

## Professional doctorates: A pathway to legitimacy for non-academic HE professionals?

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### Abstract

This article discusses the current challenges faced by the two authors – both participants on a professional doctorate (PD) programme in education at a leading UK university – in gaining legitimacy as higher education (HE) professionals. By: (1) reflecting upon their own professional experiences in HE and as PD students; (2) utilizing semi-structured interviews with academic and non-academic professionals from their home institutions (in Ireland and India); and (3) drawing on Celia Whitchurch's typologies of 'third-space' HE professionalism, they found that in Ireland the current reform of the HE policy and praxis environment offers some real and positive opportunities for PD participants through the emergence of more progressive models of HE professionalism. In contrast, the relative lack of reform and a highly regulated Indian HE environment, presents ongoing difficulties in terms of applying one's PD learning in the work environment. This suggests that in India, PD graduates might, in fact, be afforded greater career progression opportunities by transitioning to a more traditional academic role.

**Keywords:** professional doctorates; higher education; non-academic; HE professional; 'third-space' HE professionals.

### Introduction

This article explores the challenges faced by two non-academic higher education (HE) professionals in fulfilling their career and self-development aspirations through a professional doctorate (PD) programme at a UK university. In doing so, it seeks to identify whether their own effectiveness in leveraging their participation in the PD programme to gain increased legitimacy in their professional settings is, in any way, influenced by their respective Irish and Indian HE environments.

Following a brief overview of the professional and policy backdrops of HE in Ireland and India, the authors present the literature on HE professionalism, with an emphasis on *non-academic* HE professionalism and Whitchurch's typologies of an emergent 'third space'. Where relevant, the authors interweave their findings from a limited number of semi-structured interviews with academic and non-academic HE professionals at their home institutions (nine participants from Ireland and five from India) to allow for some, albeit limited, methodological triangulation (Seidman, 2013). Given the dearth of research and publications specific to Irish and

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Indian HE contexts, this article extends beyond the personal experiences of both authors to provide insights and understandings not available in the literature. This article also contributes to the findings of a report produced for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Mellors-Bourne *et al.*, 2016) to explore three of the report's identified challenges faced by PD participants further. In terms of implications of the findings for PD programmes and HE institutions offering them, this article suggests that legitimacy challenges will vary considerably and can lead to different professional pathways, depending on the specific HE environments in which PD participants operate.

### **The contrasting HE environments of Ireland and India**

Ireland has just come through a remarkable 40-year period of expansion in HE, and could be characterized best as having a system of 'mass higher education' as defined in other countries (Bassnett, 2005: 99). Student enrolment numbers increased dramatically (by 105 per cent between 1990/1 and 2003/4), primarily due to the introduction of the free fees scheme in 1995; and by a further 13.2 per cent from 2007/8 to 2011/12. The *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018–2020* states that:

The higher education system continues to expand and enrol more students, and to provide an increasing supply of graduates for the labour market. Overall student numbers in the sector increased from 196,000 in 2011/12 to about 225,000 by in 2016/17, an increase of some 13% (Department of Education and Skills, 2018: 6).

Hazelkorn (2012) says that the total student population 'is estimated to rise to over 250,000 by 2020'.

However, against the backdrop of a crisis of exchequer funding (as a result of the collapse of the Irish economy in 2008), HE professionals in Ireland are struggling to come to terms with the introduction of a new target-driven, top-down policy environment, culminating in the publication of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (hereafter referred to as *NSHE 2030*) in 2011. Current Irish HE policy is increasing pressure on academic professionals to be more productive and more accountable (see Higher Education Strategy Group, 2011; HEA, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2013e, 2013f), which in turn 'challenges traditional work-practices and values' (Hazelkorn, 2013: 4). Similarly to HE institutions in the UK, Irish HE institutions are 'spending a higher proportion of their resources on administration' (Hogan, 2011: 10) due to increased massification, marketization, commodification and bureaucratization of the Irish HE system, and like their British neighbours are beginning to display managerialist and new public management (NPM) tendencies. These two concepts are loosely linked. NPM describes the development of government policies over the past three decades that aim to modernize and maximise efficiencies in the public sector (Clarke *et al.*, 2000). At its heart, it is an economic model, and one that holds that market-oriented management of the public sector will result in significant cost efficiencies without associated side effects (Lane, 2002). 'Managerialism', on the other hand, is a broader term that insists that management (and managers) are functionally and technically necessary to the achievement of progress and effective control within organizations (Shattock, 2003). It also refers to the increased importance of senior management staff and a decision-making process that is hierarchical rather than collegial.

The *NSHE 2030* neither acknowledged the existence of, nor the potential role of, the administrative functions within Irish HE in terms of implementing the structural reforms implicitly referred to in its key recommendations. The relatively consistent binary divide between academic and administrator that still prevails within some areas of the Irish HE system will not help deliver upon the proposed reform programme but 'with such continuing external pressures

upon universities, effective collaboration between the two groups is now paramount' (Conway, 1998: 6). In fact (and somewhat perversely), as resources are becoming more scarce in Irish HE, increasing proportions of heretofore core funding have been top-sliced by government for targeted initiatives that often require a specialist response, with dedicated staff assigned to develop a set of proposals and ensure timely implementation of project(s), periodical reporting and compliance across all areas of university activity.

HE provision in India compares to Ireland only with respect to the increase in participation rates in recent decades. Increased demand for higher education has led to a more than doubling of the number of central and state universities since 1995, to nearly 500 in 2015 (NITI Aayog, 2015). In addition, over 200 private universities have been established since the approval of the Private Universities Bill in 1995 (Shah, 2015), which gave provision to the state governments in India to set up private universities. However, unlike Ireland, and despite this expansion, there have been very few reforms in the highly regulated HE environment in India. The National Policy on Education was framed in 1986 and modified in 1992; since then there have been no further changes to the policy (MHRD, 2016). The government, providing close to three-quarters of the expenditure of the HE institutions (Tilak, 1993), still remains the largest source of funding for HE institutions in India. There have been calls for more reviews of performance against grants provided, and for greater transparency (Mishra, 2003).

Most senior administrative roles in HE institutions in India are held by academics, with non-academic staff primarily responsible for support functions such as student registration, finance, commercial services and examination arrangements. Hence, HE institutions in India and their leadership typically tend to view non-academic staff as a cost overhead rather than as a strategic investment. Professional management of HE institutions extends much further in Ireland, across additional operational areas such as research support services, external engagement, quality assurance, strategic planning and institutional research, where specialized professionals are firmly established both within their institutions and across national agency-supported inter-institutional communities of praxis.

A report by the committee set up by the Department of Higher Education of the Government of India stated that 'there is an urgent need to improve governance by developing expertise in "educational management" and avoid burdening good academics with administrative chores' (MHRD, 2009: 45). Yet, there are very few professional development programmes in India tailored to non-academics; thus there are limited opportunities to move beyond current administrative roles. HE professionals in India perhaps can be described as the 'traditional disinterested civil servant' (Whitchurch, 2008a) who may not have the expertise to deliver complex projects in an institutional structure characterized by fluidity of reporting lines, culture and boundaries (see Whitchurch, 2008b, 2012). However, it is unclear whether current HE professionals in India can develop this expertise or whether a new cadre of HE professionals should be hired and developed. The recommendation to the government by the University Grants Commission (UGC) – the regulatory body for higher education in India – stated:

The administrative structure of the Universities, which was devised in the pre-independence period seems to be still continuing. The new challenges facing the system of higher education in the country cannot be met without a total overhaul of the structure of management of higher education institutions. This has become all the more necessary because of globalization, which requires talent, competence, drive, initiative and innovation at several levels (UGC, 2003: 9).

Consequently, the majority of non-academic HE professionals in India display the characteristics of 'bounded professionals' who view 'themselves as working within clear structural boundaries such as their specialist function'; who possess a somewhat unhealthy obsession with job descriptions; 'perform their roles in ways that are relatively prescribed ... [and are] characterised

by a concern for continuity and the safeguarding of standards and procedures' (Whitchurch, 2012: 8). Hence, many HE institutions in India struggle to institutionalize effective management practices.

Equally true for Ireland is the fact that new roles and professional identities are now emerging in Irish HE 'that are not necessarily recognised within existing organisational [and professional development] frameworks' (Whitchurch, 2012: 19). The adoption of a more corporatist management approach by Irish HE institutions (as implied by the *NSHE 2030*), coupled with increased system steering, external accountability and an emerging focus on impact (particularly economic impact, as outlined in the Higher Education Authority's (HEA's) System Performance Framework 2014–16) are forcing Irish HE leadership to rethink the ways in which their institutions operate and are managed.

### **Theoretical background: Non-academic HE professionalism and the emerging 'third space'**

The notion that any occupational group (including HE professionals) has a *distinct body of knowledge* is at the heart of almost all traditional conceptions of professionalism. Nevertheless, what it means to be an HE professional remains a deeply divided subject. Some scholars suggest that it centres on three key areas – 'knowledge, autonomy and responsibility' – which are, in turn, applied to the rules governing the conduct of the profession (Hoyle and John, 1995: 46). If HE professionals are 'to apply that [specialized] knowledge, it is argued, they need autonomy to make their own judgements'. Assuming that they can operate autonomously, it is then essential that 'they act with responsibility'. Only then, can they collectively begin to 'develop appropriate professional values' (Furlong *et al.*, 2000: 5).

Of course, a host of other factors – most notably the increasing marketization of HE and the rise of managerialist and/or NPM approaches to the governance of HE – are also challenging traditional conceptions of HE professionalism and are reflective of the ongoing tensions between the academic and the non-academic in HE, or, as Rowland (2002) terms it, fractures between academic and management values. This is in part due to the 'binary perceptions' and a 'perceived split between collegial approaches' (Whitchurch, 2012: 3) because 'traditionally in HE, there have been only two categories of staff – "academics" and everyone else' (Gornall, 1999: 44).

Indian academics' attitudes towards professional staff underscore this more traditional view of the relationship than those of Ireland. This is characterized in a comment by one Indian academic working as the head of a department in a university – 'I see them as partners in planning. I don't mean this in a pejorative way but I see support department managers as civil servants who provide a service to us'. In addition, perceived differences in loyalties between the academics and non-academics also appear to be a constraint in their relationship. This is raised as an issue by one Indian HE professional, though, interestingly, not by any academic participant: 'the strategic priorities for the university are not as important for academics as they are for professional managers. They're simply not on the radar for many academics ... Unfortunately the individualism of academics can go against the management of the organisation'.

More recent literature suggests substantial confusion, fuzziness and an increasing blurring of the boundaries around roles, despite the perceived dichotomy and/or over-simplistic binary understandings between academic and non-academic HE professionals (see Bassnett, 2005; Whitchurch, 2006a, 2012; Conway, 1998; Gornall, 1999; Szekeres, 2011). Interestingly, some evidence in support of this was found in Ireland:

Research funding is all about big grants nowadays ... large teams consisting of academic, non-academic and industry partners ... All of the big SFI [Science Foundation Ireland] programmes now require collaboration with other universities, industry co-financing and are huge in scale compared to 10 years ago ... We [support managers] are much more involved in writing up the research grant applications than previously; co-ordinating inputs from academics, accountants, HR, ... and we pull in all manner of staff to get them over the line ... funding applications nowadays are for large centres and institutes involving teams of interdisciplinary researchers ... standalone research from single academics, especially in science and engineering, is almost extinct ... Our office has become much more professionalized in the past ten years ... all of our recent recruits are PhD graduates with industry and R & D backgrounds in the research areas they are supporting. These roles are now as well paid as senior academic posts (Research Support Manager).

However, in contrast to the literature, during his interviews, the Irish author found less tension between academics and non-academics than there was towards the management culture from both groups. This antipathy towards management is clearly aligned with the literature on managerialism and NPM, as outlined above, and the ongoing reforms of the HE system (HEA, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2013e, 2013f). Moreover, a top-down, managerialist decision-making culture is identified and appears to be particularly contentious, as noted by both groups:

In an academic institution, HR [Human Resources] and Finance should not be the nexus of power, yet they effectively present the budget and staffing plans for approval to Exec [University Executive Committee]. Deans have no involvement in it. This is a small cadre of individuals who are allowed to make huge decisions with huge implications (Head of department).

The HR and Finance members of Exec can only comment on limited aspects of this organisation – numbers on a page and headcount. They can't really talk about teaching, research or engagement ... but they seem to hold all the cards (Projects officer).

Whitchurch has built upon the work of previous studies of HE professionalism by differentiating the 'identities of professional staff according to four "dispositions" that cut across organisational boundaries and functional specialisms, with associated spaces, knowledge, relationships and legitimacies' (Whitchurch, 2012: 8), namely: (1) bounded professionals; (2) cross-boundary professionals; (3) unbounded professionals; and (4) blended professionals (Whitchurch, 2012: 8–12). The findings from Ireland confirmed some of these nuances. Take, for example, the contrasting views of a 'bounded' (HR officer) and 'unbounded' professional (projects officer). The bounded professional constructs his identity around his specialist role, with one representative stating: 'I don't see myself as a higher education anything. I see myself as a HR professional who manages the employee life cycle. It's as simple as that'. Rather conversely, the unbounded professional (projects officer) reflects that his position is defined by the project he is working on and the broad strategic view intrinsic to that role, commenting that the role 'gifts me no automatic legitimacy. In my role, you build your legitimacy on the back of your knowledge and successful project delivery. The bigger picture is very important'.

Dowd and Kaplan (2005) also point to 'boundary-less' individuals who adopt a more collegial approach to their professions, and Musselin (2008: 53) suggests that 'academic work and other types of professional work are converging', so that the 'distance between academic staff and other workers is shrinking'. Whitchurch further supports this view by both describing and visualizing the emergence of a 'third space' between the professional and academic domains. She presents a typology of HE professionalism that characterizes three differentiated third spaces within HE – (1) integrated, (2) semi-autonomous, and (3) independent – that offer opportunities for more cross-boundary, unbounded and blended professional praxis to emerge in the HE context.

*Integrated third-space* projects, Whitchurch (2012: 33–4) argues, ‘are explicitly recognised by the institution and embedded within the organisational structures’, for example within teaching and learning units and offices of institutional research, and can be characterized by ‘the capacity of individuals within it to accommodate a wide spectrum of institutional agendas, clients, partners and interest groups ... translating between academic and institutional agendas’ (Whitchurch, 2012: 37).

While such integrated units do exist in Irish and Indian HE and could offer a stable environment for specific third-space project work, the current levels of staffing, quality, autonomy and empowerment of such units vary greatly across both countries and are not always supported and/or integrated with senior figure(s) and/or senior management within individual institutions, a point that, both authors agree, is critical to their optimisation going forward (see Whitchurch, 2012: 33–7).

*Semi-autonomous third space*, Whitchurch (2012: 37) suggests, ‘represents space in which recognition has been accorded by the institution to a specific project that has a measure of independence and autonomy from the institution by being fully or partly-funded’ (Whitchurch, 2012: 37), with examples presented such as employability and/or continuing professional development units, fundraising and other external engagement-type activities. Again, these examples exist in an Irish HE setting, but less so in most Indian HE contexts. In spite of that, this definition does align most closely with the Indian co-author’s own role in the Office of Development of a business school.

*Independent third space*, as Whitchurch goes on to describe:

occurs in patches within mainstream structures and arises at least initially, out of individual collaborations and networks on a temporary or one-off basis for a specific purpose [or project, whereby individuals] ... create their own patch of independent space, either through their own volition, or as the result of the influence of a line manager or colleague ... flex[ing] existing structures for specific purposes, developing adjacent space as the need arises and where it is possible to do so (Whitchurch, 2012: 40).

This definition aligns most closely with the Irish co-author’s previous role as a programme(s) manager reporting to the Office of the President, at the University of Limerick, Ireland.

### **A comparative analysis of the challenges faced by PD students**

Amid these increasingly blurred boundaries, non-academic HE professionals enrol in PD programmes both to explore and to seek further clarity regarding their potential future careers, often driven by purely personal motivations and decoupled from their employers’ needs. PD programmes are typically aimed at experienced professionals who want to translate their expertise, while continuing working, into ‘a higher position of credibility, leadership, and influence in their profession’ (Thomson, 2017):

Those doing a professional doctorate are encouraged to look at their own practice and context and to draw their research question from it. They are expected to articulate and critically interrogate their own professional knowledge. This is not the sole source of knowledge they work with of course, as they also draw on relevant scholarly literatures (Thomson, 2017).

A report produced for the Higher Education Funding Council for England by the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) in 2016 titled *Provision of Professional Doctorates in English HE Institutions* recommended that: ‘given the growing proportion of self-funded PD candidates, institutions should consider the extent to which their promotion of PD programmes reflects personal career-related and self-development motivations, in addition to historic employer



needs for upskilling' and that 'institutions should recognise and more specifically articulate how their PD provision contributes to their strategic priorities such as research impact, employer engagement and societal benefit' (Mellors-Bourne *et al.*, 2016: vi). These challenges will now be explored from the personal perspective of both authors.

### **The struggle to leverage PD programmes for personal career and self-development goals**

The CRAC report finds that:

The three most commonly cited motivations for undertaking a PD were to enhance their practice ('extrinsic professional alteration'); to improve their career prospects through promotion in their current direction or enable a possible change in career direction ('extrinsic professional continuation'); and to take a deeper academic interest ('intrinsic affirmation'). However, in [almost] all cases ... those expressing an interest in developing a deeper intellectual understanding of their subject were doing so in order to both increase their fulfilment at work, but also to enhance their practice. Equally, by enhancing their capability as a practitioner or professional, several said that this could open up the possibility of more senior positions (i.e. career enhancement) (Mellors-Bourne *et al.*, 2016: 51).

As both authors gained more clarity about the PD programme, their career-related aspirations became intertwined with the academic requirements for completing the programme. In almost every discussion with his mentors or colleagues, the co-author from India was urged to think about his short-term career goals that could leverage the learnings of the programme, and/or to explore avenues for transitioning to an academic role. Some of the suggestions that he received included: 'I am not sure what role you will get within this institution after you finish the programme'; 'think about what courses you will teach and areas you will research so that you will get into a good academic position in another university'; and 'the non-academic roles are a dead end in universities in India; try to get a faculty appointment'. While discussing his career prospects within his current HE institution post-completion of the programme, the author was urged not to link successful completion of the PD programme with a promotion. Very soon after starting the programme, it became evident that the benefits of participating in a PD programme were more directly linked to transitioning to academia (that is, teaching and research), rather than being able to progress in his current professional role. This is consistent with the HE professional environment in India described above, where the vast majority of professional staff in the HE sector can be characterized as 'bounded professionals' requiring limited skill sets beyond the role that they are performing, and where there is little or no evidence of an emergent third space *per se*. This has led the co-author from India to leverage the legitimacy and learnings from the PD programme in order to exploit future academic opportunities post-graduation.

Furthermore, to gain legitimacy through the PD programme in India, HE professionals need to prove the equivalency of the programme to a PhD, in terms of both its academic rigour and its learning outcomes. However, PD programmes are yet to be recognized as equivalent to PhDs by the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India, which establishes the norms of appointments into HE institutions. This shifted the Indian co-author's focus of learning on the programme away from further developing his current role towards enhancing his research profile through presentations at conferences, publication of articles and applying for research grants. However, such opportunities to enhance one's research profile in the author's area of interest (higher education studies) were also fairly limited. For example, many top conferences in the area of higher education are organized outside India and the co-author

had to seek additional grants to attend such conferences. This proved to be highly difficult, as many of the available conference travel grants are reserved for PhD students studying in India, rather than for those on international PD programmes abroad.

Thus, the lack of sufficient external funds to cover the costs of international travel placed an additional financial burden on the co-author for achieving his specific PD goals. Hence, the authors feel that the availability of a vibrant research ecosystem is a necessary condition for PD participants to use the programme for their own self-development goals, particularly in countries such as India, where third-space professional praxis is less prevalent in the HE culture and routes into academic careers are more likely to be explored. For the Indian co-author, it was critically important to select both an area of research that had a critical mass of researchers in his home country and a supervisor who was experienced in his research topics of interest in an Indian context.

The situation in Ireland was very different. The Irish author had the opportunity to leverage the programme learnings as a 'blended professional' to expand his current role and increase his functional ability to work on integrated third-space projects – for example, within the teaching and learning unit of his home institution (the author has since led the production of the university's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy); research support services (where the author is seconded periodically to provide high-level support in the preparation of large-scale research funding applications); and strategic planning functions (where his principal role resides, covering a wide brief including university strategy and planning, tendering and programme management, and performance management and statutory compliance/reporting). This type of HE environment resonates more closely with Whitchurch's findings. Hence, instead of having to consider changing role or moving to another institution, the Irish co-author was able to leverage the PD programme learning to increase his legitimacy as a third-space professional and to develop and fulfil his career goals within the administrative functional area where he currently resides. In fact, since enrolling on the programme, the co-author's title has been changed from Programme Manager to Director, Strategic Planning.

However, in spite of his own experiences, which point to the emergence of third-space praxis in Ireland, the author concedes that it is still in its infancy in Ireland, characterized mainly by relatively small numbers of individuals working *within a third-space environment rather than as third-space professionals per se*. Conway supports this view by suggesting that, in spite of increasing collaboration between academics and administrators, this does not necessarily imply a convergence as such but 'that [some] members of the two groups are simply working together more closely, with administrators assuming some tasks previously undertaken by academics and, in some cases, vice versa [but] are not representative of university administration in general'. (Conway, 1998: 4).

### **Challenges due to lack of recognition of and engagement by the HE institution in the student's local market**

Many PD programmes aim to attract international students. While international participants continue to work in, and engage with, their respective home countries for their future career-related goals, they are also required to establish both the credibility and legitimacy of the HE provider and the PD programme itself. The CRAC report indicates that such institutional credibility can be established through deeper engagements in countries from where they recruit their PD students, and that the absence of a proper strategy and articulation of the research impact and/or engagement in local markets by institutions delivering internationally marketed



PD programmes poses constraints for participants who wish to gain acceptance of the PD as a route to career progression in their home countries.

The PD programme in which both authors were enrolled was specifically focused on attracting and recruiting international students. As the Indian co-author engaged with his local markets to gather data and enhance his credibility as a researcher for his thesis, he was required to establish the credibility and the legitimacy of the UK university where he was undertaking the programme, and, after that, of the PD programme itself. One prominent academic, who wrote a letter of endorsement for the Indian co-author to help him collect data, advised him: 'If you were doing this at Harvard, no one would question it, but very few people in India know about the Institute of Education (IOE) in London'. While this was surprising, the assumption is that institutional reputation in non-domestic students' home countries *can* impact on their ability to progress in their subsequent careers. Since both authors enrolled on the programme, IOE has completed a full merger into University College London (UCL), which is perhaps a far more recognizable brand in India, particularly in a business school environment, where the author is employed.

As the institutions delivering PD programmes to international students engage with local institutions for research, education and practice, acceptance of their PD students and graduates in local markets also gets easier. Such credibility can be established through deeper institutional, academic and/or employer engagements in non-domestic/international markets, but equally, the absence of a proper strategy in this regard poses constraints for PD participants in gaining legitimacy for their PD in a local setting. Fortunately, the academic connections of the Indian student's supervisor with HE institutions and academics in India helped provide a much needed degree of credibility for his own work. However, the programme and support provided were quite limited in terms of future career advice due to a lack of understanding about the specific local market. While in other PD programmes (such as a doctorate in business administration), students may get guidance from alumni of their own programme or other similar generic PD programmes, it can prove far more difficult on more bespoke PD offerings, such as an EdD, where the alumni network in countries such as India is still very weak. However, as some of the collaborations took shape around specific projects, the co-author from India began to find it easier to gain recognition of his PD programme. For example, the faculty at one of the HE institutions in the area of planning and architecture in India (where he went to collect data for this thesis) were familiar with the work done by the faculty at the Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL, which was helpful for gaining access to the participants. This would not have been possible had the author gone there as a student of the Institute of Education prior to the merger with UCL.

In contrast to the above, the Irish co-author had relied almost solely on the UK institution's reputation and standing in Ireland for its research and engagement. Furthermore, several of the co-author's peers in Ireland had undertaken the same programme previously. In fact, it was singled out and recommended by the author's line manager (the university's vice-president) as being highly reputable and credible, given that highly influential people in Irish HE are among its alumni. The Irish co-author's home university in Ireland was also financially supporting him by paying his tuition fees for the programme as part of its own professional development programme for senior managers. Hence, clear future career pathways following completion of the programme had been discussed between the author and his employer in advance of enrolment, as part of the university's performance and development review system

### **The struggle to demonstrate impact on professional practice and changes in the workplace**

The CRAC report suggests that faculty carrying out research activities in the local markets where PD students come from can help establish the credibility of the PD. Although the PD is grounded in professional practice, there is little robust evidence of its impact on professional practice and/or changes in the workplace. A sustainable impact of the PD on professional practice, therefore, will only be achieved if PD students use this new PD qualification to gain further legitimacy by *themselves* in their existing HE settings.

For example, non-academic PD participants can hope to gain legitimacy by focusing on topical areas of particular relevance to their home countries. In Ireland, for example, the adoption of NPM and corporatization concepts in the higher education context has, to a large extent, been guided by: the change drivers of financial restraint and austerity; a focus on accountability and quality assurance compliance, metrics and transparency; and a general trend towards the marketization of the sector. The tangible manifestation of managerialism and NPM in Irish HE can be seen in the development of new administrative units largely unknown in the ‘golden age’ of academe, and was therefore a highly beneficial topic of interest for the Irish author.

The impact of these policy changes on HE professional praxis were acknowledged by all Irish interviewees. However, the theme of accountability/performativity yielded mixed views. On the one hand, one academic head of department agreed that metrics can be useful: ‘It’s good. We’re relying less on anecdote, story and myth and we’re generating pretty useful data now, data that is more reliable in terms of defining strategic thinking and planning. That’s a form of managerialism that’s to be welcomed.’

In terms of the current reform agenda in Irish HE, both groups (academics and non-academics) acknowledged a change in working relationships, with a closer interaction between the two groups, although there were subtle differences:

We receive a lot more requests for information in terms of strategy, policy and planning. The last two years have seen big changes ... HEA are changing the landscape and are much more professional in terms of their approach ... requests for data and strategic documentation is much more frequent since the Hunt Report [NSHE 2030] and putting these documents together requires inputs from all the key areas of the institution – academic and non-academic – collectively (Projects officer).

These fairly positive remarks regarding cultural changes in the organization from a non-academic contrasted with the more negative responses of academics, which are more critical of the management culture being introduced:

I’m not sure where all this reform is going, apart from the increasingly regular production of documents that have to justify every action ... I worry that the outcome will be mediocrity ... I mean, if you make institutions set targets for everything and [be] accountable for everything in advance, they are obviously going to set targets they can reach to avoid any of the financial penalties that might apply in a performance funding model ... the only result is just more bureaucracy with every institution doing the exact same thing, filling in the same forms under the same headings ... I can’t see how this approach will preserve the distinctive missions of institutions (Academic head of department).

Those now entering professional careers in Irish higher education (with advanced academic qualifications, private sector experience and generic skills associated with compulsory structured doctoral training offered at all Irish HE institutions since the mid-2000s) are likely to be more suited to third-space praxis than in India. Activity related to the Irish co-author’s own project portfolio requires a broad ‘understanding of the institutional context’ and involves

'working in partnership' with those academic colleagues who 'appreciate the sort of things that my involvement can bring' (see Whitchurch, 2012: 40–2). As Whitchurch suggests, this type of work, which closely relates to an emergent (albeit small) cadre of 'dedicated' project or 'portfolio professionals' in Irish HE 'might co-exist with, be informed by, and feed into institutional activity' (Whitchurch, 2012: 137), and often has to 'overcome specific internal structural challenges' (ibid.: 41), such as: working laterally across hierarchies with no clear authority; leading in one setting, but being led in another; gaining access into external networks where there are traditionally weak ties; as well as a host of other difficulties in terms of the non-traditional 'spaces', 'knowledge', 'relationships', 'legitimacies' and 'languages' within which these individuals find themselves operating (see Whitchurch, 2012: 49–82). Again, this theoretical learning from the programme was most useful for the Irish author in terms of understanding his role and navigating his professional duties across the organization.

Furthermore, the Irish co-author would have struggled to further develop his career if, in fact, he had not undertaken the PD programme. Doctoral qualifications (PDs or traditional PhDs) are increasingly becoming a minimum requirement above middle management rank, particularly in the country's seven universities. While accepting that a key challenge for Irish HE institutions, therefore, is to encourage the emergence of more pliable, permeable and discursive spaces between academic and administrative domains as described above, it is also clear that the building of relationships and networks are equally as important as organizational structures and/or restructuring initiatives in Irish HE. Central to the building of these relationships and networks is the legitimacy of the individual, and participation in a PD programme clearly helps in this regard, especially when engaging with, and influencing, one's academic peers in the Irish HE setting.

As stated earlier, the Indian HE environment did not provide as many opportunities to demonstrate and apply learning from the programme into praxis. The notion of NPM is more or less restricted to the Indian central government and third-space professional culture is also still very much in its infancy in Indian HE. In contrast to the Irish HE environment, in the Indian HE environment, doctoral qualifications are needed only for academic positions, and management tasks are carried out by staff with functional expertise in administrative functions. In order to address the need for improving the management of HE institutions, a report by the committee set up by the Department of Higher Education, Government of India recommended:

One way to go about this [improving governance of HE institutions] is to encourage universities to start programmes in management of educational institutions. A separation between academic administration and overall management (including fund-raising) may be desirable. In this context, it will be necessary for many state governments to abandon the trend of appointing civil servants as university administrators (MHRD, 2009: 45).

Consequently, as a bounded professional, the Indian co-author had very well-defined roles and responsibilities, making it more difficult for him to demonstrate the impact of the programme on practice. He found that his attempts to disseminate and institutionalize his learning from the programme at his workplace were, for the most part, met with tepid interest from his peers. Furthermore, success, in terms of the development of third-space professionalism in India, is unlikely ever to emerge as a result of any single high-profile policy directive, but rather by 'cumulative smaller [localized] decisions that establish consistent trends and [positively influence] organisational behaviour' (Rixom, 2011: 13, quoting Shattock, 2003). However, 'in straightened times it has been suggested that organisational "cracks" appear, affording spaces for leverage, intervention and potential transformation mirroring what has been shown to occur in Third Space environments' (Whitchurch, 2012: 138), as was the case in Ireland.

## Conclusion

Features of professionalism have been articulated as ‘the establishment of a body of knowledge, the development of skilled expertise and a strong sense of a shared service ethic’ (Rixom, 2011: 161). Because the third-space model espouses collaboration beyond boundaries, and encourages the pooling of knowledge and sharing of best practice in new peer groups, it undoubtedly creates ‘opportunities for the development of professional skills ... leading to a constructive redefining of the professional skill base, with positive outcomes for professionalization’ (ibid.).

It has also been suggested that the academic and administrative overlaps described above indicate that the boundaries between the two domains are already blurring, but it may be that those boundaries have never been clear. It might also be the case that what is needed now is a clearer definition of the respective roles in the changing higher education environment, so the two groups can collaborate from a shared understanding of each other’s work and their respective contributions to institutional management.

All countries are now experiencing some sort of reform of the traditional conceptions of what it means to be a non-academic HE professional, but what has emerged from this research is that this is currently more embedded in Irish HE than in Indian HE, thereby affording more opportunities for career progression for those currently employed in non-academic roles as a result of participation on a PD programme. Notwithstanding the limitations of the Irish reform agenda, a similar reform agenda is likely to be required in India before similar opportunities present themselves for PD graduates. Saying that, detailed data and analysis of trends of this type in relation to non-academic staff in both countries is required, because how can this catch-all term that defines what non-academics *don’t do* cover the many varied professional roles to which it now refers in a modern HE setting?

There are a number of limitations to this research. First, the literature review, while comprehensive, revealed a gap in research specific to the Irish and Indian HE contexts. Second, it is beyond the scope of the article to discuss the full range of change drivers of HE professional identity. The relatively short time frame was also a constraint in the semi-structured interviews, allowing for interviews to be conducted solely within the authors’ universities. Therefore, the main limitation of the semi-structured interview methodology used in this article lies in its reliance on the perspective of a single HE institution for each country. The findings, although triangulated with the findings of the literature review, are therefore untested beyond the institution, and this warrants further investigation as part of any future research. Therefore, any generalization of findings would not be meaningful at this stage.

Notwithstanding the above, what we can see in HE professional praxis in both countries is ‘the emergence of the *project domain* as a distinctive territory in its own right ... characterised by major, multifunctional projects assembled across the university [and beyond, in many cases], building on what were previously clearly bounded processes and activities’ (Whitchurch, 2006b: 166). Increasingly, dedicated portfolio professionals will be required to implement cross-institutional, inter-institutional, industry–academic and sectoral initiatives to bring about the desired reforms and maximise societal and economic impact; indirectly, through increased forms of institution-wide planning and programming, this mode of operation will facilitate a further coalescence of professional academic and non-academic praxis in the years ahead.

Despite the limitations of this article – due to its reliance on the reflections and personal experiences of two authors – the research does suggest that PD participation is more likely to support non-academic HE professionals’ personal development in countries where third-space professional culture is more embedded, thereby facilitating tangible gains for some in terms of their professional legitimacy within their existing roles. On the other hand, for those individuals from countries where it is less embedded, such as India, PD participation might more

realistically lead to different career paths, either in traditional academia, or, if still career-mobile, new opportunities in the global marketplace.

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- Bamberger, A. (2018) 'Academic degree recognition in a global era: The case of the doctorate of education (EdD) in Israel'. *London Review of Education*, 16 (1), 28–39.
- Burnard, P., Dragovic, T., Ottewell, K. and Lim, W.M. (2018) 'Voicing the professional doctorate and the researching professional's identity: Theorizing the EdD's uniqueness'. *London Review of Education*, 16 (1), 40–55.
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