Title: Balancing Accountability and Autonomy in Academic

Professional Development

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Assess the significance of a series of issues raised by recent policy developments relating to the professional development of university academics;
- Evaluate some of the use and limitations of an e-portfolio approach to academic professional development;
- Suggest means by which tensions between accountability and autonomy can be reconciled in the recording of academic professional development

Session Outline

A range of local, national and international influences have recently served to act upon the organisation and responsiveness of professional development initiatives in higher education. This paper examines these influences and considers the impact they are exerting on measures to produce a cohesive, effective and coordinated approach to professional development.

Chief amongst these influences are a National Professional Standards Framework issued recently by the HEA (Feb 2006), arising from the white paper concerning the future of higher education (DES, 2003). And, following European initiatives, the Bologna Declaration (1999) set the agenda for both the mobility of teachers and researchers, and started moves to record student achievement for purposes of motivation and the interchange of information. This measure is becoming part of HE practice for students with the introduction of personal development planning.

These various measures have led to the raising of questions concerning the professional development of academic staff. How will staff respond to the challenge of recording achievement and benchmarking against national standards? Can the conceptual framework associated with PDPs be imported into the domain of professional reflection for academics? Can a framework for professional development assist in uniting the, very often, disparate activities that constitute academic professional development?

This account reflects upon measures being implemented at Canterbury Christ Church University to recognise, unite and record the various strands of professional achievement of academic staff. As part of a wider move to produce a coherent framework for academic development the university is experimenting with the notion of an `active CV' within an e-portfolio. It is being introduced as a paperless platform for reflection, recording and reporting. Through the means of a series of case studies, centred on semi-structured interviews with a range of academic staff, this paper explores some of the threats and opportunities presented to all of us by these measures.

The session will draw on recent research into professional development activities for university academics and highlight some lessons that might be learnt, particularly in the light of delegates' own experiences. The session will briefly outline new initiatives at our own university, and introduce some case studies of academics and their relationship to forms of CPD. These will be used as a means to open up group-based discussion of how to prevent forms of CPD being viewed as de-professionalizing. Broadly, the session will provide an opportunity for delegates to reflect on the importance of seeking effective ways to maintain a workable balance between a `culture of accountability' and a `culture of professional autonomy'.

Key question for the session: To whom, or what, should academics be accountable when it comes to forms of CPD?

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Outline of issues raised by recent policy initiatives related to the professional development of university academics (15 mins);
- Outline of key features of the academic development framework being developed at Canterbury Christ Church (10 mins);
- Discussion relating to the findings of case studies with a range of academics at Canterbury Christ Church (20 minutes)

References

Bologna Declaration (1999)

http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/

DfES (2003) The Future of Higher Education, London: HMSO

http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/hereform/index.cfm

Higher Education Academy (2006) The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and

Supporting Learning in Higher Education, London: HEA

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/regandaccr/StandardsFramework(1).pdf