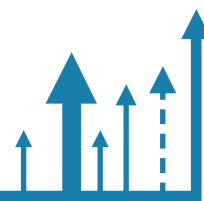


Top Tips for Programme Leaders

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I am the Programme Lead for a suite of five undergraduate biology programmes accredited by the Royal Society of Biology. I lead a team of approximately 35 academics and we currently have approximately 500 students enrolled on the suite. I am supported by a Programme Leadership Team and the programmes are supported by three specialist technical teams. I was a member of the Programme Leadership Team for two years and more recently have been the Programme Lead for the suite. My subject expertise is in immunology and I have been teaching in the biosciences for 10+ years. I have used my own learnings as a Programme Leader and reflected on the discussions of the cluster group workshops to produce five top tips for Programme Leaders.



1. Where to start

Programme Leaders have a variety of experience stepping into the role, the size and structure of programmes vary and the handover process and support available differs. The scale of the role can be daunting. Deciding where to start can be overwhelming.

It may be helpful to look at the programme needs and running at both an operational and strategic level. Develop action plans for both. In terms of operations, identify what needs prioritising for the smooth operational running of the programme with a view to enhancement. Where you can have an effect, include it in your action plan, where you can't directly have an effect, progress the issue to someone who can. At a strategic level, identify the priorities, if necessary in consultation with your department's senior leadership team. Consider both the local programme specific needs and the University strategy. Think long term and short term. Once you have your action plans, discuss them with critical friends and reflect and review. Identify departments and people that can help you in achieving the actions and secure buy-in and support.

2. Build a support network

With the role comes significant responsibility. Having a network of peers can be a helpful source of advice and support. Network with Programme Leaders within your institution and if there isn't a network, create one or ask for one to be created. Share experiences and practice. You will learn from one another. Get to know colleagues from key departments and build relationships. This will help you in achieving and securing support for your action plans. If you are new in role, or have a challenge coming your way, ask for or seek out a mentor or coach as appropriate. The time out for these meetings can help to provide focus and





direction when you are in the thick of an academic year. The more effective the network you build around you, the more valuable it will be in supporting you in your role. Where possible reach out beyond your institution too.

3. Manage expectations

The remit of the role is considerable; however, time is limited. You may have many competing priorities as a Programme Leader and with other roles and responsibilities you have. As Programme Leader, it may not be possible for you to directly influence every aspect of the programme delivery. Therefore you should manage expectations, your own, your teams', the students' and possibly members of your department's senior leadership team. In terms of your colleagues, open and honest communication is important and sharing your action plans and priorities can help to communicate the direction of travel. You need to be kind to yourself too. Identify what is realistically possible. Look at your workflow for all roles and responsibilities over the academic year. Map across to your programme calendar of events and activities and identify the times where you will need support so you can plan accordingly. If you don't have a programme calendar of events, add it to your action plan and create one. Remember, only do what you have to do, you should have oversight of everything but you don't need to do everything. Staff student liaison committees (or equivalent programme team student representative meetings) can be places where you can build positive communities with students and work to manage the expectations of the student community. These meetings are an important part of your programme calendar of events.



4. Plan for the unplanned

Within the role of Programme Leader there will be an element of 'fire-fighting'. You can't control for when you will need to react to and prioritise unforeseen situations; however, to some extent you may be able to plan for it. Build contingency into your weeks so that you have the capacity to respond and keep some work-life balance. Avoid fully booking your diary each week when possible. With each unforeseen situation learn from it and if appropriate use the experience to inform your action plans to avoid or reduce repeat incidents. If you know your workflow over the year and times of high activity you may be able to highlight periods where you will be unable to 'fire-fight' and can then plan for and seek support as necessary.

5. Go for it – take calculated risks

Reflect and review on the practices and traditions within the team and programme. Where appropriate, look for alternative methods and approaches to your programme delivery and team approach. You may not find the solutions you need within higher education, look outside higher education for inspiration. Include your team, and if appropriate your students, in the discussions and planning. Start small if you want. Take calculated risks, introduce and encourage innovation and alternative approaches. Be prepared to fail. Learn from and build on the experience. Share your practice internally and externally. Be open. Be brave. Go for it.

