

Bulletin

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Impact – the future

Career ladders, culture shifts and connecting overseas



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Striking a balance

Claire MacLeod on the future of academic recruitment



Biography

Claire MacLeod is a Director of Active Executive Recruitment, a company that recruits candidates for positions at board and executive levels.

Claire specialises in the academic sector and has helped to fill key senior roles at institutions including the University of Warwick, Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Salford. Active Executive Recruitment has offices in London and the Midlands.

Claire's background is in consultancy, research and business development. Before joining Active she worked for Hays Executive, where she established and grew the search practice within the education sector. She has also placed a number of Chief Executives and Managing Directors with education-related not-for-profit and private organisations.

Has recruitment for senior academic positions seen a growing emphasis on the importance of engagement, impact and knowledge transfer?

I'd say that in the past year or so there's been a definite shift in emphasis and urgency in terms of recruiting people who can raise a university's game in research, innovation, communications, marketing and external relations.

A lot of academics are single-minded – and necessarily so. It's often what makes them brilliant academics. But

the need for universities to sing their success stories is enormous for many reasons, and most institutions are now recognising academics perhaps aren't always the best people to do that. Universities need people who can seek out and identify successes and translate them into something accessible and relevant. And I think there's still some way to go before some understand the breadth of the benefits. The specific applications are so far-reaching. Knowledge transfer, engagement, the chance to build relationships with business and industry – in a lot of cases these really aren't fully exploited at all.

Bearing in mind those sorts of challenges, is resistance to non-academic managers growing or shrinking among academics?

There has always been a certain tension between academics and managers. You're dealing with incredibly intelligent individuals who are challenging and who like to challenge – and in turn it's a challenge to manage them. Some universities might still say they're interested only in people who have worked in universities before, but now that the landscape is changing an increasing number are realising there's an essential need to bring in people who have experience of working within a competitive and commercial environment.

One of the values Active tries to bring is to understand the institution we're working with and the individual challenges it faces. All universities share some issues that are unique to the sector, but at the same time each has its own distinguishing characteristics. A university at the bottom end of the league tables has a very different demographic to a university at the top end. It's about far more than a candidate's expertise and competence. It's a cultural fit.

How great is the academic sector's appeal to private sector executives?

In spite or possibly because of the extensive media coverage about changes to funding, the sector appeals to a wide range of people in the private sector. They're recognising that more than ever the commercial skills they offer will be seen as valuable to universities. Many of my successful candidates tell me how much they enjoy the unique challenges and excitement of working in an academic institution.

For most senior management jobs in the academic sector Active might get a hundred applications from an incredibly broad range of backgrounds. Taking the Director of Marketing roles I've handled as an example, I'd say 70 to 80 per cent of applicants are "credible".

I have to narrow that initial hundred down to a dozen or so. I'll then meet those candidates and maybe draw up reports on the best eight. Then I'll meet with the university and we'll agree a shortlist of, say, four. But I don't want them to be clones – I want them to offer different skills and experiences.

I also like to throw in what I call a "wildcard", someone who might make the university sit up and say: "Hold on a minute – look at this..." Sometimes the university might say to me: "Claire, what were you thinking?" But what's interesting is that over the past year every single one of my wildcards has made the final shortlist. That shows universities are recognising the landscape is altering and that if they're going to be taken seriously on a global platform they have to start questioning the status quo; and the universities that recognise this best have always led the way in taking calculated risks.

Do you think candidates with a business background will increasingly fill senior positions? In other words,

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should academics feel threatened or will there always be a place for them at the very top of the hierarchy?

Whether academics should feel threatened is a moot point. But they're intelligent people. I expect they're aware of how the model is changing and the implications of that. Sometimes it takes someone from outside to see things differently and challenge them, to initiate the sort of conversations that are needed nowadays.

One thing I would say is that it would be better if there were always a balance. It's important to preserve some of the elements that have always helped make universities what they are. You can't just walk into academia and say: "From today we're doing it like this." Changing the paradigm isn't going to happen overnight, and certain aspects have to be cherished.

The truth is that respected, widely published academics who are skilled and willing managers aren't easy to find. Equally, it's essential that non-academics have the personal qualities to work within a university environment, that they have the influential skills and relationship-building abilities that can benefit all concerned. If universities are going to make the most of the opportunities that exist today then they have to consider all these vital concerns and get the balance absolutely right.

As HEFCE spends the next couple of months refining the impact guidelines for the 2014 REF, universities face the need to change the current academic environment to maximise their impact results. Yet many perhaps lack the necessary management tools and therefore the "teeth" to achieve this in the available timeframe.

The impact agenda for REF increases the need for academics to engage in an "evidential" way with stakeholders, policymakers, businesses and the media. In many cases this requirement might be met with a certain measure of discomfort, if not outright hostility – and why not? The skills required to produce a 4* research paper seldom lend themselves to delivering pithy media releases to the national press or preparing well presented, carefully crafted research briefings for policymakers.

In addition, academics do not have the time to research all the policymakers, business people or think-tanks that might be interested in their findings or to create marketing materials to promote their seminars or feed back their research success to funders. Internal marketing and communications departments often have too little resource to support them on anything

other than the major "stories". And other useful assets, such as a department/school/university CRM system, are for most a thing of the future.

So how do you successfully bring about a shift to a culture that embraces, supports, creates and records engagement as part of its everyday mission? Given that they usually lack the management authority to compel reluctant academics to engage, University Research Services and Heads of Schools and Faculties need access to a range of carrots rather than sticks. They may also need to review the internal resources they currently employ. Several universities are already developing new roles – e.g. Transformation Manager, Impact Manager – to bring in-house the skill set needed to support academics with the new expectations of their role.

In the next edition of *Bulletin* we will focus on impact in relation to the REF and look at the above issues in more detail. If universities or individual schools/departments can identify ways of integrating and coordinating engagement by breaking the process down into activities that seem accessible and require little time then the chances are the culture will change more quickly – and the prospect of a good impact rating will improve.

In the meantime, if you would like to talk to us about how Bulletin Academic can assist you in improving your engagement activities and your case study impact rating then please contact us. We'd be happy to help.



URL: Useful References and Links



Active Executive Recruitment
www.active-execrecruitment.co.uk

An academic's view
<http://tinyurl.com/timeshighereducation>

URL: Useful References and Links



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A world of opportunity

“Internationalisation is here to stay.”
So said Eva Egron-Polak, Secretary-General of the International Association of Universities, at the University of Nottingham’s 2011 Lord Dearing Memorial Conference, *The Globalisation of Higher Education*.

Egron-Polak’s contention – that internationalisation must be embraced if universities and their research are to prosper – was echoed throughout an event that, fittingly, attracted distinguished speakers from around the world.

HEFCE Chief Executive Sir Alan Langlands spoke of “tectonic shifts” and the importance of “opportunity, quality, diversity, sustainability and impact”, while Professor David Eastwood, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, observed: “International

higher education is here, and it’s here in a quite aggressive form. Our competitors are spending more, building more and in some cases researching more.”

The spectre of intense competition was certainly not overlooked, but the general theme was one of opportunity rather than threat, of opening doors and forging links – not least in the case of Asia.

Simon Marginson, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, described the Confucian model of education as “a supernova” and conceded: “In the future much of our knowledge will come from East Asia.” But he was quick to add: “The West won’t disappear or be subordinated. It will have a global equal. I don’t see it as a clash of civilisations – it’s a shared space.”

From Professor Dlawer Ala’Aldeen, the Kurdistan regional government’s Minister of Higher Education, to Bernd Waechter, Director of the Academic Cooperation Association, the message was clear: this is a now globalised sector – and its globalisation can only increase.

In the words of Professor John Wood, Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities: “Burying our heads in the sand is not an option. The status quo cannot be maintained.”

URL: Useful References and Links



Lord Dearing Memorial Conference
www.nottingham.ac.uk/lorddearing

The Eastern promise of connecting globally

Bulletin Academic’s Chris O’Brien spent three years in Beijing, writing for the likes of *The Economist*, *Forbes*, *The Washington Times* and *Asia Weekly*. His experiences gave him a valuable insight into the globalisation of higher education in Asia, as he explains here.

From 2006 to 2009 I witnessed huge developments in the flow of information and knowledge between Asia and the West.

Despite well-documented censorship constraints, the Chinese media are becoming more eager to engage with readers overseas. Influential business magazine *Caijing* has expanded its English content; probes into governmental corruption are a prominent

feature of *The Economic Observer’s* English website; and in 2009 the *Global Times* launched an English version to take on *China Daily* – which has itself has now launched a European edition.

This move to internationalise is also evident in academia. Scholars from the top Japanese, Korean and Chinese universities are encouraged to publish research in international journals and contribute op-eds and blog posts to UK and US media. From my own experience, academics in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong are increasingly keen to provide foreign correspondents with analysis.

Information is moving both ways, and there is a real hunger to understand

how the West views the East. More Chinese are looking to UK and US media for a wider view; many log on to Mandarin sites devoted to translating articles from *Time* and *The Economist*.

The implications for academia are obvious and compelling. There is enormous scope for UK universities to raise their profiles in Asia, whether through connecting with prospective overseas students, the region’s policymakers – which may give rise to research funding opportunities – or academics seeking partners for collaborative research projects. The potential is there – and it is huge.