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Abstract

This paper reports on findings from a Leadership Foundation for Higher Education funded project exploring the role of associate deans in UK universities. While the number of associate deans leading cross-curricular and inter-disciplinary initiatives appears to be on the increase, there has been very little research focusing on the exact nature of the role and its importance, or otherwise, in the leadership and management of universities. Drawing on mixed-methods data from 15 semi-structured interviews and a follow-up online survey (n = 172), this paper reports on how the role is defined and positioned in relation to university organisational structures and identifies what the similarities and differences are between associate deans working at traditional and modern universities. As the first national survey of the role, it is argued that this paper makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge. By drawing on the concept of distributed leadership, the paper also offers new theoretical insights into how different types of universities in the UK are responding to external pressures as a consequence of the fast-changing and increasingly complex sector environment. (HRK / Abstract

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