Professors as intellectual leaders: formation, identity and role

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Professors as intellectual leaders: formation, identity and role

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The literature on leadership in higher education is predominantly concerned with the role of formally designated senior managers such as heads of department and deans of faculty. By contrast, relatively little attention has focused on those performing informal and distributed forms of leadership, such as (full) university professors. This article draws on the results of an online questionnaire and interviews to explore the leadership role of professors, primarily in a UK context. Professors feel that there is a mismatch between their priorities and those of their employing institutions and that their expertise is under-utilised. A number of qualities are identified which may be associated with the role of a professor as an intellectual leader: *role model*, *mentor*, *advocate*, *guardian*, *acquisitor* and *ambassador*. It is argued that new managerialism and performative expectations are reshaping the role of the professoriate, and that institutions need to do more to develop their leadership capacity.

Keywords: intellectual leadership; professors; management

Introduction

There are now over 18,000 full professors in UK higher education, constituting over 10% of the academic profession (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2009). They represent a group of individuals at the apex of their discipline or profession, with considerable expertise across many elements of academic practice, including research, teaching and service activities incorporating leadership and management roles. The professoriate undertake a range of leadership and professional support activities connected with research and teaching practice, mentoring, influencing the work and direction of the university, representing the university in interfacing with wider communities and helping staff to develop (Tight 2002). Much of this work might be classified as 'academic citizenship' (Macfarlane 2007), in aiding the development of other, less experienced, colleagues.

The growing literature on leadership and management in higher education is mainly focused on understanding the challenges faced by individuals holding designated managerial roles at a relatively senior level, such as heads of department, deans of faculty, pro-vice chancellors and vice chancellors (e.g. Bright and Richards 2001; Knight and Trowler 2001; Smith, Adams, and Mount 2007). By contrast, relatively little attention has focused on those holding informal and distributed forms of leadership, such as university professors. There has been surprisingly little research on the role of professors. Tight's (2002) article is an isolated example which identifies a number of roles based on a relatively informal poll of fellow professors. The shift of

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the modern university toward a more managerial culture, with a growing cadre of permanent rather than rotating senior academic managers, has cast many professors adrift from expectations that they will participate in the formal leadership of the academy (Harman 2002). The professoriate are not necessarily perceived as a group of key strategic 'leaders' or influencers in the same way as, say, heads of department or deans. The role of the professoriate as intellectual leaders is unclear in this context. While some senior manager-academics will also hold professorial titles, as cross-boundary 'hybrid' workers (Whitchurch 2006; Chambers et al. 2007), their sphere of influence is commonly defined as emanating from their managerial position alone.

It should be noted that the use of the term 'professor' throughout this article refers to the holder of a university chair or personal professorship. It is not used in the more generic sense to refer to all those who teach, as applied in the USA and elsewhere.

Methodology

This article reports the results of an online questionnaire and follow-up interviews designed to gain more understanding of the leadership role of professors drawn from a range of disciplines and institutional contexts. A variety of means were deployed in obtaining responses to the online questionnaire, through communication with members of the National Conference of University Professors, subject centres of the Higher Education Academy, the professoriate at a number of post-1992 and pre-1992 universities, and through personal contact with academic staff at a number of universities outside the UK. Hence the sample was self-selecting.

Initial contextual questions established differences with respect to gender, length of experience (as a professor), subject area, and whether respondents also hold a formal managerial position. The questionnaire asked respondents to consider how institutions use their expertise as professors, and the relative importance of a number of identified professorial roles using a 5-point Likert scale. These role descriptions were derived, in part, from the work of Tight (2002). Analysing responses via a Likert scale facilitated a rank ordering of roles considered to be either 'important' or 'very important'. A final open section invited respondents to summarise their view on the role of the professor as a leader, and these responses were subsequently organised by a number of identified characteristics/behaviours.

The online questionnaire yielded 233 responses, 95% of which were drawn from UK universities, with the remaining 5% drawn from a variety of non-UK universities and other higher education establishments. Of UK respondents, 58% were drawn from professors working in post-1992 universities and 37% from pre-1992 institutions. Respondents represent a range of disciplinary fields grouped by four categories: applied science and professions (34%), arts and humanities (18%), pure and natural sciences (11%) and social sciences (37%). In terms of length of experience, approximately one-third of respondents had been a professor for less than 5 years, a further third for between 5 and 10 years and a final third for more than 11 years. Most respondents were men (72%), although the proportion of women respondents (27%) would be lower if it were to reflect the true extent to which women are under-represented in the UK professoriate. In 2007/08 this figure stood at 18.7% (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2009). This is broadly in line with an international pattern of under-representation, where the proportion of women who are professors

or senior academics is generally less than 20% (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2006; Ozkanli et al. 2009).

The research also incorporates data from 15 semi-structured interviews with professors. These were drawn, in the main, from respondents who had indicated a willingness to be interviewed having completed the questionnaire. The interviews were designed to explore issues raised in the online questionnaire in greater depth with a small sample of interviewees, representative of the larger population by reference to gender, subject area and institutional context. Each interview was divided into two sections, focusing firstly on how the interviewee became a professor and secondly on how they see their leadership role. The semi-structured nature of each interview enabled attention to be paid to individual differences, particularly in connection with unique career stories, perceived barriers to becoming a professor and the challenges in managing a hybridised role (such as being a professor and a head of department).

Care was taken to ensure that interviewees were drawn from a wide range of disciplines and subject areas, such as English, health science, engineering, management, technology, economics, oncology and film studies. In order to ensure that the identity of interviewees may not be deduced through the use of quotations, professors were ascribed generic rather than specific titles in reporting their views, such as 'professor of engineering' rather than 'professor of electrical engineering'. Quotations from questionnaire respondents were not attributed to their disciplinary field.

Becoming a professor: criteria and caricature

The criteria for becoming a professor may be found in the appointment and promotions information issued by most university human resource departments. This normally centres on an individual demonstrating that they have acquired a national, and/or more normally international, reputation for the quality of their research and scholarship. This is often expected to be evidenced by peer-reviewed publications, the acquisition of research grants, contributions to academic and professional bodies and other 'impact' measures in shaping the conceptual or applied thinking or practice of others. High-quality teaching and service or leadership contributions, to both the institution and other external bodies, are also frequently cited as a criterion. The following statement from the University of Sussex (2008) is not untypical in reflecting this multiple set of expectations:

> Candidates for promotion to a Professorship will be expected to have made a broad, sustained contribution to their field and discipline nationally and internationally, and normally to have achieved exceptional performance in research. Demonstrated leadership in the development of teaching in their subject and field may play a dominant part in a case. Service to their subject, to the University and to higher education in administrative or research capacities may contribute to the case.

More than 60% of professors who responded to the online survey considered research and/or scholarship in a discipline or professional field as the sole basis of their appointment. More than a third of respondents (36%), though, attributed their appointment to a more complex combination of factors, which also included teaching excellence and management and/or service within an institution. Many professors who were interviewed believed that there was often a tacit understanding that, while they needed to demonstrate a basic level of competence or commitment to other roles, such

as teaching and administrative duties, what really 'counted' was research excellence demonstrated through publication and grant getting:

> it was entirely down to research, there were even sort of semi-official guidelines in that you should have about 30 good journal papers and you should have been bringing in half a million pounds a year for the past five years, or something. The rules were quite well known. (Professor of Engineering 1)

> I think publications was a major factor [i.e. in being appointed as a professor]. The second factor was research proposals … we were awarded about a quarter of a million [pounds sterling]. I also had a few PhDs that had gone through the pipeline. (Professor of Management)

Only one interviewee, a professor of education in a specific discipline who had written a large number of student textbooks and managed a national educational centre, attributed his appointment to something other than research. However, he expressed his discomfort about the unusual nature of his own appointment as a professor in the context of working in a research-intensive university.

> the promotion criteria here is about publications, research grants and PhD students completing. I am a very unusual professor in this university and feel quite self conscious about this. (Professor of Education in a specific discipline)

Most interviewees argued that research and scholarship should be the main basis for appointing professors, and that the criteria should not be broadened in this regard to those whose main contribution comes from teaching or service to the institution. Nevertheless, it was also argued that, occasionally, the circumstances affecting a small department might dictate criteria other than research excellence, such as appointing someone with a more modest research record who has the potential to be a future head of department.

Some interviewees felt that there had been a slight shift in the criteria for becoming a professor in recent years, with an increasing expectation that they needed to demonstrate more 'all-round' skills:

> Academic management, teaching, your standing within the teaching community. These things are also now regarded as an important factor. I didn't feel that was necessarily the case a decade ago. (Professor of Health Science)

Despite recognition that the basis for becoming a professor has broadened to some extent, nearly all interviewees, and the majority of respondents who commented on the issue, were clear that, while other criteria might be taken into account, they were not 'legitimate' or 'sufficient' on their own. The possession of an international reputation in a disciplinary or professional field was seen as key to a legitimate professorial level appointment, but some form of publication was regarded as critical for obtaining such a reputation or 'impact'.

A number of respondents and interviewees expressed views on the role of professors in university management. Here, it was recognised that being a professor, particularly in a post-1992 UK university, gave heads of department more 'face validity' and 'credibility'. Possessing an established academic reputation as a researcher was seen as a big advantage in this context:

> there are some people who have been given professorships … who should never have them, because they are for absurd things, such as being head of department for years … or for having sat on an unconscionable number of committees. That's also a very bad reason. (Professor of Film Studies)

> You don't get taken seriously [as a head of department] if you are not a professor. (Professor of English)

Several professors also referred to tensions that can exist when they are managed by a head of department or dean who does not hold a professorial title or possess a substantial research profile:

> if you are being managed by staff who are junior to you by virtue of their curriculum vitae etc., it puts both individuals I think in a very difficult position, a very embarrassing position.

One interviewee argued that post-1992 UK universities had tended to 'abuse' the professorial title by conferring it on 'anybody in any position of hierarchical seniority', such as deans or pro-vice chancellors. This, it was argued, was a symptom of a lack of confidence among such institutions, and unhelpfully conflated two distinct roles. Another interviewee argued that, in the post-1992 university in which he worked, there was a legacy of having made too many internal appointments to professorial chairs:

> I suspect that because this is a new university and it has changed its status that some of the initial appointments [i.e. as professors] were not very good appointments, and they may have been internal appointments because they had to have professors … just appointing someone internally because they are a good chap and they have been in the set up for a number of years is wrong. (Professor of Oncology)

A large minority of interviewees or respondents stated that professors do not necessarily make good academic managers. Some argued that the two roles demand different skills sets, whilst others regarded managerial responsibilities as an unhelpful distraction for professors who should focus their energies on research and intellectual leadership:

> It always puzzled me that skills at getting grants and publishing papers should be interpreted as 'this person would be good at running a department', which is quite a different job. It is a mistake lots of universities make. (Professor of Engineering 1)

> I don't think professors should run the department, because then they will never do the things they are supposed to do which is research and intellectual leadership.

There was a perception among most interviewees that it had become easier to obtain a professorial position. The growth of new disciplines, such as accountancy, was seen as one of the reasons why becoming a professor might be more easily attainable. According to a professor in this discipline, appointments to chairs in his field had been 'tainted by the necessity to pay high salaries to get people, and the only way to pay high salaries was to give them the title'. Becoming a professor was also attributed, in part, to the growth of the UK higher education sector and the rise in the number of institutions, creating a more active 'transfer market' for professors, a situation seen to have been exacerbated by the UK research assessment exercise

(1986–2008). Furthermore, interviewees and respondents felt that there was now much more of an emphasis on the generation of research income by professors in the wake of the adoption of full economic cost accounting within universities. One professor commented that appointing someone as a reader, a grade immediately below that of professor used by many UK, Australian and New Zealand universities in recognition of research excellence, can be used as a means of 'avoiding having people poached' by another institution. A professor of accountancy was told to make the case that he was of professorial quality by obtaining an offer from another university, and was then offered a chair at his existing institution which he accepted. Illustrating the 'transfer market', another interviewee mentioned that he was offered a readership in order to stay at a (more prestigious) university, but decided to accept the offer of a professorship at a different institution:

> I had the difficult decision, is a reader there better than a professor here? So I took a calculated decision to become a professor and to move. (Professor of Management)

Despite the impression that professorial level appointments are now easier to obtain, the percentage of academic staff holding a professorial position has remained relatively similar since the mid 1960s, albeit in a considerably larger higher education system. In 1964, 12% of the academic staff at UK universities were professors compared with just over 10% in 2008 (Halsey 1992; Higher Education Statistics Agency 2009).

Finally, a number of women professors commented that they felt that they had faced particular barriers connected with their gender in becoming a professor. Sometimes being held back was attributed to a poor personal relationship with an influential individual, such as a male head of department or a dean:

> my then head of department disliked me and I was turned down for a reader twice, even though I fulfilled the criteria. (Professor of English)

Gender issues were specifically cited by three further interviewees to explain why it had taken them longer to become a professor than male counterparts (e.g. 'being a mouthy woman'). Sometimes this was attributed to working in male-dominated subject areas, or because of the influence of freemasonry, an ancient fraternal organisation which excludes women from membership. Two female professors referred to the influence of this organisation:

> I know of people, indeed probably some in this university who have been given professorships either because they've got staying power or because they know the right people, or because they are masons. (Professor of Film Studies)

> there is a secret brotherhood up there [i.e. at senior management level]. (Professor of Applied Technology)

Other women interviewees also referred to a lack of transparency about how people become professors, and how this tends to act as a particular barrier to women academics with fewer role models of the same gender to guide them. Moreover, it was pointed out that the imbalance in the proportion of men to women professors is not reflected at lower levels within the profession where, for example, there is often a far higher proportion of females filling post-doctoral positions.

Table 1.   Perceptions of the role of a professor (by rank order, % agree/strongly agree).

Helping other colleagues to develop	100
Leadership in research	98
Being a role model	98
Upholding standards of scholarship	96
Influencing the work and direction of the university	88
Influencing public debate	84
Representing the department in the university	76
Leadership in teaching	84
Income generation	49

The role of a professor

Mismatch with institutional expectations

While universities publish guidelines about how someone might *become* a professor, they pay comparatively little attention to what professors are expected to *do*. At it simplest, this might be expressed as to 'profess their subject', but this somewhat anodyne phrase fails to capture the richness of the role of a professor. In part, what one might expect a professor to do depends on the basis of their appointment. However, as the online survey indicated, very few professors attribute the principal basis of their appointment to anything other than research and scholarship.

The survey revealed that over two-fifths of professors (44%) occupy 'hybrid' roles on either a faculty (e.g. head of department, dean) or university-wide (e.g. director of research or pro-vice chancellor) basis. Professors in post-1992 universities (17%) were more likely to hold a university-wide managerial role than their counterparts in pre-1992 institutions (6%). However, more respondents from pre-1992 universities (38%) held faculty-based management roles than those from the post-1992 universities (25%). From a list of nine roles related to the work of a professor, respondents ranked 'helping other colleagues to develop' most highly, followed closely by 'leadership in research' and 'being a role model'. By contrast, 'income generation' was regarded as the least important of the nine roles, with just under half of respondents rating it as either important or very important (see Table 1).

Respondents were also asked to comment on what they felt to be the expectations of their university institutions with respect to their role (as opposed to their own ideal). This produced an alternate rank order of roles (see Table 2) with some notable

Table 2.   Perceptions of the expectations of universities of a professor (by rank order, % agree/strongly agree).

Leadership in research	91
Income generation	78
Upholding standards of scholarship	66
Helping other colleagues to develop	64
Being a role model	60
Influencing public debate	61
Leadership in teaching	61
Influencing the work and direction of the university	55
Representing the department in the university	49

differences. For example, professors ranked income generation activities as their least important role (Table 1) but considered that it was second only to leadership in research as an institutional expectation (Table 2). It was also notable that respondents felt their own institutions were far less interested in their contributions to 'local' activities. Professors perceived 'influencing the work and direction of the university' and 'representing the department in the university' as the two roles their universities least valued.

Use of expertise: locals and cosmopolitans

Respondents were asked to consider the ways in which their institution drew on their expertise. Working as a research leader and a mentor to inexperienced colleagues were most highly ranked, while just one-third of respondents indicated that they had been asked to advise senior managers on specialist subjects (see Table 3). Notably, three-fifths of respondents (61%) felt their expertise was either used 'a little' or 'not at all'.

    Comments within this section of the questionnaire expressed a general view that use of expertise within a 'local' context takes place without much recognition or explicit encouragement. Typical comments include:

> Whilst I engage in many of these activities, this is not institution driven and frankly they probably have no idea what I am doing.

> I do mentor, but this is not sponsored by the institution. I do it because I see it as a moral obligation of the role, and because people welcome it when offered. Others approach and ask for it.

In similar vein, one respondent commented that considerably more use of their expertise is made as a visiting professor to another institution rather than their primary employing university. Here, there was a clear sense that professors felt excluded from the 'local' context. They were seen as individuals who could win external funding and publish in international journals. Their professional identity and reputation was regarded as existing principally beyond the walls of the institution, rather than contributing as strongly at the institutional level.

    This perception invokes the well-established distinction made by Merton (1947) between 'locals' and 'cosmopolitans' in respect to roles within communities. It was subsequently developed further by Gouldner (1957) in relation to membership of formal organisations. According to Gouldner, 'cosmopolitans' have a high base of professional skill or expertise, and identify most strongly with an outer reference

Table 3.   Ways in which institutions make use of professorial expertise (by rank order, % agree/strongly agree).

Leading research or innovation projects and groups	79
Mentoring inexperienced researchers and teachers	75
Serving on university committees	62
Developing external links	58
Representing the university in an external context	54
Advising senior managers on specialist subjects	33

group rather than members of the immediate organisation. They are also 'low' on loyalty to the organisation. By contrast, 'locals' have less commitment to specialised role skills, but are highly loyal to their employing organisation, and identify principally to an inner reference group found within the organisation. Gouldner applied this distinction to faculty at a US liberal arts college, finding differences that reflected it in relation to academic life. Cosmopolitans were likely to place more emphasis on their research priorities, published more, got their intellectual stimulation from outside the college, were more willing to leave for another institution and tended to know fewer people within the institution than locals.

In many respects the characteristics of cosmopolitans reflect the popular image of the professor. They are individuals who are perceived as both research-focused and more likely to identify with professional colleagues outside the institution. *In extremis*, this can lead to professors being characterised in negative terms. One of the stereotypes of the business school professor is as a 'cowboy' selfishly pursuing paid consultancy interests while contributing comparatively little to teaching or service activities within the faculty (Piercy 1999, 698). This lack of responsibility for the internal life of the institution is reflected in the characterisation of professors as 'idle, unwilling to support younger colleagues, content to let the burden of undergraduate teaching fall on other shoulders, distant, authoritarian' (Bassnett 2004, 3). The research assessment exercise in the UK is an example of the increasing pressure internationally for scholars to conform to research productivity expectations. This means that cosmopolitanism has come to define the reward and recognition of the university professor (Altbach 2006).

Perceptions among professors that they are often excluded from the 'local' context include their (limited) role in university governance. Here, there was a strong sense, especially among professors in post-1992 universities, that they were unfairly excluded from decision-making at a senior level. This was expressed most strongly by a professor who had formerly worked in a pre-1992 university and was now working in a post-1992 institution:

> professors and readers should automatically be on any executive body which makes far-reaching decisions about how an academic institution functions … (otherwise) it is like having a commercial enterprise, where you have managing directors and a board of directors and all the decisions are made by the second tier management. (Professor of Oncology)

Some professors went further and commented that not only did they feel their views were unwanted but that, if they expressed them, they ran the risk of being ostracised in the context of a 'macho' management culture:

> Unless you trot out the party line you would be foolish to speak out. If you speak up it can affect your career progression.

The professor as leader

The last section of the online questionnaire invited respondents to express their view on the role of the professor as leader. This topic was also a major focus of the interviews. Respondents and interviewees articulated six main qualities: *role model*, *mentor*, *advocate*, *guardian*, *acquisitor* and *ambassador*. Collectively, these qualities represent the intellectual and moral characteristics of professorial leadership.

Role model

Respondents argued that professors must be *role models* by dint of their scholarly reputation and achievements. Primarily this was associated with research productivity and the 'impact' of their scholarship. Several professors expressed the view that a distinction needed to be made between academic leadership and management. Here, the professor is defined as a 'field or subject specialist or expert', rather than possessing more all-round abilities. However, most respondents argued that professors needed to be role models across most, if not all, aspects of the academic role, needing to be 'inspirational teachers' as well as capable managers. Here, there was a vision of the professor as a meta-academic, an exemplar who possesses the credibility upon which to lead. Definitions of the professor included the following:

> A productive and high-impact scholar and inspirational teacher with good administrative and managerial skills who has a real interest in fostering the personal and collective development of colleagues (both within their immediate remit and outside of it), somebody with foresight, energy and optimism, who is both internally and externally engaged, and is up-to-date with current developments in academia nationally and globally.

> A professor should be a leader in his subject area of research. Inevitably, professors are asked to become managers of their section, department, etc. I also believe professors should strive to be good teachers and should be able to foster scholarship and excellence in teaching in their subject area.

There was recognition among some respondents and interviewees that professors can be poor role models as well as good ones in practice. 'Bad' professors were seen as those with a lack of commitment to helping others and carrying out a 'fair share' of teaching and administrative duties. Professors, in other words, should do things 'as a good citizen', and not just focus on their individual research interests:

> Some people are extremely selfish and only do things to benefit their own research activity. (Professor of Engineering 2)

> it is difficult to get professors to take responsibility to do things unless they are really interested and they have benefit [i.e. for them] or by nature they have an attitude as a team player. (Professor of Management)

Other characteristics of 'bad professors' which were identified included an inclination to nepotism, a lack of interest in teaching or the development of students, conveying overly negative or pessimistic attitudes about working conditions, and harassing or bullying junior colleagues. The motivation for this latter form of behaviour was explained in terms of either bullying junior colleagues who might be perceived as a 'threat' in terms of their academic potential, or exploiting their intellectual ideas without giving authorship credit.

The notion of acting as a role model and having credibility mirrors one of the 13 forms of 'leader behaviours' identified by Bryman in his meta-analysis of the literature about leadership in higher education (Bryman 2007). In other words, having academic standing is a prerequisite. However, being a role model is largely associated with the qualifications needed to *become* a professor. In *being* a professor, respondents referred to additional qualities.

Mentor

A second key quality identified by respondents was the primary importance attached to being a *mentor* to less experienced colleagues through encouraging and nurturing the potential of others. The language used to describe being a mentor varied, including words such as 'facilitator', 'guide to others' and 'nurturer'. An interviewee explained that the practical reality of her role as a mentor was that it had cost her 'a fortune in taking people for coffee'. More poetically, another respondent described his motto as a leader in terms of the following Welsh proverb:

> 'a fo ben bid bont' means that the person who would be a leader must also be a bridge (i.e. a bridge to assist people to develop – even if this means leaving the organisation).

The word 'mentoring' was used frequently by both respondents and interviewees. A number of examples were given of practices that were considered as constituting this type of activity:

- advising on sources of funding;
- advising on publication outlets for research;
- co-supervision of PhD students;
- co-authorship;
- applying for research grants with less experienced colleagues;
- sitting on an external fellowship panel;
- helping colleagues to develop their intellectual ideas/thinking;
- encouraging colleagues not to 'give up' if they have had a paper or grant proposal rejected.

The importance of the mentoring role related to the stage at which respondents had become professors. Greater importance was attached to this role by those who had become professors in mid to late career. Some of these professors felt that their best academic work was probably behind them. Some were nearing the end of their career, and so placed more emphasis on the notion of mentoring as a means of passing on the benefit of their experience to others.

Another perception was that the professor should act as a kind of 'buffer', protecting colleagues from some of the internal and external pressures faced by academics in terms of institutional demands:

> I tried to create a situation in which colleagues and students could best flourish. This entailed, negatively, being a buffer between them and internal and external pressures, and, positively, never ceasing to look for ways of advancing and encouraging individuals and groups.

A number of respondents identified the importance of the professor acting as someone who nurtures colleagues with potential. Part of this role was regarded as being a 'talent spotter' able to point colleagues in the right direction. Often this involves getting colleagues to take intellectual risks, described by one interviewee as 'giving them the confidence to fly and jump off, when they think there might not be a safety net'. Other comments that represent this perspective include the following:

securing and harnessing the intellectual capital of those members of the university within your purview.

My view is that professors should have an organic role to play as an intellectual leader and motivator … My sense is that more should be made of universities themselves as a place of learning with the inherent aspects of 'risk' and 'experimentation'.

Advocate

Another strong theme was the idea of being an *advocate* for one's discipline or profession. This was explained by several respondents in terms of being intellectually active and engaged in explaining and promoting key ideas, debating issues and lobbying on behalf of the subject. Being a professor implies having certain commitments which can be both theoretical and socio-political in nature. A professor may be known, in large part, for their advocacy of things related to their subject, such as improving industrial relations, access to education, preventing blindness or understanding an ancient civilisation or culture. Advocacy can be quite specialised in nature, such as championing a particular theoretical perspective, or a more populist position in connecting one's scholarly interests with a public campaign (e.g. women's rights, climate change or reforming penal policy). Being an advocate goes well beyond researching or publishing 'a lot'. It is about being, in the words of one respondent, an 'independent champion' of a cause.

Moreover, a number of professors in the humanities and social sciences were conscious that their disciplines were coming under increasing pressure to justify their relevance to society in a more 'business' oriented era of higher education. Here, there was a recognition that explaining and advocating the importance of one's discipline was an important part of being a professor in the modern era:

What we have to do [as professors] is to develop and defend the profession … we need to defend the intellectual content of what we do. (Professor of English)

Here, what was seen as a lack of public understanding of, or perhaps sympathy with, the importance of the discipline needed to be addressed by professors as intellectual leaders. This demanded a commitment to 'engagement' work, such as writing for the popular press, being interviewed on radio or television, or making links with schools or business and community organisations. For the professor of English, this work meant explaining how her research, which had analysed early textual representations of one of the health professions, was relevant to how the profession defined its role today. This professor was also keen to defend her subject from criticisms based on perceptions of (a lack of) vocational relevance, arguing that 'there is no such thing as useless knowledge'.

While professors in humanities and social science fields can be concerned about public perceptions of the relevance of their discipline, professors in science are often committed to trying to improve public understanding of complex ideas. This demands engagement with members of the public in a variety of ways:

It is important to be able to communicate at different levels. Science is a very complicated area, and I think the ability to put that over to the general public is an important part of what I do … over the weekend I spent Friday, Saturday and Sunday at a patient conference where I gave two lectures and I was on an expert panel answering questions from patients and their relatives. (Professor of Oncology)

Guardian

Another quality associated with professorial leadership is being a guardian (or 'steward') of academic standards and associated values. Upholding the principles of good scholarship is a key part of the responsibilities of senior academics when working as editors, peer reviewing contributions to journals, or in undertaking any number of other 'gatekeeping' or 'pro bono' activities, such as examining doctoral candidates or reviewing papers, that determine who receives recognition and advancement in their discipline or professional field.

Being a guardian is part of a professor's 'good citizen' role. In many respects it represents the shift in role that takes place when someone becomes a professor. Whilst becoming a professor demands a focus on a great deal of (often individualised) personal achievement, being a professor implies undertaking 'parenting' or 'reciprocal' duties, such as reviewing and editing. To some extent this is a natural progression. Research-active academics, regardless of whether they are professors, normally acquire an increasing number of guardianship duties or responsibilities as they become more experienced and better known in their field. However, as respondents and interviewees made clear, not all professors are prepared to 'give back' in this way.

An implicit part of guardianship is nurturing the next generation of academics, ensuring that, as one professor expressed it, 'I pass on the baton'. Here, professors are concerned about what might be termed 'succession planning' by ensuring that their own research interests are taken forward after their retirement by younger colleagues:

> I think it is necessary to, when we are looking at a research structure, to have people coming through the ranks and aspiring to the next step on the ladder. Otherwise when you drop off the edge, if you don't have anyone else in that discipline, that discipline just dies. (Professor of Oncology)

> the whole of the professoriate should be very conscious of bringing on the next generation of the academy because, although they would like to, professors do not go on forever. (Professor of Law)

This element of guardianship is about ensuring continuity and the survival of disciplinary specialisms in an increasingly competitive world of epistemological fragmentation.

Acquisitor

While income-generation activities were not regarded by most respondents as such a high priority as their institutions might wish, there was a view that professors must also be *acquisitors* of grants, contracts, resources and other commercial opportunities. A professor without a research centre, or at least in possession of research grants and doctoral students, is unlikely to be able to exercise as much intellectual influence over others. Resources bring the power to influence and also, to some extent, the power of independence from other institutional demands such as management and teaching.

Being an acquisitor is also related to supporting younger researchers. A number of professors explained that, while their role was, in part, to acquire research grants, these funds were necessary to support their less experienced colleagues and research assistants, whose time could be costed on a more economic basis. Hence, professors can find themselves in a position where their own time is too expensive to conduct

research, and act principally as an acquisitor of funds and in writing up articles for publication.

> I do very little real research myself now … my role mainly involves getting research grants and project management.

Professors in science areas where team-based working is the norm tend to face this pressure more strongly. They also see income generation as a relatively more legitimate part of their role than professors in the arts and humanities.

Ambassador

Finally, in an external-facing capacity, some respondents referred to the importance of the professor acting as an *ambassador* on behalf of the university, representing its interests on the national and international stage.

Being 'visible' or 'out and about' were seen as vital activities for a professor, to both maintain their national and international profile and as a means of promoting the reputation of the university. Examples given of this type of activity included giving keynote addresses at academic conferences, and participating in international recruitment and research collaboration with other universities or commercial organisations. These activities were a means of providing the university with a higher public and sector-wide profile. Here, there is perhaps some cross-over with the 'advocate' role. Being an ambassador, though, implies promoting the university and the department, whereas being an advocate was associated more closely with promoting conceptual and socio-political perspectives often connected closely with the discipline.

Table 4 summarises the qualities of the professor as a leader. Collectively, they incorporate a commitment as both a local, in serving the institution, and as a cosmopolitan, in contributing toward the development of the discipline or profession. This suggests that professors see themselves as 'cosmo-locals' (Goldberg 1976), with an orientation that combines commitment to both internal and external communities.

It is unlikely in practice that all professors will necessarily be able to live out all these qualities. Quite apart from differences in personality, respondents recognised there are different 'types' of professors. In part this is due to institutional differences between pre-1992 and post-1992 UK universities, with the former placing more emphasis on research leadership and the latter expecting a greater continued contribution to

Table 4.   The qualities of the professor as a leader.

Role model	through personal scholarship, teaching, leadership and management, influence within the discipline or profession, publication, grants, awards and other research achievements
Mentor	to less experienced colleagues within and without the institution
Advocate	for the discipline or profession; explaining, arguing, promoting, debating, lobbying, campaigning
Guardian	of standards of scholarship and academic values within the discipline or profession
Acquistor	of grants, resources, research students, contracts and other commercial opportunities
Ambassador	on behalf of the university in external relations both nationally and internationally

teaching and administration. Two respondents from post-1992 universities commented that their management role was indistinguishable from their professorial role. More often than not, undertaking a hybrid role was seen as a struggle and sometimes even dysfunctional. There are also differences in professorial leadership related to the discipline. There may be less expectation of acquisition of grants and other resources for professors in some areas of the arts or humanities, for example, than in the biomedical sciences. Similarly, some professorial appointments are closely linked to areas of public and social policy where an individual might be expected to play a more visible role as an advocate.

Conclusion

Professors represent a considerable intellectual asset to institutions, but their work as intellectual leaders needs to be recognised more explicitly in terms of both its moral and functional value. There was a strong feeling among many professors that institutions might draw more on their skills and expertise. In other words, whilst they are recognised for their expertise as cosmopolitans, they could contribute much more as locals. However, there is clearly a degree of mismatch between what professors see as their role and how they perceive the expectations of their university employers. This means, among other things, that professors feel too often excluded from the life of the university, or in contributing toward its leadership and management.

These findings are closely related to the impact of a culture of performativity (Ball 2003) and new managerialism (Deem and Brehony 2005) on academic life. While this survey drew largely on professors working in the UK, the results are likely to be of relevance to other national contexts, such as Australia, where similar trends may be observed (Harman 2002). Although the pressure to publish has long been one of the 'traditional rules' of research (Brew 2001), new performative ones have now emerged connected with meeting the demands of research audit and income generation on the basis of full economic cost. The sense of exclusion from managerial decision-making, expressed by many professors, is related, in turn, to the effects of new managerialism in breaking the link between the professoriate and their historic role as heads of department and influential members of university senates. The performative culture of the modern university has now subcontracted elements of mentoring and specialist support work, that might have previously been associated with the role of a professor, to research support units that offer specialist bid writing (Kirkland 2008), to educational development units offering support in relation to learning and teaching processes, and a host of other para-academic services. This means that, while many professors are still committed to often time-consuming mentoring and support activities, modern institutions are increasingly developing systems to release them from such duties in order to focus their efforts in a more economically efficient manner.

Despite the development of research and teaching support services, though, the basic conundrum facing universities (and professors) is that there is still a mismatch between the behavioural characteristics required to become a professor, demanding a focus on individual performativity, and the characteristics which make good professorial leaders. This necessitates a broader set of skills in nurturing and facilitating the development of others, and a more selfless and team-based ethic. University research management can only support, rather than replace, professorial academic duty in this regard. The issue is neatly summarised by the following respondent:

promotion to professorial level is seldom based upon leadership performance but rather individual performance metrics. Accordingly it can be a challenge for professors to develop effective leadership skills.

In response to these findings, institutions might look at ways of developing (clearer) role descriptions for professors (distinct from additional, formal management roles), which could draw on some of the qualities identified in this article. There is also a need to consider development and mentoring programmes for newly appointed professors, which currently few institutions have in place. Taking forward such an agenda is critical if universities are to maximise the full potential of their leading academics.

Acknowledgment

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