



Redeveloping Academic Career Frameworks for Twenty-First Century Higher Education

Mark Sterling
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“For conceptual analysis, practical guidelines and comprehensive references, I would recommend this book to any university which has realised that its role in society should be reflected in its policies for academic career development.”

—Professor Chris Brink, *Emeritus Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle University, UK*, and author of *The Soul of a University*

“This book is a gift to modern academics and modern universities. Carefully researched, thoughtful, and progressive, *Redeveloping Academic Career Frameworks for Twenty-First Century Higher Education* provides us with strong, nuanced guidance around how to recognise and build the kind of academic work we need to move universities forward. I predict this book will have a significant, positive, and very welcome effect on the culture of universities.”

—Professor Susan Rowland, *Vice-Provost, University of Sydney, Australia*

“A thoroughly researched work exploring the next horizon in academic careers. Readers will gain useful perspectives from careful discussions on emerging research-focussed, education-focussed, and entrepreneurial roles, and how these can benefit individuals and institutions. Most helpfully, the book clearly frames practical principles on how to elevate these specialist roles, which often already exist under the radar, to new opportunities that will undoubtedly end up being celebrated in universities across the world.”

—Professor Merlin Crossley, *Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic Quality, UNSW, Sydney, Australia*

“Sterling et al.’s volume offers us an insightful examination into the significant contribution that academic career frameworks make to institutional agility and to the evolving role of higher education in society. In the face of constant change and global challenges, 21st century higher education institutions need experts in curriculum, pedagogy, professional practice, entrepreneurship, public engagement and knowledge exchange alongside their research stars. And to grow and retain these experts, the sector needs robust criteria that enable progression to the highest levels in roles with different areas of focus, but which align to institutional goals, for example with regards to student experience, and graduate outcomes, and

to broader mission. In addressing academic career frameworks, Sterling et al. prompt us to look beyond our traditional role boundaries and to see career pathways as tools for capacity building and for greater diversity. It is good timing for such a volume.”

—Professor Sarah Speight, *Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Student Experience, University of Nottingham, UK*

“A timely, considered and necessary contribution for higher education institutional leaders and aspiring senior managers. With consensus around the need to recognise a broader spectrum of talents within universities and the multidimensional nature of academic careers, this volume articulates how academic career frameworks can be utilised to create more inclusive and effective working environments. The volume is, refreshingly, written from a perspective of hope. I highly commend this volume and endorse its encouragement of higher education institutions to invest in redesigning their academic career frameworks.”

—Dr Paul Roberts, *Director, CollaborateHE Ltd, UK*

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ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
APA	Academic Professional Apprenticeship
CATE	Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence
CPD	Continuing professional development
DORA	Declaration on Research Assessment (San Francisco)
EDI	Equality, diversity, and inclusion
EIA	Equality impact assessment
ERA	Excellence in Research for Australia
EUA	European Universities Association
GUNi	Global University Network for innovation
HEA	Higher Education Academy (now part of Advance HE)
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency (merged with Jisc in 2022)
HR	Human resource
IfATE	Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
Jisc	(formerly JISC, Joint Information Systems Committee)
KEF	Knowledge Exchange Framework
LERU	League of European Research Universities
NTFS	National Teaching Fellowship Scheme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBRF	Performance-Based Research Fund
RAE	Royal Academy of Engineering
REC	Race Equality Charter
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SoTL	Scholarship of teaching and learning
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

ST(R)E(A)M	Science, technology, reading and writing, engineering, art and mathematics
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
THE	Times Higher Education
TNE	Transnational education
UCEA	Universities and Colleges Employers Association
UK	United Kingdom
UKPSF	UK Professional Standards Framework (revised in 2023, currently PSF to highlight global relevance)
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VSNU	Vereniging van Samenwerkende Nederlandse Universiteiten (since 2021, Universiteiten van Nederland, UNL)

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Introduction

1.1 SETTING THE SCENE FOR THE REDESIGN OF ACADEMIC CAREER FRAMEWORKS

The degree to which universities are embedded in society has changed considerably over the last decade or so. Across the world, universities' civic relevance and mission have become more salient, either through an increased portfolio of activity in local and regional communities or through increased visibility of already existing social, cultural, or economic partnerships. The OECD (2019a) offers details about the global policy context for university-industry connections, while a number of studies explore universities' contributions to society from a variety of angles in a variety of national contexts (e.g., Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Goddard, 2018; Grant, 2021; Lo et al., 2017; Locatelli & Marginson, 2023; UPP Foundation, 2019). The last decade or so has also brought changes to the ways universities are required to evidence the value of their work to various stakeholders. In the United Kingdom, the context where the authors of the volume are based, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and its two more recent counterparts for teaching (TEF) and knowledge exchange (KEF) evaluate the contribution of higher education and focus the energy and resources universities expend on student-facing and society-relevant activity. Other circumstances have added to the scope, degree, and impact of change in UK universities—among these, the

planned launch of the UK Graduate Outcomes Survey in 2018 to ‘*gain insight into whether the student experience delivered what was promised [...], from a learning and potential employment perspective*’ (Graduate Outcomes, n.d.), welcomed by some but viewed as problematic by others, the unexpected arrival of a global pandemic a year or so later and long-awaited government recommendations on university student finance. More sector transformation is expected moving forward, in the United Kingdom and globally, driven by automation, demographic changes, broader economic forces, political unrest, government legislation and policies, the long shadow of Covid-19, as well as by a deeper awareness of how the resource of knowledge is replenished and exchanged for sustainable societal development (see the quintuple helix model put forward by Carayannis et al., 2012).

Agility will be key for the global higher education sector to develop and respond appropriately to challenges going deeper into the twenty-first century. The walls around learning and teaching environments, whether physical or digital, on campus or elsewhere, need to flexibly glide to make space for known and not-yet-identified needs arising from the accelerating pace of change in society. To enable such experiences for their students and external stakeholders, agile universities employ talented people and create opportunities for them to thrive within supportive systems. They demonstrate a genuine commitment to learning to benefit everyone (Buller, 2014; Sarrico et al., 2022; Winter, 2017). They respond to the need to regularly review and adapt both what is learnt and how the learning is carried out (Crowley & Overton, 2021; Senge, 2006). This is reflected in the new academic career frameworks that a number of higher education institutions in various parts of the world have recently introduced to recognise more fully the rich variety of professional knowledge and experiences that academics draw on to facilitate high-quality, world-relevant student learning and to deliver on complementary institutional agendas (Crosier, 2017; EUA, 2021; Frølich et al., 2018; Locke et al., 2016; OECD, 2020; RAE, 2018; Saenen et al., 2021; Whitchurch & Gordon, 2017). While pockets of good practice exist, career framework redevelopment has been uneven across the globe, with insufficient comparative data and limited guidance on framework redesign and implementation. Valuable progress risks being undone as a result of tensions between well-intended but insufficiently scaffolded framework implementation and individual academics’ experiences of change.

In institutions that have embraced academic career framework redesign, traditional teaching-and-research academic roles now sit alongside ones which place education and learning-focused scholarship centre stage (e.g., Smith & Walker, 2021, 2022), or which overtly value professional practice from other sectors, enterprise, public engagement, and knowledge exchange (GuildHE, 2018, 2019). The redesigned frameworks are due to multiple reasons which include but extend beyond external drivers such as research excellence assessments, government policy, and the perceived need for financial and social accountability (Baker, 2019; Lock, 2022; Wolf & Jenkins, 2021). They support universities' civic-oriented mission and foreground the need to rethink the education offer so that it better prepares students for an unpredictable future, resulting in a positive experience for all—students, academics, and other stakeholders in universities and in local and global communities (Bradley, 2021; Graham, 2022; Grove, 2018). They reflect how the traditional categories of 'research', 'learning', and 'public engagement' have become more fluid and nuanced (Scott et al., 2017). New pathways (education-focused or practice/entrepreneurship ones) are also intended to create greater parity of esteem and more balanced allocation of resources for various strands of academic activity. They help address tensions between agendas that prioritise global research and ranking and activities that benefit local communities. They help retain talent in universities (UCEA, 2019), offering systemic solutions rather than short-term fixes to staffing costs incurred through staff turnover prompted by reward opportunities which no longer match growing expertise (Buller, 2021; Universities UK, 2015). They help universities fulfil their role as educators, knowledge co-creators, contributors to policy and strategy development, catalysts for economic growth, and promoters of cultural wellbeing in local, regional, national, and global contexts.

The present volume spotlights new academic career pathways (education-focused and practice/entrepreneurship ones) which sit alongside traditional teaching-and-research ones and enable progression based on differentiated strengths, placing education at the centre and recognising more fully the value that professionals from other sectors and from industry bring into universities when they take on academic roles. It seeks to develop understanding of how these new pathways respond to the triple mission of universities (education, research, and societal engagement). It offers a context in which collaboration and dialogue about academic work, roles, identity, and professional growth can occur. The word 'pathway' is

used in the volume to reflect the substantive academic activities which are undertaken in addition to or instead of discipline research and which open up opportunities for progression for a broader range of academics with a broader range of expertise. New pathways are laid out in redesigned academic career frameworks, with detail about how recognition can be achieved along each. The volume situates pathway redesign in relevant scholarly literature and reports of higher education practice and unpacks how these pathways are (likely to be) experienced by academics to ensure that redesigned frameworks achieve their intended impact, supporting academic work to flourish for the benefit of all stakeholders in and of a university. It carefully considers organisational constraints around pathway redesign so that the implementation process runs smoothly and leads to positive outcomes for all involved. As well as discussing the balance of academic activities on pathways and how to build a relevant development offer, the volume considers ways in which equality characteristics and life circumstances intersect to enable or hinder positioning on a pathway.

Discussion throughout the volume culminates in 12 principles for the redesign of academic career frameworks in Chap. 6. The principles build on key parameters for constructive conversations about alignment to new pathways, highlighted throughout the volume both from the point of view of individuals at different stages in their careers and from the point of view of institutions. They are accompanied by guidance on how to implement new pathways and on ways to rethink the development offer (within an institution as well as signposted externally) so that the new pathways bed in and fully achieve the purpose for which they were designed. While the volume does not focus on pathways with a traditional teaching-and-research focus that would align to the REF in the United Kingdom, it highlights research areas where academics with an education-focused or practice/entrepreneurship remit can make a valuable contribution to REF-aligned academic work.

The volume draws on the authors' combined experience, in UK universities with different histories but a shared civic commitment, of redesigned academic career frameworks. It brings together four different but complementary perspectives: leading the redesign process in an institution, experiencing promotion on a new pathway, overseeing career framework design and implementation from a human resource (HR) vantage point, and supporting academics' development with regard to facilitating student learning. It builds on an initial conversation about new pathways (Sterling & Blaj-Ward, 2022) and on an analysis of redesigned career frameworks in

the UK context. It synthesises insights from theoretical, conceptual, and empirical literature in a range of different fields (e.g., higher education research, organisation and management studies, sociology) which have various methodologies and theoretical orientations.

The volume speaks to the wider academic community, to senior decision-makers in institutions, as well as to individuals seeking to achieve enhanced positioning on a pathway. The standpoint from which it is written subscribes to Sarrico et al.'s (2022) view that *'The "good old days" about being an academic may be gone. But that must not mean that "good new days" about being an academic are not possible'* (p. 14). The volume shows how new pathways make *'good new days'* possible, in a sustainable way, through suitably resourced collaboration among and parity of opportunity for academics on all pathways. It echoes Clegg's (2008) optimistic view that *'Rather than being under threat, it appears that identities in academia are expanding and proliferating, and that there are possibilities for valorising difference'* (p. 343).

1.2 CAREER FRAMEWORK REDESIGN IN GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Pockets of good practice in rethinking academic career frameworks are beginning to take shape in the United Kingdom (Locke et al., 2016; Marini et al., 2019; Whitchurch & Gordon, 2017) and across the world (GUNi, 2017; Helms, 2015; OECD, 2019b; Overlaet, 2022; Saenen et al., 2021), both in higher education systems where regulations are defined at state level and university staff are civil servants, and in ones where higher education institutions have fuller scope to shape the nature of academic roles and to develop human resource management policies and practice. There is widespread agreement about the relevance of new pathways, yet the design and implementation processes are being held back by the complexity of the task and by a lack of comparative evidence. As emphasised in an OECD (2019b) report, OECD member countries would greatly benefit from access to comparative data that would enable them to *'benchmark their policy choices to others, assess what is feasible, and foster deeper and more productive peer-learning discussions'*.

Some comparative evidence is available in Frølich et al. (2018), who look at the Norwegian academic career landscape alongside that of six other countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Austria,