Bournemouth University

Academic Career Frameworks: Key to Change?

A Case Study from Bournemouth University

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A Case Study from Bournemouth University

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Disclaimer: Please note that the views expressed in this report are solely those of the author who undertook the research and are not necessarily those of Bournemouth University.

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Acknowledgement: This report was developed with funding from the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education under the Innovation and Transformation scheme (www.lfhe.ac.uk/ITF). Professor Bennett would like to thank Dr Sally Worth who worked on the project as the independent researcher undertaking the interviews with Bournemouth University staff. He would also like to express his sincere thanks to all those members of staff who contributed to this project and who have committed themselves to supporting subsequent stages. Professor Bennett is also grateful for the guidance and support of John Lakin, project coordinator for the ITF projects funded by the Leadership Foundation. A number of HR directors and senior staff were also interviewed as part of this project, they are not listed here in order to preserve their anonymity but none the less their contribution has been invaluable; thank you! Finally the research was undertaken with the ethics consent of Bournemouth University and Professor Bennett is grateful for the support of the relevant ethics panel within the University and to staff of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Office who helped facilitate this research.

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1.0 Executive summary

In theory academic career frameworks have a critical role in the delivery of institutional strategic objectives, in creating effective and efficient employees, as well as balancing competing pressures on academic time. Getting it right matters, and has implications for the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of higher education, which is core to the Diamond Review. Bournemouth University (BU) introduced a new academic career framework in 2014 providing an opportunity for a case study based longitudinal study of the impact of changing a career framework on: (1) the strategic objectives of an HEI; (2) improving the efficiency and performance of an academic workforce; and (3) in supporting academic career development, talent and well-being. This project is therefore in two parts. In the first part, reported here, we draw on the BU experience in introducing a new career framework, placing it in a sector-wide context, to draw out the learning opportunities for all. In the second part, to be delivered in 2018, we will report on the longitudinal case study established in 2015 with the support of the Innovation and Transformation Fund, on the impact of BU's new career framework, both on the delivery of its strategic objectives, and also on the progression and performance of its staff.

In completion of the first phase of the project, we have the following recommendation to make for any institutions considering substantial modification to their academic career framework:

- Specialist versus generalist career frameworks. This is a crucial decision from the outset, and depends on an institution's long-term financial health and strategic direction. There is much to be said for a more generalist approach in terms of reducing risk both institutionally and for staff themselves, not to mention the benefits for students of working with academics who are engaged in education, research and practice. Such a strategy has the added benefit of maintaining flexibility within the workforce and is likely to be more cost-efficient. There is a real, and perceived, risk however, that staff become too general to be able to perform at the highest levels and devote the time needed to compete, for example, internationally at least in terms of research. Theoretically larger, financially robust institutions with a stable long-term academic strategy are likely to be able to tolerate a more specialist approach than ones with a less certain future and time variable strategy. One can speculate that this might lead to a growing divergence in the future between different sorts of institutions and their staffing models, as current changes in the UK higher education sector start to make themselves felt. It is important to note that there is a real risk with increased specialism that the duality of research and teaching will become increasingly stretched, at least at an undergraduate level. Whether the benefits of this duality are real or not, they are certainly perceived (and marketed) as being important within the sector, and define for some the very nature and value of a university education.
- Strategy dance. I have already alluded to the importance of strategic stability and there is an argument to be made that a career framework should perhaps be sufficiently robust to outlive short-term institutional strategies, especially in times as turbulent as those in UK higher

education sector at present. While aligning career frameworks to institutional strategic plans, typically with life cycles of 3 to 5 years, may in theory be desirable to their delivery, the cost of doing so may be high. The impact of doing so, in the case of BU, will only become clear in 2018 when the results of the longitudinal monitoring become available. In this case, it may perhaps depend on whether the much-vaulted concept of 'fusion' embedded in the new career framework succeeds in galvanising staff to deliver across a range of agendas, receiving appropriate career recognition along the way, or whether it is something that is quietly dropped in future strategic plans. Only time will tell.

- Evolution versus revolution, and institutional prioritisation. Any change to staffing structures have the potential to cause anxiety and concern for the academics affected, both in terms of their institutional chances for progression, but also their sector-wide mobility in the future. The bigger the change, the bigger the potential for anxiety. This is why many institutions have adopted evolution staffing strategies, rather than going for revolution. The consequence, of course, is that staffing policy and process may never perfectly align with an institution's strategy and goals. The ideal would be to achieve revolutionary change with the minimum of disruption or anxiety with the broad constraints of what is typical in the sector. The degree to which this is possible is likely to depend on two things: (1) the relationship and degree of trust between staff, unions and senior managers; and (2) more than anything else, on the degree of institutional prioritisation and strategic focus on delivering that change in the shortest possible time, and with the least anxiety to staff. Institutional prioritisation is probably the key factor.
- Communication and the 'hurry-up and wait' syndrome. For the majority of academic staff in an institution, introducing changes to its career framework is likely to be characterised by something akin to a process of: 'hurry-up and wait'. Essentially, staff are asked to give their feedback over a short period of time and then wait, before being consulted again, and again asked to wait; and so the process proceeds. Negotiations with staff representatives and unions takes time and can't be rushed, yet for the majority of staff these periods represent episodes of extended waiting with the potential for uncertainty. As one respondent put it they are periods when 'everything is on hold'. In the case of BU the joint BU and University and College Union (UCU) negotiating team issued regular and joint messages, but in light of the feedback this was perhaps not enough; during times of change people within organisations often feel vulnerable and perceive that there is something that they are not being told, even when the organisation is being transparent in its communications. A clear and detailed communication plan is essential as is exploring new ways to involve staff in the detail of the negotiations without compromising them. The consistency of internal communication across all media and by all the senior team members is also really important, not just in terms of the overt statements but via the subtext with which they are interpreted by staff. A dedicated communication plan for projects such as these is vital as the associated resource to make it hum.

- Neutrality of leadership and institutional inheritance. Neutrality of leadership is important in ensuring that one or more types of academic activity is not perceived as being more important than another, unless that is the stated intention. Academic leads for this type of project are typically PVCs or DVC, the workhorses of strategic change, but they are not always seen as neutral leaders as they normally having responsibility for one, or more, strategic areas. This needs careful consideration at the outset. More importantly, most institutional change is a reaction to something that went before, or is driven from outside and institutional inheritance is therefore an important consideration, and is neglected at an institution's peril when managing change of this sort. For example, in the case of BU, despite the fact that the previous career framework was not biased towards research, and neither was the new one, for many staff research was still perceived as 'king' to gaining rapid promotion and progression, although the longitudinal evaluation will highlight whether or not this perception changes over time.
- Implementation. Implementation is everything to the success of changes or modifications to academic career frameworks. The infrastructure needs to be in place and investment made in translating negotiated and approved policy documents into staff-accessible guidance with numerous exemplars to facilitate the smooth running of new processes and approaches. Simply posting the new policy documents on an intranet is not enough. Coupled with this, is the need for real and sustained investment of time and energy prior to implementation with departmental leads and head. They are crucial to these types of process, and they are the people that have to implement these changes both formally, and even more crucially, informally through the support and guidance they provide. This can be challenging since departmental leaders, in some cases, may themselves feel threatened or uneasy with the very changes they have to implement having been promoted under previous schema and regimes.

2.0 Introduction: project overview

Academic career frameworks have a critical role in the delivery of institutional strategic objectives, in creating effective and efficient employees, as well as balancing competing pressures on academic time. Within the UK, some academic career frameworks allow for increased specialisation, while others favour a more generalist approach. It is a sector-wide contrast that is reflected in microcosm within Bournemouth University (BU) where a new academic career framework was launched in the autumn of 2014, following a period of staff engagement, negotiation and consultation with the Union. The career framework in part represents a shift from a specialist- to a more generalist-model. This change provides an opportunity for a longitudinal case study on the impact of a new framework in delivering: (1) the strategic objectives of a higher education institution; (2) improving the efficiency and performance of an academic workforce; and (3) in supporting academic development, talent and well-being. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to share the lessons learnt with the wider sector.

In 2012 BU launched BU2018 at the heart of which is the concept of 'fusion' which emphasises the synergies between research, education and professional practice. Key is the concept of the 'triple win' when one activity contributes outputs to all three areas. Its origins, in part, stem from re-balancing a perceived competition in terms of academic workload and progression/reward between research and education. It also reflects the increasing emphasis placed on employability, professional skills and societal drivers in UK higher education policy. BU's new career framework favours a more generalist 'fused' contribution and contrasts with the previous framework which favoured specialism in academic function and career pathway and was based on common practice in the sector. Formulation of BU2018 involved extensive staff conversations as did the development of the new framework. On the one hand, the senior team looks to the framework to enhance delivery of BU2018, while on the other staff hope that it will redress perceived imbalances in opportunity for both progression and reward.

This project is therefore in two parts. In the first part, reported here, we draw on the BU experience in development and implementing a new career framework, placing it in a sector-wide context, to draw out the learning opportunities for all. In the second part, to be reported finally in 2018, we will report on the longitudinal case study established in 2015 with the support of the Innovation and Transformation Fund on the impact of BU's new career framework both on the delivery of its strategic objectives and also on the progression and performance of its staff. We can therefore set out the research questions as follows:

- Part One. What are the theoretical implications of different career framework models along the specialist to generic continuum?
- Part One. What can be learnt from the experiences at Bournemouth in introducing a new academic career framework that will be of value to the wider higher education sector?
- Part Two. Did the changes to the academic career framework at Bournemouth, introduced in 2014, aid the delivery of the institutional strategic objectives as set out in its vision and values BU2018?
- Part Two. What were the consequence for staff at Bournemouth, in terms of their career progression and effectiveness of the changes introduced in 2014, to the career framework?

The purpose of this report is to summarise the main findings to the first two questions and provide a resource that will be mined for future academic papers and dissemination activity in the coming months. Before describing the project structure and methods further we will first discuss the theoretical contrast, and its implications, between specialist and generalist career frameworks.

3.0 Career frameworks and efficiency

For a university, the most important set of tools comprises the people that work there. Having the right workforce, and one that is well-cared for, well-remunerated and well-motivated, is arguably the best way of delivering a university's strategic aims. Academic career frameworks, with their job descriptions, professional development schema, career pathways and pay or reward packages, have a critical role in delivering these, and in creating effective and efficient employees while balancing competing pressures on academic time, especially in a sector undergoing substantial change.

The pressure for specialist academic contributions is huge, as institutions try to find a unique market niche, and as the competitive pressures in the UK such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the National Student Survey bite (NSS). In the UK, having staff that specialise in either research or education has become a growing trend over the past decade. This has developed to such an extent in some institutions that there are now two distinct 'job families' in some academic career frameworks and it is common these days to have 'themed' professors in for example education or professional practice. This reflects the arrival of new agendas, including the increasing emphasis placed on universities in government policy as drivers of regional economic development and the commoditisation of research output (e.g., Oliveira, 2000; Jessop et al., 2008; Bonaccorsi et al., 2010; Hewitt-Dundas, 2012). With introduction of higher fees and the lifting of recruitment caps in the UK the marketization of higher education in the last five years has increasingly led universities to compete against one another more overtly than ever before (e.g., Molesworth et al., 2009, 2010; Foskett, 2010; Brown and Carasso, 2013). The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to be introduced shortly in the UK will add another dimension to this[1].

Career frameworks have become, in some cases, more complex, through a constant process of gradual evolution, in response to rapid changes in the external policy environment, and to accommodate university strategic responses to these changes. Different career progression routes have emerged, and by blending different types of specialist academic, an institution with a mix of strategic objectives can, in theory, focus simultaneously on different priorities, bringing specialist tools to bear on multiple agendas simultaneously. Specialisation of staff also allows optimisation of statistical returns; perhaps the best example of this is the institutional game-playing around Research Excellence returns[2]. The alternative to specialisation is to have a more flexible workforce that can deliver on all agendas, in which education and research are seen as truly synergistic, not only serving the research needs of society, but also its demand for graduate employees. Into this mix one has to introduce the demands of knowledge transfer and internationalisation. A career framework based on the generalist unashamedly focuses on developing staff that can contribute to all areas of activity and

[1] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/teaching-excellence-framework-tef-everything-you-need-to-know
[2] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/winners-and-losers-in-hefce-funding-allocations/2019306.article

runs counter to the trend for more specialist roles (Fig. 1). In truth this is perhaps a rather polarised view along what is, in practice, best seen as a continuum and most UK academic career frameworks chart a path along a mid-ground in which some specialisation is encouraged but without loss of at least one other area of contribution. Nonetheless it is a continuum that is worth exploring, since there are number of logical implications that follow from it.

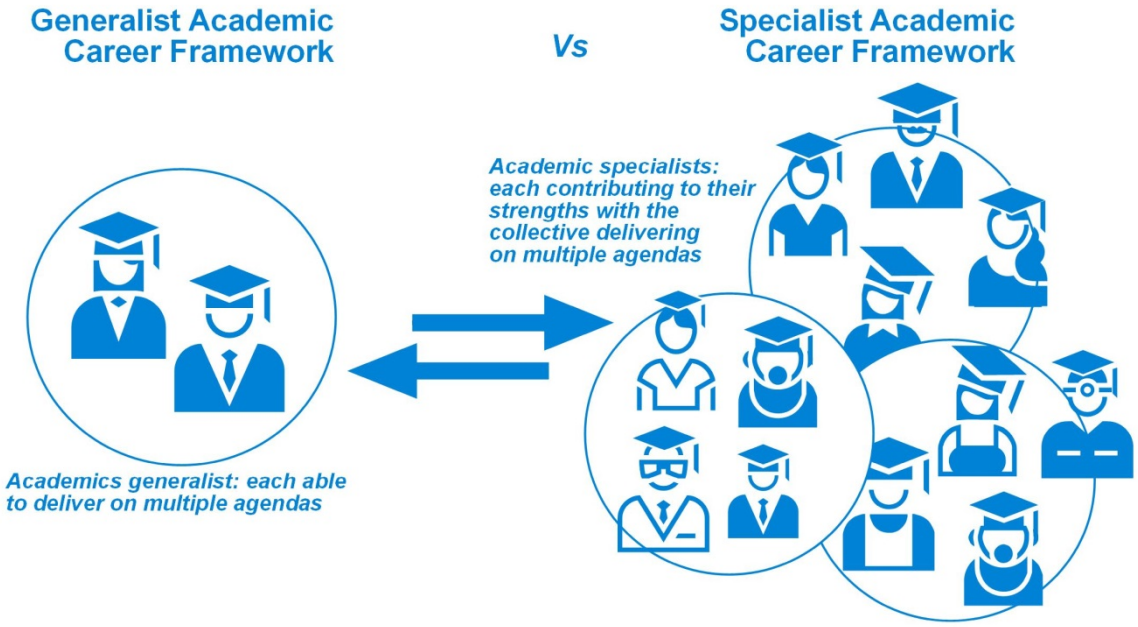

Figure 1: Generalist versus specialist academic career frameworks. Each circle represents a sphere of expertise which may in some cases be defined via such things as job families or progression routes.

For some academics the epitome of what a university should be is expressed by the Prussian educational reformer Wilhelm von Humboldt's (1767-1835) ideals of *Lernfreiheit* (freedom to learn) and *Lehrfreiheit* (freedom to teach and research) and the core idea of the unity of research and teaching (Braeckman et al., 2004; Nyubom, 2003). It is a concept that is much-repeated in policy documents and university marketing materials (Jenkins et al., 2003). Setting aside issues of whether the Humboldt ideal ever really existed (Anderson, 2004; Ash, 2006), and its relevance to modern universities (e.g., Beaumanns, 2009; Simons, 2006; Long, 2010), one could argue that the trend for specialist career routes challenges the central tenant that research and teaching are synergistic. For example, staff members that become classified, via a career framework, as "teaching-only" clearly have their freedom of choice curtailed. The separation of research from teaching is common in other educational systems beyond the UK (Braeckman et al., 2004) and is perhaps something that is taking place (or may take place) increasingly within the UK as the market drives speciation with, for example, traditional research-orientated universities becoming distinct from those that focus solely on teaching (Martin, 2012).

The question as to whether this actually matters is open to debate. There is a rich and contradictory body of research around the actual benefits of the research-teaching synergy (e.g., Hughes and Tight 1995; Hattie and Marsh, 1996; Clark 1997; Verbugh et al., 2007), although many academics still hold to the *belief* that it is critical to a university education irrespective of what can be shown or not via observed data (e.g., Brew and Boud 1995; Noser et al., 1996; Rowland, 1996; Martin, 1997; Brew, 1999, 2003; Kreber 2000; Zamorski 2002). In evidence of this, you only have to look at the fact that the majority of undergraduate degrees within the UK still contain some form of independent research-based dissertation (Garde-Hansen and Calvert, 2007). Furthermore, most academics would agree that learning to read critically, to think and question, thereby leading to discovery and challenge, is the very essence of the research process, and is a core component of what any undergraduate degree should provide. It is perhaps central to creating the adaptive long-term learner (i.e., researcher) that will provide society with a workforce capable of delivering on roles that have not even been conceived of yet. Irrespective of where one stands with respect to the importance of the research-education duality, what is clear is that the different ends of the career framework generalist to specialist spectrum have implications for how this duality is maintained in the future and perhaps the future speciation of different types of university (Sörlin, 2007; Martin, 2012). Perhaps this has implications even in the future to the very definition of what a university, or university education, in the UK actually stands for?

The career framework spectrum has a further logical implication with respect to the efficiency and cost effectiveness of higher education, which goes to the core of the Diamond Review[3]. This refers to the absolute staffing quantum that is required to deliver a university's strategic mission. An institution's academic staff base is dependent on many internal and external factors, including such things as: institutional legacy, financial capacity, strategic function, staff-student ratios which inform league tables, and the academic footprint of a particular institution. However, setting these considerations aside for a moment, one could logically argue that a specialist workforce is likely to be less cost-efficient than one which has a more generalist function, since you have to maintain and reward high performing staff who deliver specialist functions relevant to each strategic objective. In contrast you need fewer staff if they can turn their hands to a range of tasks (Fig. 1) although balancing their workloads becomes more imperative. Logically, therefore in the context of driving greater efficiency in Higher Education, there is perhaps an argument for a more generalist workforce[4]. Whether one agrees with this or not, the question should be asked even if in practice the answer is not very clear. The counterargument, of course, is that while the staffing quantum for a generalist academic staff base may be less, the output that they can achieve, and therefore the income that they attract, may also be less. An argument that can summarised simply as: 'A Jack (or Jill) of all trades, but a master of none'. The cost-benefit modelling needed to elucidate this type of question in quantitative terms lies beyond the scope of this project. Yet cost-benefit analysis is something that should perhaps be taken in to account in strategic workforce planning and change. Notwithstanding the need for further

[3] http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/EfficiencyEffectivenessValueForMoney.aspx#.VjdQG01tqpo; Diamond (1995)

[4] To be clear cost saving was not a motivation in the adoption of a generalist framework at BU.

research in this area, one can suggest that for a university of modest means, aspiring to a broad range of strategic objectives, perhaps typical of the 'squeezed-middle' in some market views[5,6], then efficiency and cost-effectiveness may lie in developing a multi-talented, versatile academic workforce that can contribute across all, or most, strategic areas or at any one time. In this context, the trend towards more specialist career framework may in fact be, if not dangerous, certainly potentially a less cost-effective solution. There is also perhaps less at risk for the staff themselves in a generalist approach since specialist functions can become redundant as strategic priorities and funding regimes change.

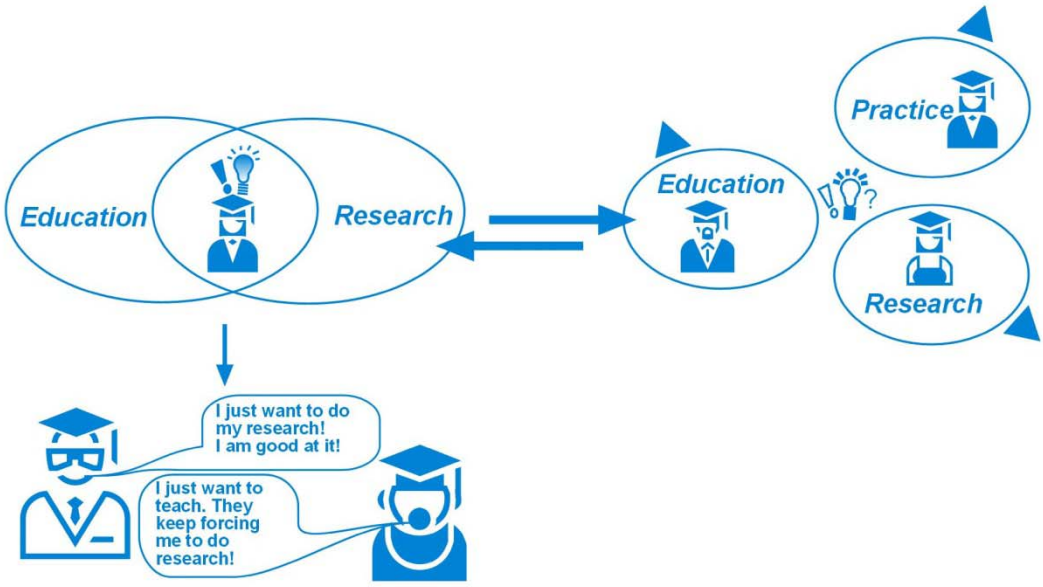

Figure 2: Is the Humboldt ideal being pulled apart by the trend for increasingly specialist academic workforces?

4.0 Project structure and methods

The project contains two work-streams one of which is reported here, while other must await the outcome of the longitudinal study in 2018. It is important to state upfront that this work is written from the perspective of an insider within the organisation, with all the associated risks and potential benefits (e.g., Asselin, 2003; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Mercer, 2007). To offset the potential risks and ensure that information was always forthcoming, open and honest, an independent research consultant (Dr Sally Worth) was used for all the BU-based data-collection. All the responses were anonymised in line with the full ethical approval granted by Bournemouth University for the work.

The first work-stream is based around the idea of learning from the BU experience. The first part of this draws on the extensive and untapped archive that exists of the staff conversations around: firstly,

[5] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/dreaming-the-impossible-dream-is-no-strategy-for-the-squeezed-middle/417823.article
[6] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/squeezed-middle-feels-pinch-as-grant-and-numbers-decline/419473.article

the formulation of BU2018 and fusion; and secondly around the revision of the academic career framework. Independent opinion of this process was sought via a focus groups and interviews undertaken by the external and independent researcher. To place this in a sector-wide context, a number of interviews were held with Human Resources specialists at other universities who had introduced or modified academic career frameworks in recent years.

The second work-stream focused on establishing baseline data between January and July 2015 from which to monitor the impact and success of the new academic career framework between its introduction in 2014 and the end of the current strategic planning cycle in 2018. This data was again collected by the independent researcher, and consisted of departmental focus groups, coupled with individual interviews, as well as the collation of metric-based output data. Three academic groups were selected from different faculties at BU and feedback was gathered via focus groups in the summer of 2015. In addition, a call was issued for volunteers to anyone who had engaged with a BU development programme over the last ten years. From a total of over 60 academic volunteers the independent researcher selected 18 from a range of grades and faculties with a clear gender balance. The selected academics were then interviewed individually by the independent researcher and the results reported anonymously. This will be repeated in the summers of 2016, 2017 and 2018 before a final report is produced. The baseline data does not form part of this report but has been compiled and lodged with Organisational Development at BU who will take responsibility for the monitoring going forward. The aim is to explore how the new career framework has impacted on individual academics changing their aspirations, performance/efficiency, academic development and delivery. This will be combined with output monitoring both for the academic groups and the individuals. The intention is to provide progress updates during this period of time, although the final analysis will be completed in the summer of 2018.

5.0 Bournemouth case study

5.1: Institutional background

Bournemouth University (BU) is a medium sized (*circa*. 17,000 students), mid-ranking higher education institution with a broad portfolio of courses recently re-organised around four key faculties (Science and Technology, Health, Media and Management). It received polytechnic status in 1991 and university title in 1992 and its rapid growth during the 1990's and early 2000's was fuelled largely by vocational courses, for which it had a strong reputation. In 2005 a change of Vice-Chancellor saw a change in ambition and a drive toward improved research performance. This involved re-profiling the academic workforce through severance and re-investment, along with a range of staff development initiatives focused on releasing and developing the potential of existing staff to deliver academic outputs, in addition to education (i.e. research, enterprise and professional practice) during

the time created in their workloads by improving efficiencies in the delivery of taught curricula. As part of this process of transformation, renegotiation of contractual terms and conditions took place leading to the introduction of a local framework agreement with the unions in 2008[7]. Essentially this was a move away from a teaching-orientated contract which documented hours to one based on a broader foundation of academic endeavour. This was supported by the universities first integrated academic career framework. This framework was colloquially known as the 'four pillars', and based around research, education, enterprise and professional practice. Staff members were able to pursue specialist academic career pathways in any of the four areas provided they maintained some form of modest contribution in at least two other areas. Themed professorial positions (i.e. Professor in Education etc.) were introduced along with the role of Associate Professor (Grade 10) to facilitate the leap from Senior Lecturer to Professor. This grade was effectively tenured, since if one did not make the transition to full professor in five years one would return, in theory, to the original grade from which you were promoted. The issues of Grade-9 Principal Lecturer which had previously been a point of issue in the institution, was not directly dealt with. While all four 'pillars' are, according to written policy, of equal value, the perception on the ground was that the only currency for promotion was that of research, given the emphasis placed by the senior leadership team on research advancement at that time.

The impact of all these changes on the institution was profound and the in RAE2008 Bournemouth was the fourth most improved university in the country.

Culturally, however, the staff-base, many of whom had entered from industry or had little research ambition, was sceptical. It is safe to assume that some staff within the organisation were not completely comfortable with its new persona, and the emphasis on curriculum change to facilitate the release of time for research, in some opinions, may have compromised the student experience. With a change in Vice-Chancellor in 2010 the institution began to re-balance its focus with the importance of education being re-emphasised, a move that was reinforced by poor results in the National Student Survey in 2011. The net result was a new vision and values launched in 2012 called 'BU2018' in which a balanced portfolio of activity was duly emphasised. This is embodied within a concept known of fusion – the fusion of research, education and professional practice, such that the whole is greater than the sum of the component parts. In essence, it was a way of favouring activity which yields a strong staff and student experience, and attempts to remove the competing pressures of education, research and practice. Fusion is a core part of the University's vision and supported by ambitious investment in pump-priming and estate. The strategic plan that followed was distinct in that it integrated the three areas into one document underpinned by an estate, people and finance strategy. The integration was achieved via three banners creating, sharing and inspiring and did away with traditional strategy areas such as research and education (Fig. 3).

[7] BU formally recognises both Unison and the University and Colleges Union (UCU).

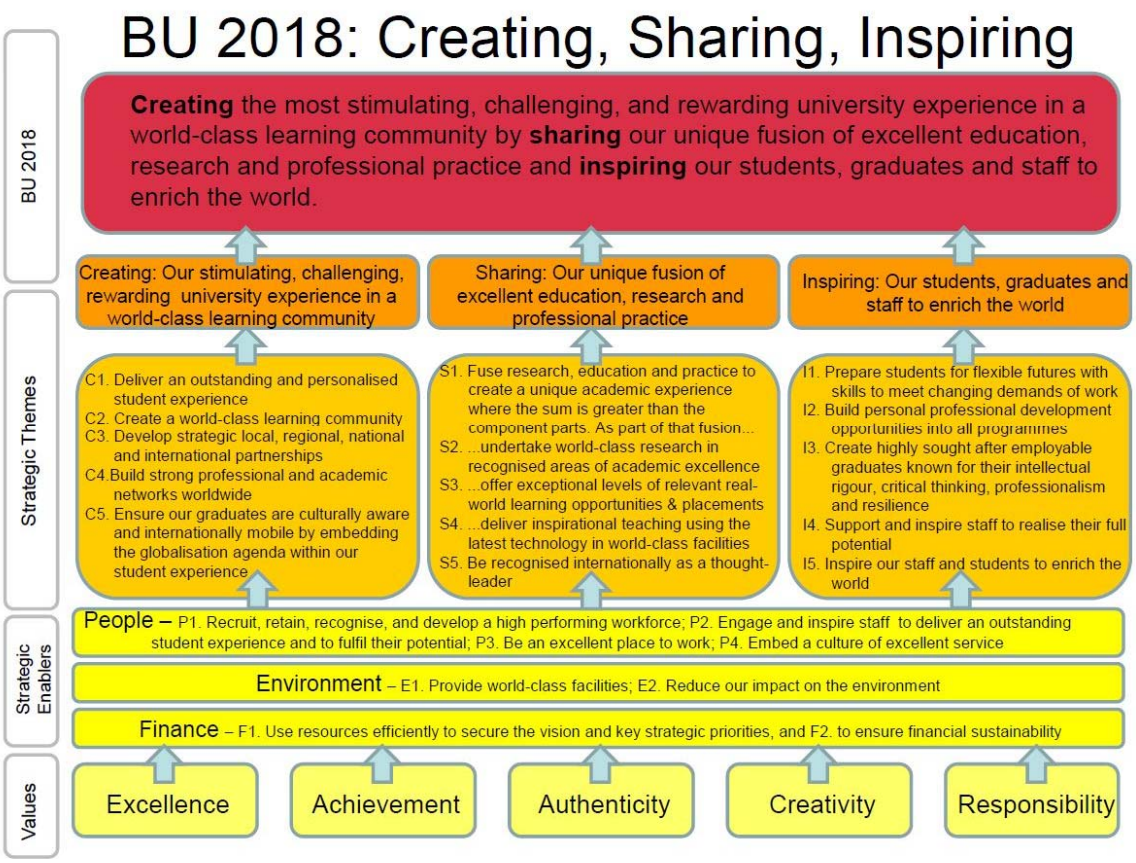

Figure 3: Bournemouth University (BU) strategy map.

Critical here was the commitment given to revise the academic career structure and align it to fusion. While this was also motivated by a range of procedural and practice issues that had arisen around the 'four pillars' of academic practice, it was also driven by a wish to re-balance the perceived, although not actual, emphasis on research in the previous framework. The process of revising the academic career structure started in the summer of 2013.

5.2: Fusion of the 'four pillars'

Versions of the academic framework, known as the Four Pillars at BU, are now quite common across the higher education sector in the UK. Its aim was to allow staff to specialise in areas of strength, in this case – enterprise, research, education or practice – while also ensuring that a range of other activities are competently covered. Staff needed to demonstrate a strong performance in one of the areas and a contribution in two others (Fig. 4A). It is worth noting that the job descriptions that underpinned this were however from a single family, unlike some schema, allowing staff to change or evolve their focus of activity through time easily. The challenge at BU was that, irrespective of what the policy documents actually said, the perception was that the 'research pillar' was the only way to advance. This was compounded by a lack of clear articulation within the institutions of what

'professional practice' actually was when the career framework was first introduced. The ability to measure research by such things as papers published and grants won also reinforced this. A contribution to education was measured more by input (i.e. units taught) than by output and the framework pre-dated the professional standards of the Higher Education Academy[8]. Initial attempts in 2008 to get educational output measured by student unit feedback met with resistance from both staff and union and so were quickly dropped. The key drivers for change can be summarised as:

- ***Alignment with Strategic Plan.*** Alignment with fusion to ensure a balanced individual staff contribution across the three priority areas (education, research and professional practice) identified by the university in its strategic plan BU2018.
- ***Career progression.*** To ensure clarity of progression routes for staff resolving ambiguities and uncertainties particularly around such roles as Grade 9. Dealing with the fact that the Associate Professor transition to Professor had not really worked, and a number of staff members who justified the grade of Associate Professor but not Professor were in danger of being, perhaps unfairly, demoted. There were also inconsistencies within the framework around budget and merit based promotion. For example, some promotions under the old scheme were dependent on the availability of resources and advertised roles, while others were based purely on merit and not the availability of finance.
- ***Evidence base.*** While the suite of job descriptions and person specifications were clear there was a lack of clarity around the evidence needed to articulate compliance with those especially in the case of promotion based on different grounds, for example research versus education. There was a perception that it was much harder to gain promotion via education and professional practice than by research. The mix of input and output metrics at play here accentuated these issues as discussed above. One of the common, although informal questions from staff seeking promotion was 'what is enough?' There was also a sense in the minds perhaps of some staff that the volume/quality metric was never clearly defined and consistently applied across different disciplines or areas of the university.
- ***Issues of implementation.*** A body of casework had grown up, which suggested that there might be evidence to suggest a degree of inconsistency across the university in the process around implementation, and that there was clear room for these to be improved and refined in light of the experience gained.
- ***Integration with development.*** Over the last decade staff development became central to the delivery of the University's mission with a succession of initiatives first around research and then education. In support of the four pillars a focus on Personal Development Planning linked to the annual appraisal system was introduced. In many respects this could be described a response to issues that arose from the career framework rather than underpinning and facilitating it at as matter of core principle. A sense of disconnect sometimes existed in the minds of some academics. In making changes, therefore, it was

[8] https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/UKPSF_2011_English.pdf

believed essential to underpin any new framework with an aspirational sense of personal development.

In addressing these issues one of the first challenges was to unpick what was actually meant by 'fusion'. One of the reasons that it was widely embraced initially by staff was that it was not felt to be threatening - 'it is something we have always done'. In practice, however, it quickly became clear that fusion meant different things to different members of staff and that one of the fundamental challenges was to articulate what it actually meant and to ensure that this was what the university senior leadership team understood to be the case.

Fusion was introduced as part of BU2018 to help address the potential conflict between different types of activity while also defining BU's unique student proposition. It places an emphasis on activity that combines or melds the three components of research, education and professional practice. Activity in the fused overlap (i.e. the central space on the Fusion Triangle; Fig. 4B) allows a triple-win with contributions to research, education and professional practice being achieved simultaneously. The concept of co-creation/production of knowledge with students and/or external stakeholders is one way of achieving this, while also delivering a strong student and staff experience. While distinct contributions can be made in the three areas they naturally compete for time and resource, the ideal therefore is to undertake fused activity which leads simultaneously to outputs in all areas while providing a strong student experience that is focused on societal need.

Fusion can be viewed at various scales; at the scale of an individual activity, or as the sum of an individual's contribution. It was never intended that the position of a project (or person) should be calculated precisely within the fusion triangle but theoretically it could be (Fig. 4C). In a given year, an individual may undertake a range of projects each of which will plot differently. The sum of all these activities defines an individual's contribution. It is recognised within the concept that some academics have particular strengths in education or research for example and such individuals may major in just two of the three areas, although not to the complete exclusion of the third. Consequently, all areas inside the triangle are of equal value but an individual cannot simply exist on the margins or at an apex. However the most efficient space in terms of time and resource, and that in keeping with BU2018, is in the centre where, in theory at least, a single activity delivers benefits to all three areas. In the institutional language this has become known as the 'triple-win' – one activity delivering three outputs for one's record of achievement. Finally, an academic may contribute, and more importantly define their contribution for the purposes of pay, reward and progression under the revised Career Framework in a different ways and no particular way is better than any other. For example, much of their activity may be fused and therefore they may draw upon the whole of their profile; alternatively they may demonstrate fusion through a specific project or unit. The point is that there is no right or wrong contribution. In practice, an academic may make a contribution to varying levels in research, education and professional practice and some but not all of this may be delivered via fusion. The more fused activity there is, however, the more efficient in terms of time and resource an individual's

contribution will be. Also in theory this should be a contribution that is closer to ideals around student experience set out in BU2018.

In addition to embracing the concept of fusion, there was a clear view that the university needed to shift the career framework from one based on a mix of inputs and outputs to one based, as far as possible, on outputs *achieved* or that could be *achievable,* given the opportunity. From the outset the aim was to develop a common framework that clearly defined the outputs that were expected by a particular grade and more importantly to shift the emphasis from one based on a series of hurdles or obstacles, to one based on development opportunities. The aim here was to allow the framework to be used as a development tool for staff aspiring to promotion and/or advancement. This could be defined in an academic sense as the underpinning or foundation and was the approach that was brought to bear on the project from the start. For example the project team started in the earliest of the engagement meetings with an attempt to garner staff input on what a career matrix of outputs would look like. This matrix of outputs was to become a resource for the new career framework underpinning all the job descriptions and person specifications and the reference document for development, pay and promotion progression, all of which followed after and as a consequence of the matrix. It is also potentially a fundamental performance management tool that can be used to clarify both expectations and aspirations for an academic career and it was embedded as an appendix to the career framework.

Key innovations and features of the revised career framework developed and negotiated jointly with UCU are outlined below:

- ***Local Framework Agreement.*** Amendments were made to align the local framework agreement with current policy of both the University and its recognised union UCU. In addition, changes were made to align it with the new career framework, which was primarily added as series of revised appendices.
- ***Career Matrix.*** A career matrix of outputs for each grade was created, developed by academics for academics, and agreed embedding the principles of Fusion into the new academic framework. Each cell in the matrix has a statement with a list of indicative evidence that can be used to demonstrate performance and outputs when making a case for promotion, or to aspire to in terms of developing an academic identity. Revised job descriptions and person specifications were brought in-line with the career matrix.
- ***Career Progression.*** A clear progression route between grades was introduced (Fig. 5), this renamed and redefined Grade 9 (Principal Academic), integrating it fully into a single progression route. In keeping with Fusion 'flavoured' professorial promotions (education, research, enterprise, or practice) were removed and the number of Professorial grades was reduced to one, pending a review of professorial pay and performance. The grade of Associate Professor (Grade 10) was made a permanent, rather than a tenured grade, and its difference to the managerial Grade 10 equivalent (Associate Dean or Head of Department) was articulated and clarified.

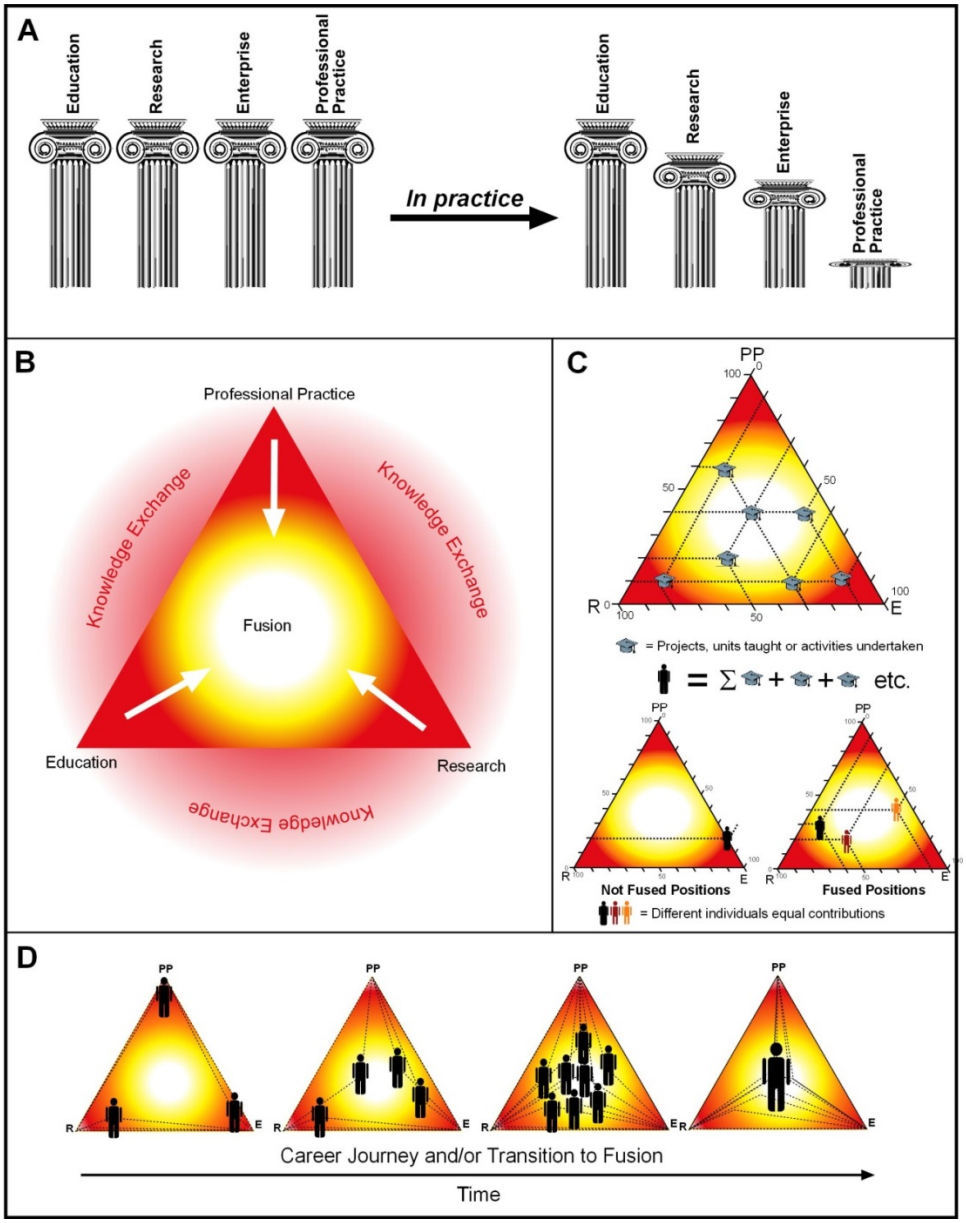

Figure 4: Career framework models and the concept of fusion used at Bournemouth University (BU).

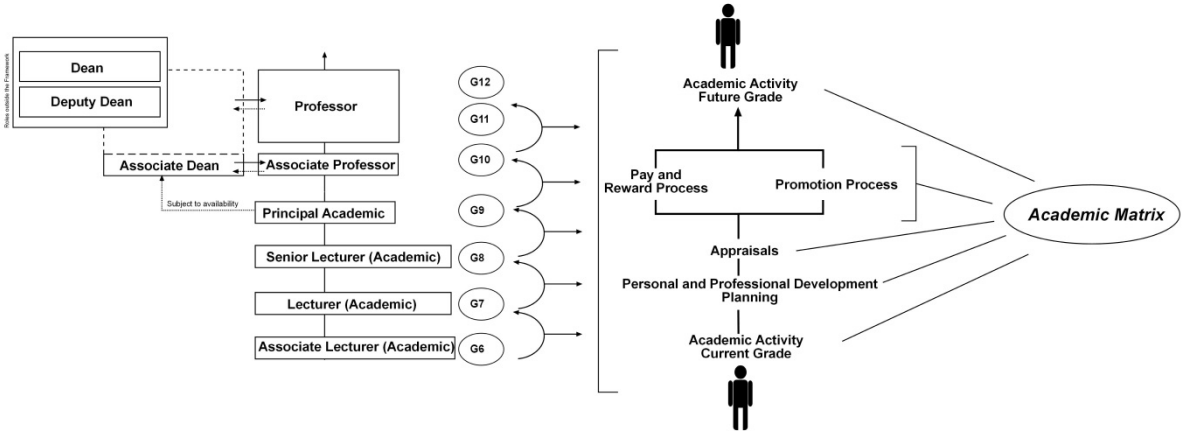

Figure 5: The Bournemouth University (BU) career framework summary.

- ***Promotion and Progression.*** The principle of merit-based promotion and pay progression was introduced for all grades. Previously budgetary restrictions were applicable to some promotions. A common process for all promotions and pay progression was introduced, involving a process of application, shortlisting and interview. Previously some promotions were paper-based, while others were not. To ensure a greater consistency in panel decision across the university a cohort of Independent Pay, Promotion, Panel Members (IPPPMs) was introduced. All panels below and including Grade 9 were to be chaired by an IPPPM, while those at Grade 10 or above were to be chaired by a member of the Senior Executive but with an IPPPM present on the panel. IPPMs were developed to deal with such things, as unconscious bias, and to be the guardians of the new policy and processes.
- ***Commitments***. A series of commitments were made to review and move research grade staff on to academic terms and conditions; to review the use of part-time hourly paid staff; and to phase out the use of the role of Associate Lecture grades (Grade 6). In addition, a promise was given to look at the appraisal system and to ensure its full integration with the revised career framework.

5.3 Staff engagement and formal negotiation, consultation and implementation

The project started under the leadership of the then PVC Research and Internationalisation (Professor Matthew Bennett) in the summer of 2013. A series of engagement sessions where held with a view to gaining critical feedback on the existing four pillars career framework. These sessions continued into the autumn of 2013, when an initial attempt was made to set up a BU-UCU working group to come up with a joint set of proposals. For a variety of reasons, the BU and UCU working group did not commence weekly meetings until March of 2014 In a spirit of positive cooperation and negotiations with joint BU-UCU staff communications this work proceeded until the summer of 2014 when a period of staff consultation by both BU and UCU was undertaken leading to firm proposals. Note that the Professor Bennett continued to lead these negotiations despite stepping down from his role as PVC in January 2014, in order to return to his own research. With the benefit of experience of being both an academic and a senior leader in the organisation, he adopted an independent stance during these negotiations, which helped to facilitate negotiations and broker the final agreement.

BU normally runs its annual pay and promotion round over the summer with an announcement of opportunities and time scales in June/July with the process running early in the autumn term with everything back dated to the start of September. A critical decision was taken in July of 2014 to delay this round, pending successful ratification of the new framework agreement scheduled at that point hopefully for August. Perhaps in hindsight this was a mistake, as discussed later since it brought immense pressure on the implementation process. As it turned out, getting approval from the National Ratification Panel of UCU for a local ballot on the framework took most of the summer, and

continued into the early autumn with a number of last-minute changes and concessions being made. The agreement went to ballot finally in October 2014, and was accepted.

The pressure to implement promotion and pay immediately under the new agreement was immense and was kicked off in December running through to February/March 2015. There was a huge amount of staff expectation about the new scheme, and that it would facilitate promotion of staff that had not prospered under the old scheme because of the perception that research was dominant. The task of implementation was huge, not least of which was recruiting and developing a set of independent panel members (IPPPMs) to sit on all pay and promotion panels. Staff felt rushed and poorly prepared for the promotion round that, unfortunately, ended up straddling the Christmas break. A lot of this discontent focused around a single item known as the Standard Academic Profile or SAP. This is basically a word template to gather information, rather like a CV and used for appraisal, pay progression and promotion purposes. It was first introduced under the previous Vice-Chancellor and underpinned the Four Pillars. In order to provide opportunity for staff to record information across the full breadth of the new career matrix, however, this template grew substantially. It has always been an unwelcome task for some staff, but this was amplified as the form grew and staff felt pressured to complete an 'onerous' form over the Christmas period. Additionally, a couple of minor mistakes in the rubric of the form accentuated these problems with staff complaining considerably about the length of time it took to complete. It created a range of issues which the university had to address via further working parties with UCU and a commitment to put the form online in due course. A second promotion round in 2015 was launched at the normal time of year, and is on-going at the time of writing.

5.4 Independent assessment

In order to gain an independent assessment of the process of consultation and implementation as part of this project, a focus group was held with a cross-section of BU staff, and chaired by the independent researcher. In addition, as part of the baseline monitoring, three departmental focus groups and 18 individual interviews were obtained from a cross-section of staff. The focus groups took place during the challenging period early in 2015 when the first round of promotions/progression interviews were taking place and this somewhat dominated the views expressed. However the departmental assessments and individual interviews were taken much later in the year May/June and contain a slightly more balanced view. The following observations are based on the anonymised notes from all of these sources as well as the reflections of the independent facilitator. The themes can be linked as follows:

- ***Speed and pace.*** There was a common sentiment that the whole process had taken a long time and could be best described as akin to 'hurry-up and wait'. Most people considered the staff engagement to be rigorous, with both top-down and bottom-up elements, but those

phases of activity and request for feedback over limited time-scales were then punctuated by long periods of silence and waiting. Additionally, most staff felt that once the process was complete there was a rush to implement and a general consensus that this was perhaps a mistake and that more preparation was needed. There is a mix of views here with some staff expressing the need for haste: 'Frustrating! Everything on hold and if you wanted promotion everything was in limbo'. While others did not see the need for the hurry and felt unprepared and supported in making their applications. Interestingly, the anticipation of the new scheme that the negotiating team felt as a pressure to implement may not have in fact been as strong as they believed at the time due in effect to the 'negotiating bubble' giving a false sense of urgency.

- ***Communication***. This theme dominated much of the feedback and many of the comments made betray a lack of understanding of the scheme and its details. A lot of the concerns raised are, in fact, covered within the policy documents but an understanding of this was clearly absent amongst many of the interviewees. This reflects perhaps a failure on the part of the implementation team to adequately communicate the detail. The problem is that the detail is by definition 'detailed' and difficult to convey. This is not just about written communication, but there was clear need for numerous worked examples, web materials, workshops and supporting sessions. Middle managers and departmental heads were clearly not any better informed themselves than the staff they were guiding, and this was a serious issue, and forms a huge learning lesson in the process.
- ***Fusion and strategic direction.*** The idea that fusion may not be here to last, was expressed by some people reflecting on the amount of institutional change that has taken place over the last decade. The view could be summarised as: 'was all this change necessary to align with a concept that might change in the near future?' Statement like 'best to keep one's head down and it will all pass' were not uncommon and a sense was expressed by some as to how dependent the concept was on individual senior managers. The focus groups also demonstrated that there is still a lot of confusion amongst some staff about what fusion actually means, and how it can be delivered at both an individual, as well as at a team level. The conflict between team and self was evident at times. A team may be offering a fused student experience collectively, so why did they need to do it individually other than the fact that promotion/progression is an individual pursuit? One individual described fusion as 'trying to hit a moving target' effectively referring to a lack of clarity about what it actually means to specific staff in different subject areas. Linked to the whole concept of fusion is this perceived need by staff to be a 'Jack or Jill of all trades' with a risk of being 'master of none'. The removal of specialisation from the career structure was manifest in some comments: 'we are now expected to excel at everything!' This is a real tension, although in fact not strictly true, since the scheme requires staff to contribute in some way to all three areas but only in a major way to two. Research is still seen by many who contributed as king. There was a perception that the impact of fusion was potentially different for different staff at different grades. For example, the implication for an aspiring early career academic was different from

that of an established professor. For the latter fusion was seen as largely irrelevant, while for the former it was a real anxiety about how they would demonstrate it and progress. Within the career framework there is a clear transition at the higher grades to leadership of fusion rather than simply its delivery, but this was not recognised by many of the staff spoken to.

- ***Inputs versus outputs.*** There was a mixed sense of views about the emphasis on outputs in the career matrix, and that inputs should not be negated or ignored. The career matrix is by definition a performance-orientated matrix, and as such is designed implicitly to encourage those that deliver quantifiable outputs. It is apparent from the feedback that this does make some staff uneasy, especially where they perceive an inequity of workload, for example between where one member of staff with a hundred students in their class compares themselves to one with only ten. There was also continuing concern about how outputs vary between disciplines and the need for this to be adequately reflected.
- ***Leadership.*** The issue of leadership was raised in various ways, pertaining both to the leadership of the overall project, as well as to local leadership during implementation. A common view can be summarised as: 'things change with new VC's and Deans; how much will things change again with future changes?' A real fear was expressed by some that future leadership changes might lead to an unpicking of the presently implemented changes. Also the independence of the leadership was questioned by some. For example, the fact that the project was led by the PVC with responsibility for research performance gave in some opinions a perceived emphasis to research in the career structure, despite the fact that it is intended to be completely balanced. This simply reinforced in some people's views the intuitional mantra about the importance of research inherited from the previous management regime. The perceptions around leadership appear to be quite important in individual views. There was also reference, at a more local-scale, to a lack of knowledge on the new career framework on the part of department heads and leaders. This is perhaps best summarised as a lack of 'knowledge and conviction' about the new career structure, which can only be ascribed to the rushed implementation, as well to the fact that leaders themselves are perhaps trying to work out how they measure up to the matrix especially at a time when Faculty reorganisations were also taking place within the University. This was particularly clear from some of the comments made in the departmental focus groups. The importance placed on leadership of fusion by higher grades within the career matrix was clearly lost on many individuals, or alternatively they were unclear about how they would demonstrate this. Yet clearly leadership at all levels, by those with and without management responsibilities, is key to the success of the new framework and embedded in the career matrix.
- ***Workload planning.*** The undercurrent to this theme is one of workload and associated opportunity to contribute, and therefore succeed, under the new career structure. It is clear from the comments that many staff still feel that they are held back by the lack of time because. for example. they are doing large amounts of teaching. Inequity of opportunity caused by imbalances and inconsistences in workload remain a tension, especially in a system that no longer has an agreed quantum for the input measure, having moved

previously away from an hours-based workload model. The institution's answer is to drive transparency of workload and contribution leading to reassignment and re-balancing of individual workloads where they are found to be materially unequal. It remains, however, a contentious area not helped by the pace at which the requirements for transparency have been implemented in different parts of the university.

- ***Celebration of success.*** There is a lack of clarity around who has been promoted and perhaps who has not. This chimes with the view from the sector that we focus on those that fail to be promoted, rather than those that are promoted. It is interesting to note that at BU we are now integrating the leadership and talent development programmes into the new career framework more explicitly.
- ***Importance of process.*** Many of the comments are focused on perceived inequality of implementation and process, whether historic or specific to the first round of the promotions under the new scheme. Lack of clarity about the processes, and a wish to argue against or to challenge them are common. Some clearly see the positive moves taken to try and increase the equality and fairness around implementation, but some clearly still struggle to see the gains made.

6.0 Perspectives and sector experience

In order to place the experiences described within the case study in to a broader context, a number of formal and informal interviews with HR Directors or Senior HR staff across the sector, associated with leading such change at other universities, were undertaken. These have been anonymised and the key themes and observations that emerge from this data are summarised below.

- ***Synchronised strategy dances?*** More accurately this should perhaps really read as the non-synchronised dance of strategy with HR policy and process. Academic career frameworks are complex, difficult to change quickly, and in most institutions tend to be constantly evolving rather than undergoing 'big-bang' changes. At any one time there may be a degree of discrepancy between a career framework and the strategic vision or direction of an institution. The issue is that the Strategic Plans and Visions of a higher education institute change with greater frequency, in some extreme cases every two or three years while more commonly over five to seven years. Perhaps more significantly, the external higher education climate has undergone, and is arguably still undergoing, a period of profound change, or at least disruptive instability, with the increasing marketization of this sector. Institutions need, arguably, to not only be much fleeter of foot, but also deal with greater planning uncertainty. Academic career frameworks operate on different time-scales. In fact, one can liken them to huge ocean liners that are difficult to turn or slow while navigating dangerous, and at times

hostile, seas. There is a tension here: 'although you might say we have a vision for our education and research strategies this has come in since [our career framework was introduced]. . . . and has changed . . . . so there is a real disconnect with the career framework'. Whether this actually matters is a critical question. Differences of opinion exist between those that essentially see career frameworks as subject to gradual evolutionary change and revision, versus those that aspire to see more radical change. While many would like to radically change their policy and procedures, there is a real sense that it can't be achieved at a rate in keeping with other changes, especially with strategic drivers and consequently HR policy and procedures must endure through a range of other strategic changes. They must, therefore, be suitably generic and flexible to cater for a range of change. Prioritisation was raised by some contributors; 'there is always a good reason for not tackling change to career frameworks. There were a number of personal changes or other priorities kept knocking it off its perch in terms of being a priority area to look at'.

- ***Research is king.*** The disconnect between a career framework and associated policies, that favour a range of different career routes, is undone by the perception that research is king which was common to more than one institution interviewed. The feeling was that while policy may say one thing, the institutional filter may result in something very different. Effectively a dominant message, for example in this case, the need to boost research performance may in effect undo the reality of policy. Most of the schemes that allow some specialisation in career routes do look for some form of balanced or partially balanced contribution, but many grapple with a perceived inequality between these routes.
- ***Leadership dynamics.*** The leadership dynamic was raised by a number of people, both in terms of the leadership of actually policy change, but also the on-the-ground leadership of the ultimate change. Taking the former first, a number of people discussed the tension between different priorities within an organisation: 'I can understand that, everybody is twisting it in a slightly different way, because they want slightly different things from it, associated with their own piece of the strategic pie'. Or similarly: 'we still have PVC's sitting across the table not quite agreeing with the approach'. The importance of partnership between HR and the academic leadership was stressed by most, but also the importance of whom the academic leader/champion actually was, normally a DVC or PVC. These types of roles are often 'themed' and again that complicates the message; for example if it is led by a senior figure that is focused on research, as opposed to teaching, or the other way around. The messages here are subtle, often unspoken or unintended, but important nonetheless. Leading projects like this, is internal 'grunt' work, time-consuming and difficult, so naturally it falls to a member of the senior executive, but one person asked whether something of the importance of a change to the career framework should not actually be led by the Vice-Chancellor? This ultimately depends on the scale of the change being undertaken: incremental or big-bang? The other aspect of leadership that was raised was that associated with actual implementation at departmental levels: 'the biggest challenge is effective leadership at departmental level, it is really important'. Another stated the problem as: 'it is [at times] a bit

like turkeys voting for Christmas' the people who are leading the change may not measure-up well to the new criteria, since they were promoted under previous schemes and circumstances. The point is well-illustrated by an institution that has perhaps shifted from solely having a teaching focus, to one that has a greater emphasis on research. The departmental heads whom have done a great job around teaching, now feel threatened themselves by the changed emphasis towards research. The idea that the key challenge around implementation was to tackle the leaders and managers was strongly emphasised by several contributors.

- ***Importance of trust.*** This effectively involves a four way dynamic between senior leaders, staff, HR and staff representatives (i.e. the unions) and it is critical to the success of the associated negotiations and ultimately to any implemented change. The quality of union relations, and the degree of mistrust, can be really critical to the length of time change takes to negotiate. It is also important to note that while unions represent staff and are key signatures on jointly negotiated proposals, the level of union representation is often quite small. There is a danger here that negotiations with the unions eclipse the need for a dialogue with the broader unrepresented majority of staff. Managing the dynamic here, while also keeping good union relationships during the process can clearly be challenging.
- ***Balancing workloads.*** The undercurrent of too many of the discussions around changes to a career framework are ones around the balanced workload of the individual, and the associated impact it may have on the equality of opportunity for progression. In some institutions, the contractual changes necessary to move towards a less teaching-orientated contract, with a specified 550 hours to one that embraces a broader spectrum of activities, is the first step before one can build a more sophisticated career framework. The persistence of hours as a currency, particularly in post-1992 institutions is clear and many have adopted quite formal balanced workload systems as a consequence. The challenge here is to keep the needs for high volume teaching well-serviced, while also prioritising new outputs such as research. In some case there is a risk that the focus on the new agendas derails the importance of old ones. The strategic priorities of different types of institutions within the sector as a whole is increasingly clear as is how this may become manifest in different types of academic career framework.
- ***Implementation – preparation, preparation.*** As one respondent said 'a career framework summarised in policy documents is nothing without effective implementation and mapping of processes' or 'without effective implementation, all the blood, sweat and tears that go into that policy is lost'. The recurring theme was the importance of preparation, and staff involvement in the detailed mapping of processes. Several respondents spoke of their investment in web-based materials, including worked examples. The policy documents were rarely left to speak for themselves. It is also probably the single biggest lesson from the Bournemouth experience – fail to prepare, prepare to fail.
- ***Talent.*** Clearly most would agree that a good career framework needs to promote and bring forward talent especially at a time of increased competitiveness in the sector. Promotion

policies are important here, but as pointed out by more than one respondent, they tend to focus on 'containing poor performance rather than managing good performance'. For example, feedback is focused on those that fail to be promoted, rather than on perhaps celebrating and developing those that have been successful. While no one disagrees about the importance of supporting those that fail to achieve promotion first time, it is according to some respondents at the expense of recognising and nurturing the successful talent. Many of the associated HR policies are about managing risk rather than perhaps creating opportunities and those institutions with talent management and leadership strategies or programmes often sit them outside the career framework rather than as integrated component parts.

7.0 Key lessons

Drawing together the Bournemouth experience with that obtained by the brief survey of the sector one can identify a few key issues that might constitute lessons and pitfalls to be wary of:

- ***Implementation***. Perhaps the strongest message here is the importance of separating out clearly the three stages of the process: (1) staff conversation; (2) negotiations and consultations; and (3) implementation. These three stages are very distinct, and equally important, but in truth what counts is the final component – implementation is everything and getting it right really matters. This is where the importance of managing staff expectation and patience on the part of the project team implementing a change to career frameworks is really important. More importantly it is very clear that a substantial amount of resource is required for smooth and successful implementation. One can summarise these as follows:
    - Documentation. A suite of documents that translate policy into procedure and practice. It is not enough simply to post the documents up on an intranet, they need to be explained and amplified with lots of worked synthetic examples. Case studies that manage expectations and guide individuals through the process, supported by development workshops are all vital, coupled with a simple delivery system or intranet allowing people to navigate the documents clearly. The sheer scale of the resource that is needed here is considerable, and is perhaps underestimated at an institution's peril. The greater the change, the greater the need for this.
    - Leadership development. The people who have to implement and field the issues are the departmental leads and heads, and not necessarily senior managers or HR staff. Obtaining the buy-in and conviction from this stakeholder group is critical to the success of the implementation, and its importance cannot be overestimated. Even if buy-in can't be obtained initially, their detailed understanding of the new scheme and

changes and why they have been implemented, is critical. This requires a substantial lead-time and sustained campaign of information dissemination.

- The long game. While operating at all times in the interest of its staff, Bournemouth could have paused after the successful ballot and ratification in the autumn of 2014 in order to ensure that everything was in place for implementation in the summer of 2015, during the normal cycle of promotions and pay progression. This was discussed extensively within the joint BU-UCU working group and a decision was taken to proceed with implementation. With the benefit of hindsight, some would say that waiting a further academic year in order to ensure that the infrastructure was in place might have led to a smoother transition and the early implementation may have dented staff confidence in the new framework. The long term monitoring will show the true impact of this or not.

- ***Negotiating bubble.*** While moving a programme of this sort forward, the negotiating team becomes to some extent isolated from the rest of the organisation. They are aware on a weekly or monthly basis of progress, engaged in debate and constantly developing new 'bits of paper' and proposals to advance the whole. However for the rest of the organisation, there is silence. In the Bournemouth case, there were joint (union and university) messages issued by the negotiating team and while they indicate something is happening they do not really address the fundamental issue of staff which is 'why it is taking so long!' Staff are expecting change, some are eagerly anticipating change, while others have applications/aspirations on hold; managing these expectations is difficult. From the average staff member's perspective the process is one of 'hurry-up and wait' – give your views in a hurry then wait for the outcome. There are no easy answers to this, but it is a critical issue and the importance of meaningful explanation about why things are taking so long is as important as anything else. In the Bournemouth's case, the delay was exacerbated by a loss of over four months between the initial formative staff conversations and the start of real negotiations. Minimising such delays by ensuring that all parties are on-board and pushing forward is essential. There needs to be a clear deck which can be difficult to achieve, due to other debates between union or staff representatives and management. However strategic prioritisation is really important and clearing a time-window to ensure the lack of delay is a key learning item.
- ***Neutrality of leadership and institutional inheritance.*** Changing a career structure is a big task, work-intensive and internally focused. It is the typical 'bread and butter' of DVC's and PVC's; after all they are the workhorses of senior teams in universities. They don't always appear as neutral leaders, however, having responsibility for specific strategic areas. The perception of neutrality is critical when trying to balance across a range of activity areas. At Bournemouth, the process was initiated by the PVC for Research and while it was completed after he had stood down from that role, his research focus and potential biases towards this area was identified by some as an issue. There are sector examples of leadership by those with an education focus and again perceptions, not necessarily real of favouritism toward one functional area. For a radical view, one might argue that the Vice-Chancellor is the person

who should be driving something like this forward because of the clarity and clout they can provide: 'this is the big single thing we are doing this year, lets do it!' Institutional memory also plays into this. New developments and changes are, to some extent, reactions to what went before, both in fact, and crucially, in perception. At Bournemouth fusion was perhaps an attempt to re-balance the mantra from research to a combination of research and education, but the dominance of research still haunted this process and rings loud in the staff feedback obtained. The inertial momentum here provided by institutional history is ignored at a strategic team's peril.

- ***Revolution versus evolution.*** The Bournemouth example is an example of a more radical set of changes, perhaps not a big-bang but at least a big whimper! During the survey of the sector, most were involved in evolutionary change, modifications, adjustments and refinements to existing structures. Some aspired to bigger more radical changes, but for most things were incremental and that incremental change was time-consuming and as challenging as bigger changes in some cases. Bournemouth has effectively had two radical changes to its career framework in the last decade both corresponding to Vice-Chancellors with slightly different visions and in support of different strategic plans. At some institutions strategic plans have a very short lifespan making radical change to the career framework impossible to sync. One of the fundamental questions here is whether it is better to have a stable and evolving career framework that is able to endure through a series of strategic changes, than to have one that is continually changing with each new strategic direction. Is the gain worth the cost in terms of staff disruption particularly when a typical career at a university may outlast several Vice-Chancellors? We find ourselves in a period of time when strategic priorities and directions are changing rapidly in the face of an external climate dominated by change and speculation about change. Yet changing a career structure is not a quick or agile process; it is a wheel that does not necessarily turn as quickly as the strategic one. Aligning a career structure to a particular strategic direction may not necessarily be as effective as creating one that can endure and survive many. The impact on strategic delivery at Bournemouth of the changes will be revealed in time through the longitudinal study, but for many people the verdict is out.
- ***Specialist versus generic.*** One could argue that if it is better to go for a career framework that will endure over the decade or more that many staff spend in an institution, then the question has to be asked whether it is better to have a framework that favours the generic academic or the specialist academic. Which gives you greatest strategic advantage? Views are polarised here. The generic, as argued in Section 3.0, perhaps favours the duality of research and teaching, but at a time when employability and practice is of growing importance where does this fit? The generic allows one to retain flexibility in a changing climate and most career frameworks in the sector at least require some balance of specialisms. In a changing climate, one could argue that specialist routes are more costly and potentially vulnerable; it is hard to retrain and shape usually strong-minded academics. It is also dependent on the financial stability and growth of an institution. An institution that is growing and financially

sound is more able to cover the cost of a specialist staff base, and in some cases carry staff that are not necessarily delivering across all priority areas. In contrast, at institutions that are increasingly pressured by, for example, loss of market share may well need more generic staff able to deliver effectively across fewer areas. There is a cost benefit trade-off here: does the cost of a large specialist academic staff base give better return in terms of student fee income, research and knowledge income and reputation than one that is less specialist and perhaps less able to excel in all areas? It is a question that is hard to answer, and likely to be institution or at least mission group specific, but in keeping with a drive for greater efficiency in higher education as set out by the Diamond Review, one might make a serious case for a move to the generic in which individual academics can contribute well across all, or at least most, of an institution's strategic delivery areas.

8.0 Achievements and recommendations

During the first phase of this project the following achievements have been made:

- We have documented the challenges of introducing a new career framework at an institution such as BU. In doing so we have pulled together an extensive internal archive documenting this process and summarised it for external consumption.
- We have undertaken an independent evaluation of the processes at BU and identified some of the institutional challenges associated with delivering and implementing this new framework for the benefit of the sector as whole.
- We have evaluated theoretically the risks and benefits associated with different framework models along a continuum between generalist and specialist approaches. As a consequence of this we have identified the potential for future and valuable research looking at the cost benefit of different models.
- We have undertaken a series interviews with Human Resources (HR) specialists from across the sector to place the BU case study in a wider context.
- We have summarized the key findings from the BU experience with the information gained from the sector into a series of observation and recommendations to be considered by any institution wishing to review its academic career framework.
- We have established a methodology and collected base line data from BU staff in 2015 with which to undertake a longitudinal monitoring exercise within the institution looking at the impact of the new career framework on the strategic delivery of institutional objectives and the impact on the productivity, efficiency, aspiration and progression of staff.

In completion of the first phase of the project, we have the following recommendations to make for any institutions considering substantial modification to their academic career framework:

- Specialist versus generalist career frameworks. This is a crucial decision from the outset, and depends on an institution's long-term financial health and strategic direction. There is much to be said for a more generalist approach in terms of reducing risk both institutionally and for staff themselves, not to mention the benefits for students of working with academics who are engaged in education, research and practice. Such a strategy has the added benefit of maintaining flexibility within the workforce and is likely to be more cost-efficient. There is a real, and perceived, risk however, that staff become too general to be able to perform at the highest levels and devote the time needed to compete, for example, internationally at least in terms of research. Theoretically larger, financially robust institutions with a stable long-term academic strategy are likely to be able to tolerate a more specialist approach than ones with a less certain future and time variable strategy. One can speculate that this might lead to a growing divergence in the future between different sorts of institutions and their staffing models, as current changes in the UK higher education sector start to make themselves felt. It is important to note that there is a real risk with increased specialism that the duality of research and teaching will become increasingly stretched, at least at an undergraduate level. Whether the benefits of this duality are real or not, they are certainly perceived (and marketed) as being important within the sector, and define for some the very nature and value of a university education.
- Strategy dance. I have already alluded to the importance of strategic stability and there is an argument to be made that a career framework should perhaps be sufficiently robust to outlive short-term institutional strategies, especially in times as turbulent as those in UK higher education sector at present. While aligning career frameworks to institutional strategic plans, typically with life cycles of 3 to 5 years, may in theory be desirable to their delivery, the cost of doing so may be high. The impact of doing so, in the case of BU, will only become clear in 2018 when the results of the longitudinal monitoring become available. In this case, it may perhaps depend on whether the much-vaulted concept of 'fusion' embedded in the new career framework succeeds in galvanising staff to deliver across a range of agendas, receiving appropriate career recognition along the way, or whether it is something that is quietly dropped in future strategic plans. Only time will tell.
- Evolution versus revolution, and institutional prioritisation. Any change to staffing structures have the potential to cause anxiety and concern for the academics affected, both in terms of their institutional chances for progression, but also their sector-wide mobility in the future. The bigger the change, the bigger the potential for anxiety. This is why many institutions have adopted evolutionary staffing strategies, rather than going for revolution. The consequence, of course, is that staffing policy and process may never perfectly align with an institution's strategy and goals. The ideal would be to achieve revolutionary change with the minimum of disruption or anxiety within the broad constraints of what is typical in the sector.

The degree to which this is possible is likely to depend on two things: (1) the relationship and degree of trust between staff, unions and senior managers; and (2) more than anything else, on the degree of institutional prioritisation and strategic focus on delivering that change in the shortest possible time, and with the least anxiety to staff. Institutional prioritisation is probably the key factor.

- Communication and the 'hurry-up and wait' syndrome. For the majority of academic staff in an institution, introducing changes to its career framework is likely to be characterised by something akin to a process of: 'hurry-up and wait'. Essentially, staff are asked to give their feedback over a short period of time and then wait, before being consulted again, and again asked to wait; and so the process proceeds. Negotiations with staff representatives and unions takes time and can't be rushed, yet for the majority of staff these periods represent episodes of extended waiting with the potential for uncertainty. As one respondent put it they are periods when 'everything is on hold'. In the case of BU the joint BU and University and College Union (UCU) negotiating team issued regular and joint messages, but in light of the feedback this was perhaps not enough; during times of change people within organisations often feel vulnerable and perceive that there is something that they are not being told, even when the organisation is being transparent in its communications. A clear and detailed communication plan is essential as is exploring new ways to involve staff in the detail of the negotiations without compromising them. The consistency of internal communication across all media and by all the senior team members is also really important, not just in terms of the overt statements but via the subtext with which they are interpreted by staff. A dedicated communication plan for projects such as these is vital as is the associated resource to make it hum.
- Neutrality of leadership and institutional inheritance. Neutrality of leadership is important in ensuring that one or more types of academic activity is not perceived as being more important than another, unless that is the stated intention. Academic leads for this type of project are typically PVCs or DVC, the workhorses of strategic change, but they are not always seen as neutral leaders as they normally have responsibility for one, or more, strategic areas. This needs careful consideration at the outset. More importantly, most institutional change is a reaction to something that went before, or is driven from outside and institutional inheritance is therefore an important consideration, and is neglected at an institution's peril when managing change of this sort. For example, in the case of BU, despite the fact that the previous career framework was not biased towards research, and neither was the new one, for many staff research was still perceived as 'king' to gaining rapid promotion and progression, although the longitudinal evaluation will highlight whether or not this perception changes over time.
- Implementation. Implementation is everything to the success of changes or modifications to academic career frameworks. The infrastructure needs to be in place and investment made in translating negotiated and approved policy documents into staff-accessible guidance with numerous exemplars to facilitate the smooth running of new processes and approaches.

Simply posting the new policy documents on an intranet is not enough. Coupled with this, is the need for real and sustained investment of time and energy prior to implementation with departmental leads and head. They are crucial to these types of process, and they are the people that have to implement these changes both formally, and even more crucially, informally through the support and guidance they provide. This can be challenging since departmental leaders, in some cases, may themselves feel threatened or uneasy with the very changes they have to implement having been promoted under previous schema and regimes.

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