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# The contribution of educational developers to academic citizenship in higher education

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## ABSTRACT

Educational Development activity is pivotal to the sustenance of academic citizenship within the academy, with Educational Developers integral to supporting academic staff to engage with citizenship pursuits and making significant contributions of their own. However, the nature of this contribution to the operation of the university and the broader academic community has not yet been explored in the literature. This qualitative study investigated how Educational Developers navigate their roles, balancing teaching enhancement activities with broader contributions to nurturing citizenship. Findings indicate an opportunity to shape the expectations of citizenship for Educational Developers and integrate them into their evolving professional identity.

## KEYWORDS

Academic citizenship; educational development; educational developers; promotion; recognition

## Introduction

Academic citizenship is regarded as central to the very notion of what it is to be a university (Kenny & Fluck, 2019; Macfarlane, 2007) and is best understood as a service to the community and academic disciplines based on reciprocal obligations. An unknown or alien concept to many in the academy, its import resides in its relationship to issues of professional identity, academic prerogatives, and commitment (contractual or otherwise) to the mission of institutions employing them (Albia & Cheng, 2023). Progressive disaggregation of the academic role into an increasing number of specialist roles and career tracks (Macfarlane, 2011) has resulted from the expansion of higher education and the widespread adoption of practices associated with neoliberal ideologies. This has changed the structures and content of academic work (de Boer et al., 2007) with academic time commonly governed by workload models (Peseta et al., 2017). Such developments have been argued to have precipitated a shift away from academic citizenship activity with this disassembly reducing previously informal activities, originally undertaken out of moral obligations to students, institutions, and disciplines, to a defined list of tasks driven by a focus on output metrics (Beatson et al., 2022; Kimber & Ehrich, 2015).

Interest in academic citizenship activity is international with studies focusing on several settings including, Denmark (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2024), the United States of America

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and Canada (Dawson et al., 2022), Australia (Beatson et al., 2022), Italy (Carli & Tagliaventi, 2023; Tagliaventi et al., 2020), and France (Mignot-Gérard et al., 2022). Despite this growing body of work related to academic citizenship, and the increasing formalisation of citizenship in the promotion criteria for academic roles, the specific contributions made by Educational Developers to citizenship and the challenges they face in this area, including issues of equity of opportunity, have not yet been addressed in the literature.

This qualitative study explored perspectives on the service dimension of academic citizenship held by Educational Developers in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. Enhancing our understanding of the role of developers in supporting and engaging in academic citizenship, will facilitate the identification of effective strategies and resources to support colleagues in these roles, and the generation of insights that may also support developers to evidence the service roles they play as part of their career advancement.

## Literature review

### *Academic citizenship*

Academic citizenship is closely linked to conceptions of the university and collegiality (Mignot-Gérard et al., 2022). It has previously been compared to organisational citizenship behaviour, which comprises activities not explicitly outlined yet important to the organisation (Organ, 1988). In practical terms, citizenship incorporates activities that vary across institutions and are often not reflected in academic workload models, but might include attending graduation, participating in departmental meetings, or engaging in editorial work (Kenny & Fluck, 2022, 2023).

Forms of academic service, as a facet of academic citizenship, have previously been articulated as a 'pyramid' comprising five levels of service; student service, collegial service, institutional service, disciplinary service, and public service (Macfarlane, 2007). This extended the three forms of service identified by Neumann and Terosky (2007). Whilst prior research has predominantly focused on academic citizenship from a research perspective (Carli & Tagliaventi, 2023; Mignot-Gérard et al., 2022; Tagliaventi et al., 2020) academic citizenship spans the full academic role.

Prior research finds that women undertake greater amounts of citizenship activity which can result in later promotion (Misra et al., 2011), potentially because they identify more closely with the responsibilities that their roles bring (Macfarlane & Burg, 2019). Recent work has confirmed that women undertake more service across all types of citizenship than their male counterparts, attributing it to the relational nature of such work resulting in women feeling that they cannot decline whilst men do say no in the knowledge that someone else will pick up the work (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2024). Further, Baez (2000) cautions that an overemphasis on the negative aspects of service activity can diminish the work of those who seek to change institutional structures through service activity, often impacting minoritised staff more than others.

The disaggregation of the academic role combined with the associated development of specialist roles across the contemporary university has arguably had negative implications for academic citizenship activity:

Such activities are critical to maintaining the infrastructure of the academy and the quality of the student experience but go largely unrewarded and unrecognised in a performative university environment where the academic role has ‘unbundled’ (Macfarlane, 2011, p. 60)

### *Educational developers*

Educational Development is an umbrella concept encompassing Instructional Development, and Faculty Development amongst other terms (Clegg, 2009; Mori et al., 2022). It has been variously positioned; both as a tool of neoliberal ideologies to improve the efficiency of academics in service of student consumers; and, as a means of promoting social justice (Ashwin, 2022; McKenna et al., 2022). Despite the widespread adoption of Educational Developer positions across the sector, there continues to be significant role ambiguity, principally related to their institutional remit (Fremstad & Ewins, 2023; Hanson, 2013). Roles are generally agreed to comprise strategic institutional work critical to the education agenda and staff development across the institution (Fremstad et al., 2020). The terms Academic and Educational Developer are used almost interchangeably across the sector (Ouellett, 2010); however, we choose to use the term Educational Developer in recognition of the explicit focus on teaching and learning.

The professional identity of Educational Developers continues to evolve, partly in response to the needs of the modern academy, and partly as the roles are mainstreamed in higher education. There is a diversity of routes into the field (Mårtensson & Roxå, 2021), and as a result, no shared disciplinary background (Green & Little, 2013). Consequently, professional identity has formed a focus for a body of research that seeks to understand the disciplinary frames of reference for Educational Developers (Mori et al., 2022). Further, Educational Developers are often employed as members of professional services rather than on academic contracts (Evans, 2023), contributing to identity confusion. Importantly, this also impacts the availability of promotion routes and the nature of academic citizenship outlined as part of the role.

In practice, despite differing contractual arrangements, the ongoing and increasing blurring of boundaries has led to the increased use of the term ‘third space’ workers to refer to staff members whose roles require both academic and professional expertise (Baré et al., 2021; Whitchurch, 2015). The disaggregation of Educational Developers from faculty-based positions has given rise to the suggestion that such roles exist as tools to serve managerialist agendas (Macfarlane & Hughes, 2009). The implication would be that internal citizenship activity takes precedence over external activities.

This study seeks to uncover the landscape of Educational Developer citizenship activity; the role developers play in the sustenance of those activities integral to the ongoing operation of the sector, and the breadth of their role in supporting the development and mutual understanding of citizenship within the academy at large. The research questions addressed are:

**RQ1** In what ways, if any, do Educational Developers contribute to fostering a culture of academic citizenship in their institutions?

**RQ2** To what extent, and in what ways, do Educational Developers engage in institutional and sector-related service activities?

## Research method

The small-scale study was underpinned by a qualitative research design. The researchers explored the experiences and perspectives of Educational Developers, as academic citizens and as professional conduits for nurturing the development of citizenship activity, and how this is reflected in roles undertaken in service to their institutions, the sector, and their career advancement. We adopted an interview-based design that was responsive to the interviewee's answers (through a semi-structured interview instrument) and enabled the researchers to capture the nuanced nature of their citizenship endeavours.

A non-probabilistic, purposive sampling technique (Campbell et al., 2020) was used to select participants who held positions of Educational/Academic Developer in UK-based universities and identified through an open call for participants through the SEDA Jiscmail list. While this method enabled the convenient selection of individuals based on the characteristics of their role, it is recognised that the sample constructed will not reflect the diversity of ideas and experiences across the whole sector, and as such the generalisability of findings is limited to the context of the study. It is acknowledged that by adopting a purposive approach, roles located in certain types of institutions or aligned to specific mission groups may be overrepresented in the sample.

Ethical approval was obtained, and related measures were implemented throughout the study, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and using appropriate steps to maintain data security. Once transcripts were created, the recordings were deleted, and a participant key was created and stored separately. The researchers applied participant codes during data analysis (Interviewee A, B, C, etc.) to facilitate anonymity.

Seventeen interviews were conducted with those who responded to the call and who met the study criteria. Of the 17, four interviewees were male. Whilst this does not reflect the gender mix of UK higher education employees, it is broadly in line with other studies of Educational Developers e.g. Green and Little (2016) which had 29.3% male respondents in a sample of 959. The data was analysed in NVivo. An interpretivist approach to data analysis was adopted with the researchers familiarising themselves with the dataset before the commencement of coding. The data were initially coded independently by the two researchers before a discussion of any differences in coding. Codes were then developed into themes through the researchers' iterative process of revision and reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This process continued until the researchers were satisfied that the richness of the data was reflected in the themes presented.

## Findings

Analysis of the data identified the following three key themes: (1) conceptions of academic citizenship, (2) forms of academic citizenship activity, and (3) professional identity and recognition.

### *Conceptions of academic citizenship*

Key findings of the study were differing conceptions of what constitutes academic citizenship among those interviewed, and limited perceived responsibilities for supporting or nurturing academic citizenship behaviours in others. The importance of citizenship to the ongoing internal operations of institutions was widely recognised, with interviewees stating that it comprised, 'Doing the essential work that keeps things afloat' (Interviewee A) and typically requiring participation in activities outside of core role responsibilities, 'I guess a lot of it is committee work, but it's actually just helping the university function as well, so I would describe it as anything that is not core research or core teaching' (Interviewee M). Findings are organised according to interviewee's responses related to their own work as Educational Developers and how they enable citizenship behaviours in others.

Service to professional and disciplinary communities was also identified as being central to how academic citizenship was conceived, appearing to influence the ways those interviewed worked with others to foster citizenship and in furtherance of their own citizenship activities e.g. 'I guess part of being an academic in terms of engaging with the disciplinary communities or sector communities to share best practice' (Interviewee C) and 'it's how you contribute to the wider community and the different ways in which you can contribute towards the wider community'. (Interviewee E).

Interviewees discussed the gendering of citizenship activity, with several of them using the term 'academic housework' to characterise citizenship. For example '...it seems to be female dominated in terms of citizenship and education. And I don't know how I feel'. (Interviewee M). The gender-based inequity was perceived by interviewees is problematic if the existing structures entrench these views and support career progression of male staff ahead of females.

Professional activities to foster citizenship behaviours in the academics interviewees worked with were found to principally manifest through support for reflection on practice and encouragement to engage in activities relevant to applications for professional recognition or teaching awards, e.g. 'it's also like helping colleagues to try and understand for themselves what contribution they're trying to make, whether that be impacting on policy or to enhance the way we think about things'. (Interviewee P)

When seeking colleagues to engage with citizenship activities, appealing to instrumental motives was considered key, 'I think it's selling it to the individuals as to why it's good for them to do it. That's the key thing'. (Interviewee M). Some also saw their position as one of acting as role models to encourage citizenship in the broader academic population, 'I feel the first thing is I need to model good practice and this is why sometimes I think if I don't, if I'm not engaged as an academic citizen, you know, how can I recommend it'. (Interviewee D).

### *Forms of academic citizenship activity*

Citizenship activities undertaken or supported by those interviewed were found to coalesce around two broad categories: the recognised/formal and the unrecognised/informal.

Academic citizenship actions ranged from the explicit to the implicit, with formal activities typically related to identifiable tasks or outcomes that are recognised in institutional academic promotion criteria. The dangers associated with the increased institutional specificity of what is recognised as citizenship were also recognised: 'the more you define it, the more it becomes one of the flashy categories rather than just being a good citizen'. (Interviewee A). The formalisation of these activities represents a significant shift away from notions of collegial reciprocity, and engagement borne out of moral obligations to institutions and disciplines as they relate to the original conceptualisation of academic citizenship.

In many instances, the formalisation of aspects of citizenship was noted as a driver for Educational Developers to engage in certain activities, and to encourage the broader academic community to do so as well. This includes, for example, engagement with vehicles to facilitate professional recognition such as Fellowship of Advance HE and SEDA.

...our institutions are making it [Fellowship] a little bit more transactional [...] because it's now perceived as something you have to do. Inevitably it turns into an instrumental exercise. (Interviewee D)

Others observed that the formalisation of citizenship expectations in promotion criteria had acted as an incentive to engage in educational development activities, such as peer mentoring or observation of teaching, but also emphasised the personal and professional benefits beyond pure career advancement stating: 'So I think that is why people often engage in those kinds of activities because they know they're useful for promotion in some way or even useful' (Interviewee J). However, there was a recognition that academics are often constrained in their ability to engage in citizenship activity by their workloads: 'The thing I generally find is that the desire is often there in a range of colleagues, it can just be the capacity and the kinds of pressure and constraints of the workloads that they're under'. (Interviewee P)

This is particularly true for those whose time is managed through a workload model. This has led to many informal citizenship activities being overlooked or neglected in preference for those that are formally recognised and rewarded.

Many examples offered reflected smaller, informal tasks that support the overall running of the university, particularly in busy periods, e.g. graduation, invigilating, appointment panels, and clearing phone lines. Comments noted the broader implications of citizenship remarking that 'it's sort of expected but not paid for. And particularly if you want to become a professor'. (Interviewee O) This perspective looks at academic citizenship as an investment in the future, a form of intangible career asset borne out of activities beyond core role responsibilities, but signals that sacrifices are required if you wish to achieve career progression. The informal nature of some citizenship activity was also compared to 'taking somebody under your wing' (Interviewee Q) and informal mentoring.

Interviewees also mentioned sitting on accreditation panels and undertaking external examining duties as forms of citizenship that are often overlooked, albeit these activities are often remunerated separately.

Peer reviewing was highlighted as a form of academic citizenship that is critical to the ongoing trajectory of academic knowledge yet is mainly invisible and unrecognised by institutions (Interviewee C). Many would argue that peer review is a developmental

process whereby the act of reviewing and providing feedback, strengthens the reviewer's academic writing:

I try and make staff aware of the benefits to them of engaging in these activities and that if so, for instance, if you peer review for a journal then you'll understand the peer review process much better. You will then adapt [...] your own academic writing so that it's got a higher chance of being published in those journals that you're reviewing for. (Interviewee L)

Many interviewees were actively involved in external communities shaping policy and practice in the sector e.g. through working with Advance HE, as a journal editor, presenting at conferences, and sitting on committees and working groups.

### *Professional identity and recognition*

Interviewees highlighted that their functional areas included Educational Development colleagues on both academic and professional services contracts, though this varied across the sample. Notwithstanding the similarity of roles, many felt that issues of contractual status did impact how the academics that they worked with perceived them, for example stating, 'even though I'm not on an academic contract, I am still, you know, knowledgeable, at the forefront of what I'm doing, thinking about students, education'. (Interviewee M) Internal recognition of external standing and associated activities was also highlighted as a factor similarly impacting on sense of professional identity, particularly for those not employed on academic contracts, 'Academic citizenship is being recognised by my institution that I have a profile outside my institution as well' (Interviewee N). The perceived lack of parity of professional esteem based on contractual status risks Educational Developers in these roles feeling undervalued and less motivated, while institutions may inadvertently be missing out by not drawing upon this expertise. Further, this differential has potential implications for the work and career progression of those in non-academic roles, potentially influencing the effectiveness of collaborations with faculty and limiting their opportunities for recognition or advancement to leadership roles.

Tensions were identified where Educational Developers were heavily involved in supporting colleagues to gain external professional recognition e.g. via National Teaching Fellowships, and Advance HE fellowships that are celebrated institutionally, and often lead to promotion for recipients, yet the contribution of the Educational Developer and the extent of their role in supporting these colleagues is not fully acknowledged.

### **Discussion**

This research represents the first contemporary study to focus on this aspect of the Educational Development role. It does so by adding to our understanding of the role of academic citizenship as a facet of the core work undertaken by Educational Developers and its perceived value. Findings indicate that Educational Developers make important contributions to the sustenance of academic citizenship in institutions, through both their citizenship activities and their role modelling of citizenship behaviours to those academic colleagues they support.



The Educational Developers interviewed did not share a common perception of responsibility for fostering a culture of academic citizenship ethos in their institutions or the wider higher education academic community. Yet, through the professional activities articulated, interviewees evidenced their important role in engaging others to serve on committees and project teams in support of various institutional initiatives. To fulfil this requirement, many called on the 'usual suspects', the hyper-engaged and those seeking development opportunities. They were conscious of the pressures on academics, manifested through workload models (Peseta et al., 2017), which has contributed to an individualistic approach to career progression (Bolden et al., 2014). This awareness often leads them to excuse the instrumental engagements from academics. As a result, we concur with recent calls to engage with a more holistic approach to academic development, encompassing all aspects of the role (Evans, 2023; Sutherland, 2018) rather than siloing them. Such an approach would make visible the different types of service activity that academics are expected to undertake.

For Educational Developers, citizenship activity was delimited into two categories: recognised/formal or unrecognised/informal. This is in line with prior findings of prestigious/non-prestigious service (Hanasono et al., 2019; Macfarlane, 2007). Interviewees noted the linkage between formal service and the institutional profile (Macfarlane, 2007). Most reported engaging in different forms of disciplinary service, particularly in the various communities that Educational Developers have established. Informal service-related activities were often referred to by interviewees as 'academic housework', invoking gendered conceptualisations (Heijstra et al., 2017; Macfarlane & Burg, 2019) that have been the subject of prior research. Several interviewees articulated the importance of flexibility around such forms of service, reflecting institutional needs and recognising different forms.

Reinforcing the academic nature of the role was important for personal fulfilment and internal credibility. This included engaging with research and scholarship to develop a professional knowledge base (Andresen, 1996), pursuing forms of professional accreditation e.g. SEDA fellowship, and contributing to the growing discipline through service activity. Educational Developers must be afforded space and time to engage in both internal and external forms of citizenship as part of their professional development activity.

A disconnect between the citizenship activities of developers and the subjects of their development activity arises, at least in part, due to the institutional positioning of Educational Developers in the third space (Baré et al., 2021). Mori et al. (2022) explain that they are often viewed as 'functionally administrative, even when individual staff have academic contracts' (p. 363) leading to a situation where their internal clients view them as service providers answerable to them.

Notably, promotion is generally not available to Educational Developers on professional services contracts, outside of applying for roles at the next level, but is open to those on academic contracts. This lack of consistency is a source of frustration for many not just from a personal perspective but also from a development perspective whereby staff members often instrumentally engage with Educational Developers to support their quests for promotion through Advance HE fellowships, NTF applications, educational grants, and so on. It leaves Educational Developers in the paradoxical situation of preparing others for prestigious recognitions, whilst operating at a more junior level themselves.

As educational development is a relatively young discipline, we do not find a 'gradual retreat' (Beatson et al., 2022) from academic citizenship. Instead, we argue that the discipline is in the process of establishing its boundaries and associated role expectations.

Understanding the role of citizenship activity for Educational Developers forms part of this work. There is an opportunity for Educational Developers to shape expectations of their academic citizenship; to evolve institutional perceptions of their role and to make visible their many and varied contributions to address concerns relating to professional identity.

In doing so, Educational Developers and the sector must guard against the role being instrumentalised by academics for their own advancement, which represents a significant deviation from collegiality and foundational principles of reciprocity (Mignot-Gérard et al., 2022), and adds weight to accusations of performativity in the academy driven by managerialist agendas (Macfarlane & Hughes, 2009). They must also be conscious of the gendered nature of citizenship activity and how this is embedded into institutional processes resulting in gender disparities between those who feel empowered to say no to service activities and those who simply comply with requests (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2024). Consideration should also be given to the experiences of other minoritised groups and the risk of devaluing service work (Baez, 2000).

## Conclusion

This study contributes significantly to the literature on academic citizenship by examining the role of Educational Developers in fostering a culture of academic citizenship and their engagement in service activities.

Key findings include Educational Developers making a significant contribution by promoting and modelling academic citizenship, a dichotomy between formal and informal citizenship activities, the 'third space' positioning of Educational Developers creating distinct challenges and opportunities, and contractual status differences significantly impacting career progression and professional identity.

Our research highlights the split between formal (recognised) citizenship and informal (unrecognised) citizenship activity which is also likely to have relevance for those following traditional teaching and research and education-focussed career paths. The unique 'third space' positioning of Educational Developers creates challenges, as they can find themselves instrumentalised by academic colleagues seeking fellowships and other opportunities in a quest for promotion. This results in a superficial developmental relationship and engagement with formal citizenship activities.

To some extent, Educational Developers' citizenship activities are constrained by contractual status whereby some are classified as members of professional services, and others are engaged on an academic contract. This differential affects internal promotion opportunities and results in blurred role boundaries and identity confusion. This disparity urgently necessitates sector-level intervention to develop more equitable recognition frameworks and career pathways to reduce the need for Educational Developers to move institutions in search of promotion and the concomitant esteem issues between the developer and the developed. Institutions should work towards better integration and recognition of Educational Developers' contributions to academic citizenship, potentially informing professional development opportunities. Sectoral organisations such as SEDA and the International Consortium for Education Development (ICED) can play a pivotal role in this discussion.

The generalisability of the findings reported is limited to the context of the study due to the self-selecting nature of the interviewee pool and the potential over-representation

of individuals from certain types of institutions in the sample which may have over or underrepresented certain experiences and perspectives.

Future studies could seek to provide a more representative analysis of the role of Educational Developers in academic citizenship activities by undertaking analysis between those on academic and non-academic contracts and across mission groups. This would address limitations identified in this current study, providing a clearer picture of perspectives and practices across the sector, and supporting work to facilitate a more equitable career pathway for those employed in educational development roles.

In conclusion, this research underscores the crucial role Educational Developers play in fostering a culture of citizenship and calls for a more holistic approach to academic development that recognises and values diverse forms of service and citizenship activities.

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