

**FRAGMENTED IDENTITIES AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH: A POSTMODERN EXPLORATION
OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Volume 2 of 2: Appendices

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Doctor of Business Administration

Aston University

December, 2024

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Paul Michael Jones asserts their moral right to be identified as the author of this thesis

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Letter



Aston University
Aston Triangle
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B4 7ET
0121 204 3000

Date: 20th July 2022

Paul Jones
Copy: Nicholas O'Regan, Keith Schofield and Philip Mizen
College of Business and Social Sciences

Dear Paul Jones,

Study title:	Individual Perspectives On Engaged Scholarship: Reforming Professional Development From The Bottom Up
REC REF:	#285-5-22

Confirmation of Ethical Opinion

On behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to confirm a favourable opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation listed below.

Approved documents

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Ethics application	2	19/07/2022
Participant Information Sheet	2	19/07/2022
Consent Form	1	10/05/2022
Interview Guide	1	10/05/2022

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexis Paton".

Dr Alexis Paton
Chair of the Business & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet



Individual Perspectives on Engaged Scholarship: Reforming Professional Development from The Bottom Up Participant Information Sheet

Invitation

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study forming part of a DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) project for Paul Jones.

Before you decide if you would like to participate, take time to read the following information carefully and, if you wish, discuss it with others such as your family, friends or colleagues.

Please ask a member of the research team, whose contact details can be found at the end of this information sheet, if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information before you make your decision.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study is exploring professional development through the experiences, thoughts and priorities of academic staff who are on Teaching and Research contracts. It is hoped that through interviews, and subsequent analysis, that the identified themes could lead to new ways of helping staff develop in their roles. Development initiatives in organisations are often lead from the top down, and through this study, it is hoped a balance can be found between what the organisation considers important and what individuals would like to prioritise. The study will involve interviewing 25 or more academic staff (up to a maximum of 40) from the College of Business and Social Sciences. It is hoped that the focus on a single college within the University will limit the variances in how staff are managed, developed and governed across all Colleges.

Why have I been invited?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you are a member of academic staff in the College of Business and Social Sciences on a Teaching and Research contract. You will have expressed an interest in finding out more about this study by responding to an advert sent out by the BSS Research Office.

To be a participant in the study you will need to meet the following criteria:

- You are between 25 – 75 years of age
- You are on a Teaching and Research contract in the College of Business and Social Sciences
- You are on a permanent contract at Aston University (either part time or full time)

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What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to join this study, you will need to sign the consent form and return it to the Principal Investigator (on the email address p.jones5@aston.ac.uk). Digital copies of the consent form are preferred.

Once the consent form is received, the Principal Investigator will contact you to ask if you have any further questions and if you remain happy to proceed. If so, he will organise a time and date for an interview to take place. You will have the choice to conduct the interview in person (on campus at Aston in a booked room that is private and confidential) or online (through mutually agreeable software e.g., Zoom).

An interview will last approximately one hour. Each participant will be asked to schedule 90 minutes to allow the interview to come to a natural close. Interviews may finish much earlier than 1 hour and you can stop the interview at any point (either for a break or to end it completely).

The interview will be semi-structured. This means that the Principal Investigator will use a guide to direct the interview but that you, as interviewee, will be free to explore your thoughts, ideas and experiences with flexibility (but within wider parameters).

The interview will be recorded. Only the audio will be kept for transcription purposes. If video is recorded it will be separated from the audio track and the video track deleted. Interviews will be singular and there will be no follow up questions, interviews or other tasks.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether you wish to take part.

If you do decide to participate, you will be asked to provide informed consent.

You can halt your participation in the research at any time by telling the Principal Investigator. If you are meeting in person, you can tell the Principal Investigator you would like to stop or agree some other signal that can be used. If the interview is taking place online, you can either tell the Principal Investigator you want to stop directly or simply disconnect from the conversation. If you are having technical difficulties with an online interview you should agree with the Principal Investigator how you will reinitiate contact to continue the interview so that re-connection is possible.

If you wish to withdraw your data after participation, then you have up to 14 days to do so. To do this, you should contact the Principal Investigator by email (p.jones5@aston.ac.uk), providing the date and time of the interview. After this point, your data will be anonymised and it will not be possible to withdraw it. There will be no way to trace your application for deletion.

A signed consent form is essential for your involvement in this study. The Principal Investigator will also check in with you on the day of the interview to make sure you are happy to proceed.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. A code will be attached to all the data you provide to maintain anonymity. Analysis of your data will be undertaken using coded data.

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If we need to collect personal data (such as a name and contact details) we will only use this for the purposes outlined in this participant information sheet e.g. to [contact](#) you to arrange an interview.

The data we collect will be stored electronically on a secure encrypted mobile device, password protected computer server or secure cloud storage device.

To ensure the quality of the research Aston University may need to access your data to check that the data has been recorded accurately e.g., for the purposes of audit. If this is required, your personal data will be treated as confidential by the individuals accessing your data.

How will the conversation during the interview be recorded and the information I provide managed?

With your permission we will audio record the interview and take notes.

The recording will be typed into a document (transcribed) by a transcriber approved by Aston University or using transcription software (and then checked by the Principal Investigator). This process will involve removing any information which could be used to identify individuals e.g., names, locations etc.

Audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as the transcripts have been checked for accuracy.

We will ensure that anything you have told us that is included in the reporting of the study will be anonymous.

You of course are free not to answer any questions that are asked without giving a reason.

How will the video recordings made during the study be managed?

Any video recordings made alongside an audio recording (when recording interviews online) will be separated from the audio track and destroyed on the day (or at the most within 24 hours of the recording being made). The video recording will not be used for any type of analysis.

What happens if I tell you something that concerns you about my health or welfare or that of the person I care for?

In the unlikely event of this happening, we will discuss with you how this should be addressed. If necessary, to protect you and the person you care for, we will report your concern to the appropriate person or bodies.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefit of taking part in this study is that you will be able to contribute towards the way professional development opportunities are provided within the College to colleagues on similar contracts to you. It is hoped that this study, and therefore your

involvement, will lead to positive changes to organisational development initiatives, that support is increased and the effectiveness of that support is heightened.

What are the possible risks and burdens of taking part?

By agreeing to take part in this study, you are agreeing that up to 90 minutes of your time will be lost when you could be undertaking other activities related to your role or your spare time. Additionally, you will be questioned about your work experiences, your thoughts on professional development, your motivations and whether your professional development needs have been met previously. While the risk is low, this type of questioning could lead you to feel uncomfortable if your workplace experiences have been unpleasant in the past. Such questions could be a trigger for increased anxiety, panic attacks or other forms of psychological distress. If you mention anything that causes a concern about your personal safety, or the safety of others, we may need to pass that information on to others in the organization who will be able to help or that should be notified. Likewise, if the Principal Investigator feels it is appropriate, he may stop the interview and signpost you towards services that offer different types of support. The Principal Investigator is a member of staff conducting research in the organisation within which they are employed. This means there is a risk of colleagues feeling under duress to take part in the study. Everything has been done to mitigate these risks and you should only volunteer your participation if this were something you would like to do.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals and/or presented at conferences. If the results of the study are published, your identity will remain anonymous. If you wish to receive a copy of the results, you should contact the Principal Investigator (on p.jones5@aston.ac.uk). A summary report will be made available to all academic staff in the College. The results of the study will be used in the DBA thesis of the Principal Investigator.

Expenses and payments

There will be no expenses or payments made due to your involvement in this study.

Who is funding the research?

The study is being funded by Aston University.

Who is organising this study and how is my data being used?

Aston University is organising this study and acting as data controller for the study. Research data will be used only for the purposes of the study or related uses identified in this Information Sheet or Appendix A.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study was given a favorable ethical opinion by the Aston University Research Integrity Office.

What if I have a concern about my participation in the study?

If you have any concerns about your participation in this study, please speak to the research team and they will do their best to answer your questions. Contact details can be found at the end of this information sheet.

If the research team are unable to address your concerns or you wish to make a complaint about how the study is being conducted you should contact the Aston University Research Integrity Office at research_governance@aston.ac.uk or via the University switchboard on +44 (0)121 204 3000.

Research Team**Paul Jones**

Principal Investigator (Doctor of Business Administration Candidate)
0121 204 4443
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Supervisory Team:**Prof Nicholas O'Regan**

Associate Dean Research (BSS)
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Associate Dean Future Students and Product Development (BSS)
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Prof Phil Mizen

Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Researcher Development
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Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet. If you have any questions regarding the study please don't hesitate to ask one of the research team.

Appendix 3: Consent Form



Individual Perspectives On Engaged Scholarship: Reforming Professional Development From The Bottom Up

Consent Form

Name of Chief Investigator: Paul Jones

Please initial boxes

1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet (Version 1.0, 10 th May 2022) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study, without giving a reason and without my legal rights being affected.	
3.	I understand that I am able to withdraw my data up to 14 days after taking part in the study by contacting the research team, after this time my data will be anonymised, and I will no longer be able to withdraw.	
4.	I agree to my personal data and data relating to me collected during the study being processed as described in the Participant Information Sheet.	
5.	I understand that if during the study I tell the research team something that causes them to have concerns in relation to my health and/or welfare they may need to breach my confidentiality.	
6.	I agree to my interview being audio recorded and to anonymised direct quotes from me being used in publications resulting from the study.	
7.	I agree to my anonymised data being used by research teams for future research.	
8.	I agree to take part in this study.	

Name of participant Date Signature

Name of Person receiving consent. Date Signature

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Appendix 4: DBA1 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA1

Paul Jones 00:04

So I have started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled, individual perspectives on engaged scholarship reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate, from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what's important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour and we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi structured, this means I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, but you're free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. The idea is that I do that with the least number of questions or interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymized, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me on the details which are on the participant information sheet that you received. Following the interview, with the recording will be transcribed, and all links to you as an individual, for example, personal data will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who will have access to the anonymized data are myself and my supervisory team. This interview is considered low risk, if you do feel the need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress. Or if I'm feeling distressed myself. That's unlikely to happen. I'm going to ask you a few closed ended questions at the start. And then we will start exploiting experiences regarding professional development. For the interview record, this is DBA interview one. Please confirm you understand the information I've given to you.

DBA1 01:59

Yes. I have read it as well.

Paul Jones 02:01

Great, and you're happy to proceed with the recording?

DBA1 02:03

I am.

Paul Jones 02:03

Great. And do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA1 02:06

Yes. Thank you.

Paul Jones 02:07

Great. So the closed questions. Can you confirm which school you work in?

DBA1 02:11

Yes. [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:13

Great. And can you confirm your gender, please?

DBA1 02:16

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:17

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA1 02:19

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:21

Great, there's two more closed questions. How would you describe your career level out of these three choices? Early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA1 02:30

Senior career

Paul Jones 02:31

Great, and could you confirm which age bracket you're in please? There's a couple of different age brackets. So there's 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64? Do any of those suit?

DBA1 02:46

I am [redacted]. So no.

Paul Jones 02:47

There is a [redacted] bracket. So that's fine. Great. That's the closed ended questions. What I'll do now is work through some of the topic areas about professional development. So can you start by talking about professional development, what it means to you, and how you found it during your experiences so far?

DBA103:04

Yeah, it's quite a contested term, I suppose. And the most user friendly way I've come across it, I guess, is in my subject is [redacted]. I've also been the [redacted], which were teacher training colleges. And in both those contexts, people talk about continuing professional development. So you need to have points if you're a [redacted] or a [redacted], and you want to keep practicing, which I think is a good, it's a good thing. So I suppose continuing professional development is, is one phrase that I'm familiar with through the professions. And then as the term itself is probably tautologist, that you drop the continuing and then you got professional development. Sometimes people prefer personal development, or development or lifelong learning, depending on what the rhetoric is around the institution. But I guess it means how I develop myself, or if I've got responsibility for others, how I help them develop themselves, rather than a kind of static sense that I graduated in [redacted]. And just rely on that for the next [redacted] something years. So keeping yourself refreshed and progressing in your career, but in your growth as an individual its probably what people understand by it. I'm probably a bit skeptical about some of your terminology, or the study's terminology, and some of the assumptions within professional development, that it's kind of linear and focused and so on and so forth. So actually, the way I've looked at it in institutions is that to grow as people and as teams, and to serve our, I think the Aston rhetoric is beneficiaries, but to serve primarily our students, we have to not just develop qualifications and skills and techniques and technical abilities. But also, we have to diversify our experiences. And particularly since I work on the, in research and teaching on the interdisciplinary edge of law, and lots of other things, then, for me, it's often just trying to read myself into or study myself into a cognate subject so as to be better at what I'm doing. And I don't particularly want to go on a, you know, Master's in [redacted] and ethics in order to teach it, I have taught it, but I haven't done it.

Paul Jones 04:31

Yeah.

DBA1 04:49

Sorry, long winded answer.

Paul Jones 05:52

No, it's fine. And it's interesting, because I wonder whether the discipline of [redacted] maybe lends itself better to those experiences, where you're more entwined with workplaces, and you're more engaged with the workplace. Because what you're talking about within [redacted] is directly relevant to cases that are happening, you have to have the most up to date cases, you are always paying attention. It's probably one of the areas in university where you're more naturally aligned with what's happening to the outside world where some subjects can be very insular in terms of their relation to the outside world.

DBA1 06:26

Yes. For instance, my son, who's a [redacted] at [redacted], who teaches in the [redacted]. So [redacted] have to go to continuing professional development, they have to have lectures from [redacted] but others as well, on recent cases in [redacted] and [redacted], some of which they've giving the judgments in.

Paul Jones 06:45

Yeah.

DBA1 06:46

But the system requires them to keep on top of what academics are saying about what they've done. So yes, so there is that, but, but in universities its tended to be much more relaxed. And I think it's been its most helpful, where I've encouraged other people to undertake, not quite DBAs, but MBAs and, and similar kind of masters courses, for a number of reasons, not just for the actual development, but because it's also kind of binding, the sense of belonging both ways between the individual and the institution.

Paul Jones 07:26

Yeah. I think that one of the things that might be worth exploring as well is, you mentioned your son, and you mentioned how he teaches in [redacted], but for [redacted], you have probably got people who are both keeping up their accreditation by the [redacted] Society and still retaining becoming a [redacted] or [redacted] on the side, while also lecturing.

DBA1 07:48

Yes

Paul Jones 07:49

That doesn't necessarily happen with different disciplines, depending on what you're doing. There may be a disconnect between what would be this take HR, for example, because that's my background.

DBA1 07:58

Yes

Paul Jones 07:58

You might join the CIPD as a governing body for HR professionals.

DBA1 08:03

Yeah

Paul Jones 08:04

They wouldn't necessarily be that important to you as part of your professional identity, as much as maybe [redacted] would then. So yes, I guess in terms of looking at professional development, your

discipline, how you relate to the outside world, can then affect how you look at your own development as a university does?

DBA1 08:20

Yeah. I began as an academic [redacted], then I went into management leadership, and then I'll come back to being an academic [redacted]. But I think the world has changed in, in that period.

Paul Jones 08:33

Yeah. Yeah.

DBA1 08:33

And so it began with people thinking [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], and lecturers and professors are experts. And yeah, can be relied on to do their own thing. And now it's very much I have to do unconscious bias training, diversity training, I even had to do PREVENT training in the [redacted] University. And now at Aston, even though in the [redacted] university's case, the, the course that you do online, has clearly answers they want you to give to get through the course, which are clearly wrong. But if, in almost everybody taking them, will be more expert. But I recognise the need for that. And the REF exercise was unbelievable, internally, at the [redacted] University, where we had to go on all kinds of training, but it's fair enough, you know, there is a panel of people who are making decisions which affect the life and death of other colleagues. They want to know that you've had this training and that training. And sometimes I think you find, for instance, I had to go again, I've supervised a lot of PhD students over [redacted] years but how to go on the [redacted] how to be a supervisor course. But it was actually it was actually very, very good. A day that I wouldn't have chosen.

Paul Jones 09:55

Yeah.

DBA1 09:56

But it was, it was and it began spectacularly. You know, with a very simple thing where the outside consultant says, you know, how many days are there in a year? How many days do we insist PhD students take as leave? There is weekends. How many days do they have to do on this and this and this, and then you end up with about three days in which you're expecting them to the billions of things, it's very, very effective. And it's a good example, I think, of something that I wouldn't have chosen to do.

Paul Jones 10:27

But what you've described there is people being put on courses. And then you described the REF. I know from my involvement in the REF, that we had to make sure people had this training, and we had to be able to log the training, make sure people had done it. We weren't necessarily worried about the effect that training had. And the outcomes that we had, it was more the case they've had that training, they we assume they've learned stuff, we didn't measure that, or see that there was a change, and make sure that people have actually taken it on board, we could just say we've done that training.

DBA1 11:03

Yes.

Paul Jones 11:04

So there's a difference between, I suppose, in my head, for development purposes, a difference between going on things to tick a box

DBA1 11:11

Yes

Paul Jones 11:11

Versus doing stuff that actually makes a difference to how you perform and how you engage. Now how you're meeting those beneficiary needs now.

DBA1 11:18

Absolutely. Yeah. And I resist the tickbox. That, but you know, sometimes you have to do it, and sometimes there's a nugget within it. And the experiences, yes, is interesting. But no, I'm all in favor of actually people doing completely different things, and doing it willingly and enthusiastically. And I think that does pay benefits. Now, again, well, how do you measure that? It's difficult, because it's a bit like saying, how do you measure the impact of the degree on the student. And I think it comes out over decades, rather than over the next academic year or something. I could give examples. But I'm now at the stage where it's so long since I was in, firstly, in academia, that we're having, you know, reflections on 25 years of this and that, so, and people often pick out ... example where I encourage them to take some professional development, which, obviously, it's a self selecting group in a sense, people do not often come and say, that really ruined my life. But people are writing about the fact that, you know, they, without the institutional support, they wouldn't have done this master's part time while actually on a career path. And now they're, you know, Pro Vice Chancellor for whatever somewhere, and all that kind of stuff. And I think that's very fulfilling. But in my own case, I suspect in many people's cases, it was the sort of context and structure I tried to wrap around it, which made a difference more than the actual things. Because trying to create an atmosphere in which everybody in an institution was involved in what we call staff development. That's another word that could be there to go back to the opening question. And I think, most spectacularly, at [redacted], we created a thing called [redacted] development festival, in which all 3000 members of staff participated for a week in September. And they could do things which are purely their individual choice for them for fun.

Paul Jones 13:45

Yeah...

DBA1 13:45

They had to do something which was related to the team they were in, and something related to the overall university. And I think any of those 3000 people will remember what they did. Even though at first the unions and some of the individual colleagues and teams resisted.

Paul Jones 14:06

yeah... Yeah, I suppose it very much depends on the individual as well, because some of the conversations I've had in the past and seen with my own eyes is that there's a number of ways people can achieve success and look at the way they can develop themselves. Some people are really driven and will find opportunities, no matter what it takes, they will find ways to add more learning into their life, and will want to do courses. And there's always this continual drive to learn new things. Other people then receive good management skills passed on to them where they're asking the right questions, again, to think about their own development. Other people then haven't got either the drive themselves or the right management in place to really help them. And they might not even think they have the time to do those types of things. So it can be a number of barriers as well. And so those combinations, we have to try and make it easy, as easy as possible sometimes

DBA1 14:07

You know, saying, we can't do it in September because we got to photocopy materials. Well do that in July in order, or that, you know, we've got to guard the campus or we got to provide for it, well we can bring in people, you know, and so on and so forth. Because people just was scared, really, of doing it. But, but I think it's those experiences where you have guest speakers coming in or you go for a walk in the Lake District or in the Dales with porters and secretaries and academics and so on and so forth. I think that really created the culture. I mean, that's why we did it. And I think that's very valuable and almost looking for equivalents to that in my own life. Rather than looking for a course in, our duties under

the prevention of terrorism legislation, you know, but, but it's, I mean, life's ... life's about staff development in a way, isn't it? Yeah

Paul Jones 16:04

One of the questions, or things I've been thinking about for the DBA, is about the reason I selected people on the T and R contract was this balance between teaching and research, in contractual terms for your, for a contract here, the expectation generally is that you would do 40% teaching 40% research, then 20% administration stuff of what goes on in the university. I don't know what your thoughts are, you might not have had enough time at Aston, and you will have had experience elsewhere, what that balance is like, in reality, how easy is it to find? Because I don't know if that it's that easy to balance those two things?

DBA1 16:42

Yeah. Well, good question. Personally, I think that universities should look at all staff, as as I already said, rather than take out, in quotes, academics. But given that, that's what you want to do. I think that the contract idea is unrealistic. Because the pressures in an institution such as Aston, are really all on the teaching.

Paul Jones 17:12

Yeah...

DBA1 17:13

And it's becoming more and more onerous in the sense that because of all this stuff of coordinating with everybody else, you can't just turn up and do your own thing, and the marking so on, and so forth. So I think realistically, the preparation of teaching and the marking after it, and so on, and so forth, encroaches on research time, or administration time. And part of my role is, if we're going to enter in [redacted], in REF 2028, we have to understand why the research is important in his own right. And to the students, and to the colleagues, and then how to protect the time, time is often an excuse in academia. But there is a reality in which I think most people who are on a contract like that will, in fact spend about 60% of their contracted hours on teaching about 20% on research about 20% on administration, but they'll do more than all of that in the evenings and at the weekend. And that bit will probably be research. And it's very unlikely to be the kind of informal professional development that I like, I like other people to do anyway, it's most likely to be to do with their research somewhere or other. And if you give people a chance to say, a part time Master's, or something, that will also come in that time, which is really their family or personal time. It's not healthy, but that's the reality. So I think, I think that institutions signal in all kinds of ways nowadays that ... the teaching because of concerns about, genuinely, the student experience, but also student satisfaction, rankings, and so on, so forth. So yeah, I'd say that that contract doesn't reflect the realities.

Paul Jones 19:09

I think there's also an element of how those things get assessed and measured.

DBA1 19:13

Yeah

Paul Jones 19:14

I think from what I've seen so far, on the teaching side, you measure on a much more regular basis and as drivers to make sure that people are, or your students are happy, research while we measure some things internally...

DBA1 19:27

Yeah.

Paul Jones 19:28

REF happens every six, seven years.

DBA1 19:31

Yes.

Paul Jones 19:31

You could put off doing research for quite a few years in your head, thinking you've got time to do some stuff in the future. I need to concentrate on doing the teaching stuff now.

DBA1 19:41

Yes.

Paul Jones 19:43

So I'm curious about the balance and of what you think those external factors, like drivers, so REF, TEF, KEF now as well, how much of a part they've played for your own thinking about your career, but also, how you've seen them affect others?

DBA1 19:59

Yeah, So just on that, and the 40 / 40 / 20, the term knowledge exchange is almost impossible to understand what it means. However, in the last couple of years, certainly, the [redacted] University junior colleagues have seen this, whatever it means, it's easier to get promoted by knowledge exchange, than it is by research or teaching.

Paul Jones 20:24

Ah okay...

DBA1 20:25

It's partly because the [redacted] University is a dysfunctional bureaucracy, perhaps. But I think there's a common element in universities, mostly the people making decisions are full of self importance about their own research. And if they've got a good memory in their own teaching, but they don't really understand this category of knowledge exchange, they're much more prepared to say, oh, this person, they're engaged in the community activity, they're in the media, they're doing this pro bono thing. I'll call that knowledge exchange, and it doesn't affect me, my identity. But when this upstart says that her research is as good as mine, you know, I'm not so keen on her, why doesn't she just apply again, next year, next year, next year. So there is that kind of way in which people are smuggling stuff out of, for instance, research or teaching into knowledge exchange. And then that isn't something, when I was young, that... that happened, or that you did, you know, so, a lot of promotion there was on the basis of potential promise trying to keep good people on spotting the potential. Now, we seem to have done away with potential because we're trying to, so to speak, to prove that X has done more than Y. And we've also got other criteria such as diversity, whatever it might be. So for the person in the middle of it, they're caught up in the middle of it, they seem to be, to my mind, far too bothered about the next run of promotion, they're desperate to be a senior lecturer, Professor, head of department head of school, Dean, whatever. So that is unhealthy. And it contrasts with [redacted] years ago, where you were effectively promoted on your research, really, ultimately, and you took a turn in being head of department or Dean, whatever, three, three years or five years. And then you went back to the back benches. And so even if you were minded to be rotten, as a manager, you had to sort of discipline that you're going to be back, dealing with it. Now, I think universities become very managerialist and tick boxy. And I think this, one of the things which therefore happens is people want to be able to say I have this staff development or professional development, I've done this course and that course, and so on, and so forth, which is like a badge to show. Rather than thinking, I've done this thing, which is good in the community, or whatever, in my research on my teaching. And yes, I was helped by or informed by going on that course with all those different people. I mean, I've got experience in other professions as well, by the

way, through my being on boards and things and a very formative one for professional staff development was the NHS,

Paul Jones 23:27

okay...

DBA1 23:28

So it's really my interest in [redacted] theory, the overlap of [redacted] and anything else, and [redacted] in a particularly [redacted] state. But when I went to [redacted], the boss was [redacted] who was big on [redacted] and ethics. So he turned everything really into [redacted] and ethics. And then when I came to, when I was appointed to [redacted] University, they saw me as having this kind of expertise, and they didn't have [redacted] and ethics. So, one thing I was asked to do was to create a master's in [redacted] and ethics with the philosophers and [redacted]. So I did that. And as a result of that, when the ... this is by now, it's about [redacted], or something, the government was introducing NHS Trusts which is a bit slower in [redacted], and they created a shadow trust for the area which included [redacted] University, which is called [redacted], health and social services trust. Because of the [redacted] local authorities didn't have much power, so it actually had more powers than in England. And because I was perceived to be good at [redacted] and ethics, the shadow Chair of the shadow trust asked me to become a non executive board member, at the time I didn't really know what it was, because NHS Trusts hadn't happened. But anyway, I had to get permission from the Vice Chancellor, he refused permission because I just become the, yeah, so it was [redacted], and he said something like any other year to this woman, who was an alumna of [redacted] University, and so said any other year, yes, but he's got to concentrate on, on the day job. Now then, there's some legislative problem, and it got delayed by a year. And she's quite feisty. So she went back to him and said, you said any other year, so I came on this board over the dead body of the Vice Chancellor. And the thing which was striking was, it had the same turnover, which at the time, was 60 million pounds a year, the same number of staff, which is about 3000. And I was a non executive in the Health Trust, but people were actually interested in what I thought and involved me in decisions, whereas at [redacted] University where I was the [redacted], I couldn't decide anything. You know, that the spine of the director of finance, the registrar and the Vice Chancellor that really decided everything. Now the NHS had this culture of away days. So you were involved with the board, but you had to go on away days. And I actually found that it was professional development or started it, or whatever. They didn't want to do it. But it was very impressive. And there's something like, it had a particular focus on mental health in the community. But it's in it sort of headquarters, were in what had been the, people would say, lunatic asylum. And so we went out to the different community facilities for a way half days and so on, then we went to hotels for away days. And I think maybe I got quite a bit of experience from all that. And from seeing this kind of model of a dispersed organisation, with these he..., in fact, I said that the asylum is like a campus, you know, put it in a more positive light. Right...

Paul Jones 26:53

Yeah.

DBA1 26:54

You see an asylum with these walls and stuff. But I see there's a long drive, obviously, originally to protect the public.

Paul Jones 27:00

Yeah.

DBA1 27:00

But if you imagine it's like a campus, and we went with that, you know, so I think that's where I've probably got a sense of, actually, any institution needs to align its estate, with its values, it needs to use, in Aston terminology, it needs to understand its beneficiaries. And it needs to be observed. So the senior executives were fantastic. And I was on the adoption panel, for instance, and on other things, but they

would go round and then we compare notes on what people had noticed, I noticed that even the chief executive had been a social worker, he was known by families who came with their down syndrome, 25 year old or something, into a daycare center, they knew him, he knew them. [Redacted] really influenced my attempt at style, if you like of leadership, later on. But things like, you know, you notice that the paintings in the arts and crafts group of adults with difficulties or something, you know, they're all very bleak or something like that. And he'd say, you know, I understand they've got mental health challenges and so on, but let's put in a bit more here to cheer everybody up. Things like that. Yeah. Fantastic. Absolutely fantastic. But I couldn't get [redacted] University to do it.

Paul Jones 28:30

No. And I think from what you mentioned there it's really interesting, because you could look at people thinking about professional development, in a sense of I do this course, for this reason. What you have talked about there's a totally different way of learning skills by being embedded in an organisation and having a different way of thinking. And you were lucky that you had people that will advocate for you and demand your time to go in.

DBA1 28:56

Yeah.

Paul Jones 28:56

But I wonder then how we can create opportunities for staff to have those experience which I think are really good. And maybe encourage them to look for these types of opportunities. But not just that, about doubling down on giving them time to do these types of things, then...

DBA1 29:02

Yeah. Yes

Paul Jones 29:11

I don't see us, I don't see much of that actively being promoted.

DBA1 29:15

Yeah. Well, that's a good point, I have in the past, when I have had influence, if you like, tried to do that. And what then happened was that, so I was quite involved in the troubles and the peace process and so on. Once peace broke out, it seemed like it's time to move on kind of thing. But I wasn't, I wasn't sure I was, I certainly wasn't qualified to do anything else but [redacted] University, or what became [redacted] University, was searching for a head and [redacted] they knew that I had been involved in bringing [redacted] together so they got the headhunters to contact me. And there was psychometric testing.

Paul Jones 29:33

Right...

DBA1 29:45

... I didn't have quite a few of the necessary requirements, in particular budget experience.

Paul Jones 30:12

Yeah.

DBA1 30:13

But I answered these questions, they said, you know, on this thing I did, quite well considering I didn't know anything about finance and so on, and then asking me in the feedback, you know, I said, because of the Health Trust. I was on the kind of audit Capital Finance Committee was, but anyway, so it helped me in all sorts of ways. And then the, by the time I actually started, the [redacted] was dying. But a [redacted] said, we've appointed you because of the things you did in the community in [redacted]. But I

don't want to do anything in the community here for the first two years until you get your feet under the table. And true to his word. After a couple of years, he then let me go on. And I was appointed to lots of different boards. So it really worked for me, and therefore, you know, I tried to encourage everybody to do something in the community. And we would give them time and support. I think, I mean, Aston probably does it in some way, but I haven't yet found that. But saying to the community in Birmingham, or the West Midlands, if you want a member of staff to be on your board, or whatever, little charities, let us know. I think that would be good.

Paul Jones 31:23

Yeah, I think that, there probably is, there's pockets of these types of things. But I think it goes back to the point earlier about, people will see this as an opportunity. And then they'll probably be active in searching it out.

DBA1 31:35

Yes...

Paul Jones 31:35

It's the right type of person that does that.

DBA1 31:37

Yeah.

Paul Jones 31:38

But there'll be people who will be interested, but we have the lead that horse to water a little better as an organisation, not just let it run out and find it themselves.

DBA1 31:47

Yes. I mean, this is turning into group therapy for me. So thank you, do say if you want me to be more structured for you, but just one other example. Even before I went to [redacted] University, so about [redacted] at [redacted] University, I was asked to take over teaching [redacted] to the civil service, college top management program at [redacted], which is once every quarter, those people have had a course of public and private professionals. It's like fast track, people gonna become permanent secretaries and so on. But then the public sector ones had an extra two weeks at [redacted]. And I did this day on [redacted], and loved it, really. And, I carried on doing it when I was in [redacted]. So overall, for about a decade. And when they found that, I mean, they're quite amused that I was going to become the head of [redacted] University. And they offered, as a sort of farewell prep, which meant I couldn't do it. Because [redacted] said, I can't do anything else. But as a farewell gift, they offered me a day on their winter node, it was called, which is a similar kind of thing. But just one day in which public and private professionals came together for management training. So I had this one day of professional development before running an organisation. And it's absolutely brilliant. Again, I wouldn't have done it if, but, you know, they were being nice. And each person had to present something. And the guy who was on it. Do you mind me telling you this?

Paul Jones 33:28

No, no, go for it, carry on...

DBA1 33:29

His story was that he was the food director of Marks and Spencer. So this would have been 1995. And they had this policy, predating him, of fresh everything. And they were early on having these kinds of loyalty cards, but they didn't allow credit cards, at the time, in Marks and Spencer. It was all part of their sort of values. And they understood that part of the role of the food in those big stores was to bring people in so that they would actually spend more money on other things on the way out. And the big thing at the time, was why I'm trying to get the date right, you know, big thing at the time was sort of, maybe it'd have been before Jamie Oliver, but it was Italian meals, right? And he said people, because he

could track on the cars, what people were getting and so on, but they couldn't do the whole Italian meal. They went on holiday to Italy, they came back thinking we'll make pasta, but they couldn't get tinned tomatoes in Marks. So he said, he had to go to the board to argue for this exception to the rule, tinned tomatoes, because he could show them that people were going to Sainsbury's or Tesco because they couldn't get everything. And it worked a treat. And so, it's basically his story, and I've been brought in to [redacted] University which was a [redacted] college teacher training, and I was going to focus on the mission. But I learned from that little bit, and I used to call it tinned tomatoes, sometimes you have got to do things which are a bit outside the mission...

Paul Jones 35:00

Yeah...

DBA1 35:00

...in order ultimately to benefit a flourishing organisation. And so, one of the very first things was unbelievably that some people want to do business studies, they kept trying with my predecessor. And he said, no, because, you know, that's nasty commercial stuff. But it really relied on doing something and something. So business studies and education or French or whatever it was, worked a treat. So I said, you know, on this tinned tomatoes principle, we're going to do that, and, and it worked. So I really enjoyed that day. And it just wouldn't have been the same if, although I am a great believer in reading, but if I read it, because I could tell it's the people around you as well, they are all reacting to something, and you've got about 20 presentations during the day. And you could tell that mine or anybody else's weren't as good as this one. There's something about this. And then over the years, I've therefore enjoyed, often when forced to, to spot. I mean, another example is just when I left, [redacted] University, [redacted] University asked me to be a visiting professor in their business school in leadership for a year. They have this MBA for oil economies. And the basic idea, because they are in [redacted] themselves the basic idea was people from Nigeria, Venezuela, everywhere, Saudi, thinking ahead as to what happens when the oil runs out. And they had this great guy, who had been in Shell and BP and everything. And, sadly, the Alfa Piper disaster, some of his friends, lost their lives. And he walked away for about three years, and he had a lot of money, so he could afford to, then he decided to come back. And he had with, with his old team, a start up with a brilliant technological thing to clean up oil slicks. And, as he's telling all these students this, they come from all over the world for a weekend. Otherwise, it's online, in effect, or whatever you call it before them. And he said, but there was hardly any oil production at this particular time. Because people in the Gulf were trying to manipulate the economy and so on. So there were no oil slicks. So he said, so my lesson to you is, you can have the greatest idea technologically and so on. But if the market isn't right ... yeah ... you're gonna have to wait a long time, whatever. So, again, you could see all these bright eyed students thinking, this is great. This is great. And it didn't work. Yeah. Right. And I, I've had personal experience with that kind of thing where we had a good idea, and it didn't work. But it's those things, magical moments really, that come from what I would call professional development. And it's partly because you are doing it with other people.

Paul Jones 37:53

I think there's two points there you made which are interesting to pick up on, the tinned tomatoes idea, but also that bit at the end then, because a lot of what's come from you so far, has been about the external environment, how you've learned from that?

DBA1 38:07

Yeah...

Paul Jones 38:08

... there's parts about the ability to tell stories and engage people...

DBA1 38:12

...yes.

Paul Jones 38:12

... which again, is, I think, a development area where I don't think we've quite skilled people up enough on that front, that tinned tomatoes idea of being able to give people the flexibility to think about what they, want outside of their traditional job role allows them to do their job more effectively, or to build up skills in other ways, that we become more flexible about allowing people to explore those things...

DBA1 38:37

Yeah...

Paul Jones 38:37

... give them time to do it, because you can affect motivation, morale, gives them something more enjoyable to do alongside their job that can give them different skills then.

DBA1 38:48

Absolutely, yeah. Yeah. And, again, people who are sort of writing about their reflections of say, [redacted] University, but also [redacted] University, are saying, telling stories really, about when they felt bad or something and they were referred on to me. And I said, well, what's really, what's really the issue here, there's one fantastic colleague who was very unhappy. She's basically homesick, in [redacted], as a young [redacted] lecturer. And she was, she'd resigned, you know, she offered her resignation. And her Dean brought her to me and I said, if you're homesick, her parents were in Reading, I said why don't you do something for us in London? And she said, well, what can I do? Well, we've got this partnership with a housing association. You can teach there, not theology, but you could teach back to work literacy and all this kind of stuff. And she did it and enjoyed it. She met somebody, they went off to Australia, wasn't homesick anymore. Then after having a child, she went back to teaching theology elsewhere. But her child wasn't well and, or, has got a condition. And by the time we had this get together, 25 years on, it was lock down. And she was saying that, actually, the way in which she sort of nurtured these housing association residents, from all over the world, has helped her at home with her son, even though she's not at work. And she called her little essay, the mothership that, anyway, so we could have just let her go...

Paul Jones 40:49

Yeah...

DBA1 40:50

...but it was, what's the real issue, you know and so on, so, and [redacted] director of finance, at [redacted] University was a lovely guy, he wanted for his 50th birthday to go on the Camino, to Santiago, on a pilgrimage, but he needed four weeks off. So yeah, sure, he did it. He loved it. But I also thought that he needed something else. So I suggested he do an MBA, and he declined a particular MBA, anyway. But he said, If I can do a master's, that's sort of related, will you let me do it. I said yeah. So he found a master's in managing change at Sheffield Halam. It was brilliant, and also helped all of us, because he sort of came back enthusiastically again, this idea of a set at a weekend, they called it, where he went away and talked with other people. And, I think he found out quite a bit about himself. And he energised everybody. After that, I was handing out MBAs or Masters to lots of colleagues. And it just was magical, really, again, the way in which it, it transformed people. Now, I suppose, say at the [redacted] University, I mean, I haven't had any power to do any of that, but just as a colleague, I can see that what colleagues think they need is a doctorate...

Paul Jones 42:13

Yeah...

DBA1 42:16

Sometime, in your case, no doubt, a good thing. But for some of them, it's actually quite a long term challenge. Because if they're gonna do it part time, as a member of staff, it's gonna take about six

years. And I'm not sure it's always the wisest choice, but anyway, I think, at the very least they want to sign up for it.

Paul Jones 42:41

Yeah...

DBA1 42:41

... and the [redacted] University pays their fees. And so quite a few have done it, a lot of them have succeeded, which is, which is terrific. But yeah, so I think you're right, this, I prefer it when they're doing something slightly outside of their comfort zone box, or whatever you want to call it, rather than when there's just the next thing is, they did this master's, they got this teaching job, they've know there's now research, so they now do a PhD, and so on and so forth. And if I could sum it all up, I suppose, the, the metaphor I used at [redacted] University, which is very sporting, in its background was coaching. So, we had won some awards for coaching, they could see coaching going on all around them and we had sporting partnerships with professional coaches. And whether or not they've bought into the sport metaphor, almost everybody can understand it. Whereas I think terms like mentoring, and some of the more technical terms around continuing professional development, didn't really corres... because it's the... everybody understands the pasta example of the tinned tomatoes. Also, everybody understands coaching. So I think another way of putting it is, how do you find a way of you being coached, which actually has ways, laterally if you like, of developing you as a more rounded person. The danger of the coaching metaphor is, the sort of assumption, that it's just about repeating a technical skill...

Paul Jones 44:30

Yeah...

DBA1 44:32

...so I mean, there's an element of that, but it should be more than that.

Paul Jones 44:36

Yeah, I think that's part of the problem with the coaching sports metaphor, isn't it, which is probably a bit more dictatorial sometimes in terms of what you're trying to do, rather than the way I would view coaching, which is trying to encourage a person in different ways, to get the best out of them then... ... I think that the environment in Aston, I'd like to see developing people in a way that everything informs how we get the best out of an individual. But also how we can look at teams of people together, rather than focusing on individual metrics to say, well, you need this, this and this and this as an average person, this is what we expect. It's like, what, how do we get the best out of you, what's your potential across these areas? How do you make the most of that? And then, how do you balance the team to make up for the deficits that you might have, but we'd bring it in elsewhere then...

DBA1 44:53

Yeah... Yeah...

Paul Jones 45:29

I haven't seen that happening quite yet, so...

DBA1 45:32

It's interesting, because one of the most formative experiences of mine in terms of coaching was, [redacted], was the newish coach of the [redacted] team, right, at the time and he'd been an Australian player, when it was part time. And he worked part time in a bank. And when he explained his philosophy of coaching, and we got him to explain to everybody in the university after this, but this was a sort of session for supporters, if you like, he said that in the bank, very early in his time at the bank, he is like 18, or something, as a clerk, he got something wrong. And he got told off, shouted at, but nobody told him how to do it right. So he said, he vowed then, that if he is ever in a position to manage as he, as he saw it, then you know, the bank manager, he would show people how to get it right. And then he

said, you know, eventually, the sport took on more than the banking and he became this coach. So he said, say, if a guy drops the ball from the kickoff or something, then he won't shout at them or whatever. But on the Mon..., so on Saturday night, they have to recover on the Sunday, because of getting beaten up, and then on the Monday, they come in, and they'll just kick and kick and kick, this guy will be there, and Tony will be by him, and he'll catch it, perhaps bring it into his body or something and Tony will walk with him, and they'll have the people rushing on. And he'll do it all week. And he'll just step it up until the end of the week. And he said, you know, that is what coaching is, it's about walking along with the person, showing them how they're supporting them, and then getting out of their way. And, you know, I got the whole university sort of understanding that was how a top coach saw it, but that wasn't however, how their managers saw it. So you have to do a bit more work to turn that into the practice in higher education. But it's that sort of spirit, I think is important.

Paul Jones 47:34

I think going back to something you mentioned earlier, as well as about, you mentioned the how those away days and different experiences were really beneficial. So an interesting question for me to reflect on and maybe get your thoughts on would be, was it the day itself, which is beneficial, or just the creation of space and time for someone to explore things themselves? I think, from what I see in higher education, people are so busy, there's a whole list of things to get done, much more than they can ever possibly achieve. But they haven't got that space and time to even think then.

DBA1 48:07

Yeah...

Paul Jones 48:08

...and I wonder whether it's, it might be a combination of both, it might be one or the other. But there's probably a difference between just giving people space and time to actually become better and think about development, and what they can do better in their job.

DBA1 48:19

Yeah...

Paul Jones 48:20

Versus having to go away and actually go somewhere to be facilitated in that regard.

DBA1 48:24

Yeah...

Paul Jones 48:24

it's probably a happy medium of those.

DBA1 48:26

Yes. So it's now very difficult because of lockdown. And it's difficult for [redacted] to get staff to turn up on campus. Yeah, yeah, in my limited experience, but in the days where you would kind of expect everybody to turn up, the... the difficulty, I think, I had then was that you have a lot of resentful people in higher education. And a lot of [redacted] this, I think this resentful belonging, [redacted] and [redacted] precarious belonging [redacted]. But anyway, in universities, you have both of these things. You have a lot of people who are on precarious contracts and so on. But a lot of people who resent the institution, because it has some demands on them, even though actually they've got a fantastic deal. And so in these contexts, it is difficult to separate out, is it really that they're too busy or is it that the busyness is a projection to create a shield around themselves because they resent the university ever requiring them to do anything, or they feel that their hold on reality almost is, or on their job, is precarious. So you have to do a lot of work around... and this is one of, the, one of the reasons why even the the rhetoric that you have to use for your project is challenging such as top down and bottom up, and where is the top and so on. I think that... it is about creating the space, time and context in which people have different

experiences of their institution. And of, if you want to call it the competition, or sister institutions or whatever, of what is possible elsewhere. So I think that you find in many universities, the people who are most critical of new leadership, are people who hadn't actually worked anywhere else. And they think that the way it was done when they came in is the way it should be done forever. But they're missing that everybody else has moved on. And I missed some very obvious things very early on, not least because I was in [redacted], I hadn't grasped that the polytechnics becoming universities in England had a massive impact on the teacher training colleges. Because a lot of higher education is about status. It's like a market of esteem. And it's difficult to grasp that when you're not in it. And also, if you think that institution isn't very good, because bla bla bla bla bla, but you suddenly find they're doing really well, and how is that happening, and then it challenges their perception. So sometimes what you have to do is not only get them to understand their own institutions, values, but to understand a bit more about other institutions, or you know, that whatever it is that you're in, and I think that is different, where it's competitive. So, it always is about trying to find stories, narratives, examples, which capture the imagination, and which relates to their context. I'm not explaining it very well, let me give an example. So I came from [redacted], so naturally [redacted] University had to increase its student numbers. So I looked back to [redacted], and brought people across, and I was meticulous in not attacking [redacted] local University or [redacted] local University. But I always said, at open days and things, if you want to come to a big [redacted] English city, there's lots of reasons for doing that. And because of EasyJet at the time, it's as cheap as coming to [redacted], really. But some people want to go to a research rich institution, some will hate being known in [redacted] and want to go to somewhere like [redacted] University, sort of anonymous, and some people will miss being known. They come from [redacted], and [redacted] University were tiny, you know, you might enjoy our environment. And then when I moved to [redacted] University, which is the equivalent of [redacted] University, I was able to say the same thing without compromising myself to many of the same, well, same teachers coming but with new cohorts across from [redacted]. Meanwhile, when I went to [redacted] to schools, speaking at speech days, where they knew, I would say, single mums in [redacted], were very reluctant to let their daughters go across to [redacted], because they thought it was an immoral place. I don't think he's the only one that has got that problem.

Paul Jones 53:30

Right...

DBA1 53:30

...and I would say, but they're gonna go to America or somewhere if you don't let them go somewhere. And if they don't go somewhere, they can't bring something back, you know. So it's all that sort of working out. But anyway, I think, creating that sort of series of metaphors about are we a village? Are we a town? There, it was sort of explaining to the staff who are listening, as well as to the students and their families, that you've got to understand the choices people have in the modern world. They don't have to come to us. ...they don't have to go away at all. And if they are going to come to us, let's, let's concede that other places are really good. Yeah, you know, and so I think professional development in the university needs to include, whatever the staff, whatever the contract they are on, it needs to include understanding a bit about what makes the beneficiaries enjoy their experience. And to do that, it can't just be put everybody on a Masters in Managing Change its often got to be, let's have an experience. It can be on campus, it can be off campus, but it has to include I think, stretching the people, not necessarily even requiring to do things in the activity, I mean, maybe you do. So we found out that, I suppose this is obvious, but if you go for a walk on the three peaks in Yorkshire or in the lake districts or something, you will, you will end up talking to more people in the group of 30 or 40, than if you put them in a seminar room, I mean, they're just going to stay in the same place. Apart from perhaps the tea break. But on a walk, you naturally change rhythm and pace, so that was really an important little lesson for us. And similarly, if you have a series of talks from people who come in, you can pick, I think, you can gauge even those who don't like, say music or sport or ballet, why do I have to go to this thing on ballet, but actually, once they get into it, you can see that their minds are racing. And so, I'm a great believer in a tripartite approach to it, that the individual has to have development opportunities, it has to relate to their team as well, at some point, and to the overall institution. And I think the mindset of my colleagues

in [redacted] is they are in the [redacted]. They don't really understand why is the college called a college, rather than, say, a faculty? [redacted]. So I would say that they're quite individualistic. The collective for them is [redacted], but perhaps it needs to be the college. And the overall institution, they understand.

Paul Jones 54:02

Yeah... Do you think then, going back to that point, there's a couple of things that spring to mind, when that point you just mentioned, for them, they were [redacted] previously, have spent a lot of time now pushing out from that view, they are probably quite focused in wanting to develop their own identity, which is maybe, maybe making them a bit more insular then in terms of how they see themselves, relating to everybody else. There's a more general sense of belonging, I think, that it's important to me to pick up on, where I think the point you made is really important. But I think, what I've noticed, through things like the progression schemes in work, or the way people interact, academics don't often have a relationship with the organisation they work for. It's a lot about their research and what the research brings them. They just happen to be employed in this place to do their research. And they don't care where they do it, as long as someone gives them the time and space to do their research. It could be Aston or elsewhere, I think there's a lot of benefits of Aston as a small community that people could make more off to develop themselves and get more joy out of the workplace. But that sense of belonging is sometimes lacking and whether that's detrimental to them developing as they could do.

DBA1 57:57

Absolutely, yeah. I tried to make a similar point about resentful and precarious belonging. And what they resent is, why isn't Aston as prestigious as whatever, the University of Birmingham or Cambridge or whatever it is, but on the other hand, they actually quite like being in a sort of challenger institution rather than the elite or the establishment and so on. So, but they're playing that out in different ways. And I think that some of them don't quite understand, or aren't confident enough, let's say, to get across to the students, that if, you know, if, say, I'm brought in, or other people are brought in or they develop their research reputations, when the students go for interviews, and they say, who have you been taught by, somebody that the senior partner in the firm has heard of, then that benefits all of us...

Paul Jones 58:51

Yeah.

DBA1 58:53

...so naturally, the student might think, well, I'd rather that she was around for my feedback. But once you explain why it's important that she also goes away to this conference, or gives this talk or writes this article and so on and so I think people begin to understand that, but there is a basic lack of confidence, I think, in some of the [redacted] people, and maybe professional development is, is a prism through which you can see an improvement in the overall collegiality and sense of pride in the institution. Yeah, I mean, people were very cynical in higher education aren't they?

Paul Jones 59:35

I think so. Yeah. I think what, what for me, reflecting on my experiences around HE, which has been, I must have done something bad in a previous life, the amount of time I have spent in HE, it's been probably about 13 years now roughly, in terms of being around HE or working directly in it. There's a number of things that have sprung to mind over the years about what's right and what's wrong with it, what I'm interested in particularly, and part of this research is about the influences or importance of external experiences. So what I've found, I've worked better with people who've had experience outside of HE than I have than with people who have just had HE as their, in their background, and I am interested in your thoughts on how much of a difference you feel it's important for people to have different experiences.

DBA1 1:00:28

Right. I agree with you. And I'll try to explain a couple of examples. But just before that, there is one other internal element, I think, which a colleague of mine, at [redacted], that I stayed in touch with, said to me, all academics are on the spectrum. I mean, it might it might be true that of society...

Paul Jones 1:00:28

Yeah...

DBA1 1:00:31

... that we're all on, I suppose that's why it's a spectrum. But once you understand that, universities attract, particularly as academics, people who, in blunt terms, could be diagnosed as autistic. And then you think within it, some of the most difficult, if you'd like with challenging conditions, would be those who've chosen to do [redacted], then you begin to have more sympathy for the fact that your colleagues will never agree on a curriculum or a research programme or whatever, because they're a self selecting group who've come to do their own thing, not out of ill will, but perhaps because they just couldn't operate in a [redacted] or in the HR Department of the National Health Service or whatever. And an example of this I've written, talked recently about this, is that two of the most difficult colleagues I had at [redacted] University were [redacted] and [redacted]. Right... ... both of whom now looking back, I think, are probably on the spectrum, [redacted] concealing it better than [redacted]. But anyway, they were difficult in the university, but they became great in politics in the wider community. Yeah... And I think it's because they were loners in different ways. And they were, you know, people didn't like them, or didn't like their politics, would say they were narcissistic, or ambitious or whatever. But, you know, I just think they were... they were focused. And they had a core that enabled them to withstand a lot of grief, eventually. The university was perhaps too small. I mean, not, [redacted], didn't particularly like me, but it's not about me. But you know, just my observation of them is that they will pick fights in a small context, because they were frustrated. But on the bigger stage, they did well, because they were able to withstand an enormous amount of pressure. So we kind of ripple that out and you come to your point, I think that [redacted] University, had these two big external partnerships going, obviously, because the [redacted] college, so lots of [redacted] commitments, and it was rooted in teacher training, so with all the schools and so almost everybody was out all the time, connected to a school, you know, encourage people to be a governor of a school, but they're actually going into the schools because the students had to go into schools. And similarly, with, with with [redacted], so there was a big emphasis on that. And you could see that the [redacted] was losing its influence in society. This is [redacted] to [redacted]. You could just see that in the community. And with schools, you could see [redacted] they were really struggling. And then this isn't a political, this is a political point, but it's not because of my politics, but just Labour came in, [redacted] and [redacted] invested a lot in schools. And the schools were lifted. They appointed me to the [redacted], and then to monitor, to chair the monitoring board when the educational authority failed it's OFSTED. So I went around all these schools. And I remember one head teacher saying to me, she is in a primary school, and she sort of opened the door for me to go through and she said 'now listen to this', and I couldn't hear anything, and she said 'that's what I meant'. Now, every time we open the door, you don't hear it, because they've got flashy doors and carpets and things. Whereas in the past, whenever anybody opened any doors banging through the school, you know, and one of the points here which was important was for people to see we, [redacted] University, were, had suddenly moved from being a nice place to come to, to being behind the schools. And from being influential in [redacted] because, [redacted] and [redacted] were, we were now kind of reviled because of the [redacted] cases and all this kind of stuff. So that was very important then at [redacted] University. And learning from that I created partnerships with sporting and cultural organisations, and with FE colleges. And, and the importance of those were FE colleges took that place of institutions that were even less well funded than we were, but had a lot of potential overlaps. And the cultural and sporting organisations, the thing I was looking for was like American state universities, where they know they're not Harvard, Yale, Princeton, but they're proud of being University of Wisconsin, Madison or somewhere... ...and to do that, I said, you know, we need to emphasise the regional strengths. And to get people to understand that you can be regional but world class. So most obvious things were [redacted] bands. So we had a partnership with [redacted] Band, right, and rugby league, so we had a

partnership with [redacted] Rugby League team. So everybody knows that [redacted] Band is good at [redacted] bands and [redacted] are good at Rugby League. And they kind of can then imbibe the idea that [redacted] University is not pretending to be a rugby union club or a symphony orchestra. But it's good at doing this. So those external commitments were absolutely integral to the, to the development, and then you find people coming and say, it was what actually happened, people from [redacted] said [redacted] Football Club is going bust. It's also at war with its all white fan base with their [redacted] neighbours, so we put in some help. and we won the [redacted] award for [redacted] Contribution to community by a university, which then lifted everybody. And it didn't come from me. But it's people seeing, oh, you know, my community connects to this institution. So yeah, I don't know yet. So I've just been in a short while how we connect at Aston. But I think it's good for my point of view, it's good that [redacted] has worked in, in [redacted] in the city. And I'm sure over time, I'm trying to get him to agree, [redacted] said fine, just go ahead. But [redacted] very, very cautious, risk averse, to create a little centre that looks at the concerns of [redacted] communities in particular, but diverse communities around Birmingham, and I've got experience of that elsewhere. And I've asked colleagues, what are the big issues in their communities, and they say, knife crime, for instance. I think, you know, you can begin to do these sorts of things. And it, it takes professional development with it, doesn't it? Because if the institution is, is looking out, like you were saying about the external partnerships, and so on, then it's a different mindset. And people begin to think, well, this thing I do in my spare time, because this is another thing. Sorry to ramble here, but people often are hiding what they do, that is the most valuable thing. So they're hiding from the university. Why are people going off early or whatever, when they're going to a governor's meeting of their local school? Well, fine, but you know, why don't we give them credit for that and help, help the school its that kind of thing, because they don't trust the institution. And they think I have this little bit of time, where I make a contribution, which perhaps helps my children or something like that. And I don't want to let the university know about it. And I found that a lot in [redacted]. And so you have to look at where the people are at don't you?

Paul Jones 1:05:55

Yeah. Yeah, one of the points you made earlier was about [redacted] looking towards the next REF and [redacted]. And what you just mentioned there about the centre, so those things tie together, where historically research has been judged on the merits of getting stuff published in journals and different places. And there's a lot of kudos that comes from being well known in your, your circles of people, that are your peers. But more, more focus is now on impact and delivering impact to beneficiaries, or where we decide the target for impact should be, we should be able to demonstrate that...

DBA1 1:09:47

Yes.

Paul Jones 1:09:47

... both through REF but our own institutional strategy and what we're trying to achieve as a college, it all comes down a lot to impact.

DBA1 1:09:55

Yes.

Paul Jones 1:09:56

You're not going to achieve impact that easily unless you start to have said this, that you engage with local communities and you're translating those, the research or the expertise, into differences at a ground level.

DBA1 1:10:09

Absolutely.

Paul Jones 1:10:09

That is really important.

DBA1 1:10:10

Yeah, absolutely. And go back to [redacted]. Obviously, during [redacted], we needed to have impact in communities. But also, you could see that we had a kind of authority, even if people were whinging that [redacted] University is becoming a [redacted]hotbed, or something, it didn't seem like that. But you know, that's what they say about the student union, or it was a [redacted] conspiracy on the staff, which again, it didn't seem that way, but that's what they said. But at the same time, the main building was on the [redacted], and it kind of radiated authority. So you have a kind of responsibility, I think, to do something with it, I'm sure that's true of Aston, and then everybody, everybody wins. So there's kind of visual cliché of the BBC News in [redacted], which would be some expert walking in front of the [redacted] building, the main building. All that, although very corny, you know, kind of plays into this is what a university is. And it's for everybody, and it should ripple out through, through the community. So one thing we haven't touched on, is the kind of visual imagery around all this professional development and so on, which I think is important. And when I was in a, in a position to influence institutions, I did focus on quite a bit. So I haven't really seen how Aston operates. But, but I think people need to have the messages reinforced. In those days, it was with publication, some of which I brought a lot. But in and now it might just be online or whatever, but, but I think people need to see one of their colleagues out in the community doing something, or enjoying some kind of seminar on something or collecting her DBA or your DBA. I do think that there's a difference between my generation of sorts of privileged, albeit state school, pupils, learning by being told things and writing them down or reading about them, and today's generations, where it's much more than doing something or see. And I think professional development, often that hasn't worked, certainly law. And teacher training hasn't moved with that change. So actually experiencing it or experience it secondhand through seeing a little video clip of somebody clearly enjoying their performance in the jewelry court or something of a workshop. I think those things are very, very important. And sometimes you have a discussion on whether can we afford the fees for something to give a an example of colleague from the EU in [redacted], fell out really with his PhD supervisors in the EU, but in education, he's looking at [redacted] apprenticeships. And so he could have done it in [redacted], but he chose to do it in education didn't like them. They didn't like him. So he went into sock, and then I had to appraise him when I came. I said, Well, why don't you do somewhere else? And he's in Wales. He's doing a Cardiff. The Oh, you will only pay fees if you do it. Yeah. I'm sure we can. In fact, we went to the staff development fund. And they agreed in the circumstance, I mean, we dressed it up a bit, but in the circumstances, you know, and they sort of happy, he wouldn't thank them, they're, bizarrely, you know, because he was sort of still sulking about the earliest, you know, to have somebody and I seen him present on this. You have to have somebody who's sort of happy. And actually see that person, I think does a lot more than anything else. And yet, the argument is all about, can we afford it? Or you can't afford not to do it, really? And the question should more be, how do we make sure even if he's not very cooperative, that other people get a bit of uplift from his example?

Paul Jones 1:14:39

Yeah. I think there's, reflecting on what you just said now, I was on a training course this morning, just before I came into this meeting, and one of the things that strikes me is that we have to encourage people both to think what can I do that is good for me and then how can I get other people to learn from this or encourage people to do it then. So the session this morning was about menopause awareness for men. And on the call, I commented that we all have responsibility now as a group to be out there, their advocate for this, and get people involved in thinking about menopause, understanding what people who are in that situation go through and trying to react better, and give them more support. I could have gone on that course and just think that's great. I'm learning to lots of stuff. And then never think about it again, but I would be really keen to write to staff members and say, I've been on this course, I've learned all this stuff, it's really important, have a look at this. It comes back to the point you were just making about how we develop others, how we send the message out, the visual cues you are given, sometimes that is through pictures, sometimes its just taking some time to write something up that this was great course you could all do that, then.

DBA1 1:15:50

Absolutely...

Paul Jones 1:15:50

But it is encouraging that mindset and getting the culture change about how we both look after ourselves, and how we look after each other, and have that more collegial feel.

DBA1 1:15:59

Absolutely, yeah. So when I joined the [redacted] University in [redacted], [redacted]. And they had a rule you had to do some, well they call it staff development, but personal development. And it got to the summer and I hadn't done anything beyond the courses you had to take such as health and safety. So I signed up to go to the [redacted] for [redacted] summer school, like two days, back in [redacted]. It started disastrously because I hadn't grasped that in the summer, [redacted] Airport was very busy. The roads to it were blocked. So I missed the plane. Anyway, I got there a bit later. And, you know, a really good couple of days. And mostly government [redacted], some of whom I taught at [redacted] University ages before. Yeah, so that was nice, you know, they came and chatted to me, and so on and so forth. And then I became an advocate for, this being forced to do something, and finding something that, you know, that you can make a difference on. I just told a little story that ... I wasn't speaking at it, but I made sure I asked the question in a way that brought the [redacted] University into it. So [redacted], the president of the [redacted] was speaking, I asked her a question, and she knew me you know, so she said 'Why are you here?' And that kind of gets you in. So I went back and I said, you know, let's be more positive about doing this. And also, let's, let's undertake, even if we're not speaking... We try to do something which flies the flag, and then follow it up, you know, so you follow it up by asking a, well politely, I didn't really think that your answer answered my question, would you come and speak to our students about it? And so on, and it's that, I mean, just very, very simple things, like you're saying about the menopause example, one of the colleagues in the [redacted] University Faculty of Business and Law, Joe [redacted], writes a lot about menopause as an impact case study. And, yeah, it does, it sort of liberates other people, doesn't it? So, yeah, I think, I think that, what you're doing is helping us create a culture here, which is where people are going out and doing stuff, and they'll bring it back in, so to speak. Yeah...

Paul Jones 1:18:40

I think that general culture shift and moving more towards, you know, we can help others touches upon coaching and mentoring stuff we've talked about, looking for opportunities, learning from colleagues about different experiences they've got, I'd love to see us shift more towards that type of environment then where people were taking the time to do those things and make the most of those opportunities.

DBA1 1:19:05

Yeah, absolutely.

Paul Jones 1:19:09

Any particular skills that you think have been missing in higher education that you've learned externally, or think that academics could do with learning on top of what they learned through PhDs and what they get taught to do their jobs?

DBA1 1:19:25

Again, that's a good, a good question. I suppose it ought to be central. But collegiality is the big thing, which I think is missing.

Paul Jones 1:19:35

Yeah.

DBA1 1:19:37

And there's an attempt to bring it into the promotion criteria of the university, which I supported, but it didn't make it. But it's a kind of implicit,... uhh, which I think criterion, which is a dangerous place for it to be because then what happens is people get a reputation for being not collegial, but it's never spelt out to them, what is and isn't collegial. So I think that's it for me probably the most important ... in terms of understanding how their institution operates, I suppose ... it's ... it's become complicated with, I was always against high fees. So not my fault, but it's become very consumerist, and so on and so forth. And I think that in terms of understanding the institutions, they say, our colleagues don't seem to understand that, in essence, we're like a charity, rather than, like a private sector business. Well, I think you should be less, anyway. So, as a charitable organisation, you have all this stuff about league tables, and particularly league tables where, and [redacted] very keen on all this, I think, because he feels the university is very keen on saying where it came. Really, it's, it's not like a league table where you can actually change where you are by being better. It's all very artificial, and so on. But with a charity, you wouldn't say, Oxfam or Children in Need, or whatever, is better or worse, because of how talented the people are, who come in, in the first place. I mean, it's the opposite, isn't it? If the people that come in, haven't got all A's at A level and you add value, then that's a good thing.

Paul Jones 1:21:35

Yeah...

DBA1 1:21:36

So I would say it's these two things, that there are people who are very good at their own research, but they don't seem to understand that they need to be collegial. And they don't seem to understand that the university isn't primarily about rankings and prestige. It should primarily be about the mission values, learning. The [redacted] University's mission was to be open to people, places, methods and ideas, but you couldn't get a more closed approach to some of these things than the bureaucracy. But it's a beautiful rhetoric. And it's quite difficult to keep open as you go through a long career. And so I think, you know, I'm genuinely interested in ... I've got back in my office, a history of Aston University, I want to know, what's the institution like? Yeah... I want to understand what is it now, how does it see itself? And I don't think that, that's widely shared, so I think that you can do that easily by, you can have, you create an anniversary or something like that.

Paul Jones 1:22:44

Yeah...

DBA1 1:22:45

You know, like the very origins in a kind of Mechanics Institute or something. You said, it's the 20th anniversary coming up or something. And you have a series of celebrations, events, seminars, lectures, whatever. And, and you tell the story, in a way. And in terms of collegiality, it's sort of John F. Kennedy asked, not what your country can do for you, what can you do for your country there? And I think that I've just learned, I meant to be doing [redacted], or whatever it's called here, helping out, [redacted]. And I think asking the explicit question of 'What have you done that helps collegiality in, I would say at [redacted], the college, and the university?'. If you just ask that, I think you're over time, you'll get people wanting to have an answer.

Paul Jones 1:23:38

Yeah. Yeah, that's pretty good. I think we have run out of time now. Yeah. Thank you so much for your time today.

Appendix 5: DBA2 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA2

Paul Jones 00:05

I have started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour though we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi structured. This means I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore. But you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. That the idea is that I do that with the least amount of questions or interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me on the details that are provided on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed, and all links to you as individual, for example personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk, if you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress or if I myself am feeling distressed. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start, then we will start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. For the record, this is DBA interview 2. Please, can you confirm you understood the information I've given to you?

DBA2 02:03

I have.

Paul Jones 02:04

Great, and are you happy to proceed with a recorded interview?

DBA2 02:07

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:08

Great. And do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA2 02:11

I do.

Paul Jones 02:12

Excellent. Please confirm the school your work in?

DBA2 02:17

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:20

And can you confirm your gender please?

DBA2 02:22

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:23

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA2 02:25

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:26

Great. Only two more questions. How would you describe your career level? Early career, mid career or senior career?

DBA2 02:34

Early career going into middle career.

Paul Jones 02:39

So you are happy to put in early career, then?

DBA2 02:41

Probably, I mean, I'm in that gray area where... yes.

Paul Jones 02:45

It is all a bit grey isn't it, depending on who's looking at it...

DBA2 02:48

We'll say early career then.

Paul Jones 02:50

Could you confirm which age bracket you're in? There's five different choices. One is 25 to 34. One is 35 to 44. One is 45 to 54. Are any of those suitable, so far?

DBA2 03:03

Yes.

Paul Jones 03:04

Which one?

DBA2 03:05

[redacted].

Paul Jones 03:06

Great. That's it for the closed questions. I'm going to start talking about professional development more generally. So can you talk me through what professional development means to you, and your thoughts on it generally, and what Aston's done for you in terms of professional development?

DBA2 03:22

I am just trying to organise my thoughts here....

Paul Jones 03:24

That's alright...

DBA2 03:24

Professional development, to me, is the opportunity and the training to advance through your career, whatever trajectory that means, for the individual. Aston has, first of all given me a huge amount of, sort of, professional development in hiring me as a lecturer in the first place, pretty much straight out of the PhD. And it also gave me opportunities to deal with other administrative and leadership roles, umm, at sort of level appropriate times when, when I was sort of, felt ready to take on a new challenge. In terms of the only, the only issue sometimes is training or knowing what to expect or sometimes job roles change in significance. So there have been a number of roles that I've been told will be relatively easy. And then within the period of me accepting them and them starting, there's been a massive sort of paradigm shift about what this role is, and it's become a huge undertaking.

Paul Jones 03:52

Right...

DBA2 04:19

So that I think that's, that's mainly the the issue, you hit the ground running a lot on these things.

Paul Jones 04:33

Yeah. So you mentioned there about how you felt Aston had already developed you because they took you on so early to be a lecturer straight from university. So that's a really good stepping stone for you to get into the role, but what are your thoughts on then how we've treated you since coming into the role and have we, do you think you've been looked after in terms of your development. You've mentioned some areas there about, there was changes to what was being asked of you quite quickly. Can you tell me a bit more about those types of things?

DBA2 05:02

Certainly at a departmental level, it has been excellent in terms of, you know, me feeling looked after, me feeling that my, umm, development professionally and sort of more, even more personally or industry side has been looked after really well, umm, yeah, it's, there is a certain sense of isolation from the rest of the university. I'm not sure how invested they are in me progressing at all. I'm not, I'm not sure you if you think about these things in sort of terms of investment, I'm not sure if there is an investment necessarily in the humanities, as such, or there have been times when I've been worried that there, there isn't going to be one. So that's, that's more the issue. But from a, sort of, certainly departmental or school perspective, yes, I've been very well looked after.

Paul Jones 05:55

So that sounds like then, and correct me if I'm wrong, more like the day to day of being supported and encouraged seems to work well. But more the longer term future of knowing that you're going to be looked after, and that they've got a trajectory in terms of a future within Aston and that seems a bit more uncertain.

DBA2 06:11

Yes, that's very, you know, causes a lot of anxiety.

Paul Jones 06:15

And the good parts then about being looked after on a day to day basis, what does that look like for you then, what makes you quite positive about this? What, what makes it a positive experience?

DBA2 06:25

The fact that I have senior level colleagues who always have time for junior colleagues, there's a lot of informal mentorship, there's a lot of advice being given, a lot of understanding that we have, certain people have different, not even specialisms, but things that they are good at, some people are really good at grant funding, and they are always happy to provide advice. The fact that our research manager or head of department has a good grasp of what everyone is doing, and has, you know, sort of

different career trajectories possible for them, you know what I mean? So it's not like, I know some heads of departments, they're not even really sure what people are doing, so they can't advise them appropriately. But it feels like without being micromanaged, there's at least a sort of finger on the pulse. On top of that, the fact that I've been approached with opportunities from people higher up who have said, I feel like you're at this level, would this be, this might be really good for your career development, is this something you'd be interested in undertaking? You know, it's nice to be thought of, and to be brought in as part of a team.

Paul Jones 07:32

Yeah.

DBA2 07:32

So I think those are the things that I found most useful.

Paul Jones 07:36

I think that sounds really positive in terms of having that ongoing support, and knowing you're being asked about how you're doing and that the support there from a senior level comes down then, because it's not always the case, in terms of then the balance, so, on a teaching research contract, the general rule of thumb is 40 percent teaching, 40% research, then 20% administration. How does that work on a day to day basis in terms of finding that balance?

DBA2 08:04

Uhh, it is, at the moment about 80% admin, probably 15% teaching, 5% research, it's, I view this as an absolute nightmare, to be honest, at the moment.

Paul Jones 08:17

And if you're were going to change things then, and if you could think about, what you'd fundamentally change in that structure for you to be able to balance those things better. What are the things that would have to be in place for it to be a better balance?

DBA2 08:30

We need to hire more staff, I think, umm, it, I think there are also sometimes roles that go to researchers that really should have their own admin staff. And I know that this has changed, I believe, recently, but I'm thinking about the [redacted]. And I was the [redacted] for a while and I worked seven days a week when I was the [redacted], I worked seven days a week for six months. And it was just, it, it reached the point, I think, where they realised this is a full time job in and of itself. So, there are occasionally admin roles that are just far bigger than you can even take on as sort of a side role, so...

Paul Jones 09:17

Yeah, that makes sense. So in terms of that balance then, it sounds like it'd be really hard to find a balance at all, and there's potentially some things you can put in place to change it. One of the things I've seen happen in the past is people have just been overloaded with work and more and more things are added on over time. Has that been your experience? You've alluded to it earlier where you are given a role, all of a sudden, the parameters have changed and your work expands but nothing is taken away then to allow you to do those things properly.

DBA2 09:47

Yeah, and I noticed things, umm, like I look at my old teaching materials from when I first started, and I had so much energy to give the students and now it's, my scores are still excellent, but I'm running on autopilot, I'm definitely not focusing in the same way that I was. And it would be really nice to connect with students, you know, again. My research, I'm trying to fit it into the cracks, but there's, you know, even with a dedicated research day, the level of admin coming in constantly means I almost never take research days. So yeah, I think, umm, I sort of view it as a almost like background programs running on

a computer, and they build up so much you don't, you know, it's leading to a hard restart. And, you know, so...

Paul Jones 10:35

And you don't want to get to that stage with a blue screen of death happens, and then everything should stay...

DBA2 10:39

...exactly!

Paul Jones 10:40

Yeah, I can get that...umm...is the pressure then, from you, both from you internally to want to do a good job and then is one of the pressures then from external environments, so manager, other things the University tells you to do? What... where does the pressure come from?

DBA2 10:57

The pressure almost entirely comes from the last few years that we've had. So the pressure, and I don't, I guess it would be called external, but it's certainly also coming from me is, if I do not succeed on every possible front, they are going to close us down. So... it's just it's an impossible pressure to sort of live up to because it feels like it's not only my job, but it's also my colleagues jobs are sort of being able to provide something to the local community that they, a lot of students wouldn't have otherwise. Umm, you know, in terms of access, so it's, yeah, it's an enormous amount of pressure. But yeah, that's probably where it's coming from.

Paul Jones 11:40

It sounds like a lot of pressure, it's the sense of, rather than just being asked to do your job, well, there's a lot more responsibility on your shoulders then of thinking, if I don't do my job well, these things could happen, it isn't just about losing your job, it's about everybody losing their jobs and the department disappearing and that seems like a lot more pressure to be shouldering in terms of performing your job, then?

DBA2 12:04

Yeah, but I mean, that is the reality. And I think every single person in our department and other departments is operating on that same assumption where there is, there's no wiggle room for a mistake. It's not just performing well, but performing perfectly and delivering beyond expectations. I did not feel this way, you know, two years ago. Umm, but I think, part of the problem is, I'm doing more, but am I doing it better? There's, there's very little room to actually, like, there's no space to think about these things. You know, there's less energy to give to students. So I'm doing more to seem flashier, but I don't think it's anywhere near as good.

Paul Jones 12:43

Yeah, and then, so last, if you look at last two years then, since you mentioned that time period, there's quite a lot of things that have happened. What is it in particular that you think has been driving this thing, because if you think the last few years we've had COVID, it has been a global phenomenon we all had to deal with, then the switch to learning or teaching at home and online learning. We've had the college merger, various other things have happened, is there particular things out of that, that has driven this, or has it all contributed towards...

DBA2 13:13

It is 100%, just the merger. Umm, and I don't know if we're gonna have another one. So, that's, yeah, it's it's been awful for morale, and workload, and pressure and mental health and things like that. So it's, you know, this has not been good.

Paul Jones 13:30

So the move to online teaching, then, it sounds like you would have coped with that quite well, it's just the additional pressure ...

DBA2 13:36

Yeah!

Paul Jones 13:36

... the structure around you is causing the problems.

DBA2 13:39

I mean, I, I think we all in my classes, my students, and me and everybody, we did all right, with online teaching. And in fact, it led to some creative thinking in those early days of COVID, about like, how to teach and what pedagogy was, and, umm, I created a bunch of supplementary materials that I think are really good, and I still use that the students still find helpful, so that, that wasn't a problem. It was stressful for other reasons, you know, if you're worrying, you're gonna get sick, but the online teaching itself was fine.

Paul Jones 14:10

And, in terms of that pivot then to online teaching, did you receive additional support and help to develop new materials or to make that move? Or was the onus on you as an individual just to think creatively, and just put stuff in place?

DBA2 14:25

The onus was on me, and, they're, one of the things that I had to think about as well, was because you see this at sort of other universities. I don't know if you've heard the story about the art history professor who was teaching online only and his his students discovered he died two years ago, two years previously, and they just kept using his materials so they didn't have to pay somebody else. So part of the creative thinking is not only what's good for the students, but how do I make useful things for the students in which I also cannot be replaced so I'm not you know, it's so it led to some, some creative thought. But I think there is always, like the tension is always, is my job even secure that's where all of this is coming from.

Paul Jones 15:09

Yeah. And that sounds really hard then. Was there things then, then obviously, you've done a really good job by the sound of it in terms of approaching the online teaching, was there things you wish the university had done better than to support you during that stage?

DBA2 15:25

It might have been nice to have had some sort of class about what online pedagogy looks like, maybe available to us. I know, I know, we have some colleagues who teach that already. I mean, but it's a discipline in its own right. It's, uh, you know, it would have been nice to maybe have had some examples, you know, but that said, I, I enjoyed thinking of things on my own. So probably.

Paul Jones 15:52

I think, yeah, I think you're the type of person by the sound of it who enjoys that challenge and enjoys the creative side of it.

DBA2 15:58

Yeah

Paul Jones 15:59

I think that depending on what you are like as a person that can vary. And, how you approach it can be quite difficult then, because some individuals will be more creative than others. Some like to embrace

technology more than others do, people's place and where they are in their career, but also their knowledge of technology, and also how to develop different ways of teaching, communicating, that can vary massively then.

DBA2 16:21

I saw that there were some people who really didn't thrive during this. But I suppose that's just it. That is a temperament thing. And I liked the sort of tech and the creative process, and what can I do? So...

Paul Jones 16:35

Do you then share ideas within your environment, within the departments? So if you're doing something really good, do you have any forums or ways of sharing your good practice?

DBA2 16:44

We do actually we have, umm, it's ,it's slightly irregular. I think it was supposed to be once every three months or so. But we're all so busy. But it's at least once a year where we have sort of a teaching good practice, innovation, sort of, online seminar, yeah.

Paul Jones 17:00

And are those dropped to the wayside a little bit because of how busy you all are?

DBA2 17:06

Yeah, definitely.

Paul Jones 17:08

So the interesting question for me in there, so that balance of 40:40:20 of teaching, research, and then the administration part, I've often wondered whether we need to craft space and time just to allow a percentage of time for running workshops, or doing professional development, or improving practices stuff, because from what you've said, so far, there's very little time spare, if like, none at all, by the sound of it, you're doing more than you should be doing to make everything balance. And it's those types of things which make a massive difference to people's ability to do their jobs more effectively, then drop off then.

DBA2 17:48

Yeah, it's a funny one, because if we had some sort of mandatory, you know, training or development session that was sort of built in, I think that would infuriate a lot of people, myself included, because I'd go no I need to be answering emails. So if, it's, it's not so much, I mean, I think it'd be great if we could reduce the volume of other things as well. Because rather than make it yet one more thing on the to do list when other like seemingly more urgent things, but you're right, that you know, these, these are some of the nicest times I have with my colleagues are when we get together and we share good practice and we talk about things and you know, that, it, you actually connect with people and feel like you're learning and progressing as a scholar and a, you know, an educator. But yeah, if it's, if it's sort of mandatory on top of everything else, we're all going to be cranky doing it and not getting anything out of it.

Paul Jones 18:41

Yes, I suppose there's two issues there, isn't there, there is the time issue in terms of having time dedicated towards doing that type of stuff. And I guess the permission issue as well of feeling like that should be something you should be focusing on then, having permission to really look both look after your own development and look after the development of others.

DBA2 18:59

Yeah. And, I mean, it's whenever I have any sort of extended periods of work off, that I feel... it's sort of, umm, like somebody's sort of lifted the curtains where you're like, oh, wow, I actually have time to process these, it's a sort of, all the noise goes away, and you can actually think about the real research

problems or the real teaching problems, and you get somewhere, and then, the noise sort of creeps back in with, with admin. So...

Paul Jones 19:32

Yes, and its disappointing then, isn't it, that you can see the benefits of having that time and space to think about things. But yet, there's so little opportunity to craft that time and space to actually do it then.

DBA2 19:44

That's why, I think, research leave is so important. Especially, I know, there's a drive now toward, we're only going to give research leave to people who are already great at publishing or grant writing. And I think that's really wrongheaded, because it just means that you're going to have two tiers of academics, the people who ignore admin, maybe at the expense of other things, for their own personal development, and they're going to some extent thrive. And then the people who actually keep the university ticking over, who never get a chance to have career development, and give themselves that space. So, yeah....

Paul Jones 20:20

But it comes back a little bit to what you said earlier as well is that part of your role as an early career researcher is to develop and become better for the future in terms of the skills experiences. But if everybody at every level is so pushed for time, who were going to be the mentors and the crafters that allow you to develop that expertise where they pass on those skills, knowledge and expertise in an effective way, then?

DBA2 20:48

It relies a lot on goodwill, to be honest. I mean, that's, that's why I mean, I've been at other universities where departments have not behaved like this, but the department I'm in right now, there's a lot of goodwill, everyone gets on, everyone's very happy to mentor each other. And it's, I think it's just a right blend of personalities more than anything. But I've been in departments where the, that has not been the case. So I think it comes down to how competitive people are driven to be to some extent, how overworked people are and even though we're overworked, I don't think there's, I think we sort of adhere more to each other. We, you know, there isn't this sort of dividing element.

Paul Jones 21:28

It's, it's nice to hear that the department you're in, it sounds like they look after each other and want to help each other.

DBA2 21:35

Yeah.

Paul Jones 21:36

To me, it's never seemed like it should be a competition. If someone's got a good idea, then there should be forums and ways to share that good practice. You talked about creativity earlier. If you are putting in time a thought into how you can develop your teaching practice, then why wouldn't we want to share those ideas? And likewise, why wouldn't you want to benefit from others doing the same thing? Because that pool of knowledge would be really good.

DBA2 21:58

It would. And I recently participated in one of the workshops, on sort of like the university wide workshops on good practice and, umm, it was horrible, it was the worst thing I've ever experienced. Because my discipline was sort of ridiculed by the following presenters. So it's, it depends, I think, a lot on temperaments and how much subjects are valued as well, I think that's, that's the other part is that if you're constantly punching up trying to be taken seriously, it that just interrupts so much time, that I could be better spending on personal development. So, it's nice to share these things. But it's nice to share these things if everyone's sort of on the same page? So yeah...

Paul Jones 22:43

So following on from that last statement about being ridiculed, and not being, it sounded like not being respected for the discipline you're in, does your discipline guide and shape your professional development, more so, because of your worrying about the way its perceived by others?

DBA2 23:04

Oh, that's a good question. I've never really thought about that before. I suppose to some extent, my discipline here is getting significantly... I don't wanna use the word... pure, but it's getting less and less pure than if I were at a Russell Group where these things are sort of intrinsically valued in their own right. It's, you know, it's not, it doesn't seem to be valued very much here. So I find myself dabbling in other things, which, you know, it's good if you're, if you'd like the interdisciplinary stuff, which I did anyway. But it's also a little frustrating that the things I'm really interested in, I can't do because they're, yeah, not. It's, it's, added pressure of attempting to sort of keep one foot in the camp of what I did my PhD in, because that's my training, and you have to sort of keep that updated. But then also keep the foot in the camp of like, but I have to make sure if the, you know, the department is still around in five years, I have to be seen to be doing other things. So it's just it's being stretched very thin.

Paul Jones 24:13

So is there a tension then between, sort of, if you looked at a traditional model of what academia would have been like quite a few years ago, people would have been in their subject areas, they'd have been allowed the freedom just to investigate those areas. And they probably wouldn't have been challenged that much. Over more recent times, we've seen much more focus on metrics of measuring performance of trying to have a beneficiary that strategy, we're trying to make a difference to students or organisations out in the world. You have to try and find a balance I suppose, between the both of keeping your focus on what was making you passionate about your topic area, but also being realistic about what was going to appeal to others outside of your niche area and what keeps you employed then.

DBA2 25:01

Yeah, I mean, they talk about that a lot with the REF, and the TEF, and the KEF and things. And part of the issue with all of these is that they're very hard things to measure. And I'm not saying that we don't need some sort of system of measurement, because, you know, it's, it's good to sort of keep an eye on things and have some sort of standard baselines that people should be hitting. But oftentimes, these things are so subjective, to measure, it's very difficult. And I think when all of a sudden there is, you know, this is the criteria now, people sort of teach or research toward that, rather than towards true innovation. So I worry that you know, research is going to get less innovative, less important, not more so, with with some of these pressures, because once you introduce a framework like this, you're not allowed to think as creatively.

Paul Jones 25:53

So if we go back to that question, I asked you earlier then about your discipline, and how it, how would that affect your professional development. If we think about the key things then metric wise that you might be measured on, that could include publications, it could include grants, it could include impact, for instance, there's a variety of things that you could be measured on. Do you think your discipline then makes you a bit more focused on some of those things and others in terms of your ability to achieve impact or your ability to win grants? Or your ability to get publications?

DBA2 26:28

Yes, it this is one of the reasons why, because I know things like grants are big for career progression. And it's wildly unfair, because I don't need equipment. You know, at most, maybe I need an assistant, but I just I, to conduct a good research, I just don't need money like that. So I spent a stupid amount of time trying to think up, how can I get money rather than thinking of what is good research. And it's purely just how do I manage to score, you know, £50k or £100k, just so I can get the next promotion step. And that's such a waste of everybody's time, because it's, i'm focusing on entirely the wrong thing.

So it's things like that, you know, impact and publications, that's not a problem for me. But you know, to, I think, I don't, I think not all criteria applies the same to all disciplines. But we're sort of held by, by those same rules.

Paul Jones 27:29

Yeah, I think for my experience, having worked across the University previously, if you looked at Engineering and Physical Sciences, the type of kit they'll purchase could be worth hundreds of thousands, if not millions, sometimes.

DBA2 27:41

Yeah.

Paul Jones 27:42

Whereas your ability to do your research. It's more about the ideas, and having the time to do it, not about the value of the stuff you need around you to support that.

DBA2 27:50

Yeah, it's just it comes down to equipment costs. And if you are in a discipline, where those are relatively low, and that seems a shame to me, because it's, it costs so much less to run my discipline, but you know, versus what it can put out. Nobody needs to buy me a half a million pound piece of kit. But it's not valued as much, even though, yeah, just about... maybe it's, maybe it's the price tag attached to all the kit that makes it seem more important. I don't know.

Paul Jones 28:20

Yeah, so it seems to me from what we just talked about, it's a shame, you can't be valued, because you've been able to do such high quality research at a very cheap level. Not the other way of thinking where the research isn't as good if you're not bringing in those high levels of grants, then...

DBA2 28:21

Yeah...

Paul Jones 28:26

... that doesn't, you are right, it doesn't make that much sense when you think about it that way.

DBA2 28:40

Yeah.

Paul Jones 28:40

But I know it forms part of the promotions criteria, have you had support then in terms of thinking about your next promotion and what's that been like?

DBA2 28:53

So it's mostly my head of department who has been excellent about walking me through, you know, the, the best pathways for me and sort of saying, like, oh, I would give it one more year to be, you know, a shoe in and things like that. So it's mostly been head of department. I know, when I first started, they had a few, sort of promotions workshops and things that I attended, which were helpful. And I think that was more at a school level. Which, you know, it's, it's always good. I always, you know, like going to those sort of things to sort of see, what's the criteria this year, you know, but yeah, but talking sort of one on one and actually tailoring in its head of department.

Paul Jones 29:31

That's good then, because it does vary between departments in terms of how much support people get in terms of thinking about those types of things. So you mentioned REF, TEF and KEF earlier, and one of the questions I'm interested in about my research is how much of an impact those external influences

have on you performing your job then, are those things always in your mind when you're thinking about your job and what you have to do.

DBA2 29:56

Yeah, to some extent, certainly REF, that because, that's what at least being sold as the big one. But it feels like we're all sort of aiming for these sort of weird targets, that we can't really see, just aim high. And, are we hitting the target? We don't know. And I know that because REF, it's a fairly new system, it gets changed every cycle they've had. So it's by no means a perfect system. But I think that's, it's, you feel a little bit like you're walking on quicksand here, you're not quite sure, you know, especially with, umm, which, you know, which grouping are we submitting to, you know, so it's, it's, is my research even going to be relevant to this, or... yeah.

Paul Jones 30:35

So when you're thinking about your own professional development then, do you use any of the different constructs out there to help you guide your activities and actions. So I'm taking it you're currently a fellow of the HEA do you use their professional skills framework still then, so the PSF, to guide what you need to do for the next levels on that or not?

DBA2 31:00

No, to be honest, the HEA is sort of, at least in my area, is viewed as a bit of a joke. Just, just because all you had to do really to get accreditation was write up a couple of paragraphs and send in, if you just pay 100 quid, they'll just give it to you. So it's that, they don't even cross my mind really, it's something that you have to slap on your CV, and then I never thought about it again.

Paul Jones 31:23

So do you have plans and to move up to different levels of that, or is it just a case you've done your fellowship...

DBA2 31:29

I am sure it's something that I probably will do as I climb the career ladder, but that is a much secondary, like, oh, that's a thing I have to tick off the box, rather than I'm doing it for, for myself, because I just, you know, the experience comes from actual teaching and engagement with pedagogy, I don't really know that they're, they're just rubber stamping it at the end of it. So...

Paul Jones 31:51

And what about on the research side then, is there any framework you use on the research side to gauge your development or how you're doing?

DBA2 31:59

Probably, I mean, it's just more peer review than anything else, and being, being asked to lecture on things. So I think it's just the publication side of things that I'm using to ... that and conferences. Just general networks, rather than...

Paul Jones 32:16

So there is a vitae researcher developer, development framework, that exists as well.

DBA2 32:21

Yeah.

Paul Jones 32:22

Have you ever had sight of that or looked at it?

DBA2 32:24

Yeah, back, back in my in my PhD, I think that we use that as part of our, are you developing as a sort of PhD researcher, but I mean, those things are sort of hammered into you so much, that at this point, I probably, like, oh, yeah, I just do that as a default. Because my, my PhD relied on that quite a bit. They trained us quite a bit on like, make sure every year you're meeting all the vitae requirements and, yeah...

Paul Jones 32:50

So, if you could then wave a magic wand, and you could just put things into place that would work for you, development wise, what type of things would you benefit more from, so there might be happening now you think, oh, that's really good, I want more of it. Or there might be things missing, you think, oh, it would be really good if Aston provided that?

DBA2 33:09

I think it's, it's... the things that I find the most useful, to be honest, are people like [redacted] and [redacted] and other sort of support staff that sort of just know where to go for things, that's, that's the stuff that makes my life a lot easier when I can just, I know who to write to and it's something that they can just handle rather than me sort of bumbling around. That's, that's the thing that that takes the most time. Because there are a lot of little, especially admin, things that just chew up so much. And most of that time is, is me not knowing, or other people not knowing that, you know, going to 15 departments and 20 different people before somebody goes, oh, yeah, I actually know what to do with that. So I think it's almost like hubs of knowledge I can go to and just say please help. But yeah, I guess that's it. More support staff is always welcome. That's the biggest thing for me.

Paul Jones 34:05

Well, I suppose, one of the things I've thought about is how we make life for academics as easy as possible, then, so that example you mentioned there is that rather than put a lot of thought, or chase around stuff, you know, the person you have to contact and you know who to go to, for that advice or guidance then, whether it's about grants, whether it's about publications, so while the research office can support on the more operational stuff internally, do you feel you've got the right network in place that could give you advice and guidance on publications, grants and also impact as well?

DBA2 34:42

To some extent here, for sort of the... sorry my stomach is rumbling, it is going to pick that up on the mic... So yeah, for my personal networks, yes, to some extent. It's, it's sort of divided, so at Aston, generally speaking, I have, I have good advice given about things like impact and REF and all of that stuff. But they can't speak more to me personally and what I trained in, which has sort of disappeared a little bit as I've, I've had to sort of fit my research into more like what the university's new frameworks are. I do have people external to Aston, people I did my PhD with, or where I know from other networks who are helpful. But it's quite a, it's quite a patchwork quilt of expertise. And in part, it's because I'm the only person in the whole university who, you know, has anything approaching my specialism. Which is, you know, it's a it's a very, very common one, you go to any other, especially a Russell Group, and they would probably have 15 scholars in my field at least. So it's just it's very weird to be all alone.

Paul Jones 35:52

Is that lonely then, in terms of like, do you feel like you're on your own? Or do you feel...

DBA2 35:56

Extremely, extremely, especially because I'm the, again, without giving too much away, everyone else in my department is mostly on the other side of like, the department, I'm basically the only one who does like, one major core thing. So yeah. Well, I mean, sort of, like, I guess off the record, like they're all on the only [redacted] person, they're all [redacted] and [redacted] people. Even the other two [redacted], people, they actually have a very strong basis in [redacted]. So...

Paul Jones 36:33

Yeah, fair enough, that sounds like a difficult place to be, because you're always trying to get away from being the outsider and trying to fit into another game that other people are trying to play them.

DBA2 36:45

Yeah. Yeah. And, but, it's just in terms of resources. I mean, it's nobody's fault. But they don't know where I should go to publish certain things, or they don't, you know, they all go to their collective conferences, and I would never have anything to present at those. So it's, yeah, it's development wise, I have to reach out to external networks.

Paul Jones 37:04

And, it's interesting, because I think one of the gaps for me, at least, I've seen is that we don't give people the skills to network that affect them sometimes. And that's both at a student level, but also staff level as well then, where it's expected that people do it, but people don't seem to be that good sometimes at doing it. And that might be a development area. What are your thoughts on that? Would that be something you would want more training on, something that you've managed to wheedle yourself out of your career and that you think, oh, I have done alright with that now, just because I've got my wits about me and I am determined to do it?

DBA2 37:38

That's a, that's a really hard question because I think it also comes down to temperament. So the big things that really help are me going to conferences and working up the courage to network and I am an incredibly shy person. So I, I hate that I never go to a conference unless I absolutely have to where I'm like, oh, it's been three years, I should probably go to one. And, you know, so I don't think any amount of training in the world was gonna, you know, make me want to spend three days eating sad sandwiches and hoping somebody will talk to me.

Paul Jones 38:08

Yeah, but if there was things we could do to help you, build your confidence, would that be useful for you then, do you think?

DBA2 38:19

Yeah, I mean, of course, yeah, of course, it would. Perhaps, I mean, how would you, how would you do that?

Paul Jones 38:25

Well that will be up to me to think about in terms of how we do it, and what the impact of the research will be. But I've been on different networking courses before ... and that can teach you how to read a room, how to read groups and feel more comfortable to go into those situations, then. It's not about changing your personality, to make you not shy, but it's more about equipping you with some skills that allow you to overcome that shyness itself a bit more effectively, there is potentially stuff like that.

DBA2 38:58

Yeah, it's, I mean, I can, I can certainly fake it well enough when I'm there. It's just, you never, it's, it's, never high on my list. I never want to. So...

Paul Jones 39:06

But that is draining then, isn't it? When you have to constantly be a different person?

DBA2 39:12

Yeah. I mean, I would certainly give it a look in. But yeah, if that was available.

Paul Jones 39:18

One of the things I want to check off as well was, from what you said, you went to do your PhD, then got the job at Aston, straight after. So you've had no external experience then of places of work, generally, or have you had some experience?

DBA2 39:32

At my, at my PhD institution I did do a couple of very short term postdocs there. But no, I've never [redacted]. I mean, I've worked in other industries before I went back into academia. So I had at least a few years in between my undergrad and then going into my master's but, no, yeah, I thankfully have not had to do the whole sort of precarious, a year here, six months there, sort of deal.

Paul Jones 39:52

So that experience you had then in between your undergraduate and master's level qualification, do you think those experiences have been useful for you in terms of your current role?

DBA2 40: 01

Absolutely, purely for, if for no other reason, it has, first of all to clarify that I did want to be in academia, I took that time off, to make sure I wasn't going to do a master's, just because it's all I knew. But secondly, working in other know, it, it's all about balancing tasks to short deadlines, and the industries I worked in were really stressful, too. They were really, you know, high turnaround sort of things. So...

Paul Jones 40:52

I think there's a lot to be said, for that external experience. In terms of some of the skills you learned, you mentioned about administration, I think things like time management, for instance, or the relationship management or communication skills I've seen... I've seen those be enhanced by those types of experiences. Are there particular skills, and you think that, from your time working places like that, that you'd like to see translate across to academia, where we make sure our academic staff are trained up on some of those things?

DBA2 41:27

Um, the things definitely, like time management, being a good communicator, and being a prompt communicator, just prioritisation... quality control, and double, double checking work, things like that, those skills, that's some of the stuff I am the best at, to be honest, because those environments, you could not make a mistake in them. So I worked in, like banking and law for a bit, and there was, there's no margin for error there. So, yeah, I think some of the most frustrating stuff in academia is, I think, very long wait times occasionally, or people missing emails. You know, it's, it's, so it's when things fall through cracks, and then it impacts my work, and things build up on my end, because I'm waiting on somebody else. That's, that's the most frustrating, for me.

Paul Jones 42:24

Yeah, that makes sense. I think there would be scope to think about the type of skills, and put maybe having a matrix of things that we think would be useful that people have gained externally that we could then bring in to say, well, these are the gaps missing, both for students and the staff, in terms of thinking, well, these are things we've recognised benefit academics, not just how to get more publications, but even things like that, about the practicalities of applying for publications, and so the intricacies of the way things work behind the scenes, that's potentially a gap that people don't see and they might know that they have to do, they don't know how to get this. Do you think that's a gap that exists at the moment?

DBA2 43:09

It's, it's hard to say, I can't speak for everyone, because I don't know. I feel like I kind of know my business. You know what I mean? Like, I've got it handled. So, I sort of, I know what to do in these situations. I'm not sure about other people I couldn't, couldn't say.

Paul Jones 43:25

So I think for me, I think there would be some tricks of the trade that you don't know, until you start to get into it.

DBA2 43:33

Yeah...

Paul Jones 43:33

... that people could benefit from

DBA2 43:35

Yeah, certainly, like publication wise, and grant wise and things. Those are things that, at the very least with publications, I assumed that that's what people would get taught by their PhD supervisors when they're sort of in a PhD, which is an apprenticeship really. So I assumed that those things might get taught there, it could be that you have people coming into jobs that don't, you know, really know that certain things like Grant bids, where if it's not common for your discipline, I could see that actually, that would be really helpful to have more support there.

Paul Jones 44:09

And, you mentioned supervision there. The quality control on supervision sometimes varies massively in terms of the experiences the students get. So it might be like a student will get some really good sage like advice from their supervisors, or the supervision relationships sometimes are much less than that. So, it can vary person to person.

DBA2 44:32

Yeah...

Paul Jones 44:33

One of the things we touched upon briefly, but I want to come back to, was about external engagement. So, teaching, research and administration is the main part of how your role is constructed. There is an expectation about how we communicate things out to the wider public and is focused on what to tell people, our beneficiaries, about the research we do then. So it's an important part of your role. Is that a part that has a lot of emphasis from management, or from the university, on you as an individual?

DBA2 45:05

I personally haven't felt the same pressure for public engagement that I have felt for, you know, publications, as such or, you know, REF or grant bids or you know, things like that, it certainly is an element of it. I think there is a tension though, between disseminating research and, and trying to engage with the public, and then what the sort of marketing glossy party line is, for a lot of it. So I think that there's a bit of a misunderstanding of, we need to recruit, we need to make viral videos, but it needs to be glossy and sort of marketing. Or, you know, engagement needs to be like that. And, and it's one of those things where, like, if it's glossy, it's not going to be, you know, a sort of viral video, you just hear these conversations where it's, you can't sort of have it all ways. And, sometimes, the, the things with the most engagement are not going to be the things that the university necessarily likes, because they're not, you know, you know what I mean?

Paul Jones 46:11

From what I get, you can correct me if I'm wrong, the branded corporate looking stuff that's been polished in the way the university is happy with, rather than you grabbing a microphone and talking to someone on the street about research, just like that run and gun type, umm, gorilla type stuff that goes on sometimes.

DBA2 46:29

And it doesn't even need to be as ragtag as that. But there, there is an awful lot of oversight sometimes about how we appear and what we're saying and what we're doing. And it's very glossy. But I think that that can also reduce scholars quite a lot, where we all look and sound the same now, every logo at every university looks the same. So, we're not going to have quite the same reach. But yeah, it's just it's, I think there's just a tension there needing to appeal to the public, but then that gets rolled back on or curbed often. So...

Paul Jones 47:07

I think that from what I've seen, there's a, there's pressure on people to be their own marketers and to do stuff. I don't know, if we give people the right skills or time to be able to do that effectively.

DBA2 47:18

Well, that yeah, that's the other thing. If, you know, some of the the marketing or the public engagement falls on us. We're academics, I hate being filmed. I don't know, you know, you don't always know what you're doing. So, I think, I think that would be really interesting of, you know, being an academic for public engagement. How do you, how do you disseminate your research to a camera to, you know, to a magazine to all of these different sorts of things. Thankfully, it's not, it's not quite that hard for me, because I know how to write and pitch to different audiences, I deal with language, but there are still certain things that could be helpful.

Paul Jones 47:55

We noticed that other academics then would struggle with looking at different audience types and writing in different ways.

DBA2 48:03

Oh, yeah. I mean, I've yes, I've seen, I've seen academics struggle to pitch differently from a first year to a final year. And if they're struggling with that, they're definitely going to struggle, you know, telling the difference between giving a conference paper and giving a general public interview. So yeah, that's, that's, yes, that is a problem for some people.

Paul Jones 48:25

So then, do you think your skills in terms of your area of research and your ability to communicate, is that something you'd have the ability to help others with then, who in different disciplines, where you could actually do some internal development for those people and take them through stuff?

DBA2 48:41

I could certainly, I, I would fear taking on any more work. And I would worry that, as has been pitched to me before, that my discipline just becomes basically a service to the other real research. I, you know, I, I would certainly like to help where possible, though, because I do that is, you know, that's where my knowledge lies, is.

Paul Jones 49:07

Yeah, and I think this isn't an opportunity to try and squeeze more work out of you, but an exploration really of thinking about, we have a lot of people doing different things in different ways. Some of the expertise that we've got, we've got departments in accounting in economics and finance, got departments in marketing, on work and organisation within the business school, got different departments within social sciences and humanities, [redacted] that have different skill sets around language or around politics or whatever it might be. It would be quite easy to use their expertise for the betterment of our staff and to be able to do some internal development. I don't think I've seen much going on at the moment, it might be done at department level where you pass on some things.

DBA2 49:54

I don't know if that's anything that's possible. But I think that consultancy might be interesting. Well. I mean, an interesting compromise here, might be to house some, a consultancy, under a research centre. Because that way, you know, the skills are being utilised. They're being, you know, helpful, but they're also maybe being compensated and given, you know, a sort of acknowledgment of value. So that that might be something.

Paul Jones 50:06

Because I think that, from what I've seen, and talking to people so far, we've got a lot of skills here that we could utilise more effectively, particularly around developing others, one of the biggest barriers is time, as we talked about already. But just having the creativity to think about what gaps we've got, how could we fill those gaps, there's sometimes a reliance in organisations to bring in external consultants to do stuff. We've got people who go out and do that consultancy, we could do better at starting to focus on that internally then to develop staff.

DBA2 51:00

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I, there are some people, certainly not me, who are very good at public speaking. And, you know, there's one colleague in particular who's always on TV and has recently given, I think, they ... marketing ... calculated it was like something like half a million pounds of free advertising for Aston, from one three minute spot on the news. So, you know, yeah, it would absolutely make more sense to use what we have already than, than hire external consultants. I'm not saying we can do everything, and ... but the expertise is there.

Paul Jones 51:34

I think just in terms of professional development, generally, people will leave higher education institutions to go to different ones to develop their career. I think there's a view you could have, where we just train people up to be the best they can, if they want to go elsewhere to look for opportunities, and then that's going to be up to them then. But we have a responsibility, like we do to our students, to give them the best experience possible to learn, develop and ply their trade. And I don't know whether we found the right balance for being able to do that, yet.

DBA2 52:08

Yeah, and I don't think, in fairness, I don't think any institution has found a perfect balance for that. I don't think we'll ever, you know, there are just too many variables. There are too many competing interests, too many different people and personalities, you know, so what might work for me, might not work at all for somebody else. But yeah, I, I see what you mean that there, there definitely is room for improvement.

Paul Jones 52:30

And in terms of then your career level, do you think once you've come out from this early career level stage, will your development needs change over time, then, so as you move up to sort of mid career, where do you see the differences being? So what's the key development parts for you now, versus, where do you think they'll be for the future?

DBA2 52:53

Oh, that's an excellent question. I imagine my... well, my fear is that, as I go up the ladder, more managerial work is going to be required. And that's actually not, the, the question is also do we want to develop in that way? I mean, do I want to climb the ladder? And if it, you know, means becoming sort of like, a business woman? No, I don't, I did not get into academia to become a manager. So that's, that's the other question is, do, do people even want to develop? If you know, if these are their options?

Paul Jones 53:30

And you mentioned there about thinking about that, and maybe having to make a decision, do you think that everything is laid out clearly for you to make a decision like that at the moment?

DBA2 53:41

No, not particularly. Because there are there are some academics at similar levels who have gotten there through very different paths. And I kind of I would like a little bit more transparency in sort of, you know, how do you become a professor purely through research versus purely through teaching versus I think there's maybe like, is there a citizenship sort of option or something like that? Possibly. And I just, it'd be kind of interesting to see what these different paths actually look like, rather than sort of hear tell, Oh, so and so just made professor from teaching, the rarest of all professorships. I was like, how do you how do you even do that? So I think that that would be.... umm yeah.

Paul Jones 54:26

Yeah, so a transparency then of, what the options are, what you have to do to get there.

DBA2 54:32

Yeah.

Paul Jones 54:32

And would you say that you fully understand all the different roles that are available for you, if you wanted to try and plot your career, you mentioned management there, but there's strategic level roles, which would necessarily be management roles, as in managing people, but more oversight of different areas, so Associate Deans, or Deans of Schools or Deputy Dean of the College. Do you have a full understanding of what exists in terms of opportunities?

DBA2 55:03

Not at all. I mean, I know these titles, but I know nothing about workload. I'm... I know nothing about exactly what their purview is. And to some extent these roles have changed. So I've seen things, you know, even roles that I've taken, where it's sold as one thing, and then oh, actually, we're merging it with another role and how you know, so a lot of the times, I don't even know what exactly it is, unless I speak to the person who's doing it and they can rundown, you know, this is what I do. Yeah. I, you know, there are a lot of titles, but not a lot of clarity all the time. About what, what does that actually mean?

Paul Jones 55:39

Yeah. And do you think that would be useful, then because I can't imagine, for myself, if I was trying to plot out what I wanted to do with my career. Unless I knew what all the options were, what existed and what support I could get, that seems like a really hard job then, to be on your own, to some extent.

DBA2 55:54

Well, and because you also don't know exactly, not only in terms of workload, and what, what this even is as a job, umm, but how is it valued? Who do you report to? How is it compensated in terms of your time? These are all big things in terms of development that you need to weigh up ... and it's, it's not always clear if like, oh, this yeah, this has a point three, you know, compensation for your workload or something. That, that'd be useful info before, you know, as you're sort of planning long term.

Paul Jones 56:25

Yeah, I think, from what I've seen, those waters are quite murky at the best of times. So having some kind of map could be useful then to think, well, these are the options I've got, in terms of both, as a career destination, but also how you can plot your way to get to those destinations...

DBA2 56:43

Yeah

Paul Jones 56:44

...this role would give me these, these and these things as skills or abilities, and they would fit into my progression opportunities this way. There is no real clarity I don't think at the moment.

DBA2 56:55

No, I mean, once every year or two, we'll get some sort of school structure hierarchy where it tells who everyone reports to, and that's helpful, but I don't think it captures anywhere near all the roles, and I'm still not entirely sure. Okay, but why do I report to you for that? What is it that this role does that this almost identically sounding role, you know, doesn't, or you know, so it's things like that. It's just having, having the clarity there.

Paul Jones 57:22

Yeah. And your interactions, and development wise, do you interact much with the organisation development department? Are there things you do for them at all?

DBA2 57:31

I don't think so. I don't think I've ever spoken to them once. Who, who's in the department, whoever...

Paul Jones 57:38

So there will be people like Beth Lloyd, Tracy Roberts, umm, they have oversight of like things like the elearning for the University, of doing different courses, some of the well being stuff the university does, whether it's financial or mental. They, they are drivers of activity...for general development purposes, I guess.

DBA2 58:01

Yeah. No, I've, I guess I've never really spoken to them about that. I think, I think maybe that's the other issue is, I know there's a lot of, and it's not wrong to have it, the general sort of like, you know, mindfulness courses and well being and things like that, but, I think it's the, at the end of the day, those feel, they can feel insulting at times, when it's like what I just need is to not be overworked. You know, all the, all the mindfulness and yoga seminars in the world aren't going to change that. Yeah. So I think I think that's, that's more the issue.

Paul Jones 58:32

I think, so I chair the well being committee for the college. And I do describe what we do as sticking plaster on a massive gaping wound.

DBA2 58:41

Yes, I love that you view it that way as well.

Paul Jones 58:44

It's true. Yes. Unless things are sorted at a fundamental level of changing people's workload. We can run courses on burnout, we can tell people they should be more mindful about their well being, go for walks, in the countryside, or whatever makes them happy. But that's not going to stop the fact they feel overworked and overburdened.

DBA2 58:56

Yeah

Paul Jones 59:05

That, just that analogy of sticking plasters on this massive wound...

DBA2 59:08

Yep.

Paul Jones 59:08

... So it's really hard then. In terms of administration duties, then, I'm wondering how we can think about making things more efficient and effective. Do your administration duties, have they increased over time, have they grown over time... and is that an expected thing? Or is that just, that just been more and more added to you as a person?

DBA2 59:30

Uh-huh, it's in part expected because I have agreed to take on certain roles. Admittedly, some of the roles have unexpectedly increased in size and scope and what I was absolutely promised from a workload perspective, there have been two roles that did that where I just wanted to die. And, uh, but I mean, I assumed that they would increase naturally over time anyway, as you know, when I started out, you know, I was teaching two modules or something. So obviously, over time, that's good, it's going to naturally increase. But, but it does, it, the other side of that is it does feel generally, even not counting for more teaching, further on in my career, other duties, it does feel like it's getting to a sort of absurd level.

Paul Jones 1:00:23

Do you think then that the administration associated with things like teaching and research, there's simply more and more things happening, has that increased out of control? Could there be more efficiencies made in terms of the way things are done, do you think?

DBA2 1:00:42

I think it's, what it really stems from, in part, is being, trying to be visible, being seen to be doing a lot, trying to conform to all these different things, trying to be basically perfect on all fronts. That means you have 15 projects going on all at once with all their separate admin. So rather than doing one thing well, I'm doing 30 things fine. I think that's, that's more the admin, I don't know, if it's necessarily efficiency, I think it's just, it's taking down external pressures will make a lot of this go away.

Paul Jones 1:01:18

But then, from what you've said there, there's a focus on being seen to be productive, rather than actually being productive. And you can create an industry of how you do stuff to show people your work, rather than actually doing the work then.

DBA2 1:01:34

Yeah

Paul Jones 1:01:35

Is that the cycle you have found yourself more so in?

DBA2 1:01:38

Yeah, it's especially, you know, with the, the restructure and things like that. I mean, maybe, I know that our department is, you know, I don't wanna say humble, but we don't shout our achievements from the rooftops all the time. But now there's a huge push back, the amount of time I spend every week on social media for various University accounts, trying to promote things and emailing people saying, can you get it in this newsletter, and this circulations and this, this, this? And it's just, it's absurd. I'm like, I, you know, all that time I could be actually doing, doing something rather than just saying, hey, I did something. So it's, yeah, I don't know. I don't know if there's a right or wrong answer for that. But it's even the distribution list, the newsletters you get, I had, I've compiled a list, and there are probably 20 different names, depending on what the thing is, to email to every time. It just chews away.

Paul Jones 1:02:38

And, do you think that should strictly be part of your job as an academic?

DBA2 1:02:44

No, it would be really great if I could just send something to somebody else who would then filter it through all the necessary channels, that would be great, rather than me sending 20 different emails, you know, but I don't know what else to do.

Paul Jones 1:03:00

Because that would make sense to me, as well, is that you have one. Inbox, we say this is for marketing, research marketing, and then you pop it in the inbox. And then the same goes everywhere it needs to go... ... that these are the places this is best to go the marketing elves go off and do the work and it just spreads out then rather than you having to do 20 different emails, then.

DBA2 1:03:12

That would be wonderful... And, and, we're duplicating work as well. I know that, I know, there are academics who were constantly saying apologies for cross posting, apology. No. And, you know, there is, there's definitely overlap sometimes where I'm like, do both of us need to be doing that? Because it seems like we're targeting largely, but not exclusively, the same groups of people. So... it's...

Paul Jones 1:03:44

Does that come though from not having a coherent communication strategy for the university internally, as I don't see us having a very good way of using our internal systems for effective communication.

DBA2 1:03:57

Yeah, I've I've discovered that in various roles, where, there's sometimes so much nuance you get, you get passed around in chains, you get, you know, oh, we can't do, we can't do future events, we can only do past events, or, you know, just it's like these little nuances. and I've ended up having to over-time, compile a guide of who do I send things to for this. And it's, it's a pretty absurd and comprehensive guide, because it needs to be. Yeah. So I mean, if you just asked, I think the normal, a normal academic, who would you send something to for whatever, I don't think they'd know, or they'd be able to list off about 50 people and say, but which one is the right one?

Paul Jones 1:04:37

So an interesting question for you...

DBA2 1:04:39

Okay.

Paul Jones 1:04:40

Your guide that you've got, have you shared that with anybody?

DBA2 1:04:43

Yes, a couple of people, because they're, we realise we're duplicating work and, or, they don't know where to go for certain things. So there have been a couple of people who also have sort of comms responsibilities in addition to academic responsibilities. And they're like, they basically begged me and said, please, can you share it? So...

Paul Jones 1:05:03

Yeah, good. Because if you've done that work, it might be that other people have done that work. And it maybe it could be used as a justification for saying to people, this is ridiculous, this needs to change in terms of what we're trying to do then. So while it can help you navigate what you do at department level, it can be used for, as a larger tool of weaponry, for actually making change at a fundamental level. And so rather than being a guide to navigating the map that exists, we try and use that as evidence for changing that map and making it different then.

DBA2 1:05:39

Or even if just we could have a formal guide of all of the different, you know, if you need to advertise something, here's the list of who you give it to the, you know, and my guide even has like, okay, if you're going to do it, and this is the cutoff date, before, you know, all that stuff, you know, and here are the email addresses. It's just, it's, it is a lot of time chewed up looking for things, or sending emails to the wrong person, and then annoying them because you've taken five minutes out of their day.

Paul Jones 1:06:07

But also keeping on top of it, because we tend to have a lot of staff turnover, where people change, or they go to different roles and move internally. And even keeping on top of that type of list is difficult then because things do change, and you don't know who's managing the inbox. If you invest in a person, and then that person changes, sometimes the inbox isn't manned that effectively, or womanned, and then people don't respond, and then it's like, just going into a dead hole.

DBA2 1:06:33

Yeah

Paul Jones 1:06:33

So you are wondering what's happening now?

DBA2 1:06:35

Yeah, so it's, umm, that, I mean, now that would be helpful, that would have saved me, you know, hours of work, however long ago when I was trying to figure this out. So...

Paul Jones 1:06:44

I think its part of my reason for wanting to do this research, is about trying to find things that we could do, ranges from more grander plans of how we can change staff development opportunities, but also some quick wins about things we could do that's going to make a difference to people's lives and to make them easier and navigate stuff more effectively.

DBA2 1:07:02

Yeah.

Paul Jones 1:07:02

I think that was about all I wanted to cover.

DBA2 1:07:04

Okay.

Paul Jones 1:07:05

Anything else that you wanted to mention in terms of...

DBA2 1:07:07

Oh, no, I don't I don't think so.

Paul Jones 1:07:11

I have covered off most of the questions I had. I covered off tensions between teaching and research. Experience from outside of Higher Education. I think that covers everything I wanted to. That's great. Thank you very much.

DBA2 1:07:28

All right, not a problem.

Appendix 6: DBA3 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA3

Paul Jones 00:02

So I've started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship: reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, where they feel there are gaps, the interview will last approximately 1 hour but we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi-structured, this means I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research. The idea is that I do that as least number of times as possible with the least number of questions. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing at the address on the details that are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed and all links to use as an individual, particularly personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who have access to the anonymised data, are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk. If we do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it's causing you distress. And likewise, if I'm feeling distressed, I'll stop the interview for that reason. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions to start and then we'll start exploring your experiences regarding professional development.

DBA3 01:47

Okay.

Paul Jones 01:48

So, can you confirm the information I've given you is okay and you understand everything?

DBA3 01:54

Yes, I do.

Paul Jones 01:55

And are you happy to proceed with a recorded interview?

DBA3 01:57

Yes, I am.

Paul Jones 01:59

Do you know how to withdraw your data?

DBA3 02:01

Yes, I think I have to send you an email.

Paul Jones 02:04

You do.

DBA3 02:04

Within a certain period of time, yes.

Paul Jones 02:07

That wasn't a test, I just wanted to make sure. Can you confirm what school you work in?

DBA3 02:14

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:15

Right, and can you confirm your gender please?

DBA3 02:18

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:19

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA3 02:21

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:23

And how would you describe your career level out of the three choices: Early career, mid career, senior career.

DBA3 02:36

I suppose somewhere at the upper end of mid career.

Paul Jones 02:39

And would you confirm your age bracket, please? So we have got 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, 65 to 74.

DBA3 02:53

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:57

Thanks very much. So on to the more general questions now. So in terms of professional development, what does it mean to you? And how have you found it while at Aston?

DBA3 03:11

God, that's a difficult question. I suppose what it means is taking on new challenges and developing, but in a controlled way, so that you develop the skills to address them as you go along. In a fairly, uhm, rational order.

Paul Jones 03:41

And you mentioned controlled way then, so, is that more about your own control and you driving that yourself or is that what the environment drives for you?

DBA3 03:51

I suppose there's, there's a, there's a bit of both in it. So what I'm trying to say is that if you, in my case, at least, if I try to do too much at once, it usually isn't successful. And therefore an incremental development is better than suddenly being thrown in the deep end doing something, not that I haven't done that and succeeded at that, but that's not comfortable.

Paul Jones 04:24

Support wise then, do you think the environment at Aston lends itself well to encouraging that type of incremental development? Remember, this will be anonymised so you can speak as freely as you wish.

DBA3 04:45

If I'm honest, no. I think that some of the, the requirements for Aston for what people on teaching and research contracts need to do. And people on pure teaching contracts are massively overloaded. But the people on the teaching and research contracts, you're expected to do such a wide variety of things in order to, to well, follow the promotion track rack that it is quite intimidating, it's very easy to look at requirements and think I wouldn't actually be able to do that, and therefore not really try so hard with the personal development, and just go on to a survival mode.

Paul Jones 05:42

And that is just the case of just getting stuff done I'd imagine, is that about right?

DBA3 05:47

Um, it's about that, yes. And it's about the fact that you're constantly making trade offs. So in order to, for example, to really succeed at your research, you have to trade off your teaching, but nobody wants you to trade off your teaching. And nobody wants you to trade off your research, and they want you to engagement, do engagement as well. And it just gets to the point where you go, well, I can't do all that. So I'm not going to start worrying about progressing with my career because it's too hard.

Paul Jones 06:19

Yeah, there's an idea, one of the things that I was going to ask you, and it's brought us nicely to that, was about a typical contract for teaching research member staff would be 40% teaching 40% research 20% administration. Now in reality, I'm not convinced that always works out to be the case.

DBA3 06:38

Yes. I think that the problem is that when you then map that on to the normal hours of work, which, I mean, so when you're an early career researcher, particularly if you don't have any family commitments, it's relatively easy to work more than your contracted hours. And I think the assumption is that you will, so it's not 40% this and 40%, that, it's 60%, that and 60% that, and then another 40% of that, on top of that please. And there comes a point when you can't do that, because life just gets too complicated. And you know, you're no longer, you know, in your early 30s, or whatever it is, when you start an academic career, with no responsibilities and plenty of time to spend all your evenings and weekends doing work.

Paul Jones 07:41

Yeah, there's two things that spring to mind there, which I'd like your thoughts on. One is about, one's I guess is about the influence that the family and different members have around you, as you grow that family, and you've got different influences. Do you think Aston takes that into account when they try to manage people and manage work? And the other is then, do you think that those, that increase of responsibilities in your role, has gone over what the typical contract would be, that's got worse over time, do you think?

DBA3 08:16

Okay, so the first thing I'd like to say is that I am very, very lucky that I have an excellent line manager. So I'm, I'm, I'm line managed by [redacted] and he is a human being. But I think that there are plenty of people within the kind of senior management structure who... uh... some of them say one thing about, you know, supporting people and do another and some of them don't even bother to say another. They just basically go, this is the way it is in academia. And there is a sense in which they're right, because we're in competition with universities that don't give a damn about what they do to their staff and Aston does at least try. Not always very successfully, but it does at least try and if you have good, good management, then they have the mechanisms to support you. Uhm, but I think, in answer to your other part

of the question, has it got worse? It certainly has for us since the expansion of the master's program, that has been an absolute workload magnifier. And certainly the carousel delivery, coupled with the large number of dissertations that we now have to supervise means that there is no longer downtime. Whereas we used to have that bit of time in the summer, in which you could, you could get through the teaching and think, well, it's okay, you know, come, June, July, August, I'll start I'll get some research done through through that time. That time no longer exists...

Paul Jones 10:16

Right.

DBA3 10:17

...and in terms of developing what you're doing in research that makes things very much tighter than they used to be. And I'm not quite sure how far down the line it's going to be before it finally dawns on the management what they've done, because I've already seen good research colleagues, colleagues with bright careers in front of them, walking away. So, I don't know when, but at the moment, you see, we continue to recruit, we continue to recruit to fill those gaps. And therefore I think it's probably not completely obvious. Because we now have increasing numbers of people who've only been in the department for a year or two, and are maybe writing up things that they've done elsewhere. It's not obvious yet, that there's a problem. And maybe there's not a problem. I'm just pessimistic.

Paul Jones 11:13

I think that the way I see things, and you can correct me if it's different for the way you look at it, but the teaching side in particular, can expand quite quickly, given all the different parts and mechanisms, approaches and things that are happening, it seems to be getting worse and worse. Then if we imagine the teaching, the research and the administration all as bubbles, the research bubble get, the teaching bubble sorry, gets bigger, the administration bubble is getting bigger. Because there's only so much time in a week, you can do stuff, the research one is being pushed smaller and smaller.

DBA3 11:49

Yes! That's certainly true for me. I couldn't speak for anybody else. I mean, that said, I have managed to get some things done this year, which I thought I wasn't going to at the beginning of last year. So I have been more successful than I had expected to be. Which is good, I think, you know, I've managed to get a [redacted] in and write a paper, and, I don't think, I knew I needed to write the paper, but the [redacted] was just an added bonus really, that came together.

Paul Jones 12:30

From what I've, from what I've seen as well, the timetabling for instance, is very haphazard, they have to find slots to put people in to run teaching, but then doesn't give you time to do your research in a lump and research best is done when you've got a lot of time you can spend on it, rather than finding an hour here, or an hour there then ,would that be your experience?

DBA3 12:55

Uhm, yes, but then on a learning and teaching contract, I'm quite lucky because the programs that I teach aren't enormous. If you're, if you're on, if you're teaching some of the modules, some particularly the undergraduate modules, which are effectively a service to the whole business school. So I'm thinking about things like Business Analytics, and the sort of Introduction to Information Systems thing that we do, that get taken by hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of students, then you're covering multiple versions of tutorials. And then your time just disappears and you have masses and masses of marking, my timetable is not quite that bad, and therefore I do have some gaps. So, in theory, I could make some time, I keep some in my time, in my calendar, but it often gets overwritten by doing something else. So I basically got a rolling appointment to do some research on a Friday. Which frequently gets disappeared into it, into doing something else. But it should probably, if it's 40%, it should, it should be more than one, one part of one day a week really, shouldn't it?

Paul Jones 14:20

Well, it would, it, it doesn't take a maths genius to work out it should be two days a week.

DBA3 14:27

Yes, instead of one which frequently gets eaten up haha.

Paul Jones 14:30

Yeah. And on the teaching and the administration side then, do you feel that, I know the workload is massive, do you feel like you've been given skills to be able to do that, those jobs as well as you can do, in terms of development?

DBA3 14:45

Uhm, okay... in terms of the admin, what I have done, is to change the admin role that I had, from something where I felt completely at sea, which was basically doing program directing work, where there are so many different tasks that I don't understand, how individuals are meant to get their head around them, and do anything else as well. And consequently, I constantly made mistakes. And that I didn't enjoy, uhm, to doing [redacted] work, which most people don't want to touch, [redacted], but there is basically only one set of procedures to remember, and I'm not good at that stuff. So that's, that's kind of, it's quite a lot of work at some times of year, but at this time of year, you know, you're talking about maybe one meeting a month, or something like that, until the coursework comes in. So it at least has a seasonal rhythm to it. Where it's not always full on.

Paul Jones 15:56

It sounds like there's a clear process as well, you can just work your way through for everyone...

DBA3 16:01

There is yes, yeah, there's a very clear process. And it's one process. And it's not 20, 25 processes, plus whatever the program office decides they're going to hand over to you, that you didn't know you were meant to be doing. And there seems to be, there's, you know, if you're a program director, they'll just chuck anything at you, that somebody else doesn't want to do. Looks like your job. So that was basically how I handled it. I got myself out of a toxic job. But somebody's got to do those jobs.

Paul Jones 16:35

And was that then something you had confidence to do because of your previous experiences, and your development, as an academic...

DBA3 16:43

I think, no, I think probably, it's just, uhm, yes. I'm now old enough and canny enough to have seen the opportunity to come come up and go, I'll do it if you take me off that role. And basically, to give conditions of when I'd take something on and when I wouldn't, which I think for younger staff is harder to do.

Paul Jones 17:08

Yeah, definitely. So one of the parts we haven't talked about, which is almost expected as well, within the contract, is the external engagement part of people's roles. I'm interested here in how much of a part that plays in your working life and whether you feel like Aston supported you to do that part of your role, because, I guess there's an expectation, but we haven't really given people the scope to really develop those skills, sometimes, from what I've seen so far.

DBA3 17:37

Um, to be honest, that comes under the general heading of things I deliberately do badly, because I know I don't have the capacity. So I do do some things. So I mean, I gave [redacted] a hand with a lecture series that he was doing to some people in [redacted], that probably counts as that. I suspect the [redacted] will probably count towards that, as being more business engagement than research, in many ways. So that'll probably take a chunk of it away. But yeah, I guess it's another thing about being

a bit older, is that there are some, particularly some admin jobs, that I just look at and go, I can't see enough value in that job to put it, to do a good job of it. So it's probably just as well, this is anonymised, in my very first job, so when I was very, very junior, I worked on a database, which was housed in a porta-cabin outside of the [redacted] department at [redacted] University. And there was an emeritus professor there, who must have been in his 80s, and he had been in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. And he taught me some very, very bad habits, which are basically, if you don't want to do a job, make damn sure you do it badly, and nobody will ever ask you again.

Paul Jones 19:00

I think that's sound advice to be fair, I see that happening a lot.

DBA3 19:04

Yes. He said, when he, when he came back, he put up a shelf, it fell off the wall, his wife never asked him to do DIY again. And he got on with doing the things he wanted to do.

Paul Jones 19:17

Very sage like advice.

DBA3 19:19

Absolutely! So yeah, I mean, and it sort of comes into that, but I wouldn't, I wouldn't ever say it out loud in a work context, but I know I don't have time to do it. And therefore I will do what comes along, but I'm not going to go and actively seek it out.

Paul Jones 19:36

Yeah. So you mentioned there, that experience, it brings me on to another topic area I really wanted to talk about and that's the influence of experiences people have had outside of HE...

DBA3 19:48

Right...

Paul Jones 19:48

... and how that makes a difference to their work as an academic then, because I think that people I've enjoyed working with the most have been ones where they have a more rounded skillset or have developed experiences and skills outside of HE.

DBA3 20:02

Yeah, I mean, I certainly have done that. So I had, I had two jobs before I went and did my PhD, there was that one, which was actually quite close to being HE, really, except that it, you know, it was, it was nominally a company. And we did end up in our own building, it's all a lot more professional now. But when I was there it was, it, it was still kind of at the stage of, of being spun off, really. But I also worked at a place called the [redacted], which again, is, it's a [redacted], but it's a Member Services [redacted], that provides, well obviously services about [redacted] and [redacted] research. And I worked in the, I worked in the library again working on databases. And I think that that gave me probably more of a customer focus than I think some HE people have. Because there was a lot of work of dealing on the phone with customers and trying to make sure that they got what they want, and wanted, and needed, in terms of their information needs. And of interfacing with the engineers in the institute, so there was also a lot, of that time in my life when I was much younger learning to talk to a very wide variety of people. Because you could be talking to a materials researcher at one moment, and then the next minute, you'd have, you know, some bloke who was trying to weld trailers together and it wasn't working, and you needed to know what he was doing wrong. Or, or indeed, one of the welding engineers would come in, and they were, they were a law unto themselves, quite frankly, they were all sort of towards retirement age, with lots and lots of experience giving people quick advice. And they would come in and say, I need to have you know, something in five minutes, you know, to go ring somebody back. Some of them were really quite cheeky. And that was fun. So I think that, that probably enabled me later on in

my academic career, when I was a contract researcher, to interact quite easily with some of the industrial partners that we had on projects. Who I think quickly found that I kind of could empathise with the simplicity of their needs in a way that some of my more cerebral colleagues didn't. Yeah.

Paul Jones 22:50

Do you think there were skills that you learned that would be, that have been beneficial to you? So, as you mentioned there, probably relationship management skills, but is there anything else you can think of, that you learned from those jobs, that has been beneficial, but perhaps we don't skill people up on if they haven't had those experiences directly?

DBA3 23:09

Um... well they sent me on voice projection lessons at the [redacted], everybody went, went there, unless, unless they were, you know, literally going to work as, as welders, they had to go and do speech training, so you could give a public, a public speech. So that certainly stood me up in HE very, very well. The other thing that they did was that absolutely everybody, whatever role they were in had to go and learn welding. Okay, so I know, I know I'm rubbish at that haha.

Paul Jones 23:52

So it's nice to be part of it, because I did, I had some experience working for a firm of property lawyers, so there would be some basic level courses to learn more about property law and the conveyancing process.

DBA3 24:05

Yeah.

Paul Jones 24:06

So I did that even though my role wasn't directly related to it.

DBA3 24:09

Yeah, and I think that what that did was, again, it gave you a really strong appreciation of the value of different people's roles and just how difficult some of the jobs that we were effectively supporting people to do are, and indeed, how some of the twists and the twisted skills of the employees of the [redacted] who employ people who are specialists in creating defective [redacted], if for, you know, non-destructive testing exams, knowing exactly how to put a bubble in the wrong place.

Paul Jones 24:59

Yeah, it sounds very interesting. And I think people who've had those experiences externally, they tend to have found those experiences really useful and it gives them a different range of skills that then can be applied to HE, but isn't something we naturally teach people because it doesn't map on directly, per se, but does have a massive influence in terms of the way they perform their jobs. So...

DBA3 25:23

Yeah, I think the other thing that I learned in both those jobs was time management. Yeah, because both of them were jobs in which we had more to do than we had staff, really. So figuring out exactly how much time in a day you were going to spend doing different things in order to keep on top of things. But also trying to fit your work into a day's work, which I think is something that a lot of people in HE have never, never really, they've never really thought about the fact that at the end of the working day, what you're actually meant to do, is to get up and walk out. Which was, you know, absolutely the culture that you would walk in together in the morning, and you'd all walk out together at night. And you don't see that in HE.

Paul Jones 26:27

No, and I suppose there's part of when you've got boundaries that are firmly set and expectations, whether you set them yourself or it's by others, you tend to be more efficient anyway. Because you, you know, you got to fit it in and you up your work rate and do stuff to make sure you've done it.

DBA3 26:44

And but also you don't, you don't over perfect things. So, so, you get things done. And I suppose that's, that's kind of what I'm really doing with the admin, is that I'm thinking, I can see that this basically goes into, you know, the equivalent filing cabinet drawer, this form and I'm not going to write anything on it unless there's something I actually think it's important to write. So I think, yeah, that, that kind of, you know, matter of designing what you do to fit the time available, rather than trying to do a perfect job, and assuming you've got all the time in the world. Is, is a difference, I think, but I'm not sure it's a difference that plays out terribly well in research, I have to say.

Paul Jones 26:50

Yeah, it's interesting, because I think there's something there about having some street skills, or street smarts, about the way you do stuff, that isn't naturally taught to people, but could be transferred through the right mentoring, or coaching, or development opportunities that could exist within the university. But we we tell people, our processes and what they should do, we don't communicate the most efficient ways of doing those things sometimes, or the shortcuts that exist, or how to play the game effectively.

DBA3 28:05

Yeah. Yeah. I think that, I think that kind of, uhm, that kind of thing is not really brought out in what people do. And that, but I think it's partly, it's a mindset of academics, that they are specialists, and as specialists they look at the very fine detail of what they do, and therefore they assume the same kind of detail needs to be applied to absolutely everything. Yeah, okay. So...

Paul Jones 28:44

Go on...

DBA3 28:44

No, no, I was just thinking, so I'm not, I've a vague feeling, I feel like I'm drifting away from the development topic for you.

Paul Jones 28:50

No, that is fine, and these conversations are going to be a little bit rambling anyway, so it's fine to explore stuff. I think that one of the things you mentioned there about skills, one of the things I've noticed is, you are right about people having what I describe as having dug a hole with their research that goes really deep, and they've dug this hole for themselves, but part of the problem then is bringing themselves back up to talk at a level that isn't so deeply rooted in that, in-depth information and knowledge, we create people to be experts on their particular tiny topic, with a huge raft of expertise on that little point...

DBA3 29:29

Yeah...

Paul Jones 29:29

but when trying to communicate to a wider, more general audience, there's been a struggle sometimes with having those skills to do that then.

DBA3 29:36

Yeah, I think you're probably right. Yeah.

Paul Jones 29:40

And one of the things I wanted to think about as well was, career level wise then, so you described yourself as like, towards the top end of mid career.

DBA3 29:49

Okay.

Paul Jones 29:49

Have your experiences about development changed as you've developed, have your needs changed, and have your, the way you think about professional development, has that changed?

DBA3 30:12

I think probably the biggest change, is kind of the shift away from thinking that you, you should be being trained to do something, to realising that actually most of the development is coming from doing things, from talking to people who've done them before you, and learning from them, and finding new ways through it. I think that probably influences my teaching in a way that students don't necessarily appreciate. They would dearly love to be told what to do, and I'm busy creating them opportunities, which if they would just get on and try and do something themselves that they'd learn something much more useful than anything I could put on a PowerPoint slide. So I think that's, that's probably the biggest change, that I no longer see development as something where it's clear what I need to achieve. It's more that it's a case of, you know, what are the, what's the next set of roles that I want to take on, in order to do something different. And I would say that I am curious, I have a fairly low boredom threshold for things, I'm not very good at doing the same thing forever. So I mean, in terms of my research, that does mean that I have, I've dug myself a wide shallow hole, actually. Which doesn't always make it easy to tell people what I do for my research, but I've kind of followed different lines of curiosity, found out about different things. And I have got more out of that than I would have done probably by building a, on paper, more successful research career. Because at least I haven't ever been bored. Yeah. And that's why I'm doing this job. I'm doing this job because those two jobs that I described to you are, the one that the, the one at the [redacted], I was basically not very good at, as it was incredibly mathematical, you had to be able to do 3D symmetry in your head, right, and couple it with maths in order to work out which number had been typed wrong, basically, was what I was doing. So, so one set of people sat there and typed the coordinates of atoms in, because at the time scanning them didn't make any sense. And another set of people had these programs that said, that oxygen to hydrogen bond is far, far too long, you need to adjust the number somewhere. And that's what we were doing. And that's what I wasn't very good at. I couldn't ever see it in my head. So that's why I moved to the [redacted], because that was similar work, but it was all language based. So I just had to learn, I had to learn how you joined things together. uhm, and I knew quite a lot about that at one stage, and then it was a case of writing stuff, and checking that stuff that was written made sense. But it was repetitive and dull. And I was surrounded in both places by people with PhDs, now, at the [redacted] department, the people with PhDs were right over my head, but engineers with PhDs were much more like human beings. And I looked at them and I thought, your not that much cleverer than me, you're cleverer than me, but you're not that much cleverer than me. And I got an opportunity to go and do a PhD and went off and did it. So...

Paul Jones 34:08

...so you mentioned management earlier. And you mentioned how your manager was very supportive, and a real human in terms of understanding your, you as a person, what was going on, and being supportive. Does that extend then to thinking about your career development and your aspirations? Do you have those types of conversations?

DBA3 34:37

Not recently, because for the last few years, with, particularly with COVID, and I was just getting out of COVID when this happened, with [redacted]'s family, but I haven't been able to think about it, to be perfectly honest with you. I have been just on survival mode. And he's understood that, now I was planning to have such a conversation with him, because I haven't actually, we haven't actually had the the

development conversation we should have had in July yet. So I was planning to do that. And I probably will. Because I think, I think I probably got about [redacted] years in which I could do something interesting, and after that, you know, I'll be [redacted]. And probably, I mean, I'm already more interested, frankly, in developing other people than I am in developing myself. But it would be nice too, you know, maybe just do one more big thing, before I do and I go entirely into that mode.

Paul Jones 36:00

If you're going to, then, is that an easy thing for you to map out in your head about what opportunities might exist for you, and where you feel you could learn something new and do something different, and satisfy that curiosity?

DBA3 36:12

Not really, if I'm honest, because the management route really doesn't interest me. And I don't think that it's terribly likely that I'm going to do something really big with my research, anymore. So I'm not quite sure where it goes, to be perfectly honest, I think for someone like me, the system doesn't really have many opportunities. So I don't know, really, because I don't...

Paul Jones 36:55

Do you think there's clarity on that system then at all about where opportunities might lie, and what you have to do to get there, and what those options would give you in terms of career progression?

DBA3 37:05

Well, I mean, in a sense, it's all laid out in documents. But if you look at those documents, well, I mean, it comes down to Expectancy Theory, really, you know, if you look at those documents, and you think, well, I can see what you've laid out there for me to do and I can't see myself ever doing it, then, then I guess the answer is no. You know, for me, what progression looks like I have no idea, I've got to find my own way. And it probably has to be more focused on me finding a way to do something that interests me, which is reasonably interesting for the university in the sense that they'll at least want me doing it. And probably not worrying tremendously much about career progression. Because I don't fit into the box to go the way that they want you to, the sort of, the greasy pole do everything at you know, twice the normal rate expectation.

Paul Jones 38:13

Because in my head, from what I've seen so far, there isn't really a clear map of saying you're in that, there is for progression in terms of the straight academic route through Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader and Professor, But in terms of all the other roles that you could do, that'll give you some skill sets, or give you experience in different ways, there's no real map to say, well, these are all the different roles that are available, these are things you need to get to that role. This is what that role will give you to then plot your way through different ways to end up where you want to be, so almost like a number of routes to the same destination. There isn't that type of map that exists.

DBA3 38:52

No, I think there probably isn't. But then I've always assumed that that is because the behaviors that are in the map that is laid out, are the ones the university wants to encourage. And if you sit a bit outside wanting to do those things, then you just have to accept that, you know, progression is not going to happen for you. I mean, I do know of, I have at least one colleague, that hasn't said to me directly, but other people have said to me, he had everything lined up for an older version of research progression. It was all ready, and the year he was ready to submit it, they changed the rules. And they said no, you can't. You can't progress because now we need you to do these other things. And at that point, he went well, I'm not gonna try then. And he spent several years doing absolutely nothing, until he got to the point though, where he was all, almost being managed out of the department, at which point he did enough research to keep his job and then went and found another job. So it is possible for those kinds of experts [redacted], not in my case, it's not what I'm saying, but it is possible for them to be actively

demotivating. If there's no flexibility in them, for people who've done good stuff, but it just doesn't quite fit a set of tick boxes you've got.

Paul Jones 40:31

Yeah, and I guess though there's a tension between what the expectations are of you in your role in the university, versus the things you might enjoy and what you think are important in your role.

DBA3 40:45

Yeah.

Paul Jones 40:46

Balancing those two things is hard.

DBA3 40:47

Yeah. And I think probably the other thing that is hard for the, and again, it's not, not really, in my case, I mean, at the moment, I'm not looking to move job. But for the people who are, it can be easier to work on their CV than to work on the development requirements of the university. And you know, that can be much, much easier and more straightforward to fill those things that are going to get you into a different job. And to progress that way, which isn't necessarily good for the university, because we lose good people that way.

Paul Jones 41:25

I think that it's much easier to think there's an opportunity somewhere, there is a recruitment process you apply, you know what you're doing, and then there is a yes or no answer to whether you get the job.

DBA3 41:37

Yeah.

Paul Jones 41:38

With the other, the university way of doing things, will be you're justifying your existence to some extent, and how good you are against their list of criteria. You're almost in competition against other people, because they're not going to give everybody promotions. And so you're battling against others. And I don't know whether the expectations we have on staff members aligns directly with the expectations the promotion process has in it, because if you look at things like citizenship, or impact, I don't know how much those things play in part of the promotions criteria, versus other things like publications and grants, for instance.

DBA3 42:19

I think, I think nominally, you have to have them. So you have to be able to say that you do some kind of citizenship activity, or at least, when Helen Higson was Provost you did. Whether you do now, I don't know. But it was something that she was particularly keen on that no, that nobody was going to get promoted, unless they could demonstrate that they could tick those boxes in some way. I guess that's probably another thing also, actually, that I have from having worked outside of HE, is that I don't see citizenship as a burden. It's just teamwork.

Paul Jones 43:02

Yeah.

DBA3 43:03

Why would you not do that? That's, that's, that's kind of my attitude to citizenship most of the time. Yep. You know, there's stuff people, you've got to do, you've got to get on and do it? Why would I be so focused on my little thing that I wouldn't do what's needed to keep the team working?

Paul Jones 43:20

But I think for me, having had experiences in a variety of different roles and stuff, I would agree with that. I think that, from PhD level up, we train people to be independent researchers...

DBA3 43:30

Yeah.

Paul Jones 43:31

...and that's a very lonely existence, and we expect them to go from having this lonely existence of not working with others, to then being collegial and working effectively with teams without giving them the experience.

DBA3 43:45

That, I mean, that is though, I mean, that's, that's, less so in some areas of the university. I think if you went into the sciences, doing a PhD is very much teamwork in the sciences these days, because you can't do anything in science as a, as an independent researcher anymore. You, you know, you have to be doing your bit of the big project, probably a big multi organisation project if it's going to going to really achieve anything worthwhile. So... I don't know how many different bits of the university that would be true of, any more, probably, probably you can probably still do something independently in computer science, but not all would be. But yeah, outside the social sciences, and in engineering and medicine, and things like that, particularly medicine, it's all going to be actually teamwork. So it might be interest, I don't know, are you just talking to people from the business school?

Paul Jones 43:53

It will be BSS. So the reasoning behind that was that there's so many cultural differences between the colleges as well and differences in terms of the approaches, it makes sense to concentrate on BSS.

DBA3 45:08

Yeah, in that case, that probably isn't going to come up.

Paul Jones 45:10

I think it's interesting though, because this, the research, I'd like to extend further, and once I've done my DBA, I think there are wider issues for the universities, and our own, in terms of thinking about some of these things. So I'm keen to have some thoughts on where the research could go in the future as well. So that's, that's an interesting observation about skills, because it might be discipline specific. So, there's the ideas around funding because if you're in the social sciences, you can still be a desk based researcher, as long as you've got time to do research at your desk, you don't really need anybody else to do stuff, you could do it on your own quite often, whereas the, like you mentioned the sciences, I think you have to work more effectively in teams, how you bring in money, quite often that's for equipment for funding. So you don't need equipment sometimes, it depends on your discipline, sometimes it's easy to win funding depending on your discipline, other times it's very hard. So there's a variety of different things going on that create this complex ecosystem.

DBA3 46:11

I think probably for different disciplines too, there are different routes, for doctoral researchers into HE. And that kind, I mean, from, from my experience of having been in it myself, and seeing other people, it can be a very, very difficult bridge to get over going from being, you know, a successful PhD student to getting a research contract, and then getting into a permanent job. And it can be quite soul destroying. And you're constantly on the lookout for where the next bit of funding is coming from, in order to, you know, keep yourself going. So I think that kind of the building of development pathways at that level is really important. Not necessarily something that we even have a system for, you know, I, there are so few postdoctoral contracts in social sciences, that either people go off and do something else in industry, or they start working as teaching fellows. And that's pretty much the only routes we've got.

Paul Jones 47:43

It's gonna get worse because with the economic climate as it is, people value security a great deal, and having a regular, a regular salary, and knowing that they are secure in their job, and feeling valued and those shorter term contracts don't give them security, nor do you feel as valued because of that.

DBA3 48:01

No. So if it's, you know, if it's clear that it's progressing things for you, you know, maybe moving to an interesting place to do something interesting, then you put up with it for a few years. But yeah, people get, you can easily get to feel like you're a disposable commodity on their short term contracts, basically.

Paul Jones 48:33

Yeah, well, I'd agree with that. One of the things we haven't covered yet, which was interesting, was how much of a part do external influences, things like REF, TEF, KEF, those types of things, how much do they play in your day to day life, and your development and what goes on for you?

DBA3 48:54

I suppose, in the fit, in the sense that they, that they drive the university policy to a greater extent, they put their, they're quite major in my life, but, as things that actually personally motivate me, no, not at all.

Paul Jones 49:06

Yeah, and I think that's what's an interesting thing I'm asking people, is that there's so much importance placed on those types of things, that at an individual level, it doesn't really translate to being that important then in terms of the day to day running of your life.

DBA3 49:24

So I mean, if you're thinking about building your CV, moving jobs, getting promoted, and so then the REF is really important, getting those REFable papers particularly, and maybe, if you're lucky, some impact cases or something like that. Those things can be really important because they're, they're kind of the ticks in the boxes. But, I mean, the TEF certainly, you know, I'm sure, I'm sure it's driving us to do certain things, but QAA is as well, and so is, you know, the various quality badges of different sorts that the university wants, whatever it is. And there seem to be more and more of them. And therefore the sheer number of those things, I think, devalues almost all of them. Because you know, if you're in the, if you're in the business school, you've got the triple accreditation, the REF, the TEF, probably something else with an F on it, that I've forgotten. You've got Athena Swan, I think you've got at least one other for racial diversity. And there's so many of those things that actually you can't get motivated by all of them. Somebody has to, and somebody has to decide what we're doing, and tell us, but as individuals, they all just blur into one big producer of irritating requirements, and forms I have to fill out, some of which are sent by you, and probably get ignored accidentally for months on end.

Paul Jones 51:16

Well, I have no comment on that. Do you think then, that one of the things has cropped up previously, out of things like REF, and TEF, etc, do you think research for career development is the more important part for people? Whereas on a day to day basis, teaching becomes more important because you are being measured more on that?

DBA3 51:38

Yes, yeah, I think you've hit it on the head there, that I think in terms of the satisfaction of thought of your career, if you're on a research and teaching contract, most of your time is spent teaching, unless you're very lucky. But most of your ambition is focused on the research. And you do the teaching well, but probably all the time trying to control how much effort you put into it. Now, I know some colleagues who are teaching fellows quite well, and for them, it can be different. So the teaching can be very much their key focus. So I think they have a heavier workload in some ways, because they can't ignore any of

their workload. Whereas I can to some extent ignore the research at sometimes of the year. But they don't have the same sense, I don't think, of trying to work out what their priorities should be.

Paul Jones 52:52

Yeah. Which I think is part of the reason I focused on T&R staff, because that tension of the demands of teaching, versus where the kudos, and probably the desire to get into academia came from, there are people who are motivated by teaching, but a lot of it is based around having an interest in a particular research topic and being given the space and freedom to explore that and do interesting things with it, those two things don't always butt up against each other in a nice way, then.

DBA3 53:24

No, um, so I suppose my route was fairly atypical for the business school, because my PhD was in [redacted]. I spent at least [redacted] years working on research contracts, most of them in a research [redacted], the [redacted], it's attached to the [redacted]. And they were very, very good at getting you funding basically, and could keep people going on, on effectively rolling one contract onto another. I got fed up of it, because actually, the research wasn't interesting to me. It felt like we were doing research in order to get money rather than getting money because we were interested in the research, and at that point, I wanted to have something that felt more, more real. And teaching does do that because you make a difference with teaching in a way that you don't immediately see the difference with research. So looking back, I can now see that there were things that we were doing, fragments of which are still being used in, in real technology. But with teaching, on a day to day basis, you can make a difference to people and I, it's possibly one of the reasons that I spend quite a bit of my time on teaching, probably more than I should do, if I was being really hard nosed about development and career and so on, is because you do get that satisfaction of knowing that, you know, hopefully, we have students come in, and they leave better able to have a good life.

Paul Jones 55:30

Yeah, and there's the immediacy you get, isn't there, with direct feedback, when you can see those aha moments and you've really captured someone's attention. You can see you've made a difference to their life right then, whereas with research, you could be talking years before your paper gets published, and people could see what you're doing.

DBA3 55:49

Yeah. And even then you don't know if they'll actually respond in the way you'd like them to.

Paul Jones 55:54

I think it was, I heard a fact today, about 82% of papers will not get cited at all.

DBA3 56:03

Yes, that's right. Yeah, most of them don't get cited at all. And the ones that do get cited, quite frankly, you can scratch your head. There's, there's one of mine. I know why it's cited. And it is very far from my best paper. But I think it's still my most cited paper. Just because we said some things which make it an easy paper to tick for if you want to define something.

Paul Jones 56:28

Right?

DBA3 56:30

So it's one of those. Yeah.

Paul Jones 56:33

Yeah

DBA3 56:33

[redacted], Tick. That paper, [redacted] et al.

Paul Jones 56:37

And it's almost like the things on social media that suddenly blow up. And all of a sudden, those things were everywhere. There's no rhyme or reason, just these things have a life, a natural life, it just explodes for whatever reasons behind it.

DBA3 56:54

Yeah, there were people from, it was, it was, it came out of one of those big projects. And so people, from about [redacted] different institutes across Europe, contributed a section. And so seven different Institutes started putting it in their references, and it just snowballed up from that. But it was, my role was editorial, really, trying to get all these people to actually do what they said they were going to do, and put it in a format that was publishable.

Paul Jones 57:22

So we've covered quite a lot already. There's one thing I want to ask you, or two parts to that really, what do you think the culture is like in terms of development? And what would you change, if you're going to change things that help you develop, what would you change?

DBA3 57:39

I think the culture is quite positive. It's very demanding, but there's certainly the expectation that everyone should be being developed. I think that there are some universities in my experience where some staff are effectively carrying the load for the geniuses, so the geniuses can be developed. And you know, the rest of you will please kindly keep grinding on, getting these students through the system, so that we can do that. We don't have that at Aston. So the opportunities are there for everybody, if they want to take them. What would I change? I would have more flexibility in assessing people for promotion, to be honest with you, I think we're too rigid in what we ask for. There are too many tick boxes. And that can make people just turn away, and go, no, I'm gonna get on with my life. And I'm not going to engage with that process. Because it's too hard. It's too hard to be the sort of multifaceted genius who on paper you need to be to do that.

Paul Jones 58:00

I think there is an idea that I was discussing recently where we don't give people the space and time for professional development, and having some type of contract, which specified you had to spend some time either developing yourself, or developing others, and sharing best practice and that doesn't happen enough.

DBA3 59:33

I think. I mean, it's one of the issues with the workload, is that there is no time to reflect. There's no time to reflect. There's literally no time to reflect about teaching anymore, because we've lost that space in the summer. And I'm sure on paper, it all looks terribly, much more efficient. But nobody is stopping to think and really consider how they're going to improve what they do. Because the next cycle is caught up with you. I mean, I literally sat in a training meeting in which we were welcomed back after our summer break. I couldn't stop myself snorting because I knew that I had colleagues who had posted up on the, on the team's chat. Like, the week before. I've just finished the teaching for the year... ...and I just thought, what bloody summer break, where have you been?

Paul Jones 1:00:25

On that point, I asked a number of people how they were, after the break, and whether they feel felt recharged and refreshed, there was not a single positive response in terms of people feeling like they had a break, that they were starting the term all energised and enthused about getting into a new year.

DBA3 1:00:41

I mean, I had taken one. And I have actively encouraged, particularly some of my junior colleagues, with families, to make damn sure they take one. And within the [redacted] team, we've thought very hard about loading. We, because the, one of the problems is that the workload model doesn't take any account of when things happen. And particularly, the teaching fellows, we have had colleagues who have literally never had a point in the year, for a couple of years, when they could take two weeks holiday, at the same time, their children were on school terms, and some of them haven't ever been at a point where they could take two years holiday, two weeks, not two years, two weeks holiday, for a couple of years back to back. And that's really, really painful. So, so one of those kinds of things that I've been doing, I suppose in an informal mentoring role, is talking to people and saying, right, when are you going to do it, how are you going to make sure you do it. And kind of pushing to reduce the number of people that we have on modules, which were meant to have multiple people. And we've now got two maximum, for most of the [redacted] stuff. Because otherwise you're constantly, you're just spread thin throughout the whole year. And actually having some peaks for development, you need to have peaks of teaching, and troughs, where you can either take a break and properly recharge, or do a bit of research, think about, you know, what the way forward looks like you just don't ever have time to think about it. So I think that actually, that is what I would change, that's actually more important than the other thing, is to change the workload model. So that we look at when people have time, because with the number of, the number of different types of programs that we have, and the way that they overlap, and particularly the carousel style teaching in the master's program. People have no downtime.

Paul Jones 1:03:03

Is that the January starts thing that's been implemented.

DBA3 1:03:06

Yeah, yeah. So with the with the jack because of the job so you started September, say and then you've got a January start. So one, one of those years is running from October to September, and the other one is running from January to February.

Paul Jones 1:03:15

Yeah.

DBA3 1:03:15

And this means that you are still doing classroom teaching in the summer on the January cohort.

Paul Jones 1:03:17

Yeah.

DBA3 1:03:17

And if you are teaching, say an apprenticeship as well, an apprenticeship will run pretty much September through to end of July. And then there are some people who were teaching the sort of online MBA, or whatever it is called, uhm, that again gets spread across the year and it is quite damaging, it is damaging to people for ability to ever have a bit of time in which they reflect and think about what they're doing. They are constantly, you know, hammering away at, you know, that's why I call it a carousel, because it just never stopped. You go round, round, right. You never get off. It is like strangers on a train. Uhm...

Paul Jones 1:03:17

And if you want to, if you're a person driven by wanting to improve things and give the best student experience, that sounds frustrating. Then in those terms you almost have no time to do anything else, but just to deliver what you used to deliver, and you can feel a bit robotic then, in terms of just reading out the same stuff over and over.

DBA3 1:03:17

You can do other things, but you have to do it, you have to learn to do them very fast and to cut corners, so you know, much though it would be nice to produce the world's most perfect teaching materials, I've stopped even trying. You know, I've, I've got a rough plan of what, where I'm going. I do enough stuff, and uhm, and I accept the fact that, you know, the students wouldn't always be perfectly happy.

Paul Jones 1:03:17

Is there, before we finish, is there a tension between providing a good learning opportunity for students, who says how they will rate you for providing the opportunity, because being a good little opportunity isn't necessarily recognised by the student for being a quality opportunity. Sometimes it is harder work and therefore your ratings go down.

DBA3 1:03:22

Uhm, yes, yeah course of there is. But the thing, so I mean, we are trying very hard not to compromise on offering problem based learning which within the [redacted] team we think is the right way to go for students, at least it is in the subjects that we teach. It's not deeply theoretical, it's, they have got to understand how to think about problems and solve problems. They don't like that.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

Yeah I can imagine.

DBA3 1:03:22

They, they, they really don't like the fact that you give them a set of skills and say there's the problem. What are you going to do, what does it look like? Uhm, the way to avoid getting dreadful, uhm, feedback on that is that you have to be friendly and available basically.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

Yeah.

DBA3 1:03:22

They will forgive an awful lot if you're willing to sit down and explain to them, what is going on, what they are meant to be doing and our unit scores, truthfully, absolutely dire, and, uhm, getting worse.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

They won't see the value for it until years after.

DBA3 1:03:22

They do not see the value of it until about three years after.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

Yeah.

DBA3 1:03:22

When, when they realise that, that they had skills that meant they could actually cope in a job where they weren't going to be given a list of instructions when they turned up. So once they get beyond the most basic, follow this by rote job, they suddenly realised we taught them something useful. But yeah, they, they don't know it six months out, you know, at the end of their final year, they don't know it.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

Yeah

DBA3 1:03:22

They won't write down to say, oh [redacted]'s course was amazing, [redacted] taught me all these skills. Oh yeah, yeah, we, we hear this from, from the alumni, we used to teach a module called Business Game, which was universally loathed by students. And you, you, would you believe that they all pretty much universally commented on it to our alumni as the most useful thing they had done at university.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

Right

DBA3 1:03:22

It got scrapped, obviously because the feedback from it was diabolical.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

Yeah it is frustrating, isn't it, that those two things don't marry up very well.

DBA3 1:03:22

Yeah it is. Some of that is structural in a way that Aston on its own can't deal with it's, it's structured in the sector with the way that we fund and it goes, you know, right back to being on the clock quite frankly. And, you know, monitoring school children on basic metrics that have learning that put them constantly on the cycle of being tested, and took them completely away from any aspect of learning, being about exploring

Paul Jones 1:03:22

Yeah.

DBA3 1:03:22

So it's in, it's deeply embedded in our education system, you know. Not only can I not change it, and my team can't change it, nothing can change it. And actually, he couldn't change it, because unless you get a government that's going to abandon measuring how well the average group of 7 year olds can read the cat sat on the mat, I am proceeding from there forever more to set their brains into thinking that there are school or university in order to pass the test. You are not going anywhere. Ok.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

Yeah I think that's it for all the questions I had, was there anything else you wanted to mention at all

DBA3 1:03:22

Nope, I think that's it, that's everything. I think I probably random, randomly rambled at you.

Paul Jones 1:03:22

That is fine I will stop the recording now.

Appendix 7: DBA4 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA4

DBA4 00:02

Right, so I have started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled Individual perspectives on engaged scholarship: reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what's important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour, though we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi-structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that I want to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want, I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area, though the idea is that I do that with the least number of interruptions or questions possible. You have 14 days from the date of the interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised and it will be impossible to withdraw. You can withdraw by emailing me using the details on the participant information sheet, my email address is on there. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed, and all links to you as individual, including personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team, the interview is considered low risk. If you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please do raise your hand, so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate this by asking. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress. And I may stop it if I'm feeling distressed as well. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions to start then we'll start exploring your experiences. For the record this is interview DBA4. So, can you confirm you understand the information I've given you please? Sure. Yeah.

Paul Jones 01:49

And you are happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA4 01:51

Yeah.

Paul Jones 01:52

And you understand how to withdraw?

DBA4 01:54

Yeah.

Paul Jones 01:55

Right. So can you confirm what school you work in please?

DBA4 01:58

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:00

And can you confirm your gender, please.

DBA4 02:02

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:03

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA4 02:06

Yeah.

Paul Jones 02:07

Great. And two last questions. How would you describe your career level? Early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA4 02:14

Senior.

Paul Jones 02:15

And could you confirm your age bracket, please? So 25 To 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64?

DBA4 02:25

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:27

Great. Thanks very much. So can you talk to me about what you understand professional development to be and what your experiences have been like for that across your career, and particularly in Aston?

DBA4 02:42

I have not thought about the notion of professional development in any sort of considered way. And I've had, throughout my career, I can't recall being a participant in a structured process of professional development. I've been on one leadership course while in my previous employer, and that was, I just volunteered to do it. It was pretty random. So, I don't think I've been privy to a structured process of professional development throughout my, my [redacted] plus year career. Did you say Paul, what do you think it involves, or...?

Paul Jones 03:43

Well, just your thoughts generally. So the interesting point there is you don't think you've been through professional development as a structured thing. So I'd be interested to think about whether you think that's been a gap that's been missing for you then, because that seems to be a big gap where you haven't maybe had the support, and the things around you, to accelerate your career as much as possible.

DBA4 04:06

I would have, I wouldn't put it as starkly as that. I think I'd have a more nuanced view, I think, in the sense that, I think, although I've never been privy to a structured process of professional development, I've had the privilege of working with some hugely talented people...

Paul Jones 04:32

Yeah...

DBA4 04:33

...And that has been very useful for my personal development, particularly in the research sense. So I think that could be construed as professional development, but, but in a very informal and individualised way, and, and in, in a way that was initiated by me, rather than the host, whatever organisation, I was with, I'm trying to sort of reach back into, to my career, but I can't recall ever being, someone ever sitting down and saying, this is mapping out my career, you look like this, look like that, or you need to do this, that and the other. I had, when I was at University of [redacted], between [redacted] and [redacted], the then Dean and I had a conversation. And he articulated his view of what say a Research

Centre looked like. And it was completely at odds with mine. I couldn't, I didn't see that, as professional development. I saw that as just an unthinking comment on his side. So, so then your point is, is it a gap? I think, I would say probably, in the sense that, you know, would I have liked that? Would I have liked someone who, or to be involved in a process, that sort of was close enough to me to understand what I was doing and mature enough to say, [redacted], you know, you're doing this, that's great. But if you did this, that would enhance it, or these are the implications of doing that. So for example, up until the year, when I, in my early career, from [redacted], to, to [redacted], I worked at [redacted]. Now, you know, it wasn't a great, it didn't, it wasn't a great, research wise, it wasn't a great university. But for me, it was in, I was the only person who did research, most of the, in the [redacted], most of the research I did, and I had a fairly successful time, was on my own, you know, and I sort of, I think, developed a track record, almost in spite of my having any professional development rather than because having professional development. But I think a critical turning point, when I came, went to my second employer, [redacted], because I thought I would intensify, deepen my conventional research career, that's why I went, but then when I went, I won the biggest ever bid that I had put in for and from that time on, you know, I sort of gravitated towards, I became sort of the leader of a team, rather than, you know, a sole researcher. And it was, that was a critical turning point. And, you know, in retrospect, you know, I think that's, it's, I think I've been quite successful by objective measures like publications, citations, grant income, international recognition, etc. But I have become a very different kind of academic, to the conventional researcher. And, and I remember in [redacted], when I set up [redacted], I also, you know, I was given money to set up [redacted], I was always, also given money to set up a [redacted] initiative, which I ran as well as being as a full time academic. And I remember a really seasoned academic saying to me, are you sure you want to do this? Because it'll take you away, I mean, I think it really did take me away from my academic pursuits. Now, I've still published consistently from then on, but I know what he means, you know, there's very different, being a leader of a team, and being a sole researcher are very different animals. And sometimes, you know, I, you know, yesterday, for example, yesterday, it was a great buzz knowing that [redacted] we've never been so [redacted], successful and embedded, you know, at the same time, you know, conventional research career is about scholarship, and although I, you know, I still do the academic, I sometimes I wonder if I took a more conventional route, which would have been much less impact oriented, more conventional scholarship, but what, what kind of academic and where would I have been then sometimes, and, you know, and you always, well I always feel it, feel a vulnerability, because I think I, I really enjoy the impact, it comes very natural to me, I enjoy, because I feel it's making a difference. But, you know, Academic Writing is hard. And you know, and I've been reasonably successful at it. But I was thinking, you know, that's what I did, I developed a skill and my distinctiveness. And you know, that for me, it seems to be something, and I'd want to, I don't want to give up on that. Because it sort of legitimises everything else I do, if that makes sense. But I suppose I'm rambling a bit, but I think the point was about professional development. And I'm saying that at pivotal points in my time, when there have been forks in the road, and I've taken a particular direction. And I've, I don't think there's been anyone in my network, who sort of alerted me to the implications of taking that direction, if that makes sense. So, yeah, so I think I would classify it that way.

Paul Jones 12:07

Yeah, there's two points you mentioned there, so one about impact and also about the team. Now, it's interesting to think about the team area, of having taken over a team, because we train academics to become independent researchers, which they often do. But then we don't necessarily train them, or give them the skills, to manage a team straightaway...

DBA4 12:26

...absolutely...

Paul Jones 12:26

... they almost learn by accident, or come across things that can help you...

DBA4 12:30

Oh, a hundred percent! I think that this is, uh, uh, one of the most fundamental paradoxes of an academic career, as you progress. You know, in your, in your scholarship, you are subject to unrelenting scrutiny from day one, you know, so let's, the conventional process of writing an academic paper. You have a thought, you draft something, you share, you have a thought, you discuss it, you draft something really awful, you get some feedback from peers, they tell you their views, you produce a conference paper, you get more feedback. You develop it. You send it to a journal, you get extreme feedback and every word is scrutinised. You're scrutinised as a, as a writer. And that's, and then, when, finally, you get it published or rejected, let's say. So, that whole process of peer review is really forensic. Now, you know, when I won my first significant [redacted] grant, I was given two researchers to manage. And they were both idiosyncratic, in any, and, you know, and they were both challenging in different ways. But, no one, no one explained to me, I wasn't introduced how to manage them. And, you know, I think, I think I play a leadership role in what I do, but no one's sort of spoken to me about leadership. And, you know, and, you know, it's a, it's a, it's a really interesting issue. And it, that, that process is, actually, it's not only for me, you know, I see academics in senior management positions, and you know, your facility as a leader, your ability and facility as a leader, is almost, what makes you a good leader in an academy, no one knows, if you're good at scholarship then you get promoted. And that, and I don't think, that's, it's a very questionable assumption that if you're good at research, you make a good leader. And, in my case, I've learned from the job, and people I respect, to have sort of given me feedback. And I've wanted, I've actually wanted feedback. Because, you know, I'm sort of, in the middle of networks now, and managing networks, and managing a team [redacted], who are very young, and you know, and I've not been trained to do that. Now, I think I've picked it up on the job. I've been reflective, my discipline is [around people]. And I think about these things. And, I know, I'm sort of, I come across as reason..., I think, reasonably informal, relaxed, etc. But I am very mindful in knowing why I do that, in the sense that it is to create an environment of psychological safety. That I think I do that because I know, but, you know, the reason I do that is not because anyone's told me, or following a sort of management precept, that's how I like to be managed, you know, that's how I've thrived when people have just trusted me, and believed in what I do. And, um, and I've tried to sort of mirror that with the people, I work, since I'm moving to Aston, so it's been a really interesting challenge. Because I've never even, I haven't even thought in any significant way about leadership and management, because mine was sent, I've not, I've not gone down the manage..., I've chosen not to go down the management route, I've had other opportunities to be [redacted]. But I've not gone down the formal management route, because I think it would be stifling for me. Given the kind of work and the ambitions I have, I think I could fulfill the roles, but I don't, you know, I know, I think I would create more added value when I'm sort of developing an agenda and, um, an academic, you know, developing an agenda and pursuing a mission. And that's where my think skills come to the fore. But since coming to as..., since coming to Aston, we've [redacted] grown it, [redacted]. And I've had a few challenges with a few people I've recruited. And I think the issues were with them, but I've got to be sufficiently mature, I recruited them. And, and, and, you know what, and I've had, I mean, Aston has been really helpful for me, but in terms of just giving me the space, I've questioned myself. And as a consequence of that questioning, I've changed the way I recruit by, you know, appointing people on the panel, who are totally the opposite to me, you know. And, that's been really helpful. So, but I always see as a, you know, work in progress, that I'm learning on the job still. And, now I find it, I actually find it quite rewarding, because I can see in the team that we've developed at [redacted] they're really committed, and interesting and excited colleagues. And it's, well, it's really, it's really quite heartening to see that that's been created, that we've, I've been a part of facilitating the creation of that, but I haven't done that through any formal adherence to principles of professional development or management. It's been, I suppose, what is very typical of me, very intuitive and that's the way I tend to manage, which I, both have these positives and it's, sort of, setbacks, positives, essentially, that's how I would work throughout my career and to my best successes have been like that. But you know, I think, In your network, unless there's, it can go, if your intuition is to avoid something, and sometimes mine is, that's negative, you know and I, I, so I think there's a, there's a realisation that having checks, having, you know, having trusted colleagues around you who really trust and believe in you, but who are not like you, is really quite important. You know, and how you sort of assess that, in terms of professional development? I don't know, I think it's an interesting challenge. But, you know, and I'll

close with this, saying this, but, so I suppose what I'm saying is, I don't think I'm probably unique, I think a lot of academics think they're really, you know, what they're doing, that, I said they're precious, I mean, that, I don't mean that entirely in a pejorative way. But they've got their own systems, ways of doing things, their own, their own ways of being creative. And they don't want that suffocated by someone who didn't, who didn't, get it. I'm certainly in that boat. At the same time, you know, I think, it would be a healthy environment, which both facilitates that creativity, gives people that space and self belief, but has, also, a way, I suppose, asking developmental questions, as well, if that makes sense? And I think, for me, that's a good management challenge to have in the academy. I don't think, this is not a criticism, and because I think it's happened in most places I have gone to, management are just so pressurised and preoccupied. And, you know, an hour a year, to assess progress, is, in some ways, just ludicrous, you know? So, I think it is genuinely a challenge. I think this challenge can be met, but I think we've got to be open to a bit more radical ways of thinking how we relate to colleagues. And by that I mean, look, you know, the kind of feedback questioning is, it has to be much more relational, immediate, informal, um, rather than procedural. So, so that's how I would summarise it.

Paul Jones 22:51

Well the example would be in my head with that is always the MyDC conversations, because, what should be happening is that managers should be having conversations with staff on a regular basis. But it doesn't happen, we put a procedure in place to try and force them to do it. The good ones are still having the conversations, the bad ones aren't engaged with our system, it just creates a lot of hassle for people, when really there should be culture change, behavior and attitude change, not just putting a process and system in place to try and combat that deficiency.

DBA4 23:21

I, I, I, absolutely. So on my DC, you know, but maybe because I'm not sort of, I don't assiduously go through it. I mean, with my staff, I say to them, look, we do need to talk about you, I want to know, and look, I want you to grow, and [redacted] to grow, and the sweet spot is in the middle. Right? How do we, how do we create that? How do we create that environment? And, I don't know, you know, I mean, for me that, it means, you have a personal autonomy, but you also have a sort of sense of connectedness and commitment to the [redacted]. And, and I have, I have that kind of discussion. And most of the team I work with are very, they're very, very different to each other, some are very private, some are more engaged. I respect that difference. And I think, for me, that's twofold. In the end, I'm not judged as a manager. This is a bizarre thing. Now, I'm managing [redacted] people. At fundamental stages of their career, you know? But you know, I'm judged on impact, academic publications, grant income, you know, and I think, I'm not judged as a manager. And, you know, I'm not incentivised to, to spend a lot of time on that. I do. I don't do it in an MDC way. I do talk to all of them. I know, I, you know, I say to them, you know, well, I know what all of my staff are doing. I'm not overly concerned how they do it. And that's the rule I have, well not a rule, but that's my approach. And we have mechanisms for coming together. And I think we're, we're doing that reasonably well now. I think we're reasonably well functioning. But it is a paradox, again, that, you know, I occupy a leadership role. I'm not judged on my leadership, you know, or management, I'm judged on, well, I don't know, I mean, grant income, and impact, and advocacy for an agenda. I think, I think, I, I don't know, but I think this goes to the the paradox that, you know, managing careers, which is what I'm doing is a very, very serious and important task. And, you know, and pregnant with implications, you know, the sort of misplaced word, and, you know, yes, you know, sort of, really destroying the competence of an early career researcher or a PhD student. It's just, it's really, doesn't really mean, I worry about giving students the right advice. I worry about being stretched in so many ways, how can I be expert enough to give them the, the guidance that they need on this particular issue? I worry about that all the time, very regularly. But I think it is an enduring paradox of the academy. Well, my experience of the academy, that and this in a business school as well, that we're not really, we're not really serious about management leadership, and the stuff that we all read in the textbooks about engagement and motivation. I don't think we treat that seriously, or with the respect, or with the enlightened, or with the knowledge that it deserves, you know, we're experts on HR, management, etc. Can you say, well, I can, I can, I have very little evidence of that being

operationalised on a day to day level, in the management process. So this, again, is not a criticism of Aston, you know, I've been sort of, this is throughout my career.

Paul Jones 28:08

I think my experience, going on to that question, I would agree with you and part of the reason I was doing the DBA is that, amongst many different gaps, I could see that people weren't taking professional development seriously, and this stems back to what you were saying about management, is that, the fact you're having those conversations seems to be a big step forward, what a lot of people are doing, in terms of asking how, what people's motivations are, what their aspirations are, I'm trying to find out where that overlap is with the center, or where the school, or where the College wants to go. Those conversations don't seem to be happening. And it becomes a tick box exercise with things about MyDC. Oh, I've done that, a conversation probably doesn't include anything about their aspirations, goals, or anything.

DBA4 28:54

No, no, no, it isn't. You know, and I'm thinking, Now, I've had my MDC with [redacted] now, and, you know, I find, [redacted] mentioned a few things, which I'm going to respond to. And I've spoken with my colleagues and we've, we're going to respond to that, that is going to, that really means that my colleagues priorities have evolved as a consequence and adapted, I think, in a positive way, because it's, it was very positive exercise. You know, that's not reflected in the MDC or my MyMDC. You know, I think, what, what, what, what I think it is, and I'm grateful for this, is a positive reflection of the culture of the team. You know, because I've got, I've said, look, [redacted] has set, and said this, you know, well, this is what I thought I said to [redacted], and [redacted] sort of reasonably supportive. How can we bring it to being? You know? How can we deliver and, you know, people have stepped up taking responsibility. And that's a healthy thing to do, you know. But I think that's indicative of the culture that we have, with these groups within the team at the moment, or wanting, a desire to take responsibility and develop. So, but, so it's not, you know, it wasn't something, it, it wasn't something that was facilitated by the MDC process. It was made possible by the, by the culture within the team, really. And I suppose that leads to another point, you know, we don't recognise enough that we are evaluated individually. But to be successful, you know, it's, our colleagues facilitate our success, rather than us on our own. And that's certainly true in my case. And, you know, I don't know how we recognise that. I don't know how we recognise that in the system.

Paul Jones 31:23

I think that, that point, the most successful academics I've seen are the ones who have good people around them, and have developed a network around them, they can work really well with... ..I think you can be successful if you're going to be a lone researcher, the most successful ones I've seen have been people who have developed that network, and know people that can help fill in the gaps that they might have as individuals, or, have a cluster of people that brings the best out of them, and helps them facilitate their own ability to deliver stuff alongside other people's ability, then the sum becomes greater than the parts. One of the things you mentioned earlier was about external engagement. And I've been asking people about this, because traditionally, a teaching and research contract would be 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% administration. Now, I'm guessing because of your role in [redacted], I am guessing your contract doesn't work like that...

DBA4 31:34

Yeah... No...

Paul Jones 32:17

... but external engagement always comes up because we don't necessarily teach or train people to be good at doing that type of role through the pathway of becoming an academic and going through your doctorate. Do you do anything in your group to try and facilitate more effective delivery of engagement processes or get the right skills in place to handle that more effectively?

DBA4 32:41

That's a really good question. So yes, and no, I think the yes, is, it's not a discrete element of our culture. It's what we do. So I think we are reasonably [redacted] as a [redacted]. And that has, an actually, I can say that, with greater confidence after [redacted] years at Aston, and because it's embedded in a lot of what we do, all of our current projects, all involve practitioners as [redacted], we've got four or five PhDs, all doing [redacted], we have practitioners coming in and out all the time. So we mix and we go together. And so I think there's an informal approach to that. So, in that sense, yes. But, but we've had a challenging experience with one PhD student. And again, I think that's, you know, I think that's, we did, we did a lot to support him, but I think that's some of his personal issues. But again, I need to stand back and think, well, what this has highlighted, is we don't have formal protocols, or [redacted], you know, and, and I don't believe in formal protocols necessarily. But that's sort of, I think it's not, it's not an adequate response to what happened, you know, and, and what it's taught me is, you know, we need to develop, if not protocols, heuristics, okay, these are challenges you likely to face. And we need to, if we're going to make this a big, a big deal of this, we need to say, establish some protocols. And that's what we're doing. That's what we're doing, so, indeed, that that will be something that we develop. We'd like to talk to you about it, actually. But that's something that we we want to develop, because we think we do it in an original, innovative, integrated and authentic way. That doesn't mean it's without problems, flaws, challenges. That doesn't mean you would appeal to everyone. That doesn't mean, you know, you can adapt to it. And it's a natural thing to do some sort of articulation of expectations, challenges and sources of support, if things go wrong, I think would be worth reiterating. So, you know, it is on our agenda to think through well, okay, how do we, you know, how do we use the experience of running our [redacted] and PhD program, in sort of, not necessarily evangelising, but making the case for [redacted], because I think it's an Aston, I think it's one of Aston's underplayed USPs, I think, right, right. And we would like to, as a [redacted], we would like to add our part, to make that case into advocate for it, at the same time, then, you know, we have to develop a clearer set of understandings, expectations, norms of what constitutes [redacted], and well, what, what are the challenges of going down that route.

Paul Jones 36:50

That makes sense, because there's an overlap here between your student experience and staff experience, as well, because one of the things I've noticed, was some of the difficulties students have had when there's a third party organisation involved. We recruit students based on academic ability quite often....

DBA4 37:06

Yeah...

Paul Jones 37:06

... it doesn't mean that we recruit based on the skills you need to facilitate relationships or...

DBA4 37:11

Absolutely...

Paul Jones 37:12

... or to get on in an organisation...

DBA4 37:13

Absolutely...

Paul Jones 37:14

... the same with, same with academics as well...

DBA4 37:17

Yeah...

Paul Jones 37:17

... there are people who are naturally aligned to develop in those relationships, their skill with doing it, we don't select those people, sometimes, in the right way for that relationship building. And we certainly don't train them or give them the skills to be able to do it, even if there's potential there, then, and I think it can be aligned to both students and staff in that way.

DBA4 37:33

No, absolutely. Absolutely. And, you know, that's, that's something I think we can, you know, we, we can, and we should, pay a lot more atten..., I think, it has echoes of the earlier point I made between the scrutiny you receive as a, with your writing and the complacency about your, or the, or your skills as a leader and the lack of scrutiny there, at all.

Paul Jones 37:46

Because a lot of the assessments are based around outputs, it's much harder to quantify good research leadership, than it is to say, publications, grants, impact, supervision, it is a much more intangible thing that takes a lot more time and effort to try and quantify and assess. I don't think the appetite is there sometimes to want to put that much effort into doing those things, even though it's really important.

DBA4 38:37

I think it is really important. And I think, I think it would be quite a bold thing for Aston to do, you know, is to maybe, to set out, you know, what to expect from an Academic Leader, Research Leader. I mean, you can come up with banal slogans, you know, but, and I wouldn't advocate that, but you know, but I think it's conversation worth having, and how we develop that in a business school, I don't know. But, you know, we've had these interventions about strategy, we've got these strategy forums, etc, etc...

Paul Jones 39:32

Yeah...

DBA4 39:33

... but they are... you know, and I'm not critical of them, but, really, shouldn't they emerge from the relationship you cultivate with your staff? Shouldn't there be a strategy from below as much as a strategy from above. By that I mean, shouldn't it reflect a real deep appreciation of what your colleagues strengths are, and how they align with where you want to go? And, you know, having a bit like, yeah, and bringing those two together, you know, so. So, I suppose what I'm saying is, you know, I think the, when we have these discussions on strategy, as the implicitly, they're predicated on an assumption that we're managed in a particular way, and that, and being managed in a particular way, will facilitate us executing that strategy. And I don't think that assumption is a safe one in all circumstances.

Paul Jones 40:53

Yeah, and I would agree, and there was two points there that are worth picking up on. One is this idea that, because of the way higher education works, in this almost solo mentality, that you develop with, as you develop into academia, we think about tasking people with targets at an individual level. So we'd expect people to be experts on teaching, experts in research, and research would be very integrated with publications, you'll need to be winning grants, and you'll need to be creating impact case studies, to be supervising x amount of people. It's all about an individual trying to be excellent at all of these different things, rather than a team based approach to thinking, well, I've got experts that are going to be winning the grants, I've got these other people that can be experts at doing more of the publications, I've got these people who are really supportive for PhD students and do a really good job. While there might be elements of all of that, that each person is doing, you almost put together a team that, there's some of which is really excellent, but not expecting a carbon copy of everyone to do exactly the same amount of work all on an expert level, because people's strengths and abilities differ between them...

DBA4 42:00

Absolutely. Absolutely. And, you know. So we have, let's say, on the engagement, which I'm really committed to, I really enjoy it, you know, I find it massively energising, rewarding, and I've got, you know, we had [redacted] the people we would want to engage with as a university. Right? And, and I do that every day of the week, more or less. Right? And, I'm not in an engagement role in the university. I'm not saying I should be in an engagement role, but, and then people who are in engagement roles, probably aren't as well networked as me, you know, and thinking., but you know, but I don't want to, sort of, do an engagement. I'm not saying that I want an engagement role. But I'm thinking, you know, what kind of engagement do we want? Really? What's it for? And is there an Aston way of doing it? I think there should be an Aston way, because I think there's, you know, the offer of dual intensive, close to business, but being able to compete with many on the academic front, and bringing it together, being very relatable to backstreet businesses, and, you know, top corporates at the same time. You know, that's a wonderful challenge for me, you know, I really relish that. But I am doing that, because I want to, the engagement is to develop [redacted] the general direction of enlightenment, social inclusion, etc, etc. And that, and so, sometimes I think, well, this is what I do every day of the week, you know, it's not something I do as an add on. So if I was in a role for engagement, what would I do differently? I'd probably do exactly the same. But, but, I'm not clear what I'm saying there. But I think I'm saying, sometimes, yeah. Are those skills appreciated? Are they not? You know, is that my fault? Is that others? What's the best fit? I'm not sure. So, yeah, yeah.

Paul Jones 42:51

There are two things that, you speaking about that, there are two things that spring to mind. One is that if you went into an engagement role, no doubt, you'd probably end up counting stuff, and writing reports, and telling people about what happens on engagement not actually doing it. And the second point is, what you described there, I was, I would see as a natural part of being an academic at Aston, or the business school, and the way we should be operating but that doesn't seem to extend to lots of people, and their ideas about how they could lead their role, or do their role. And it's almost like they haven't been told to do it, not measured on it. So therefore, they don't do it as a natural part of trying to translate research into meaningful activity and impact out in the wider world then.

DBA4 45:39

I think that's a very valid point. I think that's a really good, I would agree with that observation, I would totally agree with that.

Paul Jones 45:50

I think what you're doing is great and I really enjoy seeing what [redacted] are doing in terms of the translation of that research into, into meaningful things [redacted] at all levels. That excites me. And part of the reason I did the DBA was because I wouldn't want to just get my teat pipette, and do a bit of research, and drop it into the big pool of knowledge that exists. I want to see meaningful action from what the research dictates and to then say, well, what can I do with this to make a difference to people, what's that taught us that we can learn from and think well, if we do this differently, it will give us even better results. That's the part excites me, but doesn't seem to translate to all people where an academic pathway, in the past, probably more so, is because people had a, an interest in research, and have a particular topic area, not in actually translating that into what makes a difference out in the world.

DBA4 46:45

Thanks Paul, and, and I would welcome that, I admit, but you know, I think with the nature of getting [redacted], there's, you know, if we're serious about it, and this is where I think we, you know, it'd be great to have a more involved conversation, within or without ,out with or within the discussions of your DBA about, you know, okay, what does taking this seriously look like, you know, so I'm, one of my colleagues, she might reach out to you, because I've said now, to the team. Well, we've got five PhDs now. They're very distinctive, right? What, our projects are very distinctive. If we were to deepen this, and promote it, what would it look like? And, for me, you know, having a discussion with you, given your interest would be useful, very, very useful. But that's, we're going to initiate this conversation. I don't

necessarily think you should rest with [redacted] exclusively. I think it should be within the research function more generally, if it seems to have a value, we will, we will continue to do that, regardless. But, I mean, I think, you know, given that affinity that a number of colleagues have with this kind of approach, you know, it would probably sit with the research wanted, but we're quite happy, and would want to spend time in developing the concept with colleagues like yourself, because it might relate, it might have synergies with your own DBA. And so that's what we're going to do. And I think with the ambition of helping it to make, well sharpening [redacted] distinctiveness, but also developing Aston's USP in this space. Yeah. So that's on our agenda.

Paul Jones 49:04

I think it ties in to recruitment as well, because I think we struggle at the moment to find the right type of staff. And I have issues generally with the way we do recruitment because it is very reactive rather than being proactive. But the more we can offer a different opportunity for staff to come here and work in a supported way, that gives them ways to translate their research into meaningful activity. I think that could be a really, a really powerful USP for creating more interest in bringing stuff in to Aston and make it a different place to work and a more supportive place to work. One of the things I want to ask you about was, so on my list of stuff I've been talking to people about is this idea about experience outside of HE because I've seen with the academic staff I work with, the people who have had experience outside of HE quite often, are the ones I tend to enjoy working with more, because they've got a broader perspective on life. They seem to be able to translate what HE does into more more meaningful activity for outside parties. Do you think that, well, firstly, have you got experience outside of HE in terms of your background? And do you think that it makes a difference to the experiences you've had? Do you think that's a good thing to have?

DBA4 50:13

Well, I've worked in the [redacted] business and I've had a [redacted] business background. But, you know, I've been an academic for [redacted] plus years, I would say, though, I've been a very unconventional academic, in the sense that I've done quite a few things, which wouldn't be considered academic services. I've started ventures within the university. So I started a supply chain venture, I've supported businesses to develop peer support mechanisms. We, you know, by the nature of [redacted], we, we work very closely with practitioners, I've been involved in different sectors, virtually all my career and still am, you know, so for me, and that's probably more significant in my work than engagement with academics. You know, so, although, I've said, I've been in the Academy for [redacted] years, I've always, always had deep relationships with practitioner communities that facilitated my work as an engaged scholar.

Paul Jones 51:39

I think there's a lot to be said for those academics, and sometimes people have it naturally, but there definitely seems to be a, almost a relationship management skill set that you could look at in terms of how you relate to outside organisations, and I have a similar background to you in terms of having worked across various sectors, and my background, my background was HR, Work Psychology, I've done those jobs. I've done recruitment jobs, I've done different things across every type of sector, including being self employed, I think those experiences, particularly at Aston, lend themselves really well to understanding business needs. And then once you understand business needs, organisation needs, you can start to see how your research could have an impact and make those connections then, without having some type of external experience or understanding, it's very hard to make those links, understand the context and even have conversations about it sometimes.

DBA4 52:35

Absolutely, for us, that absolutely, for us, that external perspective, that insight, is something that we can gain with our network of relationships. Now, you know, as part of our everyday work, we don't need to do secondment to an industry. You know, because we're effectively seconded to practitioner communities as part of our job. We work with them as part of our job. And we've done that throughout, you

know, [redacted] was set up as a joint venture between [redacted] and an academic institution, it didn't belong to an academic institution. And I think that's shaped its development.

Paul Jones 53:23

Yeah, and it's the, it is one of the sentences that is more exciting for me, as I love that transaction between what research can do, and then, it actually making a difference to people's lives. And, I wish we could do more things like that, because we say we've got an impact strategy, and that the university's impact focused, and it wants to make a difference to beneficiaries. But I don't always see that coming to fruition in many of the areas I look at...

DBA4 53:48

... yeah, yeah, yeah

Paul Jones 53:49

..., than what I'd like to see ideally. One of the other things I wanted to follow up on was, are you influenced by external factors like regulations or requirements, things like REF or TEF, or different things, do they play a part in your functioning or do you just get on with what you're doing?

DBA4 54:04

Well, not so much TEF or KEF. Because everything we do is impact related. We don't, umm, REF I think is certainly on my mind, a lot of the time, because, you know, we, and this is the sort of, it's important for career, all of us really. And as a sort of senior scholar, I've got to do my bit. And even though it's tempting not to do and, you know, this is where I feel real tensions because really to do my bit, you know, to burnish my REF credentials, I, frankly, I need to do less engagement. You know, I need to work on my own a lot more. And now, but then I feel a responsibility to other colleagues. So I'm actually managing other, a lot of it comes from projects I've thought about, but you know, I've got to ensure that colleagues become lead authors, support them. And sometimes as, at the detriment of my own sort of scholarly credentials. And that's what I mean, like, the tensions with being a lone researcher, and you're the leader of a project, in the broadest sense of the word, a leader of an agenda.

Paul Jones 55:24

It's likely the university, no matter how well [redacted] does, when the time for the next REF comes, [Redacted], they would still probably come to you and say, [redacted], where's your four star publications?

DBA4 55:35

Yeah, that is really, really true. And I worry about that a lot, really, because, you know, I've got some four stars now. And I've, you know, all the REFs, I've managed to get more or less all four stars for my publications. And, you know, and that's the thing I worry about most, you see, because, and I know, and then that's the thing, I feel under confident about sometimes because I haven't, I haven't spent the amount of time I need to, to get into mindset, and to be immersed in the academic literature, to get those top rank publications, and I need to do that a lot more. But then, you know, if I do that, you know, some of the huge opportunities that have come our way now, I mean, there is no one that can actually do that role now, you know. And, so, that's the thing that sort of worries me most. I mean, Aston has been very good to me, they've never asked me, where are your four star publications? Although, you know, that might be because I've had them already. But it is something that concerns me. And sometimes I think, well, you know, okay, I'm may, umm, that was the calculation I had when I [redacted], you know, I could have stayed at [redacted], but you know, it was, but you know, because I've got [redacted] plus publications and fairly, and at the stage of career, you know, having five or six more publications, or to achieve what we've done, actually, in the last [redacted] years, which is really accelerate [redacted]. And that was, that, I want, I want to do more of that, umm, impact stuff, but I don't want to do at the expense of academic publications. In fact, I would like to do more of those now. But I just need to get into the mindset of doing that, really, and have the space to think about that.

Paul Jones 57:54

It's the space that is key. So the conversations I've been having around these areas for T and R contracts more generally, is that the teaching side can grow at the detriment of the research side, even though research has the more kudos associated with it and global reputation, etc, because you won't get globally recognised for your teaching practices, the constant monitoring of teaching, the importance of it to Aston's bankrolling for everything else that goes on within Aston, that's really important, it tends to take the focus and when that grows, research takes a backseat then more so, because they certainly don't take away administrative duties, they still expect people to do different things. But I guess for you, if I understand rightly, then, because you're so heavily involved in engagement, rather than teaching, the engagement side can have a mind of its own sometimes...

DBA4 58:43

Absolutely

Paul Jones 58:44

...so that eats into your research time then of sitting down and doing publications alongside the administration [redacted] and managing people.

DBA4 58:52

No, absolutely. Absolutely. We, uh, that's 100% right. I mean, it's, so, engage, engagement is really time consuming. I'm shattered today, I've got to go to an event tonight. I don't really want to go, to be honest. And the university is not begging me and I could give my, but you know, that, it's a commitment I made to quite influential people. And I feel an obligation to go. And it does, it does, it, and I think now, what I'm into is finding a right balance, really, and, you know, managing the, you know, making sure by trying to give my colleagues more responsibility, which they've been very good at actually, you know, exercising leadership when I can and trying to find the space for more reflective work I need to do. I have to say, the engagement side, I find just very natural to do, you know, very easy isn't the right word. But you know, but I'm very comfortable in it. And sometimes the feedback is immediate, in the sense that, you know, you get, sort of, usually quite positive comments. And I think it's just important to realise that that has to be earned. You know, you've got, you know, the, and, that's facilitated by your academic work and engagement without that academic work, well, it's just sales.

Paul Jones 1:00:44

Yeah, but I guess it's hard, isn't it? Because having done business development roles and stuff. When you building relationships, and you've got good relationships, they still take work and maintenance...

DBA4 1:00:53

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah...

Paul Jones 1:00:54

... You are always thinking, well, I can't justify spending a day or two at home just doing my research stuff, because they've asked me to do this, or this person wants to chat. And then all that, all that type of activity takes energy away. So even if you do get a spare day, quite often, you could be exhausted by that point.

DBA4 1:01:11

Oh, yes. That's happened to me quite a lot. That's happened to me quite a lot. When I think of a day, and I am shattered. And the last thing I want to do is read. You know, and you end up procrastinating and things, and, well, that's just makes it worse. So I think, I do think it's a question of managing energy, really, more appropriately.

Paul Jones 1:01:31

Yeah. I think that's covered most of the stuff I wanted to talk today, is anything else you wanted to mention before we finish the recorded part of this?

DBA4 1:01:39

No, no, that has been really thought provoking for me, and other than to say, you know, that point about sort of linking our commitment to advance [redacted], well, how do you internal, how do you develop it internally, as well as externally? That's a conversation we would welcome to have with you.

Paul Jones 1:02:03

Great, that sounds good, I am going to stop the recording now. Two seconds. And then we can have a chat about some other bits and so we'll just stop this here.

Appendix 8: DBA5 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA5

Paul Jones 00:02

I have started recording. So firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in the study. The study is called individual perspectives on engaged scholarship, reforming professional development from the bottom up and I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what's important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview lasts approximately one hour and we have scheduled one and a half hours to make sure it comes to a natural end, the interview is semi structured. This means I have some general topic areas I wish to explore. But you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want to I may try to guide you within the boundaries of my research. The idea is that I try not to interfere as much as possible. You have 14 days from the point of the interview to withdraw your data if you want to, you can do that by emailing me through the details on the participant information sheet. Once past that point, your data will be anonymized, and it would be impossible to withdraw the data from the data set. You can withdraw by emailing me the details on the participant information sheet as I mentioned, so following interview, the recording will be transcribed and all links to as an individual, as an example your personal data, will be removed, and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who have access to the anonymised data will be myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk. If you do you need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand and we can stop the interview straightaway. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate that and we can move on from that topic. If I feel uncomfortable, or I have problems with the interview as well, then I might take the chance to stop it, though, as I mentioned its low risk. I am going to ask you a few closed ended questions at the start. And then we're going to start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. For the interview record, this is interview DBA5. So please, can you confirm that you understood the information I've given you and you happy to proceed with the interview and you understand how to withdraw?

DBA5 02:27

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:28

Great. Thank you. Can you confirm what school you work in please?

DBA5 02:33

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:36

Great, thank you. And can you confirm your gender please?

DBA5 02:39

I am a [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:40

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA5 02:43

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:44

Great. Thank you. How would you describe your career level out of the three choices? Early career, mid career, senior career

DBA5 02:52

Early career researcher.

Paul Jones 02:53

Great, thanks. And the last closed question. Could you confirm which age bracket you're in? So the brackets are 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54? Any of those suitable?

DBA5 03:08

[redacted]

Paul Jones 03:08

[redacted]?

DBA5 03:10

[redacted].

Paul Jones 03:11

Great. That's it for that part of it. So now on to you then in terms your experiences, do you just want to generally talk about your experiences of professional development, how you found it, what matters to you as a member of staff?

DBA5 03:25

For me, I started working here [redacted] years ago, it's been [redacted] years now. And ever since I started working, I've had an opportunity to explore a lot of things because I'm someone who likes to learn a lot and read about new things and investigate new things as well. So I don't like to be in a particular area. So I, I made sure that I had that opportunity. I had discussions with my manager saying, see, in the future in five years or six years down the line, this is what I want to be in terms of I want to get a [redacted]. And I kept talking to him about it and we spoke with each other and I decided okay, I want to get to a qualification in it. And yeah, that's what I've been doing for the past [redacted] years now. Like I've identified which area I want to go into. And I've already gained my [redacted]. And now I'm moving towards [redacted] so I've again enrolled myself in another course I'm learning and research wise as well I've had some good grants come my way. I worked with some colleagues very interesting and I had a good opportunity there as well. And... I think I have made use of the opportunity that is given to me and I'm always looking for more opportunities even if I don't know how to do certain things. I know people whom I can go and talk to about this and we are finding always a way so that way... yeah, I do see I'm still I'm not in a stage where I want to be, I'm still working towards it. So that's what I would say my development is right now.

Paul Jones 05:07

So, some interesting points there that you raised. One of the things I'm curious about is that difference between you being a driven and focused person that is keen to develop, versus how the organisation supports you, and how much of a part they've played in that journey. So do you want to talk a bit more about what you think is off your own back that you've just done because you're keen to develop, and then think about what the organisation's done to support you? And where those differences might be and maybe what's missing as well.

DBA5 05:39

Yeah, because I started my first talking about the first degree, which I did, along with my full time job. It was the [redacted] course. But unfortunately, COVID happened. And everybody was trying to figure out how to do certain things, how to teach and everything. So at that point, I didn't find that much support in terms of monetary support was there from the university, because when I joined, I was provided with

5000 pounds that I can use for my research, it was part of my contract. So I said, like, I want to use that, towards this course and then Vice Chancellor, she actually said, yes, okay, let's do this. And it went through a huge process in terms of like, should I ask this person, that person, who should I go for, and the head of the department was very supportive. So that was very good, monetary wise. But when it came to subjects, because it was an online part time course, the ... not everybody knew that I was doing. And I didn't feel like I have to enforce myself saying, Guys, I'm already doing this, why don't you reduce my workload or anything, probably, I should have had a chat. But because COVID was happening and everything turned online, it became a bit difficult because I was teaching online, I was preparing materials for online, I was taking care of my kids, I was homeschooling and it was very difficult at that time. And I just didn't know who to reach out to because everybody was, you know, doing ... doing their own thing. And when we were completely online, there wasn't much support, irrespective of first meeting every week. And during that time, I'm not someone who just go and say, Guys, I'm having a really hard time here. So it didn't feel like anybody was checking up saying, hey, [redacted], I know you're taking up the scores, and you're teaching how are things, how are you getting on with it? Nothing like that happened at that point. And for the past two years, like I did, like six different courses submitted too many assignments, I was teaching full time. And kids well, because my husband travels a lot. So I'm kind of like a single parent, but married single parent. So that support could have been more in terms of you know, it's not just a monetary thing, we'll give you money, you go and do it. It's more about that emotional support as well. It's not like they're going to help me write assignments or things. But at least a workload few workloads here and there could have been adjusted. But I do understand like during Covid, everybody had too much workload going on. And we had to meet students too many, too many dissertations. So many... too many placements, a lot of things that was required of us to provide support to the students. But support for us was very, you know, not that much as I would have expected. But now since we are back and I've started another course, this time, the workload model has changed a little bit, because we have more colleagues. But I think it's because, you know, you want to make sure you don't overload someone just because someone is learning, and things like that. But I'm not really sure what more the organisation can do, if you know what I mean. Because all they can do is reduce a bit of a workload. But if you're ambitious, like being where you're like overloading yourself, because you want to gain the experience, because you're looking at some point like, you have to go into your next career stage, you want to make sure that a citizenship behavior involved there is you're doing your job extra. And there are lots of things that you need to do, even though you don't have it in the job specification that says for your promotion, you need to have this, this and this. There are other things that are unwritten, which needs to be done. So you don't actually have a choice.

Paul Jones 09:23

So do you think then picking up on some of the points you've made I get the impression while you've said that, financially, we were good at supporting you. But that person element of checking in on you understanding what you're going through and just making sure you were feeling supported. That was missing a bit and part of that was driven by how much work was there generally. So one of the things I'm interested here about is in any teaching and research contract, you have an element of teaching, an element of research and an element of administration. Do you think those all balance very well or is that difficult to try and balance?

DBA5 09:57

I think from my point of view, I think I've worked more than what was required. Because I was working into antisocial hours, I was even even now I get up at 4:30 in the morning to finish my work so that, you know, I can deal with my kids and evening, I make it a point not to work when the kids are around. But you know, sometimes, over the past, if we're comparing all the [redacted] years that I've worked here, things have changed in terms of, you know, you have to keep up with it, you have to, you know, find time to do it and things like that. And, yes, sometimes you work on Saturdays, you don't have a choice, because you have to, you know, you don't have time just to focus on your research anymore. That has been very difficult if I'm being very honest. Because you have to prepare for teaching. Even if you're teaching less number of modules, it's still your teaching, you have to prepare for it for a certain amount of time, even if you're repeating the same module from last year, there needs to be a preparation before

you go into the seminar. You can't just let that turn up and say, Oh, yes, I know this from last year and things, there needs to be a bit of things changed. And when we're talking about research, there's just too much meetings happening. For things that I'm involved in, but still, you know, sometimes you can just say, you know, like, just send me a bit of what happened in this meeting and get over it doesn't have to be there in a meeting just listening to people talk for an hour, and coming out of the meeting saying, Oh, God, what was what was I even doing there I didn't have to be there. So I think that kind of thing would be very helpful for people like us, in terms of we have [redacted] children, we, we want to make sure that it's a work life balance there. You want to work, you don't want to work during the time when you're supposed to be spending with your family. Because I know there are like colleagues who who make it a point to do that, but they are in different stages. But if people like us do it, then I'm not really sure where it would get us when it comes to, you know, promotion and stuff. And people end up saying, oh, you should have had more publications, you should have done more of this. And that. So so yeah.

Paul Jones 12:14

So do you think there's a element of thinking about you said about how much demands are placed on you? Do you think that the skills you've learned to be able to do your job as well as you can do have come from the organisation that you work for now? Or do you think that this stuff you've learned previously that you've been able to bring to the job that makes you better at doing it?

DBA5 12:35

I think it's, I think it might be me more than what the organisation is providing me in terms of skills, because I've always been good at time management. And I've always been good at working under stress. And I think organisation is providing me that stress that I need in order to keep up with it. But I wouldn't say I wouldn't focus on this as the skill that I learned from the organisation because of this particular situation. Probably it had made me more extroverted because I'm a very introverted person. But I think because I had no other choice but to talk to a lot of people about like things that I want to know and learn. Probably that made me an extroverted person. Because here, academia or the the way in which our sector works is unclear unless you go and ask or network with people, you're going to be left alone. So I think that's, that's what I'm learning. Even now. Like, even if I go to conferences, I'm not someone who will just let that go and say, hey, you know, just mingle with people, I'll take my time and just, you know, see whom I can speak to, or not speak to, and things like that. It's, it's kind of in that way.

Paul Jones 13:49

In other parts of your job, so we talked about teaching and research, when you mentioned there wasn't time to do research, sometimes. external engagement sometimes is an important element of the job. Are there parts you don't feel you're able to do as well, at the moment whether because we haven't given the skills to do it, or just whether there's no time to do those things that you'd like to do.

DBA5 14:08

I think it's not about the skills, I think it's more about the opportunity that I'm getting, because I'm involved with the [redacted] within the university. And I have offered a lot of workshops, which I would have liked it two years ago, where I was very new, and I didn't know what I was capable of doing. But I think that opportunity was provided me that too by my department after this, okay, [redacted] can do this and she's capable of doing it. I think there was a need for me to prove what all I can do in different ways, and that's where the opportunity came in. But skills wise, I don't know exactly what skills I learned, probably. I was given that opportunity to go and do workshops and gain more context in that way. And that's the only way that I would see it.

Paul Jones 15:00

So within the department then where you work? Do you feel like part of your professional development is done through others in the department where they help you learn? Does that happen much at the moment?

DBA5 15:10

Not really. We do have mentors, and there is support. But I think it's a very, you know, unique way of doing things, your mentor don't come and check with you or anything saying, [redacted] okay, what happened to you? But we do have our DC meetings where they're like, Okay, what's going on? Like, how was your last year and things? But it's not like they are, you know, helping you build that career or anything, or even networking per se? Like, there is no sharing of contacts. There is no sharing of, oh [redacted], you were interested in something like this. I know this person working here. Why don't you talk to them? It's not like that. Because I do that to some of my colleagues who join new I'm like, you know, you don't know this. Maybe I'll do this for you and that for you, but I am not getting that. Probably because we're not meeting each other that much. We don't know about each other anymore. Probably because we are working less number of days now. You come, you teach and you just go. So maybe because of that, but in terms of developmental help, other than the ones that I've said in terms of me going and asking for everything. I haven't had anyone coming and saying, You know what, why don't you go and try this, this looks like a good one. Except the blast emails that we get from the university level.

Paul Jones 16:29

But that misses out on the people element then, isn't it, of you know, feeling like you're potentially valued or don't feel like people care that much about what you're going through?

DBA5 16:38

Yeah, yeah. Because, for instance, if someone feels like, [redacted] you know, what I know about this particular opportunity, why don't you try this, because it seems like a good one for you, that would be really beneficial for us, and also for our own, you know, pride or ego saying, okay, you know what that person feels like, I can do this, maybe I should try something like this. But usually, that's not the case. So you don't know. Like, even the promotional aspect of things that happens here is very regulatory, in terms of, you have to blow your own horn saying, Oh, I did this, I did that and stuff. But people are not noticing us. It has to be me, who says notice me notice me. I've done all these things for the past one and a half years. So you know, it becomes very difficult at some point, like, you tend to forget a lot of things you did. And when you're writing up, you're like, God, I did this much and still, I'm not getting better, I need to see what's going on here. So that's, that's kind of a thing, like people need to notice, like, at least, you know, if there is a promotion, there needs to be a different way of things where people can like, oh, that person did this. This person, nobody's keeping note other than myself. So that kind of like, Oh, okay. What's the point? You know, how much more should I be talking about myself, I did this, that. So nobody is noticing. Other than, you know, we get a student feedbacks. But now the format has changed for that as well. So and you know, how students are sometimes very, you know, you have to bend over backwards for everything for them. If that doesn't happen, they're not going to provide you good feedback, then you end up talking to your boss saying, I did all this. And again, you have to prove yourself. Yeah. Like, there is no, that interpersonal relationship that is built here on trust, it's like, you know what, I trust you will do well, but you need to provide me with all the evidence that I can trust you. So that's, that's lacking.

Paul Jones 18:36

That's interesting. And one of the things I'm interested in as well is, do you think that there are particular skills that you haven't gained that you should have gained within your role that people haven't either provided you with opportunities to get where you feel you're missing out on at the moment?

DBA5 18:53

For now, if I'm talking about skills, I think I wouldn't say that there is anything that's lacking, because even I have, I am a [redacted] for something and whenever any kind of opportunities comes then most of the time, it's the, you know, the big people who, who have had lots of experience, maybe have another newcomer in so that, you know, we are able to learn from them. I think the learning skill is what is missing. Because we're not having that learning opportunity on a regular basis. Like even if you're running a program, have an experienced colleague with you so that you learn how to do these things

because the administrative tasks takes a long time to complete if you don't know how to do it in the right way. And if you're able to learn that because, as part of our promotion or whatever people want to know like if you're being noticed, you have to be an AD or you know something, but you can't just like that jump into an AD because they want to know whether you have experience of something similar, where are we going to get that experience, if you don't provide us maybe on a rolling basis, say, for three months, learn from this person, see what they're doing, how they're doing it. And another three months, you know, learn from this person, it's kind of like a shadowing thing. As much as you know, it's not like every day where you you know, stop, that person has something. But at least when there is a thing going on, at least you learn from them the nitty gritty data and stuff. So that we are able to, you know, promote that particular learning skill, when we come out, or I was with this particular person, and this is what I developed during that particular training or whatever. But yeah, that learning skill is what is still missing,

Paul Jones 20:39

Do you think that's an issue around time, because having the time to do some of that can be a barrier both for yourself and others that may want to take you through those types of learning experiences.

DBA5 20:49

Sometimes it is time, sometimes it's just that this person is like, has been doing that for the past 10 years, they just know what like this, like, rather than talking to you about it, they would have just gotten it done in the next two or three minutes. So that's, that could have been an issue as well. Like, thinking about time, and the amount of energy people have to do something like that even the mentoring program. We all have our mentors, but you need to have that time to go and see it's no more, you know, knock on my door policy meeting, they're all happening every time online. So even if you're knock, you don't know whether that person is another meeting like online. And if it's a direct call, you'll have to go and check like, when can I call you should I schedule something, it's no more an informal thing that is happening, where you can just talk to them, you know what, like, I like to know details about this, like, I just thought I'd tell you something about this, it doesn't happen that way. And time is very much restricted for a lot of us because even at senior levels, because there's just too much workload on a lot of us. And people are trying to, you know, get more recruits and, you know, split it and things like that. But I don't know who, there needs to be more done in terms of workload, because for us, I teach all three terms. I don't have a specific term where I can just focus on my research, if at all, I could do that in my term two or three. But I teach a specific course, which I developed, and I'm just very reluctant to let it go. So either I should get term one free, so that I can focus on term two and term three. But it looks like I'm teaching all the terms. And when I'm having that gap, I do my research, I'm applying for funding and things like that. So the expectation is more. But the way to fill that expectation is like find your own way, like in this particular maze, you have to do all these things, there's all these rewards for you just go and find it your way. So sometimes it gets very frustrating. But I think I've been here for three, four years now. And I'm just used to it now.

Paul Jones 23:03

That's a little bit sad though isn't it? That what would be nice is that, in my head anyway, is to have for you at least a guide to help you develop where you want to get to. You mentioned the email blasts that came out earlier. The impression I get and correct me if I'm wrong is that lots of stuff is top down driven. But from what you've said, from your experience, you haven't had someone trying to guide you specifically around what your needs and wants are in your career, just a case of these things existed, and then you've driven things yourself and actually had conversations about those things.

DBA5 23:38

Yeah, yeah. Because even if we do that people are going to, you know, I'm not a very big fan of this storytelling type of thing, where people are like, oh, this happened exactly like this to me, your time will come, things are changed. What happened with someone is not the same that happens with somebody else as well. So even if we are getting that blast of things, like all of us would like to do everything. But if it's very centered around coming from a single person saying we match this to your, you know, to your

interest or something which which is a too much thing to ask. But still it would be like, you know, someone is noticing us and they are asking us if they want to try because that's what the research office does. Most of the times they know we've been previously successful, and they just send us an email sometimes saying [redacted], this is something very interesting. Do you think you'd be interested in something like this then that gives you a boost like, okay, if they are thinking that we should be doing this maybe I can think about it, you know, which is which is nice. But even the promotion emails that you get, you're like, you're not, you do not have to apply for promotion, but if you want it, you can apply for it. So are you asking me to apply for it or not apply for it? What do you you know, what do you suggest? So even like last year, when I got this email, I just spoke to the HR person and I told her like you know, where I don't want to apply this time, because I'm pretty sure I'm not going to get it. So I'm not going to apply for it. And it's very generic in terms of the applications as well. Like, like I said, you have to keep talking and talking about I did all this, I had this much of research publications, etc. But are you guys giving a time to write? Because I, I'll be having the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues of that stature. Because I know in academia, everybody says, so you have to have your own networks and things. But some of us have not been able to build that network. Because you know, you have lots of other responsibilities. And during your PhD, you didn't have the opportunity, you didn't work with the proper supervisor and stuff. And even when you're at work, like people say, oh, I know this person, that person, but there is no introduction saying this person is working in your area, would you be interested in a collaboration. So there is a gap there when it comes to, you know, building networking support, because I see that for many PhD students as well, like, they are working with us, and we make them contact somebody else. And we provide them with that support, but it's not for staff anymore. And the staff that you want to work with, like those had Professor or senior lecturer level, they already have their team. So there is no inclusion of new members saying we will work on maybe... you can learn from us. So that that's, that's what happened.

Paul Jones 26:20

There was one thing you mentioned there, which is about responsibilities, and are you referring to your responsibilities as a parent, as well as having responsibilities in your job as well,

DBA5 26:44

Yeah, because it has to be taken into account, isn't it? Like, you can't just say, oh, work is the most important thing, I wouldn't say that. If I get into trouble, I'm gonna say like, family is also very important. And kids are much more important. So because we make it a point to work around them to fit all the work commitments. So it has to be the other way around as well, like the work commitments need to be fit around the kids as well, around family as well. So I'm trying to find that balance.

Paul Jones 27:18

And if we link your professional development to you being a parent, do you think those two things have worked well together, because it doesn't sound like they have done?

DBA5 27:29

With regard to the professional development and parental responsibilities, I think I could have done more in terms of spend more time with my kids. Because there has been times where I'm like, you need to get out, [redacted] is working here. And the kids are like, [redacted], you keep working like forever, where are you going to spend time with us because I realised this much more during COVID. Because my kids used to speak our own tongue very well. But because you're in COVID, I just didn't spend a lot of time with them. They were just out. They were just playing. They were watching TV they were doing in their home homeworks. And then the time, even though we were all in that same house, like the time we spent talking to each other was very less. So they ended up forgetting our own tongue. And everybody's like, you never speak any other language at home. Like I don't speak English at home. How did they forget this? Yeah, they were just like, you know, watching English stuff. And it happened over a period of time, it was just not like a month, that happened over a period of time. Because we, we just go, we finish their homework, I go, I do my whole thing. And it's just during lunchtime, or dinner time, I just go provide them their food, and then come and do my work. And there is house chores and stuff.

So, so yeah, like, I think, in that case, the profession has taken over the family life a lot. And because we are in an early career stage where we have a lot to prove to the place that we are working in, you just end up doing these things. Because at a, at a different level, you have that, you know, opportunity to say or at least you have that place where you are at to say you know what, guys, I'm not gonna do that. I don't need that anymore. But for us, it's it's not the case. Like at least for me, it's not the case. I have to say, okay, want this, that's okay, I'll do it. Sure. More okay.

Paul Jones 29:23

That sounds like more like that's driven from inside you, knowing what you think you need to do to improve your career. Not because we've said oh, well, if you do these things, then that will make you better at your job and you've got more career opportunities, there's more down to you, is the impression I get.

DBA5 29:40

I think it is down to me because I have seen other colleagues who take a laid back approach and everything. But for me, it's not about you know, getting a promotion being a senior lecturer in four years, five years time that that's not the case. But to keep myself interested in what I'm doing, because I I think I'm someone who would become very, you know, get bored very easily if I don't engage myself in a lot of things. But I think that engagement is something that is required from the university point of view as well, because I know a few colleagues who take a laid back approach and any opportunity that comes, it's not, they're not showcased in any way. But it's showcased to me to, to some extent. So that's why I kind of feel like, am I doing this to myself? Or am I need to be doing all this? Sometimes I'm at that stage where I'm like, should I do this because I like it, or should I do this because I don't have a choice? And I have to do it for my career. That is that difference and I still haven't found the answer for that. Because sometimes I feel like for the career, you should be doing these things. But some people say, you know what? Things will happen at their own pace, just take some time and things but I'm like, what is this time? Like, if I leave now when am I going to get this time back? Because everybody else is going to move forward. And I don't want to be stuck in the same place. Not not in the sense of Aston. But same position. Same, you know, the way that I was three years ago, which I'm really not right now, which, which is what I see as my development. For me, it's not about like salary or, you know, other rise. It's nothing like that. For me, it's my own development. What I know three years ago, do I know it better now? Can I know more things now? Yes, definitely. So that's where I see my development. And that's why I do a lot of things. It's, it's not about, you know, you guys should see me doing all these things. Don't care about that. It's more about am I content in doing this? Yes, I'm a bit burnt out. But it's my own fault.

Paul Jones 31:49

Yeah. That makes sense. In terms of skills then I am quite interested, as you mentioned earlier about time management skills, and you brought that to the job. Was there other skills you've learned outside of your role here, that you've brought in that you think had been really important to your success?

DBA5 32:07

I wouldn't say I'm successful yet. But I think, like I said, I think planning, good planning skills and organisational skills are very important. Like at least I have those in terms of not just saying, oh, you know what, I will do this in this time. And that in that time, but because you have lots of things going on, you want to make sure you you know, you get it done in the right time. It's not about doing it, okay, I'll do this in three months time, four months time, no, you want to get it done in a specific time, and you want to make sure you're able to be a good team member as well. And that is something that I do often. So I think that's what I would say, like more planning as to how things need to be done. And if I do this now, what should I be doing in the next three months and things like that I, uh, future planning as well. And that has helped really well, to an extent.

Paul Jones 33:04

And in terms of your experiences outside of higher education, then, have you had many other jobs or different experiences that have given you skills or just mainly through education?

DBA5 33:13

I've always been learning throughout my life, I finished my [redacted], even before I finished it, I had my seat for my [redacted]. And by the time I finished my [redacted], I had an opportunity to do my PhD. So I came for my PhD immediately after PhD, I got a job here. So I've always been like ... learning and working. So I don't think I've worked anywhere else, per se. But that would be it.

Paul Jones 33:45

When you came armed with the skills to be good at doing things in your job rather than us giving you the skills as a university and saying these are important.

DBA5 33:52

Yes, yes. Because when I came in, I had a bit of settling in period. But after that, it was like, go get on with it. So you have to figure out how to, you know, deal with students like, because I think in that way, the ... I think the skill to be ... I don't know what you call that skill. Actually, I'm a leadership person. I don't know what skill that is. It's not strategic as well. But it's kind of like a ... you change your color, chameleon skill maybe. So it's like to speak to these kinds of students, you need to change yourself. You can't go as you are, because I come from a very different environment when it comes to engaging with students. For us it was more a power based teaching. So it was like if the lecturer says it, you have to do it. Even if you have questions you don't ask them directly. But here it was completely different, though I had teaching experience when I was in my PhD times that was very different because you yourself are a student. It's a different thing. And you tutor, that's it. Sorry, here you're talking about like 200 students asking you like, what is how do I do this? How do I do that? So the first term that I was here, it was very difficult because I thought I was being very friendly. But apparently I came out very passive aggressive to the students. I didn't know I had that streak in me. But apparently they thought that and when, when my colleague because the colleague took the first term, and I took the second term, and she was like, [redacted], when your reading your feedback, don't, uh... make sure that you don't take it to your heart. And I was like, what's going on here? And then I was like, how is this even possible? I didn't do any of these things. But I think that's, that's what I, I'm more mellow now. The last two, three years like after that first slap, I was like, God, I shouldn't be behaving in this way. And that was something that I learned from here ... uh to, like, bend over backwards for the students, students and I think I had a chat with one of the higher ups, so many years ago, where they said, students, our customers [redacted] you need to mark it there. I was like, all right, okay, they are the customers, then we'll have to do that. So I think that's the I don't know what skill it is still, Paul. But that's what I learned. You know, and sometimes you do get like, how many times can I say this? But I think now I'm more used to it. I'm like, of course, I'm gonna repeat it again, why not? So I think I've become so mellow and more patience, just with the students, not with my family, just for my students.

Paul Jones 33:53

yeah? I think those types of skills are when you learn on the job. And it's almost like being able to read the room, the situation and having a range of different experiences to call upon to think, which one is best right now? And I don't know whether that would be a skill you could teach or there's just something you grow over time?

DBA5 36:51

No, I think it's something that you grow over. And I think the [redacted] in me came into it as well. I was like, okay, of course, why not? Let's do this. And you know, when when you're trying to talk to people, you're like, okay, let's, let's take a breather. Let's see how things are. Because when I was a student, I do remember, I was like, duh duh duh duh duh this happened, that happened, how can this happen? And I could just be like blasting. But now I'm more like, okay, what can I do for you? You know, there

are these things that you learn after a while. So, like you said, it's learning on the job, during the job. And I think I'm still learning that.

Paul Jones 37:27

You mentioned earlier as well, that you didn't pick up the sense of being supported as much as you could have done, do you think there's ways that the management of staff could be done better, then, particularly thinking about your own experiences, are there things that could be done to manage you more effectively to make you feel more valued, to get the best out of you?

DBA5 37:48

They could do it. But it's not something, you know, where ... there are two ways in which it could work. Sometimes you might feel like, you know, leave it, leave it to me, I'll get this done. And I'll come and tell you how it worked. Because other times, if somebody keeps checking on me, it might feel like I'm being micromanaged, like [redacted] what's going on, [redacted] what's going on. So that is, it's kind of like a two end dagger, so they can't be too much into your space, rather than and also, on the other hand, they can't be like, oh, you know what, she figured it out because she's done this for ages now. So I think there needs to be a balance, maybe have the MDC meeting ... more regularly, not monthly, but at least three months, once like, each term, so that people know, okay, what's going on, rather than like, towards the end of summer, where it's like, okay, we need to fill this, what did you do last year, we'll just put something on here. I don't think it's the efficient way of doing things. Because I wouldn't say anything about the people that I work with, because when I need something, I can just call them up via teams. When they available. I ask like, okay, what do I do? I do that to lots of them. So I think that's something that's working well for me. So from the management point of view, if it's an MDC, maybe had an MDC with a member who, who's responsible for our, you know, our next stage of the career, so that they can, you know, support our application or something like that, rather than us giving like 4000 words of essays, where the team is sitting around in a roundtable and talking about, oh, this person has done all these things and stuff. So yeah.

Paul Jones 39:34

Thinking about the climate and culture then generally around the university, with culture being the more longer term views of what's happening, and those things embedded in the operations and climate is more like a real world check of the here and now. What would your description be like particularly in terms of professional development and how supportive or good the is generally, what would be your thoughts on that?

DBA5 40:02

In terms of career development I think the culture is a good one. And the climate as well, because like I said, I have had support. But the thing is, you need to find that support. That's the thing. You can't just like that, think people are going to be supportive of it, you need to make sure because it's at the university level as well. Have it in writing, saying, there is an email chain that goes through and things. But I think ... climate wise speaking their mind, environment is very friendly as well. Because if you say something like this majority of them are like, oh, this is a good thing you're doing. Learn, read more. There might be a few of them, like, why would you do that to yourself, but it happens in anything, any, any place. But I think the climate, I like Aston because of that. Because I'm able to, you know, find these things, which I'm not sure if it happens in other organisations or anything like that. But at least here you have that opportunity to explore, like, yes, you might be shut down, saying, oh, this is not going to work, but at least you know, you can find people whom you can speak to. So with development, climate or culture, it seems to be okay for now.

Paul Jones 41:21

And I did get the impression, what you've said that, if I was to describe back what you said to me, the opportunity exists to get support. But you've got to be proactive to go out and find them not be passive and just wait for them to get back to you.

DBA5 41:36

Yeah

Paul Jones 41:36

You have to have the right mindset to go and chase those opportunities.

DBA5 41:39

Yes, yes. It's all in your hands. It's, like I said, there is no, okay, there is no transaction here that's happening. Like they do this for you, you do this for us, it's more about, okay, you want something go and find it. And only when you find it you can tell others saying that, oh, this is available, maybe you guys want to try it. So you have to find all those because many things like that have happened. With me doing my course. And with me finding out other opportunities. I find it and I tell my other colleagues as well. Oh, you know what, you can do this, you can do that, because a lot of things we don't know exist even higher ups don't know, because they have not dealt with people like me, who is like a lecturer but want to learn usually, people do PhDs, but why are you doing a Master's course who do something like this? I crazy kind of a person. So, so these things, it has to be you who go and find these opportunities. Even if it is a workshop opportunity, you have to find the right person to say, I'm interested in this particular topic, do you think there is a workshop that I can provide for your business colleagues or anyone, then you ask people, they don't come to you, even if they have like an Aston research profile I don't think we... we very rarely use it. And it doesn't reflect on many things that we actually end up doing. Because many things just happen in passing, you don't have like a topic under which you can include those things. Because for some of our research, I was looking for people whom I can work with, but I couldn't find anything on Aston research profile, all I was able to find is ...not the contact, but the people's work on articles and essays. And I'm like, This is not what I want. Give me something. But But yeah.

Paul Jones 43:28

And the other thing I'm interested in hearing about is, obviously we talked a bit about your role being teaching and research, are there external factors, things like REF, TEF, other things going on at the more grander level that influence your work or your professional development? Or is it mainly the stuff you deal with on a day to day basis, which is the focus?

DBA5 43:53

I think they do have a very big influence because even if you're teaching, you want to make sure it's not that you, you get an award for TEF or anything, but at least you're able to, you know, make sure that particular module gets kind of like a particular review. So that when it's for TEF, they make sure all the final undergraduates, we got NSS score and things because something goes down, then the score goes down and analysis becomes an issue, then they talk to us about it. But I don't know what I'm doing in terms of like, what did I do in this module? Like, I'm just teaching and I do it the same way. Like if the students didn't like it, what I can do, things like that. So we always keep that in mind in terms of what are the other teaching methods we can use, what are the softwares we could use, but it's very limited in terms of like what technology is available to us in terms of teaching so you always have to be on the lookout saying, oh, this seems interesting, can the university do this for us and things? And when it comes to REF as well, any any research publication that you have you have to be very, very considerate. Saying, oh, okay for my next REF, can I use this paper as mine? In terms of like, because each of us need to have one or two papers submitted every REF cycle. So it's like, oh, can I do this, or if it's a two star, it's not going to go to REF, it has to be a three or a four. The publication game has changed a lot. And it's like I said, it's a game. It's no more about quality research. And whether we get it out, it's more about whom do we have on the paper? And where is this paper? Who are the collaborators and things like that, which makes it very difficult. So I make it a point to not worry too much about the two or three, I'm like, this is good piece of work It's getting out. That's it. But when considering REF I need to have at least one good paper, for me to be considered in that REF. If not, then I'm gonna get a lot of heat from people out saying [redacted], what have you been doing, where is your three, where is your four? And things like that.

Paul Jones 46:03

Sounds like there's a tension between how we perceive the quality of a publication as a university or as a country or through a system, versus how you perceive developing good research, which is rigorous, and does what you originally intended it to do. And that seems to be quite hard to reconcile.

DBA5 46:26

It is very hard, because you're not going to go and tell your university I don't believe in REF, I don't want to be considered in REF they're gonna come back saying then you're going to be stuck in as a lecturer for the next 10-15 years. Good luck. Yeah. So for me, it's ... because I've been trying to get one paper published for the past three years for maybe now. But it's not because of me, I've done the whole paper, I just need good people on it. And it's not about the paper as well, because I've got really good reviews from it, but just the nudge of the people to get it published. So for me, it's like, do I really need to do all this? Like, why am I even putting myself through this? Because somebody decided from 2014, that REF is the best way to do things in terms of this is three, this is four. But if you are running behind three and four, then you will have to wait to sit on a paper for three, four years. That, is that even worth doing it? And also, if you're sitting on it for three, four years, it becomes too tiring. Like, yes, you will have like three, four different papers going on 12 years, spanning 12 years and things like that. But it doesn't happen like that. And many ways, like we have seen paper in four stars, which is worthless. We are like wondering, like, how did this even get published and stuff? So what's the game here? Like, what can universities do to change the process of publishing itself? Like, yes, I do understand three and a four. But do you see all three and fours getting lots and lots of citations? We do see articles and tools, or, you know, be your whatever, get too many citations. So why are you guys not getting cited? What's going on there? Like if everybody's aiming for an AMJ, then you need to be working with American scholars all the time. How are you going to get them on board? It's not just your idea. They need things from you. And I'm not ready to spend a lot of money on data collection, because I don't have any money. Where am I going to get all this money for it? So there is lots of red tapes, which, which I don't think is because people feel like I was talking to one colleague the, the, some years ago, and he ended up saying, if REF is not there [redacted], then minorities will not be able to get jobs. And I'm like, what has REF got to do with minorities not getting job? Like, what is that? You know, nothing, because we do see people who are unable to talk the language, but they still have publication. Like, how did that even happen? You know, not saying you don't know to write English, but I'm just saying, what am I missing here? Like, are you doing something else? Like you got a paper published. But how is this? Like, did someone else write for you? You know, there are lots of things that you think about and it becomes very frustrating at times, when all we the, all that we focus on is REF. And like, how many conferences you went to, do you think I have time? Or am I able to go to a conference when I have kids here? Because our situation is different. It's easy for people to say, why can't your husband come and take, take care of your kids? And I'm like, you don't know my situation. Don't give me some, you know, advice, just for the sake of doing it. Because that's what one of my colleagues like, I had to go to a conference in [redacted], and I decided to take my kids which the College was very supportive of, and they were fine with it. And I had to just, you know, reimburse the money. And this colleague when I was talking, the colleague was like, oh, you know, what [redacted] your husband has equal responsibility, he needs to come and take care of the kids, like, why are you even thinking about this conference, you need to go to that conference. And I was like, that's why I don't want to work with colleagues and things like this, because your single, you have no idea how it is to leave kids behind and travel. And even if it's their dad, he doesn't spend a lot of time with them. Because he's always in [redacted], and how is he going to come and take care of them? Because the [redacted] husbands are different. Because the UK people are very different. They are used to everything, but my husband is spoiled. So how is he going to come and do that? And I'm not going to be at peace five days away from them, not knowing what will happen to them. Yeah. So like I said, easy for people to say a lot of things. But only when you go through this, then we like, you know.

Paul Jones 51:05

So you mentioned earlier as well about, it was all a game on a couple of times, and it is interesting, that perception of it being a game, do you think then that as a development area if you're going to develop people professionally, that trying to give them some training on things like the practical elements of what you can do to get a paper published. So not just about quality research, what things you have to be aware about, the people you know, the relationships, you can develop, what makes that process easier, and trying to give practical advice and tips about the things that happen, whether it's research or teaching or other aspects of it, just to pass on that knowledge, which can make a massive difference.

DBA5 51:48

It could, and there are, you know, the ECRs have a lot of training done in that way, like how to get your pitching your research to editors. And you know, what is the publication happens, because we see a lot of people come and tell us, Oh, well, I was having this paper for the past 10 years, and it just got published. We do hear stories like that the stories are good to know what other people experienced. But the thing is, has anything changed in that 10 years in terms of has your experience and my experience changed anything for anyone, it has not made anything easy, it's still the same, just by knowing your experience is something changing in, in the sector itself, that's what is important, more than providing people with the knowledge of you know what, guys, you're going to go through this for the next five years, don't worry, you will get there. Everybody knows sometime or the other, you're gonna get it published. But rather than stories like that, you want something to change in the sector itself, where you don't have to run behind professors who doesn't write or even put a comma on your paper, but just to have their names in it. So that it gets published, some people would say, that's not the case. Like if you have a good research, it's gonna get published, but it rarely happens. It's all about the people on the paper, which is making it difficult.

Paul Jones 53:16

I understand what you say, and in terms of how we want to try and change the sector, make it better for people, that's really difficult to achieve, though. umm, but it's a lofty ambition, which I commend you on. But in terms of things we could change here, are the things that immediately spring to mind, where you think, oh, I wish Aston did this, this and this, that could really make a difference to people.

DBA5 53:42

Difference in terms of, uh?

Paul Jones 53:46

Better opportunities, better professional development opportunities, or just better environment for people to be able to excel and reach their potential.

DBA5 53:56

I think ... it's not just a one thing that they can do, umm, more support in terms of, you know, support, in the sense, not micromanagement, but more support in terms of what is the need for that particular colleague, like, understanding their circumstances as well. You don't have to, you know, just because your colleague is single and other one has a parent or responsibility. You don't have to, you know, give us different workloads. We're not asking for reduce, reduction in workload, but you know, simply speaking, timetable, like, look at our timetables, look at what we are able to do, like if you have me in a nine o'clock class, I'm not going to be there because I need to be there dropping off my children. And if I'm going to allow and also, you know, after four o'clock if you have a class, how am I going to do that? Because you're not paying me overtime. I have to put my kids in a club, which is 20 pounds a week, like a day. Yeah, so I'm spending a lot of my money. So make little changes. We're not asking for too much changes, like, reduction in like 50% of workload, we're not asking for that, because we're doing the admin stuff we're doing, like dissertation marking, dissertation meeting. And, and also, you know, from the students point of view as well, most of what is offered to them in terms of if it's a dissertation, they they just talk to us at, towards the end. They're like, Oh, [redacted], I need to submit my proposal, let's just do it. No set hard dead lines, so that we don't come across as bad people saying, oh, that lecturer did

this, why are you not doing it? You know, there is no streamlined process of doing a lot of things. Like even because I learned in [redacted]. My [redacted]course, like during the dissertation period, they they strict, they, they just set up a very strict deadline, saying during the summer months, we won't be responding to anything.

Paul Jones 55:56

Right.

DBA5 55:57

And you can't blame anyone because they already told you that. But here during summer, I was on annual leave, but still working. Because I had to talk to my dissertation students about their dissertations, which was during the first week of September.

Paul Jones 56:13

Yeah.

DBA5 56:14

So we know everybody breaks in summer. Right? Then why would you have a submission in the first week of September, you know, like, I know, it's this university policy or something like that. But if you're trying to create that work life balance, do something about it, set hard deadlines, which everybody is aware of, even if the students don't agree, who cares? Like if this is what Aston is standing for nobody is going to say no, the same with the December as well, like everybody wants to take Christmas break. But there is always questions about who's going to cover for whom. But why are we covering everybody, even single people need their work life balance, because it ended up during summer, many colleagues were off. So it ended up falling on one of the colleagues who ended up talking to a lot of students, which was not the right thing. So these minor changes would help us in a lot of way. Because we do tell students after six o'clock, even if you email, we are not going to respond to you. We're not asking for people to you know, stop sending us an email but, but ... be a bit more, you know, what can I say? Thoughtful towards people, like even if a colleague is sending you like 10 o'clock. So really? Why would you send it, for them it's like, I'll send it at 10 and you see it when you can?

Paul Jones 57:37

Yeah.

DBA5 57:38

But I'm like, why are you even sending it in the first place, like there is a schedule option, just schedule it, just two more steps, click on it, and you should be fine. But that's something, these minor changes would help in a lot of way. And when it comes to career development as well. Not asking for more events, per se, or sharing of experience, per se. And not to change the sector or anything, but not to, you know, pressurise people to a large extent on threes and fours, and not focus the promotion on threes, and fours. That's the worst bit of it. Because I'm, I'm very less confident to even apply for this time. Because I'm like, I'm not going to get a three or four or before that I already have a two, a good two. But they're like, it won't stand because they want to see a string of three or four behind you to get into the next level. So I'm like, what about other things that I'm doing, like, does it not count at all? So, if this keeps going on, then you will be like, you know what like, I'm not gonna get it anyway, might as well you know, not do other things to some extent, just focus on, you know, go teach, do your research as you see fit and just go on. So...

Paul Jones 58:56

Is that a tension for you then between, from what you've just said there, knowing that the way you can get promoted, versus being a friendly, helpful, a collegial member of staff, those two things don't seem to line up very well then, where you don't get recognised for the good things you're doing on the collegial side.

DBA5 59:17

Yeah.

Paul Jones 59:17

Unless you've done those the main parts of your role.

DBA5 59:20

Because for me, I like to, you know, have good environmental working ethics, I would say, because it's not just about me going into the class and coming back. But if I see a colleague, I would stand and say, hey, how are you doing? What happened to this, that, and I make it a point to, you know, share a lot of things that I know, and I listen to people and even this is not based on a promotion, but you know, I like having that citizenship behavior because I know what is missing. And that's why I want to be part of, you know, some of the well being activities and etc. So because I know that wellbeing thing is needed, that social, like you said, collegiality is needed. And I would do it. But if nothing has going to work, then why am I burning my, myself, for doing all these things not because to get recognised, but because I want to feel that way, I want to feel content, I want to be happy in what I do. And I get happiness in doing all these things. Like when I'm learning new things, I'm excited. And I really like it. And I'm adding an accreditation to myself, which is really nice for me. But if you're going to just focus on a piece of publication and say, oh [redacted], you know what, you don't have a three or a four, and what about my research funding, what about the research that I'm doing? What about the other things that I'm doing? So that begs the question, it's not that I'm saying they're only focused on publication, but if you're going for a seniority level, then definitely they want to be looking for it. And when you don't have it, it's not like you're making a career path for me saying, [redacted], you know, what, are you struggling with publication? Maybe I should, you know, link you to this person, that person because they do know that, that I have had a chat with a lot of people saying, you know what, this paper is stuck for a lot, a lot of time, can we do something about this paper? And they're like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know this person, that person, but you know, you, you're just acknowledging, acknowledging is not important. Because you're not a psychologist saying, oh, yes, I understand what you're going through, you will get better, but do something about it. Like if we are having like, even if we are able to create a network of, you know, people whom PhD students or even us whom we can contact, it would be really nice, because I think not everybody is able to go and fly to a corner of the world, just to chat with people in their own things, because everybody says, you need to get to AOM, AOM is the place to be, I'm like, who's gonna take care of my kids? And why am I using my August month where I can be with my family, which is the only month I see them in the entire year to fly to Seattle or Washington or something? Why am I even going there? So ... that's, I think, you're at a crossroads at that point. Acknowledging is not enough. And all we get most of the time is acknowledgment. But I think I'm at a stage where I'm like sick of it, I'm like, I'll do it my way. I don't want to do it anybody else's way. I'll do it my way. If I get published, I get published. If I don't, I'm happy with what I'm doing. And that's what I ended up doing. Because it caused a lot of tension at a certain point where I was like, oh, my God, I'm stuck in this place. Like nothing is happening. What can I do? What can I do? But I couldn't find any answer. Because it wasn't my fault, I have reached out to people, there are good people on the paper. But like I said, people who don't write, so what can happen, nothing can happen. So that's the thing that you have to deal with. So I was like, Yeah, I'll just do it my way, fine. If it doesn't get out it doesn't get out. Who cares? So I've just like fine, found that inner peace, and I'm just doing things that makes me happy.

Paul Jones 1:02:59

I think that's important that you find that, do you think, so one of the questions that springs to mind is, I'll be talking to various staff members about their professional development, do you think your subject area, or discipline, helps you to be more self aware and better at guiding yourself for your development?

DBA5 1:03:20

I think so. Definitely. Because when you're like, I said, when when I learned about more things about [redacted], I understood a lot of things about myself saying, oh, no wonder you're like this. Because,

you know, it's because of that. And when you're new, you know, even when you're learning about leadership and self leadership, I think I understood a lot more. And then management is a huge term. I can't just say, oh, because I'm a management, a PhD in management. That's why I know a lot of things. No, that's not true. But there were other behavioral aspects that came into effect as well. And because you understand a lot of these nitty gritty details, you end up saying, oh, this is why things are happening. You don't have that realisation, you know, and you don't end up like, even if I feel like I'm burned out already. I know what I should be doing. I'm not doing it. I do know what I should be doing. I take it slow, don't don't do a lot of things at the same time. Because nobody asked me to do all these things. That's the whole point of it. I ended up doing it thinking like if I need to get where I should be in the next few years. These are the things that I should be doing. Maybe I'm doing it all wrong. I don't know. But I just felt like, okay, I need to do all of things. Even the other day, I was like, going through my application for the SFHEA. But nobody forced me to do it. And I just thought to myself, why do you want to do SFHEA, you have like four assignments to submit two exams to learn for and you have lots of things to mark. And you have lots of things to learn and you're writing a funding application. Why would you do that in between? And then I thought to myself, okay, we can we can do it next year, then. So I think that's what I'm doing now, because it makes me realise what needs to be done. So definitely the discipline helps.

Paul Jones 1:05:09

So then following on from that, because the discipline helps you, are there things you think we should be teaching others that come from the discipline about that self management and self awareness that could help other people be more effective?

DBA5 1:05:24

To some extent, yes. Because there might be people like me, who knows what needs to be done, but end up doing just for the sake of it. But I think that self awareness is very important for people to know exactly, you know, nobody's going to know 100%, what's happening with them, but at least that realisation, and you know, that, that way in which we're like, okay, I think I'm like down, completely down. This is not happening. Because I remember a couple of weeks ago, it was my birthday. And I just felt too low. I never had a birthday where I felt too low. And I spoke to my husband and was like, you know what, I think I am depressed. You know, I feel like I'm crying to him. And he's like, what are you talking about? You were fine. And I was like, I know, right? But I feel this way. I had the self realisation, and then I was like, what's going on? This, this never happens. So what can I do more on it? And then I spoke to my mom, and everyone and it was fine. Money thing, that's what many, many people are lacking. And also, they think that you go and talk to someone, not only about counseling or anything, any, your manager, then they're going to feel like, okay, there is a problem here. You know, because that's, there is a tagline that we say, if anybody comes, have you spoken to the counseling hub, do you think that person needs counseling, like, they just want to get that thing out of them? They don't need a counseling. But I think that even to talk to someone about it, you need to set up a meeting. Yeah, that's, that's a problem now, because people don't know who to go and talk to, like, we just say easily go reach out to your manager. But the manager is too, too busy all the time, because they are like head of departments, they have lots of administrative things going on. So I think that prospect of ... you know, we have lots of channels as well. Like in yammer, the University has a lot of channels, but I think it's all too much noise to some extent, because when you're doing your admin task, like, these things pop up, and it's just too much to handle. Anyway, you know, sometimes when we just have like, okay, this is the self awareness thing, like read it in your own time, or you know, a very, a poster kind of a thing where it just provides people just a single information that they need, or even training to the managers, to some extent, because ... you go to people at Professorial level and tell them, oh, there's a training for self awareness, you need to take, nobody's going to sign up for it, because they are like, I've done this for the past this many years. I know that. But are they able to recognise it in somebody else? And are they open for somebody else to come and talk to? I think that's, that needs to be there, where we are free to go and talk to people about it without thinking about the consequences of that, that would be very helpful.

Paul Jones 1:08:20

That builds on something you said earlier, and it seems like it doubles down a little bit where people aren't coming to you to check how you are, you have to be confident and proactive to go and talk to people. But likewise, people haven't got the time to listen. And that seems like it's one problem on top of another where they aren't checking on you. And you don't feel like you can go and talk to people about it, because they haven't got the time. So there's no options then to be able to express what you're going through. And like you said not to be having counseling about it, but even just to get things off your chest and just ask questions and get people's insights into what's going on. That seems more difficult.

DBA5 1:09:01

Yeah. Because see, even for two days, we have our office hours for students, like maybe the people who we can talk to not as a manager, with someone where with whom we can speak about some of the issues that we are having, not personal issues, but at least professional issues that we are having have office hours, so that we can you know, just book your time off and come and have a chat with you. You know, 15 minutes, like 10 minutes or five minutes, just say have us a slot. Not each week. Like if it's each week, it's up to you but at least once or twice, so that you know exactly what is happening with others. Because if I go and talk to my head, probably he knows but I'm just saying like at times you're not going to know what's happening with their colleagues. Because ... because of the hybrid working situation everything is like split. You don't know what the other person is doing or can do or what they are having trouble with professionally speaking, you don't do that. And in the department meetings, you're not going to be able to say all these things in front of like 20 of your colleagues was like, come on, they are in teaching and research contract, I'm in teaching contract. So how is this relevant to me and things? So so yeah.

Paul Jones 1:10:18

So we've covered quite a lot already. But some questions still in my head about two things, primarily, one's about experiences outside of HE. And whether it benefits people to have had experience outside of HE or whether people have always been in HE are more beneficial. The other one then is about thinking here about experience levels and how things change over time, then. So whether if you think about your own career, whether over time, your needs will change, based on career level, or whether there's a list of things in your head you have to do. And you might work your way through that list in terms of your development needs. Or there might be some other situation. So firstly, do you think that experience outside of HE is a good thing or a bad thing? What are your general thoughts about people who come to the roles with other experiences?

DBA5 1:11:10

I think it depends on the role that you had outside of HE. Because if you had a management role, or a consultant role, while you were actively looking at projects, and you understand a bit of you know, a bit of academia works, then you will be fine. Coming in with that knowledge, because you're able to, you know, because the sector has changed a lot, and it is a changing one, because you want to make sure you attract students all the time, you're able to retain good researchers or teachers, and you're having collaborations with business partners, etc. So you have to excel at least in one of those things, even if you don't have a teaching knowledge, as far as you're able to bring in your practical knowledge into the academic field, then that's well and good. But if you're having a different kind of a job, which has nothing to do with it, and you're going to have a bit of a difficult time adjusting and adapting to things that are happening here. So it depends on the role that you've had outside because I, we do see lots of academics going out. And lots of you know, consultants or people who have had, like entrepreneurial experience come in as academics, but it's about the nature of your role, and what you bring into the role.

Paul Jones 1:11:41

Yeah. The second question was about how your needs as an individual and professional development or your development areas, how that would change over time with your career, do you think there would be changes or what are your thoughts on about the way it might develop?

DBA5 1:12:39

I'm pretty sure knowing me, I have different needs coming in at different times. Because now my target is to become a [redacted], which is another two, three years worth of things that I need to do. But I think after that, I'll stop learning for good, I hope, and I'm praying to myself that nothing else comes forward at that point, because I'll be like, you've had enough. You'll be [redacted]. So stop learning, I think I'll tell myself that. But I think there would be other needs in terms of what I can achieve via research, because I do have different research interest, I have different projects going on, I think I like to see it come into fruition in terms of, you know, some kind of policy impact, or I'd be focusing more on the impact my, my research would have, because you're not just gaining knowledge of all these things, just to have something behind your name, because you're not going to have lots of things behind your name anyway. But it's about, by learning all this, what was the essential thing that I was going to break, it was about understanding [redacted], and what kind of impact I could make in that field. I don't want to be known in that field. I'm not saying I want to be famous in that field. But that any type of research that I'm doing needs to have some kind of impact where people can you know, oh okay, this makes sense, this is why this needs to happen. So even if there is a small, you know, a small policy and that even a particular word changes, I'd feel very happy. And that's where the needs will be. For me, in terms of you know, I learned all this and I'm ready to do this. So I think for me, it'd be more about research impact, that will be my deed. And if I'm able to, you know, use innovative technologies in, in teaching

Paul Jones 1:14:30

Yeah.

DBA5 1:14:31

I think now, we are very restricted to using vivox or things like that, I would like for some kind of simulations, where students can go and enjoy and I, I would focus towards that, because this is the field that I am in right now. So my needs would be to adapt to the different things or at least develop few new things which will make myself, which will make, what can I say ... me interested in the field more. So that I don't get bored that I'm teaching the same thing over and over again. So something like that. Yes. I'm definitely seeing the need that way.

Paul Jones 1:15:13

I think it's an interesting thought about, every individual might have a different pathway. I'd be interested if we ask colleagues what they thought your needs were, how accurately they would be able to answer that because I don't think...

DBA5 1:15:26

I don't think there's a single correct answer, because things would change, like, nobody expected COVID would happen, because I never thought about having all the materials online teaching a particular subject online. So the needs keep changing, because it depends on the situation that we are in maybe five years down the line, I'll just feel like, you know, I don't need anything, I'm just going to, you know, have a calm life. I'm just going to teach what I can, I'm going to research what I can, maybe that that would be my need at that time need for patience and solace at that time, maybe that, so I don't think we would be able to say this is exactly what I need. Because given the current circumstances, yes, I could say I need support. I need, you know, this and that... but I think if you ask me into the future, the needs will definitely change, depending on a lot of other variables as well.

Paul Jones 1:16:21

Before we finish, last question for you, you mentioned about COVID, and how you had to adapt to doing things differently. Do you think we provided you with enough support and the skills to develop those things to be able to adapt? Or do you just have to try and plot your way through it on your own pretty much or somewhere in between?

DBA5 1:16:39

I think more than supported was most like, the information that we caught during COVID was like, do this do that it was more like a command and demand, rather than oh, we are here to support you in every way. Because anything that you ask for this needs to be changed, that needs to be changed, nothing changed. Everything remained the same, because the most, the prioritised feature of COVID teaching was students to make sure the numbers are there, to make sure they are satisfied so that they come back for the January term and things. So I think support wise, it was very less. It was more along the lines of like you said before, the top management said this needs to be done and everybody decided what needs to be done and things like that. So in terms of that developmental wise, there wasn't much support at that time. So yeah.

Paul Jones 1:17:33

Yeah. Interesting. I think that's it in terms of questions. Thank you very much for your time today. Just gonna put a stop to the recording.

Appendix 9: DBA6 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA18

Paul Jones 00:00

I have started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled, individual perspectives on engaged scholarship reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate, from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour, but we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end, the interview is semi structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. Though the idea is that I do that with the least number of questions or interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me the details that are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as individual, for example, personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk. If you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate this by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress. Or if I am feeling distressed myself. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start, then we'll start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. For the interview record, this is interview DBA six. Can you please confirm you understand the information I've given you?

DBA6 01:58

I confirm I understand the information.

Paul Jones 02:02

Are you happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA6 02:05

Yes, I am.

Paul Jones 02:06

Thank you. And do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA6 02:10

Yes, I do.

Paul Jones 02:12

Great. Can you confirm what school you're in please?

DBA6 02:15

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:18

Thanks. And can you confirm your gender please?

DBA6 02:21
[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:22
Good. And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA6 02:27
Yes I am.

Paul Jones 02:28
Great. And there's two more questions. Firstly, how would you describe your career level? Early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA6 02:36
Mid career.

Paul Jones 02:38
And last question, could you confirm which age bracket you're in? 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54? Do any of those work for you?

DBA6 02:50
[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:51
[redacted]

DBA6 02:53
Yes.

Paul Jones 02:54
Great. That's it for the closed ended questions. So can you tell me a bit about your understanding of professional development? And how you've experienced that while at Aston.

DBA6 03:04
Well, okay. So professional development taking that we are academics is slightly different. Not necessarily, about how it's doing it, just what skills we learn. And it can include a various set of skills development, mentoring, and ... umm ... support towards promotions. So it's mentoring, skills development and availability of promotional opportunities. At Aston it works, I think, more or less, okay, I only have, I don't have comparison to other institutions in the UK, I have comparison, only two institutions abroad. So for example, in comparison to [redacted], its, its much more supportive. There are available opportunities, and there is a lot of focus on especially skills development. In comparison to [redacted] where I was before, umm, it's almost equal level but only because I was on a very similar institution organised in English rather than [redacted] way, or American English way. Yeah, I would say it's, it's this kind of direction. So I, I, in comparison to other institutions I worked on, especially in comparison to [redacted], it's much better. It's equal to what I experienced in [redacted], but I don't know how it's done at other other UK institutions so I can't comment on that one.

Paul Jones 04:50
That's fine. So you mentioned a couple of things that are interesting to explore. So you mentioned skills development quite a lot.

DBA6 04:56
Yes.

Paul Jones 04:57

Are there particular skills then that you, that you identify as being ones where we encourage you to develop in and other ones that you think are missing at the moment?

DBA6 05:10

Yeah, so there is, especially huge emphasis on early career researchers skills development, which is very good, because that's, that's the kind of best time to address them. But I've noticed for the last few years, they will last few years, maybe like a year, year and a half, there's a bit more improvement for mid range. Mid range career, mostly because it, in the past, it seemed, it seemed to be like a gap there. So like, lots of support, or relatively big support for ECRs, certain level for like, the final top levels, but really missing gap in the middle. So a lot of people felt bit left alone, but that's kind of changing. There is a lot of kind of practical skills development, like, you know, presentations using videos, and especially with, with COVID kicking in two years ago, there was a large attention on development of digital skills. But there's next to that, there's also academic skills, which are broad, more much more specific. So like grant applications, training, impact case studies, or in general impact development activities. Yeah. What was the original question? Sorry...,

Paul Jones 06:41

There was two parts to it, there was one about what you thought was being given to you, and another one about what was missing at the moment.

DBA6 06:51

Okay. I think, no, but only because I'm very particular, in the level that like, if there is an opportunity I'll go after it. And a lot of opportunities available require either bit of application or like, you know, based on the information circulated and some of the colleagues just kind of ignore it because of lack of time, and so on. So whenever there's something interesting, and relevant for me, I just go after it. So, in that sense, I don't think there is miss... missing stuff. Maybe something in the direction of like better time management. But it's a bit ironic to go for like, a time management training, which takes time. So it's kind of a bit misses the point.

Paul Jones 07:46

Yeah. So from what you've said there, you seem to be a person that is quite self starting, and will be persistently looking for ways to develop and looking for opportunities. And therefore a model that we've got in terms of presenting opportunities out there, that could suit you, because you're keen to look at what's there and take up on them.

DBA6 08:08

I think so, yeah...

Paul Jones 08:09

Good. Do you think that is the right way for everybody, though, to be able to think about their development?

DBA6 08:14

Um, no, I think it doesn't work for everyone. Because, you know, sometimes, especially when the teaching starts, so people on teaching and research contracts, we can get, on average, anything between 30 to 70 emails a day. If, if, there is like yet another opportunity popping in every second day, it's so easy to miss it. And not everyone is so organised. So, I think a good improvement would be having it on a more organised manner across the year. Because then, for example, you get one email with like, a little, maybe one email with three or four reminders. That, uh, like a particular month in the year saying, this is our schedule for the whole year if you're interested sign in, and so on. Because honestly, sometimes, especially the ad hoc sessions, some of them are really brilliant and very interesting. But the problem is, they come so ad hoc and sometimes like 1) you can miss it in the emails, 2) our schedules are planned, like, you know, sometimes six months in advance. Like, I already know what I'm going to

be doing in July based on the conferences that are coming. So having a kind of yearly cycle would be, would be quite good. I don't want to add to work of my colleagues, but maybe, on some form of a credit structure.

Paul Jones 08:30

Okay.

DBA6 08:32

They are going to hate it, but like, you know, the same way as we do, for example, the training for... uhh... was it a fire, uh, fire training, whatever it's called, the one where we have obligatory training to complete online, right? Maybe it would be nice to have like a set of like 12 Mini workshops, and out of those, you have to do four a year, or something like that, which obviously, most of my colleagues will hate me. But, on the other side I think, if it was in the form of certain obligation, it could kind of, you know, improve some of the colleagues perceptions of things.

Paul Jones 10:31

So more in the form of the traditional continuing professional development points, where, you go to things, you get points and that's being monitored in terms of who you have to demonstrate you're keeping on top of your profession?

DBA6 10:44

I know, I mean, like, a lot of people hate the idea. But I think taking like, what I get sometimes, some of the emails, I go like, dude, that was part of the, this particular training, or this particular document. So, for fucks sake, just read your emails.

Paul Jones 11:02

So why, question then, why do you think your colleagues would hate that...

DBA6 11:07

...negatively? Because there's so much work already, it is literally so much work already. And God forbid, if someone has like, on top of that, some more responsible administrative job, because we don't do only teaching and research, right? If you add even a minor additional task to that, there's no way that during a teaching semester, that we can do any research. And it takes really lots of effort to draw it down, some of it on paper, so not only doing some researching. So, if we're on top of that get, like you know a request, oh, you have to sacrifice four days for a workshop, they are gonna get annoyed.

Paul Jones 11:50

Yeah, so that brings me on to another part I'm interested in, which is about the balance of a teaching and research job, then because...

DBA6 11:59

Does not exist!

Paul Jones 12:00

Well it would be interesting to hear why, because, the expectation is that it would be 40% teaching, 40% research, and 20% administration.

DBA6 12:12

Hahahaha!

Paul Jones 12:12

The impression is, that, that's not quite as it works in practice.

DBA6 12:18

It should be, like, on some of our contracts, it's actually it's 30 / 30 / 30, kind of, like 33, comma something. But honestly, it does not work because of a very simple thing. The administration related with teaching is not counted as administration, it is counted as teaching. So, during the academic year, when we are teaching there is tons of administration, regular and the ones related with teaching. So your research, if you lucky, is an hour to two hours a week, which is no way in comparison to what it should have been. And my absolute favorite is the research day.

Paul Jones 13:06

Right...

DBA6 13:07

I haven't, I haven't seen one of those, like, it's on my schedule but I haven't seen one of those in really long time, umm, it gets a bit easier in the TP two, but in TP one, there's no way with the amount of work we have to do a regular research. But again, I kind of have one of those larger, larger portfolios, and I kind of usually end up with those. But, if you look into our department, for example, out of all of us, pretty much everyone with maybe four or five exceptions, has one of the larger portfolios, which takes tons of work. So if that's added on top of it, there is no way of doing actual research. It's something which you have to sneak in some, somewhere in between meetings.

Paul Jones 13:59

So, in terms of the balance then, it seems from what you're saying, the teaching has a life of its own, to some extent, that will expand not necessarily contract, to eat up more of the time that you're supposed to be doing other things with, the administration part isn't necessarily kept at 20% either, because that could expand as well. So those two things expand. The only option is the research part to shrink, or do extra work outside of the hours you're given. Would that be about right?

DBA6 14:32

I think. Um, I think a lot of things which we ,especially for the last three years, we're asked to do related with like modules, administration, and so on. That kind of builds up and it's a little things here and there but if you sum it up, it's going, goes higher and higher. So we aim to, we end up doing almost everything around the modules now. Although there, for example, the bringing back, bringing together the, umm, all three schools into one college was supposed to be helpful. Well, now everything, God forbid you have a question it lands in the, in the bucket of souls and we see response days or weeks in advance, like after. So it's been tricky with that one, I think it's the administration around the modules, which is taking more and more time, because their administrative portfolio, that's one thing, and it's kind of like we take it on board, it's not like it's assigned to us, we can choose how much we decide to do with it. So it's the administration around the modules and teaching, potentially decreasing the number of modules or having like, a nice structure around it, to realise like, it was much better pre-unification, because we had more people in the support office. And the fact that people are overworked, and there's not enough of them, is really hitting everyone else. Because obviously, like, they get stressed, we get stressed, and then it just ends up really nastily.

Paul Jones 16:23

So then, if we were thinking about then, all the different things you have to put into your role, and the time allocated to it, that doesn't seem to leave much time for professional development activities. So you mentioned about the CPD points type activity. But there's nothing earmarked to say this is the time you get to develop your skills or to pass on knowledge to others, or to mentor, or to coach, or to work in a way that's improving what you're doing.

DBA6 16:55

Yep. So in order to do that, I have to carve it out of like my extra hours. So, I'm doing now, the what is it called... leas... [redacted] mentoring [redacted], I think that's the full title. And we have to do [redacted], [redacted] hour sessions with my mentor, before the end of the year, right? It's end of October, and we

managed to schedule only one, because my calendar gets filled in so quickly. So... we started scheduling them after five o'clock, because otherwise I have no time to put it in. Because there's so much stuff kicking in and jumping up.

Paul Jones 17:44

Is that, from what you know then, is that the same for other colleagues as well, they're all trying to be creative with the time they spend doing stuff, where it eats into your own personal time a bit, but just trying to fit things in.

DBA6 17:56

Yeah. And the problem is some of us, well, it's not a problem. Some of us are slightly better at it. But it slows down for everyone else because they say like, oh, no, after five, I'm not doing anything. And then I have to wait two weeks for an issue to be resolved. Because that's the next free slot, which obviously, I'm not keeping it against them. It's that this situation which forced us to do, and that's why the newest line of strikes coming up.

Paul Jones 18:22

So do you think then that the idea of having time scheduled specifically for professional development would be a good thing to do?

DBA6 18:32

I don't think it will work unless something else gets taken away. Because currently, there's just no way of fitting it in... and yeah.

Paul Jones 18:46

Hmm, but if it... if it formed part of workload planning that you're... you had an allocation of time to say that this was important. And that message came from the top that professional development was important. Would that work then?

DBA6 19:01

Still no, because we still don't have extra time.

Paul Jones 19:05

So what would solve the extra time problem?

DBA6 19:07

I think it would be thinking a bit more strategically about the whole time allocation. Because I think one colleague at [redacted] was doing like the workload schemes based on like student numbers and things like that. Just realising that... uh what's the word? Oh, God, I was so keen on [redacted] last whole week, and now I'm missing English words. The problem at the moment is that the... within the allocated time that we have, right? First of all, the distinction between research, teaching and admin roles does not work anymore. It's not like we can just take two hours of our schedule and that's for a particular thing. Mostly because there is no strict set up on how to, umm, like, this is Z, that's my three days of teaching, the rest is research because obviously we work in different, on different days of the week, there's lots of flexibility on when people deal with their emails and things like that. And that flexibility is very positive thing, or the negative side is that it's just, you know, so what that Monday is my research day, it's the day when everyone else sends the emails, and they asked me, like, if I don't respond, that slows them down. So I think.. kind of ... make like, which is revolution, I think for like, so currently, I'm doing what, on paper is three modules, right? In physical terms, that basically means around 40 students, which comparing to my colleagues is not a lot of work, because some people have like a hundred something students on the module. But the amount of preparation for 120 or 35, it's exactly the same. It's just more, more time later on when you do the marking and things like that. But preparation is exactly the same, dealing with the emails will differ, because getting emails from 120 is different than from 35. But it's just, there's simply no way anymore for like adding something else. So having an

obligatory kind of time slot for personal development will be tricky to put on. Because everyone will be like where I'm going to put it.

Paul Jones 21:51

Yeah, I guess it would have to go back to how much work is allocated to an individual. Because it seems there's got to be a balance between the modules we are delivering for students and student numbers. And the more modules you have, the more prep you have to do. And their student numbers may fluctuate across those modules in terms of where they are. If you've got more modules and more numbers, that's going to be an issue. And it's really hard to balance out everybody in that way. Yeah... There's always a pressure on increasing numbers for modules to get the most people on there to make the most of the opportunity to generate money from students. So there's always these tensions of balancing all these things, and we're not very good at backfilling sometimes in terms of people's positions.

DBA6 22:42

So... some solutions from other institutions like their, which not necessarily good ones, like there's a big push, for example, at some of the universities, from what I gather, to do to, like, feed a lot of teaching, and administration related to it, to like, teaching only fellows, which would leave like the teaching and research academics a bit more time. But, what makes the teaching interesting is if you actually teach on the research that you're doing, and students pick up on it, they're much more interested in modules like that. So it's a kind of weird trade off. But it's, for example, very common, especially on the larger modules in [redacted]. And I think we have now, what, [redacted] teaching fellows within [redacted].

Paul Jones 23:39

Do you think that the students are interested more in someone who has been out and had experience from jobs that relate to what you're teaching? Or do you think the research is more interesting in relation to the teaching?

DBA6 23:54

Umm, I think both. But it's not the difference between actual work or research, it's rather which year students...

Paul Jones 24:06

Right...

DBA6 24:06

So final year students and post grads, absolutely, either the research or your work experience. Year one and two are so confused of what, what they want, and where they are, that they don't need that part. But the final years, when they back from the sandwich year, or they are a bit more aware of what they're doing, they actually respond much better to that kind of stuff.

Paul Jones 24:31

Yeah, my experience as a student, I always related more to people who could bring their own war stories and experiences from workplaces to provide a context. The fact for me, back then, the fact that they did research that area wasn't really interesting to me, it is the fact that the ones who've been out there and done job roles and done things and seen how, what we were discussing, went into practice that was a more interesting part for me then, and it's interesting to think about, so related to that, it's interesting to think about how external experiences relate to success and your professional development in academia. You've mentioned how you've worked at other higher education institutions, and how you could have some ideas about the way different people did things, but did you have any experiences outside of higher education that you brought into higher education?

DBA6 25:20

Um, so I worked for [redacted] for a while in the [redacted] Office and [redacted] office. I work, well, even now, I work for the [redacted], which is a form of a think tank. So it's not super different from what

I'm doing now but, that one, and yeah, that's pretty much it. Because the [redacted] project, it's still related with teaching. So it's kind of academic.

Paul Jones 25:51

And do you think those experiences have benefited you then in HE to make you better at doing your job?

DBA6 25:58

Oh, yeah, absolutely. Especially the work with, within [redacted], because that gives you... so I teach on interest groups, right? So working for [redacted] in the [redacted] Office and [redacted] Office is exactly what I'm teaching. So that one, the same goes with the [redacted] industry. So like doing the touring with the [redacted], and so on. It's the same kind of structure. So having that experience informs my research and helps with teaching.

Paul Jones 26:27

So has that been able to give examples of how things work, or do you think it's a bit to do with skills you learned in those jobs as well?

DBA6 26:36

Hmm... I think it's more how the things were, rather than the skills. But there's a lot of skills, which I'm using that were... were doing those jobs was something which I learned at the university before.

Paul Jones 26:53

Okay, so have you got examples like that like, because I am interested to think about, if there's particular skills that we are missing out giving staff that could benefit them. So it's interesting to hear from you what skills you use on a regular basis that we do, as a higher education, as a provider, provide to you for you doing your job more effectively? Versus, are there things that we could give to you, either that you brought in that you find useful, or that you thought about that we haven't given you that could make a difference...

DBA6 27:24

Yeah, one really good one was... umm... so a lot of training, which I have done, was on grant application writing and, and research team management and so on. So I've learnt that at Aston, right, but it's being in different courses. And I use it in [redacted], because I'm a [redacted], on particular themes there. So that one, the same goes with the research leadership, umm, skills Training, because that helped there to. I have done... I was the [redacted] management training, when I was the [redacted]. And that helps with the [redacted], like simple management tasks, very practical ones, like scheduling things, organising stuff, and so on. Now, umm, what else have I used? Well, I mean, the work in [redacted] was between my PhD and my postdoc so that, that kind of previous work, previous education so that was like simple things like PowerPoint presentation, fast-reading and things like that, so it's not as professional it's more general.

Paul Jones 28:42

Yeah, umm, because it's interesting, because I have talked to people whose experiences outside have really led them to be more effective at their job then, and that could then be things like people management, or financial skills management, or project management or relationship management, there are skills that we don't necessarily teach very effectively. That could be better, I think, it's interesting...

DBA6 29:09

Yeah, especially the finance, especially the financial skills, because that's something which is lacking even currently even for like practical aspects of like project running. Yeah, so I had to learn a lot and thank God for Ronni, who is extremely patient person, and then Suzie helping up. But when it came in to the actual project running, just you get so many troubles and also understanding different forms. So

that, that will be something which is missing because the project management in general, it's there, and it's available for training, just the finances of it. But that's a very specific skill.

Paul Jones 29:54

Yeah, but I guess if you're going to apply for grants, there's expectation and most staff will apply for grants. Then once you've won that money, then having the right skills in place to manage that project effectively, that could include managing people, or managing finances, or managing yourself, and the project generally, I'm not sure that at the moment that people are given the right set of skills to do that effectively.

DBA6 30:19

So... well, I'm very, I'm very unusual because I run the projects before, right? Some of it before. And I had, and... especially with the [redacted] application, umm, that was kind of, like, realisation of all the skills that I've learned. So it wasn't, it wasn't that hard. So again, a very unique example.

Paul Jones 30:45

Yeah, and all you can talk about is your experiences and things you've picked up on. In terms of external engagement, then, so we're expecting staff members to do the research, the teaching and the administration. The other expectation is about how you market yourself, and your research, and how you expand that out to the rest of the world and engage with some of the beneficiaries, that doesn't formally form part of your expectations about how we give you time to do your role.

DBA6 31:19

Umm, not true.

Paul Jones 31:21

Does it go into what you'd expect for research?

DBA6 31:24

No, it goes in our MDC.

Paul Jones 31:28

Right?

DBA6 31:29

Yeah, you have to kind of include that, how you ,what you did last year, what you're planning to do next year.

Paul Jones 31:37

Yes, but does, is external engagement referenced in particular around that?

DBA6 31:43

Yeah, you have to insert it in MDC. It's one of the, the, is a part of the outreach section, or whatever it's called now. Yeah. So there is an expectation that you engage in, there are two which are not formally recognised in our time allocation, the citizenship and the external engagement.

Paul Jones 32:09

And, I... and that was my point that I was getting to, is that there isn't officially time dedicated towards doing it in terms of the contract expectations. And yet, it forms quite an important part of how you are expected to do your job.

DBA6 32:23

Because it's part of the research.

Paul Jones 32:27

But we've already talked about how you don't get the time to do the research as you'd want to...

DBA6 32:32

Yeah, exactly...

Paul Jones 32:34

...so do those parts have to be more formally recognised then about how we a) give people time to do it, but b) that we give the right skills to do it. Because I'm not sure that, I think you're an exception in lots of different ways because of what you've done previously, but I'm not sure overall, whether we train people up in the right way to be able to do that part of their job.

DBA6 32:55

Well, that depends. We have a lot of like, especially last year, we had a lot of sessions on like impact creation and so on, right? But it's all lovely, lots of good ideas, the problem is lack of time to actually implement it in action. Because, yeah, so the sneaky people, including me, we literally write it down in the project proposals and grants to kind of buy ourselves some time to actually do those. But the problem is, if you don't have a grant, there's no way of writing it in into your regular week.

Paul Jones 33:37

So you mentioned you're sneaky there, along with other people, shouldn't that be something that isn't sneaky and it's just generally a part of how you should be writing grants?

DBA6 33:49

Well, yeah, but that would mean that out of my week, right, there should be a limitation that for example, anything related with teaching takes maximum two days. Right? Unrealistic. I teach on one day, and it takes still more time than that. So...

Paul Jones 34:10

But isn't the idea that, if you win research grants, you then buy yourself out of some of that teaching?

DBA6 34:17

Oh, yeah, absolutely. That's, that's the way to go about it. The problem is writing a winning research grant proposal. You have to have time to write one, right?

Paul Jones 34:28

And when you're trying to squeeze it in, with everything else, given there is such high competition anyway, not having the time to craft it properly, if it's not at its very best, then you are entering into a race with one of your legs not really working properly.

DBA6 34:48

A very, so like a good example is now, like, we writing a project proposal with colleagues in [redacted]. We started in June. Right? And currently we are in October and the document has only six pages.

Paul Jones 35:08

Right...

DBA6 35:09

Because it takes so very... umm. to develop [redacted], which is slightly different, because the application has [redacted] pages, [redacted] months, just because there's no actual time to do it. And I'm not talking here about the coordination issues, because I'm the lead on both, right? So it's me who is the main coordinator, I just don't have even time to do a dance. And that's why it takes takes so long.

Paul Jones 35:40

And is there, besides just giving you time, then, which you could do with, is there anything else that can be done to support that process?

DBA6 35:49

Um, I think like endless applications are a bit tricky. So like, even to get an extra time to write the application, like grant application, right? You have to write an application. So it's kind of a weird circle. Because you need time off, to write an application, in order to get that time off, you have to write the application. It can wait. I'm sorry, my phone buzzing but it can wait. So yeah, it's a lot of these kind of weird things, which basically requires time and a bit of a brain space, which you don't get unless there is extra time, but then you are just writing application. So another good example is like currently, in my mailbox, there are four or five kind of email saying like, oh, if you interested in developing impact case study, and so on, applying for this money... and it is all lovely, and I would like to apply for all of them, because I have the ideas how to do it based on the project and so on, right? The problem, however, is I need the time to do those applications. So there are opportunities, there's no time to actually make them into reality.

Paul Jones 37:16

Yeah. And, obviously, research covers a wide remit as well. So while the teaching is an activity which sucks up a lot of time, you know, the different elements that go into it quite easily. And you know the process, with research, when you're looking at publications, grant writing and grant winning, delivering on projects, if you've won stuff, supervising students, developing impact case studies, engaging with the public and disseminating whatever research you've done...

DBA6 37:48

...and all of that only within like those two magical hours a week, which I managed to spare.

Paul Jones 37:53

That's a lot to, to think about then. So one of the things about professional development is the support you get from either colleagues, the university, your manager, what parts work well for supporting you, then, and what parts don't work so well?

DBA6 38:10

Well, so, the thing which works really well, is a nicely oiled team. So if you have someone who, with bit of a sparkle, who, who is like, who exactly knows what they do, how they can do it, and so on, and doesn't forward it just farther on, umm, that makes life easy. So like, I think I'm going to bring [redacted] a champagne by the end of this year, because he makes my life so much easier, by just knowing things and being very professional about stuff. The same goes for like a team, like, you know, when we're working with [redacted] and [redacted], for example, each of us now kind of like, it took a bit of like arrangement and so on, but each of us has different responsibility and being responsible for that. So small package of something really kind of helps with things. And also a team in the sense of like, you know, having colleagues that you can go to and ask questions, and they have like five minutes for you instead of just going like, oh I am busy or like can we talk in three weeks? So that one, I think which really helped me actually, even within our department, is the fact that we have actually quite, quite nice team. Like people are generally very nice, very supportive. And, and there's this like little lunch circle when, like, when we there and we having a chat. So having a team which has not only like actual technical support, but also mental support really helps. What else is there? Well I always, whenever I get a question from [redacted] as my line manager [redacted] like, so what do you need? Then I was, was like, a time, like, a time, time, just some of this, some time, because if I have time, I can send those millions emails and so on. But if I have to deal with six or seven issues popping up, is it just getting too much.

Paul Jones 40:23

Yeah...

DBA6 40:24

I also have a horrible habit of creating extra work for myself. But I'm working on it.

Paul Jones 40:31

It's an important thing to work on, I think...

DBA6 40:33

Yeah. But like, there are some things which I could pay, like, limit some of it, but they bring me like a lot of fun. Like the [redacted] module with [redacted] skills, it takes tons of time, with a relatively small return, because it's just for like, [redacted] something students, but it's so much fun and...and ... and the end product is just amazing, that I don't mind doing it, even if it cost me a lot of extra time.

Paul Jones 41:04

But if you're gonna strip stuff away from your job, you don't want to strip all the fun parts away

DBA6 41:09

Exactly!

Paul Jones 41:10

and be left with the mundane operational stuff of just doing a job.

DBA6 41:16

Exactly!

Paul Jones 41:17

That's the challenge, isn't it, of trying to maintain motivation and joy in your job as well as getting the task list done.

DBA6 41:25

Yeah...

Paul Jones 41:26

Those two things don't necessarily rub up against each other in the right way sometimes...

DBA6 41:30

Hmm, well, a very good example, right? Since we started talking, I've got 16 emails, right? And I'm monitoring it in the background, out of those 16, maybe four or five are like requiring proper answer. However, out of those five, if, for example, our wonderful, what are they called, [redacted], was somewhat more active, rather than just bouncing back emails to me, it could have been supported by itself.

Paul Jones 42:03

Right.

DBA6 42:04

So...

Paul Jones 42:05

So professional development, in terms of everybody around you, is quite important then? So we can both help to develop you as an individual, but everybody gets the chance to develop more effectively so that we're functioning more, umm, better at our jobs, then.

DBA6 42:21

Yeah, I think so. Well, one of the things that I would definitely do is clone [redacted] a few times, which a good solution could be just having like a properly staffed support office with like, larger number of people, and better paid, because we, like, from what I gather from the chats, which we had before, is the fact that a lot of our professional staff, there's huge rotation, because they can get paid much better somewhere else for the same work they do. So...

Paul Jones 42:55

I don't, I don't believe it is just the pay as well, the pay will be an important part, especially in the current financial climate, but I don't think that development opportunities are there, and one of the things I have noticed through some conversations are that, for academic staff, and others, there isn't really a map of thinking about how you can plot your career trajectory, knowing what roles exist, what you need to be able to do them, which roles might be suitable... for you and how you step back and forth to things that then get to where you want to be in the future. And, and, sending people a general email saying these are the available opportunities for you not always works, it needs a bit more.

DBA6 43:20

Yep...

Paul Jones 43:28

I think that comes down to the support you get directly from whoever's managing you as well, because an important part of this is feeling encouraged and motivated and given permission to explore what matters to you. And to plot a development path that's going to work for you and your career, then, the my DC conversations are supposed to be your conversation about your career. I don't know whether they work that way in most instances.

DBA6 44:04

They do, in our case, because [redacted], is really paying attention to it. So [redacted] sends us and [redacted] before that. So there is a bit, umm, there is some directory, well direction, that [redacted] always asks us to look at and so on. And it's kind of going quite... so it's [redacted] second round, I think, or third now, and every year [redacted] gets better at it. But sadly, again, coming back to the original question, not everyone prepares for those very well, because they don't have time. So it kind of ends up like being like BOOM, and oh shit, I forgot, and then going for the meeting. I think [redacted] hates me because I send all these three pages of documents. That's what I've done. This is what I'm planning and then [redacted] goes, are you sure? Yeah, I cannot reduce that and [redacted] was like, maybe you should, by like a half and I was like, no, this is all realistic. Yeah...

Paul Jones 45:02

I think it does vary considerably and it's good to hear that you've got someone who's managing you effectively to... that pays attention to your career directory, uh, direction and trajectory and wants to help support that.

DBA6 45:14

Weirdly enough, do you know what really helped? Um, so I'm part of the mentoring scheme. So [redacted] is my mentor, right? At the beginning, it was very structured. So we saw each other like once a month, now, it's mostly whenever I feel a bit lonely. But the sessions which I'm having with the with my personal coach, umm, within the [redacted], that was really good, I really kind of like, so I kind of committed to it right? And it's all going, why we haven't had the lots of sessions, it really kind of gets you thinking, like, hang on a minute, I have to stop here and have like a moment of reflection. So that really helps. So if we could have something like that a bit broadly. Hmm, again, this is a tricky one, because it's quite expensive, from what I gather, and [redacted]. So...

Paul Jones 46:13

Uh, it depends, doesn't it? Because from what you've talked about there mentoring and coaching are two very different things. And...

DBA6 46:20

I think both of them are good, like, you should have both of them.

Paul Jones 46:25

Mentoring is more about having an expert that you could ask questions to...

DBA6 46:29

Yep, and career track, and so on. And, so one is teaching you more like academic skills, the whole focus is on academic skills, and the other one more on like a general skills, how to deal with stuff.

Paul Jones 46:41

Yeah, I think what you'll find is, and you can tell me about your experience, but generally, coaching is a more challenging thing to go through, where you do the hard work, then. Mentors tend to be given you expert knowledge to help you in your role or to develop in some way...

DBA6 46:57

Mmm

Paul Jones 46:57

... and its calling upon their experiences and their knowledge and skills. Coaching is more about being able to pin you down and helping you explore your own thinking and what you need to do and then agreeing how you can move forward then...

DBA6 47:10

True...

Paul Jones 47:10

...so two different ways of approaching it. What you can do, though, is you don't necessarily need to have a, an external coach to be providing coaching. We can skill people up more effectively as managers or colleagues to use a coaching approach to be able to get you to think, so that could work, but you come up against the barrier of time again, because how do you craft time to have those coaching conversations and have the reflection time to do it, if you're, if you've got 5 million things to do every single day that's going on?

DBA6 47:47

Well, with with the coaching sessions, we have been quite sneaky. Again. So whenever we set up a meeting it [redacted], [redacted], oh, it's a very Scottish name, I have problems saying it...

Paul Jones 48:02

[redacted]?

DBA6 48:03

Yeah! So we have the session last 90 minutes, but we book off like three hours...

Paul Jones 48:09

Right...

DBA6 48:10

...and because the whole program has a blessing from [redacted]... I'm allowed to do it. But it's literally pushing the border of like, you know, if someone asked what you're doing, I'm like, well, nah, I'm gonna nah, I have my three hours booked for this. And no, you cannot place another meeting on that day.

Paul Jones 48:17

yeah... Yeah, I think having that space, crafting that space, to be able to reflect, to pause on stuff, to think about what you are doing, it's really important. I don't see that happening that much at the moment, just given the workloads, and the lack of time available then...

DBA6 48:53

Mhmm...

Paul Jones 48:53

...one of the things I want to ask you about was how much of an external influence things like TEF, REF, KEF, those things that loom above us, how much of an influence do they play on your development and your role as an academic.

DBA6 49:08

Um, so, all the like, out of all those, REF is the absolute top, any type of research application, grant applications, anything related with impact, external engagement, all that is dictated by REF to the degree that, like, if I get a request to write a book chapter, for example, in REF structure, doesn't count for anything, so I always say no, because I have such a limited time. So I would write it only if it's someone I know really well requesting it. Otherwise, I don't even read the description even if it's very interesting proposal and so on. Unless, unless it's something useful, the same applies, for example, for writing research articles and so on, unless it's something with Impact Factor. Don't even bother, like, looking into it. Which is unfair, because a lot of fantastic projects and ideas come up from like different things. But unless it's someone I know really well, and I know I can call in a favor later on, because of REF, I go like, no, I can't do it.

Paul Jones 50:27

So then, the interesting thing to think about is, here, you've just said the REF is massively important in directing research.

DBA6 50:36

Yeah.

Paul Jones 50:37

And yet, we aren't giving you the time to do research effectively...

DBA6 50:41

Yes...

Paul Jones 50:42

Those two things don't really marry up, do they?

DBA6 50:44

Oh, absolutely none. Especially the part when you're asked to create research applications, which have potentially leading to impact case study, right, which requires engagement, external engagement, requires writing policy reports, which don't, like, you know, they don't come up off a Christmas tree, you have to write them, you have to think through, you have to meet with people and so on.

Paul Jones 51:10

Yeah, so it doesn't make a huge amount of sense in my head, is how important the REF gets rated in terms of directing research, and yet, that's the part that's always being squeezed.

DBA6 51:23

Yeah. I mean, like, look, from the practical perspective, right? Our promotions, because everyone wants to eventually kind of end up a bit higher, right? Our promotions, why no officially written that it is actually based on our REF returns and the work, right? It so much is! Because obviously, if you bring a huge grant with four or five, four star publications, you get like, elevated to a next level much faster than when you do that for seven years. So absolutely everything like, a lot of us would not even bother with engagement or impact if not REF. Because in the traditional understanding of research, it's like, you know, finding your niche area, and not bothering with the external world understanding it because you discover a cure for cancer, for example.

Paul Jones 52:17

Yes. Do you, so then, do you value the impact your work can have then, or are you more focused on doing good research that expands our knowledge? How much does the impact matter to you then?

DBA6 52:31

Um, so it's, it's a bit weird stuff, right? Because achieving impact is relative, well, I'm not gonna say easy, that's a wrong word. But, if you don't give a shit about quality of the research, and the stuff which is being published, then getting impact would be much easier. But as an academic, we are required to be first of all objective or research based, like, you know, all our publications, impact and engagement based on properly executed research, including ethical issues and so on. Right? So I think it's a, it's a balance in the sense that, like, I enjoy when my research has impact, but I've burned few, many, like, few times on having negative impact rather than positive... that I'm extra cautious every single time when it's some form of engagement of my research with potential impact creation and so on.

Paul Jones 53:35

Yeah, that makes sense. And in terms of the, how you think about your own career then, and your trajectory, do you use any professional development frameworks? So, you could think about the HEA, and whether you go for fellowship, senior fellowship, etc.

DBA6 53:53

So I have the, what is it, higher education fellow status, I have to do another one, if I want to go for a [redacted]. So it's kind of forced on me anyway. But otherwise, I wouldn't do it, if not the fact that it's actually related with the promotion requirement. For research, I don't know if we have this level of recognition as we have for higher education, umm...

Paul Jones 54:25

So there's the Vitae development framework, which you can use from doctoral studies upwards to guide how you think about research and your development then...

DBA6 54:36

I think, I think I'm a bit too far already ahead of it. Because if it was something which I was introduced, like, you know, just finish PhD, or postdoc, or even during, then yes, at the current stage, it only complicates the time and space. So it just additional thing.

Paul Jones 55:00

So there's no real, for you then, there's no real professional framework that guides how you could develop in your role, is it all driven by promotions and what you have to do just to get through promotion?

DBA6 55:13

Yeah. Sad as it is.

Paul Jones 55:17

And that is, that does sound quite sad, doesn't it? That there isn't a...

DBA6 55:20

No, I mean, like, you know, it's, it's a, what's the word in English... I want to get promoted, and more money, but also because within academic world, the structure which we have at Aston, with like Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader and so on, it's not strictly recognised anywhere abroad. So like, in [redacted], because I'm not a [redacted], I'm still not recognised as a person who can supervise PhD.

Paul Jones 55:53

Oh right...

DBA6 55:53

...um, and, and then our Senior Lecturer and Reader translates abroad, depending on the mood, as a kind of Assistant versus Associate Professor and so on, which creates additional issue. But when you're full Professor, you are full professor, no matter what. So that's a kind of ultimate game. And also, the fact that, having that, you know, not being stuck on one level, I want to kind of reach the higher one.

Paul Jones 55:56

Yeah...

DBA6 55:57

...but that's more with the motivation, and, and what I want to do in the future.

Paul Jones 56:32

So, what could be done to help you then in terms of your career, would a, would things like a map of all different roles that exist, then you could see where you could try and plot different things you could do, would that be useful thing?

DBA6 56:46

No, because we already have that, right? So within, at least within Aston, we have the promotion procedure with like details, and info sessions, and things, and people you have to talk to. So their procedure is very clear. Which you could, like mentoring scheme for that, umm, at this stage in my career, pretty much, no, sorry, there's like a lot of shouting outside. They, umm, I also know quite how the structures are working. So like, you know, how academia is organised in other countries, for example. Again, that's something which I've actually done to my PhD students this year, we had those sessions well last year, we had sessions with [redacted], when I walked him through, like, how different systems are organised. So, so, that's cool, but that's early in the process. That's early career researchers, not the mid and upper, because we already know where we are going. It's rather like, you know, having the time to do it, ha!

Paul Jones 57:54

Without referring to the map, though, the promotions criteria is very much about moving up the levels from Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader, Professor. But part of that journey would be doing management roles, and getting senior research leadership type roles, or different roles exist for teaching...

DBA6 58:13

Yeah...

Paul Jones 58:13

...but there isn't a map that says oh, one of these Associate Dean roles exist, or these roles exist across the university that say how you get them, how they can be planned into your development, they more happen by luck and circumstance about someone stepping down from or being created...

DBA6 58:32

Oh, yeah, there's no transparency on that one, right? Every now and then we just get the announcement that like Associate Dean job is open, apply.

Paul Jones 58:41

So you can't plan then, to say, oh, I'm going to do this role in this amount of time, and there's no planning process to help you succeed to get those roles, or what you, what you need to put those things in place?

DBA6 58:54

No, the only thing which you get is that, to promote for a particular role. for a particular level, you have to have like, senior management job accomplished, right?

Paul Jones 59:07

Yeah.

DBA6 59:09

This is not too bad,...

Paul Jones 59:11

But then there's been discussions lately about what people view as being a senior management job and, I don't know whether that's quite clear in terms of descriptions on there about, which ones would account for that and which ones wouldn't, then.

DBA6 59:25

That's true. That could be useful to be honest. Although, you know, it's becoming a bit self explanatory, anything with Associate Dean at other beginning, usually gets you a bit higher. But yeah, maybe having like a clear structure with that one would be easy. But the problem is, it's very internal, right, because the positions will differ per University. So the position, the function, sometimes even between colleges, so if we talk with, for example, people in medical school, which is totally like, or engineering and so on, their structure is very different to what we have. So having like a straightforward map of those roles, wouldn't be like, self explanatory, because it would differ per the, per college,

Paul Jones 1:00:22

They would, but then you could try and do something like, try and produce that map for Aston then, but also talk to partners in the Midlands Innovation Group and see what they do. And then you could try and align things better then, so at least if we were swapping and changing people across the Midlands innovation Universities, you'd at least have some knowledge about a combined map to see where, whether opportunities exist, to maybe getting stuff aligned, or bringing stuff together as an information resource.

DBA6 1:00:49

But wouldn't that, as a final effect, just thinking about impact of the research, wouldn't that cause change of the existing structure? And one of the problems that Aston we have is a huge rotation of people in, in different responsibility roles?

Paul Jones 1:01:08

Well, it depends, doesn't it? Because at the moment, it seems quite haphazard. But if you had a plan about how you could rotate people around and took their development more seriously, you could do secondments to maybe different universities in the Midlands Innovation group...

DBA6 1:01:23

Ooooh...

Paul Jones 1:01:23

... to then be able to get experiences that allow you to, to increase your career trajectory, not just leave it to be up to you, to think what can I look at, it's going to help me, that we make it easier for people to see what the opportunities are, and develop them then. So we develop the university more generally, retain people because we're looking after them and giving them the right opportunity so they can progress, but also working as a more collective group to see how we can do that more effectively.

DBA6 1:01:56

Hmm, that could be interesting, but again, tricky and on sustainability of this solution.

Paul Jones 1:02:05

True, but I don't think what we're doing now has fully explored the best way to do it.

DBA6 1:02:09

Oh, absolutely not. There's still a lot of potential. Like, you know, for example, [redacted] posted not so long time ago, this opportunity about secondments to different [redacted] offices, which for [redacted], fabulous, right? I'm gonna go, I'm gonna learn how it's working on, or there's the other option where we can exchange within [redacted] actually, even, as the [redacted], it is just the time to look through the application.

Paul Jones 1:02:31

Do you think then you get, if you want them to do something like that, you think Aston them would be quite supportive to say, yeah, that sounds like a brilliant idea?

DBA6 1:02:51

So, for now, we have some examples. So [redacted] of our colleagues are on [redacted] to [redacted], there is a big drive to do the [redacted] now on the regional level. And there is definitely, because of [redacted], and the [redacted], so two separate ones. Umm, there is a drive to do not necessary exchanges, but like, like physical exchange, but like sharing knowledge...

Paul Jones 1:03:21

Yeah...

DBA6 1:03:22

So that's quite cool. I actually enjoy those.

Paul Jones 1:03:26

So while the university push for those things, do you think the different levels of the college management structure, that they will be supportive of actually making it happen?

DBA6 1:03:38

I think so, I haven't encountered any like problems before, like till now. There's something moving behind you haha.

Paul Jones 1:03:48

The cat? Because it's blurred, you can't see it.

DBA6 1:03:53

Yeah, I know, it was like,...

Paul Jones 1:03:56

Yeah, it's the cat is not some weird horrible thing...

DBA6 1:04:00

Okay, so coming back to the topic, I think for now, umm, both college and the university are actually supportive. Yeah, so I don't see an issue with it. Even, even, for example, like what is it now? We were talking with [redacted], two or three days ago, just before the weekend about the teaching [redacted] in [redacted]...

Paul Jones 1:04:28

Right...

DBA6 1:04:30

So [redacted] says, like, no limitation from the side of university, we just signing off consultation for [redacted] weeks when you're doing it. And that's it.

Paul Jones 1:04:42

That's great. And so last thought for you to think about then, does the experience level of academic staff impact on the development opportunity or needs? You've mentioned early career researchers. You mentioned how things are getting better for mid level career professionals. Is there clear, is there clear delineation between what people at ECR level, people at mid career and senior career people need to help them develop?

DBA6 1:05:10

So for ECR, yes, because it's in place, and it started to work very well. Uhh, I think the mid career and higher is still kind of its early stages, it's getting better, but it's not as structured as for a early career.

Paul Jones 1:05:29

And are there things you definitely want to see in place for those levels, then, that they need to do?

DBA6 1:05:34

Umm, I think a lot of people feel bit left behind when they mid career haha. This, like, there is this, this wonderful training. But you know, if one week there's four or five workshops, or like, the week after week, there's few of them. I just, even if they're super interesting, I just couldn't attend all of them because I have to deal with millions of other stuff. Yeah... ..and, and I think it's a bit natural progression, right? When you early career, you have less responsibilities, and those you have more time to do this stuff. But it would be nice at the middle and the top, to kind of still have the, so I would understand like, the middle one is still possibility of handling it in house, right, additional training and so on. At the higher level, the professors and so on, that would require probably external training, which can be done within like UUK and so on. But I think the mid range is a bit kind of like, okay, I have to swim the deep waters myself now haha.

Paul Jones 1:06:45

Do you think there's an opportunity for our senior academics to do more with research leadership, development, mentoring, do you think enough of that happens?

DBA6 1:06:53

I mean, there would be, if we had more of them? ...right? Like, at, in [redacted], we have [redacted].., and, and, and [redacted], if we twist his arm, because he's doing like, all this stuff with [redacted], and so on. So we have [redacted], whose lovely, but again, he got so disillusioned with everything, that he pretty much prioritises [redacted] every single time, which is okay, I get it. But he's currently the only [redacted] we have. So how are you going to develop a mentoring scheme, for like mid career, if we don't have top career?

Paul Jones 1:06:57

Yeah... And even if we did have more, that doesn't mean that they're naturally inclined to be that developmental person.

DBA6 1:07:45

Yeah, that's true. So yeah, so I was bit lucky, because when I was doing my promotion application, last time, someone looked at the documents, and he kind of was like, oh, [redacted] works on something which can be worked at. And he was like, I want to be your mentor. So that was quite good. But it doesn't mean he'll be doing it for everyone...

Paul Jones 1:08:06

Yeah, true...

DBA6 1:08:08

And, like, you know, the highest one we have now is [redacted], who is super busy, [redacted]. We have [redacted], who is doing his own projects, because he got a grant for it, and then [redacted]. And oh, yeah, forgot [redacted]. But yeah. let's just not comment on that one...

Paul Jones 1:08:33

That's fine. I think I've covered everything I want to talk about.

DBA6 1:08:36

Okay...

Paul Jones 1:08:36

Was there anything else you wanted to mention at all for professional development, before we finish?

DBA6 1:08:40

I think the good kind of ending up note would be like, so I don't feel super disadvantaged, because I'm proactive, at obtaining the skills and trainings and so on. So they are available. But, there is a need for a bit more structure. So bit like I said before, like it's awesome to have all of them, but, having an overview when we can plan ahead with like, you know, a few months in advance like, this is something which is going to be happening would be a good thing. Because again, I know exactly what I'll be doing in July already. Just based on the fact that I know when the conferences are, where the project is going, and things like that. Which basically means if I get a notice about an event taking place in three weeks, that's, that's late.

Paul Jones 1:09:32

Yeah. That makes sense.

DBA6 1:09:36

And bit more structure, in the sense like they're, not the ad hoc events, which are good and it's interesting to do them. And some of them which we did last year, was it last year, or the year before we're awesome, but just bit more structure.

Paul Jones 1:09:53

Fab, I am going to stop the recording now.

DBA6 1:09:56

Okay!

Appendix 10: DBA7 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA7

Paul Jones 00:02

I've started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship: reforming professional development from the bottom up. I'm talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour, but we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure the interview comes to a natural end, the interview is semi-structured. This means I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore. We are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. The idea is I do this with the least number of questions or interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me on the details there on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed, and all links to you as an individual, for example, personal data will be removed, and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk, if you do need to stop the discussion for a break or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand so I know that you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it's causing you distress, or if indeed it causes me distress as well. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start. And then we'll move on to exploring your experiences regarding professional development. Please can you confirm you understand the information I've given to you?

DBA7 01:51

I understand.

Paul Jones 01:51

Great. And are you happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA7 01:53

Yes

Paul Jones 01:54

And do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA7 01:56

Yes.

Paul Jones 01:57

Great. So can you confirm the school your work in?

DBA7 02:01

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:02

Thank you. And can you confirm your gender please?

DBA7 02:05

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:06

Thanks and are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA7 02:09

Teaching and Research? Yeah.

Paul Jones 02:10

Great. So there's two more questions. How would you describe your career level? Early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA7 02:21

I should say senior, I could, I think a mid career but...

Paul Jones 02:26

It's up to you, to self identify, you can choose whichever one you think is appropriate.

DBA7 02:30

I would say senior career.

Paul Jones 02:32

Fab, thank you. And can you confirm which age bracket you're in? There's a number of choices 25 To 34, 35 to 44,

DBA7 02:41

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:42

[redacted]. Fab, thank you. So, generally then, starting off. Can you talk to me about how you view professional development and what your experiences have been like?

DBA7 02:54

Professional development within my university or throughout my career?

Paul Jones 02:58

Either one, so it's just to get a feel for how you view it, what's important to you, what your views on it are generally.

DBA7 03:12

Okay, so, there are different levels, aspects I think, there is the necessity of professional development. So, one needs to develop otherwise... otherwise, I think it's impossible to stay in academia. So, there is in this, in the, in, in academic careers, this aspect of you need to put up so, what underpins development is this idea of progress, you need to progress and this is why maybe levels hierarchical and obviously, and there is the aspect of professional development which is about training and this is all, all, all interrelated activities, formal and less formal. And this again, it's again, informal in the sense that no one person can do it by themselves and also it is, it has a structural level. So it is connected to the organisation and to the discipline you are in.

Paul Jones 04:27

Yeah.

DBA7 04:29

Do you want me to analyse every, so, so, so essentially, there is this need for academics to progress, to develop, okay? And, um, and let's say that throughout this process, they, they need to help themselves and they need a lot of support is also tied to the structures of the organisation. Okay? So they work for.

Paul Jones 04:57

So for you then, you mentioned a lot of things there, that could influence your professional development. What are the key drivers for you then, in terms of your development, what's most important to you, what makes you want to develop?

DBA7 05:13

What I want to develop now?

Paul Jones 05:15

No, so more so, what are the drivers for it? So, if you think about what you just said, you said there's lots of different influences, you can have that self drive because you want to become better at doing your job. You have...

DBA7 05:28

I didn't say this...

Paul Jones 05:29

...well, there was part of it where...

DBA7 05:31

Yes, no, but I, I said, okay, that you cannot survive in academia without developing.

Paul Jones 05:41

Yeah...

DBA7 05:41

...and there is an informal aspect where actually you do it, because you, so you try to build collaborations for example, etcetera, and there is the an aspect tied to the organisation, so, you need the resources to do this, which is time, money, so, in order to meet the expectations that both yourself and the university has, you need, you need the resources, individual and organisational resources. Okay? What are the most important drivers.

Paul Jones 06:13

So, what makes you, so what drives you to do any development activity? What are the motivations? Do they come from you, do they come from the organisation, what's the instigation?

DBA7 06:26

To think, I'm sure I understand you, but, so, okay, so the motivation to develop, okay, as I said, they come, they come from me, because, okay, they can come, obviously, they come from the individual and the organ..., but they come from the individual, let's say, but, within the circumstances one finds themselves, in the sense that I can do only as much. So, I have the motivation to go to five conferences per year, because this will support my network, is this possible, to what extent this is being realistic, it's not. So, my development is really contingent to the unit, to the to the resources that the institutions provide me with. And this, I need to clarify, this is not only about here, we give you the money and you can bid, because a lot, if I take, for example, if I reflect on my experience, in my current institution, I would say that there were opportunities, okay, you could bid for this, you could bid for that, and maybe you can be successful internally I would say, okay, but this happens, I can see a lot of the activities and a lot of these these things happen across areas are fragmented. So, we give you all this, but yes, where do you want me to find the time? If I have to teach four modules per year on a research and teaching

contract, where? If I have to supervise six DBA and PhD students, okay, where to find the time? So, of course, nothing is given. So, you have to bid, so you have every time to make an effort to make a case to apply for this. And there is obviously, it, there is discourses are there. So we can only find, so we can only find one or two hours. So it's all related. So, there is no nothing is clear cut and all this the support that may exist in each area is totally fragmented. So from the, you know, the, the life, let's say, all of the working life of someone, is not considered holistically. So then a lot of the support goes, is, is only on paper, which I don't know who is benefited from that. Is it then, is it, does it benefit the institution? Maybe to some extent, because obviously it shows research environment, support, etc. But it doesn't, the support is not taken up by academics.

Paul Jones 09:17

Yeah.

DBA7 09:17

So, and yeah, and as I said, it's about, all, it's not only about one resource we give to this, it's so how all these resources are interrelated and obviously, yeah, everyone's position is different, is different. So, there is no consideration, there is generally, not only here, generally in all the universities, there is this, there is this one, one, one plan fits all, one solution fits all, but not everyone fits into the solution and especially academic careers, are so diverse and with, with changes in the trends in higher education, it becomes even more difficult. And I don't think, and this impacts, both on individual career and on institutions as well. So, yeah.

Paul Jones 10:12

Is that, you mentioned there about, almost like the individual differences for every person's career aren't taking into account. So do you feel like you're treated like a standard person, that they don't think about what you need as a person, it's more about, they've got generic approach, to provide funding, that they think they're doing a good job by providing that, but nothing's really tailored to you as an individual, then.

DBA7 10:37

Yeah, I think it's more a bit of, we have this pot of money, whoever wants to bid, bid, but this disadvantages already people who cannot afford to bid, okay, because they don't have the time, the knowledge, the support, or I mean, some of them are even beyond the institution. So, if a lot of colleagues, I don't, because academia is, there is this idea of its international, right, so international mobility is part of our career development, many colleagues are on visas. And this, yeah, they are dependent on visas for a travel, so there is a lot of these which obviously prevents people from applying for this funding or any type of support. So, and, and, so, so if you see so, and so, yes, from that point of view, there is no consideration of okay, we have the support, but who applies for that? Who can be this person? Who has the time? Not the time, who has even yes, the, for whatever reasons, the time, the energy, the resources, the, the knowledge, to do this and a lot of this is about navigating relationships, I would say, internally so one of the thing that happens with the support provided, especially in terms of research is, and I learned this very early on when I first came to Aston, the first couple of months, there was this call out, literally couple of months, about if you have international funding, whatever, so if you have a colleague, who is a co-author you want to work with, or if you have made this application Okay, so I'm very [redacted]. I'm the [redacted] for the [redacted], for the, my department, for [redacted]. Okay, anyway, I decided to make this application because I was working on a major paper and there, so, it didn't say, I said okay, I thought that would be, it, I, my case was like very clear, because it was a four star paper, we had R&R, we had like, we needed to meet, we would, there is a lot of potential in this relationship anyway, which was funded but through different means, but, and then they said no, you are not successful. Then I go and ask, I went and asked two colleagues, one left, can I mention the name, one was [redacted], also very academically very strong person. And I asked another person also who's still there, at all, and an early career, and I said, have you ever won? Have you been successful in this internal things? And they both said no. And I said why, do you know? And they said no, because they both, one [redacted] said I think he did the same, he wanted to invite a colleague, and so then, in

the end, you didn't, I, I, I thought this was a bit unaccept, no not unacceptable, because I thought we meet the criteria, there was no, the eligibility obviously was not clear there. Okay? Then I have a meeting with [redacted], I had always defied with [redacted] why should I? He is amazing. And since then, we, we have like very good, very close relationship. But our first meeting was like, who assesses this, why I didn't get it, why we nobody of us here, very research oriented, will meet, will meet the criteria, why we didn't get it and they said, but other people said that they will apply for a grant as well, and they said, and is there any accountability but I can say, they said no, there is no accountability but I can say this. If it's a matter of just saying, and then this, this, this actually decides who gets the funding, then I can, so there is a bit of, okay, in this case, the problem was a lot of, there was no, if you put, if you prioritise the people who apply for grants, then say it, I tried to push a bit for this, for the criteria, in all this to be very transparent. Nothing happened. Obviously I didn't push too much, and I didn't have the energy, because between us, then I was, I mean, I got this funding, but everyone knew that I was applying for this [redacted] grant. So it was like given even before I submit the application, okay, but then it's not, but these, this is where it becomes then, this type of support and becomes exclusionary. You see, it limits people from doing so. And someone, for example, who has caring responsibilities, who cannot leave at the, who cannot leave the, an elderly person, kids, everyone, or who are on a visa, and they know that to go to see the co-author in France, they need to apply for a visa, you know, even for a trip, for a trip. It excludes them, because they would even, they could easily bring the co-author here, and then they don't have to have this kind of grant. So it becomes exclusionary, in my firm, many different ways, I would say so. And I understand, but then it's not bad to say that priority would be given, a lot of funders do that. So if you apply for Leverhulme mid career fellowships, they have, they say, priority would be given to people who had a big admin role before and they were away from research activities for some years. Okay, so you know, okay, you take your chances, but you know, at least...

Paul Jones 16:37

Yeah

DBA7 16:38

...so there has to be your priority will be given to people, or to teams, who apply for a grant and they need to meet, to do, work on this.

Paul Jones 16:46

Yeah.

DBA7 16:48

It's just, so then the support becomes very limited to, to very few people.

Paul Jones 16:54

So it's about knowing how to play the game, isn't it? if it's not transparent, and you're trying to play a game, where you don't know the full rules of what is going on.

DBA7 17:00

But playing the game, is also, you see, developing this tacit knowledge, which means that if you are an early career, and I'm coming from an event on early careers, so it's not possible. And also, if you are snowed under, and you try to make, to, to, to, every day is like a struggle, because you teach so much. And because you have so, and, as an early career, I have to say everything takes longer. Publishing takes longer, developing contacts takes longer, make, developing a pipeline, takes so much longer, it's like ,so difficult. And yeah, it's not considered.

Paul Jones 17:01

That's where we could think about professional development in different senses, isn't it? Because there's, from what you've talked about there, professional development could be having the right mentors, and that knowledge and things to be able to make the most of these opportunities then. So it isn't just a case of going on a course, for instance, and learning about a thing, quite a lot of what helps

people develop is actually having that knowledge that makes a difference to these internal systems or having things that helps grease the wheels then, isn't it?

DBA7 18:10

Yes, it is. And I have to say, I was very lucky because when I first came to the UK, I had no clue about the system here. And because I have, I did all my PhD studies in [redacted]. And then I went to [redacted]. And there I had a fantastic mentor, I was a research fellow there who even was, apologised, because he was not there to prepare me for my first lectureship interview. And this is the person who said, you need to start applying for lectureship because I am in the UK, a career as a researcher is not sustainable, you need to go through the teaching and research path. And he was all the time there. But, this, is very important and people do this on and off generally, internally, but, and I do it personally, also externally. But if it's becoming, if it's to become something like, which is, and we want to formalise it, and talk about development, then it needs to be part of people's time. Because people need to give the time and time is a huge resource for everything. Okay? So if you, I'm happy to do it as a pair with me, please, and I'm happy to write a summary, and anonymously pair me with someone who you think I fit with, and mentor people and all, but it needs to be part of my workload. Otherwise, it's impossible. Nobody will get the support they need, it will be, I will become anxious they will become, yeah, they will think that they don't, yeah.

Paul Jones 19:47

Yeah. So one of the areas I've been trying to explore as well. So the typical contract for a T&R member of staff would be split up 40% teaching, 40% research and then 20% administration stuff. So I'm keen to get your thoughts on how that works in reality, then, because this idea, is just an idea, and for people it works very differently then.

DBA7 20:08

I had this in [redacted] we had a digital workload, every person could access it, not, I don't know if you could access it per se, but every, for every department, there was someone who could access it and it covered everything. So already in [redacted], now my co-author, they have, so you start, you have something, I don't know, 1200 hours per year, something like this. Already the 40% time of research is there. So you work with the rest of the time...

Paul Jones 20:41

Yeah.

DBA7 20:41

...and then, but it's about inputting everything. So, PhD supervision, you have something like 90 hours per year, okay, every PhD student, because this is what the formal UK policy, something like, three years, so you have two supervisors, or what is the percentage, split by two. So then you have three PhD students, or four or five or six, at some point, I had six here at Aston, not first, but still have to go to meetings, etc. Everything is part of this, okay? Everything is part of the workload, then you input everything, you put student numbers there, used for dissertation marking, which they were like coming and coming and coming and I mean, if the student didn't have a clue about their deadlines, they were, I mean, I couldn't provide any information about that. Because in my department, at some point, we had people joining us across the year. I don't know, I just mark, I just have meetings when they want me to have meetings, and I have no clue when they submit. When is there a deadline? Obviously, it's beyond me to keep track of every master student... ..okay? So, but everything was in, was there. And so you knew, and in, in, in, yeah, in all of these things, like, colleagues who teach on a module with 1000 students, this is and they this is just one module, and they have to teach, I don't know, 3, 4, 5 on top, everything is taking into consideration, then you can talk about development, probably, then you can see. So assessing who takes advantage of this development is a key thing, then assessing obviously, make this part of workload.

Paul Jones 21:58

Yeah, because I think unless ... everything fills up, but I think from previous conversations and my, my, my recollection of what people have told me, the teaching can expand quite easily in terms of becoming more than the 40%, depending on what's going on, so then the research gets squeezed then, because the administration stuff you do, that tends to take up 20%, at least, of your time. So it always seems to be research quite often that gets pushed down or we have to reduce how much flexibility you have to do your research, then, that seems to be commonly what happens with people is that the teaching can expand, the administration expands, and there's always research that has to reshape itself to fit around the other things you've been asked to do then.

DBA7 22:27

Sorry, is your project only based in Aston?

Paul Jones 23:24

Yes. So it is about staff in this college, in particular, my plan is for the DBA, get the DBA done as part of, within Aston, because I've got to do the impact part, so I can make changes at Aston, based on the findings from Aston. If I want to look at publications for the future, then what I'll probably do is add a quantitative element on at the end to think about how I can expand my research on a quantitative basis. But then maybe look at the Midlands Innovation universities to think about getting a questionnaire together to see how that corresponds for Aston's environment and culture versus other ones. And whether the themes are consistent with other universities, then, that will make it more suitable for making publication possibilities easier, probably by mixing both types of methods, and expanding the reach of what I've done then. So that's the plan in my head about how I can expand it for the future. This is about recollections or reflections on professional development within Aston to see what we can do better as a, as a way of doing it, but from the bottom up, then, because one of the questions I come on to is about external influences. But I think, from my perspective, there's lots of external influences that then influence us to make decisions about what we train people on and what's important. And we've got a very limited budget as a University and then all those things go towards what makes a difference for meeting those accreditations or different things out there. We don't listen to people in what they need. And this is what this is about then, is thinking, what do individuals need, and want and what are they feeding back about what's good and bad? And how to bring that together into a cost effective way of making individual needs, taking into account a lot of people's opinions.

DBA7 25:12

So at the moment, they, they, I don't know if we have 40% teaching, because they are, there's no, the allocation is very abstract. To give you an example, I think we have, I don't know, on a teaching and research two modules per term, or two something like this, which, when I joined, it was two modules per year, then it became, and I remember that, I remember this from the interview, they said no, at Aston it's always two modules. Because with the workload that we had in [redacted], of course, they were at some point, they would be, some people may have been a bit off. But they managed it, okay, that, but, the thing is, then suddenly, it became two modules per year, per term, and on the conversation I had informally with someone they said, oh, the ex manager thinks that it's, even this is too little. But on what, what, what is, what is the, who assesses this? What are the criteria? On what basis we're talking? So I don't know if it's 40%? What I know is it can, it can easily expand. And it expands on a very, very, what's the word I'm looking for ...arbitrary way...

Paul Jones 26:37

Right.

DBA7 26:38

...okay? Someone comes up one day and says, this is my experience at Aston. You need to teach this now, we are going to need to teach more from now on. Why? Why? Why? Do you think I have? How many lives do you think I have? 10? No! Teaching, I mean, there is known, it's a, it's a, decisions are arbitrary about this, okay? What is the workload? Who teaches what? How? The expansion, I mean,

show me the policy, or show me the workload or don't come and say you need to do more of these, because where will I feel this? Okay, so where's the time, where, I mean, where will I fit this? Sorry, where is my time, or, anyway, there is no consideration. There is only some, some decisions, at some level that yeah, so yes, and then admin is huge. So I, from, I started when I joined [redacted] years, I stayed at Aston, okay, so I started from when I started, I was teaching the [redacted]. Plus, I was sharing a module in the [redacted] program. I was teaching the [redacted], twice per year, and I was sharing a module in the [redacted] program, okay, and they had an admin role. And from that, so I was co-teaching a [redacted] module. Okay, that's it. From that, I went up to teaching, going through all the development of the [redacted], obviously, which was not accounted in terms of time, okay, with [redacted]. Teaching [redacted], twice per year and this module that they were sharing, I ended up teaching it all by myself across both terms...

Paul Jones 28:35

Right.

DBA7 28:37

...okay? And this is huge, in terms of my time, because this is a core module in the [redacted], I had at some point [redacted] students, and it has three assignments. Okay, Three assignments every term, it has individual reflection, it has exams, and it has group, and it's a mess. Okay? And not only I had to teach this across both terms, plus the [redacted], and the [redacted] because it the [redacted] falls outside of the time, I was starting teaching the first week of [redacted], and I ended up finishing end of [redacted] with no break, because I'm taking the first but you see the [redacted], the [redacted] is 12 weeks. Now obviously, this module is more advanced, because [redacted] were a good group. [redacted] had no questions, but then I realised, people didn't read, so I had to prepare for every webinar, I have to lecture. I prepare slides for every single thing because otherwise there was no conversation and now then I realised people expect me to do this because they prefer me to summarise the key points rather than than them reading. So anyway, I start in [redacted], then mid [redacted], it finishes and then teaching comes in November when I have all the three assignments coming for, and then during Christmas, I have all the [redacted] exams.

Paul Jones 28:52

Right? Yeah.

DBA7 30:04

Okay, and then the [redacted], I start second round, round two of the [redacted]. Okay, and then all of the [redacted] module kicks in. And then all of the marking and the presentations. And last year, now, when was it? Last year? I had to do this twice per week. So not only I had to teach the whole module myself or the assignment, but they splitted the group. So they said, okay, keep the material so use the three hours as a seminar, but it's too big of a module to have had [redacted] students to have one, one seminar or whatever, still, the expectations of you lecturing and having slides is there, even for that bit of less time and also do activities, but they split it into two groups. So I had to do this twice per year for modules, but across four, two days per week for, so it was, a, it's a lot. Oh, plus last last year, they had the online for those, because they allowed people to join in January. So I had to do for one module, and believe me Paul, I, throughout my career, I have always, I only taught this module. I negotiate very well.

Paul Jones 31:35

Yeah.

DBA7 31:35

I mean, I say this is the only thing I do, please give me a module that is called [redacted], [redacted], it's exactly the same in all universities. It doesn't change more or less. You are the one, I always had the session on [redacted]. Someone is a bit more focused on [redacted]. They have movement, but we've covered this same, [redacted], [redacted], whatever. The [redacted], okay, all this stuff. So. And for the module that I've been teaching for [redacted] years, I had to spend more than half of the week. It's a lot.

It's a lot because I didn't start yesterday, I had all the material for during COVID for to prepare the lectures and all the material and everything. I was spending two and a half to three days. Okay. I had to record everything. Okay. I think it was difficult for everyone. It was difficult also, because I'm not a native speaker. And sometimes, and also, it's my style that sometimes I may lose track, okay, from what so like, I make huge, yeah, I mean, I may change topic easily, and they may come back so I had to be very careful of how do I do the recordings. I, I had books up and I had I was, so not to lose track to make to help the students obviously understand more, etc. Three hours, three days per week, three days per week to do the recordings and everything and to deliver it's a lot, okay. COVID. It's, it's like that. Okay, your, your but, but last year was not, was recovery from COVID. But they didn't care about our time. They didn't consider the time and everything. It didn't count. There was no accountability for the fact that oh, it was only [redacted] is doing the [redacted] hours per week, it doesn't matter how many hours, because in the end, it will end, ended up being [redacted] hours per week plus one hour, online. Yeah, [redacted] hours per week, [redacted] hours per week for one module. Yes, imagine this, but this was not the only module, people teach more. And I had the [redacted] just that it's, it only coincided a couple of weeks. Okay. But [redacted], for example, do the second half of the [redacted] has to do the same plus the [redacted] or others face to face. We are all the, I mean, there is nothing, nobody talks about this. Nobody mentioned about this, we only hear that oh, ex-manager says that it's not enough what do you teach.

Paul Jones 34:32

Did you, that pivot then, during COVID, going back to professional development for, for you, during that time, did people help you with any skills to be able to put stuff online more effectively? Was there any type of help you got or were you just told go and do it and you just start to work your way through it then?

DBA7 34:51

So essentially, I was, okay, so there was one person from the, who I think actually then resigned, left the University, and this was a very helpful, man, I have to say, I don't remember his word, I think it was Paul his name.

Paul Jones 35:07

Paul Dyson?

DBA7 35:08

I think...

Paul Jones 35:09

Yeah he worked in either the TEL team or education team.

DBA7 35:12

Yeah! This is, this person, was the most helpful person I've ever met. He was always available, I think he has even given his number to students, people used, everyone used to call him. I didn't worry too much. I called him, I had a few discussions with him, I follow the same, I didn't worry too much. Because I thought, okay, because I had done the conversion of my module through [redacted]. So I knew, more or less, how an online for this kind of format may look like. I didn't do it, obviously the same length that the platform was style of layout. But I created, I numbered the activities, I had this pathway. So please read it first read these, then watch this video. So I had this very detail there. And I wasn't, didn't worry too much. I think me and [redacted], we both did it the same way. And it was picked up in group-mates. So we followed this. And so I didn't worry and what the other thing that I did to offset a bit the pressure is that [redacted] was teaching a kind of a similar module. And we said, okay, so we had more or less the say, to a different group of students, masters, and two different programs, [redacted] it's more or less similar modules, they are not this from the same program. And what we did, is that, okay, let's split the recordings. So at least we have a few differences. So she doesn't want the [redacted] and

I think I didn't want something, I don't know what else, well, so has, has to do two sections on [redacted], [redacted], so I kept only one and they had, and so we separated the recordings.

Paul Jones 35:12

Yeah.

DBA7 35:20

You see? So I shared mine, and she shared hers, and some of the activities and we, and then we obviously, we, we, so, and this was very helpful, because at least for a week, you had a break, you had, you could work on the recording for later for your session. So yeah, but it was crazy.

Paul Jones 37:31

So that's really interesting about how you worked with the people in the department, and about the Key-path modules, because there is an idea there that you learnt things by osmosis, who haven't been involved in that experience, that you wouldn't have known or be taught otherwise. But you able to pick that up and think what they've done there is really good, we could mirror that. There's lots of people who don't teach on the [redacted] modules that wouldn't have seen that, which then, that information isn't passed across then. And that's a potential gap where if we've got that type of expertise, that have seen different ways, how we share that type of information becomes really important because I get frustrated that people are doing really good things, but they haven't got the time to be able to pass those on so that other people can learn then, because that's part of the barrier that we've got at the moment.

DBA7 38:21

Yeah, there is no communication there, no, nothing is, is passed across then, it's not, uh, somehow... uh, okay. I don't know how to, how to pin it and make it explicit, but, I used to be before in [redacted] University, and which is a research university, which is similarly to Aston, let's say, it's a research university. Okay? I had and everyone much better knowledge of, let's say I was teaching on the master's program, I had much better knowledge of what are the modules that the students are told, who teaches the, the other modules, what probably is the types of assignment they have. I don't know how, but here in Aston is chaotic, is a chaos. I'll tell you something. When they first, I used to be Program Director in [redacted]. So [redacted] doesn't have separate teaching and research staff, it has only the staff on teaching and research, and everyone teaches so I was a lecturer and I was teaching with, I was co-teaching the module with [redacted], who is a professor, let's say, okay. So we split the module in half. So, what I'm, so everyone teaches the same. It's not, uh, obviously within the 40% and within the given role, so, if you are, if you, it depends on how many, I don't know, I don't remember if PhD students work accounted at the time, but now they count, and I know that at [redacted], they count, it depends also on other responsibilities. So if you have, a head of departments were on on a rotation, every three years, and it was always someone, an academic, probably a professor, and it was only three years they kept, and, so, but they could still teach some, or if you have this role, probably you don't teach as much. And you didn't, and, yeah, and so you, so everyone teaches somehow there was a much better grasp of the programs, of who teaches what, if you are as a program director, I used to be part of the group teaching committees, which were held by the head of the department or the deputy head. So I didn't know there was a better exchange of information. I knew what happens with this. Here, is a chaos. I said this, but I repeated because I have no clue. I only know I teach [redacted], who is in my module, from what programs, what other modules they have? I have no clue what modules people in my department teach. Because I think it's massive, or I don't know, there is no, there is no visibility of who teach, nothing! Yeah, so, when we, sorry I wanted to say that, when if, as a, as program director at the time, every year, there was a program handbook.

Paul Jones 41:50

Right.

DBA7 41:51

Okay, which it was more or less the same format, it used to say, the guidelines for the program, etc, then it captured the dissertation, because some programs they have the bizarre, surprisingly, the dissertation, which is like a big module, a double module, may not have, they may, some may have like different credits, that it's not, anyway, it captures so this, it shows the modules, it shows the, it, it, there is a table with all the modules that are taught, so I remembered I used to do this every year, every September, and I used to do, I mean building, obviously on previous version, just update the dates, etc. And then I used to circulate it to people who teach in the team. Okay. And people were asking for this. So they wanted to see what the program is, what is it again? So when they first came here, I remembered, I ask, I was asking that, I was asking for this kind of, I said, can you send me the program handbook? Can you send me? No, I think I was, people make... [redacted] may have perceived me as someone who is very extreme, like a person, because I was, and he said I'm only a lecturer, he said something like this, I'm only a program director, I don't know, maybe someone too demanding, and I, I was asking for this information. There is nothing of this kind, that is passing across, that is passed across staff. There is no, just the mo.... so, once I remember [colleague] said, what can you teach? I said [redacted], this is what I do. And he said, oh, this is the only thing you can teach? I mean [redacted] is huge. It has, there are so many, but, I said yes, this is the only thing I can teach, but I had no clue what else was there?

Paul Jones 43:50

Yeah. So you might have been able to you just didn't know even...

DBA7 43:54

Yeah, I didn't want anyway. But anyway, but, but, but there is something, maybe [redacted], so I mean, I could if I am, but I didn't know. I didn't know you see, there's so many. I don't know, anyway, there is no, from my point of view, there is no clarity, there has been no clarity of what are the modules, the programs, which module is for what, there is no clarity of what we can teach, in any way, yes, because in the end of the day, I need some change. I could have taught [redacted], for example. Okay? So these are all related. There what, there is no, I don't know. I don't know. No, no, it's not only about the titles and the module. So, although, what is it, what does this module involve? Because as I said, I don't know what my colleagues teach because the communication between colleagues in the department is almost doesn't exist.

Paul Jones 44:58

That was what I was picking up from what you were saying is that, to me, that issue about not knowing the modules is symptomatic of a poor way of communicating more generally. So the ideas about swapping good practice, that would be something I think that should exist within departments, having transparency of who's doing what. So if you want to talk to somewhere about the modules they were doing, you could do a note to speak to...

DBA7 45:21

Yeah, it's also indicative of the culture. Because a lot of these discussions do not, nobody has the time formally to start. Okay. Communication, formal communication, is one thing, it may, this information by emails maybe missed. It's about having the time and spend the time and also talk a bit about oh, my God, this group of students this year is really bad, or it's really good or no, there is no that kind of discussion, which has always been in my, in all the universities I've been, there has been this kind of a more informal communication or not, because who's gonna lie, okay, here are some good examples of, I mean, yes, we can share, but there has to be the, the, someone has to lay the ground for this kind of information to circulate you see. So there is nothing, it's like you are an individual, you say, hi. That's it. Some people, they don't even say hi.

Paul Jones 46:26

That's not the environment that I would think that relates to motivation...

DBA7 46:31

I'm, I'm told we are one of the best departments, so I don't know what it means. No, the reputation is, I don't know, that maybe we, we, we are good as a department, we are okay. We don't have massive issues, honestly. Honestly. Yeah.

Paul Jones 46:35

Who tells you that? That doesn't sound like a great working environment that is collegial, and that you work effectively together, and feel like you are in it together, and that seems like a very, almost lonely, experience about how you do things.

DBA7 47:02

Totally! So in the literature, there is this concept of communities of coping. Where actually, for those it's related to people who do emotional labor, so it was, it was in the US, for example, this back space, the teach them, to, to, to talk about or just to vent, really. And you need that! You need that otherwise you can't survive. We all know the system is crap. No? So you need this kind of community, of community of coping, to actually, to be able to share, to vent, to I don't know, just to, yeah, to talk about how you feel, there is nothing like this. Nothing, nothing. This is confidential, I know. This is something that I won't miss. Because I have to say being at Aston has been, it has been very convenient. Because I can walk to the university, which I love. Yeah, okay? But other than that, there is nothing else, apart from the relationship with some people that I can pin point, you see, I can say, okay, I had a good relationship with this person, this person, then that's it. I'm not gonna miss friends. So, I asked [redacted], I felt like I was very naive. I asked [redacted], when I first joined. So do you go out for drinks? Do you go out for drinks? I mean, because I wanted to meet people, the people in the department, there are still people I have never seen.

Paul Jones 48:37

Really?

DBA7 48:39

Because I joined six months before COVID. And then COVID. And now obviously, [redacted], so I have no interest. He said, we have never been out for drinks as a department, or even some colleagues. Nothing! Can you believe it? There are people here for 20 years!

Paul Jones 49:01

Yeah. That doesn't sound like the best environment.

DBA7 49:01

Exactly! I managed, I was responsible for an [redacted] before when COVID started, and obviously we had to cancel it. I asked someone from another department, and they said, [redacted] who actually is one of the few people I have a very good relationship with. Because I knew him from the [redacted] and he said, oh, I'm organising in the MAC, and we all enjoyed. And it's great, because as an away day, you need also to go out for a walk, you need to do, to change a bit, you see, and you need, and it's only, it's in these spaces that actually and over a drink that you can have this informal conversation or you can create this relationship with colleagues, is bonding and maybe collaborations... ..because all the people, most of the people, I work, we probably will, at some point, we found ourselves in the same institution.

Paul Jones 49:56

Yeah.

DBA7 49:56

So, and it's all this informal, and getting along with someone, and feeling comfortable. And so I said, let's do it at MAC, guess what? People said they have to take, there is no transport to go there. And we need to have it here or somewhere in the room in the, in the, like the East Side room, so that where the

train can take them or something, which I think it's ridiculous. Because from New Street, you can take a bus, you can take a taxi, how much is it? When I first came from London, I thought, I mean, it's four pounds. Okay, five pounds, we can share it. I didn't drive at the time either. I was happy. I mean, it could be, because it would be a nice thing. Yeah, so this is very miserable!

Paul Jones 50:49

It is, but what I find disappointing is that [redacted], there should be a drive in that department to do things in the right way and lead best practice opportunities about how it can be inclusive and how you generate a good working culture.

DBA7 51:35

Yeah.

Paul Jones 51:35

It's quite perverse, isn't it?

DBA7 51:36

Yeah!

Paul Jones 51:36

That such a horrible culture exists, when you all should know better about what it should look like.

DBA7 51:44

Exactly. And you can only try as much. So in the end, I gave up.

Paul Jones 51:50

Well, what is Einstein's, Einstein's definition of insanity, it's doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. And it seems like you've tried your best, but nothing was changing.

DBA7 52:01

Yeah, because I was really excited. I mean, when I came, I wanted to make, the, I joined the department, obviously. And yeah, but then, anyway.

Paul Jones 52:12

I find it strange to think that a department exists like that, because I think the most important thing for me is feeling that sense of camaraderie and solidarity in terms of being in it together.

DBA7 52:22

This may be my experience, I have to say, but I think this is not an experience we should disregard, because, in the sense that there are people there who are for, there for 20 years. And maybe they are comfortable, the way things are. But there are a few people because, the department has, is falling apart, there is high, huge turnover. And new people are coming all the time. And new people are leaving, they are not staying, like [colleague] is leaving, and she has been here for a year. Okay.

Paul Jones 52:57

From what you've described, all you describe when there is high pressures of workload, and none of the nice parts about doing a job, getting to know people, having the parts that make you happy through a job, it is just more and more work to do, nothing about sharing ideas, being able to build a rapport with people and bonds, none of those things.

DBA7 53:22

No, nothing. And all of these, they try to engineer this. But this doesn't happen, doesn't, it doesn't happen if you press a button. So we did as a group, we did, I don't know how much money they paid to bring, to bring [redacted] actually, able to say what to do, to do an activity so that we can come together

as a department. This is bullshit. I mean, first you need to ask, why do people, why, why people, first you need to ask if people feel that they belong into, into this, into this team, if they feel as members of the team, they don't take into consideration. Second, they brought two old [redacted] in retirement, and because they were known, someone knew them, and to talk us, and we, so as, so the assumptions were that you have a very traditional life that reproduces the societal expectations. Okay. And [redacted] said, I said, yeah and everyone and they assume that everyone, they assume that everyone, was born in the post industrial world, so it was terrible. It was terrible and the idea, so we saw pictures of them [redacted], and how they bond relationship with the leader, very, I mean, maybe [redacted] years ago would have passed. And then we did an activity where actually we have to share our personal lives. Why? Why, out of the blue, I'm gonna sit here for an activity that takes for giving, you give me two hours, I'm going to share my, what's going on in my life. In my life. Who's going to, and I mean, this is, I, I, I struggle to understand that, that, that, how they did this, given that those who organised it, because obviously, I have to tell you, the reason we did this is that they, the top management said, we needs to do something like a bonding activity. But this is like, who manages like that? Who doesn't know and how the people decided to go ahead with this. Given that I mean, what are we? I mean, who's going to share their life? How and be, and be, I mean, when there is no trust, between us, in the relationships? Honestly, I don't know who to trust. Okay, so this is why it's, it's a burden for me, because I don't know who to talk to. Okay. And there is no, so then, how do you expect me to spend two hours, of course I went, and I thought, and they said that I really enjoyed it, and it was like a great exercise, but it was like, because this is what you should say, right? Yeah, but it was, what was this? I'm going to share my life?. No, I have my life, which has been obviously, whose life is linear? Everyone has ups and downs. Okay? No, it was everything. I was very lucky. I said in my life. Anyway...

Paul Jones 55:39

There's lots of things that I've seen happen, which we do to people, rather than asking them what they need and being reactive to that. And that's a good example there, where, someone has said, we need to do something about the problem of not being engaged as a culture, or community, or working together, so the immediate, the immediate response is then, let's do something, not talk to people, and engage people in conversation about what would work really well, and getting everybody in the department to co-construct an idea of doing something together to bond people, it's like, we've got a problem, let's quickly think of a solution and put that in place and do it to people.

DBA7 57:33

Yeah, so, anyway, it is, yeah, it's bad. So you can, and there are people who are 20 years here, probably they have some relationship, it doesn't, apart from a couple, I don't think generally people don't have relationships. I wouldn't, I couldn't, stay in work like this. I don't know. And I have to say that, that at Aston, the the other thing, I mean, what I experienced is, with this is very personal, though, I cannot even trust the HR department. No the general HR, but the person who does the HR for business school.

Paul Jones 58:06

Right.

DBA7 58:07

I had a very bad experience. And anyway, I think because, anyway, yeah, I cannot, I, so I wouldn't do for example, an [redacted] if they asked me with, with this person, right? Because it's not someone I could trust.

Paul Jones 58:27

Yeah, that's fair. Well, you can only be, you can only base those judgments on your experiences. And there will always be fluctuations in terms of individuals.

DBA7 58:36

You need to consider that I have this experience, because I've been in a number of universities. I am new. So, and I didn't feel that I was included. Yeah. Okay. So...

Paul Jones 58:49

Yeah, it's really disappointing.

DBA7 58:50

...yeah! And then they tried, obviously, there's some very, like everywhere, there are very nice to you, when I'm not saying it's not people are not nice. It's just, there is no communication, this like relation, yeah, this relational aspect of work is missing totally.

Paul Jones 59:06

Yeah. No, I get that sense that it's, I've got a [redacted] in that department, so it is disappointing to hear that's the way it operates then. It doesn't surprise me that people are leaving if there isn't that glue that should hold them there then, because part of what does work well at Aston sometimes is that people feel they are really part of something special, that it's a good environment. People have been here for a long time. It feels like a friendly place for a lot of people.

DBA7 59:32

Only for convenience, I would say.

Paul Jones 59:34

Yeah, and I think it comes into academia quite a bit though, is that, and you can tell me if I've got this wrong, but academics generally are very focused on wanting to do their research. So whoever the employer is, whether it's Aston or others, they are just the people paying the paycheck to be able to get that person to be able to do the research. You can take your research with you and continue doing that. So the employer isn't that important in the greater scheme of things, it seems to be a sector that allows for easy transportation of skills.

DBA7 1:00:07

Yes, but, if you have an opportunity, so I, so I have, I have colleagues, okay, and another friend in another university, and she was at the point where she was applying for promotion to senior lecturer and, and nearby, there are a number of universities that they had positions open. And I said, why don't you apply and also we know some people that moved from the university and went to the other University and she said, yeah, I could, but it's not the distance, etc, but I feel so comfortable in this department. I like it so much. So, she was prepared to stay, she got the promotion, but she was prepared to stay a bit longer only for this because she liked the environment. And so between us, when I said I'm leaving, then I received an email that said, from [redacted], who said, what can we do for you to stay at Aston? And please come back to me and let's have a chat and I thought, I don't think they would have given me [redacted] anyway. But even even this, I thought, really, I don't want to negotiate because there is nothing in this department to keep me, and I wouldn't even have been so, you see, did have no connection, but if I had connect, some connection, I would have been even, probably, I would have negotiated a bit, even if they said, okay, apply next year for [redacted] Yeah, maybe yes. Maybe I would have considered, do you see?

Paul Jones 1:01:20

This is where I think we get things wrong at the moment, is that because that market is quite transient, if we're going to do a very good job of keeping people and making people want to stay, then the environment has got to be right. And that stems from everything from the recruitment process, and making sure that's done well, the induction process, which I've seen done very badly, then the cultural environment of what the departments are like, getting research...

DBA7 1:01:45

And the school, the culture of the school as well.

Paul Jones 1:02:00

...yeah, the culture of the school, getting the research leadership right, where, you have senior people in the department, which are starting to coach, mentor, are a constant source of both information, but also inspiration, to try and help you along the pathway. There's all these things that could work really well to create the culture and environment that people buy into, and want to be part of, more than just going to another university to get a promotion. We don't seem to do that very well, in terms of getting the culture and the environment right, in terms of thinking if we do this, people want to stay, we get more traction, because people are here. They're more committed to Aston because they really enjoy being here. Everything fits together then, but at the moment, that environment perspective seems very difficult to get right.

DBA7 1:02:59

Yeah.

Paul Jones 1:03:00

There's some other questions that I've got around some of the bits on this. So we talked about teaching and research, and some of the balances in the role then, and so one of the other interesting questions is, we talk about teaching, research and administration, there is a big part about how we communicate research out, so external engagement, that doesn't factor into workload really, either. Is that quite a big and important part of what you see as your role then? And have you had enough training to do that well?

DBA7 1:03:28

It is an important part because obviously, we don't live in a vacuum, okay. So, I need to, I need to, I mean, I need to do this for my career, right, it is important obviously ties with my research, I need access to people, to organisations. So it is an important part. It, but it, it has to be again, it, there has to be a logic behind these, you cannot ask people do external engagement. So for example, I had a paper published in [redacted], which is a top journal, this paper took a long time. Okay. The, from the idea, let's say, from the conception to publications, it started probably before I come to Aston. Then the publication took whatever, a few years, maybe one year and a half, so the review process, and it was very interesting, and then we wanted to, we wanted to extend this idea obviously, apply for a grant. And, but, and we, we, when we wrote, we said okay, let's, let's write for the conversation, for Harvard Business Review. But everything, so there has to be a reason for doing this. So we had to wait, the reason for publishing in The Conversation or for HBR, Harvard Business Review, it's to showcase your research, you cannot publish any time, what's the reason, it has to have a link related to your article, you see. So my title is blah, blah, blah, new research shows, whatever, so it is, there is time for all these activities, okay, so we did this, then we spent time with, and then in the summer we did this article, okay, etcetera, so I put, I put a grant based on this, I will probably put a bigger grant with co-authors, I put a fellowship, so there has to be everything is needs to have a logic. Okay, so, and I don't have the time, we don't again, it's about time, okay, so it needs to be part of your, and I know, I know it doesn't, it's not really part of it doesn't measure there, but if you have exactly 40% teaching and administration, or whatever, 40% research, then if you, this is measured appropriately then you can probably do a bit of this.

Paul Jones 1:05:49

Two seconds, let me just start recording on this one again because someone just tried to ring me. So this backup recording stopped, that's better

DBA7 1:06:00

Okay. So yeah, so show you more, I'm, I'm happy obviously, it's a lot of work, it's really a lot of work, okay, to do this, it's really a lot of work as an individual to go out and convince people, etc. And there are a few problems here. So, see those people. So because you are pushed all the time to live and to change universities and probably to change areas, it probably means you cannot develop very deep roots in one particular area. So if you see [redacted], he is very successful in doing this, okay. And he's, this is, this is the only thing he does, which is amazing, but [redacted] is, was born in Birmingham, grew up in Birmingham throughout his career he never left. Never, he never left. He never lived West

Midlands. He was in De Montfort for all his, for the majority of his career, and then he moved briefly to University of Birmingham and then Aston, because if he moves to Scotland, if he moves to Aberdeen, what is he gonna do?

Paul Jones 1:07:12

That network that he has developed and everything that he has got in place...

DBA7 1:07:16

Yeah! So then he has to say okay, oh, Citizens UK, can you connect me with Citizens UK Aberdeen, can you Scotland, whatever. So, international staff, a lot of obviously our staff in academia is international because this idea of mobility and working with, is valued for research purposes. Okay. So you cannot expect people to do, one person to do everything, to be high performing on research, teaching, excellent teaching evaluations, and do whatever, hundreds of hours of supervision across levels, do an engagement etcetera, it is, people will burn up, people burn out, they, I mean, they are and, and, and, let's let's face it, is it the same for me being in the UK and the same being in [redacted]? Is it my credibility? No, my legitimacy is not the same, first of all, second, I studied in for, it's not that I live in yet, not yet in the UK 20 years, okay, maybe if I wasn't 20 years, probably I would have that, and I still have developed okay, and then it depends on the area for some people, some people's research area can be more easily communicated for example, and some other people, it cannot be so easily communicated and you don't have the support. I am really keen to publish for non-academic journals, to, to, to write okay, it takes me an awful lot of time to convert the ideas, because I don't know if, it because of the nature of the theory that because every time you contribution is, it's about theory development, right? So, say this and write it, I need help. I need someone probably to bounce off the ideas for or off. But I don't have someone like this. I don't have someone who can sit with me, let's say or read my paper and give me some advice of how to convert things. So I do it on an ad hoc basis, when they can. Okay, and again, I still feel bad because they, they, they the pitch for the wider audience doesn't really reflect the depth of my study, may be okay, It's okay. But yeah, I don't, I can't, and I have tried. I have tried with almost every paper to have something out but it's not possible.

Paul Jones 1:09:48

And again, It comes back to time as well, because writing for those different audiences, it's hard to change your writing style. Even if you were a native speaker, but then given that you have got the other barriers of being from a different country, it's very hard to spend that time, which would be more time trying to convert stuff, and it's difficult anyway, because you're taking a complex thing, and trying to dilute it down into his basic things. So it's almost like your research, the light version, to get to an audience. And that's a difficult thing to do, that.

DBA7 1:10:20

Yeah, it's very difficult.

Paul Jones 1:10:21

And it is not valued by the university, probably, that much as well.

DBA7 1:10:26

No, and I think one of the things that they cut here, I think, it was quite bad. They cut the, uh, the fund, we don't have any funding to pay for proofreading, and the proofreaders, they don't proofread, because I don't want someone to just proofread, but I want someone to have a look, to have a look at this abstract for a lay audience, and make it more, you see, friendlier for this. If you are, if we are three academics, publishing very, very well and having like strong ideas, then maybe we have okay, the abstract is never perfect for the lay audience. Okay. Okay. They said someone else will do it, the research office, they don't always do it. So you need, my friend in [redacted], so they have always, there is not, not only she sends every paper, this is to a proof reader, and this is how I know someone, she sends every version of the article so she has an R&R, and may, sometimes R&Rs have major rewrite, rewriting, okay? She sends it to the proofreader. Again, until it's published, they sometimes, I mean, we work

together, so we did this, and they know, when the feedback from the proof reader, and the changes may be minimal, maybe, but even with that, you understand that maybe, okay, this is something that doesn't come across the way we want. Okay. And especially, obviously, when we have to write for the lay audience, etc, right? It becomes more complicated. It's not that we because this is something also you learn by submitting and getting rejected so many times, but again, it's good to see how people correct this, and how they make it, etc. So yeah, and we don't, we cannot have someone here, we cannot pay for this type of work, and we cannot even deliver it, because I review grants, but I cannot comment on the, on the, I cannot edit the grant, and I can't the proposal or the paper. And of course, I cannot write the lay whatever, the abstract.

Paul Jones 1:10:51

It comes down to the problem mentioned time as well is that, the idea is that people share stuff and they, you'd comment on other people's, they'd comment on yours, but trying to get in operation when you haven't got time, but also the relationships aren't there to really know who's the best person for you to work with, and build up some rapport with a person, to have confidence in their ability, but also just have the sense you get on well with that person, because part of it isn't just getting the academic viewpoint, but it's much better to share ideas with someone that you get on well with, and got some rapport with as an individual, not just this static cold back and forth with people.

DBA7 1:13:22

Yeah! And for me, this has been an issue here, because I couldn't find people to supervise PhD students with. I don't know, in my department, there is no, almost no one, who does [redacted] research. I mean, I'm not looking for someone who does [redacted], or [redacted] or whatever I do, but I'm just looking for someone who can be a good addition. So, I don't know, I don't know who in the department, there is no one, and across the university, across the departments, I know I have heard some names, but I have never seen them. So, I don't know what they do. And in the end, I ended up supervising students with people from [redacted] because, I can read what they did, straight forward, or from [redacted], and, and now this is bad, because, this is bad in the sense that now, my PhD students, I'm [redacted], and they [redacted], don't have the capacity, so, but, they will finally they will be [redacted]. They are two students in business management. The supervisors are one in [redacted] and one in [redacted], okay, they do, they do research, the [redacted] can understand, obviously, it's the theoretical things etc. But isn't it important that, you know, the journals, the standard of the journals, and the literature in organisation, some of this, one of these, these students, wants to have a career in academia, and they are good, why deprive them from these because we don't have enough, or because of the [redacted]. So, it's like, it affects, it's, it trickles down to students development.

Paul Jones 1:15:16

There will be an expectation, as well, from an [redacted] point of view for [redacted], about the research expertise that a student, that is a [redacted] student, should be getting. And while I can see that those people could do a good job in terms of understanding the processes involved with producing a thesis at the end of the doctoral journey, the context of [redacted], and the things you are doing, that wouldn't be there as much then.

DBA7 1:15:42

So, this is what I think, because, you see when I say, there is a literature in [redacted] about collectives, and the role of collectives, and in particular [redacted], let's say, someone who does [redacted], they may do [redacted], of course, they know, that they don't, and they don't know this, they are not familiar with this literature. So, all the, or even, the conferences that we go to in [redacted], you see, all these are the people who may be reviewing I mean, anyway, but it is what it is.

Paul Jones 1:15:45

Yeah, there's a couple of other things I wanted to check past you as well. So you mentioned right at the start of us talking about all the different things that can affect professional development. Is the external

environment, so things like REF, TEF, KEF, are those important to you in terms of drivers for your activity in your role? Or do they sit towards the sides, somewhat, how important are they?

DBA7 1:16:40

Oh, no, no, they are very important.

Paul Jones 1:16:41

All of them, or one more than others?.

DBA7 1:16:44

The one that has impact on me is REF. Because TEF, I mean, the depth is measured internally, in the sense that you need to have, your evaluations needs to be 4.5 out of 5, I think it's too high. Yeah, no, 4 out of 5, sorry, 4 out of 5, in Newcastle it was 3.5 out of 5. I think 4 out of 5 is a huge expectation. Ahh, and one of the feedback of my promotion, like, after they passed this around, is my, my, my evaluations have been very good. They said you need to have better evaluations, as if this will stay change my team. I mean, they didn't say have a better teaching style, or I don't know, it's a, you need to have a better evaluation. So they don't know, we don't care what you're gonna do, because, yeah, change the evaluation, anyway,

Paul Jones 1:17:08

There is a perverse relationship, isn't there, between teaching evaluations, and the teaching experience, and giving people good learning opportunities. And giving the students really good learning opportunities, doesn't necessarily make them give you good evaluations.

DBA7 1:17:55

No, and obviously, we know how all this, all the biases about [redacted] having an effect, do you know, how many times I got into comments that they cannot understand me. I think I have a very intelligible accent. But, you won't believe the amount of time they say that, I couldn't understand this, because [redacted] has a monotonous voice. But this, is in part, is in my evaluation, you see, then this student will give me 2 out of 5 or 3 out, you see what I mean? Or, yeah, this one, many times so, but, what can I do? Or, [redacted] sounds better in the recordings, because I read, you see, I used to, I used to for every slide, in order to be focused and don't speak for five minutes and speak for 50 seconds. I was reading, I know, I was reading from books, I had, it was a full, it was ready, I mean it was like a whole thing actually, set up with books, what to read from them, so that I'm very accurate and also within the time frame that they need. And I not go over and over. Lots of work to do this. Okay. I was not just relaxing on my sofa just recording, no, I was like very, anyway, and I had these [redacted] sounds better in the recording. I don't think they realise that some of the recordings were mine, some were of course [redacted] voice. They just heard an accent, and it was like, it's an accent, anyway, rather than in person, so do you think this doesn't actually impact on the valuation? Of course it does. I don't have a very, yeah, anyway. So. So TEF is, is, is affecting me in that, affects me in that way, you see, because for every module I teach, I need to have very good evaluations. KEF, I don't know, I mean, I'm doing it as I said on an ad hoc basis, I do whatever I can, within, within the circumstances, by myself, and then the REF is the one that affects me, mostly, because this is what the sector looks for mostly, at the minute, it drives the sector. And anyway, we all learn, we have been socialised in the sector, by, with knowing that, uh, you're, you, what makes an academic is the research, and what is, what, what you can trade is your research. So you can trade off to compensate, your research, to compensate for whatever other stuff, but I'm not doing only this, okay, because I'm aware, and they wants to do more. So I want to, for example, to give evidence to this parliamentary committee, so if I have something, okay, just it doesn't happen, it needs consistency, continuity. Yeah. So it needs, hopefully, in the future, so it is part of my mind, but obviously, my first priority is REF.

Paul Jones 1:21:16

It's interesting, isn't it, that you see REF as the most important out of those things. But yet, the part in your role gets squeezed the most is the research part, because the teaching could quite easily grow, as

we talked about earlier. But the part that really matters to you, is the research part. And that's the part that becomes this, potentially, smaller and smaller part sometimes depending on what is on your workload.

DBA7 1:21:38

It is the part, I'm not saying teaching, it doesn't matter, of course, I want to be, I think, uh, it's part as an academic, I want to teach, okay, probably, but not, not snowed under teaching. Okay, there is a difference. You can, I, I, I, think I will always want to teach, because I really enjoy talking to people about the things that I do and when I talk about bring, I bring, regularly examples from my own research in class at any level, so it is nice. But then, but the thing is a teaching is considered by institutions as a given. And research is where actually, it's not only I put more value, I put value, because obviously it's part of you become an academic who wants to do research. But it's also what drives the sector. Okay? And the competition and where it actually how you position yourself. And it has this also symbolic value. If you publish, you see, as a reputational thing, it affects a lot of your symbolic value as an academic.

Paul Jones 1:21:39

It is all related to your identity, isn't it? It is about how you perceive your identity, but also how others perceive you, then, because, as you said about teaching, as long as someone can teach, they're not worried. As long as there's good scores from the evaluations. It's not about being an expert in teaching and good teaching practice. It's getting good scores from students, where the research is much more quality focused. That's where the kudos comes from, as well, isn't it, about developing a reputation. You won't be known around the world for being a good teacher, you will be known around the world for being really good in this research field.

DBA7 1:22:54

Yeah, so, and, and, and it's also, it is not that straightforward, okay. You always need to continuously develop and expand especially, if, I mean, you need to to enjoy it, okay, because obviously good research comes from something that bugs you probably, and you want to take it forward, and you want to see what happens. And I have always collected data myself, even when, so, and I will, go and hopefully gonna end, I mean, I say this now, and I hope it is, that I will continue doing this, because I really enjoy doing this. So, yeah.

Paul Jones 1:24:06

That's good. I think I've covered everything I need to, and we're on 1 hour 24 minutes. So I will bring us to a close now.

Appendix 11: DBA8 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA8

Paul Jones 00:00

Good. Great, so started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study, entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour though we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end, the interview is semi structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. Though the idea is that I do that with the least number of questions or interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised and it will be impossible to withdraw. You can withdraw by emailing me the details that are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as an individual, for example, your personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals that will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk. If you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hands so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate this, by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress. Or if I am feeling distressed myself. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start. And then we'll move on to explore your experiences regarding professional development. For the interview record. This is interview DBA, eight. Please confirm you understand the information I've given you. Is that okay?

DBA8 01:58

Yes, I do. Yes.

Paul Jones 01:59

Great. You're happy to proceed with the interview?

DBA8 02:03

Yes, yep.

Paul Jones 02:04

And do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA8 02:09

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:10

Great. So can you confirm for me what school you work in?

DBA8 02:16

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:19

Thank you. And can you confirm your gender please?

DBA8 02:22

Ah, [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:26

And are you on the teaching and research contract?

DBA8 02:30

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:33

Two more questions would you describe your career level as one of the following, early career, mid career or senior career?

DBA8 02:45

Mid career.

Paul Jones 02:46

Thank you. And could you go through which age bracket you're in 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, any of those relevant so far?

DBA8 03:01

[redacted].

Paul Jones 03:03

Great, thank you. So just moving on now to more explorations of professional development. Can you tell me a bit about how you understand professional development, and also how you've experienced that while you have been at Aston, or while you have been at other places.

DBA8 03:20

So broadly, I would say professional development is providing opportunities for an individual to get better at their current post. But also to, also aligned with their, their own sense of career trajectory. And what they want to do. So it's a way of enabling people to... opening up opportunities for people to either improve in their own position or see potential avenues for them moving forwards, I think that is a very broad definition. But I suppose, it's sort of a working one. I've experienced that in many different forms in many places. I mean, before I worked in higher education, I worked in [redacted] education. And I think that there is very different, very, very different even though I was, I left that, you know, [redacted] years ago, and it's probably changed a bit now. So, you know, there are sort of very broad opportunities that can get offered courses, programs, sort of opt in, you know, opportunities, whether they're internal or external, or, or I suppose what I saw more of in [redacted] education was more personalised opportunities. So things being targeted at an individual, and that aligns much more closely with things like performance management, which was the, well, in my experience of higher education, it's been lightyears ahead in [redacted] education. I think we're, we're a long way behind how that kind of worked. So yeah, it's a, I've seen different models of it. I've seen it done badly. I've seen it done well, I think where it's done well, it's, it's personalised it, it's seen as something that is owned as well by the individual. And there's a sense of, you know, choice and co-construction of those opportunities, as well as things being kind of foisted on you, where it's done badly, I think, is the sort of, you know, here's a course you might want you might be interested in. Inevitably, then they're not particularly good and not particularly useful. I have myself, having been told to go on a course for [redacted] here, in the summer, which looked exactly the same as the sort of things that I was doing [redacted] years ago, pulled out two weeks ago and said, I'm not doing it. I don't think that's a good use of my time. That's not, it's not gonna develop me in any way. Because it's stuff that I was, I was doing [redacted] years ago, I've been a [redacted] and a [redacted] in education for a long time. That's not partic... it's not particularly helpful for me to be doing stuff that is, is like that. I mean, there are other things that would be useful for me, I've managed to have that conversation with my line manager, who was very supportive and has a)

allowed me to withdraw from that course, and b), you know, give me a sense of how I might use my time in a different way, that's, that's better for me.

Paul Jones 06:27

There's a number of things that spring to mind there, it's really interesting the difference that you've seen between your previous experiences in [redacted] education, and also what you experience now. And, it mirrors own thinking in terms of the differences, what you said to me there... one of the big differences is how you felt it was personalised to you when you were in [redacted] education. Whereas I get the impression now, it's just broad based courses where people get the option to go on to if they want, rather than being a tailored approach to thinking how can I get the best out of this person or opportunities they need to accelerate their career then. Is that about right?

DBA8 07:07

I think so. I mean, I was in [redacted] education a long time ago. So it might, be my memory might be a bit, a bit less effective than it was then. But I think that that's true. Yeah. Not to say I didn't experience bad practice as well in [redacted] education or less effective, helpful practice. But I get the sense, I do get the sense here. And when I say here, I mean, HE not necessarily Aston, that it's a, it's, it's not seen as particularly important. You know, we're, the focus is always on, get your teaching right, research, outputs, grant applications, and so on. And actually, sometimes, it's forgotten that sort of undone, underpinning all of that is professional development. Because if you don't, if you don't improve, if you don't develop, if you aren't given opportunities to reflect and so on, and you know, improve your practice, those things won't necessarily get better. So it's, it's a very sort of curious way of thinking about it. And I suppose also that, again, just just my experience, is that not everybody who is, how can I put it, in a role where they should be supporting the development of others is very good at that role, or probably has the support themselves to enable them to do it.

Paul Jones 08:41

Yeah, I think one of the interesting things you mentioned is that previous experience then, and so one of the questions I've been interested in for my research is, what difference external experience makes to people in terms of their job role, and particularly what experiences they brought with them to higher education, that have been particularly useful, that have filled some of the gaps that exist in higher education. But then we don't put ourselves through development opportunities, or the skills we provide people then, so I'd be interested to hear if you've noticed anything where those experiences have really benefited you from previous jobs, and you brought to higher education, they've really made a difference then, because I guess if there's gaps that exist, one of the things we could do in the future is try and fill those gaps.

DBA8 09:29

Yeah, so, so do you mean what, what experiences have I had that I've brought, brought in?

Paul Jones 09:35

Yeah, so any skills, or the experiences or ways you've developed because of other roles outside of HE, not things that HE has given you then, that you think are useful.

DBA8 09:46

Yeah, I mean, I was, you know, I held several posts in [redacted] education from [redacted] to [redacted] of [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] at the end. So I think a lot of those roles were where people focused, you know, you end up, you end up doing a lot of having developmental conversations. And sometimes the sort of other end as well in performance management. And your job, of course, in those sorts of roles is to help people get better at their jobs. That's what, that's what you're there for. So I suppose I've always seen that as important. And it's always been a focus of my role. You know, when I was a Program Director at [redacted], and a [redacted] and [redacted], and a [redacted], I've always kind of brought that. I suppose what I was mentioning earlier was sometimes not always visible here. I've, I've tried to bring that to my conversations I've had with my colleagues. Does that answer your question?

Paul Jones 10:52

I think so. I think we can explore it a bit more, so what you said to me there is about the people element, particularly about a lot of your roles have been around managing people, and doing that effectively, and probably gained the skills and experiences to do that in a really effective way. I think the way that higher education is structured, and you can correct me if I'm wrong, is different to what you think. But we have people go into roles where either they haven't got the skills or the motivation or aren't quite the right match to be leading people. It's almost like a rite of passage they have to go through even if it's not naturally aligned to their natural way of working or what they might be good at then. Would that be similar to your thinking?

DBA8 11:37

Yeah, I think I think that's right. I think that's what I was getting at before. But I've said that it, it, can be difficult I think sometimes if you're told you got to do this post or asked to do this post. And you know, you see it's important, because you know that unless you do these things, certain opportunities will be lost to you, e.g. promotion, and so on. But, but often, people don't have the support when they're in there. And sometimes it's not always clear to the people who should be supporting them what support they need, I think the, ... the performance management, my MDC sort of system we have here, doesn't really help because although it's a start, I think it's very hard to, to align that with personal development, and not to see it as a list of jobs that people have to do, or list of things they have to tick off to, you know, to get through promotion. When I, I think it's got better, when I first came here, it was dreadful, but it's got better. But there's still that kind of gap there, I think.

Paul Jones 13:01

If you could do things differently, then, yourself, so rather than being bound by what the university wants us all to do, what type of approach would you take then in terms of developing others and thinking about your own development?

DBA8 13:17

I think I'd like to, I think the MDC thing needs a revamp, I think that needs to be much more... I think it needs to be aligned in a way that was more constructive and less about, you know, that this sense of priorities, which the wording at the moment seems to suggest these are sort of task based things, even though we try and have, we have, I try and get away from that, in conversations, I have people still come to me and say, you know, here's my priorities for the year and they are, they just tasks basically, it's just things they should be doing, as part of their job anyway. So reworking that and rewording that would be a good start, I think... more more careful aligning of, of that, to things like promotion criteria, which is a really difficult one to think the university is, has done well actually, to try and open up some of these sort of myths around promotion and so on, but ... I still think, I don't, from my perspective, I think people still don't get that they, that promotion is, isn't just something you sort of think about, you know, when you when you think you nearer the, near ready, it's something you should be thinking about constantly, you know, as you move through your your career. And so reworking that, I think aligning that with MDC would be good, I think much more ownership of the kinds of things that would be useful. I think, inevitably, one size fits all courses are on, are not good. You know, the sort of thing that I've just pulled out of, I would, I would guess, even if it were sort of appropriate for me, would, would have been about 10% useful, 15% useful, and over six days, that's not a good use of time. Umm, so much more care taken into personalisation, co-construction of need, integrating sort of other methods such as coaching as well into that, I know the university again has, has, has made some steps with that, I've got a coach myself at the moment for something else, and I'm finding that particularly useful. So yeah, I think, I think just a sort of reworking from the bottom up would be good. Just generally, I don't think there's a, there's a one, there's, there's one method that necessarily works. But, but spending some time rethinking that. Uh...

Paul Jones 15:41

I think, from what you've been saying there, and my own experiences, that seems to come from the top down then, because if professional development, and development generally, isn't prioritised by the university, then we're always fighting a battle then, and the resources that go along to provide and support for that, then more limited, there isn't a focus on having those discussions, is all tied into how the university views things more generally then, one of the other things that I was interested in from the interviews I'm doing is about the influence of external factors. So things like REF, TEF, KEF, different external factors, and how much of a part that plays in your own development and whether you're trying to guide your experiences based on those outside factors, or were they very much about you as an individual, what your thoughts were, and what's shaping you to guide your career?

DBA8 16:37

I think the are, they are really interesting I mean the one that obviously probably impacts me the most, and us, us the most, you know, people in my sort of, same sort of track as me, is REF, of course. It's a, it's a tricky one, because I think... I think people can feel that they are constrained in what they do by by the demands of these external, you know, external structures, and ways of working. And sometimes that can be a good thing. Sometimes it can be a, a sort of really constraining thing, and a bad thing. And what I mean by that is, in terms of if you, if you're, if you're worried that what you're doing may be outside, you know, what's required for REF, and you may have a slightly different way of getting to a certain point that doesn't align with what you're being told is the right thing to do. You know, in terms of research, in terms of direction of research, when the most obvious thing is, and it's very localised at the moment is, of course, that we, in my department, there's a sense of you either aligned to what the Aston strategy is, or you're out, basically. And if your research doesn't fit into that, what do you do? And so, you know, I know colleagues who are spending a tremendous amount of energy, trying to realign themselves with these, these sort of, you know, these focuses that may or may not be what they want to do and may, or may, or may not be good for their career long term. So yeah, I think people do feel constrained by those. I suppose I've answered the question, but moving away from REF now, and talking about more Aston specific things around this so called vision. I mean it was most most marked, of course, when we had all this stuff, discourse, around the University of Technology, a couple of years ago. And people were panicking, and thinking, well, how can I show what I'm doing is valuable. And sometimes people will send the most ludicrous things, you know, really silly things about what they stood for, and, and sort of getting involved in all sorts of projects that they, I thought, would be detrimental to them, rather than being helpful. So it does, I know that's the situation we're in, and it may not get, it may not be any different from that as we move forwards. But I think there is a, yeah, academics do get very, very anxious and because research is probably the thing you get judged on the most that probably is the driver for the sort of ways in which you invest your time. And I suppose the long term, the long way around to the answer here is if you invest your time in ways that are probably not good for you short, medium, long term, then that's not developmental as such, that's just playing a game. And I think there's a lot of that going on.

Paul Jones 20:01

Yeah, and from what you've said, there's a tension between the passion and focus that have driven people to want to work in academia, and to have a topic they really want to get to know and become experts in, versus how that fits with the university, what they want to do then, and you're finding that balance between maintaining enthusiasm and motivation for what you're doing. But also balancing that with self preservation, and a future career, and not putting yourself at jeopardy then by the movements of the university and that seems like a really hard place to be in the middle of that.

DBA8 20:23

I think it is, yeah, for, and for some people, it's really difficult. And I think, you know, in my area, I've seen that in sort of various, various degrees. Because your identity is so tied up to, to what your research is, and that's the particular one, that's the reason you're hired in the first place, and then to be told that it's not not good enough anymore, you need to do something else. So these things aren't developmental. And that's a broader sense of development, I suppose. But the, these things, do not help people to become more confident or better or more skilled in their jobs because they increase anxiety.

And they decrease confidence and a sense of wellbeing, both academic and personal. And I know that's the situation we're in, REF isn't gonna go away, the university will always have its agenda, and its focuses, and so on. But you don't get that in [redacted], that's the thing that, this is the kind of thing you just do not get any, anything like that, any sense of at all. And that's because they have different priorities, I guess. But there isn't this... Yes... To put it bluntly, there will always be a need for [redacted], they're never going to lose your job or be told that you're not needed or whatever, or you don't don't fit to what the [redacted] wants, unless you [redacted] a very odd [redacted]. You know, it's something nobody does, but it's, it's that, I think, and so it's hard to, it can be hard to think about. And I had this sometimes, and I think MDC conversations I've had this year, we're not, we're not so much talking about where your career's going, as where you, where you might be in six months time. And for some people, they don't even know if they'll still be here. So that, that can be a real barrier to, to a high quality discussion about, you know, career trajectories and where you want to be, and so on. Because if you can't, someone says I can't think of what we'll be doing in three years time, because I'm just worried I'll have a job, full stop. You know, the conversation can't really go any further than that.

Paul Jones 22:38

Yeah, I think there's, from what you've said there, there's a difference between thinking about your career long term, and being given the tools and opportunity to really excel in what you do best, versus fighting for your life to some extent, about trying to justify why you should still remain part of the university and that's a very different place to put yourself in terms of how you think about your job, and what you're doing, and your motivations, the anxiety you mentioned. They're two very different ways of looking at your life, and your career and how you function in those environments then.

DBA8 23:12

I think so. Absolutely. And we've, we've also seen, you know, we've, we've seen other institutions, close departments, [redacted] departments, [redacted] department, we, we've, we've, we've got, you know, [redacted] closed in the summer, we, many of us got very good friends at [redacted] who now haven't got jobs anymore. So that, these, these are all, these are these these tensions in the sort of context of professional development, I think, that this year to answer your question, these external pressures are huge, and impact.

Paul Jones 23:51

So I've got a related question for you, and so from what you've said about research being very important, there's a balance in terms of contract. So on a teaching and research contract, the general balance is 40% teaching, 40% research, 20% administration. So two questions come to mind when we were talking. One was about the administration, because one thing that's probably got in common what you will do as an academic at Aston, versus what you did in secondary school, the administration burden seems to increase all the time, year by year. I think that's true of both areas, from the secondary school people I know, and also the academics I talk to on a regular basis, that administration burden seems to be becoming worse and worse, not getting better and more effective. The other thing is, you mentioned about the importance of research, and how REF is probably the biggest external factor that drives what we do as a university, how, how we rate as a university REF and our research is really important. But yet, teaching is always the more immediate driver and the thing that demands more time from staff, from what I've seen so far. So those things don't seem to be that compatible then, both in terms of getting the balance across those three areas, but certainly time to craft researcher as well, that doesn't seem to be a very easy balance to find that.

DBA8 25:25

No, it can't be. And I think you have to sort of be a juggler, I think, and the I mean, I've had this put to me so many times, the idea that we, we spend half a week doing research is just doesn't, doesn't work like that, you know, it might be close to that once you sort of add, add all the hours up, but I think you, you don't get two and a half days where you just sit down and forget everything and sort of do work that you might carve out some space to do that, but you have to be very, very careful. And this is, this, I think is what a lot of people do. Well, a lot of people, certainly people coming into the, you know, the

profession, ECRs do find difficult that balancing, I suppose if you're, if you're quite good at juggling things around it's less difficult. But yeah, the, the admin things interesting, because what's really been noticeable since 2020, is I think, how, how it's improved, actually, the fact that we now have things like this, via zoom or teams, and the the number of meetings that are, that we now do via teams has, has, has really made it much better. You know, because you don't have a lot of lost time traveling in, you don't have the sort of the time walking from building to building and so on, you can turn your computer off and get straight back to work if you need to. I think that's been a massive improvement. Face to face meeting still have a place, but I think the move to sort of a more flexible, hybrid working structures has been really useful. Umm, I, I just don't know whether that's the admin thing is that much of an issue? I think people sometimes think it is, but I do wonder whether that's the sort of, the old sort of thing that if you sit and worry about something for too much, and not actually doing it, and that kind of impact on your time? Um, I certainly think it's nowhere near as demanding a job as [redacted], as working in [redacted]. I don't even think they're comparable. I think, you know, I think our working conditions are far favorable, far, far favorable. For many, many reasons. But the thing about research is true, I think, I think it is this sort of 40 / 40 / 20 compartmentalisation, that, that might be the, you know, the the Excel spreadsheet might show you that, but the reality of that is, is, is not the case, I think for most, most people, it might work out somewhere near that over a year. But, you know, it's if you're working on a book, or you're working on a book, or any project, you, you need to be working on it continuously, really. That, that's the hard thing. If you can't do things for a long period of time, you know, you spend three or four weeks away from something and then you, you have to come back to it. I think, I think people find that hard. And also, of course, we try and do too much. That's the other thing. Sometimes that's, that's, that's aligned to the point where we were talking about previously, you know, people panicking and thinking they have to win various projects and things that they might not normally do. And also, of course, that promotion is judged largely on productivity, which is incredibly unfair. Incredibly unfair... to certain groups of people. But, but just unfair, generally, I think.

Paul Jones 29:06

We ask, we ask a lot of people, in different ways, for what we expect from them, whether it's contributing towards the university more generally, being benevolent with your time to help others. There's all these different aspects of what makes you a good employee. But when you mentioned promotions, I don't think many of those things are taken into account then, this all comes down to hard facts of publications, grants won and money brought in and the hard numbers quite often rather than the context of do you make a good employee, do you add value to others? A lot of that stuff doesn't seem to be taken into consideration, and about the difference you can make to the working environment, and how you coach, mentor and provide ideas, innovation, inspiration to others, it's very much how many publications have you had? How many impact case studies might you be developing? How much grant money have you brought in? Those are more the factors that drive those types of promotion decisions, from what I've seen at least.

DBA8 30:06

Yeah, I think that's, that's true. I think that that's done. That's true everywhere. Certainly the other [redacted] places I've worked at hasn't been any different. Although I think Aston sets the bar far too high. Talk to anyone, and, you know, people at Russell Group Universities, say you're at Aston, and it almost feels impossible to get promoted, when you see it when people don't get promoted here, and then go off and get promotions, one or two ranks above what they didn't get at Aston and somewhere else. So it's quite peculiar. I think it's char, I think the changes to the promotion criteria last year, were, were good, I think there was much more of a sort of recognition of a balance in terms of what you give to the university, including those sort of, sort of softer, skills based things that you mentioned. But yeah, I think still, if you look at the promotion criteria, there's still, there is still quantifying of outputs, and, and so on, and emphasis given to certain things. And I think that is unfair, because, you know, for certain colleagues, it's their only X hours in the day, if you've got a young family, or you've got caring duties, or even if you just want a life, that, that, that, that is unfair, and it's an unfair, that the sort of discourse of overwork, you know, work, work, work, work, work, that's the way to go higher, is he's really problematic. And doesn't doesn't help wellbeing and I, again, I have these conversations about promotion,

younger colleagues, and they're, you know, they feel the only way to succeed is to just to burn themselves out. And that's, that's wrong. And they also feel that that's the only way that they, they get valued, because they compare themselves to other people, and they compare themselves to other institutions and at other institutions, it, it does seem easier to get promoted than it does here. It, not just post 92 institutions, but you know, other places as well. And, you know, that's, that's hard. So, I think the promotion, I think [redacted] has done a lot of really good work in particular, the last couple of years on the research side of promotion and making that better, but I still think it's, it's a barrier, rather than a sort of enabler.

Paul Jones 32:33

Yeah, and if there isn't this driver to support people in the right way, it has lots of knock on consequences then, doesn't it, about motivation, morale, the culture of working for Aston, then we don't have people staying as long because they always want to seek opportunity elsewhere, because it seems so hard sometimes then to actually go through the right hoops and jump through the things that Aston wants to do. And that's quite perverse then, because you'd want to try and keep good staff and make sure that you gave them the right channels to develop and move up. And yet, we seem to do the opposite of, maybe not doing the development parts as well, and then we make it really hard for them to move up the ranks. So we don't do ourselves any favors sometimes in terms of creating that cultural environment that supports people and develops people and gives them encouragement, that Aston is going to look after them and help them to achieve their full potential.

DBA8 33:27

Yeah, I think, I think that, that is it. I mean, these, these, these processes are not pleasant anywhere, but I think, you know, it's, I get this, I do get the sense it's, it's more difficult here. And lots of people have said that and say I've seen people who have moved on, I mean, the best example I've given some someone who, you know, was rejected for Lecturer to Senior Lecturer, finally got through after two rejections, and then six months later got a chair at [redacted].

Paul Jones 33:31

That is not a bad University to get a chair there...

DBA8 34:13

Exactly, I mean, you know, that, that ,that's, that, that's an extreme version, but you, you know, you can see that there's something clearly wrong if that happens.

Paul Jones 34:24

Yeah. That doesn't sound right.

DBA8 34:28

They should have been promoted a long, long time ago. That was unfair, because that, that person had a young family, you know, was female. These, these things, they're not coincidences.

Paul Jones 34:48

There's one of the things you touched upon earlier, which you were talking about, different circumstances, like family, and your situation and wanting to get a life, and trying to balance things at home, versus Korea, and sometimes, if you let it, Aston would suck as much time as possible in terms of allowing you to spend all your time doing work for the university if you wanted to. We talk about things like Athena Swan, and developing the right culture, and trying to tackle workplace imbalances. I don't get the impression we've done it, we'd like to try and tick box things sometimes, of looking like we're doing stuff, we don't see a really wholehearted change in terms of how we approach supporting people, then, are there things you can think of that we could do better to support people who have got families, or caring responsibilities, or things externally? Is there better ways we could do things that Aston?

DBA8 35:46

Oh undoubtedly, yeah, undoubtedly, I, I don't know what they would be. I think that would need quite a bit of, of talking through and really, you know, a group of really people, people really taking that on seeing that as important. But I do think that's the case, I think it really comes up in promotion, this is where it comes up. Because it's all about productivity and what the message you're giving is, the more you do, the more chance you'll have, the more you will be valued, the perception of you will be greater and clearly, the more depends on time. And so, that is, that, that, discriminates against some people, it excludes some people. But equally, the other thing it does is it makes people do have that time over work, and get stressed as well. And, and the, the really difficult thing to do, that I suppose is more marked here than it would ever be in a school where you're seeing your colleagues pretty much every day, you know, you because you're in, in situ every day, whereas here you're working remotely quite a bit, is you don't, you don't tend to know what people are doing. And I think people also tend to keep what they're doing to themselves, as well. For fear of either being seen to not work enough or work too much, you know, again, it's back to this sort of culture of competition and comparability rather than, than, then than sort of, you know, working together. But that's, you know, it's not just promotion it's other things as well, grant applications, which are just big competitions, big lotteries, really where one people, one person wins, one person loses. So the whole, the whole culture of having to compete against others, your colleagues, is not helpful... yeah...

Paul Jones 37:46

Yeah. Whatever levels you look at, it's always driven by competition then, isn't it, because even at the high levels of REF, then it goes into league tables, and you're always comparing yourself, where are we compared to others? Why aren't we higher? At a more local level, it's the grants we are applying for, and that's a competition. And it's disappointing, if we think, that colleagues are in competition with each other, where they're trying to hide how much work they're doing, or think that promotions are a competition with others, because for me, one of the things I'd love to see is more people having more time to spend, having ideas, developing each other, being able to share good practice, and really making the most of being creative, and being able to share ideas and be able to develop each other and work as a group not have this insular attitude of sometimes just looking after yourself. And that's partly driven by not having the time to do those things, but it's also about the culture we create.

DBA8 37:50

It is, it is yeah. And I think the two go hand in hand. And one other example I might give, that really worries me. I don't know where this comes from, or whether it's just something we have to accept. But this, this spreadsheet that now comes around with, with grant applications in, and numbers, and money, and who's got what and who's won and who hasn't. And if I'm right, everybody gets to see that.

Paul Jones 39:19

It does get circulated around, I think it goes to department heads, but then I think is distributed more widely

DBA8 39:24

I think it's a dreadful thing. I mean, if you want to make people feel bad about themselves, send them around a spreadsheet that has zero next to their name, and so they can compare themselves to everybody else, and see how much well everybody else is doing. I mean it, I think it's, I get, I get the visibility for certain people. You know, I get it's useful for heads of department, but I don't really need to know what other departments are doing really. At that level, that granular level, I certainly don't think someone in my department who's an ECR, who's petrified about their, about whether they're gonna have a post next year, and is being told that if you don't get funding, you've got no chance of getting anything, needs to see a spreadsheet with zero next to their name and loads of other numbers next to other people, it's really bad for well being,

Paul Jones 40:16

It reminds me of my days in recruitment where, they would very much be used as a tool to bash us down and say, well, you haven't got as much as this person and was a source of embarrassment or pain at the time, then.

DBA8 40:31

It's like those sales, those sales companies, where on a Friday morning, and they get everybody at the front. And say you've got this, and you've got that, and you've got this, and you've got that, and your star of the week, and you're useless and everything is visible. So you would constantly be comparing yourself to somebody else. And I know, I know, because I've seen reactions to that, that sheet, this is causing distress.

Paul Jones 40:59

There's no, so one of the things has been raised about that type of thing before is, the context and the qualitative information that goes with that type of stuff is that, a number just on its own, can cause problems, because you don't know what other things are going on in that person's life. And that person can be made to feel really small and insignificant and not very good at their job. Even though that person could, could have, five four star publications in the last year, or a number of impact case studies where their, their work is making a massive difference to society on a global scale. And yet, they can be made to feel really small, and insignificant, just because they haven't brought in a large amount of money. And that's not good for anybody that the context isn't there and that, that part is visible but other things aren't so visible then, because we are being selective on what we show. And, while we've got this idea that the standard academic should be producing X amount of publications, and bringing this amount of money in and doing these kinds of impact case studies and supervising this amount of students, as well as having a full teaching load and doing all the admin. The reality is that people have different skill sets and different things that go on for them. And for me, every department should have a balance of the people who are going to give you the publications on a regular basis, the people who can bring in research money more effectively, people who could drive impact case studies, because not, you're not gonna have one, every single person doing all those things really well. And having that balance across department then, would be a much more effective way of managing that. So you level everything out by having the right players on the board, not by expecting everybody to excel at everything.

DBA8 42:43

Yeah, it's like a football team, isn't it? That want their 11 right wingers, you need people who can play centre back and in goal as well. Otherwise, you are in trouble. Yeah, yeah. And I think that's a really good point about some of these other things not being visible. I mean, we still have that, we do celebrate a lot, actually, I think the stuff that comes round, you know, in the loop, and the ECB (Executive Communications Bulletin), and all those sorts of things which are celebratory, are really good. And I try encourage people to, you know, to, to contribute to that. But these crude, these crude sort of signals really, of what I think people read them as what is seen as important. I mean, that spreadsheet is, is, I think, really difficult to, to accept, I think, because of the way it's, it's given. I think, if it went to heads of department, and you just saw your own departments, and maybe even ones in the school, but I, I don't think I need to know what all the people in [redacted] are doing. I think that sends a, sends a difficult message to people, because it's, you know, you got a zero next to your name, it's that somebody doesn't, as you say, somebody doesn't know what you're doing. They just look at you, and think useless.

Paul Jones 44:02

Yeah, that you are sat there doing no work...

DBA8 44:05

Yeah, people's perception is that what people are going to judge them by.

Paul Jones 44:10

And that has a knock on effect then, doesn't it? That if you're looking to have collaborations, or to work interdisciplinarily, across different areas, then if people see you, almost being summed up by a zero value, or a low value on a spreadsheet, that has a lot of, both conscious and unconscious bias in terms of how people can get viewed then.

DBA8 44:33

Yeah, and it's a kind of, it can just, coming back to you know, where we started, it can distort the sorts of things that you, that you think you might need to do to, to work on yourself. If something is a competition, there's only ... I always think that you know, it's not the people who are putting in bids that are rubbish. and therefore they just need need to be, they need to be trained to do better bids, it's simply because there isn't enough, there isn't enough winnings to go around. So it can sort of distort what you, what you might need to do to improve or develop on.

Paul Jones 45:18

And you can't control that winning process either all you can control is how many bids you might put in and the quality of them, you can't control whether you win that bid. And you can't control the amount of money that's available either, because one of the other big things is that some areas lend themselves well to winning higher amounts of money compared to other disciplines. And if you see someone winning a million pound grant, depending on your discipline, there's never going to be a million pounds floating about for any research.

DBA8 45:48

No, and that million pounds as a scientist, might just get, might just be the money, you need to run your lab to get the research done. Not that you would... there's no gain for the institution from it. And for the, you know, the literary scholar, you just need some books and a computer and that's it, and access to, you know, papers and so on.

Paul Jones 46:10

But it comes down to that view, doesn't it, on quantity, rather than quality, sometimes about there should be a reward for, perhaps, being able to do excellent research, but very cheaply, rather than thinking I have to bring all his money in to do my research, and that being rewarded more because you've brought money in, then the balance we've seen defined seems to be quite out in terms of how we value the, the quality aspect versus the quantity aspect.

DBA8 46:35

I think I did, I think, you know, I think [redacted] has been pretty good at trying to turn that message around, I suppose the difficulty is that ... umm ... it's how we judge whether, and this is back to just, you know, a human resources issue, how you actually judge whether bids are any good or not. Internally, so you might say, well, you should be we should be valuing the fact that people are putting in bids and not necessarily winning them, but putting in good quality bids. But then you need a, you need a mechanism for, for QA'ing that don't you, as well? So it's sort of like another layer of, of, you know, admin and bureaucracy. So I don't know... I don't know.

Paul Jones 47:21

And the same issues will occur that we have with peer review for publications in that, the peer review of publications is important for REF, but it's also being used for promotions. But those two things are different then, and have different influences and things to think about. And they are in competition to some extent together of like, how you would rate it for one thing is a bit different to how you might rate it, because it's internal, and how it's involved for promotions. So there's tensions involved, and you'd have the same for grants then as well, because even if you try to look at a rating system for the quality of the actual submission, then you'd have people questioning which way that was being rated. And if that was going to affect promotions, there doesn't seem to be some nice easy way of trying to gauge quality that everybody could buy into that is done in an effective and efficient way.

DBA8 48:15

It's difficult with the publications, because the promotion criteria specifically talks about three and four star publications. And yet, there's no way of knowing whether something is a three or four star publication, because you don't get that information back you, you'd be basing it on a different review system that you're doing internally. And that I mean for us last year that caused, whenever it was, 18 months ago that caused all sorts of problems, because you know, the people were basing their judgments on different things, sometimes whether they thought the person should be awarded that rather than the quality of the work... umm ... and sometimes on other things as well. But it's again, it's back to this, this sort of metricification and how you move away from that, which is this sort of silliness obsession with, with that, and onto things that really do improve people. And cultures of, I think, competition and productivity and so on are, are stress inducing rather than performance enabling.

Paul Jones 49:22

Yeah, it's difficult, isn't it? So one of the things that also, and we haven't talked about it yet, but I'm interested in, is that we talked about that balance between teaching, research and administration, there is a lot more external engagement activity expected of people now. And that's in addition to those three key areas we talked about that generally seems to formulate how a contract's looked at. Do you think we give people the skills to be effective at externally communicating research, and engaging with people and networking and doing that type of work?

DBA8 49:55

No, I think people, some people, can be very good at that, if they have come from other, you know, other places and you've had to do that. But, but you're, you, I think, there's no such thing as a standard ECR. But let's say a typical ECR, who's come from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree to a PhD may have done some teaching, around that, around the houses in various institutions, coming into a first job, probably had no training whatsoever in any of that. The one thing where I think a one size, a sort of more general program would work, is at that level, you know, the first two or three years as an academic, there should be, a bit like we do for PhD students who take their, you know, the quant and quals training modules, there should be a series of modules that you do as an ECR or ECT, ECTF. That, you know, give you that, that standard of, umm, people can opt into those things. And there are some really good sessions, I've seen, you know writing for the conversation, talking to, you know, external partners, but they shouldn't be opt in, they should be standard things, because that's what, as you say, we are expecting colleagues to do. That would be quite a straightforward thing to set up, that sort of ECR program. I think there are things that are offered, but it's, it's not really, it's not really a fully developed thing.

Paul Jones 51:25

Yeah. And if you're busy, and even though ECRs I know will get more time to concentrate on their research, because they're given less teaching responsibility, if I'm correct in remembering the way things work. You're still heavily pressured to deliver stuff. And therefore, and if we don't encourage professional development, and your development of your role in the right ways, it's very easy to get caught in the tasks and what you have to produce, rather than thinking I need these skills to be able to do my job more effectively in the future, then, then all of a sudden, you're a couple of years down the line, and you haven't made the most of those opportunities because they just float around in the background waiting for you.

DBA8 52:04

Absolutely, yeah, yeah, [redacted] an ECR starting next week. You know, so I'm, [redacted] having to think very carefully about what we can do to support [redacted]. But I think a, school, college, university program that gave these people those skills will be really useful.

Paul Jones 52:28

I'm hoping that through the interviews and research, there'll be ideas that will come out to this then, that can try and pull together a lot of what people are saying then, because so far, there seems to be lots of common threads about what we could be doing better and recognising some of the problems we've got then. And at least we can start to flag up, as a collective group, through this research and other channels that there needs to be something done differently, then. I did have a conversation this week about if we look at the contract basis of 40 / 40 / 20, whether we could look at incorporating time that is spent on professional development, then. So you could look at 40 / 40 / 10 / 10, where at least 10% of your time is spent looking to either develop yourself, or develop others then, and looking at opportunities. If you've got some innovations in teaching, making sure you craft the time to tell others about that and to share those ideas. But also you can learn from others in that regard. And it becomes self-perpetuating then, in terms of this circle of learning and giving back then. And I don't see that much of that happening mainly because there's no slack in the system at the moment people are so pressed, it's probably something people do if they had the time. It's just a case of there's no slack.

DBA8 53:50

Yeah, I think it's about making time for it, and that serious conversations, as you say, and saying when that time needs to be made. I mean, just to two, two observations, again, just thinking about the comparison with [redacted]. Two things that again [redacted] do very well is firstly, related to that last point. Many [redacted] will carve out time in the week where [redacted] have to engage with CPD, you've got, I don't know, you have 1, 1, 2 fewer [redacted] on a Wednesday afternoon, and that's CPD, and the good [redacted] of course, will, will make that work by making it worthwhile, not just oh, you know, go off and do whatever you want to do. But that's, that time is accountable. You're accountable for that time. So you know, you have to show you've used that time wisely. Whether that's, you know, doing a course or doing something a bit more local or whatever it might be. And that's good. I think I've seen that model work a lot. The other thing that they do, of course, is they, every, if you're an [redacted], a [redacted] in a [redacted], you, you, have to go on a sort of [redacted] program, you're not allowed to just go off as you are here on your own, you know, so there is a, there is that, that systematic program for newly qualified staff of mentoring, of various kinds of support, various kind of input, and so on. So that, that builds up that skill set. Because if you do a [redacted], you can't, you don't develop all those things in one year, in the same way as a PhD doesn't give you anywhere near the time to develop the skill set you need. So they will be quite easy things to well, not necessarily to implement, but to, you know, to think about I think,

Paul Jones 55:47

yeah, and I think the idea that you're, you're thrown into the pool as a lecturer aren't you, once you've got, been given your job, you're thrown into the pool, and sometimes, the right management or people around you will be your armbands, but generally you're left to swim alone. Whereas, it seems like secondary school, you'd be enforced to wear those armbands, and you have no choice but to have that support around you, to make sure you can float and swim and, and be able to be effective in that pool, then.

DBA8 56:17

Yeah...

Paul Jones 56:17

Whereas, you could drown quite easily if you're not given the right support here, because there's no mechanism.

DBA8 56:22

I think you could, and I do think [redacted] is much harder... than HE. It's a, it's a much harder job, much harder. But, I've also seen, you know, people who have, whose wellbeing has suffered and suffered mental health issues, considerable ones here, I when I say here, I don't mean Aston necessarily, I mean, in HE, because of that, sort of, that, that scenario you've just described, of being, feeling left alone. And there's, there's nothing worse than feeling left alone, apart from when you're also left alone,

and you feel that incredible pressures to produce. And that, that, that sort of anxiety that comes from that, as well, in conjunction and that I think that's often the case, the two are there simultaneously. And that's really hard.

Paul Jones 57:24

And I'd like to think that we were responsible, whether it's Aston, or HE generally, for allowing people to come in and have career aspirations for developing a career in academia. And because we haven't provided the right support to help them do their job effectively, they end up either leaving the institution, or leaving academia completely, because they don't think it's for them. And that would be really sad if those types of things happen then, when we could quite easily have provided that type of support then.

DBA8 57:52

Yeah, I ... I think it happens. So, I don't, I don't think it's all doom and gloom. I don't think, you know, we are necessarily doing lots of things badly wrong. But I think... I think, I think there is space for improvement. And I think, you know, generally we could be more mindful of the sort of, these sorts of pressures and tensions, that we've spoken about today and how they impact on people's sense of career and so on. I don't know, I mean, if, you know, just ... the UCU vote yesterday suggests that lots of people are unhappy about working conditions and pensions and pay and the rest of it. So I think the sector genuinely isn't in a good place. I don't really, if I'm honest, I don't really see many people walking about looking really happy. I often see people walking around looking quite anxious and, and tired.

Paul Jones 58:54

Yeah, I mean, I do worry about that, and I've got a particular interest in people's well being and, from my background, and I always ask people how they are. And I haven't had many positive responses. I can't think of any really positive responses since after the summer, and that's really disheartening then, that no one's coming back, refreshed, ready to start the year. It's like you're on half power, and you've got the start of the year to get into, and that can't be an easy situation for people to be in.

DBA8 59:23

No, and I, you know, I don't want to dwell on this too, in any length, actually, but I do think we are also, if you're talking to people from [redacted], you're talking to people who have come from a very difficult context the last couple of years, as well, and that, that's going to take a long time to shake, a long time. You know, this deeply impacted, not just people in [redacted], but across the, the other departments as well.

Paul Jones 59:49

Yeah. One of the things that I wanted to pick up on, that it goes back to your external experience, two things really, do you think then, because you've been in [redacted], which is a very tough environment, that's made you more skilled to work with the administration parts of the univer..., the way University organises itself. But also the amount of work you've had to cope with previously, sets a benchmark for you personally, which means you can cope very easily now, whereas other people haven't had that experience if they've always been in HE. So they seem like they're under a lot of pressure, because the context for what they've ever experienced is very different then.

DBA8 1:00:34

I guess so. I mean, I can only speak for myself. I spoke earlier, this sort of metaphor of juggling, being a juggler, I think that's what you have to do in [redacted] definitely. Typically, when you take on senior roles, because half the time the, the [redacted] day is just spent fighting fires, actually. So I suppose I've got quite good at that. Moving things around, I think, I think, you know, it helped me do a PhD, definitely, I did a PhD come in, in, at the tail end of my time being in a [redacted]. So it was, I found it very, not easy, but I, it was relatively straightforward to sort of juggle that and be working as well. And, and fitting things in even with young children. [redacted] child as, as at the time was doing. So I guess, yeah, I guess it has made it easier for me. I think I've got a sense of how, how I can get things to work and how things work for me. And I know that, you know, I don't worry too much. If I don't get things

done in the day, because I know I can work in early in the morning or late in the evening, I can move things around, and I suppose the thing I've learned is you have to be flexible, and you have to be willing to be flexible. I think if I weren't, if I were to say I'm, I'm having cutoff times and start and end points, I think I would be in trouble...

Paul Jones 1:01:58

Yeah...

DBA8 1:01:59

And that, that is just the way I choose to work. And if you don't choose to work like that, it wouldn't work, I suppose. But def, definitely, but coming, coming from a different context has made this job easier. Not least because I think the other context was... I, I, get all the concerns and the worries and, that, that people have in this sector. But I do think it's, it's nothing like [redacted], it really isn't. I think the demands there are much harder.

Paul Jones 1:02:33

I think the skills is interesting for me, because I've had conversations about this before, where if you look at what, how we skill people up, if you come from that traditional pathway of master's degree, PhD, straight into an academic type of career. If you haven't had external experiences, some of the skills that might be missing are things like relationship management, or understanding people, and working with people, self management, umm, time management, a lot of people don't seem to manage those things that, as well as they could do when they haven't had those external experiences, I think there's a lot to be said, from working in different environments, and the skills you gain, that then have a knock on influence within an academic role to make you better, more effective, more savvy with technology use and managing your own time, that can make a massive impact for people. But that doesn't form an important element of how they think about their jobs then, so they don't look into doing these courses. And they might be naive and think that they've, they are good at these things already. But, in reality, there's probably a large amount of development that they could do then.

DBA8 1:03:44

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And ... sometimes ... it's easy to align the wrong person to the wrong role as well. You know, just because someone's a Distinguished Chair, it doesn't mean they're necessarily good at managing people or time management or, you know, organising things or it's, we I think, also, we get the seniority thing wrong here as well, we just assume that senior equals better, for some reason, well, at least that's how I perceive it.

Paul Jones 1:04:18

Yeah.

DBA8 1:04:20

And that, that can, that can be problematic.

Paul Jones 1:04:24

We, it's not the only sector to get that wrong. I've seen it in so many other places where I've worked, where people are promoted for the wrong reasons. If we take recruitment as an example, you could be a very good recruitment consultant. And then they put you into a management role. But that's a very different set of skills compared to being good at being the actual consultant that is working with businesses rather than managing people. And yet, we think we have to promote them because they've done really well, whereas sometimes where they excel best is in that position, and you develop them to become better and better at what they do, not push them into a management position, which is very much out of their comfort zone. And I think the same rules apply within the university just in a different context and where we push people. But just because they excel at one thing doesn't mean they'll excel at another type of job, that depends on what the skills are like.

DBA8 1:05:11

And the other thing that's odd in HE, is that, is these sort of two, these two parallel systems that don't really align, seem to be working. So you've got the sort of academic ranks, and then you've got the sort of admin ranks as well, you know, so you might be a, might be a Programme Director, and then you might be a Research Director, Head of Department, Associate Dean, Deputy Dean, you know, that, they're not necessarily the same as the the academic rank. So it's sometimes aligning that, and seeing that, because the higher those out, admin ranks are, obviously, the greater the skill sets are, and the more senior kind of roles they are, really, but that doesn't always align with the other, the other strand. It's a very odd thing.

Paul Jones 1:05:58

Yeah, one of the sort of discussions I've had recently has been around the fact there's no map that exists about how you could, what roles exist within the university, what you need to be able to do those roles, and how you could try and get the skills you need to get to these places, and how you could try and provide a route to get to where you want to be then. So if you had aspirations to be a vice chancellor, what would that look like in terms of the stepping stones? What would be best for you? Or if you wanted to be Dean of a School, there's nothing that allows you to plan your career aspirations in terms of thinking, well, if I do this, this and this, I get these skills, and then it leads to this then.

DBA8 1:06:38

Yeah, that's, that's really true. That I think that's, that's, that's a much better way of explaining what I was trying to describe these, these strands where there's, no one's quite sure. It's, well, even though it might be flawed in some way, it's still clear what you need to do to get up the the other way. But yeah, people are, people are interested, clearly in those, those admin roles as well. And they should be, they should be seen as equivalent in seniority to your, your, your academic rank as well, it's, I mean, you don't have that in [redacted], for example. You know, you are just a [redacted] and then you can get promoted, might be a [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], [redacted], but you don't have another rank alongside it, that you also are moving, moving up.

Paul Jones 1:07:26

Even if we look at our own college, the structure within the college, still confuses me about where Department Heads sit, the Heads of School, the Associate Dean's, the college overview versus schools. There's, there's a lot to unpack there. And I've never really got my head around how it all fits together, then. If I can't get my head around it, I'm sure there's plenty of other people that have the same problem about thinking...

DBA8 1:07:53

Yeah, and it's, it's actually causing lots of problems, where you, you, you get different conversations going on in little, little smaller groups. And then no one's sort of bringing that back to the bigger group. You know, so you might have associate Dean's working with teaching and learning directors and doing stuff. But that doesn't, that doesn't always align with what's going on in departments, and no one seems to be talking. Maybe there's just too much admin? Is it too many, too many initiatives going on? Too many, you know, processes and not enough coordination. So definitely one.

Paul Jones 1:08:32

Yeah, I think that that communication part, we're talking about, both ways, both going upwards and coming back downwards. Nothing really sort of seems to trickle down effectively at the moment, things seem to go up to the college Management Committee, and then they get discussed but I don't see it very effectively then coming down to the wider masses saying, we discussed all these things and these important points that you need to know about, these are the decisions we've made then. And, I don't know how the SMTs work across the different school, or if it is like that, I, I would be unconvinced that every school is doing a good job of communicating stuff back downwards. Things tend to find their way up sometimes, but nothing seemed to come down effectively, then...

DBA8 1:09:17

No, true...

Paul Jones 1:09:18

...and that's disappointing, then, because the types of messages we need to give, both in terms of professional development, but everything else, we need to be clear about what the expectations are, how we support people and what we expect them to do. And if we're not clear about that, how can people do their jobs effectively and know the things they're supposed to do in the wider context of the changes, or the demands that are being placed on people? So it's difficult then.

DBA8 1:09:45

Maybe these larger structures don't help with it if I'm honest. I'm not sure it was any better when we were in [redacted]. Really, I think the structure would probably be better in terms of less layering. and so on, we were told that moving into a college would decrease admin and bureaucracy and layers and it has made it a million times worse haha.

Paul Jones 1:10:08

Well, even trying, I don't, after two... almost two and a half years now, I think, isn't it? After almost that amount of time we are still facing cultural issues, process issues, all types of stuff that we haven't been able to iron out. And that's really difficult then because they should have... I'm not sure if it should have ever happened in the first place, but we should have been in a better, better place to react to it and try and find some economies of scale and doing things effectively, but it just seems to balloon rather than reduce in terms of tasks and admin.

DBA8 1:10:46

Yeah, I think it's, it's, I mean, the little, the little sort of separate, what's the word for it, little separate sort of compartments or structures of work that go, that are going on, for example, you know, you've got the different Associate Dean's almost running separate little practices that don't, don't align with anything at all and it's, it's, [redacted], it's really hard, actually. Because it's really hard to know what's going on. Unless [redacted] all the time talking to people who are, you know, engaging with these these different little groups. And what we found this year is a lot of work has been duplicated. So NSS, for example, so we sat down and, and when we got our NSS scores last year, [redacted] asked [redacted] to do a report for him this year, [redacted] asked [redacted] to do a report for her. [Redacted] did that in the summer, [redacted] now have [redacted] being told they've got to do an NSS report, action plan, [redacted] haven't been involved in that conversation at all. So, you know, we've got, we've got, we've got in [redacted], we've got [redacted] separate action plans. None of, none of, none of, neither of which has spoken to each other, one has been already given to the group, and the other one nobody knows about, I mean, it's just a complete waste of time. The research, the research bit is actually the better, the best of all the compartments, I think, in that, you know, [redacted] are involved a lot, which is good.

Paul Jones 1:12:15

I think the good thing about looking at [redacted] as a school, I think that the Research Directors and the Heads of Department have always had a very [redacted] relationship. And the culture generally, that's come from [redacted], is one of collaboration and communication more generally. I know we just discussed issues that, that the larger meetings don't tend to communicate very well. But I think generally, on the ground, things do work really well from that perspective, then, there is this communication, but you have one Associate Dean for Research now for the college, but there's probably about at least four Associate Dean's that tie in to education. So you've got Undergraduate, Postgraduate and Education Associate Deans, Future Learning Associate Dean, all of those tie in to teaching in some capacity, but all different. And then they are trying to liaise with different people across different departments and schools. That seems like a very messy approach to try to make anything work effectively... Well, that's the key point, isn't it, is that people are spending time doing the work to get the information together or putting things in place. But then if it's not being used in some way, effectively, then what's the point in doing it? And, for me, I think there's things that have increased over time where people have added

new ideas in and looked at stuff, umm, there's no, not been a regular overhaul of what we do and, and trying to think about what we can cut away, it tends to be always new ways we can improve things that add on extra work, not thinking, how can we get rid of stuff? What don't we need? It's always these new thing being added then.

DBA8 1:13:16

It's really messy, it doesn't work, It's really messy. It just doesn't work. And then you've got the other layer, which is when you've got the [redacted] asking you for things, and your [redacted] asking you for things, and none of its aligned, I don't know where all these things end up, you know, all these different bits of information we've been asked for, or what's done with them? Yeah, yeah. And the structures don't work. And I think that the, the sort of, the jumping between different levels of the hierarchy is difficult for communication. Umm... so [redacted], I think, are often left out of those conversations, those sort of [redacted] conversations. So there's a bypass, there's a sort of bypassing side, whatever, however, you know what the equivalencies are, again, I think in [redacted], if you've, in the [redacted], you have a [redacted], [redacted], you'd have a run of [redacted] and then the [redacted] would be that next crucial layer. And so, if you were [redacted] you, you'd work with the [redacted] or for, whatever it is, [redacted] side, it wouldn't be that you were bypassed, and they were working with someone in your department you didn't know anything about. So, it's really, really hard. And it's hard to, you know, coming back again to this idea of overworking, it's hard to tell people that they shouldn't be doing certain things, because they're not of any use, when they're feeling under pressure from elsewhere to do them. You know, it's a difficult one. We're just duplicating work. We at the moment, we're just doing things that have already been done.

Paul Jones 1:15:42

When everyone's pressured anyway, and that's the feedback we are getting, that doesn't sound like it's a good way to be then, because we want to try and reduce the burden on people not add unnecessary work on top. I've got one last question for you. So, part of what I'm trying to investigate is how much, things like, the balance between teaching and researching, for an academic, you have professional development schemes that exists for both areas, you have the HEA, and you've got Fellow, Senior Fellow, etc. on the one side, then on the research side is the vitae framework for career development and different things. Do those things ever play a part in your thinking about your development, though, do you use them as tools? Or do they just exist in the background and only come out if you ever need them, to do something with them, particularly?

DBA8 1:16:37

I think the latter if I'm honest, I think, they, they feel, when I was at [redacted], we were told not, don't, don't do any of the HEA stuff, it's not, you don't need to do it, it's not important. Then, I came to Aston, and it was the complete opposite message.

Paul Jones 1:17:02

Yeah.

DBA8 1:17:04

So, I mean, then, this might be a personal thing, but I've always I've always just felt that there are things that you have to do rather than things that are actually supportive, if you look at those HEA, you know, descriptors, and when you need that, they're just impenetrable. What half of them actually mean, it's not clear what these things are, you know, these, these, these different, different levels of, of skill sets and knowledge is that they're not user friendly. I think it's, they're very hard, unless you've got someone who is an expert in that process, umm, and is able to explain what that means and how that might align to what actually you ought to do and what you should do that, they're not incredibly useful in a formative way. I found the pro I mean, I, I applied for um, I've got [redacted], I found that a ridiculously long, difficult process that was almost like a game, where we have to write in a certain way. And you have to provide evidence, micro evidence, for pretty much everything, I mean I've done lots of these things before I did the, the [redacted], which is the [redacted] qualification in [redacted]. And that was a, that's a

[redacted] year program, where you have to build up this similar sort of portfolio. So I've worked with those sorts of systems. And that, there are okay for providing evidence that you've done something but I don't think they're good at sort of looking ahead, as a looking ahead mechanism. So the answer is probably no, I've looked at, I looked at the [redacted] one a couple of years ago, and just thought it's not, it's of no use whatsoever.

Paul Jones 1:18:50

Yeah.

DBA8 1:18:52

The research one, I didn't realise there was a similar research one.

Paul Jones 1:18:57

So there is the vitae one, which is a career development framework. So it's encouraged for PhD students, or doctoral students, to think about but can be used for the research element of how you can construct your portfolio then, so there is an online tool you can use as well, which they've developed so you could manage your development online, so it might be worth having a look at.

DBA8 1:19:18

Yeah, I hadn't, I didn't even, I probably have may have seen it, but certainly, can't recall it.

Paul Jones 1:19:23

Particularly, I think, we mentioned about [redacted] early career researchers so particularly in terms of thinking about their development, that can be a really useful tool to think about areas that, it breaks it down into, it's like a circle you'll see online and it gives you different areas you can think about. But that could be a useful tool, both to understand where that person sits at the moment in terms of what they might be good at and what needs they might have, and then use that as a tool to craft the research side of that roll then, which starting off is quite a hard thing to continue with, isn't it, when you are an early career researcher.

DBA8 1:19:51

It is, yeah, yeah, but I suppose it's ,yeah, it's the onus is on the individual, isn't it? Do we have an Associate Dean for Professional Development? Or is there professional development included in an Associate Dean's role?

Paul Jones 1:20:03

Not that I'm aware of, I think our conversation, the other conversations I've had, would indicate that no one's really taking charge of professional development and thinking about how it impacts that, right across the college or the university then, in terms of encouraging this or having a focus on it and asking questions about it, we, I think we've discussed here, that there's a very big focus on metrics and measuring people's performance, but not really thinking about how we get people there, and what skills and development we need. So I think, within the research office, myself and Nicholas, think about some of the broader things we could try and put in place to help people, there's no one really that I have seen championing professional development. And that's one of the reasons why I started doing this research was that, that in my head, there was a gap in terms of how we develop people, how we treat people and what we can put in place to make people more effective then and, to help them achieve their career aspirations.

DBA8 1:21:13

Yeah, I was I was asking for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I think there ought to be, a remit in someone's job, and not just sort of spread across everyone. But all, I'm also again, thinking of [redacted], who do this, who seem to get the, the structures much better, I think, than, than universities, where you would have an [redacted] whose, one of, one of whose key remits would be professional development... umm... staff, and that, you know, that's seen as a valuable contribution.

Paul Jones 1:21:46

And would have for a number of reasons, it pulls together a lot of different threads that we've talked about. And it weaves through most of those different areas then, but also it sets a clear message that this is important. And it has to be thought about in the context of people doing their jobs, and that crafting time to do professional development activities is really important. And that senior management encourage that because it's something we're looking at, and we've got someone that is paying attention to it then.

DBA8 1:22:14

I'm wondering if other institutions have, what they have...

Paul Jones 1:22:21

It's an interesting thought. Definitely. We have Associate Dean's for most things, so I'm sure we could find room for another one somewhere.

DBA8 1:22:31

Yeah. Well, new, new, new Executive Dean may be open to....

Paul Jones 1:22:38

Yes, exactly. I think it'd be interesting to see what comes from a new approach to the way things are managed. I think that's it in terms of questions about the interview. So if you're happy, unless you have anything else to contribute, I can stop recording.

DBA8 1:22:53

No that's fine. Yeah. Thanks.

Appendix 12: DBA9 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA9

Paul Jones 00:05

I've started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship, reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral students studying for a doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate, from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour but we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want, I may at times try to keep it within the broader bounds of my research area, but the idea is I do this with the least amount of interruptions or questions possible. You have 14 days from this date to request the data to be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me with the details provided on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed, and all links to you as an individual, including personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who have access to the anonymised data are myself, and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk, but if you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, then please raise your hands so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do so by indicating this by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel is causing you distress, or indeed if I feel distressed I may stop it as well. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start, then we will start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. For the interview record, this is the 14th of November at quarter past three, can you understand and confirm that the information I've given you all makes sense?

DBA9 01:52

I understand and confirm

Paul Jones 01:54

Great, and are you happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA9 01:56

I am happy to proceed with the recorded interview.

Paul Jones 01:58

Thank you. And do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA9 02:01

I do.

Paul Jones 02:02

Great. So can you confirm what school you work in please?

DBA9 02:06

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:07

And could you confirm your gender please?

DBA9 02:09

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:10

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA9 02:12

That's correct.

Paul Jones 02:13

Two more closed questions. So how would you describe your career level? Early career, mid career or senior career?

DBA9 02:19

Senior career.

Paul Jones 02:20

And could you confirm your age bracket please? So we've got 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, 65 to 74? Are any of those suitable?

DBA9 02:33

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:35

[redacted]? Great. So can you talk to me a bit about what you view as professional development and what your experiences have been like regarding that? I'm happy to cover it all so what do you think is most important to you how would you consider it then.

DBA9 02:46

Well, professional development has, there are many aspects to it, and it depends how you want to categorise from an academic point of view, what include distinctions between formal and informal. Paul, I think there are elements in both that are very important, both formal and informal. So then you can class almost everything and any interaction that has a developmental impact on the individual, as such. Now to me, what I view paramount important, and that can be both from a formal point of view and informal, is the individuals the, the aspirational group that is in there, so people that, the people that other people aspire to become like them. And so whatever [redacted] are offered, what kind of mechanisms are in there in place to support them in reaching. becoming like this, these individuals and also these individuals themselves, how much effort they put say into supporting formally and or informally, early career researchers or early career. This is about early career researchers, isn't it?

Paul Jones 04:02

No, so it's going to be about professional development generally.

DBA9 04:06

Still, still the same holds, because research is a profession, or a practice, among others. So again, the same thing, these people, who are senior say, that other people aspire to become like them, is how much effort they put into mentoring those people and/or coaching them. To me, that's a very powerful lever.

Paul Jones 04:27

Yeah. So that's talking about the research leadership path then so I would see academic staff who are senior, as having to take a lead on those type of activities then. So from what you mentioned there, there was part about, almost like personal responsibility of trying to look for opportunities but also responsibility of senior staff to present opportunities as well, as that about right?

DBA9 04:48

That's correct. That's about right. And it's also, you know, when you think, it depends how you define senior because in academia you have, senior it can mean two things, can mean seniority in terms of rank, academic rank, and seniority could be in terms of the managerial scale. So you may have someone, let's say, who's head of department, they have not reached a professorial rank, right? But still, that person's a senior academic and can have a tremendous impact on someone's development. And when I said about mentoring and coaching, applies to, obviously, to the, to the head of department to, they can have a tremendous influence on the themes of a department.

Paul Jones 05:31

So do you think then that Aston gets that right, in terms of the right mechanisms to make those types of things happen?

DBA9 05:38

I think will continuously improve ourselves. And if I look back from the time that I came to Aston, which is more than [redacted] years now. I see that we continually build on the mechanism part, new elements are added, with them now to do things more methodically, or more systematically, if you like, than when I arrived probably, because development, there is a sense of interest if you'd like in development, it was always important. But it just becomes more conspicuous now and so efforts in that direction become more evident than, than before, that are better publicised, I think. The, there are more structured than they used to be. And over the years, I see, I see an improvement on the formal part. Of course, there is always scope for further improvement.

Paul Jones 06:44

Yeah. But on the formal part, then when you say formal, I guessing you're talking about training courses, things the university has organised to let people do stuff, that type of thing?

DBA9 06:58

Yes, that's right. Yes, that type of thing.

Paul Jones 07:01

And you mentioned there about, there being more focus on trying to do development activities. Do you think that's driven by outside forces then, generally, or what do you think's driving that improvement?

DBA9 07:14

Well, certainly outside forces play a big role. So the agreements that that we sign, what the funders require, what government bodies asks us. What, what certification organisations ask from us. What professional bodies ask from us. What accreditation organisations, if I think of [redacted], ask from us, and then we tend to say something, not to use jargon there, there is, there is something called isomorphism, it's basically you tend to copy, to do things, that others that you've, you're successful do. So there is not, there is things that we do because there is some, some outside influence or impact on us. And there are things as well that we genuinely do. Because we have ideas about improvement, which may not necessarily or originate from the, from our interaction with the external, let's call them agents, like all these organisations, which I mentioned earlier. But yes, I see that there is a, there is. So if we were to say, Paul, does it happen, mostly because we have ideas? It certainly does. But I see that what happens externally, it's a huge influence on the way that we, that we approach development.

Paul Jones 08:41

So in particular then, do you think things like REF, TEF and KEF are drivers for what we expect of people and what we develop people in then?

DBA9 08:49

Exactly, yes! So Government, I refer to Government bodies of research, Council and mandates and, of course, the metrics that they are, over which we are assessed, in a way, influence how we respond, and what kind of initiatives we take to become better, the processes we use if we'd like to reach those outputs and outcomes. And then I talked about this Isomorphism basically copying what others do, there are learning bodies or learning associations or associations. One of them is the [redacted]. And then, you know, there is the sort of dissemination of, of good practice, and what we should be doing. That's one. It exerts on the research front you have research bodies, research funders, councils, and the agreements that we sign on about having place mechanisms for developing people. There is a lot that happens outside, and along with the training, which we, which we mentioned as part, as part of the formal I see mentoring and coaching as well, as part of the formal thing. It could be informally mentoring, as always happens, it's a natural thing. But there is a lot of scope as well on the formal aspects of that. So not just the training.

Paul Jones 10:23

So on the coaching and mentoring thing, do you think that it's better for it to happen naturally? Where people are interested, engaged and form those relationships, or would you rather a more formal way of imposing that on people to say they have to do it? Is there a better way to do it, do you think?

DBA9 10:40

I'll tell you what, there is, there is certainly scope for making this, for making the pairing, if you like, with a mentor and mentee, or coach and coachee, see, because we, I have never seen, I haven't experienced coaching, in this institution with, it's something that which we don't do anything, there is scope for doing that, provided we have people who are willing and able to do it, right?

Paul Jones 11:12

Yeah.

DBA9 11:14

But let's, let's stay, on the mentoring, which is, which has been always something which we need similar documents placed, and we do it as well, but it does happen. Now. As you rightly said, it begs the question, which one is better, letting it happen organically, as it happens, or being more systematic in doing that? And you can say, you can bring up experiences say, well, in my experience, these things happen organically and you cannot impose. Yes, partly, but you can make, you can help the choices that people make.

Paul Jones 11:54

Yeah.

DBA9 11:55

So by having these people who are willing and able to be mentors to stuff, especially early career people, having a repertoire of people, or if you like, profiles of people, and the way to do that mentoring, and then letting people choose which one they want to go for. Of course, you have a problem of capacity there. There once, they might, you might have people that are mostly liked, and therefore they would be over subscribed. So, you know, it's a very, it's a very difficult question to address the one that you're asking me. But I believe that although these things happen organically, and it's best when it's happened organically, great, you can certainly help it happen organically, better. So like a flower where you put for fertilizer, fertilizer, right? And you can do the same thing, you can kind of fertilize the space where that happens.

Paul Jones 12:59

I think using your fertilizer analogy, for me, there's probably three groups of people, there's the ones that would grow anyway, because they're the right type of person, the right circumstances.

DBA9 13:09

Yeah

Paul Jones 13:10

There's another group then in which they've got potential to grow, you add the fertilizer, and then they grow as they, as you hoped they would, then there's another group then, that no matter what you put into their pot, they don't grow, they're not interested in growing, and have got a very rigid view in their skill set and aren't interested in growing.

DBA9 13:26

Absolutely, you're absolutely right! And I think you hit on the nail because we say, so far, the discussion wasn't what we do generally, but of course, we need to target, when we talk about development, or training and development, you need to target us first and different divisions are treated differently. So, you know, may have people that are considered talent. Right? And so, these people may have specific needs, and their potential might be very different than other people, and they may require more, more tailored interventions for them. So, the way that you choose who the mentor for that person be, may require more effort, the kind of training that these people receive maybe in addition to what other people received. And again, there are different ways to categorise people, right? There are those, and again, there, there is always will and skill to do something, let's say, so as you rightly said, there are people that may not be very, very interested in, they are certainly able to have the skill, but for whatever reason, the will is not there. There may even be because they're in a stage of their life where, you know, they, they view things very differently, necessities and priorities. So how do you, how do you deal with that? How do we develop someone who doesn't want to be developed? Right? Yes, that's a legitimate question and applies everywhere. So, you know, leaving these people out, because these people might be built differently. Maybe the, maybe the, the priority for them is not development, it may be something else, may be challenging a certain behavior, you can certainly send them for training and development, but I'm skeptical about the effect on that. If, if the, if the, if the problem is not skill and ability, so, but for all the others, yes, I think having, having in place the right mechanisms, and using a typology as the one that you've mentioned, one of them, it's certainly, you would, you would most likely pay results. There is enough evidence on that.

Paul Jones 15:46

That middle group is interesting, isn't it? The ones who are self motivated and interested, no matter what the environment is like, they'll probably seek out opportunities, either internally or elsewhere, to help them develop. That middle group with the is, it's how we service them to give them more opportunities and better structure to make the most of it then. I'm interested, in terms of your own experiences. So you've mentioned you consider yourself to be a senior level academic. Do you think that you receive less opportunities and less care and attention now, for your development needs, because you're at a senior level? Do you think that affects you at all?

DBA9 16:25

No, I don't think so. I mean, one of the thing is that, what, what becomes different, no, and from my personal, that's my personal point of view, whatever I've asked from the institution I got. It, it has never been the case where I've asked something for that, is for my development, or where I was, I was declined, my request was declined. That's my experience again, and that doesn't mean that necessarily it's reflects reality, in the institution, what of, what you find more difficult is, the harder you progress, the higher one progresses in their career, the smaller, the narrower, the pool of people becomes that they can ask for advice, or, you know, like, that's mentors to them. And then, you know, that's, that's a thing, not the opportunities given. And also, there is something else as well. You know, it's say someone who has reached a stage in their career, senior stage, acts as a mentor to someone who is early career, you know, they, you know, because you come from that background. The developmental impact doesn't happen only for the more junior member of staff, early career, the senior person also gets back, ideas are generated as a result of thought, and maybe the person, that senior career colleague interacts,

happens to be early career, but still, the colleague may have knowledge and skills in other areas that the more senior person who acts as a mentor does not have. So it's not strictly a one way street.

Paul Jones 18:23

Do you think though, that senior members of staff always realise that it can, it is a two way relationship? Because I think I've come across people in the past where they see mentorship more as a one way thing, that they are just giving information and advice. And sometimes they don't realise the value it can have of having those discussions, and therefore, they're less likely to give time to it, because they don't see the value then. Do you think that happens?

DBA9 18:47

I think, well, from conversation, I had I think you, I think you might be right on that one. And again, that's a challenge to make it, for some, for some mentoring is quite natural. It's a natural thing as human beings, we want to offer our knowledge to someone else, whether that's a child, you know, it's, we, we are built, this thing is built in, in us, to give, right? But as you rightly said, when you're in an organisation and time, time is a quite important reserve. And at the end of the day, people are more willing to have to, some people, many people, not saying all, but many people are more willing to act on something when they know that there is a reward from that. So, if that is factored in, somehow, their contribution, they tend to be more willing to do it. If it's not, if it's purely, what we call discretionary effort, and citizenship, right, which actually it's on a promotion application, as well, yes, good, that is factored somehow in. But I think, if this contribution, mentoring say, counts for something, somehow, it's, is appreciated not just by words and say, oh, yeah, good on you, this is what you should be doing. But if it's registered somewhere, it counts for something, I think people will be more willing to do it, to get this kind of people.

Paul Jones 20:32

Yeah, it's hard to compare to publications or research grants, or supervisions that you'd have for doctoral students, it's much harder to identify the value that mentoring plays, we know is a good thing to do but we can't categorise it as easily as publication outputs, or amount of money won through grants, etc. And therefore, I can imagine people not willing to take that risk, even though they know it's a good thing to do. When it comes to promotions, like you mentioned, or other KPIs you might look at, it's not as tangible as something like a publication or a grant.

DBA9 21:08

It's not, but it could very well be tangible. I'll give you an example what I mean by that. So people get on the workload model, now, this differs from school to school, and the university, right? But, at the very least, there is a notional amount of time that one should be spending on teaching, research and engagement, right? And, of course, there are trade offs there. So if this was classed as an official activity that someone undertakes, and by doing this, will not be doing something else, in which case, it's an investment, that, remember what I said about counts, counts for something, counts for something, I think, that would be tangible. And you would say, then it's also, it kind of legitimises why you're asking someone spend time on that. I know that, personally, it's in my nature, we're alike. Not just mentoring, but say, talking to people and advising them, like, I would welcome advice from someone else that has reached a level that they haven't say, right, so it gives me satisfaction. So the driver is not some kind of instrumental transaction. I give you my time, you give me some points on the workload model. It's, yeah, I'd say, like the interaction, like, like this interview today. Right? And at the end of the day, like I said, before, it's never a one way street, you learn by speaking to someone, whether that's in a mentoring capacity, or a different interaction capacity. There is a lot to gain from that, not, maybe not with the specific, with a specific sort of individual. But if you do that, you know, you're in a space where serendipity happens, then, so you may find that you have common interests, you can be together for a project, you know, shall beyond the fact, beyond the fun part, there is also a utilitarian reason to do that.

Paul Jones 23:33

I think there's a lot to be said just for having space and time to have conversations, because the reflective process you go through, even through this situation of thinking about things, quite often what's cropped up with people I've talked to is that there's so little space and time to do this, it becomes really hard then to, to craft it in different ways.

DBA9 23:53

That's right. We're all time poor. And, you, that's on time isn't something that, that increases, when you go, when you progress on the organisational ladder. Quite the contrary. Actually, if anything, the way of experiences, the time you have available becomes less. But there are two things. One is what I said earlier that some people like it, I think, I tend to believe that most of the people like it, would like it now, whether they're effective in doing that, in that role, that's another matter. But I think because I believe it's built in, we're built in like that, to give. I think that most people will enjoy it. But then, you know, given that everything is quantified and measured. You want, one would want to see, what does that do for his or her metrics? Does it help tick a box, for instance?

Paul Jones 24:51

Do you think that we could do more to help people who've got knowledge, skills and experience become better mentors then? It's not something we train people to be able to do effectively. It's an expectation that exists, but I've not seen people go on training that can help them become a better mentor, for instance, or give them advice about how that could work.

DBA9 25:14

Certainly, Paul, I do believe and I'm a great advocate of learning, training and development and that, well, there is, there is great benefit in bringing people together, whether that's done online, face to face or a combination, hybrid mode, it's a great there is, there is a great scope in doing that. And it's not only as always, as you know, is not just what they get from the instructor, the person who is delivering some content is also what they learn among them, when they, when they interact among them. So yes, certainly, I think that is a good thing.

Paul Jones 25:54

Do you see that happening a lot? What I like the idea of is sharing good practice and what I would call street smarts, in terms of, so an example would be, a lot of the courses we deliver internally, it would be process driven, they tell you what a process is, they tell you mechanistic views of what happens. They don't really tell you often what it is like to go through that process, what the shortcuts are, how to save yourself time or the street smarts that come with doing that. Does that happen at the local level? Have you seen that happening much?

DBA9 26:25

Paul, I have started a course on coaching, mentoring and coaching last year, I haven't finished it because there were other priorities. And basically, the publication, funding clear, clear for the next REF and do my bit about funding, securing funding. So my, my only experience, and by the way, this was a selective course. So you had to go and it was, it was, it was for [redacted]. So it wasn't for say mobilising the great senior level academic staff, If you like, where you have a lot of firepower there. So, the only experience I have was from the, I think the content was very good, with the course was very well delivered. And it was for this specific purpose for [redacted]. So, obviously, a training program that is, that has a scope that is wider than that would need to be different. And I haven't experienced anything like that. But I'm a strong advocate of developing something for that. And I've heard about systematic studies, structured mentoring, right? So, you know, to me, it's a no brainer, with a training like that would be, could be useful, if of course, like any training is designed and developed and delivered appropriately.

Paul Jones 28:11

Yeah, that makes sense. What are the things I want to ask you about was, that balance between teaching and research, so traditionally, there's a model of thinking about the split for 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% administration. Does that work out for you like that in reality, in terms of your role, and your remit, within the department?

DBA9 28:31

I would say yes, but remember that it doesn't work exactly, in my experience, because I have seen not just my situation, but other people's situation as well, as a [redacted]. Obviously, I say that because, because it kind of identifies me, but...

Paul Jones 28:51

I will take that out.

DBA9 28:52

...Okay. All right. Okay. And thank you. Circumstances may differ. So, you know, you may have someone, and by the way, it's, it's funny that you, that you use this, this categorisation because you have research and teaching, and then administration, and I don't see engagement in there, and engagement is something which we, which we are measured on, right? So, now someone may not be doing say, when we say teaching, strictly going teaching undergraduates and postgraduate but may be delivering on a course for businesses, which may be an award program, an academic award program, say a master's or not, you know, but still that person, that colleague is in the front of a class, is in a class, whether physically or digitally online, delivering content and interacting with people who are business people, right? So, this would be classed as teaching. It has always been the case and for the percentages we mentioned, are there people who will be doing less or more? Yes, of course. So even within the teaching and research category, you're, you have people who are doing less teaching. But I think, when that happens is well justified. So these people take additional responsibilities on their research, their research expands, if you like, because you want them to be doing the project, in addition to their current duties. So that may expand a bit. So they may not be teaching two modules, or two and a half modules, they will be teaching, instead of two and a half, two modules, that kind of thing. But to return to the question, and close the loop, I think there is variation, and when that variation and when, but this variation is, is justified.

Paul Jones 28:53

I wonder then, so there's people I speak to that have mentioned how the teaching element can expand. And therefore, it takes away some of the research element, because the administration side doesn't really, doesn't often contract at all, it stays the same. So people at an earlier stage in their careers I think, are more likely to have the teaching side expand, therefore it makes it more difficult to do research, because of the teaching onus put on them. But then from what you're saying, at the level at which you operate, you might have a bit more flexibility then, because you've got a bigger track record in doing the research, then perhaps you get a bit more flexibility in terms of being able to focus on it a bit more?

DBA9 31:31

Well, it has changed, in the past senior levels, at senior levels, you, you're teaching would be more like guest lecturing, as far as I remember it. Well, now that, that's not the case. That's not the case, you're to deliver, umm, at least one module, at least, and I know people who are delivering more than that, far more than that. So, it's not that. And when it comes to early career researchers, when they join, whether they teach more, you know? All bets are off, because we're living in very interesting time. So if you ask me the same question before the pandemic, I would tell you no, yeah, that wasn't the case, they wouldn't be teaching more, despite the fact that we have a huge expansion, at least, in my experience, in my department, teaching could be covered without increasing people's teaching above what was the norm at that time, which was two modules not two and a half, as it's currently. Right? So, then, then the pandemic came, and the demands suddenly changed. And we deviated from the norms. Now, it's what happens in the sector, though, if you if the question was what happens in the sector and not so

much, and not only just a Aston. Yeah, the, the, it's quite, quite commonly this, this is, this is quite common, or it may be happening in other departments, and not in mine, that newcomers take maybe, you know, they're teaching expands. And because they're new, they don't know exactly how the system works. It's up to the head of department to say well take that in addition to what you have. But generally speaking, I haven't, I haven't, I haven't seen that.

Paul Jones 31:36

You mentioned earlier, one of the questions I wanted to ask is about engagement, because you've got this idea of research, teaching and administration. There's other, other expectations on a member of staff to do things like engagement. They're not officially recognised in how we think about the structure of an academic role for T and R staff. How much of a, a time element does that play? And also, do you think we train staff in the right way to be able to do those types of activities correctly?

DBA9 33:58

You will find that the people, again, that it's dangerous, risky to generalise, generalise, but is it a group that are well equipped to do the sort of activities, or people that have previously been in the industry, and they like it, and they have the skills, and they feel comfortable interacting with businesses, otherwise, is, umm, even within the [redacted] school it's considered, umm, an alien space or, you know, very different. It's a very different community, the business community, or the policymaker, the policy-makers. But I think there is greater appetite now to do that. And you have people who have never worked in the industry and they go and they interact with [redacted], business people, and they do that very effectively. And, I've been, I've been looking at people's, people's feedback,, now that you mention, from a Masters that was delivered to a major [redacted]...

Paul Jones 35:03

Okay.

DBA9 35:04

...and I had a couple of colleagues who, by the way, were excellent in doing research. And there, because, because the stereotype is this, that if you're you know, you may be trained to do research, but you may be a little bit odd. So you wouldn't go down very well with external audiences, right? And I looked specifically for that, and they had excellent, excellent feedback. So, you know, but it might be just them. But, what I've seen, that most of the people who are at least, the ones that are willing to go there and do that, are people who had some exposure to the industry before joining, joining academia, because there are always bright exceptions.

Paul Jones 35:42

Yeah, and I, my experiences would agree with that, there are people who sometimes naturally are able to liaise with outside parties, and understand [redacted] needs, and just get the way you communicate with those entities. Other people then, no matter how much training and development you gave them, they would never just get that type of relationship.

DBA9 36:01

No, you need to, yeah, I agree with you, Paul. And, you know, you have to like it. That's the thing, you have to like it. And personally, I'm, I enjoy doing that. That element of the job I enjoy it a lot, you know, interact with real [redacted] and real [redacted] to simulate [redacted]. It's great.

Paul Jones 36:29

I think, yeah, I think there having the right person doing that is really important. And I think there's probably the potential for us to work with people who are interested in doing that more so, and giving them sharper skills even of being able to handle that type of relationship management process and opportunity, and trying to take people through who are not interested would not be a good idea.

DBA9 36:49

I think you mentioned something very important there. Yeah, so probably, we're there, we're missing opportunities. So yes, someone may enter a Class and do a workshop for practitioners. But then how much time was spent on telling these people what else the university has to offer? So a training, say, a program, even if it's very short, then people how to do relate, relationship management, with these companies that they meet, rather than for their own research or writing case studies for them, or open for impact, which is paramountly important. Yeah, that's something that would be useful in this relationship management thing. And also how to cross sell, to use the dirty word selling, but you know, what else does the university has to offer, basically, for them?

Paul Jones 37:43

I think it's that mindset of thinking about, so I come from a business development background. When I first started at Aston, my role was as a Business Development Manager for a particular ERDF project. But I would always go out with the mindset of, I would listen to a company's problems and issues, and find out how I can relate what the university does to what they're experiencing. It wasn't just about selling my own little patch of land and that was it...

DBA9 38:06

Exactly.

Paul Jones 38:07

... but, we don't have many people thinking that way, because of the way they've been brought up.

DBA9 38:11

Exactly. I think you're absolutely right. You, you absolutely hit it, that, that's what it is. That's what I find lacking. So, and third could be as well, what we probably haven't looked into great detail is, how we induct people, and isn't only the induction week, whatever, whenever that happens. You know, traditionally, conventionally, I don't know if that's the case still. Induction, in my experience, is that induction, when someone joins a department is poor, the head of department is busy, probably at best to take the new colleague out for lunch, tell them where the library is, where things are, how things work, you know, and that isn't then, then we say, well, if you need to ask something, ask some of this. Yeah, but there's so much more that we could do on that. And, there is, that's the kind of training where I think it could be part of the induction as well, telling people, maybe not, you know, I'm not talking about the first week, but the first period and because that also will signal our values, as well, that we value engagement, and this is what you could be doing. And this is how you could get a KTP, and what you do for them, when you go to a company, oh, you know, you have this need, yeah great, did you know that we, that we have this wonderful program for you which is KTP, which is funded sponsored by the Government, therefore, you know, that you experience those savings in labor cost. you recruit that person, you have this huge support, financial support, but you also get an academic who is working on your business with the, with the associate. Did you know about this? Do you know about the programs we have? Do you know about innovation vouchers? Did you know about all these things? So, yes, having this skill, knowledge and skill, to cross sell, signpost, or being even more, I think it would be a great addition to someone's skill set.

Paul Jones 40:19

Yeah, there's two things there, the induction part, I agree with, totally, I don't think we do enough. And it's their opportunity to really embed it personally into the organisation and to make sure that we retain them for as long as possible, make them feel valued straightaway. I think there's a lot there about how we can skill them up on things like KTP, if we could get them shadowing others who are good at doing that, to have that link with business, there's a lot of stuff you could set up quite easily to do that type of activity. There's also part there about, it starts before induction. And that's the way we recruit. Sometimes I think the way we recruit doesn't really mirror what we'd expect from people when they come in. There is processes we have, which are quite old fashioned, in terms of how we think about what we're

looking for. But that doesn't really match up to what you want when they actually get on site, and the values, expectations, and behaviors that we think about then.

DBA9 41:12

The before, the before we recruit, I was thinking the other day, what happens, because you know, we expect that that person join us. Fine. But you know, that before the time that someone says, yes, I'm coming and coming, a lot of things happen. And in great many cases, people that even when they've signed the contract, they don't. Right? So they get a counteroffer, or they even applied, they continue applying, they had applications, and they don't come. If we engage them somehow, before the come, before they arrive, it would be great, not only before they, not only because they could get there, we can offer it to them, we cannot oblige, because they are not employees, we can offer it to them and say, well, here is the thing, would you like to attend? If you can't, if you want to come, we would reimburse your expenses, and that certain hired person, as well, hooking the new, the new recruit, into the, into the institution getting a taste of what it is, how wonderful we are, and making that person come, it's a great thought what happens prior, prior to the person arriving on campus.

Paul Jones 42:28

So having worked in recruitment, consultancy, a lot of my job back then was identifying talent to come into the organisation, but also ensuring that they chose that particular job. So, it didn't matter about what other jobs they're going for, we create a relationship where we'd be in touch regularly, we create an excitement about them starting, we wanted to make them feel as good as possible. There's lots of little things you can do, that add up into a much bigger picture, to ensure that they feel valued and welcomed, even before they step foot on campus for the start date.

DBA9 43:02

Sure. And then the question becomes who's going to be doing it first, for instance, if you have this kind of relationship, where it's not a transactional relationship. Okay, maybe you don't, you chose not to come now, but you may join us in the future. Great, okay, let's, let's not close doors, let's, let's keep in touch somehow, then the question then becomes is, who's going to be doing this stuff? And that's, that's a perennial issue, isn't it? So, okay, that's a great idea, who's going to be doing it? And then the time comes and who is going to be doing it, and when that happens at HR level, the HR function level, or goes down to the department, as many, as oftentimes does, things get to trickle down. Then again, you need to ensure that if that happens, that within the department, you have, you have a mechanism, that is well reserved to be dealing with that and I suspect the training thing, about KTPs and all this would be something that is central, so probably RKE [Research and Knowledge Exchange] would be dealing with that, some, some, somebody, some section within the, within the organisation.

Paul Jones 44:15

There's a lot of potential there for doing stuff better, and I think that we are, we've generally got a more old fashioned way of recruiting, which is reactive. So we put an ad out, we hope good people apply, we interview them. There is an opportunity to be much more proactive and to get the message out there more generally and creating applications. But coming back to the professional development front, by getting the right environment for professional development, encouraging development, that becomes a selling point then, doesn't it, to people who are going to join the organisation.

DBA9 44:48

Great point. Yes. If you say look what I'm gonna give you, you're on top of what you will be receiving, you'll have this, this, this, this and by the way, these are people who have gone through that, and look where they are now. When you have these people saying, yes, it benefits me, it benefited me that way and that, yes, it's in kind, what you're giving to them. And you can even put a price to that, say this training would cost that amount of money, and we'll give you for free. Yes, absolutely. And that product range is... thinking big, once you have that system, the training system, in place. Yeah, you can do lots of stuff with that, both internally, but also externally.

Paul Jones 45:15

So, I think this is about creating extra value, isn't it? I think, as an academic, you could ply your skills at whatever university would want to take you. But it's about creating a better link to the university here to say, well, you could work anywhere and do this job, but these are the benefits you get by being here, and the support, and the development, etc. Yes, I think so, even if you looked at the university and local area, we're in the Midlands Innovation University Group. There's no reason why we couldn't share resources, do things as a group to make sure we gave the right opportunity to become a real powerhouse, then, as a centre for recruitment, coming into the group of universities and trying to make the most of resources then so it becomes effective.

DBA9 46:17

We could join forces with other universities, or having that on our own as a national brand. And then what happens, you have people that may want to come from our universities. And again, that would be a conduit for recruiting good people as well. Once you have that in place, it's something very powerful to have.

Paul Jones 46:36

Yeah, I think so. One of the things I wanted to pick up on, we talked earlier about people who had external experience outside of HE, coming in to HE. One of the questions I'm interested in, in particular, is whether there are skills that people develop outside of HE that are useful to have within a HE environment, that we don't necessarily teach them, or train them up on. Do you think that's the case? That there are some skills, we talked about relationship management, for instance, that's something I think is really useful, but we, we don't necessarily train people on stuff like that. Are there other things you think might be useful from an external perspective, that people learn, that then they can use them usefully in HE?

DBA9 47:16

Yes, everything that, I mean, it's, I don't know how useful my response will be for you. But virtually everything that someone learns before joining the University, in a sector or professional role, which is, doesn't seem relevant to HE, can be very useful. So you know, here's an extreme example [redacted] military service, [redacted] useful in different roles, although it shouldn't be, it's a completely alien sector, doesn't have to do anything with that, but you know, resilience, discipline, organisational skills, even conversations, negotiation, you know [redacted], that's an extreme example, but this is precisely the reason why I brought it, [redacted], it's in a completely different context. But you know, [redacted], marketing and sales, comes, comes, skills learned there, and knowledge come very handy...

Paul Jones 48:37

Yeah...

DBA9 48:38

...And, and I think one of the exception, now everyone carries with them a past. And in that past, there is knowledge, experience, skills, that's transferable. The one that, if we were to think of, what has helped me the most I would say, we chat about relationship, relationship management and people, people, emotional intelligence, understanding that people are different. Managing conversations, very important. Definitely. knowledge, skills, experiences, learned outside or gained outside, it can, can help someone a lot, once they join.

Paul Jones 49:37

Yeah, an area you have mentioned there, which is quite interesting, is marketing and sales, because it touches upon the engagement piece we talked about earlier. Because there's an expectation of academics that they will not only do good research, but they'll be able to sell that research out, as in talking about it and getting people enthused about it, and finding channels to disseminate that research, and those relate then to having some marketing skills and sales ability in terms of how you do that. That's not something we generally teach them. We do courses on things like Twitter for academics and

LinkedIn, but we have departments here who are skilled in different ways. We have a Marketing and Strategy department, we have a Work and Organisation department, Economics, Finance and Entrepreneurship, and various things we've got skills in, but we don't necessarily pass those skills on to our colleagues. Even though those skills exist internally, which I find a bit frustrating, that we've got things we could utilise, both at a local level for the university generally, that we don't really sort of plug back into the system.

DBA9 50:37

Sure. Sure. There are, you know, and I think the ones that are ... there was a trainee in later states of their life. And they join a very different academia, a very different model. They may be, less enthused, about doing all these things, because they will say, hold on a second, I won't do that, I would have probably got another another job. I didn't come here to be a second, a second car, a second, a second hand car salesman. I came here to do serious academic work. Well, you know, when you write an article, you're selling it to an audience. So sales shouldn't be seen as something that is dirty, it is something which is natural everywhere, right? You've got an interview, you sell yourself, good or badly. Well, or badly, but you do it. So why not learning to do it today right? But, I think, that the ones that are joining, you know, the, the early career researchers, I think that there will be much more, umm, enthused, they will be more enthusiastic, or more receptive, to this kind of ideas. And the other thing, a lot has to do, everything has to do with culture. And, when you have people who can, who, who work as role models, and they're respected. So what I mean by this, is that, right? You want someone who writes, who's up to this point have been running, writing papers, it's a very good thing to write papers, especially if these are four, four and three, especially four. Okay, so say, oh, hold on a second, what is this gonna do for me now? I want my time, I want to build my career, and all this. Right. Okay. But if this is someone who is of that calibre, who is a researcher doing it, that legitimising, when you hear the instruction, going so, for someone who hasn't achieved in the area aspire to become, great, is more, probably, that's the one we're, we're gonna face more resistance. So the propagator, the one who preaches the gospel, will have to be someone who is accomplished in the area, that the audience views us instrumental to their career. Whether that's because, but if that's publication, yes, or if that's them becoming great in bringing funding for the university income, then yes. But someone with that, that and other, yes, okay. So, because not, not everybody has the same, not everybody has the same notion of what success is, of the university, this is another thing, as well. Because we always, we will, you want to convince someone that, that's an attitude and behavior that has to be exhibited, well, one, the first will be mirroring someone else's behavior, which part of the aspiration group, and two, has to be factored in, factored in, in the way that this counts for the, for the career. So, you know, I'm thinking of my development conversation, which officially I don't say that that will happen, only then one point in time, that's catastrophic. It should be, you know, it's a continual thing. But certainly there, what's the formal, that's point, and also when it comes down to promotions as well, it needs to be factored in. That's the number one lever to change culture.

Paul Jones 55:07

Yeah, I think there's a lot to be said for having the more regular conversations. And, I always get the impression that we've had things like MyDC put in place as a way to combat people not having conversations, but having that structure doesn't mean it's changed the culture in terms of having conversations. It means that people use it as a tick box exercise to say that they've done it without using it properly then.

DBA9 55:33

No, but this conversation doesn't have to happen. [redacted] When I was referring earlier to continuous conversations, beyond the one point, I know that this particular technological module might develop a conversation, it does that, enables you to do that, but for some reason, it hasn't been a huge success...

Paul Jones 56:12

Yeah...,

DBA9 56:13

...my perception. But you know, the conversations you're having, whether online, when you meet people online, and the conversations you're having, when you're here on campus, at the kitchenette, making coffee, the conversation you're having when you knock someone's door, you interact, right? The everyday conversations, then, are also touch points. And who does this, well, it's the head of department that does those. First, to be really determined to put the time in so that this is done properly. It doesn't have to be formal, there is formally, and there used to be half, now, actually, this was replaced by My Development Conversation, before that there used to be half annually, there was another conversation that, now I supposed to be doing by this other thing, it should be done, beyond my development conversation, not saying we should scrap it, I'm just saying that it should happen more substantially on face-to-face, on, on a personal level, without involving my development conversation.

Paul Jones 57:32

Yeah, I think there's a, there's a risk there that we use the MyDC process, and only that, to be able to understand staff, and then it gets bogged down in having objectives and stuff, clearly outlined, without taking account of people's aspirations, motivations, developmental needs, and what the barriers are, it becomes very transactional in terms of these are your objectives, we need to measure these, what we've done against them, the other parts of the conversation don't happen as naturally,

DBA9 58:01

It doesn't happen. And, again, my experience, there is a lot to be done to supplement my development conversation, or to complement, if you like, a lot, it's invaluable having these conversations with people, head of department, you know, like I said, in the corridor, when it's, when it's relaxed time. You know, informally over coffee, like in someone's door, speaking about something else, then the conversation comes to that, you know, it's, it's, it's invaluable. Of course, you know, time, it's about time.

Paul Jones 58:53

That's the same for everybody, isn't it? People are time precious, they are time poor at the moment. So you have to become very precious about how you use your time, and then, people are making individual judgments on what's best for them, to try and meet their objectives. And there's no slack in the system...

DBA9 59:09

...that's the thing...

Paul Jones 59:10

...do you think then, that if we were committed towards professional development, and getting the best out to people, then that model of 40/40/20 for Teaching, Research and Administration, that should be reworked to look at having a certain amount of time put into that equation that says you will spend this time developing yourself, or developing others, because in other professions, CPD exists and so it's a constant thing they have to do. But, for Higher Education, that's a nice thing to have, but it's not a consistent way of approaching your work and being able to justify how you spend that development time.

DBA9 59:49

I think, Paul, it's a great suggestion. And depending on seniority, it should be certain time, it should be how you develop yourself, but also how you develop others. A certain, a certain time should be given to that, so that time, depending on level, so someone who is at professoriate level, a significant amount of time, I don't know what that would be, a significant amount of time, not 5%...

Paul Jones 1:00:23

Yeah...

DBA9 1:00:24

...because 5%, you say, yeah, okay, I did my 5%, and what's 5% in a week? 10% is 3.5 hours. 5% is 1.5 a week. Actually, that could work. It could be. It could be on that. But depending again, on how many people someone has in their remit. So that's why I say 5%, maybe, maybe more, and then it's not just what they do, it's also how much time they, they used to develop themselves, to prepare for these conversations...

Paul Jones 1:01:05

Yeah...

DBA9 1:01:05

...it's not just okay, let's have a chat over coffee, it might be that happens in a informal way, but the person has to be informed, about the individual, you know, keeping notes, remember, unless you allocate one-to-one, which only one person, so you remember, you know, I don't know what form this could take. So, what I'm trying to put across is that, it needs to be seen seriously, these kinds of activities can have a tremendous impact on the institution. And the funny thing is, that we [redacted] advocate this, you know, we have, we have wondrous learning, training and development, and we say how important this thing is, how important mentoring and coaching is, as part of that. So at least, we should be, it should be doing what we're preaching.

Paul Jones 1:01:19

I agree with that, and that is part of the frustration, isn't it? I know there are other departments, as well, that do some very good work that could influence the way we operate stuff. But the frustrating thing for me is that I know that these lessons exist, and that we've got the skills to do it, but we don't feed that back into the way we operate. We tell people about it, and we can preach about it, but then we don't actually do it ourselves.

DBA9 1:02:18

That's very true.

Paul Jones 1:02:19

So, I think that's covered pretty much all of what I wanted to talk about, was there anything else you wanted to mention before we wrap up?

DBA9 1:02:25

No, I, um, it was a, it was, not only was it a very good discussion, but it also helped me as well to reflect on these thoughts, I had, and bouncing, bouncing them over to you. So it was very enjoyable and rewarding.

Paul Jones 1:02:46

Thank you. I will stop the recording now.

Appendix 13: DBA10 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA10

Paul Jones 00:00

I have started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel that there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour but we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi-structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. Though the idea is that I do that with the least number of questions or interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me the details that are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as an individual, including personal data, will be removed, and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself or my supervisory team. This interview is considered low risk. If we do need to stop the discussion for a break, or we need to stop completely, please raise your hand. So I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview, if I feel it is causing you distress, or may do the same if it's causing me distress. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start, then we will start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. So can you confirm you understand the information that I have given you?

DBA10 01:57

Yes.

Paul Jones 01:58

Thanks. And are you happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA10 02:01

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:02

Thanks. Do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA10 02:05

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:05

Great. Thank you. So could you confirm what school you work in please?

DBA10 02:10

I work in [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:12

Great. Thanks. And could you confirm your gender please?

DBA10 02:15

I am a [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:16

Great, thank you, and are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA10 02:20

That's right.

Paul Jones 02:20

Great. So there's three choices. How would you describe your career level? Early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA10 02:29

I would probably say mid career.

Paul Jones 02:31

Thank you. And could you confirm which age bracket you're in? 25 To 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64?

DBA10 02:43

Within [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:45

Great, thank you. So could you tell me a bit now about how you consider professional development for yourself and more generally, and what your experience has been like so far for that?

DBA10 02:55

I think my views on professional development have probably changed quite a bit. And I suppose some of that is linked to, as I say, I identify as mid career. So I see professional development as a lot less to do with formal training compared to when I was starting out. So when I was new to higher education, including things like going on to mandatory, at the institution I was at, it was the postgraduate certificate in academic practice, although in my department back then we called it something slightly different, which is probably not fit for publication. And some of those formal trainings like that, these days to me, and I suppose I'll probably be talking a lot more about that, I see professional development is something that really is about what I'm choosing to do, trying to have a vision about how I want to grow as an individual, although I'm a bit critical of the idea of individualising everything and respons..., individualising responsibility. Actually in turn, for me, professional development is very much about my responsibility, partly because it's actually about deciding in what ways I want to develop and how I'm going to do that.

Paul Jones 04:07

Yeah, that's great. So then, do you, so you mentioned there about having individual responsibility and thinking about your career and where you want to be? I think that's really important. Where does that overlap then what the university does for you? Is there much of an overlap? Do you get support in that way?

DBA10 04:43

Okay, so I would say in the early days, there was overlap because my first I think, generally speaking, for most of us, when you are new into role, your first concern is really finding out what on earth you're doing, and hoping that you get reasonably good at it before everyone realises that you're an imposter. So, back then, I'd say the overlap is high. Now, I would say in many ways, the overlap is at best a coincidence. And I suppose that's for a couple of reasons. So one of the things I'm probably elaborating on about is, for me a significant part of my professional development, I really see it in terms of my disciplinary and professional identity, which is I would say practitioner first and academic second, really. But

also, I think, sometimes in terms of, I wouldn't, I suppose it technically is professional development, I don't really see in terms of what professional development means to me, but in terms of things like training, sometimes, I think increasingly, in the last handful of years, I've been going to training and thinking, well, I wanted to get this out of this experience, and I haven't. So I think, again, I'm probably disengaged a little bit from the formal method. And I'll give an example. I think last year, I'm fairly certain I went on an online bit of training about being a program director. I think I did, I could not tell you for the life of me what actually was covered, except I am fairly sure it covered things like strategic and, you know, it emphasises things like the leadership, or the relationship with students, and things like that. And actually, what I really wanted to know, are things like what, what is the calendar over a year? When am I writing reports? What are the forms I need to know about? Things that are not necessarily terribly thrilling, actually, I would say a lot more to do with the day to day of the role than the inspirational stuff that we put on our CVs.

Paul Jones 06:59

Yeah.

DBA10 07:01

So I think I'm, I think I might have started getting myself on a bit of a tangent there. So I might check back what you asked me.

Paul Jones 07:07

That's fine. One of the things you mentioned, which I'm keen to pick up on, is you said you identified more as a practitioner, rather than, that would be compared to an academic them, yeah? So one of the interesting things to think about there, is the drivers for you, in terms of your professional development, do they come more from your professional accreditation and what you have to do to keep up continuing professional development and maintain those standards versus what you've been asked to do as an academic. Where does the drive come from in terms of your development?

DBA10 07:41

I think, although I should be answering the question immediately, I'm going to do the terrible academic habit of answering a slightly different question that I've invented. But, I think, just to go back a little bit further in time to contextualise where this came from, I was an academic first, in the sense that I pretty much, from PhD, went straight into a full time lecturing job, which was an incredible privilege. Because for so many it doesn't work out that way. And my PhD was in my subject area, so to anonymise me, you will probably have to bleep out in the, in the write up, but in [redacted] subject. So I was teaching and I thought, well, you know, I know all the theory, I can teach very happily about the research and what the evidence suggests, but actually, to do the job well, I need to say, well, what does this look like in practice, so it was important to me to then pursue training as a practitioner. So it kept me busy for the first handful of years in a job because at one point, I was simultaneously doing the postgraduate certificate in academic practice, and starting out a master's in [redacted] subject to cover [redacted]. And then I think I probably took a bit less than a year break between finishing the masters and starting [redacted]. And I finished [redacted] years ago, and those details will make it clear to at least a couple of members of your supervisor team exactly who I am. So [redacted] I think I've essentially, for the better part of [redacted] years, because the Masters was two years, [redacted] took me four years, so for six years, really, I've almost had a very clear end goal working towards and known really what I need to be doing at any given time to keep moving forward, probably in a bit of a limbo [redacted], in the sense of that has stopped, and there is no one, I don't really have an external thing that I'm working towards that is strongly important to me. I mean, for some people it would be, you know, work towards becoming a reader or work towards becoming a professor, I don't think those things will happen for me. So, yeah, certainly a big drive for me is, obviously, I've got to keep up CPD, as obviously the fact that I think, for anyone who's spent that long working on becoming a professional, you don't do that unless you care about it. So it's, even if it wasn't CPD requirement, I would be trying to keep up with my game anyway. And plus, also, I'm fairly embedded in the community. So I volunteer with [redacted] organisation. So I'm kind of [redacted] for the [redacted] and I'm the Interim editor for new publications. So those also

are sorts of things to do with professional development. But it's also things that I'm doing just to contribute back, and similarly, a key bit of my professional development at the moment, when I'm finding time for it, I'm working on some, what they call it modules, it's basically filling out some documents. They're doing work for the [redacted] organisation, so that I can pursue becoming qualified as a supervisor, so that I can supervise our trainees, and that's probably something I wanted to do anyway. But also, there's a shortage of supervisors. So again, it's, I suppose the drivers for me are, you know, my professional body. Not that I think the [redacted] organisation is perfect by a long shot. And my profession, and I think Aston is a place where perhaps it gives me the opportunity to do those things. But I feel it's, it's, and I suspect, it's probably the case for lots of people. I think academia is kind of a marriage of convenience, because everyone's career is so individualistic. It's making sure you're ticking some boxes for the employer, whilst doing the thing that you want to do, because actually, the employer does not care what it is you do.

Paul Jones 12:12

So you mentioned something interesting there about Aston allows you to do the things you need to do, is that that it gives you permission, and it gives you time, or just permission to do it, but not really giving you the time to do it?

DBA10 12:31

Well, if, I think it's, I have time to do things. And there's not particularly a great deal of oversight. So I'm conscious that part of the thing I've got to do is, at some point, is bringing in money, and doing freestyle publications, I think so long as I do enough of those things, they don't actually care what it is I do. But if it turns into a nice press release at some point, then they might pretend to care. And this is not me trying to say that the sector is evil, or if, it's a large organisation, effectively, we are all ants or cogs depending on what kind of metaphor you'd like to use. Ultimately, the only way to manage that is probably some degree of tickboxing. So, I would say, you know, Aston doesn't really know what I'm doing. At some point, a line manager will probably check what I'm doing. I might elaborate more on that later on. I have to be a bit careful.

Paul Jones 13:39

Yeah, that's fine. So one of the things I'm curious about as well, when I do these interviews, is about the general structure of contracts for teaching and research member of staff would be: 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% administration. How does that balance work for you at the moment in terms of being able to do your work? Does that work as it should do?

DBA10 14:03

I think so, I've certainly, I've had more time for scholarly activity than I've had in a long time. I would, you know, maybe like my first year of working in a profession, or possibly, or less time, I suppose in a PhD because that is all research. But it's probably the best arrangement I've had in a very long time. I don't really pay that much attention to does it really work out 40 / 40 / 20? Because I think with any job, or organisation, what you have on paper differs from reality anyway and that's just part of life. So at the moment, for example, it is my incredibly light teaching term. I've basically got a few sessions on one module. In theory, I'm co-leading it, I suppose I am perhaps, but it doesn't feel to me like doing a lot of what I associate with running a module. I'm covering for a colleague, one session, you know, small bits and pieces, and of course, still got supervision of students. So I've got a fair bit of time, I think, the admin probably feels a bit longer just because one of the things that I'm doing, and again, I don't know quite how you're gonna anonymise this, but I'm leading on [redacted] project. And that's effectively I think, my manager, and someone who's also sort of mad to me a bit, just said that they've basically given me extra in the workload, because it's quite a bit and actually, I think they've treated it almost as if it's half a module, which I think is probably quite fair, because when I'm not trying to progress one of the writing projects, or prepping for a specific bit of teaching, then I'm typically, I'm working on just doing, it's a lot of paperwork, but it's got to be done.

Paul Jones 16:14

Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. So one of the things you said there was about, previously was about, you don't feel as much oversight at the moment in terms of what you're doing, which can be both a nice thing where you are allowed to give, being given the flexibility and empowerment to just get on with your job. But also it can be a reasonably lonely existence then, in terms of not feeling like you're being supported. It's a difficult balancing act to find. Where on that spectrum do you think you are then, do you feel like you're getting support at the moment?

DBA10 16:48

And again, because I've sort of reflecting a bit on the early career to now journey, I think when I first started, firstly, I wanted to prove that I was basically doing the job right, and make sure I didn't get fired, because, you know, mildly neurotic. I think at some point, then, I was trying to make sure that line managers at my first institution, basically, I was trying to say, hey, look, I've done this thing, isn't it great, aren't I doing a good job. That made absolutely no difference. But every now and then it was, you know, a bit of verbal praise, which I'm a sucker for. And, I think at some point, I probably had some experiences that sort of changed my relationship with management. So, my first institution, I never, I'd been looking to leave for a while because I was stagnating. But also, I think, the ... oh there is a special word for it, but it's not coming to mind, but I think the thing that brought things to a head was that I had a quite toxic manager. So for context, five other people left same year as me, but anyway, quite a lot. And went to [redacted] University, where I had a fantastic line manager. And I think that felt less about trying to say, hey, aren't I doing well, so I can go and get a promotion. I was very happy working for him. And I think he brought the best out of all of us really, not really sure where I am quite going with this, but this is, you know, also during the pandemic, and I think seeing how institutions responded during the pandemic, I think, was, I think I was already quite skeptical of the higher education sector, I think, the pandemic probably fundamentally shifted my relationship with organisations, because I saw how slow they were to pre-empt lockdown when it was clear that we were going to be heading in that direction. And also seeing how quick they were to bring people back in face-to-face before vaccines were available. And seeing how quickly mask, masking was abandoned, and all the rest of it. I thought they don't care about our well being. So this is transactional, they pay me to do a job, I will do my job. But, you know, a new organisation is not family, not friend. So, I think, that probably changed my expectations a bit, in that, I've been doing the job long enough that I'm reasonably confident I know what I'm doing. I do occasionally ask questions that are specific about how things work at Aston like, you know, I'm used to, you know, here is a situation. My instinct is we do this, but you know, is there someone they need to talk to. So I don't feel like I need a huge amount of supervision, but I mean, I think, I probably, something is freeing about knowing that your manager is not particularly watching you, but as ever, more or less, I don't particularly like that, I would rather, I think, because I'm somewhat neurotic, I think part of me fears being seen as a failure or not doing the right thing. So I fear under-performing, but actually, I also do want feedback on how I'm doing and honestly, again, I'll just say and I will let you worry about how you anonymise it... ...I will do it as well as possible... ...So because my line manager [redacted]. But nice [redacted], but [redacted], I think, how [redacted] sees me, I think [redacted] might be in a parallel universe, because I've heard the way [redacted] said, [redacted] said, looks to me, like, oh, you know, I see very much this kind of person that I'm thinking, why, how, it's not just me. And I wonder if, it might just be, because there's so many people to supervise. And I know that, you know, being a line manager in higher education is the job no one wants. It's thankless, it's full of lots of admin, I have to imagine, [redacted] probably hasn't really got time to particularly observe what I'm doing. Particularly if I'm not causing any problems. So, I suppose, I'm not, although I would like I suppose a different style of management, I can appreciate why things are as they are. It's not particularly causing problems, and I can get on with my job. I suppose it's just another reason to be quite self-directed.

Paul Jones 21:45

Yeah, and I can understand that higher education is difficult in terms of line management, quite often, they come from an academic background, and they've got their own priorities in terms of research objectives, and different things they have to do and try and balance them. But that doesn't mean that you as individuals should lose out on getting the right support to encourage you to, to be able to function at

your best and to enable you to do what you want then. And that might be a fundamental problem of the way higher education works is that, that management structure might not be quite right for supporting people in the right way then.

DBA10 22:21

Perhaps, but I think some of it might also be, um, so my first institution, I knew people who worked in nursing, partly because my, okay this will also de-anonymise me, [redacted], and I remember hearing repeatedly about things like, for professional, for professions, university regulations don't work because actually, the way universities work is, you know, that's more a pastoral element, it's like each line passes me, and if you can pass me in the morning you should, but you don't really want that in nursing, because, I remember one classic tale. I'm afraid it's off topic, but I like sharing this one. My former colleague told me about a student who is writing an essay and, or something like that, and the assignment task was to I think, come up with a care, a care plan for a patient and part of a patient presentations that they had obesity. And I, and a student, it said that they put them on the Liverpool care pathway. I don't know if you're familiar with that. That's basically end of life. You stop giving medicine and you turn everything off, and you let people die.

Paul Jones 23:33

And that is known as a Liverpool care pathway?

DBA10 23:37

It's probably not going to help add in to the DBA, at least I hope not. But, so, the point is that for a... hence, it's a sort of tension, if your priority is making sure that the right well, if I say the right people, I think it has the wrong connotations, because that ends up suggesting I think demographic issues or elitism, etc. But the right people in terms of people who have the competencies, I think, because, again, my, the locus of my identity, really, is outside of the institution, it is in the professional world. And I'm thinking about things like industry, the clients we're working with, the impact we have. For me, the ultimate priority is students have to have the skills and knowledge. And whilst that's ostensibly what HE is about, I don't think it is necessarily always the reality.

Paul Jones 24:33

Right.

DBA10 24:36

So, again, to try and bring us back to the original point because I've, I've, I've done what I always do, it's that I wonder a little bit. I think I've got a clear sense of what my priorities are, and I suppose my agenda, and I recognise that there are tensions between what I want to achieve and what the institution wants to achieve. And I think because I've got to this point in my career, ultimately, the decision, and it's probably a theme throughout this interview is, I know what I think is right. And I would rather be fired, if that doesn't meet expectations, than compromise on things that I think are deal breakers, and so one of those things is about making sure, trying to make sure, that on these particular [redacted] where I have got responsibility, that way, you've got to make sure that students are actually competent, because for [the department], students could then go into professional training, and actually, in the long term, it's a reputational hit if we've got students who are enrolling on training and a supervisor saying these students from Aston they don't know how, they don't know a thing. I am no longer saying it's that bad. That's an exaggeration. But that's to avoid.

Paul Jones 25:57

So just to clarify on that point then. On that point, then, do you think there's a difference between passing a course, and being competent to go out into the world and do stuff?

DBA10 26:05

Absolutely. And I think it's not always necessarily a problem, as such. Because not everyone is doing a course to go out and be a practitioner, I think we forget that a lot, with this employability drive. But I've

known students who are doing it because they're interested in the subject and they want to learn at a higher level. And I find, I find myself forgetting this sometimes, I find that quite sad. Because surely this should be a place where there's a love of, a love of learning is first, and other things are maybe a close second that. And sometimes people are going into an academic role where, I sometimes describe academia as a very expensive psychiatric institution, where we keep people to avoid them doing real damage in the outside world. And occasionally, I cast myself as being within that population. So if someone is doing something that is more about, you know, if they're, if their journey in life is more about theory, and quote, unquote, pure knowledge, whatever, then I'm less concerned. But if you've got a course, where you're saying this is accredited, this is part of the professional qualification, then even if someone doesn't want to pursue it, you've got to make sure because someone will change their mind later on. So I in, for example, in, in [redacted] subject, if someone is leaving a course that they've got no understanding of, you know, in those pressures to do, to focus on individualistic approaches, and they don't understand the value or importance of [redacted] or [redacted], then I'm concerned. If there are students who, in some variety, perhaps, are not showing the professional values, I'd expect, for example, around respect for diversity, etc, then, I've got a story about that, but it's possibly off topic. So I can always, you can decide if you want me to tell it or not, you know, if someone, if someone's not meeting his professional values, and again, you know, obviously, we've got to address that before the end. But, you know, if people aren't meeting expectations, then again, I've got a duty as a professional, to not pass them. And, again, this is probably gonna sound cynical, but I think there's a realistic element here. From a university perspective, you want lots of people passing, so they've got a good pass, right? They want people getting jobs and making lots of money, because those are all things that ended up on Times Higher Education, league tables, etc.

Paul Jones 28:51

I can see the tension between wanting to represent your profession and your identity in that profession. And making sure people are going to do a good job in that profession versus the realities of, we want students, good NSS scores, good rankings and league tables and all those two things don't naturally add up. And the other thing that doesn't add up, quite often, is the tension between providing a good learning experience versus getting good grades on your teaching. And those two things don't line up very well.

DBA10 29:24

I mean, again, it's quite funny because obviously, I've, part of my KPIs is around student feedback, but I don't care, because honestly, after, I mean, and this is reflected in the literature, often I don't, often I don't find the feedback useful, so for example, in my first institution, for years I had students saying, oh, we want separate lecture and tutorial, because I've been doing these kind of two hour sort of lectures, but we have some activities sort of embedded in. So okay, fine. People have been asking for this for a few years I'll do it. So went through the paperwork accepted process to get this happen. And what happened was, in hindsight, very predictable in that hardly anyone actually went to the tutorials. So basically, for one of my sessions, I had two students turning up, I said, well, you're getting the Oxford experience here. So one thing that people don't always know what they want, and sometimes people ask for things, but they don't necessarily use those, if you offer them, and that is not something specific to students, it's kind of human nature. People sometimes don't enjoy things at first, and value later on. So lots of students will hate research methods in [redacted]. But actually, it's one of the things that a lot of the stuff I've done with clients, basically, I've got that work because they wanted someone with research skills. So you know, it's great having those skills, so the process of acquiring those skills is not fun. And there's few ways to make it fun. But there's also the other side, this, I mean this actually works out, kind of in our favour, because as a, as a white male I'm likely to get higher ratings on student evaluations compared to people of color and women. And this is something that, you know, there's been, you know, research around this, it's, it's widely known. So basically, I get student evaluations on easy mode, because as a white guy, middle aged, [redacted], I probably looked like one expects an academic to look like. So, you know, I could get good rating without necessarily having done a good job. Also, how do students know if it was a good learning experience? So one of the issues also students tend to like lectures. And there's a lot of controversy about that. And I used, and I'm, I'm flip flop on this one myself,

because I see the value of activities, but also, I think we're often not critical about flipped learning. So it doesn't seem to work for everyone. I understand that there's some evidence suggesting that flipped learning actually tends to favor the higher performing students because they're better able to prepare in advance. So might not be doing wonders for students at the lower levels of performance. Who might benefit from maybe more, you know, just direct lecturing, and opportunity to ask questions, because although not many ask, ask questions I find. It's all complicated. I mean, for us to talk about developing and having a bit of a vision, there's also many times when I think, I don't know what the answer is, I just try and do the best, I tell myself it's just, is ultimately just a job. I think I do try to, I think there are ways to try and make learning a bit more enjoyable because if people are enjoying it, they will probably put a bit more effort in. But also less stuff you have to do regardless of whether people enjoy it or not. So if you, if you've got a course that is credited by an outside body, like [redacted], [redacted], whoever, they will say there are things that people have got to learn, it doesn't matter if you like it or not, they are going to damn well do it.

Paul Jones 33:21

So that brings me on nicely to one of the things that I'm interested in for this topic area. And that's how much you are influenced by external factors. And you've touched upon this because you've already said that your identity, your [redacted] certification and your identity within the [redacted] are all really important drivers for you. What about things like the REF, the TEF and KEF, are those important in your head in terms of what's driving your activity and your development?

DBA10 33:54

That, I basically think, I'm not sure about the KEF, it's a relatively new thing. But REF and TEF I think are basically poison or cancer, depending on what metaphor you want to go with. So, and this is something I didn't, I was sort of meant to mention early on, but I got, I think I got very enthusiastic about the point that students rather than research, is okay, I've got to get three star, three and four star publications, if I want to keep my job, and especially if I want to be promoted, I don't actually care about three or four star, four star because, all that means is that there's a bunch of journals that people have decided are prestigious. And because it already seems prestigious, they can be selective, so they publish the stuff that people tend to cite, and if you want to get into those journals, you have to publish those kinds of research. And what they generally what is stuff that is theory building, and if it helps someone that's a happy accident, but that's not what they're there for. And of course, if you want to get into those journals, you've got to cite stuff in those journals, so it becomes self reinforcing. And actually, part of my identity is, as a practitioner, I want to do research that provides evidence that can actually help people solve problems. And that often means that you're focusing on specific professions or organisations or sectors doing something that is context dependent, probably not a randomised control trial, although that is possible. And basically, you're doing things that all will count against you for trying to get into a three or four star journal. Also, things that I'm finding is that REF can make it harder to do interesting, multidisciplinary stuff. Because, okay, I'm in [redacted], so I've got to go by [redacted], one of the writing projects I'm on includes someone from another institution who's from a different discipline, they've got different journals they've got to aim for so potentially, you're having to split research into different papers so you can try and make sure everyone gets a win, or you're having to compromise on where you're pushing it. So, again, as, as with the professional body bit I mentioned earlier, it's another areas where I know what kind of research I want to do. That's what I intend to do, while trying to find a way to squeeze into three star journals. But if I fail, I'm prepared to be fired and go do something else in my life. Because I don't want to do something that is abstract. And, you know, ok people might read it, and then cite it, but it's not actually informing practice, and it's not helping organisations do a better job.

Paul Jones 36:46

Yeah, and there seems to be a tension there between the expectations of what you should be publishing, and as you mentioned, the journals and how they, how they, edit and review work and to select what to put in them. The [redacted] is an important element of [redacted], but when you look at the wider context of research, the way we do stuff internally will be based on peer review. And there's more of a push with things like DORA to move away from using very simple metrics, like [redacted], or to

pigeonhole, what the research is like them, you will see more things coming through the REF now with impact having had a higher rating. And that translation of research into meaningful activity, there seems to be a shift into it becoming more important for people to think about and to work towards then. But I do think from what you've mentioned, it would be good to get your thoughts on, that practitioner element that you've mentioned quite a lot, that's really important to you. But it's probably really important in your department, more generally. Do you think that certain disciplines then have more of a, more of a drive, from what's happening in the external world, so accreditations by [redacted], [redacted] or people, where that department becomes driven by that, and then your professional development would have to change because of those drivers. Other departments might not have that same sense of belonging to this outside world, then.

DBA10 38:17

Possibly, but I've always been part of departments where there's, because I was in [redacted] before, so that was purely [redacted] driven. I'm in [redacted], where I'd say the main driver is [redacted]. Because actually, there's a huge overlap in the program and actually [redacted] students do and the [redacted] students do, there's only one or two modules different. Which is a whole other kettle of fish. I'm conscious that I haven't mentioned TEF, so I'll come to that in a moment. So remind me if I don't. So I should, I should think, the drivers are probably different, but I've, like I say, I've never worked in a, in a department, where there wasn't that external of, a reality I've ever worked, even when, I remember at one point someone suggested, at my first institution, I might consider the [redacted], basically, it wasn't [redacted], but effectively that what it was, it's where [redacted] sat. So even if I'd moved there, which I don't think would have been a great fit, but then they would have been driven very much by [redacted] external bodies, so I think even without those you have other external bodies, because of course, you've got government strategy, plans, and this will bring us back to TEF, and all these other various policy documents you end up having to read. I guess, thinking back to TEF, because I mentioned that as a poison too, I think that's because, I think again, like REF it, now I believe in the principle of, we want to do good research and we want to do good teaching, and I would hope you wouldn't find anyone in, in, in any university who would be against those things. But to then evaluate them, you don't have to make it measurable. And again, for your background, I'm sure you have heard a lot about the way you measure things drives organisational behavior. So with TEF a big element then is around employability. And there are so many challenges around that, because again, my first institution was, well, everyone says they are widening participation now, where you used to joke at my first institution is widening participation in the, in the broadest possible sense. And I joked that our clearance question, basically went along, and supposedly picked up was, I'd say, say, here's our admissions process, check the pulse, great, you're in, which wasn't, wasn't really fair. And actually, we had some great students who came in who on paper would have looked like they would have crashed and burned. So. But, we know that there are, all of these kinds of disadvantages that are baiting for so many of our students. And again, I suppose, on reflecting more on the previous institutions where I worked, where there were more UK Home students. So you have people who were often from poor economic backgrounds, taking my first institution, but I would say also for [redacted] University. You have people who are often first generation students, university students, you have, obviously the inequalities to do with gender, and race. And these are all intersectional. And I, the employability agenda, as proposed by the government, doesn't take into account inequalities. So, and there is also this perverse thing, where you find yourself trying to drive students towards things that would look great for your institution, so you're trying to get them to go to these events where you've got these big corporate recruiters coming, because if you get enough students on those, fantastic, they are earning enough, and you'll get some good ticks. But that might not be what students want to do. And often the career trajectory that [redacted] students, for example, would have in mind often means being, having rubbish pay, for a very long time, is not a good thing, but it's the reality because so many want you, for example, go into [redacted] profession while you're working for the NHS then. So you always find yourself trying to, thinking you want to make people want things, and you can't do that, it's not possible. And you're trying to focus on what would be good for you, rather than what would be good for the student, what would be in line with what they want out of life. And you end up not appreciating things like, I remember a student to, had a third class degree, which, you know, according to things like TEF, that would be regarded as a failure, for her it was brilliant, but

she'd not been sure she'd get a degree at all. And for her, it was like, well, she had achieved something, and I probably wouldn't have felt the same way. But that didn't matter, it was her life.

Paul Jones 43:18

Yeah...

DBA10 43:20

So, I think, the risk is with these drivers is that we have to play the game. And in any organisation, you have to play certain kinds of game. But I think along the way, we risk losing the heart of actually what we care about. Because actually, I came to university, because I love my subjects. I love sharing it, I want other people to love it too and I want other people to learn things, you know, be amazed by the things that they learn and then go out and do something with it.

Paul Jones 43:47

That makes sense. It's interesting what you said about the type of things we do will drive behavior then. So if you are measuring things, the expectation is that those things are important, then your behaviors and attitudes towards those things will change. And you'll end up doing those things. And it's part of why I wanted to do this study in the first place. Because we have a very, for what I can see, top down driven organisation development system, which is then driven by things like those external pressures of, you have to do well in REF, we have to do well in KEF and we have to do well in TEF. We can't afford not to do those things, we have to do them, but in my head, there's got to be a balance between knowing how we achieve good grades in those places, but not be driven by that solely then. So if we take research, creating the right culture, for instance, that should drive the right activities that will then do well in REF, we don't say REF's the end point. And this is what we do to achieve well in REF, it should be a case of if we get the culture right, and we develop people in the right way, then all the things that would be measured well in REF will appear, but a lot of other benefits will be had then, but it does seem to be very focused on the result orientation of some of these key things.

DBA10 45:12

I can give an example, but I agree, I think, I mean, I hate, I hate a lot of these games, because I think I see myself as very straightforward. And I'd rather just do what I think I ought to be doing. But I think, it can be, it is possible to play the game in a more conscientious way where you think, okay, here's, here are my values, how, what are the ways in which this can fit into this agenda. So, for example, I intend to try and do good quality research that is still very practitioner focused, that hopefully, the quality of the evidence might convince a freestyle journal, I'll see how that pans out. There are other challenges there. But it's probably not really the focus of the interview. But I remember going to a departmental research meeting. And I think it was early, it must have been fairly early in my time at Aston. And, I think, I'd had a very naive anticipate, because as I've said, probably quite a few times, it's my first time being in a very research focused institution. And I think I've had this in mind that I would come to this institution, everyone would talk about research ideas, or what they think the big gaps in the literature are, and like, what are the questions we're curious about and that we really need to answer and basically brainstorming research, and forming collaborations, and then I went to this meeting and it was basically, right, there's these pockets of money, and there's these journals, which we should be targeting, and, oh, here are some things that, you know, people are already doing in the department. But it was very much that kind of, well, it was very driven by the metrics, and I didn't hear one bit of anyone saying, oh, I'm really curious about this, I'd like to learn about, you know, I've been seeing some evidence, things are working like this, but no one's really sure why, and I'd really love to explore that. So, I think bringing that back to personal development, I think, rather than being overly concerned with what the top down strategy is, and what the institution wants, because that in itself isn't helping me so far, what I think the big thing getting from Aston is the time. And, if, not so much the other things, but there are people I already know that I want to work with. So I, you know, I have my little pockets, I will work within that. And, fingers crossed, that should help me hit those targets. I'm not so concerned about working with the wider department. And it's a shame to say, but it's, it is my assessment of the situation.

Paul Jones 48:04

So you mentioned something about the values, and the values you hold, and it can fit into a broader question of the management that you talked about earlier. The first part is, do you feel like your departmental manager, or others, understand what your values are? And one of the things you mentioned earlier was you've had experience of poor management, as well as very good management, what has made the management good for you and what has made management bad?

DBA10 48:37

So I think, to clarify a bit. Now, my line manager, I would, I'm not sure. Because I've talked about the kind of research that interests me. I mean, I had to do that for my interview to get the job. So in principle, he's got the opportunity to do, know what my values are, but I do think that when he looks at me, and indeed other people, he is seeing it through a slightly distorted lens, and I am not entirely quite sure why it is, I find it a bit fascinating. I mean, for example, it's obvious, he sees me as very industry focused, and I am to the extent that I pay attention to some of the discourse out there. And I know people working in industry, and I know about some of the practices, but not in the sense that I would normally expect, you know, in a business school or some big industry, or in the sense that they've spent 20 years actually being a manager, and doing all this stuff, and now they're coming and teaching the programme. So I fit more into a scientist practitioner model, where it's very much about the evidence and the science and how that informs practice, anyway, so, so I'm not sure in terms of my manager what [redacted] would think my values are, and I'm sure I'd find it very entertaining hearing. But I think, you know, probably part of that stems to the original problem, is that, he's obviously got his own targets and, and tasks to do, and his own KPIs, etc. And I think it's, you know, as much as to me, it seems a bit like the department, and probably the institution, is a gaping vacuum of values, it might just be because the values aren't what is driving things. So values might be there, but they're not visible. But going back to the early bit about good and bad management, I had a few experiences. My, when I first started out, I had a somewhat laissez-faire manager, but not really acting in hindsight, but, you know, he would let you solve your problems, we'd go to him with like, I would like to do this. And he wasn't terribly interventionist. So for example, I had a colleague who really let me down badly on marking, and I just didn't want to go through it again, because I didn't end up staying, I would never do this again. But on this occasion, I'd stayed up till 3am doing marking because he had done such a rubbish job. So that I could release grades on time, the next day. These days I would have just said, no, I can't release on time, or sacrifice my health that way again. But I basically said, you know, I'd like her not to be on my module anymore. And off she came, I don't think she got any other kind of work to make up for it. So basically, she won out of it. But then later on, I had someone who, in same institution, who did not want to be a line manager, he basically moved to the institution, because they made him that, he will be made professor. And basically, his pact for the devil was that then he had to be head of department. And he was, well, I mean, I think early on, he tried to get things done. But he found, as I think you probably get in many universities, the powers that be have the ultimate say, and they won't let you necessarily do what you think is right. And I think very quickly, he checked out. And I remember one time I'd had enough of it, I didn't take up for them another institution, because that would have taken me away from my personal identity. But I've had this offer, and I was trying to bargain for, not even really, I mean, I said, you know, if I can get a promotion, it'd be nice. But I knew he couldn't do that for me. Basically, I used it to say I'd like different. I'd like to not be teaching this, and I'd like this instead, or whatever. And he basically said, oh, if I were you, I'd move. So it wasn't really inspirational. But, that mattered less, because I think there is a really tight knit family. We're not a family. But I suppose the family, in the sense, that some of us liked each other, and we had lots of bickering, but things got done. So it was a reasonably supportive environment. And things worked well enough, even though it was holding things together with gaffer tape, sometimes. So that probably didn't matter so much. And then the really bad manager. That was a partly a combination of that. And I remember thinking when he first joined, that he was going to be really great, he was going to turn things around, because we'd had such hands off management that he seemed to have vision, he kept saying the right things. We had a portfolio leader who was very bureaucratic and had really no people skills. So it was all because, there were times that I liked her, but just not in any capacity linked to her job. So see, we've rubbed people up the wrong way and then between her quite bureaucratic, like, this is how things are going to be, even if we had good

reasons for wanting things somewhat different. And, and he turned out to be quite a bully. And in between the two of them, we had colleagues who were, you know, crying at work, trying to hide it. I was on the verge of taking sick leave at one point. Well, and actually, the thing that did it for me in the end is I raised a grievance because I was appalled by how the line manager had behaved at, um, an event where we had a guest speaker and it was very naive, I thought, you know, these other people will support me and HR will do something. And I, I don't know how I imagined that going. In hindsight, it was ludicrous. If I kept my head down long enough, and just put up with things, he was gone after a couple of years. I wanted to leave the place for other reasons, so... but that was awful and I think probably left me with some and lingering trauma, I suppose. So I think after that, I was very careful about trusting people. But then I went to [redacted] University, where I had a really great line manager. And he was very valued, he was very value based. And his values were ones that I shared. So the implicate, implementation, sometimes we'd struggle. So for example, he's very big on open science, evidence based practice, etc. Teaching students skills, you wouldn't normally get on an [redacted] program, and actually measuring the implementation, some of it was challenging, because he was really in favor of using [redacted], and the rest of us basically didn't have a clue with [redacted]. So the students struggled with that, and I think we probably quietly moved [redacted] back after he left. But, you know, he was really enthusiastic, he had our backs. So, this is around the time when [redacted] University had started to say, we're going back to face to face, and he said, I'm going to be shielding. I've got small children, I'm not going in. And I'm not going to make any of you go in if you don't want to, and I said I don't want to, I don't have a vaccine, I have elderly parents. So, I think, for him, I really felt like he got the best out of me, I also wanted to be my best for him. And I, I mean, he moved to another institution, and apart from the fact it would have been inconvenient and I don't necessarily know that the move would have benefited me, but I seriously contemplated moving just to follow him. I've got a lot of time for him. So yeah, I've, so I still have to have loyalty to him. So I think that was around the support, around the values and his actions and his values lined up. He would, you know, he would push back, sometimes against the departmental management, I think probably those things all are part of why he couldn't stay, because [redacted] University did this really big round of redundancies that they basically didn't want grade 9 people, so basically people who were reader, they didn't want any readers, and they didn't really want many principal lecturers. So they were reducing it down so they would only have four per school. Interesting decisions in [redacted] University, they did lots of interesting things. Sorry, I'm probably going off at a tangent, you will have to check if I'm going to take you over time.

Paul Jones 53:39

Right... No, that's fine, we are just coming up to an hour now, so it is fine to carry on.

DBA10 57:58

Okay.

Paul Jones 58:00

It's interesting what you said there. So your manager, the good one, from the comparisons of different examples you gave, I'm curious about that buy-in you had, because I'm wondering whether it was the fact that your values aligned with his, or whether it was the fact that he appreciated you for your values, but someone else who did that wouldn't necessarily have to have the same values as you. But you felt heard and listened to and supported for who you were and what you wanted to get out of your career, then.

DBA10 58:30

It's interesting. So it's an interesting point. I think he definitely showed appreciation for me, as an individual, and for all of us. I mean, to be fair, everyone in the team was fantastic. So it probably wasn't hard to appreciate people. But, so he showed real appreciation, he also had good values and he was also very good whilst also keeping an eye on performance, you know, and he would say, you know, these are the things that you need to be doing. If his values had been different, I suppose it depends how different they were. I've certainly had line managers who I would say, probably had somewhat different priorities, not necessarily in conflict, so I, for example, altruism and helping people is very

important to me. I think if I had a line manager who maybe wasn't so super strong on that, but didn't prevent me from enacting that, I think probably would be fine. I think if I had a line manager who was very, I suppose, self oriented, or was about you know, the institution making lots of money and it doesn't matter if we're helping people. I could probably, I would probably suck it up because we've all got to have a job. I probably would struggle under those circumstances.

Paul Jones 59:53

I guess my, having done some management, and the things I have studied, what would be important for me as a manager is trying to get the best out of others and releasing the potential as well as finding ways to understand what drives them, their motivations, their destinations, in terms of their career, and thinking about how you get the best out of that. There seems to be sometimes managers take the approach of reminding people of the targets, and telling them they have to do more work, but not really appreciating how they can get the best out of that person and what the barriers might be trying to support them in the right ways.

DBA10 1:00:28

I think to be fair to me, for some people, it will be an individual difference. So managers will vary in how people orientated they are, or even their skills, because you can like people and not necessarily be good at interacting with them. But to be fair to managers, and I like to occasionally be fair in between ranting, managers are incredibly busy and actually to do that people orientated stuff, you need the time. So if you've got, you know, if you've got 30 People who are your direct reports. And I mean, people do come and go in academia, and indeed any other job you've got, and you're getting people breathing on you above from, about targets, so you've got people from below complaining because they're being asked to do their job, because that's a massive issue in academia. So I should think there are challenges to getting people opening, and again, to be fair to our current line manager, with the pandemic and different ways of working, actually, what is his scope for really getting to know me, that's, I mean, I suppose in theory, if [redacted] had infinite time, and I was [redacted] only direct report, maybe there are things that [redacted] could do, but in the real world where [redacted]'s got lots of other things going on, you know, [redacted], if I'm around long enough, and I don't get fired, then eventually, [redacted] probably get to know me. So I don't see that as easy. And, again, I've got to take a little bit of responsibility is, I don't really, I suppose expect to be very embedded in the department, or to be very well known, because I just come in when I've got teaching or some other specific commitment, because I [redacted], I [redacted], and it's not Aston's fault, but it, it takes quite a lot of time [redacted]. And it costs a lot of money. And frankly, I'm more productive at home.

Paul Jones 1:02:21

But there's also this idea of putting your head above the parapet, isn't there? And you've got a nice balance at the moment from what you've said, in terms of having the space and time to do stuff. The more problems you make for yourself, the more you open yourself up to more things happening then.

DBA10 1:02:35

Oh, I've put my head above the parapet once and that went very badly. I've, in that, in terms of the grievance, I've occasionally pushed on particular agendas and had responsibilities for them, and I think it was fine for that stage of my career, and also when I was so close to my institution, I was in every day. And that was pre-pandemic, and of course, it was pre-pandemic, so, every, um, most people were in a lot more. So, my own network and influence, I suppose, was a lot better back then. I think now, obviously, there's no incentive to put my head above the parapet, because it would, the main metrics, research, well, if I get myself on saying I want to lead on student experience, that's not going to do my employability any wonders. And it doesn't actually matter if you're going for an external interview and things like that. So, keep my head down and try and churn out some publications and Aston will be happy with me. So yeah, I think it's a shame because, I think, I would, so it wasn't good for my career, I kind of liked how I used to be, you know, I was more embedded, that I was doing things that were, in theory, about trying to make student learning, etc, better, and to help people, and the things that I thought should be done, but it didn't benefit me. And I'm being a bit more ruthless now. Which I think

probably is better to my career. It doesn't actually make me particularly happy with myself as a person or in terms of my career, but I am still paying the mortgage!

Paul Jones 1:02:50

And I think this is a balance that everyone has to find, isn't it, and it has come up with other conversations as well, where there's a tension between being true to your values, what your original research was on, and what your passion is for, versus the reality of someone who's paying your salary. They've got expectations, and you try your best to find the middle ground that both satisfies your intellectual curiosity and your drive for research of particular topics, versus how do I get the university what they expect from me then, and it's always that careful balancing act. Some of the things we haven't picked up on, do you, besides [redacted] and [redacted], and that being a very key driver for you, do things like the HEA, or Advance HE now, and fellowship or senior fellowship, play a part in your thinking, or the vitae development framework for research, at all, do those things play an important part?

DBA10 1:05:19

Okay, just for the benefit of the recording, when you're having to transcribe this all, so I was smiling, smiling on the verge of laughing, during that question. I could go on for ages about Advance HE and HEA. I'll try and keep it brief. So I'm [redacted], I got, did it at my first institution, I got a badge. I don't have it with me, but I could show you, it's got some shiny bits on it. I would say, it's probably the most I got from that. Apart from occasionally, I remember mentioning I've got [redacted] at a job interview and they basically said 'well done' but they did not care. Because, you know, again, it's not the big driver, I don't know if it's changed, but certainly back then all you needed for the TEF was that you had enough people who had at least Associate Fellow status. And it looked good if you had some people who had Fellow, but Senior Fellow didn't really matter and it doesn't really impact career, as far as I can tell. I am rather dubious about some things the HEA and Advance HE puts out. It's not, it doesn't really strike me as being very strongly grounded in evidence. And, so, I was an employability leader in my first institution and one thing that struck me quite early on is that the quality of evidence, supporting how we do things, was not very strong. Which is one thing, one reason why I did a research project around employability. And I went to a HEA conference in 2016. It is the last one that that I will ever go to. It's the only conference, right, where I literally face palmed during a keynote, where I actually took off my glasses and [redacted] because there is a keynote who, his professional discipline was chemistry, but he was basically talking about [redacted] concepts and getting it horribly wrong. So he was citing [redacted] saying, you know, anytime you change something, it doesn't matter what, satisfaction will go up. Just a moment's observation in the world will tell you that is not true. He said, you can't combine likert items, scales, and that's how measures work. And I was fuming quietly when people were in the Q&A saying, oh, I didn't know about Likert items, but you've learnt the wrong thing. I say, oh, you know, I hope other people do the research to explore these things. But I only have 30 students a year, so I can't collect quantitative data. And I thought, oh, no, of course you couldn't possibly collect data in multiple years, and then combine the pool. And I was going to presentations, again, not the key, apart from keynote, where people's standard of evidence is basically we did this thing and students liked it...

Paul Jones 1:06:17

Right...

DBA10 1:06:45

..well, there's all sorts of things that students might like that don't do a damn bit of difference. So basically, I don't pay attention to Advanced HE at all. Vitae? I probably should. I saw the frame, a framework, way back when I was a PhD student. But I've not looked at it. I suspect there are things that I'm probably doing and stuff that I probably would be doing anyway to develop me. But I've not been using it to drive me. So, really, it's kind of, it's very much led by, you know, being a member of my profession. And so the way I see myself is I am an [redacted], who happens to be employed by a university. So I'm an [redacted] first, and I, so the way I do my job is influenced by that, so, well, in as much as I can help it because if I was designing, learning from scratch, I probably wouldn't do it in a way that we tend to do things in university, but then doing a bespoke workshop for an organisation is very different from

running a module, they are different beasts. But, you know, that is the main thing that is informing my development.

Paul Jones 1:09:24

Great. Now, one other question I've got for you is about, is there any experiences you've had outside of HE, in terms of jobs, or different things you've done, that have been beneficial for you in your job now, that we wouldn't have naturally given you through developing you as a academic member of staff.

DBA10 1:09:43

Oh definitely, and also it's something you could get people, so again, I'm smiling here. One of my early jobs, and this is like [redacted], I used to be a [redacted], on a [redacted]. And I often joked to students that working on a [redacted] is really great practice for customer service. Because if you can keep a straight face when someone says that they are [redacted] or that the [redacted], or whatever, then you can manage people who are a bit snippy about a returns policy. But I think that learning to keep a straight face, or something it's quite handy with students because, as much as I say there are no stupid questions, occasionally there are, but also something a student will say may be quite worrying, and you don't want to panic them further by reacting, and one example is, I had a student way, many years ago, who since graduated, so he turned out okay, but he came to me the day before deadline in his first year. It's a qualitative project. And basically, he said I'm just about to start doing the analysis. And I forget where it went from there. Because I think the first thing I think is you are so, I won't repeat the words that came to mind, so, on the inside, I was going to, sorry I am making a grimace, or feeling a little bit anxious on his behalf, right, he should have felt more anxious. But on the surface having to keep a very calm face. So, the, so I think working on a [redacted] is helpful, and I think something I learned from there is that none of us are normal. It's just a question of how abnormal we are, or how difficult we find functioning in the world. So I think that is sometimes helpful for dealing with other people. Other kinds of experience? Well, you mentioned earlier, before the recording, that you've had training on [redacted]. And actually one [redacted] I trained on was [redacted], I don't know if you are familiar, they kind of do, so they have one [redacted], which is basically, you know, the [redacted], but they've got different categories, there is one, which is basically the [redacted], so things like your tendency to [redacted]. Or they tend to seem to be overly [redacted], and things like that. And a measure of [redacted], [redacted], etc. But one of things that was interesting in training was they talked about how these linked together, so based on the evidence, where the correlations were. And that was actually really helpful, because it's often easier to spot [redacted] in a way. So being able to work backwards, and go, okay, I can see how this probably leads to [redacted]. And I can kinda see what, how you might be seeing a situation. So I think that helped understand [redacted] a bit more. And, I mean, I think it's probably useful for any role. But that's something I did a couple of years ago. And that I've found really helpful.

Paul Jones 1:10:02

It's interesting, isn't it, because you're, the [redacted] you're in, there is a range of tools that you would have available to help [redacted], and to [redacted], and to have more knowledge about what goes on, I get the impression that we don't use any of those things that we would use in a Industry focused role, to be able to manage, or develop, or train people in the right ways then. And you mentioned teaching as well in that, given what you've learned about [redacted], the way [redacted] and the way [redacted], different things, there's loads you could do. But then you'd be putting yourself at risk them by doing, doing something that's quite different, to what the standard expectations are.

DBA10 1:13:36

To be fair, I think it's about the nature of the degree. So it's not just like, oh, you know, Aston aren't doing it. So one thing that I find make a huge difference is teaching people something that they want to learn when they're ready to learn it. So, or at the very least dealing with buy-in. So, for example, I did some training for a charity which is around helping them understand what they could do with evidence that they already had, because they are having issues with people not seeing why it was useful to record data. So it's kind of like something that distracted, was a distraction, from their real job, etc, etc. So I had to do a bit of buy-in, because I knew some of them was sceptical. But it was about delivering

something that the director of the charity said actually, this was a concern for her. I'm thinking about, well, how might this actually help them do what they want to do better, etc, etc. So in a sense, there is that capacity for them to be ready for it. Now with a degree, your reasons for doing a degree as a student might be various, but we assume that most people probably are aiming for some job or other. And it doesn't necessarily mean that you've signed up [redacted] for everything you're going to encounter.

Paul Jones 1:13:36

Yeah...

DBA10 1:14:02

...so the difference in [redacted] is people often do it because they're interested in [redacted], they want to [redacted] and very few do it because they love [redacted]. And yet [redacted] is a huge part of [redacted], as well, as you would know. So you can't, you don't have the luxury of waiting till they wanted to learn it, or waiting really to where they would use it in their professional life you've just got to teach it then and there, so it's a very different model. So, I've really enjoyed doing the bespoke activities, we have an organisation, where you spend some time talking about [redacted], maybe talking to [redacted] etc. And trying to put together something that people want to do. But realistically, you can't manage the degree that way, you can maybe try to adjust bits of the curriculum to try and link it up with things students saying they want to learn, if that also meets industry needs, linking in with what employers are saying they need, blah blah blah blah blah, but ultimately, you still have to deliver the modules at specific times. Repeating pretty much the same stuff each year with waves of new people. It can't work in a more free flowing way and don't expect to, but it is a challenge. Because you might have a room of, you know, [redacted] or however many people and you don't know how many of them really want to be there. I mean, obviously the value, how many might be there just to get the letter on their transcript and then move on. But that is a whole other subject, I've ranted about that at length.

Paul Jones 1:16:33

I think that's really good. It's covered most of the things I wanted to touch on. These things are quite free flowing anyway. So I'll stop the recording now.

DBA10 1:16:39

Okay.

Appendix 14: DBA11 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA11

Paul Jones 0:06

So, I started recording. Thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled, individual perspectives on engaged scholarship, reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour, though we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview will be semi-structured. This means I have some general topic areas that I want to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area, though the idea is that I try to do that with the least number of questions and interruptions as possible. You have 14 days from the date of the interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised and it will be impossible to withdraw. you can withdraw by emailing me, my contact details are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as an individual, including personal data will be removed, and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk, but if you do need to stop the discussion for a break or you need to stop completely, just raise your hand or give me some other indication. If you would like to move on from a particular topic then do indicate this just by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it's causing you distress, or I'm feeling distressed myself. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start, then we can start exploring your experience regarding professional development. So can you confirm you understand the information I've given you and you're happy to proceed with the interview?

DBA11 1:54

Yes to both.

Paul Jones 1:56

Great, and you understand how you can withdraw if you want to?

DBA11 1:59

Yes.

Paul Jones 2:01

Great, can you confirm what school you work in please?

DBA11 2:04

[Redacted].

Paul Jones 2:23

Right, thank you. Can you confirm your gender please, for the record?

DBA11 2:27

I'm [redacted].

Paul Jones 2:29

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA11 2:32

Yes, I am.

Paul Jones 2:34

Great. And how would you describe your career level out of the three? Early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA11 2:41

Senior career.

Paul Jones 2:43

Thank you, and can you confirm which age bracket you're in? I will read out a number of different age brackets. So 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, 65 to 74?

DBA11 2:58

[redacted].

Paul Jones 3:02

[redacted]. Yeah?

DBA11 3:04

That's right.

Paul Jones 3:04

So what we will do now is go into the more open session of asking questions. So, I'm really keen to get your thoughts on what you consider professional development to be, then we can explore some more areas around that then. So what do you consider professional development and how is that materialised within Aston for you?

DBA11 3:23

Um, is that for me as an individual, or for others, or generally?

Paul Jones 3:30

For all of those, you can start with yourself, about your thoughts, and your career as an individual, but also more generally about what you have noticed about that within Aston.

DBA11 3:37

Okay, so my personal view is that personal development should be ongoing and you should always be working on personal development. Even as a senior [redacted] and someone in [redacted], I'm learning all the time, and one should be learning all the time. I also think that professional development needs to be arranged so it is suitable for the individual but suitable for the individual also within the institutional context. And, and I, in my [redacted] life, I use a model, an align model, which is where you align your strategy, with your workforce planning, with your structures, with your processes and procedures. And, I think that's the same, same with personal development. I think it should be aligned with where you, where the organisation needs it to go. So that's my personal view. Now I'll, now I'll move on to how I think it works at Aston. I think as a learning organisation, the university does take personal development seriously. And from what I see of other organisations, and other universities, it does take it seriously. However, I don't think it's very structured. So I think, you know, for example, we have the My Development Conversation, My Development Conversation should be used, there's a section in there about development, that should be collected more systematically, so that we can see what needs there are, but also, I think we need to design people's personal development according to their, according to where we need them to be in terms of the strategy. Yeah, I think that's probably enough to start with.

Paul Jones 6:18

There's a couple of things I want to pick up on there. So you mentioned about, at your senior level, that it is important. Do you think enough importance is put on that? So for the people at professor level, or senior ranks in the university, do you think there is encouragement to think they've got development needs and enough is done to try and support them in continuing that journey?

DBA11 6:40

Um, well, I don't think you, you could never have enough. And I don't think there is enough. And I think that universities are interesting organisations, because you, you haven't got the same managerial framework that you have elsewhere. So you recruit an academic because they are creative, push the boundaries, they're very good at teaching, they're very good at research, or one or the other. And then you, um, you, you try and, you then put them in a management role, which they don't necessarily have the qualifications for. So I think we, the problem is we rely very much on accidental managers, I think they're called in the literature. And so maybe we haven't got people who understand the importance of systematic strategic personal development opportunities. I think if you asked any manager, they would say yes, they're really, really keen. But, I think it's variable. And that's an issue in itself. And I think it's, um, also, yeah, variable, not systematic, and not aligned with the strategy. And I also think it wouldn't take much to tweak it, so it did. You may, you may know, I've been doing some initiatives around coaching and mentoring and [redacted]. And I think that [redacted] support like that, that is really important. Another example is the [redacted], so yeah, I don't think it's, that probably summarises, where I the position is.

Paul Jones 9:36

One of the ideas that has come up in previous conversations is the idea of people having a map that they can use to think about where they're stepping stones could be, and what those roles would give them, both in terms of what they needed to get into those roles, and what exists, but also what they get out of them and how that can help their journey then, but I don't really see much of that happening, in terms of people understanding how different roles can then influence their career and provide them with the stepping stones to move up, and if there is an easy way to, sort of, plan that journey from what I can see. Do you think that's true in terms of where people find themselves? That there isn't this easy way of thinking these different roles, like AD, or whatever ones exist, that there isn't really a map that they can use to think of? I want to do this, and I want to do that, and this is what it's going to give me then.

DBA11 10:24

I suppose it does relate back to what I said, that I think if we had a systematic, that if we said, this is our strategy, this is what we need to get there. This is our workforce, who do we need, so that, so that actually, and we do have the infrastructure to do that round the My Development Conversations. And, um, I am, and, we do have the people so that, sometimes they say there aren't the career opportunities. Well, I think you have to be creative around that. So yes, I think, I think it's, it, I've seen at other universities, sort of apprenticeship schemes, where you, you spend some time in lots of different areas, and that's quite a well designed program. I think that would be another thing. I also think, yeah, I think, I think it would work, and I think it would happen if it was a systematic, there was a systematic framework. But you see, we are so amateur on so many things. You know, this support doesn't come, personal development and support doesn't come by accident. But also, I don't think it's so much the doing of it, it is the availability of it. So I think it would motivate people more, I think it would, I think productivity would go up. I think the literature says the productivity goes up if you invest in people. And so, so yeah, I suppose the answer to your question is yes. But it would be no good without that framework of identification that, and, and everyone had the opportunity, it would need to be part of a wider framework.

Paul Jones 12:29

I guess that leads me on to one of the areas I wanted to try and talk about, was that idea, you mentioned about availability, that's both a case of availability of schemes and the structure to use, but the availability of time for people to utilise it then as well. One of the areas of interest is that balance that people have to find between teaching and research, external engagement, administrative duties. Do

you think that the teaching and research balance allows people the chance to get invested in development opportunities, or is the case that they are always hitting the ground running to do the tasks, and there's no real structure around allowing time for development.

DBA11 13:13

I'm sorry I'm a broken record, but I think if you have a proper strategic structure, where you're actually seeing what's important, so if you recruit your staff, according to a proper workforce planning, so we need someone to do this, we need something to do that. But we, it's still not very structured the way we recruit. And so everyone is being pushed to do absolutely everything. So [redacted]... so we've, what's the balance between teaching and research that we need in [redacted]? Or, what are the expertise that we need? And how many people do we need to recruit that are teaching fellows? And how many do we need to recruit that are teaching and research? And then, what are we expecting of someone, what we need, the people on teaching and research to do? And, if they're teaching all hours of the day, and that, how can they do their research? So [redacted] they all have a term without teaching. It's a systematic thing that they have a term without teaching, so that they have that space, in order to, for personal development, or research development, or whatever. And, [redacted] the teaching fellows who have to do the PG cert, so that they've got time, so they don't have to teach in that term, because that's the teaching with PG Cert, so I think, if you could design it like that, and then [redacted], reduce by flexing round people's timetables and [redacted] reduce the number of modules they're all teaching and research are teaching. So they have fewer modules, and they have the term off. And [redacted] have done some proper workforce planning. And we have exactly the staff we need to do the roles. And, we're equipping the staff to do the roles. [redacted] of them has had [redacted] My Development Conversations. And each of them is on some sort of plan towards their next promotion. And that might not be for five years or more down the line. But they, so they know what they've got to concentrate on. And they also know what personal development they've got. And they can't say to [redacted], well, I don't have time for that, because [redacted]. So I think it's about managing, I think, I think you can have all these wonderful schemes, but unless it's done systematically, and professionally, and seen in the round, it won't work.

Paul Jones 16:34

I think that sounds great. That would be what I would want to do anyway, because the ideas I've always had is that, I'd want to look at it, each department as a whole. And you play into people's strengths, give them the time and space to develop. And, you bring together a cohesive whole that gets the outcomes you want, but people fluctuate in what they're good at, and what they're best at, and how you can give them time and space to achieve in those areas. But from what I've heard from other people, that those in a teaching and research role, there's quite a lot of creep, that the teaching time takes over more than it should do. And therefore, the only bit that gets reduced is usually the research side, then, because the administrative duties don't go away, the teaching side expands and the only bit that can reduce quite often is the research part then, and that's been quite a common theme that comes up.

DBA11 17:27

So where does the money come from? The money comes from our teaching...

Paul Jones 17:34

Yeah...

DBA11 17:34

... so 80% of our money comes from our teaching. And, and there's this model, which, if you recruit students, it brings you money. And if you if it brings you money, you can invest it in research. And if you, if you do research, you get reputation. And if you get reputation, you can recruit some more students. So it's a virtuous circle. If you've, if you're, if you really are managing workload in an intentional way, if you're doing proper workforce planning, you, you look at the skills you need, and the skills you've got. And you, you use them appropriately. So I think, in some cases, in a lot of cases, because we don't think, do things systematically, we don't do things, what I would call professionally, we do it like

amateurs, everyones scrabbling around, and it feels like that, but there's the other, the other part, is that there are colleagues who believe that teaching gets in the way of their research, on principle, and if you look at your typical, your typical teaching and research person, they should be doing 40% teaching, 40% research, 20% admin. So if you, if you look at your life like that, you actually see that you should be spending 40% on your research, typically, unless you have been given remission from that. And I don't think that when people talk about teaching gets in the way, you don't think they necessarily reflect that 60% of their time should not be on research.

Paul Jones 20:09

I think that's right. I think people do get confused in different ways, about what their expectations are around it. And they will have a natural liking for one part over others, it is very rarely that you get people who are balanced like that, in terms of teaching and research, and have skills in both areas, there's always a trade off for a person in terms of what skills they've got. One of the things I was interested in, with that role balance, and the work you've been doing, do you think there's been natural skill gaps that existed in the staff that you see a common theme on?

DBA11 20:49

So, my first, I'm looking at my, I've got my objectives from last year, and my objectives from this year, I was using. So, I think the first thing was to, the first thing is to make sure you have open and transparent information. And I don't believe in all singing all dancing load models, really. But I do think you need principles and data, and it needs to be fairness, fair, fair. And so [redacted].

Paul Jones 22:04

Right...

DBA11 22:04

... so if we, if we really had good, really, if we didn't have skills gaps in research, we would have done far better in the REF. So we have people on teaching and research con, we have a lot of people on teaching and research contracts who are not meeting their, the expectations. And this is not just in this [redacted], this is elsewhere. So another was, another skills gap was, really high quality teaching for different groups of students. So we've grown massively in Masters students, they haven't really had [redacted] before. So, and also, designing of assessment in a way that was creative, discouraged plagiarism, got students to develop their, their, their skills. And I suppose, what comes into my mind around that is, you're looking at personal development, I think it should be an expectation, if you're in a professional body, that you're you are doing your CPD the whole time, in your your research skills, and your teaching skills. Because there's no other profession where you don't update your skills all the time. And then, I think, there were skills gaps in, in really understanding how the university works, and how the university functions, and how it's financed, and, and I think that's quite important to let your workforce know, I think if you ask most academics, they wouldn't know how the university is funded, or anything like that, but, but, so I think there's quite a lot around that of, this is the situation, this is the strategy, what are we missing?

Paul Jones 24:30

Yeah, I think that element of communication is really important in terms of giving people information about the way things are at work. It's interesting the way that academics come through the ranks because we teach them to be independent researchers. There's skills gaps I've noticed in quite a lot of staff members and students then about networking skills, relationship management stuff, because we're so focused on developing this person that can operate and do research on their own, there's some gaps like that where I have seen in terms of external engagement, networking, relationship management, those are skills are quite often people who have come by, either by accident or developed outside of HE, we don't necessarily give them those skills as part of their journey, or give them to them when they enter into HE as an employed member of staff.

DBA11 25:19

Yeah, I agree. And, so what we do, is we have essentially an induction program and when you arrive you, you have to do the PG Cert, we have the RITE program where you can accredit, essentially, your, your developmental skills, but we're all amateurs. How many and, and, we're being paid to be amateurs where, you know, and how many, and, and, I think there's something about the motivation to go on a course. You must have seen people don't want to go on the supervisory training. Well, they don't want to go on the updated updates of the supervisory training, because they say, oh, well, I've been a supervisor for years and years and years. What other industry would you be able to, to operate like that? And it goes straight to the bottom line, if you leave things to chance, you might do all right. But you might not. If you're systematic and strategic and, and you invest in this thing, the research says that you will go, it will go straight to the bottom line, it, you're not leaving it to chance, you will be able to take those opportunities.

Paul Jones 26:59

Having come from a background within human resource management, training and development, recruitment, and seen lots of different ways organisations work. It always amazes me that the right structures aren't in place quite often across HE, where the ideas of continuing professional development, like you mentioned, we should tell people that they got x amount of time per month that they have to do it. It has to be catalogued like it would do in schools, we have to demonstrate that they're continually developing themselves to become better and better. But that doesn't seem to happen at all and it's a really weird set of circumstances. The people I like working with most, out of the university staff, I get to interface with tend to be academics, who worked in industry outside HE, have got experience they can bring into HE, they tend to be more organised, more effective and efficient. They understand more the mechanisms that exist around universities for organisations functioning, and tend to embed themselves in a more effective way. There are others then who have come through a more traditional route who've been ingrained in HE all their life, and trying to get them to open their eyes in different ways can be much more of a difficult challenge, then, because they've got no other context to speak from and that proves to be a big barrier for them internally to sort of shift from that mindset.

DBA11 28:16

Yes, and I suppose that's why I very much enjoyed [redacted] because essentially what I've done is to run it as if I was running the [redacted] that I would like to run. And I have taken my, my life of being a being a professional manager and also professional academic. And I've taken my, my reading, and my consultancy and [redacted] have got the whole thing, but goodness knows, but they've really benefited from it so they're happier, [redacted] are happier, they, they're doing more [redacted], things are fairer, still got a long way to go, but I suppose I've just tried it, tried it out here.

Paul Jones 29:16

Do you think that experience out of HE is a real beneficial thing for academics, because you could look at things like secondments, and different opportunities to skill people up in different ways, have you seen a benefit then from those people who have had experience outside, and then either come back to HE or was in industry first of all, or done something different?

DBA11 29:41

Yes, [redacted] a national program where we have academics shadowing, bit like nice work. Have you ever read [redacted]. So it's a brilliant book. And [redacted] a structure based on that, and it, we evaluated, and some, some good work came out of it. As always this, with these things, it was always the enthusiasts and the people who you didn't really need to do it, who went on the, on this. So that's why, for example, I'm with [redacted], when he said, every, everybody should do placement visits, because it absolutely gets you outside, it shouldn't be seen as a, oh, it's a chore to go off and do a placement, actually, use it as an opportunity...

Paul Jones 30:56

Yeah...

DBA11 30:56

...we've also got this thing I just had an email, while we've been talking about mandatory, do all this mandatory training. So again, training is seen as something that you get forced to do rather than an investment in. And I think if we, if we want to invest in you. So this is why this happened. This is why CPD is important. Personal development is important.

Paul Jones 30:57

It is interesting with the mandatory training, because, and it comes up as I've mentioned to people before, we don't tell people why things are important, quite often, or, or the reason behind why we do things. And it comes back to what you were talking about earlier, about the communication, because people aren't being told why things are important. They're just told to do it. There's no context to understand the need to do it, or to be engaged and motivated by it. And there's good reasons why the mandatory training is in place, and why it is mandatory. We don't tell people those reasons we just expect them to do it. And that's not a great way to engage others. That's about training and development generally then.

DBA11 32:06

But then again, again, I'm the broken record. If you have a proper strategy, then, then we don't explain it because we actually don't explain it to ourselves, necessarily, you know, oh, isn't it good to have this sort of training, or this sort of training, we don't sort of look at the new strat... when the new strategy comes out it won't necessarily be that the, the next thing that comes from it is the workforce planning, strategy. And then, and then a, and part of that is an organisational development and a personal development strategy. I think the other thing in, in this university, and I've been doing some work with [redacted], where this is even more pronounced, is that organisational development, and the other training, isn't connected. They're not in the same unit. So organisational development is seen in a way to be for professional services staff, rather than and, and then there's the education. So education is just looking after part, it's not looking after holistically.

Paul Jones 33:36

Yes, it is a difficult one to get right, as I don't think things are connected. You mentioned earlier about Aston being a learning organisation. I think I agree that we are a learning provision organisation. But the idea that we have embedded learning for staff, and that we do things in the right way of what we would typically think of as a learning organisation, we're quite far behind in terms of the culture, and the climate and the, the way we promote that sense of learning and development for our own people. While we sit there every day and teach people, and try to develop them as students, but our own needs, and our own way of managing stuff is quite different then in terms of what we do.

DBA11 34:17

I think that's what I was saying at the beginning that we think we're a learning organisation, we, we, if anyone was asked, oh yeah, we support our staff, we encourage them to do, actually, it's, it's, it's not embedded in what we do. But so, so are a whole lot of other things that, that strategically, you know, is going back to this, this amateur. And yet, you see, we have a group of the workforce who are very committed to learning. And yet, the take up of learning is low. So there's a mismatch between, we've got people who want to learn. But we've also got people who, people who, who appear not to want to learn. Yeah.

Paul Jones 35:27

Yeah. So I think one of the things I wanted to look at was the organisation generally, and we've talked about bits about management. And I don't think managers encourage that type of development opportunity. You mentioned, my DC and I don't think managers use those types of tools effectively to have those conversations. The culture and climate from what I've seen, would need work on, to shift it more to having a natural inclination to want to make it a place where we can learn, explore, develop, the way I see the organisation having gone more recently, things are becoming much more prescriptive. They

see information about the way we are telling people how to do the teaching. That doesn't seem to foster, or encourage, a climate of creativity or going outside the boundaries that have been set to try and get people to do different things. It seems more, almost more authoritarian, in terms of telling people a very defined way to do stuff. Would you agree with that? Do you think we are becoming more prescriptive in terms of how we tell people to do stuff?

DBA11 36:35

Well, I'm getting concerned that some of these questions you're asking me are quite leading questions.

Paul Jones 36:42

Well, it prompted you and you can give whatever answer you want...

DBA11 36:45

So so, umm, yeah. I don't think I can add anything more than that, I think I've really answered that in a way. I don't think Aston is any worse or better than any, many, many, many other organisations. It's just we muddle along, we muddle along, and I just can't believe, as a major business, that we should muddle along, and I think it's about professionalism. And I have, throughout the last [redacted] years, I have thought, now here we have all this, all this skill and knowledge and everything, but we don't look after it in a systematic way. What it is, yeah, it's absolutely amazes me. However, if I worked in lots of organisations, I might find the same, you know more commercial organisations, I might find the same. But yeah, this holistic way of operating this, keep going back to being amateurs. So if you are, if you run your organisation, like being an amateur you, personal development isn't a priority.

Paul Jones 38:58

No, so one of the things I get amazed by is that we have departments specifically set up to focus on work, organisation, the way things run and can operate effectively. And yet, whenever things like well-being comes up, or the way you want to try and change the culture, none of that expertise is utilised, those people asked about what they can contribute to it effectively. They tend to be left in the departments to do research on those areas. But there's a lot of people, right across the university, that have got experiences elsewhere, expertise that can be utilised. We don't tend to be very good at asking who's got the skills, what skills exist and how we can try and utilise the people that are good at things in the organisation. It's more a case of pigeonholing people into a job and not making the most of all the talents and abilities and experience that people have gathered over their careers.

DBA11 39:54

I think you're right, and I think that's because, again, it's not systematically, that there is no knowledge of it. But I also think that if these people were, they may be in that area, but they may, they may not know how to teach you how to do it. So they may be able to. Yeah. I've seen academics try and support initiatives in their discipline areas and not necessarily work.

Paul Jones 40:36

No. And I totally agree with that and I have seen that on numerous occasions, but I think that because we're not asking the question, the ones who might be good at doing that are missed out. And then we haven't made the most of some of the opportunities that exist. But I do agree that, there's people that even though they might know an area in terms of research, their ability to transfer that into being applied in it, at all, or to make an impact or to be useful on a local level, that can be quite a hard journey to move through, then it would never happen. But I do think we are, I suppose for me missing opportunities to make the use of some of the skills that exist there at least because we aren't asking those questions.

DBA11 41:17

Because we haven't got some, we haven't got a systematic framework to collect it. We haven't got a systematic framework to, to run it, we haven't got, you know, it's, I think it's all the same thing, isn't it?

Paul Jones 41:32

Yeah. And when people enter the university, we select them based on a job that they would be brought in to do, we don't take note of the skills they bring with them, or the experiences, or have a plan for any succession planning from what I've seen, or having a database and the skills that are available to use. We don't utilise people in terms of projects correctly, because I've seen so many projects in university fail, because it's always added on top of a person's job, not people given the time and space to run with that project and do it properly, and given time away from that job. So there's loads of things in a structural level that we could do differently that could really unleash the power of what we've got within the university. But nothing has been put in place to make the most of that then, or a structure. One of the other areas that I wanted to cover as well was the influence of external regulations, or the environment, so things like TEF, REF, KEF, those types of things, and how much of an influence those things have at an individual level for you, or speaking more generally. Do those things weigh on you in terms of being important as a member of staff? Or are they very periphery things that exist at the back and you just get on with the tasks of the job that you know, you've got to do?

DBA11 42:57

So a few points, I think the first one is, universities were pretty unaccountable for very many years, and a lot of public money goes into universities, a lot of public money, still through loans. And so I think we have a responsibility, and I, in one way, welcome more accountability. We haven't necessarily helped ourselves, and I know that isn't necessarily a common view, but I think, I hold it quite strongly. However, I don't think you should chase accreditations and chase rankings and chase compliance. You should decide where you're going, and how you should do it and be very purposeful and strategic about it. And then, these things will just fall into place. You shouldn't do them for, so the TEF, shouldn't do just because it's a tickbox, on the TEF, we should, we should celebrate the fact that this is about making sure that every student in our university can thrive, and that every member of staff is qualified and is to help them do that. And I don't think we, we should recruit students who can't thrive because if we, you know, it's two sorts of students, there's two sorts of, three sorts of academics, there's the one who blames their students, and that one blames themselves, and then there's the one who, who says, well, this is where the students come from, and this is where we're trying to get them. And so I think that... I think it makes us think. But I think people sometimes hide behind it, or we can't do this because QAA wouldn't let us do this, or we can't do this, or, so I don't think we should be led by it, but we should be mindful of it. And when I was a young, young person in universities, I went on a training course where the chair of the Funding Council was, and he said, well, there are all these levers that all the different accreditations, and the funders, and the compliance and we shouldn't be trying to pull all those levers, we need to think about which, which levers are important for us and which ones we'll go full throttle on, and which ones we'll, we'll just keep a gentle hand on the tiller.

Paul Jones 46:04

And I'd agree with that, I think that the importance of knowing what your destination wants to be, laying out clearly so people can get behind it, knowing what you should be doing to develop that way, and knowing the things you shouldn't be doing as well, because I'd agree on the, on things like REF and TEF, is that I've always talked to people that if we get the environment right, and we foster the right environment, REF, TEF, and other exercises, just become cataloguing all the good work you've done, it shouldn't be directed towards those as mediums for success, it should be a case of, you're just reflecting all the good work you're doing. And you will naturally score well in those things, because you're just talking about the excellent environment you've developed, whether it's research, teaching, or anything else. I don't see us moving in that direction that well, sometimes, we tend to work around and I've talked to academics, and they'll sometimes guide, when they publish things around, when the REF's coming up, they don't have that sense of a continual journey they should be doing things, they will try and guide their activities around these types of events rather than actually thinking, I've got all these things to do, and having a constant cycle of development stuff.

DBA11 47:20

If we have that strategy, if we had that strategy, if we had that. We've got the strategy and then what does it mean below the strategy, what does it mean for each group, and what does it mean for each individual, then everyone would be very clear. And that, that because we don't have that, and there's a disjoint between the collectivist and the individual where we, we have to manage in a collectivist way with a whole lot of individualistic people, workforce, and, and we have to have a framework to do that. We don't.

Paul Jones 48:11

So I covered most of the areas I wanted to cover, were there other things you wanted to mention about professional development, at all, that have come to mind since we've been talking, things you think are really important. So anything else that you think professional development that we haven't touched on? We have touched on all the key areas I wanted to talk about?

DBA11 48:41

I suppose we haven't discussed about what the definition of professional development, you know what is professional development and what isn't it, and I am assuming that in your, in your thesis, you are you've defined professional development as something specific.

Paul Jones 49:00

It's very much focused on a more generic view of it. And I might have to define it in terms of what I think about it, but what I was keen to do was get people's opinions on it. Because while I can find a definition through the literature, and there'll be various ways you can do that, what I am keen to do is get a sense of what people think it is then and work with that, to get a sense of what matters to individuals. And this whole idea of working up from the bottom is to really get a sense of what matters to people, what drives them, what's important to them, and what the barriers are for them developing them. So it'd be nice to hear what your version of, and we talked a bit about at the start about what you think it is. And that's why I was keen to do from people was I can place a bit on top. One of the reasons I chose to do this as I did, and to do interviews, was having come from from a psychology background it would be very easy for me to put my own stamp on things, and create a questionnaire, and send it out to X number of people and try and get some questionnaire feedback back, and then develop that way. But for me, the important part was actually listening to people and getting their thoughts and feelings and experiences to ground this in what was happening on the ground floor rather than just saying, this is my view of what people should be talking about and answering questions on it. Does that makes sense?

DBA11 50:23

Yeah. So ... personal development and the definition of personal development and ... so I suppose personal development can be seen as personal, what you want to do. Or it can be what we need you to do in order to do your job properly. And I think there's three principles of management. The first is, you show people you care. So, how do you show people you care, one of the things is you invest in them, you find out what their strengths and weaknesses are you, so that's the first thing. The second thing is you build on their strengths rather than weaknesses. So in order to do that, you need to be aware of their strengths and their weaknesses, and then you need to come up with a plan with them to use it. And then the third thing is, give them a sense of direction. And my view, is that, that sense of direction is really, really important, because then everyone knows where they're going, going back to what you said about communication, everyone knows where they're going, they know what to concentrate on, they will know what not to concentrate on, and then you can work out the individual personal development that anyone needs, or the collective personal development. So I think it all stems from those three things. And personal development needs to be there to motivate you, to make you really want to, to be productive, and also to make you want to give to the organisation, but also, you want to, people to realise that you, what your strengths are, and personal development can help on that as well. So that would be my, that would be how I would define it.

Paul Jones 53:08

I have another question for you then, so in my title, I refer to professional development. Do you think there's a difference between professional development and personal development? And do you think the terminology we might use matters?

DBA11 53:25

Well, I think what's important is to, it doesn't matter what terminology you use, but you need to make sure that you define what you are using and what it is and what it isn't. Person... professional development, I suppose I think personal and professional, professional development are very similar.

Paul Jones 53:58

And that would be my view, as well. I am just wondering whether those sorts of terms do make a difference to individuals. So for me, I'm a curious person that likes to learn stuff. So a lot my time is spent learning stuff online, or looking at new videos on YouTube. And I love developing new skills and I love trying to get people encouraged to develop new skills. While I'm trying to think about how we tap into different people, because not everybody's got the same mindset as that, and some people need to be dragged along that type of pathway rather than skipping down it like I would be. And those types of terms can make a massive difference to some people about how they think and how they visualise stuff then.

DBA11 54:43

Yeah, I suppose the other thing is about, is this development that helps them develop as a person, or is it development that allows them to develop in their role in the organisation? An organisation should want to invest in people in order that the organisation can be the best it can possibly be. We're paying people to be in this role. Now, some of that might be more personal not, it might be tangential to their roles, because that will make them more motivated and better... better motivated, but, but I think what you're talking about, is about people within the context of their work, their ability to do their work, it's not about their ability to go and find another job elsewhere.

Paul Jones 56:07

That's interesting, because I think that we've talked about the necessary, the need there to put a structure on how we support people. But if we can reduce our turnover rates, and keep people and develop them, it's always a, as you mentioned earlier, there is different types of virtuous, virtuous circles. That's part of looking after staff and giving them the motivation and enthusiasm to want to be part of the, whatever the organisation they work for, but part of the journey, then, to stay there.

DBA11 56:41

Yeah, yeah.

Paul Jones 56:41

So by not investing they're not going to feel part of the organisation, they're not going to feel as committed towards doing their work. It all feeds in to this idea that they become better employees, they enjoy it more, they want to stay longer, because we're investing in them and that's really important.

DBA11 56:57

Yeah, and I, I have, we've all known people, and we've all, all known people who are personal development junkies, they go on every course that possibly, and I think that's, that's an issue as well. It's not just about going on courses, it's about what's appropriate.

Paul Jones 57:22

And that covers everything, was there anything else you wanted to mention at the moment?

DBA11 57:31

No, I don't think there was.

Paul Jones 57:36
I will stop the recording.

Appendix 15: DBA12 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA12

Paul Jones 00:01

Great. So I've started recording. Firstly, thanks for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship, reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate, from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what's important to them and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour, though we've scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi structured, this means there are some general topic areas that I wish to explore, you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want, I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. Though the idea is that I do this as little as possible, with the least number of interruptions or questions. You've got 14 days from the date this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me on the details that are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as an individual, including personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed, the only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk. If you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, then please do raise your hand, so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress, or I might do the same if it is causing me distress. I am going to ask a few closed ended questions to start. And then we'll start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. So can you confirm you understand the information I've given you?

DBA12 01:45

Yes.

Paul Jones 01:46

And you're happy to proceed?

DBA12 01:47

I am.

Paul Jones 01:48

And you understand how you can withdraw your data?

DBA12 01:51

Yes.

Paul Jones 01:52

Great. So can you confirm what school you work in?

DBA12 01:56

[redacted]

Paul Jones 01:58

Great.

DBA12 01:59

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:00

Yeah. And can you confirm your gender, please?

DBA12 02:02

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:03

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA12 02:05

I am, yeah.

Paul Jones 02:06

Great. And would you describe your career level as early career, mid career, senior career.

DBA12 02:11

Senior career.

Paul Jones 02:12

And could you confirm your age bracket, please? So 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64...

DBA12 02:13

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:25

Great, thank you very much. So we can start by you thinking about your professional development, what it means to you, and what your experiences around that have been like. Before you start, if I look down, it's just to check it is still recording and that it hasn't run out.

DBA12 02:39

Yeah. Okay, yeah. So do you mean professional development within the university or just in general?

Paul Jones 02:45

In general, so what I will like to explore, as well, is if you've got experiences outside of Aston, and outside of HE, there's all types of things. So whatever it means to you to start with and we can have an exploration of that.

DBA12 02:56

Okay. So because my background is in [redacted] teaching, so I was an [redacted] teacher in [redacted] for many years before I came into HE in the UK. So my initial experiences of professional development were within my own field, through doing certificates, through attending conferences, and then finally doing an MA, well MSc as it was then, [redacted]. So, I kind of feel that a lot of my own professional development has been within my own field, rather than in HE, and I came to Aston having already been working for sort of [redacted] years. So I wasn't fresh out of study, if you like. And also, at the time, when I started at Aston, I mean, I came to Aston in [redacted]. So I've been here [redacted]. When I came to Aston. It was all very kind of, I suppose amateurish, is almost the word I would use. I mean, it was all very friendly and very nice and very... but there wasn't an awful lot of organisation. I mean, there was a staff development [redacted] at the time. But what it offered was extremely limited, and not particularly of high quality. Within the school itself, there was very little, I was part of what was at the time was called the [redacted], which was, which operated almost as an independent republic.

Although it was part of the [redacted], as it was in those days. [redacted]. We were almost an independent republic. So we did an awful lot of professional development amongst ourselves...

Paul Jones 03:05

Okay.

DBA12 03:09

We had, because we were all teacher educators at that point, so we, we kind of brought that into our own, and we did a lot of professional development within that group. And in many ways, that's because it was specific. It was, it was the most useful, I think, in many ways. So we did something that was called co-operative development, we met, it must have been once a month, I guess, where they, where, there was like a speaker who would, it was a non-judgmental, kind of non-judgmental, non-judgmental practice where a speaker could speak. And those who were listening, there were certain moves they could make, like feeding back to help your thought processes move forward. And it was, I found it very effective, it was a very good way of kind of solving issues and thinking about things. We also had [redacted], it was called, writing for academic purposes, where we would meet regularly to comment on each other's written articles, and so on. What, looking back now, what was missing for me was for somebody who was in that situation, was the kind of development for specifically around HE. And I kind of, in some ways, still feel, just now and again, I think I'm gonna go and do the certificate, I think I need to, I've never done the kind of general education stuff, I've only ever done my own sort of [redacted] stuff, which overlaps to an extent. But looking back now, I feel that it's a real gap in the professional development that, that I've had, and that I had, because then it became much more, as things got more organised, and move forward. There was kind of an assumption, obviously, that somebody like me, who by that point was no longer an early career researcher, or didn't actually need any of that stuff. So I was doing practical things like, how to use PowerPoint, and how to, you know, those kinds of staff development and all the compulsory ones, and all the rest of it. But looking back now, I think the fact that I feel like I missed a phase, if you like, that, I think now probably staff now do have, but I almost felt like I missed a phase.

Paul Jones 06:47

So there's a couple of things there that spring to mind, so there's this idea of you looking after each other, and sharing good practice, and developing as a group, which is really good. There's this idea that, back then, things weren't as good from a central perspective, but that may be improved now. And this other idea about, you were assumed to have the skills necessary to do a job, but there wasn't any consideration of how they could help you develop further...

DBA12 07:17

Yeah...

Paul Jones 07:17

... and becoming better at you in your job, then, yes? I think that it would be interesting to explore each of those. If we start with the professional development within your small group, does that sort of stuff still exist now where you're sharing best practice or discussing things?

DBA12 07:32

It does and it doesn't, we try. I mean, we've had a couple of attempts at doing the academic writing, the [redacted] stuff, as well. And as a [redacted] group now, I mean, I've tried in previous years and [redacted] now trying to get something more supportive going in [redacted]. But back, back at that time, we had time for professional development. You know, when I look back, I was only working on the [redacted] at that point. That's all I was doing, teaching a couple of modules on the [redacted] and doing well, at that point, I was still doing my PhD, but, so we had time to do professional development, and then gradually that was eroded away. And now I find that, although we, we, I mean, obviously, dynamics have changed, we're a bigger group, at that time we were a relatively small group, we're extremely compact and extremely cohesive. But I think people just don't have the time. And I know myself, you

know. So like I say, sometimes I think, oh, I should go do the certificate, I think I'd really learn something and I think when am I going to find the time. So, that's a huge change, you know, that the way that workload has increased over the last [redacted] years, I think professional development has got squeezed out a lot from that. Certainly voluntary professional development.

Paul Jones 08:40

Yeah, and I think that, on the contracts people have at the moment, that's definitely increased in terms of the amount of work people are expected to do...

DBA12 08:48

Yeah.

Paul Jones 08:49

...and I don't suppose, and correct me if I'm wrong, that anybody says to you it's really important to share the good practice and do stuff.

DBA12 08:57

Well, yes, it is. Because we do try to, I mean, I organised when I was [redacted], I organised a [redacted] showcase and [redacted] organising another one. And we do go to those, and we do share, and we do try to, I mean, in many ways, I think what we organise amongst ourselves, people are more inclined to go to than they are to the more general stuff, because time is so squeezed. I think, you know, even now, I've put a flag on Angie's email about the 'A game' stuff, which I think is really interesting. And I'm thinking realistically, am I going to be able to go to that. There are other, you know, there's going to be other priorities. So I think it does tend to get pushed down the pri, certainly for me, but I think for a lot of people, it get pushed down the priorities,

Paul Jones 09:35

Given your teaching background, within those professions, there's a focus on continuing professional development and having to make sure you do stuff and demonstrate what you've done. That doesn't seem to exist within Higher Education of, the same level of, telling people they have to as part of their role..

DBA12 09:51

No, no, it doesn't, no and within teaching, there is a, you know, I think in a way, I would probably welcome if we had to demonstrate so many hours of professional development because it would make me do it.

Paul Jones 10:05

I think that's a really important point, because I do think that lots of professions have that...

DBA12 10:11

They do!

Paul Jones 10:11

... and you have to keep up, you have demonstrate what you've done, and you have to keep a log.

DBA12 10:15

You have to, you have to have so many, I mean, certainly in many countries around the world, [redacted], they have to do a certain number of professional development hours every year. And they have to document those. And it's not a huge number. But it's, I mean, I think 50, 50 hours, I think, in Italy, it used to be 80 hours, but in Italy, across a whole year, that's not a huge amount.

Paul Jones 10:37

Then one of the other points you mentioned was about the capacity of the organisation to provide opportunities. And you mentioned, you thought, that it was less than good previously...

DBA12 10:48

... It certainly was, yeah.

Paul Jones 10:48

... and now I've got the assumption, or got the impression, that things were better now, in terms of what was offered. Are there things that stand out then that you think that Aston, for instance, is doing well at the moment?

DBA12 10:59

What, I mean in, when I [redacted], there was very little offered by way of professional development, it was extremely limited. It was a very small, there was just a staff development group, there was no [redacted] or [redacted] or anything like that. So now I think, I mean, I just see them coming round. You know, there are lots of things. But again, there's lots of things, I think, oh, that sounds really interesting. And then I'm thinking, Oh, am I really going to be able to give up half a day to do that? No, I'm not. Which is why I think it's, it is important to make it, you know, I would, if I was told I had to do so many hours a year of professional development, I would do it. But on the other hand, you see, the other thing that's happened, as well, is that back in the day, you just, you were allowed to just get on with your job. And as long as you didn't mess up, nobody was really that bothered. And I mean, just to give you an example of how things are now, I mean, I messed up last week, because I [redacted]. I mean, why do we need [redacted]. And then not only did I have to fill in an interview form with all the details of the interview, and whether we were prepared to offer, I was then sent another four page form to fill in about giving the offer. And that kind of thing drives me nuts. Because I live that, I experience that as being such a waste of my time. And there are so many examples of that now.

Paul Jones 12:23

I get the impression that there's a drive to want to improve quality and people think that filling out forms... ... and it doesn't, it just keeps a record of stuff that probably doesn't get used as well.

DBA12 12:32

...improves quality! I mean, you know, I look at things like that, and now we've got a double module written on the module reflection, which one is it, there's one where you have to fill in a form, then you have to upload it to another form where you fill in the same information. I mean, things like that, and I'm thinking, and I see the sort of professional development stuff. And I think, if I didn't have to fill in all of those blinking forms thinking, and they are not accessible either. You never know where to find them.

Paul Jones 13:02

Yeah, and for me, there's a part about trying to make people's, given the time pressures, making people's lives as easy as possible. And where I think professional development has a role in that is giving people better skills at becoming more efficient or more effective...

DBA12 13:15

Yes!

Paul Jones 13:16

...giving them time to work on projects that allows you to get rid of some of the bureaucratic stuff that doesn't need to happen. There's always this propensity to add more stuff on, but never take things away. And that eats up all the time.

DBA12 13:28

It does eat up all the time. And I think that, I mean, one of the things I also find very frustrating is that these, all these things, they're not that accessible, either. I mean, I've just had to fit them in, the whole travel, I appreciate the need to do a risk assessment. I mean, I've just done one for [redacted], and obviously it's going to come out high. And obviously the university needs to approve that. And I appreciate the need for that. But I've lost track of how long it took me to find the information about the travel procedures, about the new travel procedures, and it turned out it was under expenses. Well, you know, how was I supposed to know it was under expenses? Eventually, I found it by clicking on, but it took me ages.

Paul Jones 14:09

Yeah, and I don't think enough is done to try and think about the impact things have before they are released. I don't know what the reasons are.

DBA12 14:15

They need to make them accessible.

Paul Jones 14:16

Yeah, it should be as easy as possible for you to know, you go here, there's a map of the things you need, taken from an academic's point of view, that's almost like a little map, of this is for travel, this is for this, this is for that.

DBA12 14:27

It's there, but it's then where do you find it? That's what takes up all the time. Because I mean, the first step you're, well I always do, is Google it. Nothing comes up into Google for hardly anything on the university. So I just think, I mean, this is going off, but it is, I mean, I do think that time pressures are, have a real impact on professional development, you know, and the fact that although there are lots of opportunities, and I see lots of things advertised on it, oh, that'd be really interesting. Well, that sounds really interesting. And then I'm thinking, aww, I can't give up you know, I've got to write this report for the British Council, and I can't give up half a day to do that.

Paul Jones 14:59

But from what you described there then, so you are used to seeing the training courses, which are usually generic ones that pop up on the email to say, this is available to you, if you want it. Do you have conversations with your manager about your own development, what aspirations you've got? Or if there's training needs that you have that you think should be met?

DBA12 15:19

No, I mean, there's MDC, and there's the opportunity there, too, but I find, I find it quite, you know, somebody sort of says to me, what training needs do you do have? I find that a very difficult question to answer. It's things that come up. And that's why sometimes, I think, I mean, you know, I keep thinking, I'd like to do an advanced PowerPoint and make my PowerPoints a bit more jolly. But then I think, well, actually, I did one of those years ago, but unless I'm actually then going to use it immediately, there's no point in doing it, because I'll forget. So it's also, it's almost like doing courses when you know, you need them, because, and then they're not necessarily available. But I know, because I know, if it's practical things about how to do this, that or the other unless, unless I then go and apply it, I know I'm gonna forget.

Paul Jones 16:03

So, let's take the example then of the PowerPoint, if you are going to learn better PowerPoint skills, or develop better PowerPoint skills, what would be the best way for you to be able to do that? Would it be through a course with others, would it be one-to-one tuition, would it be accessing something online that takes you step by step through different things you could do? What would be the best for you to learn?

DBA12 16:23

I don't like, I'm not very keen on this step-by-step online ones, I like the in person, you know, the best, the best way for me would be to do a course with a group of people here at the university. Yeah, actually get into it...

Paul Jones 16:32

And then, so an example could be, do a course for half a day, but then the afternoon is done doing practical examples using the software, rather than listening to people tell you about how to do stuff, and actually get into it then... so you have had the experience of embedding what you've learned, because if you go back to your desk, that's not what your priority is going to be, is it? And then if you are looking for one, what would you do to find one?

DBA12 16:52

Yeah, or I will forget. So, but that, from my, what that would need from me, it would need me to do the course, when I know that I've got, so like, I know now that I've got a [redacted] module next term, actually come to think of it, maybe I will see if there's a PowerPoint going. I've got a [redacted] module next term that hasn't been taught [redacted] So the [redacted] materials are not there, it's all got to be done. So this would be a really, you know, for me, this would be a really good time to do the PowerPoint course. Because I have a real reason then to actually use what I learnt. I would go on to the Staff Development website and search for if one was available.

Paul Jones 17:29

So would you ever consider, going back to your point earlier about sharing best practice and knowledge, would you ever ask people within, either your smaller team environment or others, to pass on what skills they've got?

DBA12 17:42

Possibly not, because I would assume, I would, I wouldn't want to burden them. I'd know how busy, because I know how busy everybody is, and I wouldn't want to burden them with, you know, please come and teach me PowerPoint.

Paul Jones 17:53

Because I think that's frustrating, isn't it? Because I think there's a, for me, there's a range of people who have got different skills across the university, and you're all trying to achieve similar things. So this idea that we can have an environment where we, don't work in silos, that we share best practice, and that we develop each other as we go along. That, for me, is a really powerful idea. But, and this comes on to my next question, is this idea that on a teaching and research contract, you do 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% administration. And the impression I get from people I speak to is that, the teaching part might expand more than you expect it to, the administration part expands more than you expect it to, research get squeezed and there's certainly no time in between those things to do anything else besides try and do those things then.

DBA12 18:42

No. No, I think that's absolutely right. In [redacted], it was always [redacted]. I think now we're, now we're in the college, it's [redacted] 40:40:20. But these are also things that we find out later. We don't know. And they don't know that either. You know, there's some things, I know, there have been various things where I've said, well, in [redacted] we do it. Do you?

Paul Jones 19:02

Yeah.

DBA12 19:03

So, so yeah. So we've always worked on [redacted]. But you're right, that the admin and the teaching, in particular, squeeze out the research. But that's something that I've noticed this year, a huge difference, because I don't have any admin this year, for the first time in [redacted] years, since I've been at this university. I don't have an admin role. And all of a sudden, I've got time to do research.

Paul Jones 19:26

Yeah.

DBA12 19:27

So, yeah, it's amazing how, how that made a huge difference.

Paul Jones 19:34

So just to check then, given that I like numbers and maths, the [redacted] model, is that more to represent [redacted].

DBA12 19:48

No, no, maybe it was [redacted], yeah, yeah.

Paul Jones 19:50

Yeah, that doesn't sound as good then though does it?

DBA12 19:51

No, it doesn't, does it...

Paul Jones 19:53

Yeah, I just wanted to check to make sure because, in my head, there's some idea that 10% of time should be spent either trying to develop your own skills or helping others develop. And whatever level you're at, and that could change either early, mid or senior level, that you could try and be more flexible, so if you might be more senior, you might be passing on more stuff than you need to learn. I also think, and it'd be good to get your thoughts on whether you think that, because you're at a senior career level, there's almost like, oh, you are okay, [redacted] has got everything [redacted] needs...

DBA12 20:25

No, I think it's really important that we continue to develop and learn. I don't think you ever stop. I mean, colleagues, young colleagues, have some, such great ideas. I mean, it's really easy to get stale.

Paul Jones 20:36

Yeah.

DBA12 20:37

I mean, because one of the students, one of the [redacted] students, asked me why when [redacted] retired, why I didn't take over as [redacted] Program Director. And I said, because, because [redacted]. I said, it needs fresh ideas, it needs new ideas. And you know, [redacted] and I have been here for [redacted]. We can't, we need, you know, the whole program. It needs somebody new that comes in with fresh ideas. And that's why in our mentoring program, I mean, it's, we're only just sort of starting off, but we're trying to embed mentoring. But, I mean, I've made it really, really, I'm supposed to be the mentoring lead for the department, made it really clear that this isn't about senior colleagues mentoring junior colleagues, that it works both ways. So I feel I've got loads to learn from younger colleagues.

Paul Jones 21:23

I think you're right, I think, what I don't like, and what I pick up on a lot is, that our senior colleagues don't really get talked to about their own development needs, or what motivates them, or the importance of having conversations about how they develop even further, because we assume if they've

reached the senior level, that's it then, there's nowhere else for them to go. But I think that's a big mistake...

DBA12 21:45

oh it's a huge mistake!

Paul Jones 21:46

... in terms of motivating and helping people, driving the right culture...

DBA12 21:49

I mean, of course, as a senior colleague, I can mentor junior colleagues in things like, you know, research, writing grant applications, you know, I've got experience of that. Grant applications, supervising PhD students, all this stuff that, you know, obviously, I've been doing for years. But when it comes to new ideas, and particularly in teaching, and technology, and using creative uses of technology, creative ideas, they've got far more in their repertoire than, than I've got, and there's loads to learn from them. But I think that again, the tricky thing is, how you, how you organise that sharing, though, because I mean, I think the lunchtime showcase worked really well, what, we've done that, that, ex colleague who went to [redacted] years ago, [redacted] started that, [redacted] did the first one of those, and it was literally five minutes slots. So you have five minutes to present a Learning and Teaching idea, it keeps the pace quick.

Paul Jones 22:46

Yeah.

DBA12 22:47

It was done over lunchtime. I think we have sandwiches as well. And lots of people presented ideas, you often have to cajole people, because very often, they don't realise that what they're doing, for them, it's just so normal, they don't realise that it's anything exceptional and worth talking about. So you do have to sort of keep your ears and eyes open, find out what people are doing. And I think that works well. And it particularly works well when it's done at departmental level, because potentially school level, because it's relevant. It's relevant to everybody. Otherwise, I think a lot of the stuff now we're a college, with [redacted], it's hard to see the relevance...

Paul Jones 23:27

Yeah.

DBA12 23:28

And when you are so time pressured, so that works well. Having a one day university wide showcase, I don't think does. It's too diverse. I tried when I was [redacted], I tried to set up an area on blackboard with short videos. Again, the instruction was not more than five minutes. And I really, really pushed Learning and Teaching conveners to try and get their different departments, but they didn't, people just said they were too busy. They just didn't have time.

Paul Jones 24:00

Well, we've got the RAPIDMOOC technology, so a green screen and video booth, and that was one of the things [redacted] was how we got more people using it. So I wanted to use it for research, to do like three minute or two minute videos about people's research.

DBA12 24:13

I did the [redacted] lecture, was that what that was...

Paul Jones 24:17

That's a slightly different one. We are trying to get people to self-service, and just encouraging people to use it, that's been hard to get people to do...

DBA12 24:19

... but that didn't, because we did, I did a, professional development, on presenting your research. And that was, they were teaching us how to do that, how to do the kind of quick, and that was supposed to be part of the [redacted], but nobody ever followed up on it. I assume that had just been dropped.

Paul Jones 24:43

No. So we tried to follow up with some of the sessions...

DBA12 24:46

Oh you were in there, you were in the session.

Paul Jones 24:48

Yeah. So I helped to organise it and we did follow up with people then and trying to get stuff happening, but then there wasn't that much traction generally, where people were not coming back or doing this stuff they were supposed to.

DBA12 24:57

I never got anything. I thought with a follow up could do a research one as well.

Paul Jones 25:03

So, I think that's one of the things that is available to use, and we want to try to encourage people to do. But I think one of the barriers is time, because that could be used for teaching quite easily. But it's when people are so pushed, they resort to what they know... ... I can just get it done and they don't think, oh, what can I do differently? Or what skills can I learn that helps this process, and it almost becomes this horrible circle of I haven't got enough time to learn things that would make my life easier, and you just continue doing the same stuff for year on year because now, with teaching at various points of the year, where I don't know whether it affects you, but the January intakes, some of the feedback I get on courses, is there's no gaps in the year, there's no down points now, the teaching is always present...

DBA12 25:18

Yes! We haven't got one this year, it's been pulled. But yeah, last year, where the last two years, where we have had January starts, there's just no, you are just straight through from September to July.

Paul Jones 25:58

And the impression I get is if you're doing research, trying to fit one or two hours in here or there isn't the way it works for trying to do research, and get into the mode, and thinking about these things.

DBA12 26:08

It depends how you work. I mean, I'm not very good at I mean, and that's the same with writing as well, with writing, academic writing, you know, writing, I mean, I'm a really, really slow writer, that's something, that's something I think, you know, is that something that was missing from my professional development years ago, it's a bit late now. But, you know, I never had, when I finished my PhD, because when I finished my PhD, the, this [redacted] that I was in collapsed, and I ended up [redacted] temporarily. But it was enough to knock any kind of publication from the PhD completely off track. Because I couldn't do anything except try to salvage the department. And that kind of, I think at that point, I probably needed support. And it wasn't, I mean, the university wasn't organised, then as it is now. So that wasn't forthcoming. But I think, uhh, I am a very slow writer, and I can't just write, you know, I've got an hour in the morning, I can't use it to write, I really need to, I need to think that my day is clear and I can just write, whereas there are people who can just do an hour.

Paul Jones 27:19

I think that's rare though, from what I've come across, is that you want that time because you always have to wait, you just get yourself into it, you get into a flow then, you're right, some people can turn

that tap on straightaway. Other people takes a while to get the top flowing, and they don't want to stop then when you've got that...

DBA12 27:33

No, you don't want to stop.

Paul Jones 27:35

One of the other things I wanted to explore was about, so you mentioned earlier about your experience externally, do you think then you came here with a range of skills that really helped you to succeed in higher education, but they wouldn't have necessarily been taught as part of your introduction to HE?

DBA12 27:53

I think in terms of teaching, yes, certainly, in terms of teaching, because a lot of the kinds of techniques and activities that I learned through doing certificates and going to conferences about [redacted] teaching I actually use in my teaching here, you know, that they're generally applicable. So the whole kind of idea of learner centeredness and not, not lecturing, but actually helping students to explore and develop through doing activities. So yeah, experiential learning and active learning, or, you know, I was doing that, that's how we're trained in [redacted] teaching anyway, so. So I was able to apply that and use that. So I didn't feel, I mean, I've never lectured. Even when I first came here, I didn't lecture because that's not how I've been trained. I've been trained in experiential learning and active learning, I just naturally applied those principles. Where the gaps were, I feel now looking back, the gaps are, in general, educational theory. And in fact, I'm just this seminar we were just, I was just doing just before you, one of the [redacted] students on that he's [redacted]. And he was, you know, quoting all this stuff from sort of general education at me. And I have to sort of say to him, I'm sorry, I'm not familiar. I know it sounds ironic. But [redacted] teaching and general education tend to be on parallel lines and not meet in the middle.

Paul Jones 29:14

Do you think then that there's still a lot of the lecture idea, because traditionally, the idea that people have in their heads about university is, someone stands at the front, they talk at you for an hour or two hours. And then you disappear after making lots of notes. Is that still common practice for the large majority?

DBA12 29:31

As far as I know, at least pre pandemic, it was common practice. I think the, you know, when we all went online, and now with this kind of flipped learning model. It's changed to an extent. But I know that, it's quite funny, isn't it? Because I know, because we would try, you know, the alto training told us to do sort of 15 / 20 minutes long, and I know that one of my colleagues does an hour's lecture, and her view is that the students can stop it every 15 minutes if they want to, but the students have complained. So I think getting away from the idea of the lecture is still, for some colleagues, is still quite difficult. And I know when *redacted*, and we were talking about when we came back on campus, and, you know, how do we use the contact time? A few colleagues for [redacted] sort of contacted me and said, Is it okay if I do the activities asynchronous but I lecture face to face? I think it's hard to get away from that.

Paul Jones 30:28

Yeah. Do you think that's because it's easy just to get in that mode and just talk, rather than thinking about, because when you're looking towards giving experiential, more experiences towards students, that's a bit more of a different way, very much a mindset change, and it almost seems harder then getting out of just I can go there, and I can talk about this, that's my job done then.

DBA12 30:47

I wonder if that's the way it, well if you've not been trained, because to me standing up and lecturing is far harder than doing a series of activities that leads them to their own kind of conclusions. And, I mean, for me it'd be far harder to talk for an hour.

Paul Jones 31:02

And is there a tension then, because this has come up in other conversations, about how students rate classes, versus giving a quality learning experience?

DBA12 31:17

I think, potentially, yes. Because I think that students don't necessarily, but students are different as well. I mean, you know, students have different learning styles, just like we have different teaching styles. So there'll be some students who will prefer the lecture anyway. And there'll be other students who prefer the experiential learning. I mean, there's certainly when I worked in [redacted], it's not happening so much here. But when I worked in [redacted], I, you know, and I was kind of eliciting answers from them. I did actually overhear a student at the front say, why don't she just tell us!

Paul Jones 31:47

Do you think then that people actually think about the learning styles when they're developing these things at all for the students, or even if they measure the students learning styles at the start of the course and think about how they could adjust what they're doing?

DBA12 31:59

It depends what professional development they've had. Depends if they've been trained to think about those things. I mean, like I said, I've not done this certificate in higher education or the diploma here, I assume that all those sorts of things are covered. But then it's relatively recent that we've been insisting on it...

Paul Jones 32:16

... you would assume wrong, because I've been on it and you'd assume wrong.

DBA12 32:18

oh, okay...

Paul Jones 32:20

So it would be worth you doing just to see what they do because...

DBA12 32:22

... yeah, okay.

Paul Jones 32:23

... in terms of course development, because of your experiences, other people that I've talked to that have come from an education background, in secondary education, for instance, there's lots of good things that happen in that environment that could quite easily translate to HE.

DBA12 32:38

Yeah...

Paul Jones 32:38

... but doesn't seem to happen because of the old school way that we consider education.

DBA12 32:44

Right. Okay, interesting, because the student I was talking to today, he said, oh, you know, I've been reading all these books for [redacted] teaching, but nowhere have I seen the idea of a final feedback plenary. But that's what you do in education. And I said, well, that's interesting. I've never heard that in [redacted] teaching, either. But it's a, no, well, you'd have to see what they've learned.

Paul Jones 33:04

Yeah, and I can't remember, because I did the course and it was quite a few years ago now. But my background was in psychology. And as part of my first degree, I took in things like educational psychology and I wanted to become an educational psychologist. So, the ideas around learning, and understanding learners needs, and also having a training and development background. That's all stuff I'm familiar with. But I often see gaps in terms of people's knowledge and motivation to want to explore that, and then tailor the way they deliver, and the idea of differentiation and trying to find out what differentiates learners, that doesn't seem to exist that much.

DBA12 33:39

I think there's, there's, there's a lot of emphasis, too much emphasis, on student satisfaction, and probably not enough emphasis on student needs. And I don't think we're trained, I suspect then, that we're not trained to do that, you know, we're not trained to think in those terms about things like learning styles or how students learn.

Paul Jones 33:59

Yeah, and the drive, and the interesting point for me, is the driver is to get good results on satisfaction surveys...

DBA12 34:05

...Yeah, exactly.

Paul Jones 34:06

... but that could often be giving students the easiest pathway through the module, not giving them the best learning experience. And they don't realise how good it is, until years after, when they get through to employment and are using it.

DBA12 34:18

Yeah, I mean, that's always been one of my little gripes, actually one of my hobby horses. I'm sorry, but students don't necessarily, call me old fashioned, but I believe that students don't necessarily know what's best for them.

Paul Jones 34:28

Yeah, and I think, you know, you'll have your own thoughts on this, but as the cost of education increased, and the idea that students are consumers that they buy into something, that doesn't help with that either...

DBA12 34:40

No, it really doesn't, it really doesn't.

Paul Jones 34:43

...their expectations are much greater these days about paying for a service essentially.

DBA12 34:47

It is paying for service and also, you know, paying for a degree. I mean, I have had particularly international students because they're paying so much, we have had students say but you know, you can't fail me I've paid for this and then you know, you have to go back and say, well, you've paid to be taught you haven't paid to have the degree.

Paul Jones 35:04

You've paid for the opportunity haven't you, when you think about it, not the result at the end.

DBA12 35:07

Yeah, not the result at the end.

Paul Jones 35:08

So are you heavily influenced then by anything external. So I'm thinking particularly in terms of REF, TEF and KEF, those types of things, are there external factors at play for you, as an academic, that you are very mindful of, or is it just a case of, you know what you've got to do in terms of teaching, you know what you've got to do in terms of research, and you just carry on regardless...

DBA12 35:29

I wouldn't say it was, well, REF, yeah, REF, obviously dictates what you do, to an extent, in research. You know, I mean, my research tends to be impactful anyway, because it's about [redacted]. And it's about, it, it works, we work with teachers. So it's about influencing practice anyway. But obviously, REF to an extent dictates what you write as well. And so yes, but TEF and KEF, I would say not, no, no, certainly with teaching, they are not.

Paul Jones 35:58

And it's interesting, because this comes up quite a lot, people have cited REF as being, out of those three, the important one for them. And yet research is the part that gets squeezed the most out of all the different things, those two things don't align. And then there's the other idea that, research in terms of an academic contract for Teaching and Research. Research is the thing that drives kudos, and how you are looked at, and how you are remembered for the work you've done. But then on a day to day basis, teaching takes more emphasis, that doesn't bring you kudos, you could be the best teacher ever, and you wouldn't have a global reputation, but research can make you known globally. And it's a stake in the sand to say this person did this at this time.

DBA12 36:41

But I think there's an immediate, I mean, with, the thing with teaching is that there's this immediate kind of risk, if you like, you know, of getting bad, you know, we're all trying to avoid getting the bad scores, because we know that there'll be internal, it might not give you a global reputation, but there'd be internal consequences if you've got bad scores or students complained about you or, so, that doesn't seem to stop some people, but they are a distinct minority these days, I think.

Paul Jones 37:07

I am not sure, if you went for a job, or a new job somewhere else, I would imagine they would probably ask you more about your research more than the teaching.

DBA12 37:14

Yeah, they do, of course they do...

Paul Jones 37:15

... and they wouldn't ask you about what scores you're getting on your teaching, probably...

DBA12 37:18

... they wouldn't, no, and that's a contradiction, isn't it? And I mean, this, you know, the universities priority is getting these good scores in NSS, and so on, but because, obviously, lead tables etc, are quite important. But in terms of, you know, in terms of global reputation, then research is far more important.

Paul Jones 37:38

Yeah. Do you think then, so culture wise, then? Do you think it's a supportive culture? Besides the fact we've talked about the fact we provide courses, do you think generally, that we are supportive around people's development and wanting to put a focus on that then?

DBA12 37:57

I think, I think there's, support for staff from the university, I find very mixed, and quite contradictory. I mean, I've been, I mean, I'm not the only one, but deeply resentful of the strategy that, and the previous

VC, with all this emphasis on beneficiaries, and it just seemed to be that staff were the means to supply the strategy to the beneficiaries, and at whatever cost. I've seen a slight change with the new VC, he has started to talk about staff alongside students and beneficiaries. I mean, that was always my gripe with the previous one, where are the staff? Right? Why are the staff not there? Surely, we're a beneficiary as well. So in that sense, I, I haven't found the uni, and I find the university, you say the university, who is the university, but talks the talk, but doesn't walk the walk. So there's a lot of talk about wellbeing, work-life balance, etc, etc. And, you know, oh, yes, well, you can contact PAM and you can do this, and you can do that. But it doesn't do anything to actually concretely support, work-life balance, or stress and workload. So, I mean, just saying, oh, well, if you're stressed go and contact PAM is, isn't the answer.

Paul Jones 39:22

I have the same issue because I chair the wellbeing committee, and I describe it as sticking a plaster on a massive gaping wound.

DBA12 39:28

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So that, I resent that. You know, so I don't think the university is supportive of its staff in that sense. And I don't know at what level that can happen because, you know, your Head of Department's hands are tied, your Head of School's hands are tied. One thing that I think, where I think the university could be a lot more helpful, and I think it is a professional development issue, particularly for younger colleagues. I mean, I worry about my younger colleagues. They're under far more stress than I ever was, when I was at their stage of career, I really worry about the kind of pressure that they're under, where the university can be more helpful is stopping this message that everybody's got to be brilliant at everything, and helping individuals to prioritise, and don't say to do it through MDC, because that doesn't work. They need help in prioritising, because at the moment, there's the message of, I mean the message that I always felt I was getting mid-career stage, which caused me massive stress, that was probably the most stressful part of my career, was that I had to be brilliant at everything. I had to be brilliant teacher, I had to be a brilliant researcher, I had to be a brilliant administrator, I had to do everything, anytime a volunteer was needed, you know, we should all be volunteering otherwise, it's a black mark against you. And now looking back, I realised it wasn't like that, but nobody was helping me to prioritise. And you can't, you don't know what's important and what isn't. And you don't know what you can say no to. What I needed was somebody to teach me to say no, or to teach me what I could say no to.

Paul Jones 41:04

I think there's an idea there about street smarts, isn't there, about...

DBA12 41:09

Yeah...

Paul Jones 41:09

... a lot of stuff we give to people as well is about process, or instructions for doing things. We don't actually share knowledge about what it's like, and the day to day of doing those things. And I imagine any of the admin roles you've done, you've been given it, but there's been no handover or telling you...

DBA12 41:24

Oh very rarely...

Paul Jones 41:25

...you've got to do this. And this is a really clever way to do it and this will save you time, there's probably not much of that that goes on...

DBA12 41:31

No, there isn't...

Paul Jones 41:32

... which is really disappointing that there's ways to utilise the system to make it efficient and effective, but what we do is concentrate on ticking a box to say...

DBA12 41:40

... we've done this or we have done that...

Paul Jones 41:41

... but we're not improving quality, we're just measuring the state of stuff, we aren't looking for efficiencies quite often, we are just saying, we've ticked that box now, because we've measured it and that's the bit we've done. There's nothing about how we actually help people...

DBA12 41:56

There's thing like, it's also things like, I mean, if you look at the promotion criteria, I mean, you know, I remember every time I was offered, you know, a plenary at a conference, or an editorial board, or an article to review for a journal, I always felt I had to say yes, to everybody and to everything. And that's why you really get overwhelmed and the stress that that causes, because it's massive work, amounts of work when you, but, but you know, when you look at the promotion, and you've got your esteem indicators, so I had better say yes to that and I've got to say yes to that and I've got to say yes to that. And looking back now I realised that actually, I didn't have to say yes to it all, it would have been fine to you know, just do some of them, and, but I think younger colleagues in particular, they need help in knowing what they can say no to.

Paul Jones 42:44

Yeah, and I think the idea you mentioned about the expectation that people are good at everything, that's still quite strong...

DBA12 42:51

It is yeah...

Paul Jones 42:52

...and for me, I think every department should be a balanced of, so if we take research, for instance, you know, you have publications, grants, supervision, impact, you can't be good at all those things. And we need for me, if I was the head of department, for instance, I would be looking to think, I need my team of players to be able to win this game effectively. But that means you have people who are good at the publication side, you have some that are good at winning grants and delivering those, you have individuals who are, whose work generates good impact and the supervision then, you find people who can do the supervision while they have capacity for doing that. And you have a team then of people together that, the overall balance works for you in terms of delivering what you need to...

DBA12 43:37

... that's how it should be, but I don't think the Heads of Department at the moment, they don't have that kind of power either. Because then you've got your AD Research, sending traffic lights, red, green, and yellow for each member of the department according to how much grants income, how many publications, how many PhD students so actually you do have to be good at all of those.

Paul Jones 43:59

Yeah, it's, it's disappointing that we can't, we don't tend to celebrate people's excellence or abilities in particular areas and then balance those things out, it's very much a case of always picking holes of, it doesn't matter what you've done well, these are things you haven't done well...

DBA12 44:16

... yeah, you have done this well, okay, but you haven't done this, this and this.

Paul Jones 44:19

And for me, it just seems ridiculous that, we are never gonna have an army of people that are excellent at everything...

DBA12 44:25

No! Exactly. And that puts immense pressure on, on particularly on young, I mean, as you get older and you usually work through the system, you learn a bit more about what you can and can't say no to, but, particularly younger colleagues, they, you know, they just say yes to everything.

Paul Jones 44:41

I have a vision of like a child where they push different boundaries and see what they can get away with. And over time you get used to then...

DBA12 44:48

Yeah...

Paul Jones 44:48

... which ones you can flex, which ones are more in place that are immovable, and you develop that knowledge and you find a rhythm for your way of doing research and teaching that works within those boundaries, then. But yeah, I dread to think for newer colleagues, there's a lot to take on...

DBA12 45:03

...there is an awful lot to take on...

Paul Jones 45:05

...and we want them to stay here and we want them to develop and we want them to feel supported.

DBA12 45:09

Exactly. They are under a huge amount of stress.

Paul Jones 45:13

So you mentioned MyDC. Do you think that's a useful format for helping you on a yearly basis?

DBA12 45:21

Not really, not for me. No, not really. I mean, I suppose it might be for younger colleagues who are planning their careers, you know, an opportunity to see, I didn't even get an MDC last year, *redacted* never got around to it, don't seem to have suffered for it.

Paul Jones 45:40

No, I think I think that's true of a lot of people where, for me, it's been put in place because I think good management means having regular conversations. And therefore, because not all good management happens, we have to have a structure that tells people to have a conversation...

DBA12 45:44

...yeah to have a conversation...

Paul Jones 45:50

...but then that, even that, doesn't work to make those conversations happen, so you are trying to fix a problem by one method, but that hasn't really sort of solved that problem.

DBA12 46:02

No, no, I don't think it really works. I mean, the university has never really been able to find a satisfactory way of, of having this kind of development.

Paul Jones 46:12

So, for you then, on a personal level, if you were being encouraged to excel and to do more, and to help you sort of meet your needs as an individual, what would work for you then on a personal level?

DBA12 46:25

I think for me, I mean, going back to when we were the old [redacted], we used to have conversations with the head of group, but that's what it was. It was an informal conversation a couple of times a year. How's it going? Any problems, any issues, anything I can help you with? I mean, I find this itemising everything in the MDC, totally unhelpful, frankly. And it's more about counting, oh, you know, you've only got three in research, you need to add some more. Well, that's what I'm doing. Whereas having those conversations, which were genuinely supportive, and genuinely sort of an open conversation, is what's missing. What do you need? How can we help? That was far more helpful and far more supportive.

Paul Jones 47:09

Yeah. Yeah. And I don't think we've mastered that ability at the moment....

DBA12 47:13

... because if you're not giving awards, why do you need to formalise everything?

Paul Jones 47:17

Yeah. And I don't know whether, so the Heads of Department, I feel sorry for them, because there's some that feel pressured where, as Head of Department, you know that your term will be up at some point, and you have to then work back into the department after, that means having difficult managerial conversations...

DBA12 47:39

... but also you're squeezed in the middle. I mean, I really find Head of Department, you're damned if you do, and you're damned if you don't, because you've got your department and you've got the School and the College, and you're really stuck in the middle...

Paul Jones 47:47

...and you're trying to find how you can motivate and enthuse your staff and encourage them and develop them. And yet, you've been given directives, quite often confusing directives...

DBA12 48:00

...Exactly, or contradictory directives...

Paul Jones 48:02

...yeah, and there's no clear structure about how that all works, then... ...do you think the college structure's helped that, or do you think it's made it even worse?

DBA12 48:06

...No, exactly... I don't think college structure works at all.

Paul Jones 48:13

No, I personally don't either. I think it's confused at the top of who owns power for different things and where the accountability lies...

DBA12 48:21

... I think that we've lost to kind of, yeah, I mean, unless you introduce an intermediate layer, again, at School level, but I just feel like we've lost so much, particularly in research. I mean, that, that's not, it's

not AD Research's fault. But it's so diverse across the different Schools, that without having somebody who's, who understands the research that this school does, it's really, really difficult.

Paul Jones 48:48

Do you think then that those ideas about the College and the structure, would there be better ways of doing things at the moment, then?

DBA12 48:56

... what apart from going back to where we were before haha?

Paul Jones 48:59

... ha, that would be a nice solution, because the cultural differences are vast...

DBA12 49:03

... they are huge. The power is, the power is different, I mean, I just find that, you know, we're [redacted]. I mean, you know, all of our January starts have been swept away. And, you know, no more visas are being issued because [redacted] programs are full. [redacted]

Paul Jones 49:21

...Yeah.

DBA12 49:21

Oh, no, because it's all you know, it's all got to, it's all lumped in together.

Paul Jones 49:28

Yeah. That's difficult then. So, at the same time, same time as the college structure changed, or came together, we also had COVID. So do you think COVID had an effect, now, in terms of the culture and how people react, it is able to separate that from the college stuff do you think?

DBA12 49:48

I don't think the college would have worked anyway, partly because of how it was done. It was done so badly in the first place. I mean, there doesn't appear to have been any planning, or any thinking through at all, there was no kind of Project Management, you know, it was just he, or, you know, tomorrow, you're all going to be together, get on with it. So I don't think it would have worked anyway, I don't think it was helped with COVID, because obviously the opportunities to kind of all get together and share. I mean, in fairness when I was [redacted], and was sort of regularly meeting with [redacted] from across the college, I mean, we had an awful lot in common and we used to have some really good meetings where we discuss issues like, you know, ethics or dissertation supervision, or things that we all that were of, things like academic offenses, you know, we'd have really good discussions, and there was far more we had in common than, than divided us. But I think there's something as big as that, it's very hard to find that kind of common ground.

Paul Jones 50:52

Yeah, and even get voices heard as well...

DBA12 50:54

... Yeah, getting your voice heard...

Paul Jones 50:56

...once you go past a certain size, then you've only got more dominant people tending to speak, and you are often moving on to different points, it's really hard... Yeah. And email isn't necessarily a guarantee that people are going to read stuff, either. But there's this idea that, if we send an email, that's our job done, we can tick it off, and it's gone out then.

DBA12 51:03

... communication becomes really difficult as well. I mean, you know, we found that [redacted], [redacted] and myself found it really difficult to get communication out, we didn't want to be constantly sending all college messages. But on the other hand, if you rely on, on [redacted], or [redacted], to communicate with their own departments, some did, some didn't. And then you get people saying well, I didn't know about this. It's very hard to know other ways, though, of communication.

Paul Jones 51:39

Yeah, but that's partly because we haven't got a communication plan either of thinking, we've got all these different channels at the moments, you've got teams, email, yammer, different ways of doing stuff. But no one...

DBA12 51:51

... it's all a bit random, isn't it, no one is being strategic...

Paul Jones 51:53

...yes, and no one's really been skilled up to use them properly, nor have we been told well this channel is for doing this and this channel is for doing that, it is a free for all at the moment...

DBA12 52:02

...it is, yes, I've even got students have started to contact me on teams now, which I've had to take off my, take the notifications off my phone, otherwise it never ends.

Paul Jones 52:14

Yeah, so those are some of the main points, I guess one of the things I'm curious about, given your [redacted] background, if you had a magic wand, and you could change the way we do things at Aston then, and we could train people up in different ways, and make them better at what they are doing, are there things you would do?

DBA12 52:33

Well, I think I mean, in terms of professional, ooo that's a, that's a big one, isn't it? I mean, in terms of learning and teaching, I think we could teach better. I mean, there are some excellent teachers, but there are a lot of fairly average teachers that don't have an education background, they don't have an, and I don't think just doing the certificate is enough, so I think there's a lot more we could do around that, reading the feedback from the students as well, there's a lot more that we could do, to make teaching more effective, more learner centered, more effective. I'm not a great believer in the lecture. In terms of research, I think we need to, I think we're quite good at supporting younger colleagues at research actually, frankly, at least in my department anyway. But I think generally we are, there are structures in place that just weren't there when I was starting out, I think we are getting pretty good at that. And there's lots of sort of things like support for grant writing, and all that kind of thing. I think that's done pretty well, these days. I think, I mean, the one thing we really, really could do with is just a complete overhaul of the admin. We need a system that's fit for purpose. We need procedures that aren't constantly duplicating themselves, you know, it would free up so much of people's time. I mean, I know that's not a professional development thing. But it would give people more if only the systems work more efficiently. I mean, that, SITS and all that is just not fit for purpose.

Paul Jones 54:11

No, they are not, and it's horrid and even though those things per se, aren't professional development, if those were fixed, they would create opportunities for development.

DBA12 54:18

Opportunities, that's my point. Yeah, they really would. I mean, if you only needed two on an interview panel instead of three, you know, that third person would have an extra hour, and if you only had one form to fill in at the end of it instead of two? And yeah, if you could actually find the form and you know,

you weren't spending hours trying to find out where the form is. I mean, I've just come back from a trip and, and now I've got to fill in the expenses. And I've got no idea where the expense form is these days.

Paul Jones 54:43

In my head, what we need, is that map idea of just you go to one place, then you can easily plot what you're looking for...

DBA12 54:48

... but you need to know what that place is...

Paul Jones 54:49

...yeah, and you also need to have that map of how it is all going to work as well, because what tends to happen, we have silo mentalities in lots of ways. Someone's looking after X. so they will send an email out about X, so there is no scope of thinking, well, how does this link to everything else and what the user experience is like for doing those things. It is always, I've done my job, I've created this, I've sent it off. Now people can use it. And there isn't this link then to those things being cohesive for people.

DBA12 55:17

No, and things are organised in a logical way, either, because I mean, what I tend to do is go to the staff pages. So when I was trying to find the travel procedure, I went to the staff page, I think there is travel. So I clicked under travel. And there was nothing about travel approval. And I can't remember why, I think I just started clicking through all the different pages and eventually I found it under expenses. I'm quite curious now, if I go back and look, whether under expenses there's actually the form, or whether it just tells you what you're entitled to?

Paul Jones 55:45

Well, I wish you every success with that. The last question I've got for you, then, is about the structures that exist for, on the teaching side and on the research side, so you have fellowship and senior fellowship of the HEA, or now Advanced HE, and then on the research side, is the VITAE development framework for researchers, do either those things, either now or in the past, have they played an important part in your development?

DBA12 56:13

Not the research one, no. But the HEA one, yes.

Paul Jones 56:16

Is that useful then, for you?

DBA12 56:18

I think it has been useful for me. I mean, it was, I've been, I mean, it has played, played a part on both sides. Because I've been [redacted] for quite a long time now, so I [redacted] and am down as a [redacted] as well. But nobody's ever wanted my services, but anyway. But also, I've got [redacted] myself. So I've gone through that myself. So that, to me, that has played an important role. I found it very, I did find it very useful, actually, to fill in those applications, very time consuming, but I did find it useful to fill them in, because it really makes you think.

Paul Jones 56:50

... but is that justifying your expertise or is it helping you develop expertise?

DBA12 56:56

I think it does help you in a way it helps you to develop as well, because you have to put it down in writing. It makes you articulate things that you perhaps wouldn't necessarily think about consciously, stuff

that you do unconsciously. And also, I mean, certainly [redacted] is really helpful, because I read, you know, I've read a couple and thought, oh, I must go and look at that. In fact, in one case, I even did go and look at it. Yeah, oh, that's a good idea. Well, that sounds like a good idea. Oh, that sounds really interesting. I could do that, you know, so, so from that perspective, I find it really useful to read.

Paul Jones 57:26

So on the research side then, besides the training you get as a PhD student and the support mechanisms that exist, generally, there isn't a guiding framework then that you've used then...

DBA12 57:36

Not that I have used, no...

Paul Jones 57:37

... where you think I am missing out elements of this, or this, and I need to sort of fill those gaps?

DBA12 57:41

No, not at all.

Paul Jones 57:43

Because it's interesting for me about the teaching and research roles, where you have a framework for teaching, you have a framework for research...

DBA12 57:50

...I wasn't even aware that it was kind of a framework, I mean, I've heard of VITAE, but I wasn't aware that it was a kind of a framework that we could use...

Paul Jones 57:56

... they've done a lot of work on the website over the last couple of years, you could actually log on there and have your own development plan, essentially keeping track of all the different elements then. But while it gets emphasised at the PhD level, I'm not sure any researchers have used it as a framework to think about their own development needs...

DBA12 58:12

...yeah, their own research development. Yeah, I mean, again, you know, I've always done research in teams, and we tend to learn from each other, but teams from different universities.

Paul Jones 58:24

That's really good. We've covered off pretty much everything I think, any last points you want to make about professional development

DBA12 58:31

No, I don't think so, we've talked about quite a lot haven't we?

Paul Jones 58:34

Yes, we have, which is really good. I will stop recording now.

Appendix 16: DBA13 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA13

Paul Jones 00:05

I have started recording and firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship, reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral students studying for a Doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate, from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what's important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour but we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview semi-structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. The idea was I tried to do that with the least number of questions and interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, and you can withdraw by emailing me on the details that are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed, and all links to you as an individual, including personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who have access to the anonymized data are myself and my supervisory team. This interview is considered low risk. If you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand. So I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress and if I'm indeed feeling distress myself, I may stop for that reason. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start, then we will start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. For the interview record this is interview DBA13. So can you confirm understand the information I've given you?

DBA13 01:58

Yes, I do.

Paul Jones 01:59

Right. And are you happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA13 02:01

Yes, I do.

Paul Jones 02:03

And do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA13 02:06

Yes, I do.

Paul Jones 02:07

Great. So could you confirm for me what school you work in, please?

DBA13 02:11

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:13

Thanks. And can you confirm your gender, please?

DBA13 02:15

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:16

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA13 02:18

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:20

And how would you describe your career level? Early career, mid career or senior career?

DBA13 02:28

[redacted].

Paul Jones 03:00

So, if I had to put you in one or the other, so early career or mid career?

DBA13 03:03

Oh sorry, yes. I would say mid career.

Paul Jones 03:07

Fab, and can you confirm your age bracket please? So, we have 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64.

DBA13 03:19

[redacted].

Paul Jones 03:21

[redacted], great. So, can you talk to me about your understanding of what professional development is? And what your experiences have been like?

DBA13 03:32

Sorry to ask, is it my experiences at Aston or just generally?

Paul Jones 03:37

It can be both, so whatever you feel is relevant to talk about, so you can start with Aston but then maybe describe other experiences you've had as well.

DBA13 03:45

I think professional development, it needs to be relevant, or it needs to be targeted to the type of vision that, that one sees as their career goal. So for me, I always perceived myself to be in a teaching and research contract type of arrangement. And so for me, professional development entails development not only in the research part, but also in the teaching part. Now, each, each part will have its own nuances. So there's a certain, a certain way of dealing with research for example, a certain way of building research culture, getting expertise, getting training for example, which is slightly similar, that is slightly different to that of teaching. So for example, you may be more focused on practical delivery of the, of the teaching subject. There is some overlap in the sense that if you want to look at the theoretical or pedagogical foundations it is similar to the research you have to execute research, literature reviews, etc. So that's similar, but in terms of developing teaching, you focus more on the practice, whereas in the research, you focus more on the skill set that relates to generating research and different elements there in my view.

Paul Jones 05:00

Do you think then that you've had good support to do that throughout your career?

DBA13 05:06

No. So let's take from the Aston perspective. Let's look at the, let's look at the research side. So if we look at the research side, since I've joined Aston, as in, you know, this was [redacted] years ago. So at that point, I would have considered myself coming close to the middle of early career transitioning out. I did not feel that 1) the culture was there to foster the sort of, the motivation to work together to learn. So if I may put it this way, there is, in my perspective, a degree of research snobbery. And so people, for example, who perceive themselves oh I can produce four star in a particular way. So in a very doctrinal way, may look down and, and in their conversations, make others who do let's say practice focus type research, which is less doctrinal, feel that their research is not as valid, or should not be considered at an equally four star compatible standard.

Paul Jones 06:13

Right.

DBA13 06:14

So that is, that culture has existed there for me. And so, I have always reverted to rely on my external networks outside of Aston to develop my own research competence. And linked to this sort of perception, from people who are presume, who arguably, are much more advanced in terms of their, let's say, their publications ability in terms of star rating, etc. There is also similar sort of approach that I have noticed when one is talking of KEI (Knowledge Exchange and Impact) activities, where for example, there are certain people who are very good at KEI, but their approach to come to someone with less experience is not like, okay, let's see, how can I work together with you, to develop your KEI profile, the approach has been more along the lines of, you should be doing this. Or, you should really need to get out and do this. And I think, that if you start from the point of almost like a reprimand, almost like a degree of I'm superior, I can dictate to you what you want, what you should be doing, you're not going to encourage someone to really want to work with you to develop their own competence or their profile, but either just, but neither to focus on doing KEI development, for example, because of that sort of atmosphere, because of that sort of interrelationship. And I think those sorts of, from my perspective, those sort of approaches by some colleagues, I just, like I said, reverted to rely on external networks, putting my head down and trying to develop as much as I can, in my own independent space. I haven't really, I haven't gotten a perception within the [redacted], that culture where if I have a problem, I would not be judged, because I have this problem, or I have this deficiency in my skill set. And, you know, that sort of, that sort of atmosphere has sort of made me build a wall, that I don't want to expose myself to these types of characters, I really don't have time for it. And I just tried to plod on as much as I can. On the opposite side in teaching, I can, I see there is a concerted effort to make that sort of collegiality, stronger in developing the teaching expertise, there is still a degree of snobbery, some people I know, I am, I am this in this position, you should be doing this. But there have been initiatives where, for example, there is the message, irrespective of your standard of, of years of teaching, you work together, it is about sharing perspectives in sort of a mutual benefit development, both for the observer and the observee, for example, and that sort of, it's not fully crystallised within [redacted], but it's certainly there. And that's more than what I would say from my experience on the research side so far, whether that will change because of [redacted] new appointment. I do not know. But certainly, that's how it has been for the past [redacted] years for me, at Aston. I think, prior to joining Aston, the institutions I worked at, but unfortunately, they were institutions that were building their profile, building the capacity. So when I joined, for example, the [redacted] University prior to coming to Aston, and this was in [redacted]. They were on a massive expansion to deliver their own independent, own produced undergraduate and post-graduate programs. So the focus was solely on teaching. And there was no sort of focus on developing research or usage capabilities or expertise. You kind of was left on your own really to develop and to build networks and or to speak to more experience colleagues. In my, you know, at the [redacted], it was a bit more collegial. So I had a confidence that if I went to a specific colleague, I would not be judged, or I won't be reprimanded or spoken to, as if I 1) that I knew nothing or that, you know, I, whatever concern I have, whatever gap I have is understandable, anybody can have it, irrespective of the level of expertise. That was the culture that was created if I went to someone, I mean, not everybody

had that, but I knew there was someone that I can go to who would not reproach me and at Aston, I don't get that. And so at [Redacted] University, less support, but the collegiality, the culture was there, that fostered that willingness to develop. Structurally, in terms of their, for example, if we compare it like yourself, or the RKE people, where there's a bit more structural support for research, that wasn't there at [redacted] University at the time for the [redacted], it was there for the departments, but it wasn't there for the [redacted]. So that was a problem at that point. Teaching wise though you were basically thrown overboard, and you fight, and you, you work your way through? So that was in terms of development, teaching and online software. You learn by trial and error. Yeah, I think a previous job I had was teaching only but I was just pure teaching, there wasn't any really room for considering personal development, it was you needed to deliver your teaching. If you want to do something for personal development, you do it in addition to your teaching, there wasn't a space.

Paul Jones 11:37

Yeah. And an interesting point you made there was about the difference between [redacted] [redacted] University and in Aston, where there seems to be more structural support from central areas for you here.

DBA13 11:51

Yeah.

Paul Jones 11:52

And then it was more collegial, and you had support from peers in [redacted] University? Did you find one or the other better? Are they just filling different gaps? What are your thoughts on those differences?

DBA13 12:04

I think they're, I think it's a lot. I think it's fulfilling different gaps. I think, even, to be honest, even with Aston, even with the structure that's there. There's a structure that supports, for my own, from my perception, a certain level of let's say research funding activity. So if you were an early career person, for example, and I've gone through it, I've applied for some of the small grants, it was pretty much you do everything. Now I understand from a institution perspective, you can't provide support for everything. But if you want to encourage someone who's an early career to make that little lump, that jump, into that sort of small grants, or medium grand bidding, you will need to provide much more support to the journey for the person to make that bid, even if it's a small bid, because it's about confidence building, if I know I can get, if I build that confidence for 10,000 or 11,000 pounds on a grant, and I know what I'm doing, and I feel supported in that, I will have greater confidence to apply more than once, not only for a smaller grant, but maybe I'll try my bit, my hand at a mid grant. And so I think that is the sort of gap that I've noticed at Aston, that I think will be useful to address. But nonetheless, there's still structured support, that if I want to go for, you know, a six-figure grant, for example, I know there's structured support there. I know about the discussions. I know about planning, I know the peer review process. And at [redacted] University, I wasn't there. What I would like, I think, is if, for example, the culture within [redacted] specifically, I can't speak to [redacted], but if the culture in [redacted] and the approach taken by supposedly more senior colleagues in their research, towards supporting individuals who are not as advanced as their own, to develop the [redacted] profile, develop the culture in [redacted]. I think that is the gap there. I hope I've answered the query rather let my rambling take over.

Paul Jones 14:06

Yeah. No, it was good. So I'm interested then, for your perspective of being on a teaching and research contract, one of the questions I've been asking people about this is that the general denomination within the contract is you get 40% time for teaching, 40% for research and 20% for administration. In practice, how does that work out?

DBA13 14:26

Ha! That doesn't work out like that. At all! You see, for example, I was thinking about this, I thought this might be one of the things you might ask. When, you know, you look at some institutions and their badge of honor is we're research led, and so you know the order of priority, between research and teaching, you know which one takes focus. At Aston, it seems to be teaching lead, despite the narrative, despite the focus that we are both teaching and research. It is heavily skewed to teaching and unfortunately that has led to certain people in management, I'll be honest, within the [redacted], not appreciating the value of space and time to do research. Everything needs to be subservient to the teaching. And I've had clashes with this before with the program office where, for example, I think I was, I think I had just joined Aston, and I wanted to do a [redacted] grant. And there was a mix-up in communication in the program office when marks had to be due back, and the error was theirs, not mine. But the error meant that, for example, they wanted, they didn't tell me when marking was due, and three days before they sent a reminder it was due to, in, on the third day, the same day that my [redacted] deadline was for. Right? And there wasn't an appreciation that there is this conflict that might happen. And therefore, maybe there should have been an extra 24 hours flexibility on the, on the marking, or, for example, we needed to give you a clear time. Even if I make a mistake, I should therefore have to exercise judgment, I think the assumption, both within management within [redacted], and within the program office has been teaching, and that's it. And, you know, you're kind of hammered into accepting that that's the focus of the school. And so therefore, when I do my research, it's always I, to be honest, I do my research on weekends, on evenings, when I can get through the admin and teaching. Yeah, I don't feel I have that appropriate space. I have, I only recently asked a question from a colleague who's in senior management, is it okay for me to turn around and put my out of office and said, this is my, this day, I am addressing research matters, I will address your query, let's say, there might be a delay in my email. And the person said, yes, that's fine subject to you fulfill the requirement that you need to respond to any emails within 48 hours. Well, if I have a pressing deadline, I may want to take, for example, one day to do all the peer review, you know, answer peer review two's comments, but it might take me a little bit more. And so, for me, it's, again, they've factored in that admin and teaching must take predominance, and there's no flexibility around it to accommodate the other aspect of teaching. So no, I totally get the idea we commit to our students 48 hours. But if, for example, someone has a key research deadline or funding deadline, is it that detrimental, if for example, instead of 48 hours to respond in 72 hours, for example? I think that's, that appreciation, that flexibility is not there. I don't know how it is in [redacted], other schools. I mean, [redacted], I get the feeling that there is a greater acceptance of that flexibility, but certainly not in [redacted]. There have been times where, for example, I recall, I booked time off, I actually booked time off because I had, had a publication due and I decided, well, in order to secure my time, I'm actually gonna book my annual leave for this. And I forewarned the students and everything, students wanted feedback close to the assessment and I, forewarned students weeks in advance. Look, I know your assessment is do this, but I have to be aware on this period, any queries, please send them to me earlier. Students, of course, didn't do that. And so when they wrote to me in the period in which I told them I'll be away, they ran to, to people in senior management, who decided to send me a text or send me an email, to please answer student queries...

Paul Jones 14:37

When you are on annual leave?

DBA13 15:33

... when I'm on annual leave and annual leave that I have booked so that I could focus on research. So even then I've been, forgive my expression, I have been shafted in that way. So I, I don't know what, what to do in this instance, maybe to, maybe certain people in senior management need to be sensitised to the value of giving colleagues research space, but also colleagues themselves. So there have been instances where, for example, we were discussing who's teaching what module, what module in which term. And [redacted], of course, is delivering, you know, the [redacted] degree. So therefore, there's a heavy concentration during the summer months for some people to produce the materials to teach from September. And there were, there was a conversation two years back where, for example, I had told line management during this month in [redacted] and [redacted], I'll be going on a research

visit. I have some research activities planned, in the conversation about who's delivering the module in September, colleagues on a teaching only contract says teaching is first, you can do your research at a different time. Okay, so even not only management, but colleagues who are arguably at the same sort of level, but lecturer, senior lecturer, still do not perceive the value of giving colleagues with research obligations the space, or the flexibility, to be able to achieve those other things. And again, it's the perception that research, that research is sort of an afterthought or backburner, despite utterances otherwise, oh we value research, in actions it does not translate to that. For me, with my experience.

Paul Jones 20:18

Do you think that's partly because of... so from what I've seen on the teaching side, there's always pressures on teaching. So when you mentioned about responding to students, there's always a part of the process you're doing. There's always this pressure on teaching, no matter what you're doing throughout the year, with research, because it's more flexible about when you do it, besides deadlines for grants or things. It's almost like because it's flexible, they think you can just move it around whenever you want then, which is really hard to craft that time to actually do it then if people keep treating it as movable thing, that doesn't matter when you do it then.

DBA13 20:53

Yes, yes. And I think it's also the, I think it also comes across for the, from the experience of those who are making those comments about movability, because they have not gone through the research experience themselves. They're not researchers themselves. All be it, I must caveat this. There are people who are in senior management who are researching and teaching contract, but they still foster, or allow those in other senior management teaching, or in other senior management positions, or who are only on teaching contracts to make those comments. And that's what I found surprising. Maybe it's because of, I don't know, their own perception of their own research, I don't know. But about it, you know, supporting colleagues to develop their research, I think that's at least something I find missing.

Paul Jones 21:41

So that feeling of being supported to say, on a constant basis, research is just as important as teaching, and not having it backed up in terms of meaningful actions then, yes?

DBA13 21:52

Yeah. And I've, you know, I've heard stories where, for example, well, actually, let me not use this story, let me use a practical example. There was a time [redacted] years ago, after I applied for a [redacted] grant. [redacted] has suggested that I go up for this grant writing program... ... and I said, you know, it's great. [redacted] is suggesting I do this possibly seen something in what I've done before, so let me sign for it. Part of that process, is the assurance of line management that they will give you the space to participate in these things. Yeah, yeah, yeah, we will do. That never happens. Right. All right. So is the case Oh, yeah, yeah, I'll sign it as long as you do your teaching. But there is no sort of reduction in the workload allocation, or the teaching obligations, to reflect the fact that I'm on the program. And so at the end of the day, I didn't actually get to complete the program, because at some point, when we had to do the actual grant writing on the grant, I was so flooded with marking and teaching, I just couldn't give it the respect and the space that it deserves. And this leads me to what I was about to say before, about I've heard instances of certain research colleagues being told explicitly by management that yeah we will support your study leave application, but for those colleagues it's never really transpired. And in terms of them getting it, then it's a bit strange that they didn't get it, because they were of an advanced stage in their research career. And so if, therefore, your priority is to give people who are producing research, who have four star outputs already, to really get a boost, and to prepare us for REF2028, you do not deny those people having study leaves, or you have an honest conversation and tell them, okay, we can't give you study leave this year, we can give you this, but the whole process of fictitiously saying yes, you can, I will support your application, but then it does not happen, then that, that builds a level of distrust even further.

Paul Jones 22:11

Yeah... Yeah. It's an interesting point, you mentioned there, about the communication. So do you feel in a position where you can have honest and open talks about your research needs then, or do you feel that it is always dismissed? How does it work usually?

DBA13 24:00

It depends who I'm talking to. So if I'm talking to senior management, I think it's, it, I wouldn't say it's dismissed in a conscious way. I'll say it's dismissed because they don't appreciate the, the seriousness of what I'm talking about and say, they, they don't give the weight of attention that they should...

Paul Jones 24:23

Yeah,...

DBA13 24:24

...they, in one or two instances, so they would say, you know, yeah, we value research, yeah we value research, but I don't, I think it's a mixture, depending on who the individual is, it's a mixture of being dismissive and it is a mixture of being ignorant of what it actually means to say you are gonna support. But that's in senior management. If you're talking about other colleagues, let's say more advanced colleagues, and let's say in KEI activities, more advanced colleagues in research publications. I think someone with a strong profile of grant captures, there are one or two people there, but even then they were quiet, there's, with my memory, so there isn't really someone in [redacted] with a substantive grant captures as a PI. So coming back to KEI, and coming back to research publications, I have no confidence, I do not feel comfortable going to those colleagues to speak to them, because I know their attitude. And I've had, you know, informal conversations with them, and I know their attitude, I know their approach, and I just don't want to subject myself to that type of, that type of perception, that type of conversation. It just, I, it's always gonna be demeaning. And I don't, I don't want to subject myself. There were, there was one person, that I thought that he, you know, I could have gone to him, but he's now left Aston. And that was [redacted]. Not even [redacted], I think [redacted] was, unfortunately, he was more focused on the theoretical doctrinal and gave that his attention, and support was actually more of an afterthought for other developmental areas. But [redacted] was, [redacted] was a good sounding board. Also, because I think he, he in some way mirrors my trajectory in the sense that he did not have [redacted]. So he went through the same hurdles of having to sort of justify his existence as a researcher without [redacted]. So he knew how to deal with, even my conversations with him as a springboard, as to get to picking his brains, as to how to deal with things, it wasn't judgmental. It was more along the lines, I can see that, I've experienced this, this worked well for me, how about you try this. Maybe we can have a chat afterwards, after you have tried it, to see how it went. Well, that is a bit more helpful conversation, rather than you should be doing this, or, you need to do this, end of story. Yeah?

Paul Jones 26:53

I think there's, um, something that has come up on a fairly regular basis about, almost like what you mentioned there. It's about having people around you, where you can learn things off them, like I described it as like the street smarts of knowing how the system works, understanding how you can get the best out of it, and being able to have people around you that can help you do that without having to learn everything yourself by trial and error, then.

DBA13 27:17

Yeah, so I think that's it, but I think it's having those people who have the street smarts, but having those people with the street smarts who appreciate that having to share that knowledge requires a certain personality approach. Because that's the thing, it's, it, you can have the knowledge, you can have the street smarts, but if you have an ego behind it, you will not be in a position where you, that people come to you, for you to share that street wisdom.

Paul Jones 27:47

Do you, do you think we encourage that type of sharing, then, because my experiences across different places would suggest that can be quite variable sometimes...

DBA13 27:56

Yes...

Paul Jones 27:56

... I've not seen many examples where it's really encouraged or developed in any sort of meaningful way.

DBA13 28:01

I would agree with that, it's not really encouraged about in a meaningful way, it's almost an afterthought. So sometimes we'll have, let's have a, I think [redacted] did it before [redacted], let's have a research session where you can bring an idea, for example, or bring out a paper in production and present it to colleagues. And you observe that people who opted in to do that, they would present, well, there was a pressure to present a paper that was not near to perfection, but was so, that was developed so that they wanted to mitigate the risk of them being under pressure for certain types of questions. And then you also notice the interaction of, of colleagues, who are making that sort of comment to the colleague. So, why haven't you, you haven't thought of this, this doesn't seem to make, it's just the way in which you provide that feedback to the person, there isn't a, for my experience, there wasn't a recognition of that, of the presenter's vulnerability, of having to have an underdeveloped thought, or some sort of piece of work, at this infancy stage, presenting it to colleagues who could be quite thorough and, and that's to be welcomed. But colleagues who can't appreciate that, that level of vulnerability exists, and therefore we need to deal with this in a tactful way and we need to support the colleague in a tactful way. Some may say that's a good thing, because then you're forced to have high quality stuff to present. But in the, in the atmosphere of having to a lot of teaching, having to do admin, you really can't get yourself and into position very early to have that sort of sort of product ready, to share with colleagues and then develop afterwards. You kind of need to not take advantage of those opportunities to share your work, until such time as let's say later on in the year. And that's what eventually happened because what turned out to be the case was that certain seminars were not fulfilled by speakers, because either 1) speakers weren't interested or 2) speakers didn't feel comfortable sharing certain work with them until they feel comfortable having a final product.

Paul Jones 30:06

You almost need like a set of ground rules, don't you, to say this is what behaviours we expect to people giving feedback rather than, what seems to be, the variances and how well that is done then. So rather than be accusatory, and condescending, to be supportive and developmental, thinking oh, have you thought about this and, oh, you might want to think about this, and nudging this little bit, rather than saying, this is rubbish, or why haven't you thought of this, or why haven't you done that.

DBA13 30:31

Yeah! And I think it's also, what was also noticeable, was the variance and approaches by colleagues. So if you had, for example, you had what I call the doctrinal clique presenting to their friends, they would be a bit more accommodating to any errors, a bit more suggesting, a bit more understanding in how they frame suggestions. But then if you had colleagues who are not in the, sort of, the doctrinal clique, and they present their research, you know, you're gonna get the full brunt of scrutiny. Now, one, that level of scrutiny is, to some extent this, you know, we should value that, because that strengthens the quality of the work. But if you want to support people to grow within [redacted], in my view, within [redacted], there is a time and place for when you do that, you have to cater for certain things, if someone goes to a conference, you know, for example, to get into a conference, you need to have the paper spot on. And so that, the high level of scrutiny, is to be expected and welcome, because that's the position of the people in the setting that it is, in a setting where you're trying to encourage development of quality of writing, in the setting we try to encourage development of people engaging in certain research projects, you don't have to have that sort of strict approach as if you were doing it in a conference, or in an expert working group, because that's a different setting. You can bring it, depending on the nature of the development of the of the paper, and maybe the speaker can say, look, I'm presenting this tomorrow, so it gives context, and then colleagues can be as scrutinising as they want. But if a colleague

comes in and says look, this is my thought, these are sort of the ideas I'm going along with on this project, with this paper, then the approach to me needs to be a little bit different.

Paul Jones 32:18

Yeah, I think there's a good balance you can find there, I wouldn't want to see people improving the quality of a paper or, or conference delivery, but the price they pay is having their ego eroded, or their confidence eroded in some way, you can do both, can't you? You can give some good advice and feedback that's rigorous and developmental, without becoming difficult and denting the person's confidence.

DBA13 32:44

Yeah, yes! I think it certainly is the case. And I think that inability for some colleagues to appreciate that fear, and self reproach, has manifested itself. For example, when I recall sitting when a PhD student was giving their presentation, not now, maybe [redacted], or [redacted]. And, okay, there were clear gaps in the way the student was thinking about their research project, if we reframe the research question, but the level of hostility that I saw that that student was subjected to, you know, I thought, no wonder students don't want this or want to do this, in other instances, colleagues have been okay with PhD students. But, you know, there, the fact that that previous incident took place, tells me that sometimes colleagues can't make that judgment, as to what, how they should approach things in different ways.

Paul Jones 33:36

One of the things I wanted to ask you about as well, we talked about the balance between teaching and research or the imbalance between teaching and research, and also administration, engagement comes up a lot at the moment, in terms of we have expectations on staff to be doing engagement activities and be out there and developing relationships and promoting research and doing that type of stuff. There is no real explicit mention of that in the expectations of the contract in the way we think about that, how do you fit time in to do that? Do you manage to fit time in to do some of that work?

DBA13 34:13

I do it on my evenings and weekends. So for example, I've done some KEI activities. I did two this year. One in [redacted], which I got the [redacted] grant for, and I just did it, everything, organisation, I did everything by myself, from planning the idea of it by myself, I got support in from the Impact Fund, for the, for the events this year, but everything else, you know, just the wish to, to pursue this is something I decided on my own volition to do. I was never pushed to do it. Now, I can see there is an indirect, there's an in out way that Aston is approaching this, in the sense that, in order for you to get promoted, you need to do KEI activities, or show some sort of KE or public education. And so, by default, if someone is looking to get promotion, at least from the [redacted] to [redacted] position, you will be forced to do KEI activities, but as a, as a, as a, as a type of activity that is valued, and equally valued as having a four star publication, that certainly does not exist in [redacted]. I know, like at [redacted], for example, there is a viable path to be promoted up to Professor using KEI pathway. All right? And so if someone wants to build their profile like that, that's, that's, you can, similarly, the development of, and support for colleagues, to undertake those types of activities to do so, to generate the impact, to develop the case study potential for the next REF, that hasn't even been discussed here. Well, at least publicly, they may have had discussions at senior management level. So I don't think that 1), I don't think that has been explicitly encouraged within [redacted]. But 2) I also don't think that the culture, so far, at the moment exists, where that is equally valued as having a publication. Certain, I know for, you know, again, a certain clique, a certain doctrinal clique, perceived research in a very narrow, confined area. And so undertaking certain types of activities, like KEI activities, are not valued or perceived to be equally credible.

Paul Jones 36:37

We present ourselves as being a university, and college, as being impact focused, and having the beneficiaries in mind. But from what you're saying there, that doesn't necessarily translate to how people view the research they do, and trying to translate the research into meaningful activity that leads to some kind of positive change for society, or for organisations, or being able to do something with the research that is meaningful.

DBA13 37:03

I think it doesn't come naturally. There's one person, like [redacted], I mean, [redacted] done a lot of KEI stuff. But, and [redacted] embarked upon that sort of activity before she joined Aston I think, and from the time she joined us, she was already doing that. So that shows that the, her knowledge of the value of that, was already in place before she joined us. Whereas I know that colleagues in Aston who, and we, even so far, since we've started having this conversation, or generally we've been talking about research in the law school, it hasn't been sort of extensively focused on about having, building that network, that, that collaboration with stakeholders, doing impact related activities for stakeholders, let's say in businesses in the community, etc. To me, that conversation has not been given substantive weighting credence, at a [redacted] level. But from, you know, I've been pursuing these, because similar to [redacted], I know the value of these, it just happens to be aligned to the Aston strategy, but I appreciate the way the sector is going. And I know my research, in addition to having four star or three star quality articles, I know having these public engagement, knowledge exchange or impact activities are equally important in developing a research profile, at least, if it's not going to be appreciated within [redacted], I know other [redacted] would.

Paul Jones 38:24

Yeah, I think you got to be, there's a certain sense of being true to yourself, as well, isn't there, that if you value those activities, and you can see the importance of them, you want to be engaged in those things. And part of the reason why I did the DBA was because I wanted to be able to do something research wise that then led to activity that would change the way we do things.

DBA13 38:44

Yeah,...

Paul Jones 38:45

I personally, I find it really hard to imagine doing research when I'm just taking a teat pipette and dropping my little bit of knowledge into the big pool that already exists, just to forward it a little bit. I'd much rather see some meaningful activity and think oh, I've made a difference to one person's life or a group of people's lives, and done something that makes a difference out there. That's what brings me joy thinking about stuff like that.

DBA13 39:09

Yeah! And it does for me as well. So, even my area of research has been always about, not my area of research, my focus in my different areas of expertise has been how certain [redacted], or [redacted], can protect or support the disadvantaged. So whether that be consumers, whether that be members of the, general members of the public, whether that be investors, I've always undertaken activities, to bridge that gap between what I'm saying for the protection of consumers or the public, I try to bring the public into that conversation so they can receive that knowledge. But that's because I know the position of my research and I, I can see the utility of my research for the public, or for, for people outside of academia. I know there are some colleagues, and I've had, and these are my conversations with those more senior colleagues with the four star articles, for example, because they're so hell bent on how this particular, like you said, their knowledge can, can increase the field, that's all they're focused on and that's all they value, but they can't see the perspective of okay, actually, you need to have a practical benefit for the research. I think, considering the promotions process, I think there was, I know, I had a conversation with one colleague, and he's now started to grab the importance of having these sorts of KEI things. But before, if you didn't speak to him, before the whole change in the promotion process, he would give KEI activities short shrift. And if you look at [redacted], you would see that very few people have undertaken that sort of set of activities, you can count them on your hand, really. I mean, everybody knows [redacted], I've done some, I know one or two colleagues have done some, but in terms of a substantive push to deliver more than one activity every year, for example, no, people do it because of promotion, not because they see it as part of an instrument, or part of their own research

development. And because you've got that interest then, do you feel you've been supported enough to make the most of that... No!

Paul Jones 41:19

...and, so, has there been much at all that has happened to think, oh, you've got an interest in this, and you've got a skill to be able to do this, how can we make that skill better? How can we support you better? There's been nothing along those lines?

DBA13 41:32

No. And I've, I went to [redacted] once, and talked to her about how her approach to public engagement was, she typified that example of, at least, in her interaction with me, she typified that example of someone who would be judgmental and directorial rather than hi, let's, let's see where your gaps are, how can we work together. And that was the tone of our conversation. And after that one conversation I have not approached or spoken to her. If anything, I have actually spoken to colleagues at [redacted], where they give this sort of thing serious thought, for example. And I've looked at how the business school operates. So like, how Paula and stuff would offer events for SMEs, and looking at what they're doing. And I'm using that, I'm looking at what they're doing, as sort of a template for some of the activities that I might actually offer, but in law. So for example, I'm looking at doing evidence cafes with practitioners, for example, I did a training event for [redacted] in [redacted]. So those are the types of things I'm looking to do. But I know I'm going to have to bear the brunt of everything. There will be little support administratively from [redacted], nothing.

Paul Jones 42:47

And there wouldn't be anything, then say no, that's a really good idea, let's take something off you, so you can go and do that property...

DBA13 42:53

That is not gonna happen. That's, even now, I had the two events in [redacted] and [redacted]. And there was a, you know, I told, I told the, I mean, it's real confidential, I told [redacted] about it, I asked for support to tap into his networks to share the event. And I'm certain he didn't do it. There was one colleague who, I was struggling for an extra speaker, and she was kind enough, she had just joined, and she was kind enough to find that, to find a potential speaker for me. But that's about it. I had to, I had to, work with finance to book tickets, and we had a [redacted] administrator who, basically, she just passed it up the chain, you know, it was, it wasn't supportive at all. So I found, despite my wish to organise those events, from an Aston brand perspective, I wouldn't do it. Unless I get the support for it, I'm just not going to have it in Aston. So my collaborators, for example, they see the value of it. So, for example, I had an event in [redacted]. And I had to, you know, to quickly think about how are we going to have branding? How are we going to have food prepared? How are we going to advertise this? We're going to market that infrastructure, and that thinking, was already there. And so, if I wanted to advertise something, it was in the sense that there'll be a willingness, from at least from within [redacted], to let me tap into our industry connections. Nothing, I had to push that sort of chain of thought.

Paul Jones 44:29

I guess, that there's no map either for you, as an academic, but I have not seen a map that says, if you want to do this, or do that, that you can know who you're going to ask for support, where some of the financial support can be, or whether it is just helpful support that can guide you in the right direction. There's nothing that I've come across that says, this is how you can sort of plot your journey through doing these things.

DBA13 44:50

Yeah, I think the only help I, I, found this year, at least from an Aston side, was via the [redacted] Fund. So I knew, for example, that [redacted] will get in touch with me, she will discuss what I had planned, and [redacted] will have a chat with me about the ideas, and in fairness to [redacted], he was really, really helpful in sort of, you know, not only brainstorming potential approaches to, let's say evidence

collection, for example, [redacted] was also the same. That's been there. But I think from a school perspective, to push that sort of support, push that sort of help, that is not there at the moment and I mean it maybe something I can, I'll be happy to do, or work with, let's say somebody like [redacted], but again, it's going to be coming out of my own time, I wouldn't have space to really do this. It's going to be subjected, it's going to be teaching, admin, research publications, my own activities, and potentially then helping the school. It's, I want to do it, I think it's, I like engaging with the public, I like delivering sessions where the public is engaged in sort of an exchange of knowledge and experiences, same with, with the practice, you know, with practitioners, I want to do those activities, but there's no support for it.

Paul Jones 46:10

To me, there seems to be, there's often a case where we try and assess individuals about expecting them to do everything well, rather than taking a more team based approach to thinking, this is my team of players, these are the ones who are really good at this thing, these ones are really good at that thing and trying to provide space and time for people to be better at the things they do and giving them the encouragement to go and do that. Rather than expecting everyone to do everything and be good at every single piece of that puzzle.

DBA13 46:39

I think, I think, I think the fault is different. So, for example, if I get the impression, I could be wrong, I get the impression that if a colleague is certain, you know, let's say, they're very prolific in writing books, for example, I get the impression that their workload might be adjusted. So for example, they might not be put onto very research intensive modules. But maybe, let's say the basic modules, they have volume of students, but basically, the intellectual challenge to deliver those modules is not that difficult. So they have that sort of less burden on their shoulders. And I have the impression that if colleagues are very good at something they are given the, they have to be very prolific in it, very, very prolific in it, then they might get certain dispensations and discretion exercised in their favour, in the sense of what they're allocated, and what they're doing. But the, the thought hasn't gone across, well, these people are prolific, how can we help them, or provide them with space to share what they're doing with others, that, that has not fit into the conversation.

Paul Jones 47:50

And that sums up a number of different areas, and we talked a little bit earlier about that street smarts stuff, but there's no real space or time, or even inclination sometimes to want to share people's good practice. Academia generally develops people who are very self focused and we create independent researchers at a PhD level, and then we expect them to be different after we've created that very individual way of looking at stuff. But we don't give them the development opportunities sometimes to be able to develop out of that then, even though the expectation is there, and I think you're different because you haven't [redacted], and you haven't gone down that pathway. One of the questions I want to ask you about was, have you had external experience doing other things outside of HE?

DBA13 48:35

Um, no.

Paul Jones 48:37

So you've always been within HE have you in terms of jobs and experiences?

DBA13 48:41

Yeah, I trained as [redacted]. But I never got into the profession of being [redacted]. I then pivoted into teaching because I wanted a better work life balance, to be honest, I saw, in sort of like the placements and internships that I was doing, I saw the toll it will take on work life balance, I thought, you know, I wanted to do this as a notion, but I don't think, given my advancing years, and my own health, I don't think I'm gonna subject myself to that sort of stress level. So I pivoted to HE because it brought that level of flexibility.

Paul Jones 49:13

So the placements and internships you did then, for that training to be [redacted], do you think there was skills and abilities you learned through those experiences that you brought to HE that have benefited you?

DBA13 49:25

Yes, certainly, I think. So, when I did [redacted], there was always this focus on how to present [redacted], how to stand on your feet, how to structure, you know, the delivery of certain points, which is first, second and third. And you can see a synergy of, of that skill set, into academia. So conveying ability, and writing a paper for example, and how to structure a conference presentation, I draw on some of that skill. So thinking on my feet is certainly something we all do when we're going to conferences, when someone throws up questions, whether it be a professor who wants to show off that he's a professor, and therefore you have to address his queries, but I would navigate and deal with that, you know, training for Barrister in that way helped me prepare for that sort of experience at the conference level.

Paul Jones 50:14

Yeah, that's really interesting. I'm interested in terms of what type of skills people learn, that they bring into higher education, that are really useful, but that we don't necessarily teach them. So, an example I have seen in the literature, would be around problem solving, where people tend to bring problem solving skills with them to the job, we don't teach them that, or how to get around problems, they tend to be better adapted because of things they've learned elsewhere, though.

DBA13 50:42

Yeah, yeah, that's certainly the case.

Paul Jones 50:45

I think that things like relationship management, as well, we were talking about collaborations, creating networks, doing different things. We don't teach people networking skills, or relationship management skills, the expectation is that people can do these things, we don't help them to do those effectively, and people vary in terms of how well they do those things.

DBA13 51:03

Yeah, and certainly, so even for me, I have a PhD student. And I noticed, I noticed, that the level of confidence that she has, not only about her research, but also about speaking to others. And so, I've taken the approach wherever I can speak to her about signposting to things she can do, or what she can think about, when she's going through that like, say, external setting, she's going to a conference, for example, or she's attending an event, to really push herself out there, if she can, and she's comfortable doing so, just to get her to develop that skill. So navigating different personalities, to deal with interactions. Yeah, I certainly think, if I had to think about it, that wasn't something that, you know, I've seen other people who are in early careers, or early stages of their career as a researcher, for example, being offered support in.

Paul Jones 52:00

So, thinking about your own self, then, and you seem to have done a lot of development activities yourself and got a good network around you. Is there things you think we should be doing to develop staff that aren't happening right now?

DBA13 52:19

I, there are, I mean, to address the deficiencies in the culture, that I mentioned, but I'm realistic, it's not, it's not something that you, as in let's say, let's assume the research office, or even Nicolas can do, it has to come from within, you need to, it needs to come from sort of having the right, let's say, the right roots in [redacted] to be able to develop that you, you can talk about it from the outside, but if the, if the

person on the inside of the school does not see it, and doesn't appreciate it, it's not gonna, no matter how much you build on the outside, it's not going to translate to the, to [redacted]. That's the problem, I think. Unless the, so maybe, there may be an instance, I haven't, I've yet to see what [redacted] will do. So I need to give [redacted] space to do it, it maybe the case that [redacted] appointment leads to that cultural shift, that change of thinking about things. And you'll notice I only speak of [redacted] here, because I do not think the others have been told, they've been talked about, and had conversations about research before in the past, and nothing has worked. I think, there is a hope that [redacted] appointment may shift the thinking, the approaches, but it's going to take some time, because if you think, for example, given in one of the law school meetings, [redacted] was talking about creating an inclusive research culture. And someone who is prolific in research writing turns around and says, well, REF only requires us to have three to four star, why should I care about the culture in the school? As long as you're getting the three to four star, why should I care about anything else? Now, there have been colleagues, for example, who have told people who are on a teaching contract, who want to do scholarship, that their research is not of a good caliber, and shouldn't be given due credit. Alright, and that's a level of again, that it typifies or exemplifies, the, the sort of a culture that's there from certain people, who are in senior positions, or who are in advanced stages of their own research profile, how they approach the developmental space for others who are not as developed as they are, or who are, who maybe developed as they are, but who are looking to diversify and go into different areas of research. Not in terms of publications, but let's say KEI activities. That is the type of thing that, that's the culture that exists. You know, let's see if [redacted], [redacted] efforts translate into change. But given the resistance [redacted] had, it will take some time.

Paul Jones 54:56

You mentioned about the REF there and about three and four star publications, one of the things I want to pick up on was about external factors that can influence people. So is that one of the key driving forces then that people see the REF as being the main thing they have to make sure they do, to meet? Is there other external forces that are at play?

DBA13 55:17

Yes, I think there's external and internal forces, so the external, there's the REF, there is KEF. So that's there. And so that, insofar as the university is signed up, and going to adhere to, and see that as value, it's going to feed down the management chain, and so therefore line managers know they need to allow colleagues to do these things. But outside of that, sort of having a three star or four star article, other things are given short shrift, like a sort of encouragement culture light, or that sort of culture, because it does not lead to the target of three star or four star being achieved. I think there's also an internal blockage. Because if for example, you turn around and say someone who is on a research contract must have a three star article, for example, by a certain number of years, in addition to doing, let's say, authored publications, for example, what if someone doesn't have a three star article, but was very prolific in KEI activities. Right? Do they have the confidence that they can continue with the development of the KEI activities in a certain stream and they wouldn't be penalised for not having a three star article in that three year space? There is this ambiguity and I think, in the promotions process, for example, there is this oh we will think of everything in the round. But that's a, to me, that's a cop out. Because that just everything in the round, what does that mean? How much extra, or by the side, do I need to do in order for my extra work to be given equivalence to a three star that you have explicitly stated?

Paul Jones 56:01

Yeah, well seems very nebulous in terms of being very easy to work with facts and figures where it's explicitly said what you have to do. But where it's like, do this, we don't give you any parameters in which to measure it by, that's really hard then because you don't know what you're working towards, they can justify whatever way they want, and it seems like a bit of a tool to beat people down, or make decisions, and be flexible about decision making.

DBA13 57:12

Yes, yeah.

Paul Jones 57:14

That's covered main topics I wanted to go on was there anything else you wanted to mention about professional development, or the culture, development opportunities or the balance between teaching and research at all?

DBA13 57:28

I think, it's certainly something I think, the balance, just to summarise, I think the balance is on paper, it's not in practice. And I think, yeah, insofar as externally, there can be a sort of a sensitisation of those in leadership within the law school about what, what, what the balance means and that needs to be challenged.

Paul Jones 57:55

Yeah, great, I'll stop recording now.

Appendix 17: DBA14 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA14

Paul Jones 00:02

So I've started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship reforming professional development from the bottom up. I'm talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour though we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end, the interview is semi structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore. But you are free to explore your thoughts and experiences as you want, I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. Though the idea is that I do that with the least number of questions or interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised and it'd be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me the details that are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed. And all links to you as an individual will be removed, for example, personal data, and the original recording destroyed, the only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk, if we need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, just raise your hands so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular item, please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress or if indeed I'm feeling distressed as well. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions to start, then we'll start exploring your experience regarding professional development. Please, can you confirm that you understand the information I've given to you?

DBA14 01:51

Yes.

Paul Jones 01:53

Great. And are you happy to proceed with a recorded interview?

DBA14 01:55

Yes, I am. Yeah.

Paul Jones 01:57

Great, and do you understand how to withdraw draw your data?

DBA14 02:00

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:02

Please could you confirm what school you work in?

DBA14 02:05

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:10

Great, and can you confirm your gender please?

DBA14 02:12

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:13

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA14 02:16

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:17

So there's three choices, how would you describe your career level, early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA14 02:23

Senior

Paul Jones 02:25

And can you confirm what age bracket you're in? 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64?

DBA14 02:35

[redacted] haha

Paul Jones 02:38

[redacted].

DBA14 02:46

Ha, oh yeah?

Paul Jones 02:49

So you know, there's two more above that, so it's good, and we're in the same category, so I think that's good. So we've done the closed ended questions, can you just tell me what you consider to be professional development and what your experiences have been like?

DBA14 03:03

Okay. So I guess there is, being on a teaching and research contract professional development is, falls into those two categories, professional development as a teacher and professional development as a researcher.

Paul Jones 03:17

Yeah.

DBA14 03:19

When I was a junior academic, there was very little attention paid to formal courses or qualifications in teaching, there seems to be assumption that if you had a PhD you could teach. It's a good thing that is no longer the case. This meant that it was only [redacted] years ago that I did the sort of portfolio route for the HEA [redacted] thing, rather than that I've got any formal teaching qualification, as such. So in terms of how I've developed as a teacher, I guess I, early on, I was at a university, I was at [redacted] in [redacted]. And I had a lot of peer observation and feedback from a fairly senior member of staff, but there wasn't like a formal teaching course. And I found that very useful. I like to think I'm a good teacher, but probably so does everybody who teaches, I enjoy teaching, I consider sort of teaching to be a sort of performance in some ways. I enjoy the lecture theatre teaching as well as the small interactive teaching. My teaching these days is very limited. So it is limited mostly to [redacted] students and a very occasional lecture on the [redacted] program. I don't have any [redacted] responsibilities. And I think that, I guess, the area of teaching I've had least developmental input in would be PhD teaching. And I

think that's the area where we, there's the, there's the sort of the course run by the University, I have had PhD students before I came to Aston, I arrived at Aston in [redacted]. And before I came to Aston I've had [redacted] PhD students with a slightly more senior supervisor, and now I'm on about [redacted] or [redacted] of them, I've lost count. So I'm fair, fairly experienced at PhD supervision. And it seems to be an area where very much it's making it up as you go along. The training offered at Aston is in processes rather than in how to supervise that, like in classroom teaching, that's assumed to be a native skill that you've acquired by being an academic. I think there's lots of different ways people supervise, and can supervise, and adapting yourself to the students needs and so on. Very little attention is paid by that and there's very little ongoing development work in that area, I guess, that, you know, I'm not, so every five years or three years or whatever it is, I have to re, re-accredit myself with short online lectures and then multiple choice questions. But again, that's about processes and regulations. It's not about how to teach. So I think there's minimal development in that area. Umm, as a researcher, I think that most of the development is through collaborative work. And I think that's sort of more appropriate in research that co-authoring, working in, you know, relatively junior roles on projects and seeing how to deliver projects, and then you end up being a PI and so on. I now do a lot of mentoring, which mostly means reading and responding to things other people have written, whether it's papers or grant bids. I have, so, I, I'm trying to keep this fairly anonymous, it doesn't really matter to me, but you know, so, as [redacted] that's a [redacted] team, really, there's about [redacted] of us in total. But I have [redacted] who are in my bit of it, who I spend a lot of time with, talking about their own research projects and ambitions and how to achieve them and mentoring them in a fairly unstructured way, but a fairly frequent regular way. And I think that's quite important. So these are [redacted] level, I do quite a lot of that sort of work with, umm, I guess, as a, an area where I've never received development, and I've had to make it up and go along, it's financial management of research projects, and that just learn on the job and actual general management skills, nobody teaches you at university. And, umm, basically, I'm, you know, so as a teaching research contract, but, 40% of my time is taken with management activities. And that's an area I've never received any specific development in and I've had some conversations with [redacted], and I know he's offering development mentoring for sort of [redacted] to [redacted] career researchers, in particular, but, but I feel like I've missed the boat and I could do some coaching or mentoring or something on how to run [redacted], you know, at the top level, and how to, umm, running a [redacted] type development. So that's, I guess, that's what I, uh, does that answer the question? Or?

Paul Jones 03:49

Yeah. Yeah, it does, and there's quite a few things you mentioned there, which would be interesting to pick up on. If we start with the PhD supervision, then, I think it was my feeling that there wasn't that much that went on in terms of development. So it's nice to have that confirmed from your experiences, then, I think my understanding was, was that it was very process driven. And we've seen different challenges happen. And probably inconsistencies, then, because you can apply your supervisory skills in a variety of ways. Sometimes those ways aren't very good, and sometimes they're excellent, so being able to get people up to a certain threshold with that, but still be able to weave their own way of doing into that process, I think would be really important for the future.

DBA14 09:23

I think, I think there's different sort of models of what a PhD is. And there's quite an old fashioned model of a PhD as an apprenticeship, a research apprenticeship, once you get a PhD your sort of qualified to do research on your own. You know, that sort of model, and I think it's not the only thing that the supervision is, but I think that is a really useful model to think about. So I always try and have at least one publication with my PhD students so that they can see the process of writing a paper. I always insist they are first author, it's on their research. Yeah? So they are first author, but, but, learning that process of how to, you know, write a paper for a particular journal so that it will be accepted, and the process of submission, and then rejection / revision and... all the rest of it is really important to learn and seeing, you know, when we do get rejections, and so yeah, this is the life of an academic, you know, this is, this is what we do. And then we look at it again, and we look at the comments, are they good? Or are they bad? And, and this is the process you go through again, and again. So there's that sort of apprenticeship model, which I, I use, but there's also a sort of more formal, I guess, it's three things that go on,

there's, there's the project management level of supervision, so you're there to ensure that they're making good progress, that they're, you set them, you know, intermediate deadlines, so that they'll meet the final deadline of the dissertation. And you get into a rhythm with it of what you'd hope they're do in their first year, and then their second year, and then the third year. And so, so as a supervisor, you have an idea which they don't have of whether they're behind or on schedule, because it's the first time, the only time they've done this, so they don't get that. So there's that sort of project management bit you, I feel you offer to the student, and it is quite transparently, you know, you, we set that out with them, they are, there, at least this is what I do, like I say, what I'm saying is, I think each of these areas could require some attention and training. And then, the third bit is the research itself, the topic area. I always say to my PhDs that by the time they're at the end of the three years, I know there's part time PhD's over a longer period, but the standard model, they will be the most expert person in the world on their topic. And early in the PhD, I can point them to areas of reading and other research and so on. But they should be exceeding my knowledge of the topic area by the time they get, you know, halfway through the third year or writing the thing up. That, so, there is topic input, but in a sense, that's where the interest is, for me, I'm really interested in what my PhD students do. But that's, that is the least requirement, for a PhD supervisor. That's the bit that it's fair to assume they have some expertise in the topic, or you wouldn't be there to be supervisor then. So each of those three areas of the sort of co-production / apprenticeship, project management, and then topic, how you integrate your topic knowledge with the student and set them on their way. I think, you know, if someone offered development opportunities in those areas, I'd be really interested.

Paul Jones 12:45

Yeah, and I really like the apprenticeship part, because I think that's one of the gaps at the moment is the way people might think about it. One of the things that's cropped up in conversations more recently is the idea of, sort of taught courses or the process stuff, like you mentioned, which is important. And it sometimes comes across as ticking boxes to make sure that you have done it versus the, like street smarts, of how to do things. And where you mentioned about the publication pathway, it seems to be more about getting those street smarts then of being able to guide the student about the things that may not be apparent, because they might know the process of going through a publication, but there's lots of little things that you add in, in terms of sprinkling with bits of knowledge, that can really help that journey either be easy or more effective.

DBA14 13:35

I think that, I think that's right. And I think that... umm... the students below PhD level and including PhDs, think, so, publications are magically high quality. Yeah? Once you've been through the process yourself a couple of times you realise that that's not true. It's what could get through the process gets published it actually, in some ways, it's tricky. In some ways. It's a low bar, you know, it's both. But I think teaching students that stuff is massively important. I think also, I have quite a strong eye on the students see the development through the process. So this is sort of somewhat extracurricular, but hopefully overlapping, so I like, it doesn't happen with every PhD I've supervised, but I say, if at the end, you've got a publication, some teaching experience, and some experience of working a few hours on some other project that's going on [redacted], which gives you breadth away, you know, related to but away from your PhD. Then you've come out not just with a PhD pass, well done, you're a doctor now you've also got a CV that will help you in the next steps. And I think that's really important.

Paul Jones 14:50

You also mentioned earlier about mentoring and the importance of it, like supervision that can take different forms as well then and the quality of the mentoring process can also vary. So I'd be interested to think if you've had training yourself on mentoring, what you've seen happen with the mentoring for yourself, but for others as well, in terms of what goes on either here or elsewhere, where you've worked.

DBA14 15:18

No, I've never had a formal mentor. And I've never, I've never been assigned formally as a mentor or had any mentoring training. I see it's something that just do as a more senior academic, I guess. And

it's another area of academia where everyone's presumed to have the skills and I'm not... so, I, so as this is about sort of development, I'm slightly, I'm often left slightly skeptical about CPD opportunities offered by universities. Not that, I mean, Aston is typical of other universities. I'm not picking on the Aston provision in that sense, in that they seem to be, so I would, I, what I'm saying is, is I wouldn't rush to sign myself up to a mentoring CPD three hours, is typically, I've think well, what would I get from that? How practically could I apply the results, and things like that, and often, they're very long winded. So you kind of think, well, we could have done that in an hour, or whatever it is, you know, is that kind of feeling. And the ones I've been on, haven't been, haven't been helped, most of them have gone online now. And there is the strong temptation, which I couldn't possibly say I always do, of skipping straight to multiple choice tests and see if I can get through without reading material and 9 times out of 10, you can do that. Which, is sort of, just shows it's a tick box, right, literally in that sense. And if it was real training, if it was real, I wouldn't be motivated to do that. And I wouldn't do it, because it would be interesting would be valuable to me. And it doesn't seem to be that sort of training.

Paul Jones 17:11

Yeah, I think that's an important point. And I think, as you discussed a bit earlier, that tick box mentality seems to happen across a lot of things as if we've given you something you've ticked that you've done it and you passed whatever, low bar or easy bar to achieve that you've done this like, right, that's get you out there doing stuff now...

DBA14 17:31

Yeah...

Paul Jones 17:31

...the mentoring thing is interesting, isn't it, because if you think about professional development, i.e. the general perception is you have to go on a course, either a short course, or long course. Then once you've completed, you're expected to be good enough to be able to do something, but we don't check the quality of what the person is doing after. And sometimes it's not the most suitable pathway. So for instance, for you, mentoring is all about using your knowledge and skills you've developed to try and inform other people and help shape and guide them through imparting knowledge and wisdom that you've gained over that time. You could be helped to be better mentor, just by having a crib sheet in front of you, thinking have you done these types of things...

DBA14 18:16

Yeah! Yeah, that kind of, and I am really willing to, so I'm, it's just the way I built I, I hate little online videos of everything. You know, senior management sometimes choose to talk to us all in an online video. I'd much rather they wrote it down in an email. That's just a personal choice. You know, I, if it's a video, I don't listen. But if there's an email, even if it's a longish one, I'll read it, because that's who I am, I like words, written words. So that kind of crib sheet, uh, you know, and you're mentoring someone, have you considered this even, or even if there was a booklet or something a bit longer, I could use as a reference, you know, leaf through a bit and find something that would be useful, mentoring activities, you know, that would be more valuable to me than three hours sat in a room being told stuff.

Paul Jones 19:06

Yeah, and I think it goes down to, you mentioned about your individual choices, people in education know people have different learning styles and the way we process information, but we don't really take account of that, from what I've seen for staff in terms of the way they like to learn or the way they absorb information...

DBA14 19:23

Sorry, I know some people will much prefer to have listened to the five minute video from the VC, than read a longish email, I'm the other way, you know, and that's fine, and I accept that's a personal choice. It's not... umm...

Paul Jones 19:36

...and that comes back to the tick box mentality then, doesn't it, of we've put something out there, therefore we've done our job.

DBA14 19:43

Yeah.

Paul Jones 19:44

It's not a case of, we need to do something on mentoring or supervision, we will cover all the bases to make sure that everybody's catered for, it's a case of we've done that now, that's it.

DBA14 19:55

Yeah. No, I think that, I think that's right. It's making it more real is the thing, and you're focusing on, on development. And so, if I think of teaching as a development activity of our students, we all know that a one off session doesn't, doesn't stick. Yeah, as, as, as a teacher, we know that repetition is important. And we know that interaction, doing the stuff, reflecting on it does, it used to be called deep learning, but I think that's out of, out of trend now, none of our development activities follow that pattern. They don't use that as, you know, what's an education, in some, you know, so what, what, you know, so it's either, you know, typically knowledge or skills. Yeah, what are the new, so the knowledge stuff I'd much rather read the book. Yeah? So the development stuff, I mean, you know? So, um, you know, do my homework first, or checkup that I've done my homework if it has to be assessed, but the development, the development stuff, is really the doing, I think.

Paul Jones 19:55

That comes back to a, the point that's come up quite often then, and one I wanted to talk about was time. So if you think about a person's contract, and usually an academic contract is split up in terms of 40% teaching, 40% research, and then 20% administration, you've already mentioned, because of your role, that's a different construct for you. I think the same barrier, which has come up, is that, certain things in your role will take more time than you're scheduled to have it for...

DBA14 21:40

Oh, yeah, yeah...

Paul Jones 21:41

...and therefore it eats into the other parts then and research quite often is the part that gets eaten away. So you might be doing research administration, but the actual research is what quite often drops...

DBA14 21:53

...Yeah, I think, I think that's, I mean, it's a long term gripe of all academics throughout all my career, but the demands of teaching and some administrative demands are immediate, something's got to be, you've got a class next Tuesday, or you've got a deadline for submitting some paperwork for the University next Friday, or something like that. It's an immediate demand, the research can always be put off. So it's the research time that gets eaten into, or you end up doing the research on weekends and then in the evenings. And that's a bad model for wellbeing. I know, we all do some of that, but, but it shouldn't be institutionalised. So, I think, I think that's absolutely true. And I think there's various, you know, I've been fighting my corner on that [redacted] about making sure they have enough research time, if they are, if they're on T and R, rather than research only contracts, and sort of defending their research time as much as I can. Whilst also, you know, recognising the multitasking nature of what we do, and you know, if things, it's fine, if things ebb and flow, it's not fine if it's all ebb, you know. And it's quite, um, quite tricky, in some ways, to help, well, for myself to defend real research time, which for me, is mostly writing papers, typically so in my area of [redacted], the data collection analysis is very, very time consuming. So a research project typically involves someone else you hire to do that. So,

which you manage to do in the way that you would expect them to, and obviously, you hope they'll come with their own contributions on what can be done. Yeah?

Paul Jones 23:42

Yeah...

DBA14 23:43

...and, and then they sort of deliver to you, it is, it is much more interactive than this, but they deliver to you the analysed data, which you then both consider and write up papers from, write up the answer to whatever the research question was. So, there is that data collection analysis is very time consuming, which is why research bits are all about people, how many postdocs can I, do I need to achieve this, this sort of, these sort of questions. So, one thing and then also, of course, in terms of my investigator time on a project, I'm really expensive compared to those postdocs. So there's a pressure to not boost the cost. So, you say, well, I could do it as 10% of my time rather than 20. A morning a week rather than a day a week. Yeah? And so the, the pressure of bidding, where you are trying to make it seem cost effective, pushes you to have less and less investigator time down to a threshold where you think that the grant awarding bodies won't think it's credible. Yeah? You can push that too far. But, but generally, you don't give yourself enough time on the research projects. That's, that's institutionalised not only within the university, but across, you know, the ESRC and things like that. I don't think, you know, if it, if you're a PI on a two year project, you know, the standard now is about 20%. But that's dropped from 40% when I started out, and 40% seems credible. Yeah/? And so, so probably, you know, in your heart of hearts, that you need between 30 and 40%, but you've given yourself 20%...

Paul Jones 25:18

Yeah.

DBA14 25:19

... then you go to your head of department who says, well, we'll drop a module for you, because you've got this project. Yeah? Which probably means 10%. And suddenly, you're just overwhelmed with work to do. Yeah?

Paul Jones 25:31

Yeah...

DBA14 25:31

... I think that's quite a common, and I guess, part of my development has been really realising that, and so you become a better manager of the people you hire. And you think, well, these are, these are really smart people, give them the responsibility, get them to do more of the thinking, don't just direct them, don't micromanage them. You know, what sort of analysis do you think would be appropriate, rather than trying to get your head into everything and, and that's rewarding for them and, and useful. So empowering them to do the work is important. But also, kind of trying as hard as you can to give yourself enough time with each project.

Paul Jones 26:13

Is that hard though, because there's two things that springs to mind one, the ability to give up some of the control on staff, which seems like a really hard thing, particularly when you're very invested in that research. But two, the tensions there, so you described how you had to try and drive down the cost so that the awarding body found it a more appealing study with pressures from the university to have as big a grant number as possible...

DBA14 26:38

...yes, because most of the overheads are on the on the investigator, well on the staff, are on the investigator...

Paul Jones 26:45

Yeah. And then the tension of trying to get the time do the research then, which isn't necessarily in line, with the university's desire to get the grant up as high as possible then... Yeah...

DBA14 26:54

Yeah. And they're not as respected as research, proper researchers, who become professor. Yeah? Yeah, I think, I think, I think that's right, there's a lot of things you're juggling in that, in that situation. I mean, we get promoted on the basis of how much money we got in. Yeah? It's not the only thing we're promoted on. But, but as a researcher I, quite often, when my more junior staff are applying for their first lectureship. So they've done a postdoc for a couple of years, and they're applying for a lectureship. What you know, is that people get appointed on the basis of their research outputs, whether that is grant wins or publications, yeah? But are appointed to do, in the early years, do heavy loads of teaching. And it's a kind of paradox. And then you get people who are stuck at lecturer, because they're spending all their time teaching then they don't have time to advance their publications to get, to get promoted. Yeah? And that is partly because I think largely, even at Aston, or Aston as well, we give lip service to the idea that people will be promoted on the basis of any, academics will be promoted on the basis of any other, anything other than research outcomes. Yeah? There's not a, there's not a, there are very, very few people who become professor on the basis of being excellent teachers. And maybe that's the, maybe I'm old fashioned in my view. But, but you look at, you look at someone and say, are they a quality academic? And that doesn't mean their teaching...

Paul Jones 28:29

Yeah...

DBA14 28:30

Yeah, which is unfair. It's unfair, but you get people trapped in this, in this cycle, and partly because of the pressures that juggling of costs and time. And it's blaming that and getting people to understand that when they're putting in their early grant bids, I think is really important, and that there is no, you, you're trying to find the sweet spot between what's affordable and what's doable...

Paul Jones 28:54

Yeah...

DBA14 28:55

...what's, what will be, you know, winnable. There's sort of three things.

Paul Jones 29:00

It's interesting, isn't it? Because we've talked a bit about the importance of research, how it informs the promotion criteria, and more so, there's also this, this idea that you can become globally known for your research. You will never become globally known for your teaching ability...

DBA14 29:19

Yep!

Paul Jones 29:19

...but yet, it's research that gets squeezed out of all the things that you do.

DBA14 29:23

Yeah, I think that's true. Reputationally, the academics I know around the world are those whose papers I've read and admired because I've never been into their classrooms.

Paul Jones 29:31

Yeah.

DBA14 29:32

Yeah.

Paul Jones 29:33

I think that's true of everybody, unless you win an award for teaching...

DBA14 29:33

Yeah, there is one or two exceptions to that, but I think on the whole it's true. And, and yet, the formal development is focused on the teaching.

Paul Jones 29:49

Yeah...

DBA14 29:51

You know, the, the HEA type stuff, the courses, the portfolios, the whatever that we, and I think we, I think it's absolutely right that we've moved on from the idea that you've got a PhD, so stick them in front of the class, you know, that's, that we've been, we're right to have moved on from that. And we need to pay attention to teaching, and teaching quality, but, but the reputation of a university is made in its research, I think, rather than its teaching.

Paul Jones 30:14

And it was always, in my head, there's always this perverse relationship, when I, back when I was looking for universities to study at, quite often the score you get for it at the time, was the old version of the REF, so the RAE, you'd look at the scores, and they informed a lot of the league tables and different things then, but your basing a university decision to learn on a University ability to do research.

DBA14 30:35

Yes! And I think, I think that's even more broken, because the Russell Group are research intensive universities, but they sell themselves as the place to send your kids to learn. Yeah? And it just doesn't match up. And I think, and this is a really old fashioned view of what a university is, I think the university ought to be a place by, you're taught by leading researchers in your field, and they're putting their research in front of you. Not in the first year, but by the third year, that should be true. Yeah? And the teaching administration and quality assurance systems prevent that. And the, and the, you know, the more successful you are as a researcher, the less teaching you do. And I regret that, as I said, [redacted]. I'm... I have to watch as I'm always about [redacted] bought out on external funds. Yeah? So I need to. [redacted] has told me very strictly that I shouldn't go over 100% because that would be fraud. Yeah? Which is true, you know, because people are paying for a portion of my time, but it's a little bit dodgy anyway, because the idea that I do everything else in 20%, you know, is a nonsense. So, so this is the pressure. Right? And, umm, so that's why I have no time to do teaching. You know...

Paul Jones 31:59

So if you enjoy it so much...

DBA14 32:01

... [redacted] students, you know, they partly come, you know, it's a little bit egotistical, but they partly come here, because they've heard of me, and seen me on [redacted], or whatever it is these days, you know, the [redacted]?

Paul Jones 32:13

In a good way, you mean, on [redacted]...

DBA14 32:14

Ha, yeah in a good way. Yeah, you know, so I'm, a sort of, a [redacted] for my area at Aston. And that should attract people to the [redacted], I'm all over [redacted] in various ways. And then they don't really see me. And is that almost selling a false prospectus?

Paul Jones 32:33

Yeah, and that, it's the time element that it comes back to, a lot of this, again, and what I was gonna ask you earlier was the idea that, everything is split up into these chunks of how much time we give academics. But there isn't a proportion of time we say you need to either develop yourself or develop others.

DBA14 32:51

Yeah...

Paul Jones 32:52

And that's a real shame, because I think, I don't, because no one's got time, there isn't this natural passing of good practice, or sharing ideas, as much as they could be then. So I like the idea that we should be saying, X amount of percent of your time, should be about developing others, passing on knowledge or picking up stuff yourself.

DBA14 33:10

I think. I think that's a really nice idea. You know, as socially, it seems impractical, because I'm so busy. You're right, as a principal, and you think of other professional status jobs, like teachers, and doctors and lawyers and so on, have a requirement of X number of development hours a year.

Paul Jones 33:30

Yeah...

DBA14 33:31

Yeah? That I think is quite useful. Even if people are, maybe in annual reviews, whatever, well, you know, you should have at least 20 hours and you've only done five, that's unacceptable. You know, even if there's no real sanction behind it, that, that kind of setting expectation, or whatever, I think would be very useful for, for me, you know, not just managing down, for me as well, make me do development. Yes. Sounds like a good idea. But then, of course, you've got to provide development that I value and is useful to me.

Paul Jones 34:02

Yeah. Or you encourage, or give permission to people, to go off and seek and find ways to support their ideas...

DBA14 34:07

Yeah, so we've got, we've got members of staff who are doing a [redacted] program in another university, which we're being asked to partially fund and things like that, which I, you know, if I can find the money, then I'm all for. And there's a, I think there's a danger in saying, we'll fund them and then, then they go off to another university. And so we shouldn't be doing this. I don't agree. I think you know, what comes around goes around in the sense if as a, as a sector, this became more embedded, then, then I think that's important.

Paul Jones 34:44

So that idea you just mentioned there, where you've got to be careful of allowing people to come into contact with others, and that might make them go to other places, I think that's really disappointing because in my head, if we were to create the right culture at Aston, that's about getting people up to the highest level they can do in the best ways possible...

DBA14 35:05

Yeah...

Paul Jones 35:06

...and that creates more attachment to Aston then because we look after them...

DBA14 35:10

I think so. I agree. I agree with that worldview, but I've heard, heard it said, oh, well, if we fund this, you know, [redacted] programs, whatever it is, only four or five grand a year, but it was a good chunk. For two years. So it's not, it's not peanuts money, you know, it's not a couple hundred quid. And, you know, do we require them to stay with us for three years afterwards, you know, that's so misses the point for me, they're more likely to stay, if they know we have this culture of funding these things, are more likely to be happy here, and well developed, and gain those skills we can then use. I absolutely believe that. And I think there is a degree or, I think there still is a degree of certainly at discipline level collegiality across universities. We're not all in competition, one with the other.

Paul Jones 36:06

Yeah...

DBA14 36:07

Yeah? And there's something about, you know, the academe or the college, or whatever you want to call it, yeah? We're all, we're all trying, we've all got the same objectives, and they're not commercial objectives, their educational objectives, and, you know, knowledge creation, is, is, you know, is what we should be doing as universities. And that, that is a collegiate not a competitive process generally. And so if, if that person does go off to a different institution and uses what they picked up from their time at Aston, plus their new course, in a new institution to further the discipline, that's a good thing! You know, that's the point. Yeah? And we can be too locally focused sometimes.

Paul Jones 36:56

Do you think that's driven then by external pressures? So one of the things I wanted to explore was about the influence of things like REF, TEF and KEF or any other external influences that impact both your practices and academic ones, or other ones do you think where you've seen that happen. Do they play a big part in how you have to do your own role versus how other people do their roles?

DBA14 37:19

I think external pressures are key. And all of those league tabelling type things about, are about instilling market pressures, league tables, you know, the top, the bottom, we all want to be at the top, that's competitive. And it's an idea that that will force us all to be better and better in some ways, where in fact, what we know is that all we, we doubt the measures and metrics all the time, you say, well, yeah, we'll jump through the hoops for the REF, but so and so over there won't be entered, even though they're an excellent researcher, because they don't need that model. And so [redacted] people in [redacted] who've been doing really, really good research, but the kind of outputs they produced weren't REFable. And that's a problem for their career development. Yeah? So we get driven by these things. I think, as a [redacted], my role is to make people become as good a researcher as possible and do as good research as possible. And then the metrics will look after themselves. But, but that's I know, is naive, sort of, it's idealistic, but just do the best research you can, and that's what's important. But it is increasingly naive, because the political, for instance, you know, across the sector, that's not the ethos, we are meant to be in competition with one with another in these league tables. And that's what's meant to drive us. And I think it is a shame. And I resist that way of thinking about the world. So I see, so in this sense, I see more connection with colleagues in my [redacted] discipline area, in universities across the UK and across the world. And I'm more interested in them developing well and developing good ideas. So that's in my mentorship code beyond those I'm directly managing. Yeah, that's more important to me than whether, you know, their success creates my lack of success in the sense of if, you know, someone's got a million pound funding pot, then they win half of it, and we don't, yeah, there's a

sense which my promotion of them had or development of them has penalties on me. But I still would hope that I would do that, that sort of cross disciplinary promotion.

Paul Jones 39:45

But the mentor, the mentoring part interesting because while you might be seen as a mentor, that's the one importing information, the conversations you have, often will generate ideas or thoughts from the other person that you will learn from.

DBA14 39:59

Absolutely! So I've got I've got a really specific example of that, of a, an individual, who was at another university and really unhappy and felt she was being sidelined and bullied there in my area, so [redacted], so in my area, and she out of the blue said, can I have a conversation with you. And this led to sort of monthly conversations about her situation, what she could do about it, then we had some positions coming up, and it was your well, should she apply for this and at the same time, another position came up, so to allow her to transfer out of that situation. And I was helping her look at her CV and having a look at what publications were on the way and sell them to help her get a new position. And in fact, my advice was that for her, the other place was actually a better place to apply for rather than for us, because she's across [redacted] and [redacted], and we don't really do [redacted], and, and so on and so forth. So there was a real bit of time consuming, mentoring, in my sense, just out of the blue, and I try to be open to this kind of stuff. It's, it's sort of, you know, I've only got so much time in my life, but I try and make time when people come to you with that stuff. And I think that's massively important. And then she is now sort of thriving, and happier, much, much happier is producing really interesting research, she does stuff on [redacted] and [redacted], from a [redacted] perspective, and so on. And it's not impossible that in three years or five years time, she will be in a position to apply for a professorship with us or something...

Paul Jones 41:42

Yeah...

DBA14 41:43

Yeah? Do you see what I mean? And that's what, that's what comes around goes around. And there's a sense in which I've got no competitive or commercial interest or institutional interest in offering mentorship in that way or development in that way, but for my discipline, you know, that's really important, because we're a [redacted] discipline and a [redacted] discipline. And the more [redacted] that are out there, the better.

Paul Jones 42:14

But I think you're a good example for how I envision good research leadership then in terms of spending that time to mentor and to pass on that knowledge and inspirational ability to think about the different things people could do then. And I've mentioned this to people before, I don't see enough of that happening at times. And I don't know whether that's time pressures again, or whether people aren't being managed in a way that that becomes important for senior members of staff. Or they're not just the type of people that do that naturally. And might have to be developed in that way then, but I don't see enough of that.

DBA14 42:47

I think, I think there is, I think there are time pressures and management pressures. And I think there is individual personality factors. Well, I guess, I think, certainly the cross institutional stuff is almost discouraged as a waste of time...

Paul Jones 43:06

Yeah...

DBA14 43:07

...think of the opportunity cost you could be, rather than spending, you know, 45 minutes a week with this person, you could be writing another paper, and that's better for you and better for us. So I think, I think, you know, it's stuff I do, it's not stuff that gets reported on my [redacted] or whatever it is, there's no place for it. And it's not the only one, that's the most recent, it's not the only time I've been engaged in those sorts of discussions. Slightly, you know, mid career, people say, not usually very early career, but mid career people who I've met at conferences and so on, and they say, oh, can I have a word with you at some point? And then a few months later, they email me and, you know, that sort of thing? I think, I think it's, I think that's a sort of a cultural shift that we should seek that, that's what's, so I think there's a real distinction between management and leadership...

Paul Jones 43:13

Right...

DBA14 43:37

...and I think that's part of that distinction. Yeah? Management is, is administrative largely, and decision making important decision making. But leadership is primed to lead from the front in various ways...

Paul Jones 44:19

Yeah...

DBA14 44:19

...and I think that and leadership is probably leading the discipline and leading the team and the team might grow as you go up a university. But there's a sense in which, it, it can become siloed, and that's a bad thing. But, but there is, you know, the way, the way you become a leader is to fight for your team so that they can see that you're representing them. Then when they ask you to do the stuff they don't want to do because, you know, there's a management pressure for me to implement something in the team. They're more willing to do it, rather than having to be made to do it in a managerial way. Because it's a requirement. Uh, and that's tough stuff to teach, I think.

Paul Jones 45:05

Do you, so one of the ways you can learn, is by example, do you see that you're managed in the right way then to get the best out of you in terms of motivation and what matters to you, and do you feel heard in terms of your needs, and wants and your development?

DBA14 45:21

I think. I think I have a real problem with my management because of my seniority. My management lines are very unclear... Yeah... I'm a member of [redacted]. And [redacted] in, as [redacted], is my direct line manager. And [redacted] does my MDC, because [redacted] ...

Paul Jones 45:47

Right...

DBA14 45:47

...and then I have quite a lot of conversations with [redacted] and with [redacted]. So I have, I and, being who I am, I may, I use that as a creative space in which I get to do my own thing without being overly managed. I do. I do feel that I don't have that mentorship, or someone that I can turn to for advice, or a sounding board or [redacted], I quite like him, no problem with him at all, but he's very focused on [redacted]. So [redacted] is, within [redacted] department, he from the other end of [redacted]. And, and he, you know, he, he understands what we do, and I understand a bit of what he does, but in terms of, you know, I can't turn to [redacted] for managing [redacted] questions. [redacted] is very helpful and square behind us. But it seems odd that [redacted] not my line manager in a direct sense that I would report to [redacted], [redacted] helpful to us, umm, and the lower level, you know, to have a monthly conversation with someone about the sort of combination of the day to day and the strategic

development of [redacted] in terms of am I, me, am I being a good manager? Am I, you know, do I want everyone to like me too much, so I'm not avoiding the hard decisions, you know, if someone, I don't believe I am, but that's me, that's not someone looking in and telling me that. And that's, so I could do with mentoring or managing or developing the the senses, I think,

Paul Jones 47:32

I think, depending on your seniority, on your seniority level, then as you get towards your level, where you're managing [redacted], leading [redacted], it's almost as if you're seen as a finished article on, that it isn't as important for you. But I would never see any of us as a finished article...

DBA14 47:49

Yes, you know, so I haven't ever, you know, I don't want to go on an abstract management course, I'm not sure abstract management is a thing, I want, I want to have a mentor who can help me learn how to manage an [redacted], a [redacted]...

Paul Jones 48:07

Yeah...

DBA14 48:07

...It's that I think, which bits to, you know, devolve decision, it's all about how, how far do you devolve decisions? How much do you depend on your own group at sort of slightly more junior managers, and how much do you... yeah. But that's, that's, advice on that, you know, I'm making it up as I go along, and have been for the last decade, ha!

Paul Jones 48:38

And you wouldn't be the only one, I don't think...

DBA14 48:41

That's where there's a missing, certainly a need, and the institutional need for senior management mentoring, and it may require people outside of the institution, but who build relationships over a longer period of time with us, you know, because there's a sense in which if it's not going to be, you know, there's a sense which [redacted] or [redacted] or [redacted] are sort of the right people to be doing that, but, but neither of them is absolutely right.

Paul Jones 49:13

And I think the problem you'd have with any of those people was, would be that they have their own agendas...

DBA14 49:19

Yeah, yeah!

Paul Jones 49:20

...so they would want to enforce the messages that they want you to have, not be in a space, a safe space to discuss your issues and getting some good advice and guidance on how you could tackle those things...

DBA14 49:32

Yeah, I think that is right...

Paul Jones 49:34

...there is this top down, which happens a lot, the top down push of what's important, and you would never be able to get away from that with any of those people, is that there will always be an underlying theme for you then.

DBA14 49:45

Yeah, I think that's right. And you know, I get, I absolutely get that the University sets the strategy, which we're trying to help deliver, in terms of research and, but, I occasionally need to push back and say this isn't the way to achieve this. Yeah? And to have a sounding board of when I should be pushing back, and when I should be acquiescing, or strategy for how to push back more effectively, sort of requires that, that's what a mentor or somebody would provide to me, I think.

Paul Jones 50:18

And have you ever considered looking for one yourself then, where there are lots of people around...

DBA14 50:22

Not, not, I not really, although I have a friend who's just doing a coaching course, and she needs, needs guinea pigs, so coaching is slightly different to mentoring, so I'm just going to start six weeks of coaching with her, just as a short thing that she, you know, she needs a certain number of participants, to achieve her qualification. It's a question of time again, you know, it's making time for it. Whereas if it was, you know, in my required development hours at the university, I would have to make the time for it in that sense.

Paul Jones 50:56

Yeah, and so if you've got to find that combination of the coaching and the mentoring, so I think where they really dovetail nicely is, the way I see it, the mentoring is about knowing someone that's been, someone that's been there and done it, has got experience they can relate to and get you to think about those things that they've done and present you with a particular way of doing stuff, what the coach will do is try and challenge you to think about how you're going to do it and create a space for you to think about what's going on for you, what your problems are, and how you can come up with solutions to tackle them...

DBA14 51:27

Yeah...

Paul Jones 51:28

...just to give you that bit of space and time. But that combination of both together can be really powerful, because you are getting distinct ideas, and then the coaching is to explore those for yourself. Now, you could take that and move into something that works for you then, that fits your personality, style and situation.

DBA14 51:43

I think that's right. I do think that's right. And yeah, so I know, I know, there's distinctions between coaching and mentoring and know roughly what they are, I am sure I don't know technically what they are, but, but, they both have slightly different purposes, I think. And, and some of that, but, but from a university, oh, you're probably talking about a fairly small number of staff in terms of a level of seniority...

Paul Jones 52:09

Yeah

DBA14 52:10

...but it's not lots of people, but it would be quite expensive, right? Rather than a CPD program that you stick off and everyone gets to watch and does the multiple choice test at the end. You know?

Paul Jones 52:20

It would be expensive, but, then if you have a look at the benefits, because we, the senior staff we've got, if they all feel like you do, which is the management structure is confused. They're not getting

support to make the best out of them. There's a lot of potential that is being wasted in terms of how we make the most of those people...

DBA14 52:37

Yeah, definitely. Definitely.

Paul Jones 52:40

...and then the wider idea for me would be, we create that culture that makes us a place that people want to come and work at because we're doing things the right way, then we get people bringing other people in, and this idea of sharing knowledge, etc, it would work even better then.

DBA14 52:56

Yeah, yeah, definitely. And I think it's more of a old style collegiate culture that you're describing, rather than a management business culture in some senses...

Paul Jones 53:07

Yeah...

DBA14 53:08

...although I know a lot of businesses aspire to these cultures too. But it's, its that, in my head, is the, sort of the alternative models where, you sort of, if you tell people what to do and make them do it, rather than allow the bottom up... you know, guide people from the senior level to grow themselves in a bottom up way to create, you know, value in, in the personnel.

Paul Jones 53:35

Because there's more and more layers, as we go on in years, more and more layers of measurement, and of measuring what we are doing, rather than actually providing time to do this stuff.

DBA14 53:45

Yean, the amount of administrative bureaucracy that we generate, that seems unnecessary, it may not be unnecessary, necessarily, but seems unnecessary is just enormous.

Paul Jones 53:58

Have you, so one of the questions I want to ask was, have you had experiences outside of academia at all, or did you come through your PhD and go straight into being an academic?

DBA14 54:06

I did, I did come, I've been an academic all my life, I've wandered between departments in a haphazard way. My first degree was in [redacted], and a master's in [redacted] and a PhD in in [redacted], and my first job was in a [redacted] and then in the [redacted] Department, and then a [redacted] department and then a [redacted] department and then here, so I've wandered around, but also my, my contact with the outside world, so to speak, is very much through the [redacted] and consulting and the [redacted]. I've got a small [redacted] business and work quite closely with [redacted] and [redacted] and things like that. Yeah...

Paul Jones 55:00

The interest for me is about, do you see those external experiences as being really useful for your development as an academic then, does it give you a more rounded skill set for being an academic...

DBA14 55:11

...in terms of knowledge and research potential, definitely! You know, it's applied research it's what I do, but that's not I think the question you are asking. In terms of skills, I think, I think, yes, I think, everything I do is interdisciplinary, and will involve external parties and understanding how different organisations

have differing pressures, so you know, a big one is around, if we're doing this project for you, as an organisation, you can't give us the data, so we've got to go and collect the data. But you might say, well, I'm talking about working with sort of security services, or whatever, they want us to do a project, they'll pay us to do a project, but they can't give anything and then they want to have some control over what we publish...

Paul Jones 55:21

Yeah...

DBA14 55:25

...and, and so, those constant negotiations, and relationship building, quite honestly, is what it's based in, we're building relationships of trust that, well, we have to publish because that's, that meets our academic needs, but um, can we publish it in this way, rather than that, kind of negotiations often get quite fine grained. So those sort of people skills and perspective taking, understanding their concerns and their needs is really important, I think.

Paul Jones 56:33

Yeah. And I think it's one of the things I'm trying to identify partly through this study is, are there skills that are useful as an academic, that we don't teach people. So I think that the people who have got external experiences elsewhere, so outside of HE generally, those are the people I tend to enjoy working with more, because they've got a much broader skill set generally, that impacts on their ability to do the job. And what you've mentioned there, so the people skills, and the relationship management skills, we don't teach academics about those things. But I think it's a really important part of the makeup because there's more and more focus now on external engagement, working with collaborators outside and in the world, so why wouldn't we want to make sure that our academics are skilled up in those ways, then?

DBA14 57:19

I think, I think then, I think, I agree with you. Absolutely. Yeah, a lot of my stuff is sort of relationship stroke negotiating skills with others. And I think I'm quite good at that. I think, you know, the, we build and manage relationships with all sorts of parties. I think they're not generic skills. And that's like, whether they, because the sort of relationships I'm trying to build and understand, and way I want to influence people in our benefit, is quite different than say someone who wants to work strongly with the NHS or someone who wants to work strongly with small businesses. So I don't, I agree that, that's yet another area where we just learn on the job and make it up as we go along. But... I'm not sure how train, so, if it again, through mentorship and One to One stuff that might be trainable, but I don't see that, but you know, if you're in a room with 10 people, explaining their own external relationships and how they manage them. Maybe I'm wrong, I'd be interested to try. But maybe, I'd think, I'd be a bit sceptical about how much learning I could have with somebody's trying to work with small businesses or someone.

Paul Jones 58:32

Yeah. And I think part of what I am trying to do is identify things that we could potentially look at, but then, so, and I agree to some extent that you can't just put people in a classroom and then say, we're going to teach you relationship management skills for the next hour, then you'll be excellent.

DBA14 58:47

It's this one off hit of stuff again, rather than how we know people learn stuff.

Paul Jones 58:50

But if we know there's people we know are good at doing that, and they're going to meetings with, with people they're working with, for instance, then why can't we get people shadowing or picking up on some of this stuff, and bringing them through these channels, then? Yeah

DBA14 59:03

Yeah, so some, something that I always do, and just have done and it's not a thing that I thought was strategic, or planned to do, or thought was mentoring in any way. Whenever I have, because a lot of our research projects arise out of meetings with different parties. We had one yesterday with one of our main funders, which are more conventional. With one of our main funders, and we're talking about a pilot project, which one of our PhDs has just submitted, might be able to run for them. And I always have everyone along, I have the most junior person in the room along in those meetings to discuss how it should look like and what they can do. And so they are learning those management skills by association, they don't say very much in the meeting and that's fine. Right? But they were there in the meeting and, and we have a 10 minute chat afterwards about well, what are the next steps... ...you know, and that, that I think it's really important. So it's just having them along with us, that shadowing type thing. But I've never thought of it as shadowing, it's just naturally, they've got an interest in this and why wouldn't they be in the room rather than, Oh, this is, this is the senior contract management bit, you don't have to be here, you know?

Paul Jones 1:00:21

But I think that's good that you do that. And it very much marks you as a person that thinks that way, in all the conversations we've had, I've always thought of you in that way that you're always looking to develop those around you.

DBA14 1:00:33

I guess the point is, that's not why I'm doing it. I'm not thinking of that as development, it's just what I do, I think, because in the end, it's got to be their project. Yeah, I guess it's, it is development, I can see that it is developing, or development activity in some senses, but I think it's building that stuff in there is just something that enables people to witness how things work, and how they could be done. And maybe, two or three different people do it in two or three different ways, that sort of thing, is development. And that sort of shadowing type thing, you know, would be really interesting. I don't know, maybe I could spend a week shadowing, shadowing [redacted] and see what he does [redacted], and vice versa. And things like that, peer mentoring is another area, isn't it?

Paul Jones 1:01:20

Well that's the immediate thought I had earlier was about, I was gonna say, I imagine you don't spend any time with the other [redacted] to think about...

DBA14 1:01:28

We did very literally, we started off trying to have monthly meetings, and then we were all too busy, uh, we do talk on email a bit, yeah.

Paul Jones 1:01:35

Yeah. But it's not a case of having that time and space to really get into challenges and discussing stuff, then probably.

DBA14 1:01:42

No, it's not.

Paul Jones 1:01:43

I think it's interesting you don't view that, your perception of how you brought people on, I can see why you view it as just being a natural part of how you would treat people and why they should be involved. I think the issue comes is that's a very good approach. What we have to do is try and get other people to think in that way. And that might be that we have to say, well, this is good for their development...

DBA14 1:02:04

Yeah...

Paul Jones 1:02:04

...or find the reasons to think the development of a person through academia is all about making them into an independent researcher. We make them into an independent researcher, but then we expect them to do all this collaboration work, and work with others, and have all the skills, which we haven't been training them to do in the first place.

DBA14 1:02:22

Yeah! And quite honestly, the PhD is the most isolated bit of research that you will do. Almost everything else is collaborative in one way or the other...

Paul Jones 1:02:31

Yeah

DBA14 1:02:32

...yeah? Whether it's you and a postdoc who you've hired because you've won a grant bid, that's still a collaboration, right? Even though it's your idea and your project. Yeah? But, so PhDs, I think, are the exception. But that's what, that's the qualification.

Paul Jones 1:02:47

The other part that's sprung up quite a bit is about, we talked about the sort of split of contracts generally, for academics, there's another element of external engagement and having to be forwardly putting your research out there and marketing it and be responsible for dissemination in lots of ways. That's not something we're very good at crafting time for people to be able to do it, and part of our makeup, it probably falls into the research part of you have to do your research, and you have to market it and be out there blowing your trumpet all the time. We, I don't see us being very good at helping people to be able to do that process.

DBA14 1:03:26

Yeah, so, so in my in my area, impact and engagement is easy, because it's a very applied area. So it comes with the territory. Media work, it also is sort of the media, they like the stories, they like [redacted] and, you know, the way we're [redacted]. So very early on in my career, I had a little bit of media training through someone and I'm, uh, at ease doing that stuff, if when, when, when the opportunities come. I don't, I turn down more opportunities than I take up for media stuff, just because I don't have the time. And that's what, I try and, so there was a while that the university was keeping asking me to go on radio, and go on telly, and do bits and pieces. And I kept on putting forward the junior colleagues as a simple survival strategy for myself. But also where you know, 80% female and the management's male, and you don't want to give those that gender balance, let's give the right portrayal of who we are, and things like that, too. But I can't remember who it was in the press office said no we really need you for some of these things. There was [redacted] said, this one, we need you, you know, stop, stop, stop pushing these to everyone else. And there's, there's a bit of that, that again, it's, it's potentially mentoring, the more junior people, to dip their toe in the water and have a go at some of this media stuff. But it's, a sort of, it's not deliberate mentoring, it's sort of by necessity. The case work is obviously a form of engagement, or impact, and then there is, we've done, quite a lot of policy work with [redacted] and others, which is also impact impactful. So like I say, the actual, the metrics of impact are really easy for us to fulfill, and are very closely aligned with the research project. So I don't think that's, that's a difficulty in our area, but if you're talking, media engagement is the bit that you can tap on the side if you choose to or not choose to.

Paul Jones 1:05:31

Yeah. But I think reputation generally is growing as a pinch point for the university.

DBA14 1:05:37

Yeah.

Paul Jones 1:05:38

Because with the driver, like we said about league tables, you've got things like the QS rankings and different things and they are driven by people who mention Aston and people won't know to mention Aston unless we start telling people to mention Aston and putting ourselves out there more, so, so it becomes, it's going to become more and more important, because as those rankings dip, more and more focuses on saying, well, we can't allow that to dip, we have to do more stuff. So then there's more pressure on that part. But someone's got to drop off the tail end then, hasn't it?

DBA14 1:06:07

What, what are you doing this instead of is the question, isn't it?

Paul Jones 1:06:10

Yeah. And that's not the question that gets asked very often from what I've seen.

DBA14 1:06:14

Yes.

Paul Jones 1:06:15

Yeah, we pour more stuff on people, yet, we don't take stuff away.

DBA14 1:06:18

Yeah, I think, I think that's right, I find the QS ranking things quite tricky. Because the recent messages have been can I give up all my contacts. And I have, I've discussed this with [redacted], and it's not really your focus, but there's something about, I understand the need, and I am motivated to improve our QS rankings, but the mechanism seems, I think a lot of academics are going to say, are not going to engage, because they don't want to give up their contacts to the university, which is how it feels, at most you will write out crassly to my people, you know, and things like that. So I had a conversation yesterday, in [redacted] about this, and about how we can let the university know that we have, you know, four or five contracts at this university, or that university, contacts at this university or that university, or this organisation or that organisation, and we'd be willing to write out to them for the QS rankings. But that's a different process than, I think, the one we're being asked to engage in. I guess that's, I mean, that's too specific for your, but the making time for reputation enhancing stuff, I think is important.

Paul Jones 1:07:28

Yeah, I think the point you just mentioned, though, about writing out and different things. The wider issue for me is that, and part about the management style that we've got, people are very keen to ask for stuff to be done without providing the right context or understanding of why that's got to be the case, then. So we say you have to do this for QS rankings, but there's no link into why it's important or how it all works, the context then to understand...

DBA14 1:07:54

I tried to, I tried to do that for the meeting we had yesterday where I sort of said it, you know, so we want overseas students from our master's program. And if we're not in the top four hundred, you know, the Indian government won't fund their students to come here, you know, it's as simple as that. And then people begin to get the links. And so, but like I said, this is one of the areas where I think that the strategy is right, but the mechanism for getting engagement within the university or within the college might not be.

Paul Jones 1:08:26

I think that if you apply that back to development as well, then, if you're not having the message from the top to say that development is important, which you don't see that we ever get, then it's not going to trickle down as being important for anybody, because they are being asked to do particular tasks. They're not been asked to develop, but I don't think the my DC conversations work, as a general rule

for doing that, so there's not a mechanism to think how can we get the best out of you and what you need to be able to facilitate that.

DBA14 1:08:56

No, I agree with that. And it is a cultural thing. It's very definitely a cultural thing and a modeling thing from the top. Yeah, I think, definitely.

Paul Jones 1:09:06

That's really useful. I'll stop recording now because I've covered all the questions I need to. Thank you.

Appendix 18: DBA15 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA15

Paul Jones 00:03

So I've started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study, entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship: reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a doctorate in business administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up how academic staff members view their professional development, what's important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour though we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi structured, this means I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. Though the idea is I try to do this with the least number of questions or interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study, when it is past that point, your data will be anonymised, then it will be impossible to withdraw. You can withdraw by emailing me on the address included on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as an individual, for example, personal data will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only Individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team, the interview is considered low risk, if you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, then please your hands so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate this by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel this is causing you distress, or if I'm feeling distressed myself. I'm going to ask you a few closed ended questions at the start and then we will go on to explore your experience regarding professional development. Can you confirm you understand all the information I've given to you?

DBA15 01:53

Yes, I understand, I were just mentioning that I'm just trying to change the background to make it blurred. But also I was going to mention to you that I [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:29

That's no problem at all. So you understand the information I've given you. So are you happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA15 02:35

Yes, I'm happy.

Paul Jones 02:37

And do you understand how to withdraw if you wanted to?

DBA15 02:42

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:43

Great. So can you confirm what school you work in please?

DBA15 02:46

Yes, I work in [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:50

Great. And can you confirm your gender, please?

DBA15 02:52

Yes. I am [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:54

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA15 02:57

I am on the teaching and research contract. Yes.

Paul Jones 03:00

Great, and how would you describe your career level out of the three? Early career, mid career, Senior career?

DBA15 03:07

Yes. Early career.

Paul Jones 03:09

And can you confirm which age bracket you are in? So that's 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64?

DBA15 03:21

Yeah, [redacted].

Paul Jones 03:24

[redacted]

DBA15 03:25

Yes.

Paul Jones 03:26

Great. So that's all the closed questions done which is good. Can you just tell me a bit about what you understand professional development to be and what your experiences have been like regarding professional development?

DBA15 03:39

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts for your DBA project. So, I mean professional development, personally, I perceive it as something that should be mutually developed and designed by the employer and the employee, or the organisation, and so, there could be some interest in personal development of a staff member by the organisation. But I think that is something which could be more like a top down like kind of a thing for example, there are mandatory trainings are, which, whenever, when I joined, [redacted] years ago, I had to complete in all, under all the circumstances I had to complete those, or there could be something, something which are very essential for our progress, for example, like the, the PG certificate course, or the other some, uh, health and safety related or GDPR, ethics related things like that. But at the same time, I have another view on this, that there could be professional needs, which might change from individual to individual. Now even within the accounting department there are colleagues who are on teaching and research contracts, but they have varying research interests, and they may have got varying degree of experience in the research. And they may even have varying degrees of experience in teaching, they might be coming from different sectors, different sectors, or maybe different universities, different cultural backgrounds. So I guess that should be a more like a tailored, there should be a tailored system of professional development, which addresses more the individual needs, with the intention of the organisation to try to retain, capitalise on the staff that they have. So this is my broad and basic view on, on continuous professional development. Yes.

Paul Jones 05:45

Do you think then that your experiences at Aston mirror what you'd expect from professional development? Have you had good experiences so far?

DBA15 05:55

Definitely, there are, there have been good experiences, mainly related to the early career researchers events, or the workshops, led by RKE mainly. So those I found really useful. I remember not missing any one of them, at least in the first year or two, whether those are on campus or where we were, we went online completely. I didn't, didn't miss anything. Even now, whenever there are new themes in work, for example, the last one, I remember were related to the media publications, or presenting yourself [redacted], thing like that, even after that, I had joined as a member of some other voluntary academic networks of [redacted] academics, today recently had some workshops, again, related to publications in media and engaging with policy thinking like that. So I find it really interesting, I find it useful in both in terms of my knowledge enhancement, in terms of my understanding or awareness about the resources which are available, and also they give me at times ideas about research that I want to do or are in pipeline. So how can I make use of certain resources, or I can refer back to some of these knowledge intakes that I get from the training in the future if I get come across any ideas of research or funding opportunities, things like that. So generally, yes, this had been, I will say positive in a sense of value addition so they had been a value adding additions in terms of giving me more awareness about the opportunities available, more awareness about resources available. So very, I think the most recent one, or just two days ago, it was a workshop. It was the workshop by the [redacted], a network of quality organisations. And then I think at Aston, there was a seminar led by a colleague, with the Impact Manager, I think, all the REF purposes, and he explained to us about impact. So yes, there's always some value addition coming from these things. They also had been recently on teaching side, so, so that also, I would think I would mention that on teaching side also, there had been some usefulness in terms of ideas of assessments, or making them more engaging. But I think sometimes I also feel that maybe continuous professional development when it is centralised it, it sometimes feel me with my own view, but I sometimes feel that the focus gets lost. Maybe as soon as some presenters get some ideas, or they get inspired by some ideas, they think that let's share it with others and it might get implemented. But I guess we might not be seeing change so quickly. So one, one, I would say feedback would be that it would always be good to perhaps make the reflection on CPD activities in a more, or immediate feedback on CPD activities or events, more reflective. So rather than only finding out about how useful were the event, how useful was the idea? Or how useful do you think it can be? I think that would be, that would be more, making it, the CPD, more aligned with the strategy, both University strategy as well as the individual career objectives of the individual.

Paul Jones 10:19

Yeah. So some of the things you've touched upon there, you've mentioned both teaching and research, so one of the questions I had for you is around a teaching and research contract, because, generally would expect people to be 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% administration duties.

DBA15 10:39

Yes.

Paul Jones 10:40

Does that work out like that for you in reality? Is that how it works? Or is it different when you actually start?

DBA15 10:45

Well, I mean, I really cannot say, comment on this one, because I don't know how much easy it is to measure this like that. Of course, this might be a broader scoping of this role. But when you actually try to, I mean, operationalise this contract, I don't know how it can this fit in, because just maybe it's in my case only, but let me share my example. So last year, when you were coming back on campus after

COVID, there was one module, undergraduate module. And because the teaching has to be changed to make the group's smaller, so only for one undergraduate module, because it was a bigger size, very bigger cohort, with [redacted] plus students, I and other co tutor, we had to teach five days a week, only for a single module, with four days commuting to campus. And then Fridays, were online webinars. And still it was counted on the workload as a single module.

Paul Jones 10:55

Yeah.

DBA15 11:30

And then there are modules, with with the online programs, Executive Program, which run in after the office hours, like for example, 7pm [redacted], I will have teaching to do or there is a drop in session on weekend, also [redacted], but again, there is no different or separate measuring of this workload. So I think it's a difficult really to really kind of ascertain or confirm that, yes, the research work and teaching work is going 40%, 40%, 20%, from last year, last academic year, because we went back on campus, because the teaching design changed, so much because of the classroom changes. And also, as I was still relatively new to Aston, just [redacted] years been there, so some of the modules were very what I was teaching the first time. So that academic year, I did not do any research at all. It was only in April [redacted], when almost a teaching was about completed, I got back to my research. So I think there is a, I would say, it's like, yes, I think it's like a, uh, or do you say, or unknown, I knew there was a pattern of activities I would say, sometime you would have more investment in teaching, sometimes you would have more investment of time for research. It's not irregular, I would say yes. Yes, yes.

Paul Jones 13:43

I guess that's part of what's coming up in discussions before. Because thinking about the research side, there's, if you use the percentage I mentioned earlier, two days per week, should really be spent researching if we were to use that definition of 40%, but a lot of the people I've spoken to, probably wouldn't say they get 40% of the time on two days during the week to do research, quite often teaching would overextend the percentage and they would ending up more teaching tasks. And even if, even if the percentage was right, because teaching is so disjointed about when they're delivering it, finding pockets of time to do research isn't the best way to get research done when you've got an hour here or hour there.

DBA15 14:27

Yes, that's right. I absolutely agree on this. I mean, this is, this is what I also feel that when your day is disrupted, you don't, you are not productive at all in the research world. So again, sharing an example there could be days, and there had been days in the last year, where I had to go to a campus only for a one hour session.

Paul Jones 14:53

Right.

DBA15 14:54

So the all on campus teaching was just for one hour but you lose more than an hour in commuting, and then, because of the disruptions, and keeping an eye on the clock, your concentration goes off the research, I guess a lot of an important aspect of academic research is, I will say peace of mind. So that you can stay longer on your computer or on your, in your library, where you can concentrate on reading and writing. But if that gets disrupted, that has, I would say, more significant or substantial impacts in dealing your productivity.

Paul Jones 15:37

Yeah, I can understand that completely. So one of the things that isn't mentioned, but is expected, is about external engagement. How much of a part does that play in your role? And do you feel like you've

been given the skills to be able to do that type of job, of interfacing with external bodies and promoting your research, etc?

DBA15 15:59

There, there is definitely an encouragement to do this at Aston, definitely an expectation, my personal view with that expectations outweigh the encouragement. And that also means that expectation outweighs the facilitation also. One key factor which I see missing, from my personal perspective, as being part of Aston, is that perhaps we have, or at least in the department that we're called that, we have not been able to recruit and retain, with a vision to strengthen the research in some area or in some topics. So you don't find friends, you don't find colleagues, with whom you can network to work in particular topics. So if you are alone, of course, a lot of that, a lot of that engagement, will depend on your personality and will depend on an experience, will depend on your contracts, will depend on your awareness of the environment, opportunities that are there. So you'll feel a kind of being left alone. But still, the expectations are there, where I was the student, a research student first time, or full time, is where, I still consider myself a student. But when I was formally a student, research student, there are things that were strategically you planned and conducted differently there. The recruitment, the hiring, were quite, I would say, focused at which type of research interests they would like to seek to apply for a job and then keep them to deliver on these people working together, in different topics that they were interested in. So I think that is one of, one I would say, factor which would be I, I would say, a success factor and might be a critical success factor, which is missing in my present job. And that I don't see that network available. There are some other departments where I see that, for example, in the [redacted] department and some other one will, there are colleagues who have got these strong networks, they understand each other, they support each other projects, they apply for funding together and things like that. And they have, they have got established centres there, research centers also. So that is one I think, deficiency, which, or let me say, it's a deficiency detail, and my perspective, that bars us to reach out to engage. So the only, for example, outlet I know about is, for example, like the media, okay, like The Conversation, for example. So that is the only one where I've been trying to make one or two submissions. Let's see which one gets successful. Recently, we were encouraged to start using social media. But again, social media, you would be able to do that and that relates to the previous question about the time, how much time you have to read about the area that you're interested to research. I mean, of course, if you have publishing you can keep on publishing it, but people would read about your work if your work is of interest to them. So how much of, how much of your, how much you have been following other people's work. For example, with my area of research relates to, or my interest relates with the government policy in certain areas, if I, for some time, don't get the opportunity to keep myself up to date on that policy, I would not be able to suggest anything or hear something related to that, when it is the correct time to do that. So I guess it's, it's these two things. One is to have a strong, I would say network of people who are there already who have these public engagement contexts, and you go through them, that is one way to do that. The other is how up to date, your knowledge is and your about, about the situation that you want to research. And accordingly, you can, you can submit your findings or share your ideas to that.

Paul Jones 21:02

Do you think that hampers your development as an academic then, because you haven't got people you can work as closely with and learn from each other, and share ideas, and develop ideas together?

DBA15 21:14

I think Paul, the more pressing element to that, is that, when you have to undergo your annual review meetings with the senior management, so that of course, you know that you are missing on something individually, depending on if you are a positive person, you are optimist, you will, you will wait that something might change, something might improve. But when the time to meet somebody and the, and you there, you are kind of going to be answering well what we have done and what we have not done. So that that has a more, I will say, pressure on you that what we like to say to them, because they, they expect us, as I was mentioning, I think in one of our previous responses, that the expectation outweigh the encouragement which are there. So I think that is something which is definitely hampering. But in

the short run, the more pressure, pressure is because the performance evaluation get affected, you don't show, you are not able to show that you have been able to do these things.

Paul Jones 22:28

So there's a tension there, isn't there, between having targets, or things that are expected of you and maybe not getting the support to actually achieve those targets...

DBA15 22:38

That's right.

Paul Jones 22:38

...because from what I've seen so far, some of the way things are managed, or presented internally in different ways, isn't necessarily a supportive mechanism for helping you achieve your best performance. It's just a case of telling you what the expectations are, and almost like leaving you to get on with it, rather than providing mechanisms and ideas and support to get you to that place.

DBA15 23:02

That's right Paul, I will agree with this. And I think particularly the mechanisms have to be, I would say, strategically thought of and then integrated in the whole performance management system, I would not say that it should be a performance measurement system for the teaching and research tab, it should rather be a performance management system where issues, where they, for example, myself as what-ever I've been sharing about you, the challenges that I have shared about myself so far, those should be managed, rather than only being, being measured that why these targets are not met. And through this support system, as you suggest.

Paul Jones 23:54

Yeah, because there's a difference there, isn't there, about the way people will think about performance management, which seems a very harsh term to think about targets, are you meeting targets, etc versus performance support to get the best out of staff, and finding what the barriers are, and then trying to eradicate the barriers and helping you to grow your skills and abilities in a supportive way to help you flourish then, there's two different things going on there...

DBA15 24:20

Yes, I agree

Paul Jones 24:22

... there is more of the former, than the latter, in terms of thinking, how can I help you as an individual grow and flourish and what's gonna get the best out of you?

DBA15 24:30

Yes, yes. And, and this, this makes me reiterate a point that I had shared on some other forums, that this, these changes might occur as something positive, based on my perception, if staff or employees are included as one of the beneficiaries in the organisation's strategy, then the focus will be that, how to improve them so that the university improves also. So their output will be the university's output there, whatever they deliver, is going to be an outcome or output from the university. So let's support them to do it.

Paul Jones 25:26

Yes, I do agree with that and I have raised similar points previously, I am quite interested, there's another part of what I wanted to talk to you about, it is the idea about external experiences being useful to bring into higher education. Have you had experiences in other jobs previously?

DBA15 25:43

I, I, sorry I am just [redacted]. So, I started after my first degree in [redacted], my first [redacted] years were in a commercial organisation, it was in the [redacted] sector. But I for, for many factors, I was not feeling, considering myself fit for that role so I went to academics. So I only have experience, in terms of external experiences, I only have experiences from other regions, I will say, other countries, what otherwise... umm... mainly it is in academics. But coming back to your question that sorry, was your question. Yeah. Am I right?

Paul Jones 26:34

The role of experience outside of HE and the skills and abilities you've developed in those experiences, how much of a beneficial part do they play in you becoming a better academic?

DBA15 26:49

Yes...

Paul Jones 26:49

We don't necessarily teach academics some skills that can be really useful?

DBA15 26:53

Yes.

Paul Jones 26:53

People who have learned them elsewhere apply them in their jobs then. Yes... umm... I can give you an example, for instance, if you look at the research, and some of the literature, then problem solving skills don't tend to be taught to academics, people learn them in different environments, and they bring them into HE, and I wonder whether there is other skills that people develop, that are really useful within HE, but we don't naturally teach people about as part of a way of thinking about development for academic staff.

DBA15 27:30

Yes. I think, I think one, one skill, or I would say leadership, a leadership quality, let me call it that one could bring to HE from other, other roles, or other experiences, is of culture. So what type of culture they want to promote in the higher education. The other thing I, or maybe the other one is not in, on, that other one is not a skill, either. It's more like, it's more an issue of other more characteristics of, of an approach or aptitude, but that is not, that's not a skill. So yes, I think the cultural, managing cultures, organisational cultures, the value systems, the social interaction, the social controls, things, I guess, that is something one could really gain experience, and not necessarily to bring it from the external experience to the other one, but to reflect on, I think the first thing is reflection, maybe the experience in the previous organisation, when you, when somebody comes to you in education, they might reflect that what was done previously was not correct. So it might make them change themselves now, than what they were doing previously, and the change might be, not because of they had learned it in, from the previous job, but because they now realise that what they were doing previously was, was not so, the idea of, or the element of, a positive feedback, that is important to just have that reflection there. But definitely, I guess culture is one thing that could be useful. Organisation can be other thing. So how you organise your activities, because when I joined Aston, coming from another system, or culture of operation function, I was finding it really challenging. Because there were too many tasks, which I was not doing all of them are there. And all of them were kind of based on computer. So whether those were the communication was all through, mostly through emails, and then the trainings were online and teaching, were both on campus, and we have webinars, so many things were new for me. So how you organise yourself, the concept of doing some diaries, and scheduling the calendar, things like that. So I guess that could be something, which if anybody comes in with a more sophisticated and easier way of organisation, organising the tasks, so that could be something that can be shared with other people. Yes, so I guess these two, these two can be helpful. But again, I'm not thinking about these, from an individual perspective. I am thinking about these and sharing with you from a collective perspective. So

how can an experience that you bring from outside, whether that is something you change now, or whether that is something you would consider better doing and continuing to do, how you can share that with your peers, with your colleagues, and that makes a collective change for better.

Paul Jones 31:30

Yes, and does much sharing go on generally, from your experience, in terms of passing on good practice, and skills, or helping each other to become better at your jobs? Does that happen a lot?

DBA15 31:43

Sorry, I think I missed the first part. Can you repeat the question?

Paul Jones 31:46

Yeah. So you mentioned there about sharing ideas and skills, etc? Does that happen a lot naturally, in terms of the department or your experiences? Do you share things quite regularly locally to try and help each other?

DBA15 32:02

There are, there are colleagues who, who do share ideas, particularly now on MS teams chat, we have our departments team chat. So whenever there are some issues that that is being discussed, or in a thread. So people who share their ideas, either based on their own experiences, or they have colleagues, friends, in some other organisation based on their experiences, the issue there, that is something which I think, at least in our departments, it does go on quite often is.

Paul Jones 32:42

Yeah. And do you think that's a good way of learning then for you, and for others, in terms of sharing some of this good practice that exists?

DBA15 32:50

Yes, I think, I think that's a really good, even, I would encourage and recommend that, that more important issues for our university, and particularly for our department, for example, that if a program enrollment has dropped, or the students are not engaging son and so forth, even that to, we should try to seek ideas and inspiration from those universities who are running this several degrees, but they are much better. So I think that is really important to get some useful ideas. Yes, I would encourage this.

Paul Jones 33:33

Do you think then, depending on which way courses or learning opportunities come your way, are you more likely to engage with colleagues at a local level if opportunities present themselves? Rather than looking for a a course that's run generically for people and are just advertised through email? Is there a difference in terms of how you rate different opportunities?

DBA15 33:55

I, I would, I would look at the course and its relevance for me. So, for example, as I mentioned, the workshop I attended the day before yesterday. I, I did not know anybody there personally, so because as I mentioned, that is a volunteer, volunteer body of [redacted]. So there were people from different countries. But whenever they have, because the, the theme of the group is that they try to make any, they want to make an impact, and that is something I also would be, would aim for, and would wish to achieve from my teaching and research. So that's why whatever they advertised, and that I think is of relevance for me, I will participate there. And likewise, if there's any opportunity, if comes here with local colleagues whom I know, but if it is relevant, I would go for it. So, yes, so I think it will be more depending on the relevance of the content or the course.

Paul Jones 35:12

And does anybody encourage you to try and go on courses, and will give you some guidance in terms of what might be relevant, or is it very much down to you to seek opportunities and be self motivated?

DBA15 35:23

Yes, so far there, it has been self motivated. And when there are some trainings or workshops, which for, which there is again, like, as you were speaking earlier about, about expectations, when there are expectation, the senior management would like people to participate, then we get some emails or like some more specific wordings by, by our department seniors, like the research convener, or the teaching convener, or the department heads themselves, that there is an expectation that they would attend. So they do come along, when there is, let me use the word, some sort of pressure that senior management would like people to attend it. Otherwise, otherwise, if somebody attends any course, and they just mentioned it on a teams chat that I attended, these people encourage it, so generally there is an atmosphere of encouragement. But yes, sometimes, when there's some kind of official expectation attached to it, then there's more persuasion to do it.

Paul Jones 36:46

And do you think there's skills missing that we haven't filled in the gaps for you yet, that would be really useful as an academic member of staff?

DBA15 36:56

individually, for myself?

Paul Jones 36:57

Yes

DBA15 37:08

I don't see any, I mean, yes, I don't see there's any skill gap missing, as such. Yes, I think it's mainly the, so, so far, the main challenge has been, one is this impact thing that I, but I guess that's not related to skill, that's more related to the pressures of teaching and then publication for academic journals. And impact is something different. Yes, I don't think, yeah, I don't think there's anything related to skill development.

Paul Jones 37:49

Do you feel, so, I have had conversations about this previously, there's a big focus on impact in different ways at the moment. Do you find it hard or easier to translate your research into having a meaningful difference for beneficiaries? Is it easy to do that?

DBA15 38:09

No, no, it's not easy to do it. Until very recently, even making a public engagement, I thought, that will be an impact. But as I mentioned earlier, among one of the CPDs, is that which was like a seminar or a workshop conducted by university or School's Impact Manager, there, I understood that impact is different than we measured it for, when you reported for REF purposes, it's different. It is my understanding from the gentleman was that, is that impact should make a change? Or should have the potential to make a change which might not come early, it might come many years later. So, it, it kind of made, made me a bit, I will say, not unmotivated, but made me feel, made me feel like perhaps I'm not still able to do that. So, I will not even say that it demoralised me, but I will say yes, I'm still far away from doing that. If, if, that is, if that is what impact means, that we should be able to make a change, so I don't see that I am doing anything at this stage to make a change. Sorry, Paul, can you please repeat the question, the last one.

Paul Jones 39:55

Yes, so I was asking about the impact and about, essentially, where we thought there might be gaps. So what I'd be interested in is that you've now had a better understanding about what impact means...

DBA15 40:08

Yes.

Paul Jones 40:08

... and I'm wondering whether there are things we could do to make that easier for you. It seems like this has come as a, bit of a, more of a surprise, in terms of what impact actually means... ... and it's good now you have got a better understanding, but could we give you better knowledge earlier on in your career, could we facilitate you been able to translate your research into impact by giving you better knowledge, or getting you to work in groups and trying to identify ways it could create an impact, and a change in an organisation or a beneficiary? Are there things we could do essentially, that will make that easier for you?

DBA15 40:19

Yes. Yes, thank you. This reminded me the question also, Yes. Thank you. Yes, your question was, whether I find it hard or easy to evaluate the impact, or to identify the effect of my study. So definitely, I'm finding it hard. I, because what, one of my understandings was that perhaps public engagement also is an impact. But no, perhaps that could be a starting point. It's not, it's not an impact. So in terms of what, what support support could be provided? Yes, definitely, I think people, individuals like myself, who are in this role, who want to make contribution, but are not able to, not because they don't have the capability, but perhaps they, or the capacity, but perhaps they lack the support. I think, I think what could be done is to put them in teams. So whenever there is an impactful project that is approved, whether there's a knowledge transfer partnership, whether there's anything else, there should be one vacancy always there, or maybe two vacancies depending on the size of project, for relevant people who could be part of that. And, and it should be ensured that the original contributors, or the original investigators, they give them equal support, not consider them as a burden on the team, not consider them as something that they have to take, but just try to involve them as partners. So I think that would be really helpful. And I remember hearing this, in maybe in some other words, in one of the assembly, academic assemblies. But again, the response we got from the, from the senior management who was, I think hearing it, is that opportunities are there, we have to go and find it. But opportunities are gone by the time we know about them. Politics has already approved the project, it is already signed and things like that. But I guess that would be really helpful. To share, to do some contribution, yes, be involved with, if not in all the publication, just maybe in one publications. But that could be considered as part of CPD, will increase our record of publication, of course, we will make a contribution of sorts, but at the same time, it would allow us to learn about the ways how can we make impact? How can we do public engagement? How can we be part of the funding applications? So that feeling of loss or non achievement is not there. And at the same time, there is that professional development going on also.

Paul Jones 44:02

There's two points there, which I think are relevant for what you mentioned before. One is that if you had closer relationships with people in your area of expertise, where you had other academics who are researching similar or complementary topics, you could form a group where you could discuss how you could translate your stuff into, into impactful activity, but at the moment is sounds more like you are on your own a bit, in terms of having to think about everything. The other thing that springs to mind is that most academics now are thinking about how they translate their research into impact. Some people find that an easier prospect than others, because of the type of work they do, and their natural way of working, it might be engaged scholarship might be working with organisations, but everyone is having to do this translation of research into activity and making a change. If we could share some general approaches that people are taking, that might spark some thoughts for you then, in terms of thinking, oh, well they've done this way of translating their research into impact this way...

DBA15 45:07

Yes.

Paul Jones 45:07

... I don't see much of that happening, or being shared at the moment, to say, oh, this is all the activity going on, these are the ideas that we've got, and trying to make it easier for people.

DBA15 45:15

Yes, that is right Paul. I think, I think you interpreted the first point very correctly. Absolutely. This is what I, I have that position also, in terms of that network not being there. The research groups not being there. In terms of the second one, about translation, I guess there were, sorry, I don't guess sorry, but I recall, there were one or two events, again, initiated by, organised by, RKE about successful funding applications. But, again, that focus was more about filling the application in rather than, rather than the process through which one reaches that stage. So I agree with this one, also, that a translation would be more helpful if, if, if somebody is part of the whole process of the thinking, and networking, rather than only looking at the technical side. So a training on technical side might help a little bit, because RKE is always there to complete a funding application. And so what is more important, I guess, is this, and I, again, I think it has a mutual, it has, I would say, it has a reciprocating relationship with the senior, or the top policy, top management policy and departmental level policy, that what areas of research we want to develop. So I think, I think, yes.

Paul Jones 47:11

I think there's a, there's an example within what you were saying there, where there is a lot of training that is done that is based around process. So people will tell you what you have to do, what forms to fill in, how you work through this process, and all the different aspects of it. I think for me, there might be gaps in that knowledge you accumulate when you've done these things, the top tips, the street savvy-ness that you get from having done these things, that we don't pass on then. Because it's one thing knowing what the process is, how you navigate that, and get the best out of it, and what can make a difference in that process, we are not very good at sharing those ideas or as good as we could be at sharing that stuff then.

DBA15 47:55

Yes, I think. Personally, again, Paul, I agree and my simile, simile for this, is like, it's like a fisherman. So you have your line and hook ready for funding. So it means that you are already ready with some plan with some ideas, and that is your research proposal, the only thing you want to grab is a funding opportunity. So I think the important thing is not to teach us in a workshop, how to hold a fish by the hook. But the important thing is where to sit, how to throw the line, which hook to use, things like that. And that's the whole, I will say, the preparation. The procedural preparation, is more about that thinking process, that discussion, that networking, that trying to align a research interest towards an impactful area. So how do I find an impactful area in the topic that I am, or in the area that I'm interested to research, if I am the only one in the department doing that? Of course, my my focus, or the primary focus, will be to continue publication, because the next round of REF is coming, or even before REF, after probation, I am expected to produce one paper per year. So perhaps I don't have the time to do case study always, or to run studies here, so I would go for me writing essay types of papers, conceptual papers, just to get it through the journal. And that, that too takes time. So, so I guess, yes, I think, I think again, it's what is important, is to have networks, that is really important, if the institution, the higher education institution, be that Aston, or anywhere else, wants to make an impactful research, as one of the strategic aim, so having networks of people with research groups is something I guess is, is essential, I would say, yes.

Paul Jones 50:31

One thing we haven't covered yet, which I'd be interested to hear about is, you mentioned REF there and we've talked about impact, for instance, the influence of external drivers like REF, TEF or KEF, how much of a part do they play in your thinking about what you have to do, and how you have to develop yourself, as an academic?

DBA15 50:50

Yes, yes, well, I think, I mean, of course, star ratings is a pressure. So, if you don't have a four star, I mean, if you have a four star you, you're mentioned differently, I would say, in front of colleagues, in with colleagues, and everything like that. So, so, that is something which I observed and noted from the

very first day of joining Aston, in our department at least, so, that definitely has both a cultural impact, a star rating, and has your individual, as you were talking about earlier, the one to one with the senior management, once a year the performance review discussion, not with the line manager, but with the Dean or with research Associate Dean, so that is something which is specifically spotted there what work for publication do you have, what work for publication do you plan to do, things like that. So, that have, I will say, a pressure and you, because you have to, you will then have to comply with so many requirements of the journal in terms of the topics that they require, the format and the fancy structures that they require, it is not easy that, if you are declined by one journal, you can very easily go to another one, no, you have to change a lot of the way you have written it. So it takes time and being, get, getting declines becomes quite frustrating also, when, when, because nobody counts your efforts over here. Efforts go, I will say, unnoticed, it's only the result that they want to see. So, I guess, and this is again when, I will say, position that I have in my heart, and in my feeling, that efforts should be weighed, efforts should be counted, and accounted for, by, as part of the performance measurement rather than the results or the outputs. And so, this is one rating, star rating, is one thing related to the question that, how much this REF has impact on me. The other thing is, I mentioned earlier, that after understanding that impact is something different than just, than just a public engagement. So, that again is like, they are conflicting in terms of resourcefulness, you can give time either for a journal publication, or to make an impact case study, and an impact case study is going to take more than a year because you will have to go to bring actual data from the field, either through case studies, through surveys, through whatever means. And then once that is done, it can go as a single case study, but might help you to make multiple academic publications. But, but I guess they have the compromise on what each other, they, they kind of had conflicting interests in terms of our conflicting demands, in terms of time. So these two, I guess, are the facts I will say the impacts, so in some ways, I would say that the journals, the journal and the requirement to publish in the journal, sometimes I feel it like, it sometimes sounds redundant when we think about impact. So what, why did I publish? I didn't, did I need to publish in a three or four star? If it is not going to make any impact, who is going to read that? So I think it's, it is not only for the university then, it's for the main reader, national government, also in maybe at some international forum, or for people to think about it. If funding, what will guide government funding for research, could it be guided only by things which actually make change, which actually contribute to betterment, then how do we define it, either as a matter of academic publication, or either we integrate the meaning of impact as something which we exchange, but as also something which encourages academic debate. I get, I guess this would not be they're separated as they are right now.

Paul Jones 56:20

Yeah, I agree, they can be conflicted in terms of where you spend your time, when you think about your full role, 40% for research, you've got a limited amount of time to do stuff. Then, if you're trying to generate impact, that takes time out of doing anything else. So it's important to find a balance for you in terms of what you need to do as part of your role. I think that covers all the questions I had at the moment. So is there anything else you wanted to add in at the end? Or are you happy that you've given a good account of your views on professional development?

DBA15 56:59

Paul, thank you, I think, I think I have just spoken, I will say, my heart and thank you for giving me this opportunity. Because yes, I think, I think I've shared my personal views on things, my personal opinions, so I don't, I don't see anything that I, that we have not covered, yes.

Paul Jones 57:26

Great. Thank you. I'll stop recording now.

Appendix 19: DBA16 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA16

Paul Jones 00:00

I have started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship: reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctorate in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate, from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour but we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end, the interview is semi-structured, this means I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore, but you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep you within the broader bounds of my research area. The idea is that I do that with the least number of questions and interruptions possible. You have 14 days from the date of the interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw. You can withdraw by emailing me through the details on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as an individual, for example, personal data will be removed, and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk, but if you need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand, so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate this by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress, or if I'm feeling distressed myself. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start, then we will start exploring your experiences regarding professional development, for the interview record, this is interview DBA16 taking place on 10th. November at 1130. Can you confirm you've understood the information I've given you?

DBA16 01:28

Yes.

Paul Jones 01:39

And you're happy with proceeding with recording the interview?

DBA16 01:55

Absolutely. Yes.

Paul Jones 01:55

And you understand how to withdraw your data, if necessary?

DBA16 01:59

Absolutely. Yes.

Paul Jones 02:01

Great. Can you confirm what school you work in, please?

DBA16 02:04

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:14

That's fine. Can you confirm your gender please?

DBA16 02:17

[redacted]

Paul Jones 02:19

Thank you. And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA16 02:22

Yes, I am.

Paul Jones 02:24

Great. And how would you describe your career level out of the three choices? Early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA16 02:32

I would say mid to senior, mid career, I would say.

Paul Jones 02:36

And could you confirm your age bracket? There's a number of choices, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54?

DBA16 02:45

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:49

Yep. Great. Thanks. So thanks for the closed ended question answers, can you just talk to me about what your perception of professional development is, and how that's gone for you within Aston and your career more generally? What do you think of professional development?

DBA16 03:06

So I think any any kind of training, or any sort of workshops, or any conversations, that potentially could help you or me, as an individual, to be able to do my job in a more efficient and more effective way, I would consider as a professional development. It could be in different forms, for me, courses, or a piece of reading, workshops, as I said, group workshops type of thing, or one-to one type of activities. So that's the overall perception that I have, although I really don't know the exact definition of what professional development is. But that's my perception of what it should, or it could be. So, in terms of your second point, when it comes to what did you ask in terms of what have I received at Aston or what was the second one?

Paul Jones 04:01

Yeah, so I think it's more about thinking about, you've given me a description about what you, what you believe professional development should be...

DBA16 04:07

Yeah...

Paul Jones 04:08

How does that match up with reality then of what goes on for you in your role?

DBA16 04:11

Uhm, yeah, I know, uh, it's not a criticism of, I think, of Aston, or an institution that we work, but it's more about the, the misalignments when it comes to academia, I would suggest, in general, because if you've got a, if you've got, if you work in a different industry, you've got some set objectives to address, etc. Then you would go through different trainings to be able to actually help you to address those objectives. When it comes to academia. As, as much as you've got some of those objectives being set, there are lots of variety and flexibility, etc, etc, and different disciplines, that work differently, different

topics, etc, etc. So it's, it's very hard to come up with the one size fits all type of training program or professional development. That's why sometimes you get a mismatch of what professional development you receive, versus what you are after. So the, the, the best ones, should I name them? Or do you want me to name a couple of them?

Paul Jones 05:23

You tell me what you want, and then, if there are things I need to take out to this, because of identifying you, I can do, you just tell me what you think's important.

DBA16 05:32

So, so, I think one of the best ones that, that I've had, since day one, which is now [redacted] years, it was about the media training that we had. And I considered it, as perhaps, as it, as a professional development type of training for me, because this is part of the, my job, as well, the more senior you become, I think, the more that they're expecting you to do some of these media outlets anyway, and to deliver impacts from your research. So this was one of the, this was definitely one of the good ones that I've had. Also, we had a series of professional developments around publications. And I remember when I was more junior one, I was, I was lucky, acting as a tuttee. Then when I was becoming a little bit more senior, I was becoming like a tutor, and to be able to help the others. And then the third one that we had a couple of months ago, it was about leadership and change management type of thing, which I found that less interesting or less relevant, only because of perhaps the people who were delivering it. I didn't, I was expecting the most senior, at executive levels, to be able to tell you about those, rather than people who are, who know less about managing people than then what you know, for instance. Am I in the right space of addressing your your question?

Paul Jones 07:09

Yes. What's interesting about what you mentioned there was, if we take engagement, for instance, so it is really good that media training was a really useful experience for you, part of the questions I want to explore today was the nature of T&R contracts, so generally, you're given 40 percent teaching, 40% research and 20% administration. I'm interested to get your thoughts on how that balance works in reality, but tying it back to what you said about the media training, engagement doesn't really feature as part of those things traditionally, it's an extra tag on to what you're asked to do...

DBA16 07:09

Yeah, that's true.

Paul Jones 07:12

...so you mentioned, that is an important part, because it doesn't naturally feature what would typically be viewed as, what your contract stipulates.

DBA16 07:55

That's right. And I, to be fair, have I had any training on teaching? No. Have I had any professional development training on teaching? No. Have I come across anything in Aston, it wasn't, some of the, some of these professional developments, like publishing papers, writing grant proposals, media training, leadership, they are, they're coming in your, in your way, it's in your face all the time, emails, contacts, etc, your line manager asked me to do x and y. But when it comes to teaching, I didn't have, for instance, and that's, that's 40%, that is 40% of the contract is all about this. And, I don't think it's a criticism, and again, it's not a criticism of Aston, but I used to be in another institution before coming to Aston, two more institutions before coming to Aston, we didn't really have any formal type of professional development, or education, or training on that. They came as, as, as, in a natural way, type of thing. So they were asking you to shadow your supervisor, while he or she is teaching, and see how it works. The other thing that we, we haven't had, and I think we struggle at Aston at points, is that we haven't had a professional development when it comes to developing modules and developing new courses, as well. So, courses as, as an entirety, and then, so even if you've got a framework for the entire program, when it comes to your specific module, okay, what what is it that you need to have? So we haven't had

it. I didn't have it, to be honest. And, I don't think for the newcomers, even we, we, we, as far as I know, at least, I haven't come across a professional development when it comes to the teaching, the development of the, of the modules, or curriculum, etc. I think the, most of the emphasis on the professional development for, for Aston, at least, for [redacted], is around research, I would say. Um, as I said, publications, definitely, a little bit less on grant proposals, and the difficulty is that you cannot, it's, it's a notion, when it comes to like grants, etc. and you know it too well, you've got different councils, you've got collaborations with different institutions, you've got lots of different threads coming in. It's difficult to have a generic professional development courses when it comes to that. But most of the emphasis have been around research, leadership of research, and engagement. Oh, the other way, for instance, the other thing that we had, again, coming back to research, was about which is a mandatory one, which is a brilliant one to be, to be having a mandatory use, doctor students training, supervision training, that, that's mandatory. And I think, based on my understanding, for the past [redacted] years, that's the only mandatory professional development training that we should have. Never come across anything else that's been mandatory, apart from other training courses, that are not relevant to teaching and research. So, and then, as you said, rightly, the, the emphasis on media engagement. It's interesting, because as you said, it's not really, it hasn't been written into my contract, for instance, that I have to be engaged with media.

Paul Jones 11:29

It forms part of the wider view of research, in terms of how we develop impact, and the knock ons of all the different ways of doing stuff then, because unless you're engaging with our beneficiaries, and talking about it, then trying to make an impact, and generate a momentum for change in policy and stuff, is really difficult. But there's no formal notification within the contract saying this is expected of you, for instance, the other part that I was keen to find for you, then, if we take that notion of 40:40:20 as a breakup of teaching, research and administration. Is that the reality for you, though? Or, is that percentage different in terms of how you perceive your role, do you think?

DBA16 12:12

Um, no, I mean, it's, it's, for me, personally, it's been slightly different, because I didn't start in a traditional way for the progression. So I was on a research contract. So when I finished my PhD, I started as a, as a [redacted], as a [redacted], and then [redacted], in the, in [redacted] previous institution, when I joined Aston I was still, I joined as a [redacted] on an external funding. And then it came to the point that I had one grant proposal as principal investigators and [redacted] grant proposals, as a CO-I, and I, I was, I was after a more permanent position. And it was a debate in the University level at the, at the school, and university level, about creating a position going forward for me to be able for me to stay at Aston. And then we were also looking for some capacity to, I was teaching as well, although it wasn't part of my contract. I was teaching [redacted] level anyway, but I was on 100% contract. And then there was a need for someone who was, was able to teach [redacted], which we in, which we didn't have, so naturally came about we had couple of positions, they can tweak it, etc, then I started as, as a kind of like a [redacted] position. But maybe because of that, my, the percentage of what you said doesn't really apply to me. I am almost like [redacted] type of thing. And because I'm tied, and when we created [redacted], again, it was it was slightly different. Because I'm tied into [redacted] quite heavily. The whole dynamic is a little bit different. So I teach a little bit less than other colleagues inside [redacted]. But in fact, when it comes to research, I do [redacted] more than most of the people, at least not, more than 90%, 95%, of the people that we've got in the department. So that balance doesn't really work when it comes to me personally. I don't know whether you want me to judge the whole department, but when it comes to the whole department, I don't think that would apply, either. Most of the people are on the other side of the fence. The teaching loads is much heavier. And because of that, they, I don't think they will get a chance to do much of research to that percentage of allocation about 40%. I don't think that would, that would necessarily apply to a lot of my colleagues, at least within the department that I know it to well.

Paul Jones 15:17

I think that's a reflection of some of the conversations. or most of the conversation I've had, is that while it's a nice idea that these things are nice, neat bubbles that exist, on the teaching side, that tends to expand more than the 40%, the administration doesn't seem to get any smaller either. And that expands probably to more than 20%. And it is always research that is being pushed down to try and find that space and time to do stuff, then.

DBA16 15:43

Because that's the, I think, it's an unfortunate, first of all, and it's been, in my view, it's because, that's something that it hasn't been, there's no, there's no set framework, when it comes to research and publications, you can say, I want to publish two papers in [redacted], or [redacted]. But there's no set stone, when it comes to teaching, you've got a set timing and set framework. That's why it will consume the, the, that 40%, which is less firm, I would say. And when it comes to admin, then most of the admin roles will be heavily around the teaching. Students being seen, office hours, marking, supervision, etc, etc. So, so I totally agree with what you said.

Paul Jones 16:44

Yeah, it's difficult, isn't it, to be able to, neatly categorise all the different stuff you do, and then depending on the modules you are running, the size will vary. And while there's some fluctuation given to the size of modules, and they are grouped together in different ways, in terms of the number of students, that can then, you could be at the top end of what that category you're in is doing, and makes you busy with that type of work then.

DBA16 17:10

I mean, the one thing to add is, is, sorry, before COVID we were flexible enough to be able to tell people, look, if you're good at research and grants and engagement, etc. spend 60% on that, 70% on that, and 30% on teaching. And if you're good at teaching, just okay, we can either move you to a teaching contract, on a teaching only contract, or you can have 80% teaching, and we're not going to request a lot from, okay, where's your three star or four star publication, For instance. I think we had the luxury of doing that, at least in my department, because of COVID, because of the way that we, for instance, the January starters, etc. everyone got consumed. And I think we've got [redacted], I think it has [redacted] faculty members, and we're still struggling with it, with teaching workload. So some people have still got loads. So I think there's a context to it as well, I would suggest.

Paul Jones 18:15

Do you think that flexibility, you mentioned then previously, do you think that's changed then, that as we've changed the processes around how we bring students in, and, there was a vulnerable, a vulnerability, we identified through COVID about the way the university was working, we had to make sure we were getting student numbers in, that still seems from what you said then, to be playing a massive part in the operations, and about how people, that flexibility that existed, that seems to have disappeared now, it's just all hands to the pump is the impression I'm getting.

DBA16 18:50

Yeah, that, I would, I would agree. And then, the flexibility is almost gone, which recently, past couple of months or so, and you know it too well, it started to realise, that we, as much as we need to have the money from students and getting good feedback from students, etc. We need to, we need to also be strong in other, other parts, which is like being able to get grants, etc. So we, we started to see but, for the, for the past two years, it was all about teaching, it was all about students, it was all about making sure that the innovation is there, in terms of the delivery, making sure that we've got new courses, we've got new modules to be able to attract more students, um, because of the competition, etc. So the flexibility is gone, but, I think, I don't know, but my guess is that we are starting to get more and more of the others as well. And it happened, the previous one, it happened only, as well as COVID, li... was because we will towards the end of the cycle for REF, so the university wasn't, the university wasn't expecting more publications for REF, because we knew that everyone had like two or three papers, etc,

we were okay with it. Therefore the emphasis went for teaching more, and also the COVID thing, but I think because of the next cycle of REF, and easing with COVID, etc, etc. Hopefully we will, we'll see a little bit more flexibility going forward.

Paul Jones 20:22

So, one of the things you mentioned there was about, almost a pivot, to the online teaching, coping with COVID, developing new content, do you feel that you were supported in terms of developing skills that allow you to do that effectively? Or was it very much a case of these are the expectations and you just have to go off and find a way to do it? Or was there support mechanisms in place to make it all work easily and efficiently, for you?

DBA16 20:46

I don't think there was. If I want to, I can't say there wasn't, there was any, there wasn't anything, but if I want to scale it, like zero being none, five being brilliant, for training for online teaching, I would say it was like, two, two ish. So, and only because I think everything happened very suddenly. We weren't prepared, of course, those who are delivering online courses, they were brilliant, because they've been doing it for years. I learnt, for instance, a lot from people like Matt Davies, who has been doing it for years. One of the things that we were all struggling with was student engagements, when it, when it was coming to online teaching, and we weren't, we weren't trained on how can we get them engaged when we're in a virtual world. And that was, that was, that was, that was, that was a big hit. And when you don't get engagement, especially when it comes to postgraduate in the MBA, then they're not going to provide a good feedback, because they felt that they haven't been part of it. So overall, I don't think we had training, everything, everything was ad hoc. Oh, we need to do this and deliver it in this way. Oh, by the way, this is a training that you can do, um, a lot of people were struggling with a Blackboard Ultra connection, not connection, how to use it. We didn't have a, like a prior training type of thing. We had very ad hoc, on ad hoc basis. And I think this is this is because of the fact that we were doing 80-90% of our teaching face to face. But like other institutions, I was talking to a colleague couple of weeks ago, at Warwick, they've got, like, they're delivering online MBA. And they've been doing really great because they were able to, they had lots of people teaching them the online MBA, which they can do a bit of resource allocation from those people and put them in teaching other stuff. Because they were well prepared in online teaching, they could teach other modules. And so they've got really good feedback on that sense, for instance. Um, yeah.

Paul Jones 23:12

Yes, it's interesting, because I think that people were scrambling around to find ways to cope with all of this. Like, why is, there isn't any, there isn't much slack built into the system, or things in place to develop skills around teaching, like you mentioned earlier then, to make sure that people are up to speed, they know the systems we've got and how to get the best out to them. It's quite often the case that unless people have got an interest, and they go off exploring themselves, there isn't many formal mechanisms saying, we need to skill you up in these, these, and these areas. It is just a case of people just bumble along themselves and find the opportunities. So what you mentioned about Matt, was that something that you sought out yourself? Or was that presented to you as someone that could help?

DBA16 23:58

It wasn't a face to face one, it was, it wasn't one to one. Um, but he, he was, he was actually, he was doing a training on Blackboard Ultra and there are lots of different different buttons here and there. I'm tech savvy myself, and I usually explore things myself, instead of reading the manual. But then, when it comes to, to, when it comes to teaching, your, your focus is, is, when you are in the class, your focus is on, just on teaching. When it was virtual, you had to take control of like two screens, then there were lots of breakout groups, and an exercise, and a survey, all sorts of things. And it was, it was taking a lot of time, and then they, you were losing focus, et cetera, et cetera. But then Matt did the training on Blackboard Ultra, which I took three times, it was not the same thing, it was like it, the basic, the basics that you need to do, the minimum that you need to know, and that's enough for you if you want to teach, if you want to do a little bit more then, and then when he was, he was doing this, and also the

presentation that he did, I learned a lot in terms of the, the ways in which he was getting attention and engagement from the audience. Like you've got 10 seconds to type your question now. Otherwise, the time has passed, and then people started to react, or you need to do in, so always giving some timeframe, and limited time to people, to react to something, and then reacting to it. And then when you had one or two people reacting to something, then everyone else was coming in. So it wasn't, it wasn't a one to one, or a personal one, I sort of learned from him as he was doing the actual delivery, if it makes sense.

Paul Jones 26:00

Yes, it wasn't you, it wasn't him telling you, that you should do these things. But you were savvy enough to think, oh, this is good practice that Matt's doing, I could pick up this myself to improve my practice.

DBA16 26:10

Exactly.

Paul Jones 26:11

Do you think that happens a lot in terms of transfer of knowledge and skills and just like that, the street smarts of how to do stuff naturally, through your experiences at Aston, do you think that happens a great deal?

DBA16 26:27

Um, I think it depends, I think when it encompasses the whole teaching, and presentation, as I said, I haven't had any formal training on how to teach or how to present, etc, etc. I don't know. Do we have such a training at Aston? I don't think so, I haven't come across. You've got two types of teaching which, which, which we heavily involved, on one to students and one to industry, for instance, we haven't had it for either. But the ways in which I've started to learn, it was just shadowing, and listening to people, and looking in and watching a lot of YouTube videos to see, okay, how people present and watch a lot of TED Talks. Which is, which is very amazing for me. And, and also, on the topic, I think, for instance, [Redacted] been quite a role model in terms of the way in which you present stuff. And now we are in the situation that both of us share lots of ideas about okay, we need to be aggressive on these three slides, and it's soft on these next slide, etc, etc, to be able to convey the message strongly. And we started to watch a lot of, as I said, Ted Talks. It was, it was amazing, because a lot of those talks, they don't have slides or anything, 99% of them, they are not going through slides, which I, which I found really cool. So, it hasn't been a formal thing, going back to your question, it hasn't been a, like a formal training, or me asking someone on this. It's been more about listening to someone and say, oh, how brilliant they are, their phrasing, the story or how, and then the other one, which has been really helpful to be honest. It's, it's [redacted] with his storytelling, with his use of storytelling frameworks, and the whole stories, etc, etc. Because he's been delivering storytelling for a couple of years now, firstly, it was to, through, towards our SME, and now to most of our clients. And he teaches us as well, in my module, he teaches the role of storytelling in [redacted]. And he's got a really nice framework, Hero's Journey framework, etc, which you actually develop his story, or what you want to say. So that's been really instrumental as well. But again, it hasn't been a formal, formal type of professional development, if you want.

Paul Jones 29:09

And you mentioned earlier as well about professional qualifications, or training, at Aston. So are you familiar with Advance HE and fellowship, and senior fellowship, so are you a fellow or senior fellow then in terms of your role?

DBA16 29:24

I am a [redacted], I should go, I should go for the, for the [redacted] one, but I'm a [redacted] of, yeah.

Paul Jones 29:34

Did you do that course at Aston then, to get the [redacted], did you do the [redacted]?

DBA16 29:40

No, when I was doing my PhD back in [redacted], um, we had like a PG Cert type of thing. We, I went through that for a year and then what happened was, because it was very close to, to the, to the completion of my PhD, I took it in the wrong year. I took it in the final year, because it was too close to my completion, and then I got a job. Then I went through it, but I couldn't submit the three or four assignments. So when it, when I came, when it came to Aston I went through the details with, what's the name of the unit that runs this? CLIPP? Education team? Yeah. And then they said, I think it was Julian, who said, yeah, that's fine. You don't need to go through any courses. But you can develop your applications with a mentor. So I had a, I had a, I had a mentor, and I developed it. I think it took me about, a couple of months. So it was, it was a formal, strong informal relationship that I had with a mentor, my mentor, and I went through it, I had [redacted] as my second mentor as well. I had lots of questions, etc. So I went through the training somewhere else. And I went through the, this, this mentorship type of thing at Aston and submit it. And I got actually lots of comments from the panel, which I had, which they gave me the opportunity to address them and resubmit it.

Paul Jones 31:17

So do you use their framework at all then, so the professional skills framework? The UKPSF? Does that ever enter your head now in terms of thinking about your teaching practice? And what you're doing? Does that, is that useful at all these days, or not?

DBA16 31:32

Not hugely. I would say when I was close to the application, it was I think, four or five years ago. Um, yes, I was thinking about it. Yeah, but a lot of things come, come, come your way. Which is, which is, which is not good actually, with you saying that? Because it was a really nice framework anyway, and very much applicable framework. But to be honest, if I'm honest, no, I haven't thought about it past couple of years now.

Paul Jones 32:02

On the research side, as well, there are frameworks that exist on the research and development side, which can be applicable both to students and people who are progressing their careers at different levels. So if we took the Vitae one, do you ever use that? Or do you use that Vitae framework for developing as a researcher?

DBA16 32:21

No, no, it was, it's been most, most of my, my, my career development has been around the learning from others, and learning by doing, type of things, like for papers, definitely learning by doing. And grant proposals as well, learning from learning by doing and, and learning from the failures, and the successes. So a lot of the experience on that has been from there. So, I don't know whether it's a good thing or a bad thing. But I, I've gone through it with less rigid and firm frameworks. It was mainly based on learning by doing it.

Paul Jones 33:07

You seem like an individual who's keen to learn anyway, and is quite self-reflective, and wanting to better your skills. So for you as an individual, I think it seems to work really well for you, developing those skills and continuing to put an emphasis on it. But naturally, there isn't part of the contract, for a Teaching and Research member staff that says, X amount of time is dedicated towards development, it isn't like a continuing professional development or CPD type aspect, like there is in some other sort of professional areas. Nothing says oh, you will spend X amount of time developing this art or you have to justify what you're doing. At the moment it's very much up to the individual and whether they're interested in doing that or not then.

DBA16 33:49

And that takes away the, the synergy and standard, because you, if you're if, if, if the majority, let's say of the departments, go through a standard professional development, then there's more synergy on, in the processes that you work. And because of the lack of that, I guess, the, everyone will take, will go through their own processes, when it comes to like publication for instance, etc. Because we haven't had that type of, even at the, even at the departmental level, we could have something, in a sense, that these are like, for instance, these are different ways in which you can, we can write papers, these are the different frameworks that you can use, etcetera, etcetera, which is applicable to your exact discipline and exact topic. We haven't had it either, that's why, it's a very individual thing when it comes to research, and then the team that you've been working, either internal or external, and that seems to be coming a smaller and smaller, because then you realise, I work with this, this group, but I can't really work with them, because they don't get me, I don't get them, etc, you tend to start working with, with a group that you're most comfortable with, going forward, If it makes sense.

Paul Jones 35:18

I think there's a difference with the point you're making, there is a difference between learning process based stuff, which quite often, on a course that what will happen is, this is the process, and this is what you're supposed to do. There is an element of, what is it about the process that makes your life easier. or the things you learn on the job, or all those little bits that just make things the oil or grease is the honest engine work effectively, that allows us to shortcut bits, or know how to navigate certain pathways. So if we take publications, you know what the process would be, you're trying to get a publication by doing research, like the paper submitted to a journal, etc. There's lots of parts around that, that can make that go easier, or harder, depending on which way you do stuff. I don't know whether we're very good at passing on that type of detail between ourselves to make that process better.

DBA16 36:09

No, and I guess that's the, that's that, but also, I feel that you will become much more expert and experienced, if you have been and done it 10, 15, 20, 100 times. And it's the same and, and that's why, for instance, the, sometimes you see similar names coming out from the same journals, because they're getting comfortable with the process of the journal, with the ways in which the reviewers actually review with the editor, et cetera, et cetera, some people are saying, sometimes it is, but some people are saying, oh, it's becoming a politics, and family, and friends. But to be honest, we usually go like three or four journal outfits, because we, we've, we've got the experience with those. And the experience, it come out of the fact that we've had some success, and lots of failures, and learn from that. And that's the same when it comes to grant proposals as well. I mean, you have to be, it's different when it comes to proposals because you want to apply, or chase, whatever opportunities that come your way, but you know that you're better, like, I'm better with [redacted] than [redacted] is, but he's brilliant with [redacted], more than I am. And because of, because of the ways in which we work in the past, and because of the processes and the, the, it's very much framed around the outlets, you would learn it by doing it, you can take someone else's, so I had a, I had a training for the department's through, and then the school, through, through Ronnie, for the [redacted] grant. I could take everyone through, and it was three or four rounds, I took, I could take everyone through the process, what's important, what needs to be done, what shouldn't do etcetera, etcetera. But when it comes to the nitty gritty stuff, you have to do it yourself, to be able to learn how to do it, I would say. And maybe that's one of the reasons that makes it a little bit harder to have a professional development training, at least for, for part of the research activities that you do, does it make sense to you?

Paul Jones 38:39

Um, yeah, it does make sense. And I think that professional training can take all types of forms and development can as well. I think you're right, there's so many subtleties involved in different funders, and the way you approach things, it's very hard to put a course, or an activity, in place that will teach you everything that allows you to do everything possible. It's like the, like the description of you becoming more the expert on [redacted] and [redacted] more the expert on [redacted]. And you have found your, almost like your place in the world, and what you're becoming the expert on. You can still share ideas,

and help you develop each other's grants, by picking out things that could be better. But based on your experience, what I don't see sometimes is this sharing of knowledge, as well as it could be done. Because I think being a, becoming a researcher, and the way we develop people for the PhD into becoming academics, we train them to be independent researchers...

DBA16 39:34

Yeah...

Paul Jones 39:34

... and then we say, once you've become an independent researcher, then you need to be collaborative, and work with others, and understand what else is going on, without giving them the framework to do that properly...

DBA16 39:43

Exactly...

Paul Jones 39:44

... and take things like networking, for instance, there's so many academics I've seen that don't seem to have the right skills or ability to go and make connections and make the, join up the dots on how they could be useful, or how you could work together then.

DBA16 39:57

That, yeah, you hit it on the nail. We are not trained, or, and we are not training, our doctoral students and postgraduate students to work in, in, in a collaborative way, as you say. And then when they, they've got a job, then one of the criteria would be okay, show us how your research has been collaborative. And the problem, another problem with that is, that you have people that are not trained to do collaborative research, who've been sitting in the panel as well, saying, so if you demonstrate that I've done most of my research has been, been in collaboration, they criticise that as well. Which is, which is weird, because say, okay, what's your, what's been, what is your contribution, you can say to, to a degree that, what your contribution has been, but it's a collaborative research, it's a, it's a team that it's delivered this. And so it's, it's, it's a huge mix, that's why you see a lot of academics, you see them everywhere, that they, as they say, they're sitting there, in their ivory tower, they write papers, papers, papers, and that's why as you said, they're not good at networking, and that's why we, for instance, we struggled when we were looking for contacts for QS, for instance, like was it two years ago, that only a couple of us could provide some contacts, etc. So, first of all, we, we are not training, we're not training, but when it comes to the promotion, we are pushing for a collaborative, but again, it goes back to the people who run the panel, which don't understand the collaborative research, and then start asking, what's been your contribution? So there is a lot of mismatch here, I would say.

Paul Jones 41:54

Yeah, I'm interested as well, have you had any experience outside of academia then, in terms of jobs, or doing different things that, a) that you've had? b) has it been useful for you to bring the skills back into higher education that you've learned elsewhere? If you have got those experiences.

DBA16 42:09

Yeah, I mean, when I was doing my, so I did, I did my first degree in [redacted], then, I think was [redacted], when I got my degree. And then I stopped working in a, in an, in a [redacted] company. We were doing lots of projects, with like fleet management type of thing, type of project. And I was part of a team, like [redacted] manager, something like this, for a couple of years, and then I started my [redacted], etc. And then I came to England to do my, my, my, my [redacted], and then doctorate, etc. Um, it was very helpful, in a sense, that I learned a lot of the processes, and practices, and framework for project management, which I can and I've been applying it to research as well, I've tweaked it, I've customised it a lot, but in terms of keeping the budgeting, and keeping the budget, type of thing, timeframe,

timeline, and, and the entire project manager, and a little bit of people management as well. Most of the, most of the positive feedback that we usually get from grant proposal that we submit are around those things, they are less worried about people management, budget, timeframe and timelines. Most of the criticism is around this word [redacted], anyway, that was the, that was the framework of practice, I could really bring it on that I've been using it a lot to be honest.

Paul Jones 43:54

So, do you think then, that that background you mentioned, has that bolstered your ability to write good grant applications and made you more likely to be successful then, because you've got those things in place, and can clearly articulate that, and weave it into the narrative about how you will manage projects and that money is in a safe place, to put it in your hands?

DBA16 44:15

I think it's part of it, it's not the entire, it has helped, definitely. As you know, it's a big, I think it's about like a third of the application review is about money and people management, etc. We usually get ticked off from that. And I guess that's, that's been really helpful knowing my previous experience. So I would say yes. Again, we could have, for instance, professional development courses or something around project management, for instance, to be able to help others as well in this sense, but yeah, I would say I agree it has been helping. It's not the entire reason for the success, the successes that I've had, but it's definitely been playing a big part of it, I would say.

Paul Jones 45:06

The thing is, with any grant proposal or application you do, you're, it is such narrow margins about who gets selected, their ability to articulate those areas, could be that little bit that pushes you above the other people there, because if you have all got quality research, and you've all got good things in place as a structure, it'd be those differences that can actually just push you ahead of all the other applicants then, so I think it's really important, and while we could train people after the fact about, so I don't think we do a good job of that either, but we could train people after the fact of winning to say these are the things you need to do to manage people, and to manage budgets, but if we pushed that further forwards, and they could weave that into applications, it might increase our chances of winning more bids for all the ones that go in.

DBA16 45:51

It's, yeah, it's a very good point, at, sometimes I come across papers, or articles, or grant proposals and I wonder how beautiful they have been written, how do, how do people write like this? I mean, English is my second language to be fair, but at least I've learned, in terms of academic writing, to try and I've learned, for the past [redacted] years now. But again, sometimes some of the, some of these grant proposals that I review now, I said, they, they're very simple. But the story is so beautiful, that you wonder how do they write like this. Um, one, one of the exam, one of the things that [redacted] and I, I think learned a lot as well, was when we were writing a piece for The Conversation. Um, it was Matt Warren, I think it was his name, the chap who helped us to, he, he wrote the piece with us, and then he came to Aston twice, on the basis of like a one-to-one type of, one-to-one type of education or teaching, learning etc. with us, in terms of, instead of using this word, use this, instead of using the arrangement of words in this way, do it this way. I think it was grateful, it was, it was great. Also, also, I forgot to mention [redacted], as well, in terms of the media training, but we got help from him, for this [redacted] project that we're doing, because we wanted to, we went through an exercise, that, we got the advisory board and a couple of senior researchers to understand, okay, after the, after the, at the end of this project, what do we want to see as the headline in newspapers?

Paul Jones 47:42

Yeah...

DBA16 47:43

...and then, so we got [redacted] to help us. He facilitated that workshop. And it was brilliant. He took us through different, the elements of headlines, et cetera. And what we are not, for instance, good at, which has been helping us as well, is to come up with catchy titles for our proposals, catchy, catchy, first paragraph, type of thing, because that's, you either win or lose, on those things as well, sometimes...

Paul Jones 48:10

Yeah...

DBA16 48:11

...so, yeah, I mean, it's, it's, we don't do it much, in terms of the training. We don't, you know, we don't have much on those either. And I think, when I was talking to one of the folks who was, was doing it, I told him, like you wrote this beautifully. He's at LSE. And it was like, how do you do it? And it's just, the thing is all he does is writing and reading books and writing. And, so if you can imagine, like 80%, 90% of his time, and the way he does it, that I, again, [redacted] and I are writing a [redacted], which is 99% done, on [redacted], the way in which we, it's a different style to a journal publication. It's a style for me that I wasn't familiar with. I didn't know anything about how to write a [redacted], etc. And I didn't have any training. I didn't know whether there is any training for that or not. The way I trained myself was I was writing every day in the morning before writing a page or writing a paragraph. I was, I picked two [redacted]. [redacted], was one of them. I was right, I was reading a page of it, because I really liked the style of that book. I was reading one or two pages, and then writing what it wanted to write, and trying to follow the, the narrative, it is a totally different book that one, but to try to help me navigate sentences, navigate the word arrangements, etc. That's how I kind of train myself, yet to be read and seen to, in a way, whether it's, how good it is. But that's the way I think that I tried to educate myself in writing a academic / non academic piece, I would say.

Paul Jones 50:04

It sounds like you've acclimatised yourself then, doesn't it, you know when you, when you first get in the bath, and it might be really hot, or you're in cold water, and you just get used to it, and you're immersing yourself in it, and then once you've prepared, then you can start swimming or doing whatever then, and that seems like a really good way to do it, to find a way that works for you just to get familiar again with the style, just to get your head in the right mindset for doing that, is there, it seems to be a big difference then between the writing style for journal papers, which is how we tend to train PhD students, how we train people for the process of becoming an academic, to then be able to write things like books, or in The Conversation, or case study, there is these different styles of writing, we never equip staff with the skills to do that necessarily that well, we just expect them to do it.

DBA16 50:53

And we expect them to do it, but it is, it is really hard, to be honest, to switch from one style to another, you get confused. And so you've got journal publications, you've got book and book chapters. You've got grant proposals. And you've got, well, industry outlet like you've got, you've got public outlets or conversations, which I haven't got any expertise in that. And then you've got, so we are developing these, as we call it, [redacted], which is like taken out of our research, we change the language to be relevant to [redacted]. And that's the fifth, that's another outlet that you need to write about. And it is really hard. We've got [redacted] postdocs now, recruited on an [redacted] grant. One just finished his PhD in [redacted], one [redacted], one I think [redacted] years after his PhD, and we've asked them to write what we refer to as research notes, which is the foundation of these [redacted]. And, the, we've gone, what, like 10-12 rounds, and it's new for them. It's because they have not done it, first of all, they hadn't been asked to do it well, when they were doing their PhD, and they, they're not equipped. We had the same experience with a couple of internal or external academics and we wanted to write some of these mini guides with them, it was far off when it came to language, it was either too academic or too loose, to put it in front of executives. And again, I think we've learned a little bit by, by doing it to be

honest. And there's danger here as well, that you lean towards one of these outlets and one of these types of writing and then, I remember one of the feedback, one of the reviewers, a couple of months ago that I got, that the reviewers saying that it was a journal, it's still under review, it is a journal publication, with one of the reviewers saying that the writing style is too relaxed. It's like you're writing a book, or you're writing for, for, for a magazine. And I was like, oh, so there's a danger here as well, because you lose momentum in there, as well. So it was interesting to reflect when, when that person commented on this. So yeah.

Paul Jones 53:27

Yeah, because if it all comes down to knowing your audience, then being adaptable to understand what their drivers are, what they're expecting, because if you take the example of [redacted] and his storytelling, that would create some great circumstances, but it wouldn't necessarily suit the journal publications sector, where they're expecting a very different style of writing, much more hard hitting, punchy, factual type of this is what happened, this is what we did, these were the things we discovered, etc. Rather than, take a seat, come and relax while I tell you this story about...

DBA16 54:00

Yeah, yeah...

Paul Jones 54:02

...it's a very different style then, isn't it, and the expectations are very different, from what they're expecting.

DBA16 54:06

Very much, and then they, the rate of switching between one to another. Sometimes it's really great and you, in the morning, you're working on journal paper, in the afternoon, you might want to work on a piece for The Conversation. Any, it takes a lot of time. For me it is, personally, I find it really difficult to switch between one to another. So I can't, if I write some, if I write for two different outlets, two different audiences in one day, both will be terrible. So I need to give a space, and think about something else, or do a bit of teaching, and then office hours, and then go back to the moment. It is difficult to change, as well.

Paul Jones 54:46

So, when you're thinking about your collaborators and who you work with, do these types of thoughts ever enter your head in terms of right, well I need to pick people around me that, I might pick some that's good at doing public outlet writing, that's the knows the research area, that's one skill I'm going to bring into my little team of people, you might be a bit of a writing expert. Another one might be the front facing media person that can talk about your research, might be excellent. It's very rare to find individuals who can master all those...

DBA16 55:17

Everything...

Paul Jones 55:18

...different things that have been expected. I've never, I don't really see people thinking strategically, about the teams they place around them and to bring those types of skills in then.

DBA16 55:29

I think that's, that's, yeah, spot on. It's just dependent on where you are in your academic career as well. Early on, I had to collaborate with whoever was coming my way in terms of knowing a little bit of the topic, interested in what I was doing, etc, and more senior than me, etc, etc. As we started to develop, and know, getting to know [redacted], etc, etc, and the topic, getting some authority on the topic, then you can be very much selective on how you want to work. First of all, you've got a bigger pool to select. And then you can select who you want to work with, mechanically, so you usually go with

someone who is, who's good at, was good with the, for instance, for grant proposals, who's good at, who is good with the councils, someone who they know, track record, etc, as you said, someone who can, so when we get picked up, we get picked up because of our industry exposure and our authority on the topic. So for instance, we work with a Prof down in [redacted], which we've got a couple of projects with him. He's very good at the politics side, he knows how this paragraph should be phrased, to get to the reviewer, etc. And ultimately, we will usually get people who are really good at, as you said, the, the impact side as well, writing the impact side, etc. We struggled hugely when we were writing our [redacted], at the beginning, which we found out yesterday that it's been scored [redacted] formally, apparently, our [redacted], but we struggled hugely. I think you remember well, that we went with a consultant first, he didn't do a good job. And then we did with, with, with [redacted], etc. With that., and that's because, that's because it's different skills, they need to have, to be able to communicate the outcome and [redacted].

Paul Jones 57:46

I think with the [redacted], in particular, what I noticed from last time is that, and I used the description yesterday, [redacted] in the past has quite often been treated as the cherry on the cake, once you've built your research up and done stuff, but what we found last time was people scrabbling around to get the information that justifies what they've done, in terms of [redacted], and the evidence that backs up the story that they are telling about [redacted], whereas really [redacted] should be mapped out right at the start, part of what you're trying to achieve, and almost like that example you gave, you want to know what you're trying to achieve, you work from the start, and know what you put in place to both measure things and record things, as well as doing the research, and then you can work with [redacted] all the way through, then it becomes really easy to write, because you have got all the evidence and the journey, then, but last time was a case of, we know what story we want to tell, but then you're scrabbling around to find the evidence to backup those stories.

DBA16 58:40

Yeah, very much. And the, the, the quick point in this, when it really comes to [redacted], we used to have like a different document called [redacted], which is now combined with the case for support. But most of the applications I review these days is just about the, they either explain the [redacted] stating the research would have, or most of them they forget, okay, the actual pathways, how you've achieved that, or how you will achieve it as well. So, yeah, in a sense, that it's a new game anyway. And it's the past three or four years that we have started to focus a lot on [redacted], rightly so...

Paul Jones 59:24

Yeah.

DBA16 59:25

...but we're not very well equipped., even the, even the, the big Profs that we work with sometimes, and then, you really work on [redacted], and they send you something, and they haven't really got what the, what the [redacted] really means, to be honest. So, yeah.

Paul Jones 59:43

There's definitely some work to be done on helping people to understand more about what [redacted] is about...

DBA16 59:51

Yeah.

Paul Jones 59:51

I think for me, in particular, about how you can translate, the excellent research into making meaningful differences to people's lives, then... ...where I can see people struggling with, how they translate what can be excellent research, they don't really see how it's going to make a difference on a day to day or month to month for people out in the world.

DBA16 1:00:00

Yeah. Yeah, and then there is the beneficiaries, yeah, the beneficiaries, that you know, your beneficiaries of your research, and then you need to, early on, when we were writing [redacted], we decided that we've got to go with like two or three measures, and then assess our research based on those two or three measures, which was wealth creation, job creation, and change of cultural attitude in a positive way. And then we assess everything based on that. And we wrote the story based on that. Sometimes, for most of the other research, it's not easy to identify those measures, to be able to tell your story, it is difficult, and some people who struggled more, in our department with the REF on that case, they were struggling with the, with the indicators and measures that they can [redacted], to be honest. So you're right. Yeah.

Paul Jones 1:01:02

I think part of that comes from, from what I've seen so far, part of the problem is that, if people haven't had experience working in organisations directly, or got different things, besides higher education experience, there's no real knowledge or ability to understand how things operate then in the real world. so therefore, for people like yourself, who've got experience of working in other places, and have had hands on experience of doing stuff, then you know, firsthand, how an organisation operates, then you could imagine how somebody could impact it, to make it work better. When you're quite far removed from that, have no experience whatsoever, it's really hard to be able to imagine how that works in practice.

DBA16 1:01:43

Absolutely. It's just, yeah, absolutely. It's just, unless you've worked with industry, hands on, go and see the like, factories, the businesses, the processes, people and spend time, live with them, it is really hard to, first of all understand impact, and second, these days, your research become meaningless, because, because unless someone takes it, and apply it, and work on it, for me, these days, if my paper doesn't get any citation, but gets picked up by an executive or middle manager of a business, and they apply it, and they see some benefit out of it. It's much more, it's huge for me, than getting citations, of course, it's good to get citations, don't get me wrong, but it's, for me these days, is just making difference in manufacturing, in industrial businesses, rather than trying to do, trying to show who I am in the academic world, to be honest, I want to make difference in the real world. At least these days, we'll see what comes.

Paul Jones 1:03:02

But that's not necessarily the reason why a lot of people traditionally have got into academia, is it, because I am like you, and the reason I like the DBA, is because it's got to lead to some impact at the end of it. Whereas a lot of people got into academia, to research an area they really love, and wanted to contribute towards, but they didn't really see the importance of that translating into meaningful action or, or change out in the real world about what it could lead to. And certainly, if you haven't started your research with a problem you're trying to then resolve, it's really hard then to backwards match what you're doing into making a meaningful difference to people's lives, because you don't know what the problems are, and you're trying to always find this match and say, oh, I might be able to target my research into this, or this area. It isn't as naturally a nice flow through saying, here's problem X, if I do this research, we can find a solution, here is solution Y, we can implement it, we can measure it, and we can see the differences and whether it's positive or negative, then.

DBA16 1:04:04

I feel that we need to have a spectrum of people. I mean, you've got people who, on the left side, they work in the ivory tower, write papers, papers, papers, conceptual, we need, we still know that we still need those people, and we've got people who are on the very far end, they are just, all they write is for FT or for The Conversation, and those type of things. And I think, the way I see myself, I'm hybrid, in the middle, but I think we need, we need a spectrum of all. And there's still lots and lots of people, especially within social sciences, that they only do conceptual stuff. Because they need to move the

discipline forward, in a way. In my world, I don't think we can move the discipline forward, if it's only conceptual, you need to see how it's been, especially for like operations management, service operations, if it doesn't get applied, if it doesn't solve a problem of today's world, then it's meaningless. And that's a problem with a, with a lot of disciplines, it is difficult to see an immediate, or not even in like a mid to short term impact in businesses, so lots of like, I don't know, marketing, strategy, a lot of small disciplines in those areas, it is difficult for them to see. So, so it's not a criticism of them. But it's, I think it's the, it's the topic and discipline that you're involved in as well, to be honest.

Paul Jones 1:04:04

Yeah, uh, I think you are right there. Um, one of the things I wanted to question you about as well was, we've talked about [redacted] and stuff, external things like REF, or TEF, or KEF, do they influence you on a regular basis, is there a priority, is it that you get driven by these overarching things that are in your awareness? Are they a real key driver for you, or is it just something that's in the background?

DBA16 1:06:08

No, the big, especially the REF, not in terms of publications, because we've, we've managed to create a, an engine, for a better phrase, for our publications. So it's an ongoing thing about ideas because of the exposure that we've got to [redacted], and the capacity we've got. So I'm not, we are not thinking about REF as a priority for publication. But for impact case, yes. Because of different things, because first of all, internally, we want to demonstrate that our research has had impact, usually. But secondly, that would also the, the, the [redacted] we wrote, we've used it in so many different ways, as well. So we've got lots of quotes, and sort of from businesses, and we've actually used it as a benchmark for ourselves, what have we done in the past five years? So it, the, it [redacted], there's okay, we've done this, how can we expand it? How should we extend it? What was the, what were the limitations? What did we miss, etc, etc. So it's always, [redacted], always a priority. And because of the evidence, for instance, that we need to capture, but also we've, as I said, we've seen it, not, not just an exercise for the REF, or for the university, it's an exercise that we can share with other companies and say look, this is the impact we've had, for instance. So it's definitely right in the agenda.

Paul Jones 1:07:47

Is there any other external factors that influence professional development, do you think, in how you direct your time and energy?

DBA16 1:07:56

Maybe the landscape of the, the, the context that we're in, or the landscape of funding as well. They will definitely impact we, we wrote this proposal on [redacted], we had people who are specialised in [redacted] and we've got [redacted], [redacted], from Warwick and [redacted], they were both ex Aston people. So we weren't aware of too much and, on the [redacted] last week, we had a one day training course for ourselves, so they were teaching us on what do we exactly mean by [redacted]. We thought that we know a lot. But to be fair, I knew like 10% and [redacted] helped us greatly to understand, what do we mean by [redacted]? What do we mean by [redacted]? What do we mean by all the data development? So we had that and also we had a training course on [redacted], what is it? How do we measure it? So, then we step back and say, wow, this was a great way of start learning about new stuff from the peers, so that would, the landscape I think, the landscape of the society where we're heading. The, the grand challenges that we're facing down, definitely influence the training that I feel that we, I need, to be able to connect my topic to those and see how [redacted] could actually address or, or somehow impact, did that answer your question?

Paul Jones 1:09:46

Yeah, I think so. One of the interesting things you mentioned there was about the use of internal knowledge and skills. So we talked earlier about people management, and financial management, and project management for instance, we have departments in [redacted], in [redacted], we have a [redacted] department, I don't see much cross referral of experts coming to guide and shape what can be beneficial for the other departments to learn about various things in those areas then. So, for instance,

[redacted] management, there must be things that our [redacted] department could pass on that can be really useful in terms of [redacted] managing projects, and getting the best out of others. There could be [redacted], or [redacted] information, or skills, that could be passed on in terms of [redacted] management, either from departments or central services, I don't see that much happening in terms of thinking, we have experts in these areas, why don't we utilise them to pass on some of those things to colleagues?

DBA16 1:10:41

No, I absolutely agree. I don't think we are strong when it comes to cross-department, cross-schools, cross-colleges. Definitely not strong. And I don't know why, but, but, and I don't know how well other institutions do this. But, we definitely, I mean, [redacted] years, couple of proposals, couple of grants that I've got, this is the first time that I'm working with someone internally, which is [redacted]. Which is, which is, at the end of day, it's a shame because they were there. But either we didn't, we and, we knew what they're doing, etc, etc., but we haven't done much on that front. We've got lots of synergy with [redacted]. And we've tried to be as open as possible, for instance, one of the, one of the issues with [redacted], as soon as they run, are [redacted], and we've got a [redacted]. So we tried to present a couple of times, and we, we tried to give some incentive in terms of, we apply for these huge grants, you can have a postdoc, etc. I don't know, we didn't have so much uptake. It may, could it be because of the other responsibilities that they've got, that we don't get that much of an appetite from them. I don't know, to be honest, but they're, I don't think there's much of an incentive, when it comes to cross collaboration. We've started doing it, but we, we could and we should be more rigorous with that I would suggest.

Paul Jones 1:12:24

I think time is a barrier that comes up a lot for people, and people have some good ideas about what would be good to do, but then it often drops down the list because of time and the pressures of other things that, that are more, more demanding. But also, it'd be nice to create opportunities for this to happen, a bit more naturally and easily for people, because it seems to be a more complicated situation at the moment, for people to find the right connections and for people to dig into...

DBA16 1:12:50

Yeah...

Paul Jones 1:12:50

...if there was ways that we could make that an easier process, that might actually help gain some traction for these things to happen.

DBA16 1:12:59

And it's, well, it could be, I think we've got, I don't know whether we tried a couple of, I think we have it in a website that, they like with an expert directory, or something, that you could search, I don't think that's been working very well, anyway. So if you wanted to do a keyword search around, I don't know, some types of [redacted] frameworks, to see whether there's anyone in the school that is doing it, I don't think you would be able to find anyone, anyone that, and the other thing for cross collaboration sometimes is the different incentives that different disciplines will follow. So for some disciplines, writing a book chapter means a lot. When it comes into our discipline, it doesn't really count for instance, we do a lot of book chapters with others. It's a, it's different incentives that people have got, and also time, and also finding the right person, a platform to be able to find the right person I think, is hugely lacking I would suggest.

Paul Jones 1:14:04

Yeah, I would agree with that. I think that's all the questions I've got, is there anything else you want to add at the end before we stop?

DBA16 1:14:11

No, I think it was, it was very interesting for me to reflect on, on the whole professional development processes, and also the topics, and again, going back to my earlier point that we, as you said like, 30 to 40% of most of the teaching and research contracts, are around teaching ,and we don't have that much of professional training on those, which is, which is a shame but no, nothing else to add.

Paul Jones 1:14:41

I am going to stop the recording now then.

Appendix 20: DBA17 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA18

Paul Jones 00:02

So I was transcribing as well. Great. So we've started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study, entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship, performing professional development from the bottom up and talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour and we've scheduled one point five hours to make sure it comes from natural end, the interview is semi structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that you wish to explore. But you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep it within the broader bounds of my research, though the idea is that I do this the least number of times with the least number of questions and interruptions, we have 14 days, or you have 14 days from the date of this interview, to request that it needs to be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me. The details are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed, and all links to you as an individual, for example, personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team, that team is on the document participant information sheet. The interview is considered low risk, if you do need to stop the discussion for a break or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand when you need to stop. If you would like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate that we should move on, just ask directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress, or if I'm feeling distressed myself. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions at the start. And then we'll begin by exploring your experiences regarding professional development. This will be an interview record of your DBA interview. Please confirm you understand the information I've given you and you're happy to proceed with the recorded interview.

DBA17 02:15

Yes, I'm happy to proceed.

Paul Jones 02:17

Great. And do you understand how to withdraw your data so you can email me directly?

DBA17 02:21

Yes, yes. It's all clear. Thank you. Great.

Paul Jones 02:24

So first closed question. Could you confirm what school you work in?

DBA17 02:29

I work in [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:32

Right? And can you confirm your gender please?

DBA17 02:35

I am a [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:37

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA17 02:39

Yes.

Paul Jones 02:41

Great. Two more questions here. How would you describe your career level out of the three? Early career? Mid career? Senior career?

DBA17 02:50

Mid career.

Paul Jones 02:51

Great. And then last question here is, could you confirm which age bracket you're in? So there's a number of different choices. There is 25 to 34? There's 35 to 44? There's 45 to 54? Any of those correct so far?

DBA17 03:08

Yep. [redacted].

Paul Jones 03:11

Great. So we can start them by exploring your ideas about professional development. What's important to you about your professional development? How would you view it?

DBA17 03:22

What are the elements of my professional development that are important?

Paul Jones 03:27

Yes. What do you think is important if you're going to develop professionally, in your career, what do you think is important about it? How do you view it?

DBA17 03:35

Okay, so first of all, that I enjoy the way, the what I am learning. So because this is the first, the first reason why we decided to have an academic career that is we love the content of the work that we do. And so the thing that my development has to be enjoyable and enriching to me at a personal level is the very, probably, the most important factor. Then the second thing is that what I gain is valuable from a career perspective. So I want to gain some content that is that is relevant, okay, relevant and effective for the prosecution of my career. And, number three, it's important that professional development does not interfere with my other working commitment and with my work life balance. So I don't want that professional development is done, for instance, during my weekend, during my free time, so there should be really space for doing these things within the working time if my employer requires me to go through a professional development process.

Paul Jones 04:49

Yeah, that makes sense. So what you've said there, the enjoyment of it is really important to you so that your job gives you joy in terms of learning. You've also mentioned there about the space and time that you should be given to be able to develop then.

DBA17 05:04

Yep.

Paul Jones 05:04

So on that last point, I think that's quite an important one. So, do you feel like you're, you've got enough time to develop? Or are there barriers to you having that time at the moment?

DBA17 05:16

Well, the thing is that the we academics tend to have quite a busy schedule, so our careers are driven by, ultimately, by papers and grants. So I've just been promoted to [redacted]. And I think that what drove my promotion was the fact that I bring a considerable amount of money, and the fact that I publish very well. So I don't think that I get I got a promotion, because I've gone through the professional development process, and I attended the [redacted], and all these things. And so as a consequence, what they say is that we academics try to maximise the time that we are located to projects, but at the end to... to papers, so funded projects and papers. And we kinda have to try to find ourselves the time to go through these professional development opportunities. So I've been through several developing opportunities in Aston, but it was a bit difficult to make a space for these within my... my agenda within my diary. So and I think the reason is that the department is happy to do these things. But I have not seen the mechanism that officially recognises the fact that you are going through these and so you're located a specific amount of time to this professional development activity. Because for instance, in in our school, we don't have a workload balance model. So there is no mechanism for doing that. So you end up some time postponing these things, because you don't find the time for doing them.

Paul Jones 07:10

So from what you saying there, it's a case of there are opportunities that exist, but they don't take things away from your workload to allow you to do them. They say you can do these things, but it's fitted on top of everything else, you're supposed to do then.

DBA17 07:24

Exactly

Paul Jones 07:24

Rather than think I'll take away one thing, so then you can do this other thing, it is the case of...

DBA17 07:29

Exactly, exactly. Especially if we talk about teaching opportunity. If you want to me to develop as a teacher, you should discount my teaching load proportionally. Because otherwise, everything is to the detriment of the time dedicated for research that is already scarce. And then the result is that you don't publish paper and you don't grow as a career. But you know, the... our employers know very well that papers are the top of our concerns. And so they know that we will protect ourselves, our time, that time. So they tend to maximize the time that they are located with the with the teaching. So you have this teaching load, and we don't discount that you are you're supposed to do these things on top of this.

Paul Jones 08:13

And that balance then between, in an academic contract, there's usually a balance between teaching, research, and then some administrative type duties and expectations. Is that a balance that is easy to find or is that particularly difficult, and if it is difficult, what, which way does that shift then because it's not usually a 50/50 balance between teaching and research.

DBA17 08:34

Yep. So my contract official is 50/50 balance between teaching and research. Yeah, so... and ... but see, in terms of since the reason the workload the model, what does it mean, 50/50 Teaching Research, is it in terms of time, is it in terms of results generated? Because in terms of income generated, I have many, many projects that buy beyond the 100% of my time. Okay, so, yeah, you see that the 50/50 split is already not there. But at the same time, I have a teaching load that is supposed to buy 50% of my time. So I think that workload model would really, really be helpful in making things explicit

and try to be more fair in the way in which the two things are balanced. So it's not really it's not simply something that we managed to keep in place this 50/50 percent balance.

Paul Jones 09:35

Yeah. And then I guess what you said earlier, even though you're trying to find this work/life balance, when all those things are being thrown at you, that sounds really hard to be able to not have to do extra work to get everything working as you want then.

DBA17 09:49

Yeah, and then you end up doing it out of personal passion, we will see these development opportunities. Some of them are really interesting, you know, and so you want to do it, you like it, you like reading or learning more. So you do these things because you love them. So that's the first factor that we consider this there. But it would be nice if an appropriate space is given to these things.

Paul Jones 10:14

Yeah. And so going back to your point about the grants and the publications then and being those are the most important factors that got you your promotion, do you think that Aston gave you skills to be able to do better in those areas? Or are those skills you brought with you to your role at Aston already?

DBA17 10:32

Sorry, I don't understand the question.

Paul Jones 10:35

So do you think when you look at your, you winning grants, and you doing publications, has Aston helped directly to improve those skills to help you or was that something you just had to learn yourself and talk to others? Or which way have you developed those skills?

DBA17 10:49

No, I got very good support from the university, both in terms of development and in terms of actual submission process application processes. So lots of support much, you know, much more compared to my previous university, that is, [redacted] and you know is a Russell Group. So you're expected there to be much more structured, just because of the size and the amount of resources that they have. But it's not the case at all. I found very good support in Aston.

Paul Jones 11:21

That's good to know. And it seems of your career level you describe yourself as mid career, in terms of developing your career further then, what type of things would help you, if there was courses, or activities, or mentorship or anything that existed that you had ideas on? What would help you now increase your ability to move up the ladder even further?

DBA17 11:45

So my current ambition is to become a Dean and a Pro Vice Chancellor. And while I know very well now, what I have to do in terms of research, and in terms of teaching, I didn't get any training in terms of leadership, it would be nice to get this type of training. So because at some point, you are a you are asked to take some managerial roles, but without having never really done this type of job without having experience in this because you know, you are I come from a pure academic career. So PhD, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Reader, and I lead researchers, but then you start to leading things that are bigger, like lead a Research Centre, lead a potential department, it would be nice to get some training on leadership, and it would be nice to have the opportunity of assisting senior members of the university in doing their job. So for instance, if we say that the Dean wants an assistant with the objective with the idea of backing him in the job, helping him in some tasks and being exposed to what are the contents of the work is. So these in terms of type of training that we get, that could also be done by some external organisations, because it's not that everything has to be done in Aston, we could buy externally the the, in some courses, some training from external companies that are specialised in

doing that. There is these thing of the mentorship but I don't find it helpful so... I think it's a waste of time. And because you know, you you meet a mentor once a, once every four months, you have a conversation, quite general, a half an hour about how things are going, you get some general feedback, but that's not really how you develop so different... so, while the training is effective, the mentorship is not then apart from the training... so, another thing that would be helpful is to get the constructive feedback on the, on whether we are doing the right things to develop our career. So for instance, I want to be a Dean, I want to be a Pro Vice Chancellor, I would like to meet somebody that tells me, okay, so you should start doing these things, you should start taking these roles. You should read these things. And, I mean, I could sort these by myself, but it's you know, it will be much easier for the university as a more proactive HR, a more proactive something in place from HR, you know, doing this understanding what is your career ambition and building a training program accordingly, which also designs your, your job according to what is your aspiration. Now, we mentioned the fact that our contract is 50% teaching 50% research, but nobody has nobody adapts to this or builds this role or your tasks based on the direction that you want to take, you're supposed to do it yourself, it would be nice to build these in a kind of dialogue with the university.

Paul Jones 15:10

Okay, it's it comes back to your issue on time as well, as that, you know the things you could do but there's no time to do the latest stuff that looks after your own development, it is a case of these the work tasks they've got to do when you tick those off your list.

DBA17 15:25

Yeah

Paul Jones 15:25

You never get the time to put time into doing those nice things that could help you actually to, to move up. The other thing that springs to mind, is while you were talking there, is that it might be good to have a map of if you want to get to these types of roles, these are the types of experiences internally that can help and almost, like, put a map together where people could try and look for opportunities to develop them. But it's more clearly laid out in terms of these are all the different committees or leadership roles or things exist. And then you can almost put yourself either on a waiting list or have discussions with your manager about how you can move up into some of those roles then.

DBA17 16:01

Exactly, that's exactly what I have in mind here.

Paul Jones 16:05

So that makes a lot of sense. So in terms of one of the things that strikes me is quite a few people bring external experiences into the organisation and they benefit from having experiences elsewhere. Have you worked outside of HE at all? And if so, has that been beneficial?

DBA17 16:20

Well, I have a, let's say, a collaboration project with a [redacted].

Paul Jones 16:27

Right. Yeah, that sounds really good. So in terms of that opportunity then, I know that the university supported you. But did you have to find that opportunity yourself originally?

DBA17 16:28

So the agreement is that this [redacted] at [redacted], in exchange for my time that I spent in a company, and these gave me a direct exposure to the way in which the company operates. And this was an extremely positive experience. So I really learned a lot, especially in terms of leadership and project management, that are two fields that in a company are very, very important and in the university, they are not that that much, because, you know, in a company, we have a very, very strict deadlines,

sometime, that deadlines that are quite, you know, quite stringent, and you have to stick to them. And if you want to accomplish these things, you have to coordinate a team, and you have to get feedbacks. And you need to delegate and you need to do all these things. You know, dealing with a complex industrial project, while in university, you tend to work by yourself on your paper or with a team, but with deadlines that are kind of relaxed. So the thing is that what can go wrong, if you write a paper, they reject the paper, that's fine. You submit it again, the company, if you do something wrong, they you know, they come back to you and say now we lost half a million, what do we do? And so it's so it was an extremely positive experience. And saying, very pleased, that university gave me the opportunity of doing this, because it was quite something that required the approval of [redacted] and of [redacted] and of [redacted]. And they gave me this opportunity extremely positive from a professional development perspective, it also exponentially increased my, my value in the market. So the value of my CV since I have this is much, much broader and much, much higher. And it gave me a very big visibility apart from enabling my professional development. Yes. So it's, except, well, to be honest, I started working with this company to supervise student projects.

Paul Jones 18:41

Yeah.

DBA17 18:42

Then from there. The company said, why don't you work for us full time. And they [redacted]. But you know, I decided I want to be an academic. So I said, let's do this as a research project. So I brought this project to the university. And I had to create it myself, but within a context that is a part of the culture of Aston University that is a well, I would say, [redacted] there is a strong vocation for [redacted] integration. So it's just something that [redacted] always pushed us to do. It's something that [redacted] pushed us to do. And, you know, talk to [redacted], integrated with the [redacted], try to do apply the projects. So it's these environments that the culture created, that enables the creation of this opportunity. So I would say 50/50. 50 my ability in interacting, right way with the company, but the opportunity was really in the context of number one, freedom. Number two, vocation for good [redacted] integration.

Paul Jones 19:49

It is interesting because I think those types of relationships you can develop very much depend on the person and their skill set in terms of relationship management and opportunity spotting, I would I would say, so do you think that we could do more to help people to gain those skills, so others could benefit from that type of opportunity, because I think what you've done sounds great in terms of developing you and giving you different experiences. I wonder whether there's an opportunity there to try and hone people's skills to be able to be more effective at spotting opportunities, put themselves out there, and then realise those opportunities as well.

DBA17 20:29

Yeah, I think yes, the university is a, I mean, they allowed me to do this, but it required a lot of negotiation, a lot of approvals, contracting, so because the university tends to be protected with academics time, and at the beginning from, in some cases, I found some skepticism on the value of this type of work. So they said, why don't you use that time to write any [redacted] grant or why don't use that time to write the paper. But if we do these, we continue doing the same things that, you know, always generated the same results. And so, I think that there is a problem of relevance of [redacted] research in [redacted]. And the reason is, because the academics are measured based on papers published in journals, okay? So people tend to build their careers, to publish a paper in a certain journal not to publish something that has an impact. Yeah, that's a big problem. So unless you have a personal desire of doing these things, it's not convenient from a career perspective in engaging in, in [redacted] work, at least on a short term basis, because you know, theories are not long term basis, I can say yes I gained these schemes, the value of my CV has grown. But I could have published two papers more, I could have published two grants more I could have written two grants more. So university could make it easier for people to do the work in [redacted] in parallel with their academic work. And also, yep, so giving people the freedom to, to do that, to work with [redacted]. And also, if you want, recognising this type of

achievement as part of your academic results. So when we assess what is a, what we have to do to get promotion, in addition to papers, in addition to grants, it would be nice to assess in terms of [redacted] integration in terms of impact, what has [redacted] done. So I know that if we throw in words, so if they say, they say that all these things are definitely considered, they say that there is the suffering that we want. But what they think is that in practice, the leading criteria are still papers and grants. Because we are an academic institution and recreation of knowledge is seen as publication of papers. While I think that it's not necessarily the case, also, because these journals are becoming, you know, more and more prescriptive in the way in which you should do some things, it's really they're becoming real disconnected from what happens in the real world, and what happens in [redacted], they want these. So the comments that you get from reviewers regards how you write some sentences, or how you interpret the theory, does it really matters in practice, so I've seen excellent pieces of work, that are really impactful not being published, because the interpretation of the reviewer of the theory was not in line with the work the academic has done. And there was seen mediocre work being published in the top journals just because it was fitting of the boxes that were requested to be published. So I think that they these are dated indicators of performance for an academic and the world is moving in another direction, in terms of in terms of research that has to be impactful, in terms of teaching that, you know, as to target the way of learning of different individuals. So we should update the way in which we work as universities really.

Paul Jones 23:11

From what you've said there, the university and [redacted] in particular has a clear strategy of wanting to be impact focused. There seems to be, from what you said, and correct me if I'm wrong, there seems to be a difference between what the university or [redacted] has strategised versus the way it is measuring success of academics. You've said success and about grants and awards, but then the strategy would dictate that we are supposed to be impactful and making a difference to beneficiaries and making a difference out there. And those two things don't actually align to what you're saying.

DBA17 24:02

Yeah, it's true, so there is definitely a culture that is let's make a difference in reality. And there are some, because of this culture, there are some elements of, you know, initiatives of the university, the University that go in that direction.

Paul Jones 25:26

Yeah.

DBA17 25:26

But a very, very strong driver of professional development and of career building is your promotion is how you progress is... so when you go down to these things, my feeling is that that still the ... the old indicators are what mostly decides whether it will be promoted or not. But also, because you know, to some extent, your promotion is determined by your marketability, okay, so if I apply for a job out there, if I want to get a professorship out there, they will check the number one my previous number two my money, if they say, if I say, oh, but they have a very relevant relationship with this [redacted], I enabled them to deliver projects for these amount of million, they don't care. Yeah, but where are the papers, where are the grants. So to some extent, it's the market that dictates the way in which things are done.

Paul Jones 26:23

I guess from a certain external point of view on this, and thinking about the external stuff, and I'd be interested to hear your viewpoint on this. We have, like I mentioned to you previously, there are drivers like the REF, the TEF, and the KEF in terms of what we have to do for those things. The REF in particular over many years has become more impact focused, I get the impression from what you're talking about here, that the external environment would have to change to then make the university change what it values as important. And we can see that the REF has changed a bit over the last one we did to the one before where impact became more important, or until impact or other things take more priority

from external perspective, the university is not going to catch up, it looks like, would you agree? Or what are your thoughts on those external factors influencing the university?

DBA17 27:15

Yeah, they... they play a pivotal role, because the REF is the mechanism through which the government gives money to the university. So it's a key driver of the interventions that a university puts in place. And I agree with you that REF has changed, It's gone more into the direction of impact. But see, my perception is that it's a kind of exercise that is done to tick the boxes of the REF. So I want to write a REF impact case. So I try to build the evidence that I need to write a REF impact case. So the way in which this REF is, is done. They... it should be more of a dialogic process between the institutions and the REF, I don't know, the REF committee whatever, rather than we do the submission with some guidelines. So I see how everything poorly communicated, and not that effective so look now, we, there is a say that the next kind of cycle is 2028. Will it be 2028? We don't know. Where are the guidelines to write a REF impact case? We don't know. Of the REF impact cases that we submit to many have to be granted as three star, we don't know, we cannot have access to this type of information. What's the point? I think that this type of ambiguity is something that is designed on purpose, you know, they want for purpose to leave it with some degree of flexibility. Because they don't want people to go back at them and say, so why is this a 3 and not a 4? Why is this a four and not a whatever so... but in doing which it's designed is not that helpful to really structure my day to day work in such a way that it has an impact on industry. So you said a very good thing that there is a very real thing that there is a disconnect between what the strategy dictates and what happens in practice. So I agree that the REF goes in the direction of maximising the impact but the way in which it is designed, what it generates in practice is that academics will do the usual things papers and grants and then try to cluster these things in such a way that they tick the boxes to write a REF impact case.

Paul Jones 29:37

Yeah, that makes sense and do you think then, so thinking about local management, and how you are managed, and supported, do you think you're given enough support to make the most of your abilities and things like the my DC conversations or conversations you have with management, do you feel like they do a lot to support you? Do you feel like you don't get enough direction? And does professional development play a part in those discussions?

DBA17 30:04

So my DC conversation is not a useful thing, in my opinion. So it was much more useful, the conversation that I had one to one with my line manager, when but you know, this thing, that I have to declare my objectives in the thing, and then there is a review every year, I don't know, that was not that value adding in my opinion. Yeah, we're agreeing on a couple of KPIs that I always achieve what I had to declare. But it was much more useful to have a, to have that conversation with my line manager, but then in a conversation of half an hour, what can you really... I mean, how much support can it give to you. I mean, because of the amount of time, I mean, the my line manager with whom I had my one to one conversation was really, really skilled. And then amazing person, so it was [redacted], so when, so I was having my development conversations with him. I mean, I think the best colleague that I had in Aston was in terms of development, exemplary attitude, extreme profile that is also very similar to mine, because he comes from industry, and then he got this academic role and all the suggestions that he gave was, were really good and value adding but limited to half an hour. So, if this would have been a continuous process, where you review continuously what you're doing, and this person can give you some feedback, it's more of an ongoing discussion, then it's something that can have an impact, but with the conversation of half an hour where we agree on six KPIs, and then I achieved that KPIs. What is that? What what what, what difference does it really make?

Paul Jones 31:55

That half an hour you mentioned, is half an hour every year or half an hour every six months? Or which way does that work, then?

DBA17 32:02

My development conversation, there is a, an initial, initially you set the objectives, then there is a review in between. And then at the end, you discuss whether that objectives have been achieved or not.

Paul Jones 32:16

Yeah,

DBA17 32:16

See... yep

Paul Jones 32:18

What were you going to say sorry...

DBA17 32:20

Just to, just to say that, I always set objectives that are achievable for me. So it's kind of easy for me to say, I will publish two papers, I will get this grants, I will do these in terms of teaching and fix these roles in terms of citizenship. It ticked the boxes of doing it, but it becomes an admin task rather than something that really gives me some tools to develop professionally. So it's all the stuff that you get in terms of this inspiration of career do not come from institutionalised conversation, but more from the direct interaction that you have with people in telling you okay, in this job, you get exposed to this, in this job you do this, and so on.

Paul Jones 33:03

Yeah, and, and I think that's difficult, then, isn't it? Because what you want about those conversations is helping you to develop because I'd be interested to know what your, how your KPIs are formulated, because I'd imagine, they're probably things you'd be doing anyway. And I've seen examples before where your KPIs weren't around professional development, or how your career could be managed. It's more about just those key things you have to do in your job then, rather than the wider conversation of how can we make the best out of [redacted] and what's his future going to look like? And how do I get him there? It's more a case of what's he going to deliver over the next year that matches what university wants, is that right?

DBA17 33:43

Exactly. That's exactly it.

Paul Jones 33:45

So it probably needs to be thought around how we skill managers up to have those conversations, and what we put at the forefront of what those conversations should be about, rather than, I think you mentioned it, being a box ticking exercise previously. Because I think that's sometimes what it feels like is that process of I've done that now. I can do it in six months time and then have the review at the end of the year rather than it being something that really develops you as a person.

DBA17 34:11

Yeah, exactly.

Paul Jones 34:13

So culture wise then, generally, do you think the culture is quite supportive? So outside of your line management relationships, do you think generally the culture is quite supportive or trying to get people to where they need to be?

DBA17 34:25

Well, there are elements of positive elements and less positive ones. So the positive elements are the fact that the university is aligned with the [redacted], the fact that there is a lot of freedom so there is no micromanagement in Aston. And there is a lot of space to be positive and entrepreneurial, this is

something that I really really love, the the freedom okay, that I get in the department of doing my things. Of course, you know, I come from another place, [redacted], that was [redacted] University, that was extremely controlling okay, so every month there was a form that you had to fill with the activities that you've done outside, because they had a terror that you could work outside and take contracts away from the university. So it was a bit of a toxic culture while in Aston, everything is transparent and ... and the nobody takes anything from the university, but in a culture of freedom and possibility of being, you know yourself as develop your academic identity. And then also the, the human dynamics in the university are extremely positive. So the people we work with are amazing. And it's really a pleasure to come to the university and work, everybody tries to do the best for the institution, everybody tries to make the most out of the collaboration centre, the work that we do, there are elements that I don't like of the culture that are part of, you know, the way in which some processes have been designed. For instance, one thing is that the university is extremely bureaucratic. So while you are free to be entrepreneurial to do things, then you at some point, you crash against the wall of forms to fill, and authorisations to gain and the people to talk to, I say oh my God you see, I have a ... I really cannot take forms to fill, and boxes to tick and so these things because just just for an exam, I mean, you write the exam paper, there are two people checking it before one people checking it after then another check, then these, it's not the fact, it doesn't improve the quality of the assessment. So if we think of what is this for, it doesn't work for that. But I've been told we know that some of these things are excessive, but we need this fix for accreditation purposes, I I would say, really, I mean, I think that there are other ways of, you know, demonstrating to institutions that we are worth these accreditations without having to create these administrative monsters that, haha, that steal a huge amount of time. And also see if you want to do, see when there are forms to fill, also for the supervision of the students reports. And they tend to be bad at these things, so I'm always chased by colleagues, because I hate them. And I think that they take time away from the real work that has to be done. So from this point of view, see, [redacted] since they have more resources, it was much more effective, because there was somebody else doing these things for you. So you could focus on your, on your proper academic work, because there were other people taking care of all these tasks.

Paul Jones 37:48

So what you've said, then, there's an awful lot of things bureaucratically that are happening. Do you think then that over time, things have just increased and increased, and there needs to be some kind of mapping of all the different things people have been asked to do. So we can rationalise stuff, and because from what I can see, time is a key barrier for you and for other people. So we should try and find the easiest way to get you to do the most important parts of your job. But it's very easy for these types of things to creep in. So what comes to mind is trying to rationalise all of it and almost providing a map of all the things you have to do then as you can see, well, this is...

DBA17 38:31

Everybody add something on top and say, oh, yeah. What is it? It is just a form. What is it? Just an email that you have to send. What is it? It is just attending a meeting, then you put it one on top of the other, and they end up, if you want to be compliant with all of these things, you'd spend half of your time doing only this. If you want to be compliant with everything that's what you have to do.

Paul Jones 38:52

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense and trying, and what people haven't got is the time sometimes to do that mapping exercise of understanding all the different demands they are putting together, because there'll be different pockets of activity in the university. They all think they're doing their job well to rationalise their process or making it more quality focused or better. But they don't see all the things coming towards that endpoint then and how that grows in terms of an administration part then.

DBA17 39:18

Yep.

Paul Jones 39:18

So ideas around contracts would be, I think, 40% teaching, 40% research, and then there's a 20% administration part when you look at a person's contract. Do you think that's enough of a percentage to do all the admin that you're supposed to be doing?

DBA17 39:36

Well, I am me, I make it tough because I'm not very compliant with the admin stuff.

Paul Jones 39:36

Right.

DBA17 39:46

So I am chased at the end in saying that, okay, you have to fill these. So I go through it, I fill it quickly, and that's it, but if I wanted, if I wanted to do things properly, definitely 20% would not be enough.

Paul Jones 40:00

Yeah. I'm just wondering in terms of how we think about contracts, because it would be nice if there was a system where you had a percentage that was for your professional development then. So at the moment, all the parts of the contract is things you have to deliver. But there's no room in there whatsoever, to do your full job, let alone think I have this time to concentrate and develop my skills. Because part of what I've seen previously, and it'd be nice to have your thoughts on this, there are opportunities for people to become more efficient and effective in the research side or the teaching side. But yet, there's no time crafted so that can become better at doing it. So therefore, they're stuck in this cycle of we can only do as well as you know, at the moment, there's no scope to learn better skills and new ways of doing things that can make your life easier because there's no slack in that system.

DBA17 40:57

Yeah, I would agree with these. Yeah.

Paul Jones 40:59

Yeah. So it seems difficult that from that perspective, I'm interested as well, so, you've described yourself as a mid career academic, do you think your needs for development have changed over time? So when you were an early career researcher, was there a different set of things you'd like to have seen as a, as development tools for you versus now what's good for your mid level career place? Do you think it would change again, when you move up even further then in terms of what your needs would be like at those different times?

DBA17 41:34

Well, when I was a, an early career researcher, I was in [redacted], so not in Aston, so I came to Aston as a senior lecturer, so already what is middle career I would say, yeah, well, with respect to senior career, what is your question?

Paul Jones 41:49

So it's about, so what I'm trying to get at is, thinking about development across the course of your career. Do you think that changes over time, so your needs, the needs don't stay the same that might change depending on where your career level is. When someone might need different support at mid career versus different support at senior career.

DBA17 42:12

Yeah, of course. I mean, when you start as a lecturer you, for instance, you don't know you didn't apply necessarily for grants as a PhD student. So you need to learn that things. So it's good to be paired with colleagues that have more experience in these. And that's what happened for me in [redacted], I mean, I was working with the REF people more experienced at these, the same for publications, when when we are at the middle level, I need, you need support to different level, you need support on leadership,

because you have to coordinate a team, you have to learn how to delegate. While versus when you are very senior, again, it's a different skill set, because it deals with networking with the creating, giving the right visibility at a national level, institutional level. So, of course, is the type of support that you need evolves based on the career stage at which you are but also based on the personal aspirations and ambitions of the academic. And usually, when you win a grant, for instance, there would be some type of team around you.

Paul Jones 43:01

I know you can win grants, when you are doing things on your own. But if you've got a team around you, do you think we give academics enough skill development to manage people effectively and understand how to get the best out of a team?

DBA17 43:21

No, no, because, see, one key thing is project management, okay, so you should learn to, what to delegate, how to keep track of the tasks whether to complete or not. So it would be good to have some training in place for this. So at the moment is everything left to the knowledge, to what you know, from your personal background, but there is no training on this. And it would be highly, highly needed. Because project management become, becomes most of what you do when you start to being at a more senior level. And you have to control that other people do the things that we are supposed to do.

Paul Jones 43:59

Because to me, there'll be a case of project management, there's going to be people elements of, no matter what team you pull together, people will always cause some type of issue because everyone's different. They got different motivations, different aspirations. Trying to manage those people is difficult. There's also financial aspects of managing a grant and making sure all your spending and things in place are managed. And that's part of project management. But there's probably some financial skills that exist there to develop then. And from what I'm hearing, we don't say, well, you want to grant, hears all the training you need to be able to manage this grant effectively, it's more a case of, well done on winning the grant, now off you go and do it. And that's about that.

DBA17 44:43

Yeah, you mentioned the good one that came to my mind that is [redacted]. So I've been reading by myself, you know, [redacted] and I love to do these things because it's something that you really need for several reasons. And then unless you come from that type of background is not something that you necessarily know.

Paul Jones 45:02

And there seems to be an opportunity, then you mentioned [redacted], which is a good example. We have a number of different business school departments with experts in some of these fields, it would be very easy to try and get departments to work together, or put a program in place to say, we've got new people managing grants, why don't you come and speak to these to give them some tips on your area of expertise, to be able to help them manage grants more expertly, or to build that into part of a wider program where we can identify people who haven't got that experience or are doing it again, but feel like they've got needs, where we bring in both expertise from departments, as long as we can create the time, an expert from central services as well to be able to give their viewpoints and just put a program together where we give you the skills to manage that grant effectively and deliver.

DBA17 45:53

Absolutely, this would be really a game changing intervention within the university, because we have a lot of expertise in all these different business areas. And if we just could just sit as the students in other modules, that would be so so so much value added in terms of professional development. So that's exactly that's the difference between a training that is kind of one off sitting in a room for half a day, rather than really taking a module, interacting, and I've been doing this by myself, kind of unofficially. So yeah, I asked, I contacted the colleagues directly. So for instance, I needed some skills in [redacted]. So I

contacted with colleague and I said, listen, can I can I attend your module as a student? He said, yes, yes. The colleagues were extremely helpful. They said, yes, of course. And don't wait that there are the seminars. But if you have questions come to me directly, and asked me the questions. And they could really learn the [redacted] I've written now, a [redacted] that it's fun, it's fantastic, advanced level, because I could attend this module. And I could learn a lot. If I had to build all this [redacted] by myself, it would have taken for time in the times to having everything in place. So imagine that when I need some input on [redacted], or some input on low, for instance, [redacted], if I could just talk to an expert colleague and say, listen, I have this problem, how can I solve legally these things legally what else is implied, yeah? That would be really, really, really value adding. Also, see, for career aspirations, what we mentioned before, I mean, I really like the university, that they gave me the opportunity of doing this master's education, I took the opportunity. But it would be nice to give the same opportunity for other fields that is not just teaching, so they sponsor the master education, because they want us to be better teacher. But okay, I love learning. So I really love this master and did it, even if teaching is not necessarily my, you know, my career aspiration, why don't they let me do a master's in [redacted] focused on [redacted], so that I have the opportunity of learning what I will need when I am a Pro Vice Chancellor. So let me do it now. In parallel with my job. And I'm also, if this is the case, I'm also keen to sacrifice part of my personal time, because it's something that to some extent is a part of what I want to do personally. So I would be happy to do that. But it would be nice if the university sponsors it and in terms of fees and recognises it as an achievement.

Paul Jones 48:37

One of the things I personally invested in, is like, I like to teach myself new things much like you've said, and I will often be watching videos on YouTube or learning things in my spare time, because that's what I enjoy doing. We've got an awful lot of software that's available within the university, there isn't any sort of rollout plan of saying, these bits of software can really make a difference in your life, you might want to look at this because it could add value in this way or that way. And here's some courses which you can teach yourself stuff. I don't see that type of stuff happening at the moment. But that would be useful. Do you think?

DBA17 49:11

Absolutely, yes, absolutely. Because some of these tools, like Microsoft Project, for instance, for project management, or EndNote, too or Outlook managed properly with the tasks in place and the projects so if somebody gives you the training for making these, these tools work properly, then some of these could really simplify your work. But see, as you say, you're not you don't necessarily have the awareness of what are the tools that exist out there. You'll discover them by chance, but if somebody explains you listen, this piece of software can make a difference by simplifying your work in this way that would be really value adding

Paul Jones 49:50

Yeah, I think so as well. I think there's definitely some things university could do to improve the way we skill people up and people haven't got the time sometimes to look look at what exists in these different packages, or the motivation. But if we put a, if there's a program put together, for instance, of telling people what's available, the reasons why it can make a difference and make it as easy as possible to pick up the skills, I think that could be a really good learning opportunity for everyone then, that would increase both a person's efficiencies and create more time to do other stuff. And it can be a really positive way forward, then.

DBA17 50:24

Absolutely, yes.

Paul Jones 50:25

That is pretty much everything I wanted to cover. Was there anything else about professional development that you wanted to mention or that has come to mind?

DBA17 50:34

So the I want to put emphasis on the last point that we discussed the possibility of learning between different departments.

Paul Jones 50:43

Yeah.

DBA17 50:44

And see, often it happens that they need the... so I think that some of the training is available, but it doesn't come to the time that you need it. So I make an example. I, there was some training at the university on [redacted], okay. So I didn't attend to that, I attended to that training, but it was one year ago, then I needed the, to use [redacted] for a paper. So I desperately needed somebody teaching me how to use some advanced functions. And there was nobody that could give me this type of training because the company that delivered the training at that moment. So I think that some of the specific training could be delivered on a, let's say, on a demand basis, rather than on a fixed basis. So on demand, I need some training on [redacted], we have a person that can deliver it. I mean, I'm not saying that they have to, because maybe you have to put together a number of requests from two or three people. But see, it's easy to put together a small team of people interested in it. And, you know, they can teach us the stuff that we need, the details that we need. So I think that the dialogue between departments would be the training opportunities between departments would be a very, very, very good thing. And these on demand modules, and plus another very important thing about personal development is to have a workload balance model in place, because otherwise, that visibility of what some people are doing is not there. And so you think that people are underperforming for some areas, while the truth is that they are massively over performing in, in other things that they are priority for them.

Paul Jones 52:42

One thing that springs to mind before we finish as well on that last point is that, that idea of having a waiting list, ready to be able to deliver training. We don't necessarily have to keep it to Aston either, because there must be other universities using that type of software...

DBA17 52:56

Exactly that's an excellent idea

Paul Jones 52:57

There must be a way to pool those people to make it easier then, wouldn't there?

DBA17 53:01

Absolutely. And we can share the cost. You know, we can share the costs which okay, we are a team of 10 academics working across 10 University let's organise one day and we can ask one to one questions. And often that's the case because these 10 academics, maybe we're working together on a proposal or on a grant or whatever. That's exactly what, what would be needed.

Paul Jones 53:20

Just need to find someone with the time to be able to craft those opportunities and just think a bit more outside of what... because all the universities are trying to do similar things. There must be lots of overlap. And we're part of the Midlands innovation group. And even those as a first point of contact, there must be other people that will need that type of training, where we can try and pool resources.

DBA17 53:41

Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes.

Paul Jones 53:43

Excellent. That's it for me then. So thank you very much for participating in this. I'll stop the recording now.

Appendix 21: DBA18 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA18

Paul Jones 00:02

So I've started recording, firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study, entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate, from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour that we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end, the interview is semi structured, this means that I have some general topic areas that I wish to explore. But you are free to explore your thoughts and your experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep it within the broader bounds of my research area. Though the idea is I try to limit the number of questions interruptions as much as possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me the details that are on the participant information sheet. Following the interview with the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as an individual, including personal data, will be removed and the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team, the interview is considered low risk. If you do need to stop the discussion for a break or you need to stop completely, please raise your hands, so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if I feel it is causing you distress. And likewise, if I'm feeling distressed, I may stop the interview for that reason. I'm going to ask a few closed ended questions now. And then we'll start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. So can you confirm understand the information I have given you?

DBA 18 01:49

Yes.

Paul Jones 01:50

Good. And happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA 18 01:53

Yes, let's do this.

Paul Jones 01:54

And you understand how to withdraw?

DBA 18 01:57

I know Yeah. Yeah.

Paul Jones 01:58

Good.

DBA 18 01:59

Question. Who's your supervisor, actually?

Paul Jones 02:01

So I've got three. Keith Schofield in WON. Nicholas O'Regan, ADR. And Phil Mizen, who is the, now the Head of the Graduate School.

DBA 18 02:11

Okay, good.

Paul Jones 02:13

So can you confirm what school you work in? Please?

DBA 18 02:16

[redacted], that's not the school, um, [redacted]? Do I have this right?

Paul Jones 02:22

So I will say correct because you will know better than me. But yeah, that's correct. Can you confirm your gender, please?

DBA 18 02:28

I am a [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:30

And are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA 18 02:32

That's correct.

Paul Jones 02:33

And how would you describe your career level out of the three levels? Early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA 18 02:41

Probably mid career, hopefully, the end of mid career at some point.

Paul Jones 02:45

Can you confirm which age bracket you're in? 25 To 34; 35 to 44; 45 to 54; 55 to 64?

DBA18 02:56

I am [redacted], I think

Paul Jones 03:01

[redacted], yeah, that's fine. Good. So that's all the closed ended questions. So talk to me about professional development, what your understanding of it is, and how it works for you in practice at the moment.

DBA 18 03:15

Me being the subject, or I'm delivering and offering?

Paul Jones 03:20

You being the subject. So how does professional development work for you? What are your experiences around it? What are your thoughts on professional development?

DBA 18 03:28

So how it would fit around me as being, me being that the one was professionally developed?

Paul Jones 03:30

Yeah.

DBA 18 03:30

Oh, I think I've never been systematically professionally developed.

Paul Jones 03:42

Okay.

DBA 18 03:43

I know it exists. And I know it is taken serious in other places. I, in my career, I don't think I have been, I've went to a few courses, but I'm not sure how overall this fitted a systematic professional development structure.

Paul Jones 04:04

So you don't feel, so from what you said there, you don't feel like you've had access to the level of support that you might have thought would be possible compared to other places.

DBA 18 04:14

Not on the university ... I mean, I am always amazed in how private businesses, the amount of courses and the amount of very high quality development steps people are getting, getting carried through. And at the university, we have the odd here and there, and I know there are opportunities, and so on and so on, for these courses, but it's not as systematic as I've seen it in other places. I'm not saying that... I think the university is a bit different because I don't, I think that the assumption is that academics figure it out themselves, how to develop themselves. I think that, I just don't think there is, and that's probably not even a bad assumption. So I think there is a natural inclination to look things up if we need them.

Paul Jones 04:30

Yeah.

DBA 18 04:40

But yeah, I haven't been pushed in a specific direction.

Paul Jones 05:14

There's a number of things that influence what professional development can look like. And there's a number of different influences that affect professional development. So thinking about the culture and the management style involved for you in the area you sit within, do you feel that you get support to look at opportunities and your committed to do that type of development work?

DBA 18 05:33

I mean, nobody has ever said no to any things I want to do. So that's, that's a given, I think once I went into a one week course on statistics, advanced statistics, [redacted] years back. So there's never any, any, any pushback. But I'm not, I'm not sure specifically, what, what I would need, not that I'm saying that I have, that I know everything, or so. But I, at some point, one is so specialised, that there is not anything that is in the mainstream, that would help me dramatically. So, yeah.

Paul Jones 06:23

So that's interesting, because from what you just said, there, you wouldn't necessarily know then what things exist to help you. So then it doesn't sound like you're getting the conversations that might help you work those things out either, so you're left trying to figure things out on your own, but don't know really what options are out there. So would it be good to have people you could talk to, either as a mentor, or have your manager talk to you about this stuff on a more regular basis to try and generate ideas and think about where your next steps might be in terms of, because none of us are ever going to be a finished article...

DBA 18 06:58

... Yeah

Paul Jones 06:58

...you need, you need people to prompt you, and have someone to bounce off in terms of ideas and stuff then, don't you?

DBA 18 07:03

Yeah, and, the perfect, yeah, it's a, it's a, it's a conundrum. If I would get pushed into putting, I don't know, five days per year into professional development, I would probably make the argument that this is important time taken away from the important things I do. It's just I would immediately, I mean, I get pushed to, for example, to do my PhD supervisory training, which literally takes five minutes. And I've been pushing this in front of me for two months, because I thought I never had this five minutes. So this is, this is the idiocy. I mean, I'm sorry, I have to correct myself, I'm now part of this mentoring scheme, there's a [redacted] going around, or [redacted] something. So I'm part of this, I think, this is probably part of professional development. So yeah....

Paul Jones 07:05

and how is that working out at the moment, then? Is that a useful experience do you think?

DBA 18 07:29

It is definitely an interesting experience, and, and also useful, but it is not, I mean, the important thing there, it is not, um, subject matter related. So the way I see it actually gives you just a break, a forced break, into discussing what you're actually doing and what you're doing well, or what you're not doing well. So this is literally, the way it's set up, it's the guided stuff, reflection, and again, you know, we all know what self reflection is, and, and, but we never do it, because we're so busy with other things. So this is the forcing, forcing this, this is good. Yes. So I have no regrets even that it costs time, but it's a good experience.

Paul Jones 08:54

And then coming back to what you mentioned earlier, then. So comparing that, we just mentioned that the time is really good to be reflective in, in what's a busy schedule, you don't often have the chance to dictate that to yourself and to say, ah, I want this time just to sit and ponder on what I'm doing. So you can look at professional development, and you mentioned earlier, the five days of going away and doing stuff. If we built in time for a person to say, well, professional development is important, and you should do X amount over this timescale, do you think that would be a helpful thing to do then where people have to try and take some responsibility, and take some time out to reflect on what they are doing, and knowing where the gaps are in terms of their development and their needs?

DBA 18 09:37

Um, individually, probably not. So I've been on a lot of, on a lot of, no, not a lot and some courses take three to four hours. And that, I mean, the main essence of what I'm getting out, I could have also find out by reading something in 10 minutes, so condensing it. So individually, in terms of content, it is probably not, not worth it. But I'm a big, okay, let's, let's do it the other way around. We have been on a, the, with some colleagues of the [redacted], we have been on a course on how to speak to [redacted]...

Paul Jones 10:22

Yeah...

DBA 18 10:23

Sorry, I am just, um, so I have done some of these things, it is just coming back to me.

Paul Jones 10:28

That's alright.

DBA 18 10:28

I've done this course before, I funnily, first of all, I totally forgot that I've done it before. But I got dragged into it first, only when I saw the, the, the guy who was running it, I know you, I have been here before haha.

Paul Jones 10:42

Yeah...

DBA 18 10:43

And I was about to say, sorry guys, I mean, it's just it will take another full day or half a day, I don't have it. Love you all, but leave it, and then I said, you know, that's impolite, I'm not doing this. So, then we, so there were four of us, or five of us, and it was probably a really useful experience. Because we did this as a team, generating professional development. So I mean, we talked about [redacted], and presenting them to [redacted], and so on and so on, we realised that we have two completely different definitions of all the core concepts, that we don't agree on anything in the way we present things. And we realise that there is a massive gap and a massive need for alignment in our messaging. And the, I forgot the name of this presenter, but he's very good. But he said, you know, this is actually the one of the most interesting experiences of ours, because what we took out is not about how to speak to [redacted], but we took out about how we actually need to do a lot of things on a team basis to align our, our messaging, because if we can't get a straight line, we confuse the rest of the world around us. So yeah, I think my verdict is a lot more around team based exercises and team that, things that have team, team building, but not explicitly, but implicitly team building involved. And that kind of, what, what do you call this, kind of, team based thinking, thinking as a team, that is probably where I would see the most value for for this.

Paul Jones 12:14

And that's interesting, isn't it, because I think as anybody that develops into an academic pathway for their career, you get taught at a PhD level or doctoral level onwards to become an independent researcher...

DBA 18 12:27

Yeah, yeah...

Paul Jones 12:28

...but then all of a sudden, there's a turning point where you get a job where you actually have to stop being independent and work with others effectively. But we don't really give skills to the students who are going through that doctoral pathway to then work in teams. And it's a very quick switch they have to go through.

DBA 18 12:43

Yeah. But again, a lot of people don't have to do this. So we chose to do it because we want to, we believe we achieve a lot more. And it is a lot more fun to do it as a team. But I, I know millions of people who are happily just stare, stare at their own screen. And for some, it works well, for me, it doesn't. So I mean, we chose to do this. So in which, because it is, we work as a team, we work very, very effectively as a team, but it can still work a lot better as a team, we realised, and there's a need for it. But, does everybody need to learn how to work in a team as an academic? Yeah, I mean, a lot of academics probably would like to collaborate a lot more. But then they get sent to these networking conference events. And I'm in the [redacted] domain, where you get the, this is the [redacted], um, the [redacted] conference you can imagine, and then there's a social evening, I've never seen anything as antisocial as these evenings, it's like, everybody just stares at their own screen during the dinner. It's horrible. But on the other hand, I mean, this is the personalities of people that come together. But yeah, I mean, I think the university would like us to work more in teams. And, but, I don't have figured, I haven't figured out, how to actually, why it works in my context, with my colleagues and what to learn from it, to make it replicable. If it can be taught as a, as a, as a, you know, as an exercise. I'm not even sure if that's possible. Sorry, I was rambling. But yeah.

Paul Jones 14:30

No, that's fine. And, so I used to do [redacted] at one point in time. So I was used to dealing with people who were in [redacted] jobs, and that lack of social skills sometimes, or not even that lack of skill, but lack of motivation to want to talk to others. It's quite prevalent in [redacted] circles, generally. So I understand the environment you're talking about where it's not, they're not natural people that want to be around others, and talk, and make new best friends within the space of five minutes, it's very much a case of, I'm happy with my technology, I'll talk to people online, I've got no interest in people in person quite often. And that's the way it works sometimes.

DBA 18 15:10

I've been in a, a what, when I did my PhD, I did some, some, a bit of [redacted] work in a company. And they were all sitting in the same room working on [redacted], when they had a lunch break, they would all switch their program from, you know, whatever they worked on to [redacted]. And then they played [redacted] for half an hour and then they switched back to [redacted] and that was basically it.

Paul Jones 15:36

Yeah, I can well imagine that. Do you think, going back to that point though, do you think that we give people the skills to network effectively, and to make the most of those situations?

DBA 18 15:49

I mean, I don't think we do this, but I'm not even sure it can be done that easily, I, or it, so I'm skeptical about a lot of things that cannot be done in a teaching environment. So I'm also not a big fan of teaching these kinds of skills, I'm teaching, I'm a big fan of bringing people together, make them do good work at these skills, is one of the most beneficial outcomes of this, but getting into a room, and now we teach you about how to network, it's just probably not the right approach.

Paul Jones 16:31

So it's interesting, as I've been on courses like that, and having come from a business development background, and been involved in different committees and things, we've brought in trainers who specialise in teaching people how to make the most of these types of situations and how to read the room, how to read groups, how to introduce yourself, how to get away from conversations, and move on to others, or introduce people to other people. So there's definitely things there on the market in terms of people who can teach these things and teach it well. But it's all about finding the right way to get across to a group of people, and the people you're working with, by the sound a bit, even if we gave them the skills, there wouldn't be the motivation there to put them into practice quite often, because they could go for the training, but there wouldn't be any motivation to actually think, oh, I've got the skills, but do I want to use them, it's probably not the case.

DBA 18 17:20

It might well be that they do. I mean, I don't, I don't know, it might be that these, all these people who would stare at their screen would have loved to be the first on the dance floor or not? I can't tell. So there's also a bit of, you know, sometimes people do things not necessarily by their own choice, but maybe there are barriers to everything else. So yeah, I mean, so I'm skeptical, because I haven't seen it yet. But it might well be that there are courses, I'm not, I'm not saying that they can't do this. But I'm a big, big fan of putting, working, on subjects. So for example, when I, when I teach a student, a student exercise, and one of the learning outcomes is, I don't know, you know, empathy development. So understanding what the other person's issue is, I could not imagine to have a, an empathy focused exercise, I rather want them to develop a [redacted] and have to interact with difficult clients. That helps, and then in this case, later on, identify explore what they learned about how to handle the situation, than just having something that is based on empathy. As an example, I'm not doing empathy stuff, but I could imagine that this is, yeah.

Paul Jones 18:51

And taking your example then and thinking about some of the ways, so one of the gaps sometimes for academic staff is we're expecting people to work on impact, and develop impact out of research, quite often that will involve working with a third party, of some type of organisation, to actually make an impact or some entity outside the university. And people skills sometimes align themselves well to doing that type of work with a third party. Other people then do not have that, a single bone in their body, which lends themselves well to, to work in that way and being collaborative with an outside party. So it can vary very much on the person, and the context, to find out what professional development a person might need then to help them excel in a role, but not necessarily trying to force them to adopt different personality traits or go against the very nature though.

DBA 18 19:42

Yeah, I mean, there is, so, I mean, I explored similar thing with with the coaching lesson I had yesterday. I think there are two sides of the coin the way I see it, so I work very well with [redacted] because we complement each other, I'm not a shy person or anything, but I hate schmoozing people. And I hate asking for favors and, and he's great at that. So he is like, his little address book, I mean, is anything down from the Prime Minister, and so on and so on. So, I condense, if I have to write an email to somebody, a professor so and so, and I have to ask them to do something for me, it can take me an hour to just, oh, should I really blah, blah, blah. So I have a natural blockage to this. But we, you know, we collaborate in a way that if it's somewhere related to both of us, or the wider [redacted], he does it for me. So is this something I should learn? It's probably, maybe, but on the other hand, is we complement each other in the sense that we find that somebody is better at something and then, than the other. So, I don't know...

Paul Jones 19:53

Yeah... That's an interesting concept, isn't it? Because I think part around what you've mentioned already, part around professional development is being self aware, and the opportunity to think about what your skills are, but also where the gaps are. That doesn't necessarily mean you have to fill the gap by developing yourself. You could look to fill it by complementing, by working with someone else, or a team of people. But the first step, I guess, is realising where the gaps are. And then you have to find the best way to then fill those gaps, whether it's through your own development, or bringing in collaborators and building a team around you. I think that's really important, and whether we get time for staff to do that self reflection, that will be debatable then, because people are so busy,

DBA 18 21:45

Yeah. I mean, I like your, I like your general focus on development of staff, at the university, because we don't do it, in a, we don't do it good enough. Either because we don't have the offers, or we don't push the offers, or whatever. So we getting a product coming in, I believe that we kind of getting and we had another conversation I had today, it was somebody, I think we are recruiting downwards. I think the people we bring in is, is not at the level that we brought in [redacted] years ago, I think, we don't find anybody at the level that we want. So, but, we leave them there, kind of, and we kind of degrading our entire teaching and offering and so on and so on. So what, how do we get out of the cycle, we cannot find better people, we try everything already, we don't seem to be able to. So we have to do something to get more off of the resource that we have available. And I am not meaning this in the slavery sense, of making them work harder, but somehow taking something that is, you know, a bit of rough on the edges and make them as smooth operator as we possibly can. I just don't know what the right pathway is, I don't see the right pathway, if it's formal training, or if there's anything else, that can achieve this. So I work well with [redacted], I think I learned a lot from him. I learned, you know, I think he would say the same for me. Is it because of formal training? Or is it because of we doing work together, and therefore learning from each other? So if I go down, up and down the corridor, I will believe that a lot of my colleagues would like to have another colleague they can work very closely together, on a really trusting basis. How to achieve this? I'm not sure. But this is for me the pathway, probably, a strong pathway for personal development.

Paul Jones 23:49

Yeah, I think that for me, I want to try and get people away from thinking about professional development just from being going on a course for a couple of hours and then that's it then, I think it's very much a case of that can work sometimes, but that we, we quite often have process driven courses which tell you about a process, then you finish it and that's it, there's no reflection or thinking about how you implement it. There's no thinking about what I would say with the street smarts about, if we take funding applications, for instance, quite a few courses that can be delivered are about the process of applying and what you have to do to get through the different hurdles, it isn't about the subtle tips or ways you can manipulate the application to give it more of a chance to succeed, or about the different experiences that can help you craft a better application, but often it's process driven stuff. And I'm really keen to find ways out of this project to try and help develop people in the right ways that isn't necessarily putting more courses on. It's about trying to find out what people need, and then trying to find ways to facilitate, and develop it in different ways then, and I don't think we do enough of that. Going back to your point about recruitment, if we can get the professional development stuff right, that becomes a selling point for why people might want to come here. If they know we are supportive, people can see a real career building opportunity, we're more likely to get people to want to come along then. And one thing that happens quite often is that people at Professorial level, I think, we almost assume that they are the finished article by that point, but they will still have their own needs in terms of developing and feel like they've been supported having those conversations, then. Just because they've reached the level of Professor, which is hard to do, doesn't mean there isn't needs in their portfolio where they're not quite as good as others. They could be very good technically, in terms of knowledge, but then networking, or being out there to promote stuff, or generate an impact might be a thing that needs to be developed. Or likewise, it could be other needs they've got. But I'd love to see everybody have this journey where they're always helped to wherever point in time, and the management becomes the important part of how we have conversations, how we develop people.

DBA 18 26:03

[redacted] Sorry. This was sort of, this frees up some time, interrupted, but it frees us up some time. Yes.

Paul Jones 26:51

So a question for you then. So you're on a teaching and research contract. Generally speaking, we think of teaching and research contracts as being 40% research, 40% teaching and 20% administration. Is that the way it works for you in practice? Or is it quite different?

DBA 18 27:11

Over the year, probably, yeah. Probably the year. Yeah, I mean, there is back and forth, it is probably in my case. It's probably not 40% teaching, but 30% teaching. But that's, that's over the year, with bursts of teaching and so on. Yeah, that's more or less what I do. Yeah.

Paul Jones 27:34

That's, that's been a struggle for some people I talk to about the balance, because teaching can quite often, depending on the area you're in, teaching can quite often expand. And then it puts pressure on, and certainly the administration part doesn't decrease either, so that puts a greater demand on trying to find research time, which becomes smaller and smaller in terms of trying to find that time then.

DBA 18 27:56

Yeah. I mean, I have to say that, that I've been doing teaching since, I don't know, [redacted] years. So, I found a lot of ways to cut corners to make it, to make it as efficient as possible. So um, I probably have a black belt and, and, and doing the whole teaching piece as efficiently as possible. Yeah. And I mean, there are days where it gets absorbed, everything, but there are also days where, where it's, where it's efficient. Yeah.

Paul Jones 28:29

So your black belt in teaching efficiency, did that come from just learning ways to navigate that yourself? Or did the information get passed on to you by anybody around you?

DBA 18 28:40

I, then, I think trial and error. Yeah, I mean, if you ever set up a, an assignment, that at the end creates you more time, you need more time marking it, than the student writing it, you don't do it a second time. You're all, you know, is that, I'm not, you know, I'm kind of quite proud of my teaching, and so I'm not shirking everything, but you have to think about what you, how you mark this thing at the end. And if I see some junior people that bring everything into the assignment, and then they, they realise this, this doesn't make it easier when you get it marked. So I think trial and error is a big part.

Paul Jones 29:22

So you seem to have developed a really good bank of knowledge and skills to navigate teaching and make it efficient. But have you passed that on to anybody then, have you ever thought about how you can help other people to learn these lessons more efficiently?

DBA 18 29:37

This is, in [redacted], there is a big focus on [redacted], as a general, the way, I mean a part of it, it is a part of why [redacted] are so good, because we take apprenticeships, and these are not apprenticeships where, where you go into university, or to a friend, this is really, there is the old wise guy, and the young guy, and they work together, for five years. And that is the apprenticeship. And that is how you, that's one of the models for, for learning, in my, in my world. So I'm just, for example, developing a course with [redacted], I'm not sure if you have met [redacted], and [redacted] is relatively junior, and I am more senior, so I give, we have discussions, and reflect on this together, how we develop this course efficiently. And, I mean, if you, if all the tips and tricks how to teach efficiently, if I would put this in a bulletin board, or teach those in a classroom, I would probably get arrested. Because not all of it is, is you know, some, yeah, some, some of it are shortcuts, and some of them are even shorter cuts.

Paul Jones 30:57

But then, if you if you can make those shortcuts work, then there probably needs to be some work done on the systems that are used, because if that work is missing, and obviously it doesn't have a big effect, I think what I see is there's lots of administration stuff that's added on, but never stuff taken away or analysed to see which bits can we cut, it is always there's something new to do, there's something new to do, not, we'll take these away, because it's not working, or we don't use it, there's never the, that deletion of things from the processes.... just let's add more stuff on.

DBA 18 31:29

Never...Yeah, yeah. Sorry can you rephrase the question? I mean, I agree with you. But, what was the question...

Paul Jones 31:31

There wasn't really a question, more a reflection on the state of things. So I think there's probably an element of, for me, we want to create more space and time for people to do either development or research, whatever parts they think is important for them. But we don't do enough of trying to make processes more efficient. And that's probably something we have to think about. If we want to create more time, then we have to get rid of some of the stuff people are doing and make it a more efficient process.

DBA 18 32:06

For every process that comes in, then people look for ways to get around it, and so on and so on. At the end, yes, I mean, they yesterday, for example, I tried to get a personal tutors, I wanted to get a mass email to all my personal tutors. In the old days, I could do it. Now they created on map something that is so crazy, that it took me half an hour. And now I'm emailing students asking if they individually received my mass email, because I had to go through so many hoops, I don't get any response, I

believe that my effort of half an hour was wasted. And the mass email didn't go out. So I mean, why I mean, it cost me there's, you only have kind of 10 of these half hours per day, and then the day is gone. So yeah, I mean, there's, I wonder, these processes are not clear to me why they have been changed. In the olden days, mass email, all students I can write the email in Outlook, and it gets sent out. Now I have a lot of interfaces. Yeah. I mean, that's, that's something I haven't found a workaround yet. But I will.

Paul Jones 33:10

Ha, I am sure you will. I think there's a lot of, um, there's a lot of things done under the banner of quality, that just take up more time, but to make up for peoples shortcomings. So if you've got people not doing something, they put a process in place to then make sure people do it, but then that process doesn't really work effectively for all the people who are doing it correctly, it just creates more time and doesn't really solve the problem to start with.

DBA 18 33:38

Yeah, I mean, part of it is these, these module reflection, okay? Somebody who does not reflect on their module is in the wrong job, and probably doesn't, will not last long in this job. But having to write down reflections, I know why they're trying to do this. I know, they want to make sure that people do this step. But I will write down whatever it takes me to get rid of this form, quickly and efficiently. And I think I'm quite reflective in my teaching. Otherwise, I wouldn't find these shortcuts and get away with it. But this is, these are the things that, yeah, exactly, they found, I don't know, five people that didn't do the reflection, or they didn't progress in the way they present the module, and now they make us all write self-reflections about every module. It's, yeah, and there's another form.

Paul Jones 34:33

It's the same with, if we take MyDC as conversations, the reason that exists is because people weren't, or managers weren't having conversations with their staff, which is a good management practice to do, because they are not, we have then got a system that then tries to enforce people to have conversations. But the people who weren't having conversations are probably not using that system. And even if they do, it's a tick box exercise to get something on to it not being a meaningful conversation. So rather than tackle the issue, we've just shifted the issue around a bit and made more work for people.

DBA 18 35:06

So I mean, if, why do we even have people that do not have meaningful conversations with their colleagues and their staff? Why do we, why do we not find a way to make sure that we don't hire people that would fall into this bracket? And why do we let people get away with it? And progress without having this, without being, you know, genuine human beings?

Paul Jones 35:36

Yeah, so it's interesting isn't it, because my other topic I considered for my DBA was about performance management within higher education, because that's messy at the best of times, because you have people managing, that aren't necessarily trained to manage, or want to manage, but it's almost like a rite of passage, to go through, and then they're going back to, back into departments after, so they haven't got an appetite to really challenge poor behavior. And the people who suffer, the good people who are doing a good job, because they get asked to do more and more, because they are doing a good job. And it's like, oh, we'll ask them to do this, because they know they get a good job done. So we pour more and more on to the good people, without tackling some of the more poor behaviors then in terms of not doing your job very well.

DBA 18 36:19

But then again, for these ones, I mean, we put a process in place and put a form in place, it doesn't really make a difference. And if we put a training module in place, that will also not make a massive difference. So yeah, I want our recruitment to be a lot more rounded, I really want to.

Paul Jones 36:42

So, do you think then that, so, I agree with you, because I've got my own ideas on recruitment and what we could be doing better. If we recruit the wrong people to start with, who aren't interested in development, who aren't reflecting, who aren't going to be good colleagues, then that, that's just going to erode the culture even more, isn't it? And that's what I see happening is that we are making decisions on recruitment, that, like you mentioned earlier, are diluting the quality of people we've got, so we, year on year, we are reducing our effectiveness to do stuff, and then that creates its own problems in terms of developing links and building rapport with colleagues and having faith in colleagues.

DBA 18 37:21

I mean, what, specifically, I mean, we were recruiting. So when I started, when I started at Aston, there was an implicit culture in our department, [redacted] specifically, that we would not recruit any, any divas or, you know, academic divas. And, and, I wasn't polite in, in places, and in recruitment committees, where we literally it was said, you know, slightly stronger evidence, but not a real good fit, not a good feel about him, or her. And that was generally accepted. That this is, we rather look for fit, you know, the whole package than maximise on bringing another £100,000 in grant income. This seems to have gone totally out of the window. And so we get on the, if you look for impact cases, or we get these high hitters, we recruit them now with a lot of money. And, but the other side of the coin hasn't been, has gone down the drain. And it starts to show us, I feel, I mean, it starts to show that we probably, on the high end, we get more impact cases. But on the other hand on, culturally, it also starts to show, off of what it, the toll it takes.

Paul Jones 38:44

No, I agree with that totally, and it is disappointing that those decisions are made, because I think that, you could find someone that's got a track record, they bring money with them, they might be able to develop impact cases. But part of that senior staff selection process should be about the capacity to work with others, to develop the people around them. And to be ones that can mentor, shape and guide, and show good research leadership, not just do their own thing, get an impact case study, then it doesn't matter what kind of mess they create around them, it's like oh well they have done that part that we want them to, there isn't that greater remit of how they fit, how they interact, how can they shape others and guide others then.

DBA 18 39:26

Yeah, yeah, so, I mean this is my, my priority, if I would say, we cannot catch with poor recruitment, we may or may not, but I don't think we can compared to what we can with, with development opportunities. That is... yeah, but on the other hand, we don't have any choice anymore in recruitment. We don't have, we are not even any in the position anymore to say oh, you, you know what, they are slightly better, we will be happy if we find one person that is recruitable, being able to teach coherently, and have one or two papers that are at the level that we can appoint them on a lecturer, lecturer position.

Paul Jones 40:17

Well, that's, that's a balance, isn't it, between, on the research front, you could wait to find the right type of people who create the research environment you want to develop. But the pressures to teach never go away. So there will always be modules and stuff to teach, you need to have somebody that can deliver the teaching element, or your colleagues are asked to do more. And if your colleagues are asked to do more teaching, that impacts the research side, so you could hold on waiting for the right research element of a person. But then research generally is impacted because everybody else is covering teaching more so, and they're impacted, so there's no easy solution to all that in terms of a circle of what goes on, then, is there?

DBA 18 40:57

So my take on, so when I, before I was at Aston, I was, I was doing, I mean, the reason I ended up here was, I was doing, I was doing okay, so I did my papers at the right level, and so on and so on. But I would looking backwards, say that I didn't really have any momentum around my research building up.

So nothing and no coherent storyline around that. The reason I now I consider that I have a momentum, and I consider that I have a storyline and the trajectory, is because I am now in an environment with [redacted] that really pulls me along. So there is, and this is not by pressure, but it is the dynamics around this, there, there, you know, part of its efficiency, because I find it easier to have people to read my work and so on. But in general, being as part of a, of a fast moving environment makes me fast moving. And that is probably more beneficial to my research output than any of my PhD training exercises, and so on and so on. So I think this is, these creating these [redacted], is probably good, but I've seen so many [redacted] that do not provide this environment, that I've seen so many [redacted] that are just talking shops or, or, vicious, so [redacted] is not necessarily the solution to it. A lot of them are, you know, you know, they come and go as well, because it depends on one person, and then there's no momentum, and so on and so on. But this total environment is for me, I think the important one to be increased productivity.

Paul Jones 42:55

I think, so part of what you're talking about there, and I think it's important is that I agree with the [redacted], it can very much be a focus for people to come together and provide some type of ability for people to come together. But having a [redacted] doesn't make it successful. It's about bringing people together who've got a similar mindset and focus on the research that are complementary. And whether that's in a [redacted] or in an, in a group or whatever it might be, it's having some similarly minded people around you that you can both work with, that you can share opportunities with, discuss work with and generate more momentum together, almost as a team rather than just thinking I'm on this on my own and I haven't got people around me that can help support me and share ideas. I think where I've seen departments fail a bit more is where that's been dissolved a little, where there is, people who are related but it is quite spurious relations. From what you've said, and I think why your team works well, is your similarly minded, you get on well, your research all links together nicely, and you can drive each other then, that momentum doesn't come from your manager, it comes from want to do well as a group together, and pushing each other to explore things and do things together.

DBA 18 44:12

Yeah, and also, I mean that, so again, which leads me back, if I would have one recommendation for [redacted] is, I would teach them, as you know, as the example I had with [redacted], as [redacted]. So I understand that the push from the university is very clear towards these [redacted]. And it is a good push, I believe. But if I were to target, if I have my budget for research training, I would probably put this into this [redacted], in order to make these people gel together a lot better. Instead of, of, you know, spreading it out in all directions. So that would be my, my thought.

Paul Jones 44:58

One of the things I wanted to ask you, do you have experience outside of higher education? So have you worked elsewhere and done different jobs at all?

DBA 18 45:05

Yeah, not, before this I was interested in your background, before we spoke, and I looked at your LinkedIn page. And I was wondering if there is one organisation you haven't worked for haha.

Paul Jones 45:15

Ha! There's a lot of stuff I've done, which I think is useful, but there is a lot of stuff I've done.

DBA 18 45:19

Yeah, yeah, um, I worked as a, I mean former jobs, millions of part time jobs, but formal jobs, I was a project manager in the [redacted] industry. So for two years only. So that was, of course, limited, but I was at a big [redacted], and I was a project manager there, yeah.

Paul Jones 45:44

So do you think those skills have enabled you to be more effective then in higher education? And is there things you brought across that we would not necessarily have taught you, as an academic, but you think oh, they've been really good skills to have in my armoury of things to use in your job?

DBA 18 45:58

Yeah, I mean, but it was, I mean, speaking now, it was only two years. So I mean, that's, that's limited, but I mean, I, I took from all my jobs, I took a lot away, I mean, I wouldn't even say that this is a, I've done everything from [redacted] cleaning, to, to, to waiting, and so on, and so on. So all of these come together. And my son, he's just, I put him, he's on the trajectory to hopefully get into medicine. But I pushed him to work as a waiter, because I believe that, you know, this customer service piece is probably where I, I got most kick out of, and I had really early good experiences on the waiter business. So all of it comes together. If your question goes to, towards, you know, should we recruit more people from, you know, non academic backgrounds, or who have had outside experience? I think this is important. But if I look at, for example, let's say, [redacted], he had two years as consultant, [redacted], I think he never went outside of university, but still working very well with businesses. So, you know, as a trend line, probably yeah, but but there are other people as well, who can work well on site.

Paul Jones 47:31

[Redacted] is a good example, because he naturally gets how to interface with organisations and is a good person to be that liaison between the research side and an organisation. And I think that your group generally, is a great example of translated research into making a practical difference for people, which is really positive then. So all of those areas that seems to work well then, but that doesn't always happen across research, generally, it can be quite tricky to find the skills to understand an organisation's needs, to then translate research into making a difference for the organisation. And that's one of the challenges around impact is that there's a lot of people that got into academia for the love of a particular topic that just want to do research. They've never really thought about what the translation is of taking research and making a difference to beneficiaries, whatever they might look like. So that's quite a big challenge for people at the moment is trying to work their way through that.

DBA 18 48:28

Yeah, I mean, I come from a research area or research domain, I was in [redacted] before coming to the UK, at the University of [redacted], is probably in my domain, [redacted], the most, there were 30 Professors of [redacted], 20-25, maybe, nothing professors of [redacted], departments 50-70 People, [redacted], nothing else, so probably the biggest and one of the best departments in the world. I believe that very few of them have ever stepped outside a university to even speak to somebody in the business. So the entire, entire culture was driven by papers, highest level, the highest number possible. So this is where I got brought up in, let's say, as a, as a driver. When I came to the UK, I, because I didn't have this high pressure environment, I dwindled a bit around, but I had the skills, let's say, to do something good. And then I got sucked into [redacted], and I, this is the first time that I, that I got exposed to actually doing research with an opportunity for impact, and so on and so on, was never discussed, never required. And then suddenly I can take my old skills, of you know, structured thinking method-based paper writing and putting into an area that is actually is quite interesting. So it took me probably [redacted] years, [redacted] years to arrive at something where I feel everything is nicely balanced. I'm not sure why I said this. But when we start with, the idea of getting, what?

Paul Jones 50:14

... It was the experience, wasn't it, about the skills you can develop externally, whether that was useful for higher education, then...

DBA 18 50:21

Yeah, but, so, even at universities, you can have different skills and different drivers, and so on and so on. And my drivers were a lot different at different places. And, I would believe, if I would leave Aston and go, for example, to University of Birmingham, I think they would possibly be put less pressure on

business interaction, more pressure back on papers, and I would act accordingly. So, I mean, there's one thing that I, that I, find always, and I'm not sure how this sits with me, but the idea of they want to do research, or love research, and so on, and so on. I don't even know what this means. So, I don't either, in practice, I mean, let's say I'm, I'm, a researcher and productive in research. Do I love it? What does that mean? There's so many things to it. There is for example, the writing the papers to it. Personally, I hate it, every keystroke. But on the other hand, I love it, when it, when it, when it finally is done ... so research, this, for me, is a very emotional experience. So if I, you know, let's say I'm, let's say I'm a productive researcher, and I don't love research, I couldn't say a statement. I love research. I know that I see a lot of young PhD students, I love research, and so on, yeah, that's nice for you. Do they love research? I'm not even sure. It's part of my job. I love my job in combination of all these different things. Research is an important part. Do I love it? I'm happy when it's done haha.

Paul Jones 52:01

I'll be happier when mine is done as well, to be fair.

DBA 18 52:03

Yeah..

Paul Jones 52:04

The joy I get is the end product of making a difference. So I would find it difficult to do a PhD because you don't necessarily get the impact from a PhD. You add in a contribution to theory and knowledge, but I like the DBA, because there's the necessary impact of what you're doing to make a tangible difference to something after, and I like that part of it.

DBA 18 52:25

Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, it, it, this is only to my work. I mean that, in the last three years or so, I actually do research. And then I present it to a company. And I run a workshop. And it changes first of all, is that, I'm always like, why did you guys not know this? I mean, this is my, in my head? Like, I mean, this is very close to common sense. Why does that impress you? And then they speak a year afterwards about the workshop that it helped them to change practice. And that's like, yeah, yeah, I did that. That's nice. I never thought this possible. But yeah, so this is the impact. So it's a lot of delayed, delayed gratification that comes out of that. I have to say,

Paul Jones 53:13

Yeah, and I can imagine that it's, it's good to hear about the balance you've gotten, that you like the balance you've got, I think there are people that love research and just love to delve into topic areas that interest them. They aren't really, they don't really care about much else sometimes, they really love research, and having the space and time to have someone pay them to just embrace their love for a particular topic and just immerse themselves in it then. I think the more rounded view you've got of how you can use your skills, and what you get joy from, I think that's the way certainly the Aston is going, but I think that's the way that the REF and other pressures are pushing people to have this more balanced view on doing stuff, then. There's a common way of thinking about researchers, which is based around, we expect them to do everything well. So if you take any T&R member of staff, we expect them to be excellent teaching, we expect them to be excellent at research, and then research could break down into publications, impact supervision, winning grants. Then there's the administration side, doing the extra roles you've got, in my head, it seems impossible that people can be good at all those things. But we tend to manage people and pick holes in them saying well, all these other parts might be good, but you haven't done well on this part. I'd much rather see a more balanced approach to teams and departmental management where you collect people together as a team. You have experts in some bits and experts in others and together it all balances out rather than trying to focus on individuals and having to be excellent at all these different things. But do you have similar types of feelings or do you have a different viewpoint in what's going on? How do you feel about this?

DBA 18 54:58

I mean, my I, so there is nothing wrong with a world where people are particularly good at one thing and not so much the other. I think this is, this is a fact. And it's probably, it's probably, you know, if you can focus on one thing, you're probably better than if you focus on a lot of things. So I mean, that's why we bring in these divas. And, and because we buy into this. Is it good for the culture? It's not good for the culture in the sense that people can literally prioritise themselves and make others feel awkward because you know, you're good at teaching. So do more teaching. It's, this is a death sentence. It's really, it's the kiss of death. I mean, it's one of the biggest insults, which is so wrong. But it is an insult, for an academic to be said you're good at teaching do, more of that.

Paul Jones 56:02

Yeah...

DBA 18 56:04

But, in the ideal world, we would be good at this. It's a shame that, I mean, let's say for example, I think I'm quite good at all three, not 100%, but I mean, I'm, I don't know how good you can be at admin, by the way, I can fill out forms haha.

Paul Jones 56:28

I am sure you are excellent at doing admin, I'm sure you've found the right ways to do it.

DBA 18 56:31

Yeah. Okay. I'm good at admin. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, I think I'm reasonably competent. I think I'm, I'm, I think I'm a good teacher. I'm a confident, good teacher, I believe that. And I think I'm a good researcher, I think I cover all that, by the way, I'm conscious of this, because I'm just providing my, my dreaded promotion application.

Paul Jones 56:59

Okay...

DBA 18 56:59

And I can give you the whole thing about why I'm good at everything. Because, for the last month I've tried to convince myself that I am good at everything.

Paul Jones 57:09

Yeah, the whole speaking to yourself in the mirror type thing, of like, I'm good at this, I'm good at that, etc. We have got to have that sense of being in it together, haven't you? And if you've got people who aren't teaching, where a lot of the pressure comes from, then it doesn't give you that feeling of cohesion as a group, and it feels like there's different classes then, isn't there, of people who are good enough just to do research or people...

DBA 18 57:14

Yeah! It's really like that. Come on, come on, I am excellent. Also, you know, good at dancing and everything. And, and, um, but can I expect everybody to be good? Is it, a good at everything? Or is it a better world where we have people who are very good at one thing and not good at the other thing? I'm not even sure but I mean, what, what I really, what annoys me is the idea of I'm good at research, so I don't, shouldn't be doing any teaching, it, it destroys the culture, it denigrates our cash cow. And it denigrates people at the heart. And it's, this is the wrong, the wrong approach. Yeah! It becomes a class system and some people feel comfortable in this class or caste system. And it is, it is, it is wrong, it is wrong on, if it, does it look good for our KPIs? That's the stupid thing. It probably does look good on our KPIs. Bringing in divas who are not getting bothered with teaching probably pays off in terms of a research grant income and so on and so on.

Paul Jones 58:23

It's weird, it's weird the way it works isn't it? Teaching is what pays the bills and keeps the lights on...

DBA 18 58:46

Yeah...,

Paul Jones 58:46

... but in terms of kudos and reputation, research is what gets you known around the world. Being a good teacher won't get you known around the world, being a good teacher gets you probably more teaching activities and things...

DBA 18 59:03

Yes, yes it's dreadful...

Paul Jones 59:04

... but you won't be remembered for your teaching unless students remember you years down the line. What you get remembered for is the, is your research and then, even though teaching is massively important to us to pay the bills, it's the REF and related things that really drive kudos and activity to make sure that people are happy and they've got good jobs and this idea of a teaching and research contract, how can you be on a teaching and research contract but not doing any teaching? You could be on a research only contract, but then, that's not the same kudos for people as a teaching and research contract. I think people prefer academically to get jobs and promotions, it's generally better to be on a T&R contract. Yeah, because then they have to fill in something in, the teaching part of the, of the, of the application form then. And it is, I mean, they, they, want one thing, let's assume that somebody who is a good researcher, quite a number of them could actually be also good teachers, if they would consider it to be worthy of their time. And that's important, because I mean, the feedback I got from from some of the teaching fellows, because we are in the, you know, in the [redacted] group...

DBA 18 1:00:29

..., I'm looking after the [redacted] bubble, which is around [redacted] people, [redacted]. So we started off with probably [redacted] or [redacted] teaching fellows [redacted] years ago, [redacted] years ago, every time, nearly every time we lost a teaching / research colleague, we were replaced with a teaching fellow. So we are now, I think, around [redacted] are teaching fellows.

Paul Jones 1:00:29

Yeah... Really?

DBA 18 1:00:56

Yes. And, because first of all, we don't find anybody who can actually meet the requirements of both. And there was always the opportunity, or we have two more courses we need to teach, we only have one position. So we need a teaching fellow in order to create more capacity for teaching. So now I'm hearing, and I'm actually believing it, the teaching fellows say, this is not, they want an environment, which is not just about reproducing the same slides every term or so, but interesting discussions and, and more. I mean, they started, a lot have PhDs, they have a research interest, as well. And we are becoming just a sausage factory of teaching and losing that research side. So they, they've considered this to be a less attractive place to work even as teaching fellows. Because there's nothing interesting happening.

Paul Jones 1:01:55

Yeah, that's disappointing then, isn't it? Because I've noticed on the stats about how we've lost a lot of T&R staff, and seem to have backfilled with teaching only staff. And you want to make their roles as interesting as possible, as well, and give them the motivation to want to develop and think about things differently, not just that sausage factory mentioned.

DBA 18 1:02:14

Yeah...

Paul Jones 1:02:15

That's really interesting. So one last question for you then, in terms of external factors that influence you and your job, we've talked a lot about REF, is REF the main one that might hang over you a little bit in terms of thinking about your role, or did none of them really bother you in terms of your day to day role, you just plod on as usual. And you know, you'll meet the criteria that is expected of you, because you've got a good pipeline in the works, and the work you do is good. So do those external factors bother you at all?

DBA 18 1:02:42

Funny that you're saying that. You were not around, but [redacted].

Paul Jones 1:02:48

Really?

DBA 18 1:02:48

... from the University. Yes. [redacted] REF.

Paul Jones 1:02:56

Okay...

DBA 18 1:02:57

So the story goes like this. I came from, when I came from [redacted], high focused, then I, there was one, in my world [redacted], one journal, one journal, that only [redacted] of the people publish in. It's called [redacted]. We were working on one paper, and one paper only with my colleagues even here. So I didn't have any other papers, and this paper just didn't get accepted. So I didn't have a lot of papers to show. So when [redacted] came in, in the [redacted] year, he reviewed all the outcomes. And I ended up on the wrong side of the spreadsheet. And on a teaching and research contract with little research to show. So he wanted to meet everybody. And all of them, we got an email, I got the special paragraph in my email, this might become a difficult conversation. If you want to bring your union representative with you, please do so. This is the day I joined the union haha. Yeah, and I went in there with my union representative. And in order to, to, yeah. I mean, there was a recruitment consultant alongside and she has gone through all the CVs and they were setting it up as a conversation about you know, are you sure you are in the right job here, or what else do you want to do? I prepared well, so I got out and I think I managed to turn the ship around. But yeah, so the REF, the outside REF thing bothered me a lot, at this point in time. Now, not so much anymore, because, you know, the pipeline is there and I'm not so at risk anymore. I found my, I found my balance. Yeah, what bothers me are external factors. What bothers me a bit is, is that I believe I do a good job. And, and, you know, it's quite easy to compare yourself as an academic. Because, you know, you see the papers, you see the grant income, and so on and so on. And I see that there's a lot of colleagues outside in other universities, and even better universities, they've already been promoted to [redacted], and with less whatever characteristic you want to look at. And that, that bothers me that I mean, I'm now going for the case, for building my case for, for promotion, and so on and so on. But yeah, I mean, this, this bothers me that I don't think, I don't want recognition in the terms of, that people should be telling me that you're good or good. I don't, this is, yeah, but in terms of progression, and so on, that this is not automatically happening.

Paul Jones 1:05:53

So I would imagine then, that you'll find yourself caught between thinking that you'd have to move elsewhere to get promotions more easily if you're looking at the external environment, versus being in a really good team that you work really well with, and part of your success is because you've got this team that you work, and are embedded into. And those two things don't gel very well then, do they? When you think that your career prospects seem to be jeopardised, because the university has got his own

processes for development, and other people are succeeding, but then you wouldn't want to give up what you got with that [redacted] group of people you work with. That seems like a really hard position to be in then.

DBA 18 1:06:28

And, and, this is the position I am in, literally, am in.

Paul Jones 1:06:35

For the record, I'd hate to see you, you leave the university, because I think from what I've seen you do a really good job. And I always enjoy our conversations, but it has come up before about the promotions criteria being hoops to jump through that are really hard at Aston compared to other places.

DBA 18 1:06:50

And, and, even other places that are University of Birmingham, that we would rate higher, in terms of these things here. No, I mean, they and I've been, I've been in a situation where I'm, and in recruitment, I was at a recruitment panel. And I had, there was a person that we were deciding if they should be lecturer or senior lecturer, okay, did that make the cut and so on. And then there was an argument, you know what, let's do him only lecturer because he is based in Birmingham. And he would come anyway, even though we could actually make him Senior Lecturer. And this really pissed me off, saying, okay, there is value there, it should be comparative, that because there are circumstances that will tie him to Aston, we don't have to give him the recognition or the let's say, the formal of pay, whatever it is, that pissed me off. And I don't believe this will happen when I apply, I hope it doesn't happen, I will not be in the room when it happens. But I mean, that might be one of the reasons that, or one of the things you know, he would not leave anyway, because he's very much integrated here. It's the wrong argument. And I hope it doesn't happen. And I wouldn't hear anyway, if it happens on us, but, but it might well be yeah.

Paul Jones 1:08:10

That, yeah, that would be disappointing for me, as well, as it should be based on people's merit, and both what they've done, but also the potential they show, not trying to, try and get the cheapest deal possible, and bargain people down...

DBA 18 1:08:23

Exactly

Paul Jones 1:08:24

... this should be about celebrating an environment where we are keen to develop people, want to bring the right people in, and then we reward them for having done good stuff in the past.

DBA 18 1:08:31

And, and, I mean, the cost for the university between me now and [redacted], what is it? £10,000 per year, £5000 per year, this is, this is not much, it is, you know, the difference in salary is not really making a big dent in anybody's budget of the university. So not giving this label, because of something, it's just not right. Yeah.

Paul Jones 1:08:58

I'd much rather focus on getting the right people in, and paying them what they deserve. But also tackling the poor performance that exists and getting people to do their job. Because I find it really hard that we would be so picky over bringing people in, and say those types of things, but then we don't tackle poor performance very well and try to challenge people on not doing the job we employ them to do.. That seems like, I mean, it seems backwards.

DBA 18 1:09:24

I got, I got [redacted], quite directly haha.

Paul Jones 1:09:30

You did, but there are examples where, I think when [redacted] came in, there was probably a big push to try and look at that, for that REF, because it would have been probably about [redacted], would it have been, when you went through that?

DBA 18 1:09:42

Yeah.

Paul Jones 1:09:43

Because it would have been just before the last REF then when they were trying to clear people out probably and thinking, you know, what can we do to make the REF submission better, and some of the things that happened this time for the last REF, but that, that's a bit backwards in terms of how we do stuff, and support people, and trying to get the best out of people then.

DBA 18 1:10:07

Yeah, well, well, we will see, we'll see what happens.

Paul Jones 1:10:09

Well, good luck with your promotion, I think that has covered everything, is there anything else you wanted to mention that might be relevant?

DBA 18 1:10:15

Um, not at this point. But yeah, I enjoyed the conversation and it helped to think about how this place needs to be run. So I'm glad that you're taking such an interest. So I mean, you're in it for the, for the long run. So help us to be a lovely place here. That's what we want.

Paul Jones 1:10:36

Part of the reason I chose this topic was there's definitely a gap in terms of what we do, I think, in supporting people. That's not the only gap I have identified, but it is certainly one I can do some work on and think, oh, there is an opportunity here to make a difference, and do something good, and try and shift the balance of picking holes in people to actually think in a way, how can we get the best out of people? How can we help support them and develop them, then? If I can shift that meter more towards that direction, I'll be happy then that I've done a good job for this.

DBA 18 1:11:04

And, and, just one thought that came to me the other day. I mean, I was walking, coming from the, usually I come from New Street, this time I came from back there. And I realised, I mean, we are getting surrounded by Birmingham City University. I mean, I don't know if you have walked around there. I mean, it's amazing, the strategic investment they made in looking good in, their in it, for, you know, for greatness. I don't know if they get the students to do, at the end of everything, whatever, well I have the feeling that at Aston, first of all, our buildings crumble, our staff crumbles. Everything is just about not investing in big things. But in putting out fires here and there. And you know, you're, I know you're, you are a photographer, or artistically seeing, you know, somebody painting a big picture of ambition and greatness. And then I come to Aston and everything crumbles. That's what is a shocker for me. And we are arguably couple of leagues above that university, but they are writing the better story.

Paul Jones 1:11:30

They are writing a better story, and it's impressive to see all of the building work they've done, and the investment they've made. Our campus, while it is not shrinking. It always feels like it's shrinking because of that growth around us then. And there isn't this investment that we need to make things work effectively. Whether it's in people, whether it's in buildings...

DBA 18 1:12:17

Exactly.

Paul Jones 1:12:19

... it's just a general lack of growth to think about the plan of how we're going to get forward, it always seems to be like, we are caught on the back foot. And we're always reactive rather than proactive.

DBA 18 1:12:48

Exactly.

Paul Jones 1:12:49

And that's a difficult place to be then, isn't it?

DBA 18 1:12:51

Yeah, because it's, you know, it affects in the long run anyway. Enough moaning for now, I need to go to another meeting.

Paul Jones 1:13:00

I know, I don't want to be responsible for a breakdown in communication between you two. Thank you very much for your time. That's very much appreciated.

DBA 18 1:13:06

Thank you.

Paul Jones 1:13:08

Okay, bye

Appendix 22: DBA19 Transcript

Interviewer: Paul Jones

Interviewee: DBA19

Paul Jones 00:06

So I have started recording. Firstly, thank you for volunteering to be a participant in my study entitled individual perspectives on engaged scholarship: reforming professional development from the bottom up. I am talking to you as a doctoral student studying for a Doctor in Business Administration qualification. The primary purpose of the research is to investigate, from the bottom up, how academic staff members view their professional development, what is important to them, and where they feel there are gaps. The interview will last approximately one hour, we have scheduled 1.5 hours to make sure it comes to a natural end. The interview is semi-structured, this means I have some general topic areas that I want to explore, you're free to explore your thoughts and experiences as you want. I may at times try to keep it within the broader bounds of my research area. Though I intend to do that with the least number of interruptions or questions possible. You have 14 days from the date of this interview to request that your data be removed from the study. Once past that point, your data will be anonymised, and it will be impossible to withdraw, you can withdraw by emailing me, regarding this, using the details on the participant information sheet. Following the interview, the recording will be transcribed and all links to you as an individual, including personal data, will be removed. And the original recording destroyed. The only individuals who will have access to the anonymised data are myself and my supervisory team. The interview is considered low risk, If you do need to stop the discussion for a break, or you need to stop completely, please raise your hand so I know you need to stop. If you'd like to move on from a particular topic, then please do indicate you'd like to do so by asking directly. I may stop the interview if you're feeling distressed, or if I'm feeling distressed myself. I'm going to ask you a few closed ended questions to start and then we will start exploring your experiences regarding professional development. For the record this is interviewed DBA 19. So can you confirm you understand the information I've given you?

DBA19 01:50

Oh yes, yes.

Paul Jones 01:51

Great, and you're happy to proceed with the recorded interview?

DBA19 01:53

Yep. All good. Paul. All good.

Paul Jones 01:55

Great. And do you understand how to withdraw your data?

DBA19 01:59

Yeah, I understand that.

Paul Jones 02:00

Can you confirm what school you work in please?

DBA19 02:04

[redacted].

Paul Jones 02:07

And can you confirm your gender, please?

DBA19 02:09

Yeah. I'm [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:11

Good. And then are you on a teaching and research contract?

DBA19 02:13

Yeah.

Paul Jones 02:14

Great. So two last questions. How would you describe your career level: early career, mid career, senior career?

DBA19 02:22

Uh, mid career, I suppose. I mean, I did my doctorates in [redacted], yeah, about [redacted] years that's probably correct.

Paul Jones 02:33

And could you confirm which age bracket you're in? So 25 To 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64?

DBA19 02:44

[redacted], I'm [redacted].

Paul Jones 02:47

[redacted]. Great. So can you talk to me about your thoughts on professional development and your experiences?

DBA19 02:55

Yeah, so. Paul, maybe just one thing to clarify at the start. I have experience in a number of contexts. I've got experience in a role I have in a [redacted] outside work. I've got experience from a [redacted]. But I'm assuming that this is only going to be about the bits in the Aston context, is that, is that most useful to you?

Paul Jones 03:10

Start with the Aston, but one of the questions or areas I want to go into later was experience outside of HE that could be beneficial within HE, or has been beneficial with HE. So start with professional development in Aston or elsewhere. But then we can move on to experience, some experiences, from outside then as I think that is important.

DBA19 03:38

Yeah, okay. I mean, so, okay, I mean, a couple of, a few opening reflections, then, you know, since, since really working in the university, on professional development. There are a range of different ways in which academics would develop professionally. And I think, I think people might view them differently. One will be about the acquisition of new skills directly related, excuse me, directly related to research. And candidly, this is not an area that I've done very much in, I really enjoy going to conferences, picking up what people are doing. Going to colleagues presentations. My own research is probably stuck in a methodological time warp around the mid 90s. So I don't bring great quantitative skills to the piece, nor do I use kind of computer assisted textual analysis, or anything like that. What instead I'll tend to do is, if needs be, bring onboard a co-author and that sort of thing. But in that scenario, and I think a lot of colleagues see value in that, we could talk talk more about it. There's then stuff I suppose, which is quite directly related to the sort of core teaching business that we do. I did the PG cert early on because I was required to do it. Obviously, I've taken part in any number of peer observations over the years, that sort of thing. I supervise a number of doctoral students, and so have taken part in the training that's, that's required for that, I suppose, so those are all, you know, relevant, relevant things that

one might do. And then there's a sort of further bundle of things which relate to academic sort of wider responsibilities in the university. And some of those will be the sort of, I don't know, the training one might do on a new university policy, like due diligence, or whatever it is. Or the fire, the famous fire safety training, which gets far fewer plaudits now it's video rather than the dishy firemen wandering around, which was much appreciated by a number of my colleagues. And, yeah, all of that sort of thing, as well. I mean, I could offer reflections on any of those elements that you would like, and about how they, how they work for academics. But over to you.

Paul Jones 06:08

Do you think then, as you mentioned earlier about the skills externally, because what I am trying to do is identify gaps, I think, in terms of what exists at the moment and how we do professional development, versus what it could be like then? So one of the things I'm really keen to talk to people about, and have done is, what have you learnt outside of university in your experiences, that you've brought back in, that's been useful, but doesn't necessarily play part of how we train and develop academic staff?

DBA19 06:36

Okay, no that is a fair question. So, you mentioned a bit outside the university context. So, as I mentioned, I've for the last [redacted] years, been a member of a, of a [redacted], and have been mentored and have been a mentee in that role. And it clearly benefited from an element of professional development in that. And then also, other sort of roles around that. And then I [redacted] department quite recently, and created some training as part of that. A couple of things. I mean, one reflection, I mean, one is that the single most instructive bit, is working alongside someone and being able to watch and learn really at the top of their game. So the bit which really made a difference to me was working with a [redacted] chief exec for quite some years, who's just recently retired. And it's no surprise he, you know, in his career, he got any number of kind of accolades, you know, [redacted] of the year here, there and everywhere, and just watching, watching, watching and appreciating how someone could offer clear, strategic leadership, I found tremendously beneficial. And I picked up quite a bit from that, and tried to deploy it, no doubt in a less, in a far less, in a far less adept way when I was [redacted], and I went on some, I think I went on some sort of management training courses, they were not a patch on simply, you know, watching, watching and learning from someone that was really, really good. Not, not, you know, that can't always, that can't always work, around the university context, one works alongside people, some people are very good at what they do. But, but anyway, yeah, that that was one bit. In the [redacted], actually, bit, bit of a different context. So maybe this is something we can tease out. So there, in the [redacted] environment, you absolutely have to demonstrate your commitment to continuous professional development, for promotion opportunities. And, so, probably it was a bit over the top, to be completely honest. And people would be seeking out some opportunities that weren't always very relevant, and rather over egging the pudding. And it could just, it could get a bit much. But that will segue into a reflection I've got on Aston in a moment. In the best bit, actually, the most memorable bit of training I did, was about race and ethnicity. And it was a very interesting talk, which was led principally by some of my colleagues who were Black, Asian, Minority and Ethnic background. That was the term they used. And we talked about various scenarios, factors, in online session, which were quite related to real life and it was extremely thought provoking. And I thought that was really, really excellent. And I took quite a lot from it, not just again, from, you, you know, for that particular role, but for other, other roles as well. And, part of it, I think, was the very fact that it was delivered by colleagues of an ethnic minority background themselves who were affected by the sort of situations they were talking about every day, and that we were involved in every day. So it was very sort of clearly relevant and practical. And a reflection on the difference between [redacted] and Aston, and this is, I think, this is probably a slightly depressing, depressing bit Paul, but I'll just say it. If [redacted] goes a bit over the top, and people are running around training till the cows come home, in order to tick boxes for promotion, in academia, you're playing a constant game of keepy-uppy, with all of the other obligations. Yeah?

Paul Jones 10:48

Yeah.

DBA19 10:49

So, you know, I'm looking at my list of tasks, I know I need to contact my students about the dissertations, I know I need to contact my placement students, I've just been chasing up some budget stuff, my teaching, it'd be nice if I prepared it for week after next, you end up just juggling so much stuff. And some of these things are things which are you really core to what you do and very immediate priorities. You know, if a student contacts you, and if not, if you're not marked the student work, that's a problem. You're not turning up to lectures or you haven't got anything to say, as you're not prepared enough, that's no good. Or, alternatively, particularly on the research side, you actually need to be advancing your own agenda. And my sense is that unless it's about research, you know, skills that are directly related to research. And there will be a degree of impatience amongst academics. And it's not because people are bad people, it's because people simply don't have the bandwidth to do stuff, which is perceived to be nice to have. Yeah? And so and so, and people's bandwidth is really, really limited. And that's a sad thing, and then sometimes you'll, you'll get the impression you're making, you know, someone's delivering the training a bit sad, or you have to get bullied into turning up to something, because you know, you get 28 reminder emails, then again, you know, some sort of threat about being reported to the Dean, or whatever. It's not how anyone would want the world to be, but it unfortunately does reflect the reality of people's situations at the moment. And so that's sort of what you end up battling with. I don't know the answer to that. Because the University, and a punch line, a logical punch line would be, the university should be more like [redacted], and we should reward people, and expect people to be training themselves in the relevant professional skills, that'd be a perfectly reasonable punch line. And that's fine if they say, but by the way, we're reducing our expectations for publication and grants. But they don't say that, and they're not going to say that. So then you just end up lumping more and more in, and so sadly, this sort of workload conundrum, which I know in other bits of your life, you're painfully aware of, sort of pops up here too, and rather colors people's view of the whole thing. Those are a few reflections.

Paul Jones 12:51

I think that is really useful. You're not the first person to have mentioned the tensions between all the different aspects of the job, and it's one of the reasons I wanted to do the DBA was this, for T&R staff in particular, was that battle between teaching, research, and administration duties and other things that get tagged on as well. And this idea that what you're being asked of, year on year increases, without people taking away stuff as well. So, it is this constant filling of you up to the brim, and over the brim, quite often. And people find it hard to find out where they should put their time and energy then. You mentioned about [redacted] and continuing professional development. I've had some experience in [redacted], so I can empathise with some of the good parts, and some of the bad parts, about what that environment is like. The CPD more generally has come up a couple of times. Do you think then, that the university should be looking to professionalise things a bit more, in terms of the way we consider training and development and ensuring that in workload planning, time is given towards those type of activities to make sure people do it?

DBA19 13:59

Well, the chance, chance, I mean, should the university keep asking people to do more and more with the same number of hours in the day? No. So the university needs a clear view of what it asks people to prioritise in the round and that does mean being willing sometimes to deprioritise. Should professional development be part of the mixture? Yes, it, I believe it should. You know, very candidly, I have maybe, again, maybe I'm a bit outspoken on this, but I'll just say it. On the teaching side, I find it truly remarkable, that so much of what is offered, in terms of CPD, has no benefit at all to our students. And, this, this, this festival of different fellowships and super fellowships, or whatever they're called, which is increasingly being asked for, with no reference at all back to the student experience, that I can see, and then a unanimous view amongst people that have done them, that did it as a box to tick because I want to get my promotion, is really, is really unhelpful and too much of it is sort of process focused. So I think the university probably, in doing that, needs to be quite ruthless about whether, whether what's being put forward really benefits its mission. Because, because also, and this is something I think we may have, we may have talked about this a bit in the past, but everyone believes their own little bit of the

world is the most important bit of the world. So I'm the [redacted] lead, right, and I could devise a CPD module on that and say, it's really important everyone does my module, so they understand what [redacted] is, and there would be some benefit. But whether that's a greater benefit, than other ways of people spending time, where it's just lumping an extra thing in, is a bit of a moot point. And I think, you know, every bit of that. every bit has to challenge itself there. And then specifically, on the teaching side, I mean, you know, we can't be lifting nine grand a year plus, off our students, or more in the case of other categories of student, and then be providing them with an unsatisfactory experience as learners. And so, of course, you know, ensuring people, one way or another, have the skills they need to deliver teaching effectively, it has to be part of, it has to be part of that. I'm not sure whether necessarily, what we deliver quite meets that ambition. That's my sneaking suspicion. So you know, yes, it's got to be done. Of course, it should be part of where how individuals spend their time, of course, it should be considered with workloads, of course, then, you need to be willing to deprioritise. And also, you need to be a bit ruthless about stuff, which is a nice to have, which is peripheral to the aim, which you're trying to serve. Okay, if you're, if you're, if, for example, take an example from my bit of the world, right? If you're saying, well, what we really care about [redacted] is a better REF return.

Paul Jones 16:52

Yeah...

DBA19 16:53

Then if I give everyone a little mini course on [redacted], it's not going to make any difference to [redacted], because I don't think there's going to be any academics, who've never thought of [redacted] before, who in five years time will turn in a terrific [redacted]. So you know, the people will be more knowledgeable, but it wouldn't actually help with that, with that goal. So you need to align the training to the goals that you want to achieve.

Paul Jones 17:12

Yeah, no, I agree. It's, um, there's a lot of silo working that happens quite often where, as you mentioned, each person is concerned about their own little patch without the wider dots being joined up. And then thinking about how we have a strategy, but then how we operationalise that and give people the space, and time, and the expertise to do that in different pockets. So when the ideas, what often happens, is that if you are managing a department, or a school, or a college, that you have the same expectations of every single member of staff. So you want people to be excellent at teaching, you want people to be excellent at research, that can include publications, grants, supervision, impact, but it's impossible for everybody to be good at everything and deliver everything. So ideas about how we can share the workload in different ways, and have a team of people are quite interesting then, where you can make sure that individuals who are good at certain things are given the space and time to do those things. Other people who are good at other things are given space and time. And as a collective whole, you've got a team of players that can go out there and deliver on the day, on the week or on a year, then, rather than saying everyone's got to be good at everything, because that doesn't give any clarity then.

DBA19 18:20

Agree. Yes. I mean, you know, absolutely. And, I mean, part of that's also about about good leadership, isn't it? You know, part of that is also about giving, giving, giving managers, I think, the space to, the space to step off the treadmill and think about where they want to go. And my observation would be, for example, heads of department are just constantly bombarded with messages. And it's a constant kind of firefighting exercise or Whack a Mole exercise. So taking a step back and thinking, how do I deploy my team resources in the best way possible is, is very difficult. I'm not honestly sure either that we necessarily give all the kind of relevant training, support, mentoring, to make that, to make that work necessarily. And then, you know, yes, a kind of a template, saying, here's an academic, the academic should have this module feedback score, this level of grants for this career stage, you know, this publication in this journal, this impact factor, I mean, give it a rest people, people aren't like that, and that way, will just

lead to people feeling inadequate and fed up and you'll also just miss what people are doing well, except for a few, a few sort of stars. And, yeah, not, not, not a good way of dealing with human beings.

Paul Jones 19:50

So do you think the culture then, generally, lends itself to people having time and space, and the motivation, to think about their professional development, or is it a case of just keep your head down and try to get through the list of things you've got to do.

DBA19 20:01

Yeah, no, it's absolute, life is far too much Whack a Mole. Yeah. You know, I've got to fill in the tasks that I've not done it, course I've not done it, I never do it without a reminder. I mean, it's just like a snooze button on alarm clock, you know, you snooze it and eventually, you chuck the alarm clock across the room when you get out of bed. The, I see, we've got some correspondence about research ethics. So I'm aware the decision was taken, it's fine. We should do research ethics modules, but you end up just with Whack a Mole. And there's certainly no, no strategic plan. I mean, some people are very good, but I think it'd be very good when they've got particular commitments on research. You know, I may have a colleague who thinks I really need to learn these new skills for my papers. And I think then they'll kind of fit in their mission, or they might do a course or whatever. If it's perceived to be very relevant to promotion, people might kind of put it in a bit of a work plan. But that happens with a teaching fellowship. So, as to say, that's never about an ambition to be a better teacher, sadly. But then other than that, no, we're all just whack a mole, we don't have anything like enough space, we're just sort of, you know, trying to box and cox as best we can. Yeah, it's one way of doing things. And it means people eventually, probably, mostly get around to doing some of the training that they should, but it's no real way to run a railway.

Paul Jones 21:24

No, and I think the points you have made there, and I have had another conversation about this as well, is that we talk in one way about what we should be doing, but the behaviors and attitudes, and the space given by management to do stuff is different to what we say we're good at, and what we're supposed to do. So if we take the students as being a key beneficiary, then you think that you would do everything to make sure they have the best experience possible. The examples you've given are very much self motivated ones, where people do the best by playing the game they have to, to get their own careers in place or things, not because the beneficiaries at the end are the ones who are going to benefit then.

DBA19 22:03

That's right, now, I mean, a footnote there, by the way, I don't, I can barely think of any colleagues at Aston, who have a dismissive attitude to teaching. So, on the one hand, over here, you've got some professional development stuff on, on teaching, which in practice, to my mind doesn't relate very much to what happens in the classroom, or the experiences students have. And then over here, you've got academics actually, absolutely wanting to do the best by their students. Sometimes, I've observed with colleagues that in order to give the best students the best experience, they can, there's a kind of view, I must work harder. So people laying on extra stuff for students or whatever. And, you know, actually, you know, there'll be times when that could be, you know, there might be something they could do differently. But, but the space doesn't necessarily exist for that. So, I think there's a bit of a disconnect there between people's absolute hunger to do the right thing for their students, which I think people really want to do, on the one hand, it's not the people, it's just about them, and then sort of a training offer, where you just don't really have time to take advantage of it. You know, and people could hear what happened a bit, Paul, you know, we could devise a Lunch and Learn series of sessions on working with students on group work, or how to handle it, if students are kind of chatting at the back, or whatever it's going to be, right, useful stuff, useful teaching skills stuff, and you might get off out of the college, you might get 15 People join a teams call. But you know, the bandwidth is just not really there because of people's ever commitment.

Paul Jones 23:39

Yeah, and I think one of the things I like about trying to pass on knowledge and skills, I think formal training courses have a place in terms of helping people, but I would much rather see communities of practice, where you share ideas, you've got people you can work with, and smaller groups, and share ideas about how you can improve things, and then pass on things you've tried, and maybe failed at. And the reason why they failed, or good things you've done then, people don't seem to have the time to do that. Even though that makes sense. In my head, there seems to be little, little chance to cross pollinate ideas and to share those types of things. Would that mirror your own experiences?

DBA19 24:15

Um, I think it does. A bit of a caveat. Departmental life gives you a bit of the kind of informal community of learning. Now my observation would be, since the advent, since the pandemic, and since the advent of teams, I say Microsoft Teams, and more virtual teaching and what have you. Departmental life is less intense, you just see fewer colleagues, you see them less frequently. But it still happens, in practice, those, those communities of sort of practice, whatever they do, exist around that sort of structure still somewhat, and in practice, that's good. You know, I'm struck that we, so we've had two depart... this maybe supports your point, we have had two departmental away days, in the last couple of years, we have one a year or so, at the start of the year. The one two years ago, it was an absolute fiasco, we had a ridiculously full agenda, we didn't get through two thirds of it, it ended up virtually with a stand up row between two people, both of whom were meant to have a slot before the end of the agenda about who was going to pick up this slot, and what was gonna happen and that wasted a bit more time, I, I had to walk out and do something else at that point anyway, so it didn't worry me. But, you know, it just, it was, it was absolutely hopeless. And it was partly because it was a bit of a, you know, our head of department was being given all of these messages that you know, and all of these things we were meant to cover and come in on an away day, there might have been some guest speakers, goodness knows what, right. So it was a complete waste of time. And, you know, a classic case of just trying to do everything and doing nothing, not doing nothing properly. This time, we had a kind of three item agenda, which I think was something like teaching, research and AOB, slightly exaggerate. And we actually carved out the space for some really useful discussion, as actually, that was more a bit more of a genuine community of learning. And I think I'm a believer, if you put people that have got kind of common problems in common together, in an environment, it can be a virtual environment, but in person is better. And you have the space for discussion, then something will probably be achieved.

Paul Jones 26:37

Yeah, I think it's the space areas there. Because, I think, from what we've talked about, and what I have talked about to others, there's a lot of people who want to do a good job, they just haven't got the time to think about how they can do their job better. And just carving out space and time to get people together, there's practical useful things you can get out of that time, you just have to be able to commit that time, to be able to get people together, and finding that shared time and space to do it, then.

DBA19 27:07

Yeah, I think that's right, with you know, just with the caveat, it's still time. And so, you know, it's a struggle because of people juggling. Yeah. And I mean, we can, we can overegg this right. And I mean, you know, it may be people are gold plating other tasks, that maybe people are choosing to do things which, you know, in the greater scheme of things, maybe they shouldn't be, shouldn't be choosing to do and, and, you know, I love a moan about these things. But I'm also guilty of agreeing to contribute a chapter to someone's edited volume, where probably completely ruthlessly I shouldn't do that, I should, should do something else, you know. So we're all guilty of that a bit. But yeah, the time is tricky. So if you, if you end up, you know, sticking in a, I don't know, let's say we abolish half of our staff research seminars, or we make them two hours, not one hour, and have the same number of papers, in order to have informal time and space to meet as a department. It'll get squeezed, people won't come or if you absolutely three-line whip it, they will come but there'll be a bit resentful, because then they're having to work in tonight on other things, which they should be doing. So we will we keep coming full circle to this rather rather depressing point.

Paul Jones 28:14

Do you think, going back then to something you mentioned earlier about the mentoring, for instance, you mentioned the importance of mentoring to you, from an external point of view, when you worked with other people, you mentioned the chief exec as well, and you've seen things in practice. How useful has that been, more generally, to your performance within HE? Has that translated really well?

DBA19 28:36

Yeah, 100%, because, I mean, in my, so my [redacted] role, you are giving direction to [redacted] on particular particular issues, at a range of levels, part of that is about motivating people, thinking clearly, not mixing messages, giving people the space to do their jobs, but then also, the sort of guidance when it's needed. But it's a, it's not a managerial relationship, it's a, it's a leadership role. And it's a bit more hands off, you know, if you're looking like a line manager, then you're doing it wrong, and you're, you're, you're missing the wood for the trees. But, you know, absolutely, because that is essentially a transferable skill. And I did, you know, try quite hard to, you know, hopefully draw on some of the good practice that I saw from [redacted] government, when I was being, particularly being, being a [redacted]. And to be honest, as well, bits and pieces, I mean, you will form your own view on whether it works or not, but when I'm interacting with, with colleagues at whatever level in the university, undoubtedly the way I would, in a university meeting, whatever, the way I would do that would be informed by experiences. Outside the university, I mean, you, just interacting with people in those sort of, in those sort of fora, of course, you bring all of your, all of your sort of learning, learning with you. I say mentoring, I've had plenty of those relationships in both directions. When is a mentor, not a mentor? Sometimes a mentor is also a colleague appear a friend. And you might not say, hey, you're my mentor. I don't think you have to call it that. But in practice, you're discussing your experiences, you're learning, you're possibly learning from, you know, learning from each other. It doesn't, it doesn't have to trade under that name.

Paul Jones 30:45

Yeah, and I'd agree with that. I think that, one of the things that I have done in my career is I have always found people I can feel comfortable talking with, who I want to discuss with, whose values, whose opinions I value. I think those types of networks have always proved really beneficial for me. I'm not sure that we give academics the skills to be able to develop those relationships very easily. We tend to train PhD students in a very independent researcher way to get them fit to be on their own, and do stuff on their own, but then they go off into academic roles, and then we haven't necessarily given them the skills, and how they can function and operate in a more, a wider context within universities or business environments, then. And I think I've seen that with some academic staff, where they haven't developed a wider set of skills about how they can network effectively, or build relationships effectively, or do some key things that you tend to get from other industries, we don't really provide that type of training, either, from what I can see. Would you agree with that or have you got different thoughts on that?

DBA19 31:50

Gosh, let me think, so a couple, a couple of reflections, I think, I think that's right. I wonder whether, I wonder a bit what, in what discipline, whether it varies a bit from discipline to discipline. And I probably wouldn't overegg the pudding. You know, there are, for example, there are colleagues on the [redacted] side, in our college, who clearly engage very successfully with all sorts of private sector enterprises. And if I was just to pick up your sort of characterisation just now, you would perhaps assume that they wouldn't have the skills to do that. But it seems to be working. So one way or another, maybe also about the different sort of journeys people have been on to becoming academics, at Aston. Yeah. I mean, some people have different backgrounds. But, you know, some people will absolutely, will absolutely do that. And will do it very effectively. And also, people, some people, have a hinterland. Some will be very academic academics. Sometimes people might have roles in a voluntary sector, or they might be doing some, you know, serious sporting stuff outside. And sometimes that will mean that they don't have sort of, the people skills, which mean that then if they go to an academic conference, they're more likely to forge the sort of rapport which leads to something, for example. So we might, I think, maybe we get there sometimes by hook or by crook, but probably not by design, which I would, I would

accept the premise of your question. But, but equally, maybe we do a little bit better than, than it might give us rise to expect.

Paul Jones 33:26

Yeah, I'd agree, I think there's probably, there's a lot of time where three groups seem to be relevant, you'll have people who are really good at it, you will have this middle ground where there's potential, and then you have this group that are never going to do it, because it doesn't interest them or motivate them, or they just don't want to do those types of things. And I guess for me, if we're looking at trying to develop staff more so, then trying to find ways to get the potential realised with that middle group, then, where you could learn off some of the people in that top group of thinking, oh these people are really good, how can they pass on their knowledge and skills? Is there more formal training we can do? How do we create space, or mentoring, or work shadow, or different things, so you can pick up those skills then. I had a conversation the other day about KTPs and the person I was talking to acts as a facilitator quite often, to be a broker between an organisation, understanding their needs, then trying to find the right academic colleagues that could partner with it on a KTP then. It's those types of skills, where you can listen, understand and have a wider perspective, sometimes that seem to be missing, where the external experiences that people get, provide some of that contextual information to really make everything come together as a whole. And I wonder if there's things we can do to better, to better realise, those types of opportunities for people. Like trying to give people, like we do with study leave, how we put things in place every couple of years for people to to have experiences that can benefit them more contextually. So the [redacted] you did, was that an easy thing to arrange or was it quite hard to jump through hoops to try and get to do that?

DBA19 34:58

It was, it was an [redacted]. So and, and that, it was quite an easy form, and I pitched up and I did an interview, but, but it was reasonably, you know, you can't just turn up and say, hey, I'd like to be there. You know, it was a reasonably competitive [redacted], I think, [redacted]. And I think it can be, you know, when people go out of an organisation, and quite often they decide the grass is greener, and then they leave, and that actually with this [redacted] stuff, a number of people have jumped ship to [redacted], and many others have their time extended, but, but I think it can really, it can really help. Um, a slightly annoying footnote here, but a slightly annoying quirk of the modern academic world is, I think, institutions that might partner with us have well and truly wised up to the fact that universities are keen on this stuff. And therefore they drive a pretty hard bargain. So, for example, yeah, the recent, two recent [redacted] schemes I've seen, one was doctoral students at [redacted], where essentially, we have to pay to extend the student studies, including maintenance and tuition fees, in order to allow the [redacted] to have the time of our students. So we're basically subsidising their employee, their secondee effectively, which is very nice of us, but you know, they know they're on to a winner. And another one, where they get, much the same thing applies actually, someone basically being given a competition where if we win the competition, Aston gets to carry on paying a member of staff who then works for the [redacted]. How's that meant to work? They should be paying themselves but, but they're not, because they realise universities want a slice of this action. But, but if you look at it in the round people will absolutely benefit. And I just think working in, working in different contexts is quite, it's quite good. And just as an aside, as well, as having, this is rank hypocrisy, having moaned on at you about the kind of workload bit, and I think it is real. But equally, if people saw the number of plates, that [redacted] have got spinning, it's a different sort of work, there might be sort of fewer, you might be less variety in the range of roles you're meant to be pursuing, but people are also working very hard and have to, have to do a lot of prioritisation, have a lot of competing priorities. So, you know, it can also, yeah, helping that, help calibrate, help calibrate your own worries in relation to everyone elses.

Paul Jones 37:44

I think, looking at my own experience, having worked in public, private, third sector, being self employed, you learn different things from all those different types of employers and the cultures there. So I've been quite lucky in terms of those experiences, and I would be really keen for other members of staff, who have may been more limited, to try and find ways to support them to get that type of

experience then, and that might be longer term [redacted], or short term ones, or more project based work. And I know [redacted] do a lot of [redacted] scholarship type work with their cohort of people, they do [redacted] research with, umm, and those types of things, where you are getting more used to understanding an organisation's needs and difficulties and translating that into meaningful research. That can be really powerful then as a way to enhance people's skills and abilities. Particularly I think on the Impact front as being a journey towards becoming more impactful and thinking about how you tie your research into things that make a difference to people out there then.

DBA19 37:51

Yeah, I think, I think, yeah, I'd agree with all of that. Yeah, I mean, absolutely as I say, I'm, I'm a fan. And yeah, I think that's right about impact, just with the caveat that we shouldn't assume a fairly, we shouldn't naively assume a relationship between that and having great REF scores, because unfortunately, the REF asks for quite, quite specific things. And I think in the past, we've, we've assumed we're doing good impact, and that leads to good REF scores. And I think that's, that's a bit unfortunately, it's not such a linear relationship [redacted].

Paul Jones 39:28

So I want to talk to you about, we've mentioned it briefly earlier, so the idea is that people on a teaching and research contract is, generally in my understanding, 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% administration. I don't know whether that is different in your neck of the woods, because I have seen some different information, where it is more a third, a third, and a third. But whatever balance is there, does that work out in reality, or are you pushed in different ways in terms of how you have to shape your time?

DBA19 39:58

Yes, good question. Umm, and I'd heard reference too, to a third, a third, a third. But to be completely honest, because you do what you've got to do, I don't particularly, particularly challenge it, while on the other hand I have also heard about 40, 40, 20. And I think, you know, my observation would be that we fortunately, we don't teach, you know, we don't, we don't teach all year. But there's been some mission creep there, significant mission creep there, particularly also, with the introduction of the third teaching period for some courses, and all of that, that sort of thing. And then, you know, probably ramped up expectations of some of our students around sort of supervision of dissertations and so on and so forth. On the research side, umm, it, it's, it's been, it's, it's tricky. And again, some of the extra bits, the extra little cameos, doctoral supervision, for example, can take up quite a significant amount of time. You know, it's important work. It's not a complaint, but it does. But, but yes, but then the bit, which was a bit, which has really crept up, I would observe, is around the administration side of things. And that's, it is what it is, but it comes full circle into the conversation we were just having.

Paul Jones 41:25

I think with the, the frustration I find with the creep of the admin side, we keep adding new things on to people, and we expect year on year to do this, and do that. We don't really reevaluate what already exists to make that a more streamlined process and take things away, it's very much a case of we're just going to keep adding plates on to the pile you've got, not let me take this plate away and give you a new fresh one to deal with. It's always more work, not let's rationalise what's there already.

DBA19 41:56

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And, I mean, candidly, as well, occasionally, this has been, occasionally, you know, we all, we all recognise this, right? So we put this challenge to people and then sometimes the suggestion will be, well, you could do this or not do this, or that thing, but you can be fairly confident that then it's sometimes almost a slightly provocative response. So I remember one senior member of university leadership when this person said, yeah, the thing you need to do is just stop teaching MA's, just focus on undergrads. It might make sense for the university financially, although I'm not sure it would anymore, because we've got more overseas students, much less satisfying for the colleagues in terms of the kind of esteem you hold in your profession, and the university's held in the profession, if

you don't teach at masters level, you're just undergrad focused, then that's a much less good place to be. And the person making that suggestion knew that, it was a provocation, right? Or, again, you could say to me, if you looked at some of the stuff I'm doing, there's a small bit of money, I'm getting to do a, to organise an event in [redacted], which partly is partly a [redacted] event. And it's reasonable for us to be doing it. It's not completely outrageous. But you look at this, and you say, oh, why are you doing that? You're giving time to that? Partly, there's, there's a link to, there's a link to my research. But it's partly also I knew the person that [redacted] and I feel it's the right thing to do. But, but you can say, you, you can take that away, but I don't, I don't really want to take that away, or you know, that we can't keep just doing stuff that we like doing. You know, in practice, you'd have to be pretty brutalist an academic never to agree to write something in your mates edited volume, because partly those are your networks, you want to keep them going. So you're not totally ruthless and say, Do you know what, I'm only going to publish a [redacted] or in a top journal, I'm just not going to do anything else. It doesn't really work like that. And if you did live your life like that, you would then also be perceived quite quickly to be a bit of an asshole. Yeah, it doesn't quite work. Or you get no credit for being a reviewer for a journal. Journal editors tell me, I was talking to one the other day, you know, horrific at the moment, trying to get people to be peer reviewers for journal articles. But, it's bad, it's not really cricket to, to publish in journals, but then refuse to be a reviewer for those journals and just say no, I'm not doing it. So... yeah, the challenge about what you are taking away, sometimes you get answers. And sometimes, it's a fair challenge, right? And we just are doing stuff that we shouldn't be doing, don't need to be doing. But then also, sometimes, it can be a bit of a wind up about stuff which you kind of should still be doing, but which may not narrowly benefit the university, then it's a tricky thing. Hey, ho.

Paul Jones 44:47

One of the other things I didn't mention as well, was when you try and break up an academic role into teaching, research and administration. One of the key messages we're given is about that external engagement side of things as well then. But there isn't really any direct mention of that within that idea of admin, teaching and research. So we're giving no space and time to show how important it is, even though the message is, it's getting really important, that's just another layer added on then where we expect people to do it. We don't necessarily give them the training or expertise to be able to do it well, sometimes, and we don't really count it into the ability to fit into workload either by the look of it.

DBA19 45:24

Yeah, yeah, I think, I think it's probably, there's probably something in that, it depends on the role itself. And I would draw that back, so to talk the turkey, I would draw that back a bit to beneficiaries. So for example, I would observe, that fantastic amounts of my colleagues time are being wasted. And I use that term advisedly, by program review requirements. I mean, I guess you could spend some time training the colleagues in a program review, but since a lot of this is cooked up by quality control officers for quality control officers, whether within or without the organisation, that is not of any immediate benefit to our students. So, you know, having people sit, spend more time sat down with the quality people, in order to do better program reviews, exclusively on the terms of the people running the program views is not, not really very helpful. And yeah, if anything, probably the trading could go in, in a different direction. I think the bit where it will be more, is more useless, particularly around leadership bits. Yeah? So the heads of department bit, maybe research convenors, and so on, I think that'd be genuinely, genuinely a bit more useful. I think, yeah, I mean, to be completely candid, as well. And I mentioned about how you, how you learn from people, in an organisation, that you work alongside, who are really, really good. There's some interesting questions about how people come across inside our organisation, and whether we're always modeling behaviors that are really, really good,

Paul Jones 47:07

Do you think we have many role models that you could look at and think, oh, yeah, that's the type of person I'd want to become in the future, or the type of academic I want to become and to see those behaviors, and attitudes, being modelled in the right way?

DBA19 47:21

Yeah, yeah, I think it's a mixture. And I, of course, we've definitely got that absolutely. Absolutely, we've got that in our organisation, but not universally. And sometimes you find some odd examples going in the other direction, which, you know, are painful for all to see. But anyway, I leave it, I leave it there.

Paul Jones 47:39

That's fair enough. So I wanted to talk a little bit about external influences. So we talked about REF a little bit earlier, besides REF, and you can talk about REF as well, if you want, how much of a place in your life does the external regulations or requirements play in terms of directing your activity? It is something that is really important? Is it something that is just there casually in the background? How big is it for you?

DBA19 48:10

Gosh, now you're asking. I'm thinking, I'm only thinking about my, my sort of, my specific sort of role at Aston. And just the nature of what I do, probably it's not that much. I mean, clearly, projects need ethical, ethical approval, and to some degree, that's an externally driven process. It's not just external, the university rightly sets its own standards. In terms of your curriculum, I suppose requirements, the regulatory side of it, I mean, yes, we, we have to demonstrate we give certain skills to our, to our students, it's a bit lighter in my sort of part of the, part of the world than it is in some of the sciences, for example, or accountancy, or whatever way, you know, professional body bits. I mean, clearly you know, there are legal bits as well, and it's all sort of relevant. But, so I don't know. I mean, ultimately, Aston hasn't cooked up due diligence procedures for fun on its own. It's also because of the nature of the world we live in. And it's informed by the sort of legal and regulatory climate that we, that we live in. So yeah, I suppose, it all plays into it.

Paul Jones 49:34

From what you're saying there, the impression I get is, it's there, and there's a constant entity, but it is in the background of your mind, not really sort of being a pressure that you have to live by, day by day, on a daily basis.

DBA19 49:45

Yeah, I think that's right, so an obvious point as well. But, you know, there are clear times when it blooms larger. So if you're doing, clearly if you're doing employee recruitment, then you ought to, you gotta follow the law in terms of employment law. You know, sometimes that can be difficult and time consuming, if you are employing someone from overseas, and you've got visa bits, or whatever it is, handling overseas students, you'll have, you know, potentially visa type issues as well. But that is what it is.

Paul Jones 50:16

What about things like REF, TEF and KEF, then? Are they a constant source of inspiration, motivation, for how you lead your academic life? Are they more, I know REF has probably got more influences for you, because of [redacted].

DBA19 50:36

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, absolutely. REF, REF certainly sets some important parameters for any academic on a research contract in Britain, because, you're mindful about some of the, some of the ways in which you're expected to perform. It partly define, partly defines what good is perceived to be. If I'm honest, KEF, I think is probably much more, much more peripheral, and the TEF, I understand there's a growing body of regulation around degrees. Part of that is about how we, in the round, support our students to achieve as well. So some of it is about the outcomes. And, as I recall, as I recall from the, from the TEF, you know, and so yeah, and we've got to be careful not to over emphasise, the sort of regulatory bits, rather than the, that how we get the very best outcomes for our students.

Paul Jones 51:33

The interesting part for me, after talking to various people is, teaching seems to be an area that grows for people in the administration side as well. And the area that suffers is the research side where you have less and less time to perhaps do the research you want. And yet, when I've talked to people out of what they see as being most important, out of the external stuff, REF tends to be the biggest thing that comes across then, is that research is massively important, both in terms of reputation, but also what drives academia to some extent, so it's strange how teaching is the more monitorable thing that gets pushed on a weekly, monthly basis all the time that eats into research. But yet, research is perhaps the most important thing that academics have been asked to do, that drives a lot of the reputation scores and things that happen.

DBA19 52:23

Yeah, yeah, no, I got that. I mean, I think, I think I think that's right, but, but there are a couple of other, couple of other drivers going on and they are internal. I mean, one is just, we have to recruit, recruit our students, retain our students, they have to carry on paying their fees else we don't get paid our salaries, do we get salaries anymore, I mean, with this inflation anyway. But, so yeah, that's part of it. And so, and in practice, there are internal things that flow from that, and that's not about an external regulatory environment, I mean, that's about the world we live in, where there's a market for students, and everyone's competing. And then, as I've sort of implied throughout this conversation, I think we probably, bits of the university cook up and gold plate and add little extra requirements, which are nothing to do, they might pray, regulations, national regulations, or external scrutiny and aid, but actually, it's just, it's not necessarily being cooked up for, for those reasons, at all. Maybe it's motivated by it, but it ends up getting a bit of a life of its own. And I'm not surprised that people, I think, yeah, I mean, the, the, you know, amongst research academics, and particularly the peer esteem bit that you'll be judged on, is just around certain key research metrics. So principally, publications, income you've been brought in, you've been able to bring in, to some degree other kinds of bits of esteem, like journal editorships, or society kind of roles, or whatever it is. But yeah, that, that's, I'm not surprised, that that's loomed particularly, particularly large.

Paul Jones 54:10

Going back to your experience of [redacted] on the managerial side, did you feel like you had the ability to try and encourage professional development or to look at the ways staff were performing effectively?

DBA19 54:23

Gosh, thinking back we'd have our rather clunky appraisals, whatever they were called back in those days. And I think the focus will probably be on outputs and outcomes rather than necessarily skills. But if someone expressed interests in gaining particular skills, you clearly try and be supportive, and if someone was clearly in need, in need of some some help around, and in particular, skills. You know, you'd sort of, you'd sort of raise the issue. So, you know, yeah, it was, it was, it was part of, it was part of the role, but I'm not sure. I'm not sure it loomed as large as the kind of bread and butter of the kind of outputs basically, you know, a lot of the conversation was, you know, delivering the modules, delivering, you know, sending in a funding bid, publishing some stuff, contributing to the life of the department, and performing to the best of your ability. And so we do, what we got to do, whatever administrative or leadership role you were given, that tended to be the nuts and bolts rather than the skill side.

Paul Jones 55:31

Yeah, it is interesting to me, that we act as a teaching organisation, to deliver teaching for students as well as doing research. But we don't act as a learning organisation, to embed learning and development, in the way we support, encourage and motivate staff, and understand aspirations, and different things, which is disappointing to some extent, but the nature of the problem, I think.

DBA19 56:01

Yeah, it is Paul. But equally, part of my shtick [redacted], was to try and work out what motivated each individual, and try to work out and plan with them a path for them to find fulfillment within our organisation. And that wouldn't necessarily be about training and development. You know, I may well, I'd like to

think that particularly, it'd be fine, if people wanted to apply for promotion, you'd obviously talked about that, and help help with that. But I tried to find ways in which people could find avenues to develop themselves, express their, express their creativity, do things that I felt that they would really, you know, drive their satisfaction of the job. So, you know, dozens of times, I remember, particularly people found the, I'd like to engage more with the outside world, but I don't know how, I'd really try and help them do that. So it wasn't, yeah, I think, you know, we might arrive at, we might arrive at that way, that punch line, but not necessarily in a very planned way. And I'm not sure it would necessarily be about training, per se. Instead, it'd be about working with people to sort of find the right opportunities to do those sorts of things.

Paul Jones 57:33

That's really useful. I think that's covered, everything I wanted to do today. Is there anything else you wanted to mention in terms of professional development? We've covered quite a lot of ground in that conversation.

DBA19 57:42

Hmm, no, I think, I think we've had a very good honest conversation Paul and I, yeah, no, I think that's, I mean, it is, it is, one other bit of my life, which we haven't talked about, as you know, I [redacted]. But anyway, yeah, there we go, no, no, no look this, that's no, no reason to pursue that, that now. But, but yeah, very nice to talk to you and good luck.

Paul Jones 58: 31

Thanks. I'm hoping that it will go well, the part that truly interests me is translating all the information I am getting into some kind of plan of action and to make a difference. So hopefully there will be new things we can do and there has already been a lot of ideas generated. If we can try to embed some of those as new ways of working, and encouraging the good behaviours that exist then that will be really good. Thank you for your time and everything.