

The Right Blend: Creating a Successful Leadership Development Program for Heads of School

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The right... people, leadership, technology, facilities, student experience, environment, and brand. In one way or another academic leaders, and heads of school in particular, are central to our institutions getting it 'right'. Consequently, developing the leadership capabilities of academic leaders has been a focus for many of our institutions.

Following the establishment of the Carrick Institute (renamed as the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, and more recently subsumed within the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education) in the mid-2000s there has been a raft of institutional academic leadership projects within the Australian higher education sector. These projects and pilot programs have not always led to ongoing programs but have expanded academic leadership theory and practice within the Australian higher education context. This paper will outline how one organisational development unit has developed a sustainable, innovative and successful academic leadership program for heads of schools.

In late 2007 Curtin University established its Organisational Development Unit (ODU) with, amongst other matters, a priority to address leadership development needs. The ODU set about creating a leadership capability framework and a linked suite of leadership development programs. As a matter of some urgency, the University's executive requested that a program for Heads of School (HOS) be designed and implemented. The inaugural Head of School Development Program was launched in September 2008. It was offered on an invitational basis to newer HOS, deputy and potential HOS, and to heads of large departments. The year-long program includes four two-day modules, 360-degree feedback and other assessments, and an action learning project. A fourth cohort of academic leaders is currently completing the program.

In 2010 the ODU commissioned an independent external evaluation of the first two complete cycles of the HOS Development Program. The evaluation report, delivered in 2011, concluded that: a large majority of program participants and stakeholders indicated they were satisfied with the program; the program was well researched and designed: it was conducted to a high standard and achieved its objectives; and that there was convincing evidence that the program is building both individual and university leadership and management capability and strengthening succession planning capacity.

This paper will discuss the consultative and collaborative approach utilised by Curtin University's Organisational Development Unit in positioning, designing and delivering its successful Head of School Development Program.