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Portraying the role: exploring support needs of programme leaders in HE through portraiture

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Abstract

Programme Leaders (PLs) in Higher Education (HE) hold a complex role that has responsibilities that link to external performance metrics. This role, existing outside of the traditional teaching/research view means it often lacks visibility and esteem (MacFarlane, 2007). How this influences role-holders' understanding of the role, and how they can be better supported, is the focus of this study, following seven Undergraduate (UG) PLs over the course of the academic year 2020/21. Portraiture was used to capture the 'complexity of human experience and organisational life' (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, xv). A cross-portrait analysis illuminated aspects of the organisational context that influenced PLs' experiences. Findings from this study suggest that how PLs see themselves in the role influences their experiences. The absence of formal training and induction hinders role clarity and understanding of responsibilities, increasing PLs' sense of personal accountability. PLs within academic schools with distributed leadership, where they were given autonomy, were better able to view themselves as leaders. This was augmented by a collaborative senior management team and opportunities to connect to other PLs. In hierarchical structures PLs seemed disempowered and had an absence of role understanding and autonomy. This study extends knowledge of the PL role and support needs, illuminating reasons for variances in practice seen in previous studies. It supports the need for culture change around this challenging but strategically important role, along with the importance of ensuring it is valued, and resourced, as the leadership role it is.

Keywords: programme leader; programme director; academic leadership; distributed leadership.

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Introduction

This study centres on the role of the Programme Leader (PL) responding to a need for in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by role-holders. The PL is a member of university staff who has responsibilities for leading an academic programme. This 'pivotal role' connects the department, academic school, the wider institution, and the student (Vilkinas and Ladyshewsky, 2011), meaning the PL must manage numerous, and often contradictory demands on their time (Aitken and O'Carroll, 2020).

The role has an inherent lack of clarity surrounding it. Cahill et al. (2015) attempted to capture the varied responsibilities of the role and split them into: academic duties, administrative duties, and pastoral care. These duties show how PLs occupy a space that does not neatly conform to the 'research/teaching' duality of an academic role. Mitchell (2015) referred to Krause et al.'s (2010) term 'boundary spanner' to describe the position a PL holds between the university and the student. The multiple roles they must hold leads them to describe themselves as a 'jack of all trades' (Cahill et al., 2015, p.276) needing to develop new skills to deal with this highly pressurised role. PLs are sometimes seen as 'a potential single point of failure' and ultimately responsible for the programme (Ellis and Nimmo, 2018, p.35). Conversely, given the importance of the role it is also seen as having a 'characteristic lack of support and authority' (Senior, 2018, p.11).

Previous studies of Programme Leadership have explored the role in different contexts: geographical (Australia) (Vilkinas and Ladyshewsky, 2011); with postgraduate (PG) Programme Leaders (Mitchell, 2015; Aitken and O'Carroll, 2020); and through mixed samples of UG, PG, and wider academic staff, but with little differentiation between their perspectives (Milburn, 2010; Murphy and Curtis, 2013; Cahill et al., 2015; Massie, 2018). Research with UG PLs in a teaching intensive institution is sparse, and as UG students are seen as the most influential stakeholders on policymaking (McCann, Hutchison and Adiare, 2022) capturing the experiences of these PLs is crucial.

Literature review

The changes to the HE sector, and the additional pressures from marketisation, have given rise to shared leadership approaches, intending to reduce reliance on positional

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power from those at the top, towards expertise-based leadership throughout the institution (Bolden et al., 2015), recognising that leadership occurs beyond traditional institution-wide positions like senior leaders (Youngs, 2017). This is termed distributed leadership (DL), where leadership is dispersed across the organisation (Spillane, 2006). While there could be benefits to a distributed approach to leadership, through shared responsibility and a more collegial approach, DL can also reinforce hierarchical power structures under the guise of democratisation (Youngs, 2017). This becomes a vertical form of leadership as the power is derived from a top-down structure (Middlehurst, Goreham and Woodfield, 2009).

While distributed leadership has its challenges, it has been seen as a promising 'analytical tool' that has encouraged a multi-layered exploration of leadership in universities and has brought to light some aspects that have previously been obscured. Bolden, Petrov and Gosling (2008) suggest that leadership research should pay attention to the contextual dimensions to understand and alleviate some areas where there could be tension from competing forces. Such tensions are experienced in different forms by various groups of HE staff (Youngs, 2017). Exploring the context within which leadership occurs helps to understand the exercise of leadership (Bryman, 2008) as the structural and cultural dimensions of the organisation are as integral as the leaders and followers themselves.

For distributed leadership to work in practice it seems a 'clear vision and direction coming from a formal leader or senior team' gives staff confidence to pursue new ideas whilst knowing they are moving in the same direction as the university (Bolden, Petrov and Gosling, 2009, p.266). However, it is worth remembering that distributed leadership was born as a response to increasing market pressures and the need to do more with fewer resources (Olssen and Peters, 2005). The reliance on horizontal leaders, who lack positional power to be accountable to all areas of their role, risks ignoring the human costs of time and emotional labour. So, while there may be institutional savings, the human labour cost to the individual is largely ignored (Anderson, 2006).

Leadership and the PL role

An example of leadership with limited positional authority, but high accountability, is that of the PL. The role relies on negotiation and collaboration to lead teaching teams for whom

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the PL does not have line management responsibility (Massie, 2018) and the capacity to bring staff on board through persuasion and goodwill (Naylor, 2002). Their ability to influence relies on their personal attributes and the organisational context (Milburn, 2010). Rather than formal authority, PLs must draw on different sources of power such as credibility, expert knowledge, and relationships, displaying a form of horizontal leadership (Middlehurst, Goreham and Woodfield, 2009).

In the PL role, learning largely happens through informal mentoring and experience to acquire relevant tacit knowledge (Ellis and Nimmo, 2018) or from a 'more knowledgeable other' (Barry, 2023, p.20) in the form of an experienced Programme Director (Aitken and O'Carroll, 2020). A key tenet of legitimate peripheral participation for learning is that to learn from practice, the practice must be visible (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The reliance on tacit knowledge acquisition could also contribute to role stress, role clarity, and the distribution of responsibilities for a PL. The absence of formal training (Massie, 2018) means some institutions rely on the generosity of experienced PLs to act as mentors (Aitken and O'Carroll, 2020), potentially ignoring the human cost of this unseen work. More recently, Lawrence, Morrell and Scott, (2023) have sought to develop a competence-based framework to support PLs, encompassing three main areas of development: Knowledge (of HE, institution, discipline and learning community), Self-Awareness (responsibility to and standing in the learning community), and Experience (Working for the learning community). Whilst this framework identifies the development needs of PLs, and includes the importance of the institutional context, it requires significant time for self-development and reflection that is not always available to a PL.

Studies exploring distributed leadership have espoused the need to 'undertake some finer-grained studies', to understand the 'rhetoric and reality' in institutional contexts along with investigation of 'horizontal' and 'vertical leadership' in practice (Middlehurst, Goreham and Woodfield, 2009, p.325). If Programme Leadership is to be seen as a form of horizonal 'distributed' leadership, then exploring the PL's own professional identity and personal experiences through 'fine-grained' portraits, and the structural and contextual factors surrounding role-holders, this research aims to contribute to understanding the often-hidden factors that influence leadership ability and experiences within a role.

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Research methods

This work focuses on understanding the role from the perspective of seven UG PLs longitudinally through the academic year 2020-21, capturing their voices and gaining a deep understanding how they view the PL role and the influence of the institutional context to provide insights to develop more comprehensive support for both current and future role holders.

Context

City university is a medium sized, teaching-intensive institution located in a city within the Southwest of the UK. It has multiple academic schools focused around discipline areas. The structure of each school differs, as do their sizes and physical locations. The university attracts students from a wide geographical location and is focused on widening access. The university focuses on providing high levels of support to its diverse student body, as well as having a strong emphasis on staff well-being.

Participants

The PLs within this study came from a range of backgrounds and had varied experience within academia, and length of time in the PL role. This is shown in Table 1 below.

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Table 1. Table of participants.

Name	Gender	School	Years as PL	Years worked in HE
Angie	Female	A	6	10
Sile	Male	A	2	3.5
Kali	Female	B	2	3
Sam	Female	C	2	5
Alex	Male	D	4	4
Stevie	Female	E	5	12
Jared	Male	F	4	6

This table shows each of the PL's names (pseudonyms), their gender, the school they work within, their years of experience as PLs, and their time within HE.

Data collection and analysis

Portraiture was developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot in the context of education research in the USA. Portraiture is a method of inquiry that shares some of the features of other qualitative research methods, and seeks to 'capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences' (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p.3). The researcher is a fundamental part of the process within portraiture. The researcher's history, experiences, perspectives, and ability to form relationships are essential in gathering the data through building trust needed to draw out the individual by encouraging them to speak freely (Bottery et al., 2009). Within this research, the researcher's experience as a PL helped to build trust and demonstrate an understanding of the role beyond that of an outsider.

Portraiture research aims to illuminate meaning of personal stories and experiences presented as narrative (Cope, Jones and Hendricks, 2015). The portraitist (researcher) must weave together both the context and the individual to create a full portrait, revealing

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themes and enabling patterns to emerge. The 'weaving' of the portrait requires the research to constantly reflect on the participants experiences using observation, interview responses, impressionistic records, the researchers own insights and experiences and an interpretation of the context (Cope, Jones and Hendricks, 2015). A key part of the process is the representation of the portrait back to the 'actor' (participant), much like an artist showing a portrait back to their subject, which encourages reflection on the truthfulness captured from both participant and researcher.

This research follows the ambitions of portraiture in illuminating a wider understanding of the individual within their context but varies due to using multiple interviews of time rather than a multi-method approach used by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) due to the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. PLs were interviewed three times throughout the academic year via Microsoft Teams, with ethical approval granted by the institution. The semi-structured interviews were purposefully dyadic (Seidman, 2013), aiming for a conversation between equals, rather than a hierarchical question-and-answer exchange (Ellis and Berger, 2002). Participants were asked to bring three artefacts to the first online interview that they felt represented the PL role. These artefacts stimulated the conversation, adding richness and meaning to the interview process (Bahn and Barratt-Pugh, 2013) and helped to put participants at ease as they described them. The second interviews began with members checking the themes from the first interviews, and then focused on PL perceptions and constructions of their experiences within their own school contexts. The third and final interviews involved sharing the preliminary themes and portraits, along with encouraging reflection on the research process itself. Undertaking multiple interviews enabled an understanding of the variation in individuals' experiences and situated them within the analysis of the broader context. The opportunity to re-cap initial themes from the previous interview at the next was an important step in ensuring the data captured the perspectives of participants. The aim was to reach intersubjective understanding through dialogue, shared conversation, and construction between participants and researcher (Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

The portrait development began after the first round of interviews. This involved repeating the process of familiarisation and engaging in an iterative cycle of data collection, shaping the portraits following the guidance from Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997). The data were first sorted and coded by participant and then by

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themes. The analysis of the work began early in the data collection process, and, as typically used in studies that seek to document social processes and relationships, with the iteration of methodology and insight mirroring the dynamic quality of human interaction and experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

Once the second round of data was complete, the transcripts of each participant, along with any additional notes were used to identity the recuring ideas or patterns from the data (Guba, 1978). These themes were then explored in relation to the first interview and added to the portrait that had been 'sketched' after the first interview.

Once the themes for each portrait were identified, the task of constructing the 'aesthetic whole' began. This was the most challenging part of the analysis as the focus is to blend 'art and science, analysis and narrative, description and interpretation, structure and texture' (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p.243). The challenge inherent with portraiture is building stories that are 'credible' and 'believable' (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). This guided the development of the portraits to a view of the participants, created through analysis of their words, and corroborated through excerpts to bring the portraits to life. All seven portraits were developed and shared with participants for transparency and authenticity, reflecting their words back to them and exploring variances in PLs' views of the role, their experiences and support needs.

Results

The recurrent refrains from the portraits, relating to their experiences in the role, are presented in this section. The main overarching themes were around pressures on time, the role as leadership or administrative, and opportunities to learn.

Pressures on time

The Programme Leaders in this study showed concerns about the pressures of the following:

- The absence of systems and processes to support PL work.

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- An increase in time spent on pastoral care needs of students.

- An increase in the frequency of requests from professional services.

- An increased number of quality assurance and administrative processes.

- The amount of unseen time spent building relationships and negotiation through horizontal leadership.

- The increased importance of engagement with industry.

- The influence of marketisation on the pressure for student recruitment.

- The institutional importance of student survey outcomes.

The result of these multiple, competing factors increases time spent on work that is often poorly accounted for and, for some PLs, impacts their self-efficacy through the feeling they were not able to do the role in the allocated hours, rather than the allocated hours not being sufficient. The absence of clarity surrounding the role seems to influence PLs' propensity to take on additional responsibilities, particularly if it is work orientated towards students. A PL's motivation towards student satisfaction seems to also contribute to increased personal accountability due to unclear expectations impacting how they felt able to do their role. The costs of ill-defined institutional role expectations and a workload allowance that does not capture the breadth and intensity of work seem to be resulting in human costs to the individual PL.

Perception of the role

Relating to their ability to lead, the findings show that PLs who were consulted within their schools on factors that could impact their programmes seemed to feel more autonomous and valued, understanding their importance as discipline experts. This shows the connection between the organisational context and PLs' views of the role. PLs felt varied degrees of autonomy due to the extent to which their school management included them in consultation on areas impacting their role. There was a connection between the level of consultation and academic schools' views of the role as either an 'administrative' or as a 'leadership' position. Where PLs felt they were leaders, they felt motivated within their role and seemed to have a higher sense of job satisfaction as they understood their value within the school. The view of the PL as a leader was also facilitated by a more distributed approach to leadership by their senior teams, with open and collaborative school cultures and autonomy given to PLs to be the expert in their programme area.

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Opportunities to learn

In this study PLs did not receive a formal institutional induction or ongoing training for Programme Leadership. The absence of formal training, coupled with the challenges of leading without positional authority, seems to undermine the strategic importance of the role. The dearth of investment in formal training feeds the perception of the work being unseen and dis-esteemed, potentially influencing motivation for academics to take on the role. This study found that the influence of a lack of formal induction can have far-ranging impacts on PLs, creating an environment where they must learn on their own and rely on a handover from an outgoing PL, or, in some cases from other PLs where relationships and opportunities existed.

This study found that professional learning around the PL role was inconsistent and very dependent on school level arrangements to support time and create space for informal learning. Confusion around the expectations of the role and how to prioritise competing demands was a concern of PLs and this was influenced by their feeling of preparedness when starting the role, relying on learning on the job. This creates a need for PLs to constantly react to the environment, rather than being prepared and informed to face potential challenges. New PLs are expected to meet the same performance criteria as those with more experience. This has an influence on their self-efficacy as they feel they are trying to learn multiple new things, all whilst having the same expectations for performance of an experienced PL.

Within this research, support through communities of practice were school specific, and only one PL talked about forums where PLs came together to discuss and share their experiences. A lack of opportunity to learn from experienced PLs due to workload not reflecting this time to learn, or not having appropriate time for experienced PLs to mentor others, means PLs create their own meaning and orientation within the role, resulting in different approaches to Programme Leadership.

Discussion

Distributed leadership research shows that the position an individual holds within the

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organisation should confer sufficient authority commensurate with the responsibility they carry. If not then they have 'insufficient resources' to influence those within the system for which they are responsible (Connolly, James and Fertig, 2019, p.511). Similarly, research has shown a PL's ability to influence without positional authority was linked to their personal attributes and the organisational context (Murphy and Curtis, 2013). This study found PLs felt equally frustrated with being expected to lead with no positional authority. In this research this seemed to bring additional workload pressures due to the extensive amount of time spent on negotiation and building relationships with academic and professional staff. The need to show authority through action (Connolly, James and Fertig, 2019) without formal training in negotiation or leadership approaches shows another example of PLs being underprepared for the expectations of the role. The concerns of distributed leadership as a response to cost savings could be seen to be encouraging an expectation of unseen work for PLs, evidencing Anderson's (2006) concern that with institutional savings the human labour cost to individuals is often ignored. The increasing pressure from policy context towards programme level outcomes falls disproportionately on the PL, and their attempts to work with staff to ultimately improve student satisfaction adds to their increasing workload. While Milburn (2010) explored the PL role at an institutional level, this study has found variances within schools in one institution, suggesting the need to develop institutional consistency in PL support rather than devolving to the school level.

Over-reliance on informal learning

Informal learning is important to be able to engage with the multitude of knowledge and the differing approaches and contexts that surround PLs. However, the reliance on tacit knowledge acquisition could be contributing to role stress, role clarity, and the distribution of responsibilities for a PL. Previous research by Aitken and O'Carroll (2020) found PLs feel much more of their time is consumed by trying to access information and they feel more daunted in their position. Research has recognised how PL support could be best developed through informal mentoring (Ellis and Nimmo, 2018), however as reflected in previous and this research, PLs are already finding time a challenge so additional time for mentoring within current workloads seems unrealistic. This study shows that time for informal learning, and mentoring, should be properly rewarded with an appropriate time allocation.

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Mitchell explored PLs learning about their role and found a reliance on informal 'situated peer learning', accounting for PLs being unable to 'outline the precise responsibilities of the role' (Mitchell, 2015, p.722). This suggests that PLs could pass on expectations to those new to the role that might not be considered good practice, as this form of learning in practice is contextualised and could take on different meanings across departments (Lave, 1993). The reliance solely on tacit knowledge acquisition could be contributing to role stress, role clarity and the distribution of responsibilities for a PL. This research has shown pockets of good practice highlighted primarily through the experience of Stevie, a PL with access to a community of practice, a supportive school management team, and clear role understanding. Importantly, Stevie had a strong programme team, within which she could share accountability and gain strength from shared perspectives. It has been shown that for distributed leadership to work in practice, organisational structures must allow for it to avoid silos and navigate hierarchy (Kezar, 2006). Communication across schools and professional units is important for role-holders to foster collaboration and alleviate individual responsibility.

Extending informal learning communities more broadly to include members of programme teams and wider professional services could help to lessen the extent to which PLs become the 'single point of failure' (Ellis and Nimmo, 2018, p.35). This would begin to change the culture around the isolation of the PL if there was a focus on sharing accountability institutionally, removing pressure to be in control of areas of programmes that can lead to an over-reach of responsibility.

Recommendations for institutional PL support

The findings have illuminated PLs' experiences within the institutional context, from the type and size of programme, the needs of the students on the programme, the culture and support within the school, as well as the institution expectations and external factors. This has led to the recommendation that any institutional support should be nuanced and flexible to the varying needs of the PL, their prior experience, and the type of programme they lead. The importance of retaining experienced PLs is key in developing community, so ensuring PLs are valued and feel committed to the role would be strategic benefit to the

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institution, with access to experienced PLs to support tacit knowledge sharing. With that in mind, the support package proposed is outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Recommendations for support.
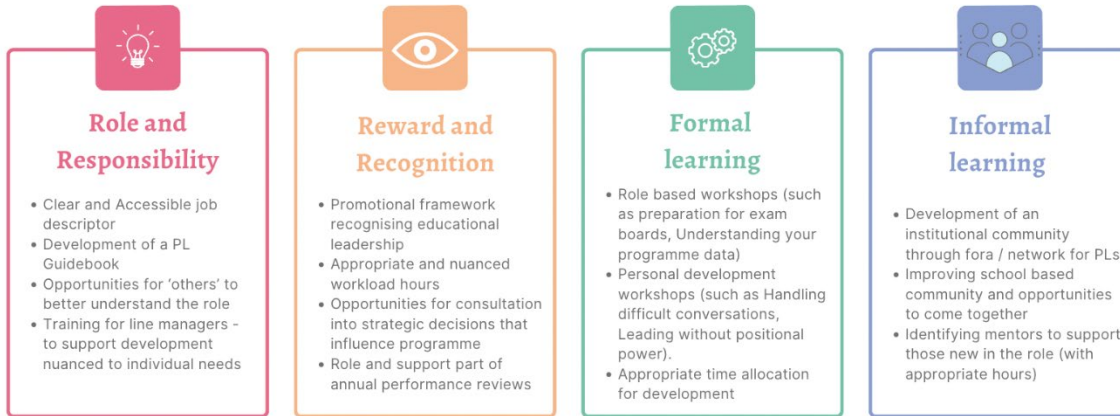
Role and responsibility

The understanding of the role was a key factor that influenced responsibility and accountability of PLs and those around them. The job description must represent the evolution of the role, and the key skills required for those undertaking it. This could be supplemented by the development of a PL handbook as a collection of much of the 'tacit knowledge' PLs describe spending time acquiring. The language throughout this guide should be carefully selected to reinforce the value of the role. Equivalent guidance should be provided for line managers to ensure they are able to support the PL, especially if they had not been one themselves. These support areas would relate to professional identity development of the PL through clearer role boundaries and influence self-efficacy.

Reward and recognition

One of the main influences on PLs' motivation was the sense of being valued and their work visible within the institution. Recommendations in this area would begin with a promotional pathway that recognises Programme Leadership as a legitimate route to further an academic career, through a promotional track recognising educational leadership. This trajectory would be crucial in showcasing the value and visibility of the role and the strategic importance of it within the institutions' ambitions. While this approach

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may vary by higher education 'type', within a teaching-intensive institution there are benefits for attracting practitioner academics and those with interest in teaching and academic leadership.

Alongside progression opportunities, recognition could be improved with new workload guidance designed for nuance in programme type and structure, including programmes that are highly dependent on competitive placements and use of practical outcomes that account for many 'unseen' hours. Allocation of hours for experienced PLs to support others through a community of practice approach could be considered rather than relying on the 'generosity' of other PLs as shown in Aitken and O'Carroll's (2020) study, perpetuating the unseen and unrewarded culture surrounding the role. Opportunities to engage with development are likely to be challenging without a more nuanced view of workload allocation, including time for development. Without this, any form of training and the integration of competency frameworks such as Lawrence, Morrell and Scott (2023) propose, would be challenging for PLs to engage with.

Formal learning

Recommendations around formal training should begin with a formal induction into Programme Leadership, supplemented with asynchronous materials via the PL handbook. Cahill et al. (2015) stated that training was less effective when focused on the day-to-day challenges of the role. In contrast, the findings from this research showed that PLs desired a better understanding of what was expected within these day-to-day tasks. Formal training around milestones within the academic year is needed to build confidence in understanding the expectations of the PL at the various annual cycle milestones (for example, annual programme monitoring, NSS response, examination boards), but could be nuanced depending on the experience of the PL and how long they have been in the role. A 'menu' of workshops would be provided for PLs, and, with support of line managers, they could build their own development relative to their individual experience and career objectives. Time for this development would be negotiated within an annual review to raise the profile of professional development of the PL role. This would help to build confidence, leading to stronger feelings of self-efficacy and job satisfaction, potentially encouraging PLs to remain in the role and resulting in stronger student and institutional outcomes.

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Informal learning

Previous research had highlighted the need for support that was not 'one size fits all' (Aitken and O'Carroll, 2020) along with the use of mentors to support with informal training through mentoring (Ellis and Nimmo, 2018) and the transfer of tacit knowledge. Exploring opportunities to support development of communities of practice for PLs within schools is proposed as a way of sharing and building collective knowledge and support. These should be in-person events, informal in nature supplemented by an online PL group for the school that can enable quick responses to questions and the sharing of documents or ideas quickly with others. There was a desire from participants for opportunities to collaborate with PLs outside of their own schools, and so it would be proposed that a PL forum be held institutionally alongside school-based opportunities for discipline discussions. These forums could include colleagues from professional services to ensure knowledge sharing and building towards a culture of better role understanding.

Conclusion

This research aimed to gain deeper understanding of the experiences of those within the PL role at City University, a teaching-intensive institution. To build a picture of the individuals within the role, portraiture was embraced to capture the complexity, richness, and the multiple dimensions of human activity in the social and cultural context (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The longitudinal approach provided an opportunity to build relationships with the PLs, establish trust, and draw out their experiences in relation to their school context and the wider institution. identified profiles of PLs showing recurrent refrains that further illuminate support needs and offer recommendations on how these can be met.

Whilst this study has illuminated PLs' experience of the role, there are of course limitations of this small study. The focus on one institution was purposeful to gain a deep insight into the variety of PL experiences and has demonstrated this variety to be a true and real concern. While the sample size is small, the selection of participants in terms of demographic background, and experience both as a PL and in HE was varied and representative of the wider PL group the University. The use of interviews only was mitigated by interviewing the participants three times, which helped in establishing a

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deeper connection and made it possible to recap themes and ensure the data was
capturing their voice truthfully and authentically.

During the 2020/21 academic year many of the changes were outside the PLs' control, but
they had to be the 'face of the programme' to students. While these feelings were not new
to the role, they were perhaps heightened, as was the added emotional pressure.
Capturing this made the PLs more alert to the influences on their time, and they felt more
in need of a space to reflect and have someone reflect their thoughts back to them. While
the pandemic brought some constraints to the study, such as having to undertake
interviews online, the desire for connection, during a time of change and less time for
social interaction, added to the depth of the interviews and relationships, which added to
the richness of the data.

This identified influences that had a bearing on the experiences described by the PLs,
centred around themes of responsibility, distributed leadership, and opportunities to learn
about the role. This multi-layered understanding responds to concerns within the literature
that when planning new organisational practices many planners are unaware of the
context the potential implementors are facing (Fullan, 1991). The underlying motivation of
the support should be around changing the culture of PLs being seen as the 'single point
of failure' (Ellis and Nimmo, 2018, p.35) and enabling them to engage with self-
development through a formal and informal development approach, alongside time for
engaging in such activities.

This study shows the importance of thinking more broadly than just support for PLs.
Training should include line managers and wider institutional stakeholders to generate
better understanding of the role and the support needs of this academic role. Hayes
acknowledges that the labour required to provide quality student experiences and pastoral
care is 'undervalued by institutions and does not bring with it career rewards' (2019,
p.140). Reframing this support as a dialogue with line managers and making time for the
development will also help PLs to understand the diversity of the skills they acquire within
the role, and how these could translate into other areas and future aspirations.

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Acknowledgements

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