

**Title:** Managing the intangibles: prestige and the role of programme leader

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### Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to: differentiate three categories of academic motivation (intrinsic love of the work, financial rewards and so-called 'prestige rewards'); determine the relationships between the three categories; recognise ways of foregrounding each of these when leading learning and teaching in higher education. This session is aligned with the *Factors underpinning and influencing excellence* conference theme.

### Session Outline

Learners' experiences are principally at the level of the subject or programme, and programme leaders have a central role in designing and managing these experiences. In light of TEF, therefore, the role of the programme leader is being re-examined and reasserted in many institutions.

Murphy and Curtis (2013) remind us that programme leaders have 'responsibility for managing programmes, but not for managing staff.' Furthermore, incremental pay for programme leadership is appreciably rarer than in the recent past. A useful way of framing the programme leader role is to use the concept of the 'prestige economy', applied effectively to higher education by Blackmore and Kandiko (2011).

In this oral presentation, I will explore the relationship between:

- a) programme leaders' passionate attachment to their work, and the intrinsic rewards of enhancing the student learning experience;
- b) financial rewards, both personal (gained through promotion or increments) and at the programme level (access to institutional resources); and
- c) so-called 'prestige rewards', such as being regarded by others as highly competent, and having opportunities to demonstrate one's skill and knowledge.

While TEF may be a policy lever which (at least superficially) focuses attention towards teaching, I will argue that the ways in which this focus is enacted within institutions must take cognisance of the complex prestige economy at the level of the programme leader.

Blackmore and Kandiko invited further testing and development of their model; this is the first time it has been applied specifically to the programme leader role.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with programme leaders at a post-1992 university in Scotland. Participants have been selected to represent a range of disciplines and programme sizes. By May, some interviews will also have been conducted with programme leaders in both Russell Group and plate-glass institutions.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

I intend to give delegates a whistle-stop introduction (5 minutes) to the three categories of academic motivation outlined above, alongside an exploration of the integrative model proposed by Blackmore and Kandiko. I will then turn the focus of my investigation to university teaching, with a specific emphasis on programme leaders and other coordinating roles (year tutors, etc.) which carry significant responsibility but little managerial 'clout' (5 minutes).

I will then use PollEverywhere to administer some of the interview-type questions from my research. Some of these questions will be open-ended, with aggregated responses presented back to delegates as word clouds (max. two); other questions will be structured as semantic differentials (max. two).

Some indicative questions include: What are the chief motivations for taking on the role of programme leader? Is the role accepted with long-term tangible rewards in mind? What motivates and demotivates programme leaders about their role? What are the risks inherent in programme leadership?

Delegate responses will largely drive the 'discussion' element of the session (15 minutes), as we explore varying institutional and disciplinary cultures. Finally, I will attempt to draw some of the discussion themes together in a presentation of my own nascent research findings (5 to 10 minutes).

### **References**

Blackmore, P. and Kandiko, C. B. (2011). Motivation in academic life: a prestige economy. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 16(4), 399-411.

Murphy, M. and Curtis, W. (2013). The micro-politics of micro-leadership: exploring the role of programme leader in English universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 35(1), 34-44.