Functional diversity of programme leaders in four European countries

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Setting the scene

- Shift from collegial to entrepreneurial/managerial governance approaches
- Impact on decision-making processes
- Central role of academic middle management operating in the space between academic and manager profiles
- “[T]here is no way in which the university’s expectations will be realised if HODs [head of departments] as ‘middle managers’ are unable or unwilling to put them into action” (Jones, 2011: 281)
Setting the scene – Programme Leader’s role

• Usually academic staff
• Responsibility for the (high-quality) delivery of teaching programmes
  – Course management
  – Curriculum development
  – Staff timetabling
  – Contact person for students
• Marketing and liaising with key stakeholders (schools, professional and employing organisations/ vocational field, HEIs)
• Leadership role (administrative and academic staff assisting with the delivering of the programme)
Setting the scene – Programme Leader’s role

• Challenging role
  – Frequently not clearly specified
  – Not always well rewarded/ well resourced (Vilkinas & Cartan 2015)
  – Ambiguous role profile
  – Little comparability between programme leader roles (Murphy & Curtis 2013)
  – PLs role still remains largely in the shadows (Murphy & Curtis 2013, Floyd 2016)
Method

• Aim: gain insight into current practices and perceptions of leadership, roles and skills of PLs at four European HEIs
  – Birmingham City University
  – Laurea University of Applied Sciences
  – TH Cologne
  – UAS Upper Austria
• 4 focus group discussions between November 2018 and February 2019
PLs role at BCU

• PLs take responsibility for the day to day delivery of a designated academic programme
• PLs responsibilities refer to
• (1) leadership: encourage excellence in performance and attainment by celebrating success amongst staff and students alike
• (2) programme management and programme delivery to deliver an excellent and inclusive student learning experience
• (3) programme assessment, programme evaluation and quality assurance: periodic programme reviews, monitor student progress, achievement and retention
PLs role at Laurea

- No directly equivalent to “Programme leaders” (who are in charge of sole degree programmes)
- Development managers: leading and supporting teams to enable optimal learning experiences for the students; in charge of staff allocation, tactical planning, and share day-to-day programme management with degree coordinators, module responsibles, appointed lecturers and administrative staff
- Quality assurance and pedagogical degree content development is shared with development managers and degree coordinators
- Shared leadership throughout the organization enables flexible development and pedagogical choices - to enable continuous, systematic and agile development of Laurea’s activities
Programme leadership at TH Cologne is not an institution-wide defined role (formal as well as informal appointment).

They are always part of teaching staff and usually do not have any assistants.

Job descriptions exist only in some cases; if so, they cover developing and running study programmes, conducting accreditation process, running joint public relation activities together with faculty management and student advisory services, inform staff involved about key figures of the study programme.

Beyond that PLs can take on a wide range of tasks, e.g. inducting first semester students, coordinating assessment schedules, offering student support, dealing with conflicts between student and staff, maintaining contact with professional services, connecting students with alumni.

Clear role expectations could help to protect PLs from overload, come to a more systematic exchange with professional practice, and connect to institutional goals.
PLs role at UAS Upper Austria

- Formal role, clearly defined tasks
- Appointed and not elected
- PLs assume a broad range of different functions (within their programme). Their responsibilities strongly relate to
  - Recruitment of potential students
  - Curriculum development & adaptation (accreditation, re-accreditation)
  - Successful management of their study programme
  - Bridging the study programme’s strategic priorities with the institutional ones
  - Acting as intermediary between students, their staff and external stakeholders (vocational field/ industry)
Conclusion

• PLs (or development managers in Finland) are important decision-makers in their academic programmes and have the capacity to adapt their curricula to contemporary needs.
• They dispose of formal and/or informal authority (and have some influence on their colleagues).
• They are in most cases accountable for the academic health of their programmes (have a keen interest in articulating and delivering effective inclusion and diversity management strategies).
• They have a substantial effect on students and academic and administrative staff and can therefore encourage genuine across-the-curriculum implementation of diversity management measures.
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