



# Resilience, Recognition and Reward: Programme leaders in educational leadership

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Across the Scottish educational context, Programme Leaders act as both programme managers and academic leaders; individuals who provide administrative support, curriculum design, quality assurance, mentoring, and manage colleagues, often without direct authority. Pulling at the threads of resilience, recognition, and reward, it is important that we understand our position as educational leaders in order to be able to manage the pressure points, not be daunted by them, and claim the value of that leadership to our institutions. This thinkpiece attempts to further the conversation about Programme Leaders as education leaders, including how to support and recognize this work.

## PROGRAMME LEADERS AS EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

An educational leader is a faculty member whose employment involves high stakes decisions regarding curricular and pedagogical initiatives at a programmatic, departmental, faculty, or institutional level (Hubball, Clarke, Webb, & Johnson, 2015; Webb, 2020). These positions are increasingly being taken up by academics responsible for practice (i.e., teaching), management (i.e., coordinating workloads) and leadership (i.e., curriculum development and innovation), as well as keeping abreast of current developments in their respective disciplines, and in the field of teaching and learning (Rawn & Fox, 2017).

Labelling Programme Leadership as educational leadership recognizes that programme leaders are scholars in their own right, who have taken on positions of administration. However, these are not purely administrative positions; they depend upon programme leaders ability to understand the institutional context as well as the ways of thinking and practicing within a discipline, including an ability to design curriculum and pedagogy to mitigate some of the conceptual challenges in student learning (Meyer & Land, 2003).

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administration and educational leadership often with the best interests of students being paramount - supports the increasing attention on the training and support for this leadership. They desire to devise and lead enhancements in response to data, yet many Programme Leaders are missing the strategically aligned support at an institutional or sectorial level (Miller-Young, Yeo, & Manarin, 2018).

The needs of Programme Leaders, as educational leaders, support the increased importance of strategically supported, institution-level educational/academic leadership, especially as these leaders are required to make significant, research-informed and evidence-based decisions around pedagogical, curricular, and policy initiatives and/or changes.



## RECOGNIZING PROGRAMME LEADERS AS EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Recognition can be both internal and external. But first, programme leaders have to be able to identify our work as educational leadership in order to make claims about its value, and then be recognized externally, or advocate for greater recognition.

Unfortunately, a lack of confidence inhibits many people from seeing themselves as educational leaders with a unique and valuable contribution to make. Not having a strong self-concept as an educational leader confounds their confidence in their own programme leadership. Changing conceptions of leadership requires willing engagement by educational leaders. Navigating the complexities of new administrative and academic responsibilities, requires adopting a mindset of curiosity and “studentness” (Cousin, 2012) as well as engaging with traditional administrative structures such as academic calendars, curriculum change processes, and bureaucratic hierarchies. Many programme leaders may be anxious about wading into unfamiliar territory. The challenge lies in recognizing that they have a contribution to make and then implementing that into practice.

The Programme Leadership cluster is bringing attention to the work that is being done and creating a culture that recognises the educational leadership of programme leaders. More than managers, programme leaders are driving curricular and pedagogical changes in their programmes, but there is more to be done in recognising and rewarding this work across the sector. Some of that has to come from the programme leaders themselves.

## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutions of higher education around the world are coming to recognize the importance and complexity of providing high quality and high engagement student learning experiences in diverse programmes (Webb, Hubball, Clarke, & Ellis, 2020). As a result, educational leaders constitute a small, specially trained group of leaders, hired to strategic positions, working on specifically supported institutional initiatives (Hubball, Clarke, Webb, & Johnson, 2015). These educational leaders, with disciplinary expertise, undertake strategic educational initiatives (e.g., program reform/curriculum renewal, evaluation of teaching, academic leadership programs), but have limited background in educational leadership including limited role specific professional development, confusion about the nature of the role, and being asked to lead without authority. Despite the issues in programme leadership, this work supports the strategic capacity building of campus-wide expertise that also supports the development and evaluation of curricular and pedagogical changes, addresses key issues of strategic alignment, and supports the integration of educational leadership practice and scholarship for educational leaders.

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## BECOMING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

I make two recommendations for the ways that programme leaders can becoming educational leaders: create institutional cultures that predispose, enable, and reinforce educational leadership, and provide strategic supports and development programs for educational leaders.

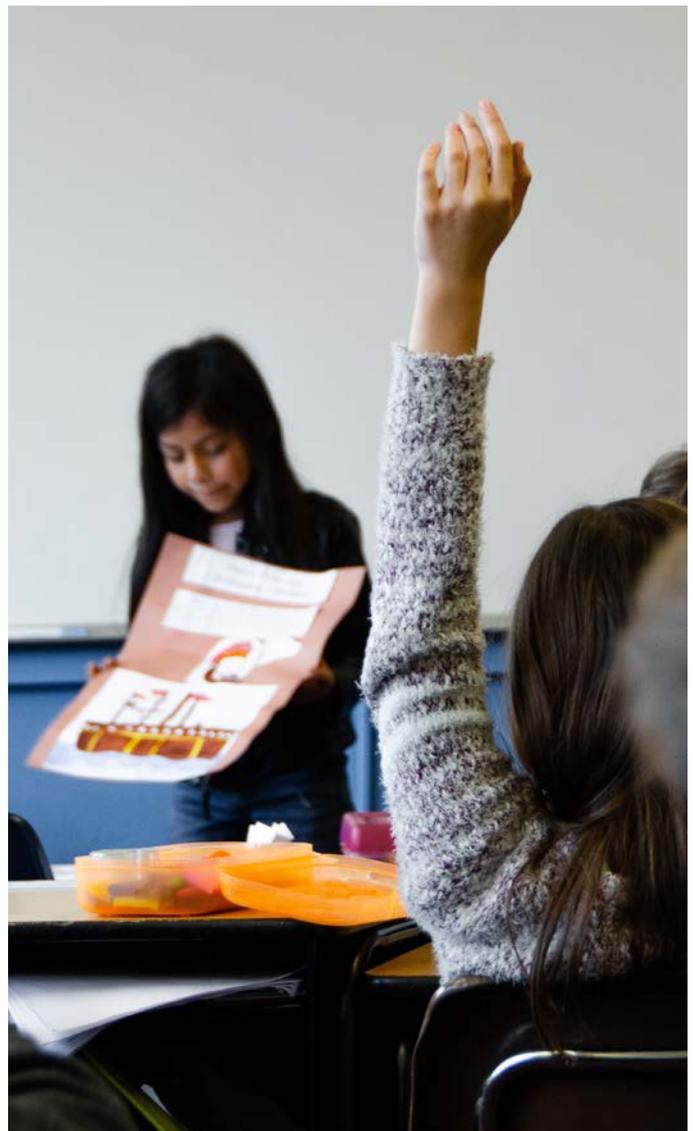
## Creating institutional cultures

First and foremost, we have to *make our work scholarship*, all the way to dissemination (Kanuka, 2011; Felten, 2013). Not only does that mean that we have empirically supported findings to drive our own programme decisions, but the findings may be beneficial to other institutions across the sector. However, dissemination does not have to be a formal journal. It could be dissemination at an institutional, regional, or community of practice level, before you target a top-tier journal.

Whether we are appointed or emergent leaders, we have to claim our space. Rather than feeling like we fall into these positions or are shoulder tapped, as educational leaders, we are agents of pedagogical and curricular change. Faculty are most influenced by colleagues within their close, significant networks such as departments and workgroups (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009; Verwoord & Poole, 2016). These influential relationships support grassroots change within a programme or institution. This is not merely leading a team – educational leadership includes helping your team members develop the skills and competencies to be educational leaders themselves.

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All disciplines have their own *communities*. Educational leadership itself is not tied to a specific intellectual tradition (Chng, Liebowitz, and Mårtensson 2020) and can often leave Programme Leaders feeling betwixt and between. Programme leaders frequently are boundary crossers, coming from different disciplines but sharing a culture of programme leadership, which often feels untied from a specific intellectual or academic tradition. They understand the diversity in educational leadership work (Booth & Woollacott, 2018) and move between various administrative levels and intellectual positions. This fledgling culture of programme leadership could be a unifying force across the sector.



## Providing strategic supports

We need to heed the call to recognize programme leadership for the educational leadership that it offers, both within an institution and across the higher education landscape. Within an institution, this is vital work for which Programme Leaders need to be *trained and supported* through mentoring, support, and guidance. Programme Leaders, much like other educational leaders, need to be trusted and *empowered to make evidence informed decisions* about programme curricula. A regional approach to understand and support programme leadership broadens the scope of recognition of the importance of this work and creates a landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner, et al., 2015) outside of the financial and political whims of any institution. The connection of a collaborative community engaged in sharing their experience is a major move forward in strategic, capacity building and the ongoing implementation of exceptional programmes.

Importantly, both these recommendations support building educational leadership with managerial leadership. Sometimes the rewards for this leadership are external, fame and recognition by your institution or in your field, and sometimes they are internal, knowing that you have designed and implemented

an exceptional programme that benefits learners. But, like Spiderman, with great power comes great responsibility. Yes, there is more responsibility and workload, and we can make that work visible by documenting and demonstrating our impact. Once we have this documentation, then we can advocate for support, training, recognition and reward because we have empirical evidence to support our impact.

### Closure

Becoming active in educational leadership requires both skills and dispositions. We can acquire the skills through training and practice, but the dispositions require significant shifts in the way that we think about those skills and the value of the work we do.

This thinkpiece is an invitation to engage in programme leadership in a two-fold way: as administrators or programmes, but also as leaders of educational programmes. Our knowledge of institutional context and culture, coupled with disciplinary expertise make us the right people to be leading both programmes and people, but we cannot do it without support.

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