

# Shifting Roles and Blurring Boundaries: Reconstructing Professional Identities in Higher Education

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**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2009, 5pm**

**Room JG3003, John Galsworthy Building, Penrhyn Road**

Despite a significant literature on academic identities, less attention has been paid to those of professional staff. Moreover, the generic terms “administrator” and “manager” mask the diversity of the staff that they are intended to describe. The session will draw on an international study funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education to suggest that, concurrent with increasing functional specialisation vis-à-vis, for instance, legislative and market requirements, there are other identity dynamics at play for professional staff. Drawing on contemporary ideas about the fluidity of identity, a model will be described that distinguishes individuals by their approaches to the structures and boundaries that they encounter. Comprising four categories of *bounded*, *cross-boundary*, *unbounded* or *blended professional*, the model illustrates possible identity dispositions, with associated spaces, knowledges, relationships and legitimacies. The session will go on to introduce the concept of *third space* between professional and academic domains, in which less *bounded* forms of professional are increasingly likely to work alongside academic colleagues. Finally, it will consider the implications of these developments, for institutions and for individuals, and draw some international comparisons between the UK, Australia and the United States.

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Before joining the Institute of Education as a Lecturer in 2007, Celia Whitchurch was Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Social Science and Public Policy at King's College London. Before that, she had a career in university administration and management at the Universities of Kent, London, Birmingham and King's College London. Her research interests include changing professional identities in higher education, the emergence of 'blended' roles between professional and academic domains of activity, and the implications of these changes for career and leadership development. She has published widely on higher education policy and management, and in 2008 completed a major study funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education entitled *Professional Managers in UK Higher Education: Preparing for Complex Futures*, available at [www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/research](http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/research). She was founding editor of the journal of the Association of University Administrators, *perspectives: policy and practice in higher education*, and is currently an Editor of *Higher Education Quarterly*.