

Emergent university missions and curricula change: Impact on the teaching-only academic role

Abstract

Universities are increasingly under pressure to produce work-ready graduates with the appropriate level of subject knowledge and expertise. As part of these coercive measures, the UK government has introduced the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), an undergraduate teaching quality assessment exercise that, amongst other criteria, seeks to ensure that undergraduate teaching meets the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions.

Universities have, amongst other measures, responded by introducing student-centred, experiential and enquiry-based learning schemes such as problem and project based learning in engineering schools. This has led to the recruitment, on teaching-only academic contracts, of individuals with the necessary learning and teaching skills, educational leadership, and practical experience. However, to date, the extent to which this has impacted the teaching-only academic role, which, historically, was a catch-all category reserved for non-research active academics, has not yet been quantified. In the study that I report in this paper, I sought to address this gap in knowledge by undertaking a desk-based, systematic literature review of the teaching-only academic role since the turn of the century.

Findings from this study suggest that as a result of the curricula changes taking place within higher education, the teaching-only academic role has evolved into a non-homogeneous, multi-stranded, amorphous role. In turn, both the notion of what it means to be an academic, and the concept of the university have become increasingly contentious as the distinction between education and training becomes more tenuous.