

Who Develops the Developers?

Professional Learning for the Plural Academic

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Where did this concept come from?

The plural practitioner

- Rose & Rogers (2012): Early years practitioners juggle seven dimensions of care
- Critical reflector, Carer, Communicator, Facilitator, Observer, Assessor, Creator

The academic parallel

- Historically: Dual focus on teaching and research (Humboldtian model, 1810s)
- By the late 20th century: Expanded to a triad of teaching, research, and administration/service (Blaxter et al., 1998; Ward, 2003)
- Today: The triad no longer captures the reality - academics now perform 20+ distinct roles (Avramović, 2023)
- The plural academic: a professional stretched across competing domains

OUR STATEMENT

Plurality is not itself the problem; unrecognised and unsupported plurality is.

What's driving this?

Marketisation

Students as consumers, knowledge as commodity

Audit culture

REF, TEF, KEF — metrics for everything

Managerialism

Top-down accountability, erosion of autonomy (academic trust erosion?)

Massification

More students, more admin, more expectations

The tipping point: COVID-19

- Accelerated digital transformation
- Blurred work-life boundaries
- Revealed (and deepened) wellbeing crisis
- 87% reported anxiety (Jayman et al., 2022)

THE RESULT

Academics now spend the same time justifying their work as doing it.

Gibbs & Maassen, 2021

What about you?

VEVOX

What roles do you perform that you think are in addition to what's formally required - or take more time than officially allocated?

Take a moment. Name the work that is usually left unnamed.

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The five dimensions of the plural academic

PRIMARY ROLE	SECONDARY ROLES	INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION
CONTRIBUTOR TO KNOWLEDGE	Researcher, Grant-seeker, Missionist, Impact Creator, Media Expert	HIGH (REF/KEF)
EDUCATOR	Scholar, Assessor, Entertainer, Interrogator, Manager, Implementer, EDIA Champion, Tech-Expert	MEDIUM (TEF/NSS)
SUPPORT WORKER	Pastor, Safeguard, Peer Supporter, Mentor, Supervisor, Leader, Placater	LOW (rarely rewarded)
OFFICE WORKER	Administrator, Salesman, Opportunity Creator, Participant in facultative activities	VARIABLE
QUALITY CONTROLLER	Editor, Reviewer, Quality Assuror, Self-Developer	MEDIUM (REF/TEF)

The shrapnel effect

“The indiscriminate dispersal of essential but institutionally invisibilised labour across the academic workforce.”

38%

of academic time unrecorded

Kenny & Fluck, 2019

70%

of 'academic kinkeeping'
performed by women

40% less

support for fixed-term staff
facing the same roles

It's structural

- Women, Minoritised staff, Early-career researchers, Precariously employed

The glass escalator (Williams, 1992)

- Those with power accumulate visible capital: grants, publications, management
- Those without absorb the invisible, scattered labour
- Two faces of the same dual economy of academic labour

Why can't we say no?

The pressure to perform

- Pedagogy of care: We care about students and colleagues - saying no feels like letting them down
- Precarity: Fixed-term and teaching-only staff can't afford to refuse
- Accreditations: Professional bodies demand evidence of everything
- Staff (cyber)bullying from 'customers' and drive for better student satisfaction
- Identity: We are our work - saying no feels like saying "I'm not good enough"

The institutional trap

- Workload models don't capture what we actually do
- "Resilience" training individualises systemic failures
- Every new initiative adds roles without removing anything

"We keep cramming in more and more because of accreditations. There's no time left to do the stuff we really care about - expanding minds."

The consequences

Individual toll

- 73% of UK academics report unmanageable stress (Darabi et al., 2017)
- 87% experienced anxiety, 79% insomnia, 81% work-related stress (Jayman et al., 2022)
- 48% report physical health symptoms linked to work
- Mental health attrition rates doubled since 2010

Institutional toll

- 61% considering leaving the profession (Jayman et al., 2022)
- Skill dilution: 52% of ECRs report fragmented expertise
- Loss of diversity: Those who leave are often those most needed for inclusive futures

THE WARNING

Without reform, UK higher education risks losing 40% of its workforce to burnout by 2030.

Nicholls et al. (2023)

The opportunity

Where traditional development falls short

- Academic development still often focuses on T&R only
- Sometimes stops after PGCert or Fellowships acquired
- Holistic academic development can lack resources and buy-in

THE QUESTION WE'RE ASKING TODAY

Which gaps require professional learning - and which require changes to roles, workload or institutional support?

Move from role-blind provision to support that reflects the whole academic workload.

Recognition • Capability • Resourcing • Institutional responsibility

PANEL

Discussion and Q&A

Bring forward the tensions, examples, and questions that matter in your context.

How would you describe your workload in one word?

ONE WORD or EXPRESSION

Name the feeling, pace, or
pattern that best captures your
workload today.

Submit via Vevox!

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Now it's your turn!

- 1 Use the handouts to reflect on the individual roles you perform as an academic.
- 2 We marked the ones relevant for PS staff with stars.
- 3 Reflect on your skills and knowledge. Do you have what's required to perform each role you need to undertake?
- 4 Discuss with others: what training do you think would be helpful? Make notes for us!
- 5 Sometimes training can help to streamline and make our job more efficient - to perform all our roles.

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