about the success of my university" and "I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help my university be successful". Participants responded to all statements on identical 7-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

#### Institutional performance environment

Finally, in order to understand the impact that the institutional performance environment may have on academic conceptions of leadership, we assessed participants' perceptions of their institutions' performance in the research, teaching and outreach and impact domains on 7-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). Participants also rated their own performance (see Figure A1).

Figure A1: Institutional and participant performance

**INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE****Research**

- My Departments' performance in research is strong
- My University's performance in research is strong

**Teaching and Outreach / Impact**

- My Departments' performance in teaching is strong
- My University's performance in teaching is strong
- My Departments' performance in outreach/impact is strong
- My University's performance in outreach/impact is strong

**Scale construction**

We averaged across the appropriate items to create the scales of interest. The scale titles and their reliabilities are summarised below.

Table A2: Scale Titles and Reliabilities

Scale	Alpha Value <sup>143</sup>
<b>Academic Leadership Perceptions: Characteristics of Leaders</b>	
Researcher Stereotype	.59
Teacher Stereotype	.79
Administrator Stereotype	.62
<b>Academic Leadership Perceptions: Formal Leaders' Behaviours</b>	
Head of School Leadership	.92
Director of Research Leadership	.93
Director of Education Leadership	.94
<b>Academic Leadership Perceptions: Informal Leaders' Behaviours</b>	
Informal Leader 1	.79
Informal Leader 2	.81
Informal Leader 3	.83
Self Leadership Perceptions	
Participant as Leader	.86
Leadership Ambition	.77
<b>Academic Identification</b>	
8.3.1 Researcher Identification	8.3.2 .93
Teaching Identification	.92
Administrator Identification	.80
Institutional Identification	.85
<b>Institutional Performance Environment</b>	
Institutional Research	.72
Institutional Teaching and Outreach/Impact	.72

In addition to the scales listed in Table A2, in our analyses we also examined the following institutional and personal variables that were based on single-item measures: (a) institution type (pre- or post-92), (b) demographics (i.e., gender, date of birth), (c) discipline, (d) job responsibilities, and (e) own performance evaluation (research, teaching and outreach/impact).

143 The values cited are Cronbach's alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) which provide a measure of the internal reliability of a scale. In general, a value of 0.7 or above is taken as indicating scale reliability.

## Appendix C: Outline interview schedule

### Changing Conceptions of Academic Leadership

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of our research on changing conceptions of academic leadership in UK higher education. This project is funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and is being undertaken by researchers at the Centre for Leadership Studies and School of Psychology at the University of Exeter.

In this project we are exploring the experiences, expectations and aspirations of people in academic roles in UK universities with regards to the leadership of academic work, including teaching, research and enterprise/outreach. Through this project we hope to be able to identify what people look for from their academic leaders and the ways in which this contributes to the accomplishment of their academic work.

Whilst we recognise that an important source of academic leadership may come from people in formal roles with explicit managerial responsibilities, we are also looking to identify and explore informal and emergent forms of influence. Within this project we are taking a broad definition of leadership as the process by which people achieve a sense of shared direction, alignment and commitment towards collective outcomes<sup>144</sup>.

The interview will last for around 45 minutes to one hour and is an opportunity for you to think through and articulate your perspective. It is fully confidential and all responses are non-attributable. The findings from the interviews will be used to complement a large-scale survey we conducted late last year and a series of group discussions we have facilitated over recent months. The outcomes of the research will be written up in a report for the Leadership Foundation later this year and a number of papers for academic and practitioner audiences. We would be happy to include you on the mailing list for any such outputs if you are interested.

Before we start could you please take a quick look at the Interview Consent Form and sign it to indicate you are happy with the procedure. We would also like to check whether you're happy for us to record the interview for transcription. You are, of course, entitled to refuse to answer any question or terminate the interview if you feel uncomfortable.

Dr Anne O'Brien, Dr Richard Bolden, Professor Jonathan Gosling  
Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter Business School  
Email: Anne.O'Brien@exeter.ac.uk, Tel: 01392 722580

### Part One: Experience in higher education

In this first part of the interview we ask you to reflect on your experience in the higher education sector.

1. Please could you begin with a brief overview of your current role and how you came to be in it?
2. What is it that you most value about your current role and the work that you do?
3. To what extent do you feel yourself to be a member of an academic and/or other professional community<sup>145</sup>?

### Part Two: Academic Leadership

The next few questions consider how people are mobilised and supported to carry out their academic work.

1. Who and/or what (e.g. systems and processes, formal and informal groups, etc.) provides you with the greatest sense of leadership<sup>146</sup> in terms of your academic work<sup>147</sup>?
2. What, if anything, do these people/processes do and/or enable you to do that are different from other sources of leadership and influence within your institution?
3. How would you say academic leadership is accomplished on a day-to-day basis within your institution/department?

### Part Three: Changing Contexts

In these questions we will ask you to reflect on trends and changes in the higher education sector and the ways in which they may impact upon your career and aspirations.

1. In what ways would you say your academic priorities have changed within your university and/or department over the past 2-3 years?
2. What have been your main formative experiences within your career so far in relation to academic leadership and academic practice?
3. Looking forward, how do you see your career developing and what forms of support and/or development would be most helpful?

### Part Four: And finally...

1. Finally, what advice would you give to people looking to support the development of academic leadership within UK universities?
2. Do you have any final comments/reflections on the interview process and/or anything important that we may have missed?

<sup>144</sup> This is a definition developed and promoted by the Center for Creative Leadership in an attempt to shift attention from a sole focus on 'leaders' to the wider social processes of 'leadership'.

<sup>145</sup> By 'community' we refer to any identifiable group with which you feel a sense of affinity/belonging. These may include members of the same department, institution, professional group, interest group, etc. They may be formally or informally defined and can include 'virtual' as well as face-to-face groups.

<sup>146</sup> As defined earlier – i.e. a process that produces shared direction, alignment and commitment.

<sup>147</sup> Including teaching, research, enterprise/outreach and related admin roles. This may include activities conducted outside the interviewee's own institution.

## Biographies

**Dr Richard Bolden** is a Senior Lecturer and Head of the Centre for Leadership Studies at the University of Exeter Business School. His previous research in higher education includes a Leadership Foundation-funded project on Developing Collective Leadership in Higher Education (2008), a Hefce-funded project on Employer Engagement in Higher Education (2009, 2010), and as a member of an international consortium looking at the Branding of Business Schools (2010, 2011). He has published in journals, including *Leadership*, *Higher Education Quarterly*, and *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, and is the co-author of the book *Exploring Leadership: Individual, Organizational and Societal Perspectives*, published by Oxford University Press in July 2011.

**Professor Jonathan Gosling** is Professor of Leadership Studies and former Director of the Centre for Leadership Studies at the University of Exeter. He has extensive experience in leadership development with international companies and agencies, and in the design and delivery of leadership education. He has been visiting professor at leading universities around the world, published research in journals such as *Leadership*, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Management Learning*, etc, and is author and co-author of many book chapters and four books.

**Professor Alex Haslam** is Professor of Social and Organisational Psychology at the University of Exeter and a former Commonwealth Scholar at Macquarie University (Sydney) and Jones Scholar at Emory University (Atlanta). He was an Associate Editor of the *British Journal of Social Psychology* from 1999 to 2001 and Chief Editor of the *European Journal of Social Psychology* from 2001 to 2005. He is a former President of the Psychology Section of the British Science Association and a Fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. His work with colleagues has involved developing a social identity approach to organisational and social issues, as exemplified by the recent books *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power* (Psychology Press, 2011; co-authored with Steve Reicher and Michael Platow) and *The Social Cure: Identity, Health and Well-being* (Psychology Press, 2011; co-edited with Jolanda Jetten and Catherine Haslam).

**Dr Luz Longworth** is the Director of the Open Campus Country Sites in the Open Campus of the University of the West Indies, in which role she oversees the management of 42 sites in 16 Caribbean countries. In her capacity as a member of the senior management team of the UWI Open Campus, Luz sits on the Committee of Deans and represents the Open Campus on the Council of the University of the West Indies. Her doctoral research focussed on Leadership in the Virtual Higher Education Environment. She contributed to the current project by compiling the literature review.

**Dr Anne O'Brien** is a Lecturer at the Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter Business School. With a background in social psychology, Anne's research investigates the contribution of intergroup factors to organisational functioning and effectiveness. Her particular interest is the area of organisational change and questions of professional and group identity. Her doctoral research was on organisational mergers, with a specific focus on factors that predict when a post-merger organisation defines itself as a 'we' rather than an 'us' and 'them'. Anne has conducted workplace stress surveys in NHS Hospitals and Primary Care Trusts and has worked with trust employees on issues of cross-team cooperation and the alignment of team and organisational goals. Anne is currently developing 'tools' to help effective partnership working in multi-party environmental and planning projects.

**Dr Kim Peters** is a Lecturer in the Social, Economic, Environmental and Organisational Research Group at the University of Exeter. An organisational psychologist with experience in psychometric testing (Chandler & MacLeod, Australia), HR (Cadbury Schweppes) and market research, Kim's research focuses on the implications of social identity dynamics for a range of workplace outcomes, such as career motivation, leadership and retention. This research has been conducted in collaboration with a number of prominent UK organisations, including the Police Service, the RAF, the Royal Marines, Positive Energy, and The Royal College of Surgeons of England. She has published this work in leading journals in the field, including *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *Journal of Personnel Psychology* and *Journal of Management*.

**Professor Michelle Ryan** is a Professor of Social and Organisational Psychology at the University of Exeter. She is a member of the Centre for Identity, Personality and Self in Society and specialises in research into gender and gender differences. Together with her colleagues she is involved in a broad range of research projects. With Alex Haslam, she has uncovered the phenomenon of the glass cliff, whereby women (and members of other minority groups) are more likely to be placed in leadership positions which are risky or precarious. Research into the glass cliff was named by the New York Times as one of the top 100 ideas that shaped 2008. Her other research addresses issues of work-life balance, gender differences in ambition, the gender pay gap, women's networks, and the way in which individuals respond to discrimination. She has worked closely with industry to conduct, disseminate, and apply her research, including collaborations with The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, The Royal College of Surgeons, The Royal Navy, and the Financial Services Knowledge Transfer Network. Her research has been funded by UK and European research councils and by industry. Michelle's work has been represented in top-rated academic journals, industry publications, and within the wider international media including BBC, CNN, ITV, and all major British Newspapers.

**Anna Davidovic** and **Kathrin Winkleman** were post-graduate students at the University of Exeter during the course of this project and both participated fully in the work – Anna on the survey in Phase 1 and Kathrin in the Interviews of Phase 3.

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## Notes

## Notes

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