Academic staff experiences of providing programme leadership to support students

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the experiences of programme leadership in New Zealand universities, and the associated support provided to students in selecting appropriate programmes and courses. The central question addresses academic staff experiences in providing programme leadership, supplemented by inquiries into the challenges of such leadership and the effectiveness of strategies to support informed student choices. Through a combination of surveys and follow-up interviews with three survey participants, this research illuminates some of the realities of the role, the notion of being shoulder-tapped, the level of collaboration with professional staff, and the impact on student support and experience.

Key findings reveal a disparity between expected and actual role demands, leading to excessive workloads that may impede academic and support duties. Despite being selected for their exemplary student interactions, programme leaders' potential for positive student impact could be improved by more collaboration with professional staff, resulting in less misunderstandings and unsuitable programme enrolments. Additionally, although a university offers extensive support resources, the demands on leaders often prevent early engagement with students, which is essential for clarifying programme details and support systems.

Recommendations include clarifying role definitions, reassessing workload distributions, enhancing administrative support, empowering middle management, providing targeted professional development, allocating protected time for research, and establishing robust student support systems for direct interaction with programme leaders. These measures aim to align institutional goals with the capabilities of programme leaders, improve administrative efficiency, and ultimately enhance students' academic journey and outcomes.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which, to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

31 March 2024

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Signature   Date

Acknowledgements

I stand at the culmination of this journey, deeply humbled and immensely grateful for having completed a dissertation that, at one time, seemed beyond the realm of possibility for me. The opportunity to explore education leadership, a field I am passionately drawn to for its potential to empower and transform, has been a profound privilege. With my dedication to educational leadership and student support, especially for those facing learning difficulties, I've felt a profound responsibility to discover and implement ways to facilitate their success. This dissertation is a testament to my commitment to uncovering strategies and procedures that aid students and bolster educational leaders in their crucial roles. Education, in its most noble form, is about facilitating growth and offering support; as an aspiring leader within this sphere, I am honoured to contribute to this mission.

My heartfelt gratitude extends to my parents. I was raised in a household where leadership was embodied through the disciplined resilience of a military father and the nurturing strength of a homemaker mother; I learned the essence of leadership. From them, I inherited the values of service, compassion, and the relentless pursuit of supporting those in need. These principles have shaped my character and instilled a profound duty to uplift and assist others. To my parents for nurturing the leader within me and instilling a deep-seated desire to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others, I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude.

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Ethics Approval

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13th September 2023, AUTEC Reference number 23/211.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This research is focused on exploring the experiences of those who provide university programme leadership, specifically supporting students that includes course selection guidance. The research seeks to add to understanding programme leaders' roles, responsibilities, expectations, and challenges in supporting students in higher education institutions, especially in providing advice about programme and course selection and helping students make the best decisions, drawing on centralised student support systems available in universities.

Understanding these individual experiences may benefit other educators or policymakers to enhance and improve student support. Please note that I am using the more generic term, programme leadership, rather than programme leader, for this research. This is because a review of New Zealand university websites shows that some universities do not use the term programme leader to reflect those whose responsibilities include programme leadership. I have only used the term programme leader because it was used in a particular study discussed in this manuscript.

1.1 The context

Universities can be understood through three main components: structures, systems, and cultures (Gunter & Grimaldi, 2021). Structures refer to the division of labour, which tends to be hierarchical with vertical and horizontal links between roles, while systems encompass the policies that determine decision-making and action. Gunter and Grimaldi's (2021) study analysed the dynamics of educational organisations and described cultures as the espoused values, mission, and purposes of the organisation that facilitate accepted good practices and ways of working. This indicates that universities are structured hierarchically, with defined roles and responsibilities, have policies for decision-making, and a set of values and missions that guide the organisation (Gunter & Grimaldi, 2021). The study continues to locate academic leaders' positions within formal organisational roles and job descriptions, enabling control and planned delegation (Gunter & Grimaldi, 2021). Academic leaders embody key behaviours to ensure the smooth functioning of university systems and structures, fulfilling roles that support the organisation's effectiveness. For example, a university

may position itself as responsible for guiding and influencing staff and students, contributing to the overall success and effectiveness of the educational organisation (Courtney et al., 2021; Gunter & Grimaldi, 2021). Academic leaders are expected to provide direction, mentorship, and strategic leadership to advance the university's mission and goals (Courtney et al., 2021).

For this research, I am defining a programme leader as someone who leads an academic programme. However, universities in New Zealand do not always label this role as programme leader, for example some may use the title, programme director. For the sake of consistency, acknowledging the variation of titles, I use the terms programme leader and programme leadership. The definition of a programme leader or programme director in academic institutions remains mainly undefined, with ongoing debates about their specific tasks, responsibilities, and authority within the educational hierarchy. Despite extensive research, including studies by Aitken and O'Carroll (2020), Cahill et al. (2015), and Berdrow (2010), clarity about the job description associated with programme leadership is still elusive. Programme leaders navigate a complex landscape, often caught between faculty and administrative duties, contributing to their role's ambiguity (Seagren, 1993). They are required to balance programme-oriented skills, such as curriculum design and quality processes, with people-oriented skills, like leadership and communication (Cahill et al., 2015). This multifaceted role is further complicated by the necessity for cross-departmental engagement and strategic interdisciplinary initiatives (Berdrow, 2010).

Universities exist in a broader system shaped by principles of New Public Management (NPM). NPM was introduced to New Zealand universities in the 1980s and 1990s as part of public policy characterised by neoliberalism and economic rationalism (Narayan, 2020). Narayan's (2020) study on the development and use of performance measures in New Zealand tertiary education institutions explores the impact of NPM on university structure and how this has been significant to the role of academic leaders. The study has mentioned how NPM transformed universities into more corporate-like entities, focusing on performance measurement, accountability, and market logic. This has shifted decision-making power from academic leaders to administrative personnel, impacting the traditional role of educational leaders in

governance and decision-making (Narayan, 2020). NPM and its influence on university structure and academic leaders will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

1.2   Rationale

The rationale for this research study, which focuses on programme leadership experiences in student support and course selection in higher education institutions, stems from a need to bridge the apparent gap between administration and academic departments (Kenny & Fluck, 2014). Marini and Reale (2015) explain the gap between administration and academics is evident in the changing role of academics, the distribution of decision-making power, and the change of discretional power exercised by different governing bodies of universities in both management and academic affairs. This gap is also reflected in the degree of importance placed on performance through funding allocations and using "steering at a distance" (Marini & Reale, 2015, p. 7) through tools such as quality assessment and evaluation, which can diminish collegiality.

Literature in this domain predominantly concentrates on student perspectives or administrative policies, leaving a noticeable void regarding the experiences and challenges faced by programme leaders (Maddock, 2023). Academic leaders with programme leadership responsibilities are pivotal in guiding students through course selection, a process crucial for academic achievement and personal development. However, there needs to be more understanding of how they navigate this responsibility, particularly in collaboration with administrative departments (Cahill et al., 2015). My experience working in a higher education institution student support and registration administration, where I closely interacted with academic staff and programme leaders, revealed significant disconnects between programme leadership with student course selection and support. By exploring the experiences of academics with programme leadership responsibility, this study aims to unearth some insights into how programme leadership supports students with their programme selections, engagement with student support systems, and contribute to better academic outcomes. Identifying and addressing the experiences of programme leadership in the literature and practice can better understand practices across a small sample of New Zealand academic staff responsible for programme leadership.

An initial small-scale literature review was undertaken to inform the proposal for this research. It drew on a few studies on middle leadership in the context of learning and teaching within universities. It identified a research gap in academic middle leadership with university learning and teaching (Maddock, 2023). Maddock's (2023) review highlights a variety of studies that showed some interest in offering valuable insights about academic middle leadership. For example, other studies reveal those in programme leadership report too many expectations from their universities (Cahill et al., 2015; Milburn, 2010). These expectations can be both a support and a possible hindrance to providing student support. For example, in a study of 25 programme leaders based in the UK, Cahill et al. (2015) discuss the pressure of workload on programme leaders and the importance of the programme leader role. The programme leader plays a crucial role in maintaining the quality of student education and promoting its enhancement (Cahill et al., 2015).

In their study, Aitken and O'Carroll (2020) discuss the academic identity and boundary crossing of the programme leader's role, stating that the role of those involved in programme leadership in supporting students is ill-defined. They frequently find themselves between the academic and professional work fields (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020). Higher education and universities worldwide are grappling with challenges from management practice shifts, global technological advancements and economic and geopolitical changes (Maddock, 2023). Because of the management shifts, university leaders (Academic middle leaders, Associate Deans, Heads of Departments and Programme leaders) are responsible for navigating between learning and teaching and the complexities of regulatory demands, such as market pressures and financial constraints, while striving to foster a supportive learning environment (Maddock, 2023). Programme leaders predominantly suffer from an absence of recognition, and the role described is distinctively placed between the teaching delivery and policy fields (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020).

According to Maddock's (2023) systematic review, little is known regarding academic programme leadership and leaders' oversight of student experience, including student support. The lack of programme leaders' role description or recognition has also been identified by Bolden et al. (2012), who listed the significance of the programme leadership positions and responsibilities. Academic leaders or those who are involved

in programme leadership positions may be a source of inspiration to students, as well as a source of guidance and support (Bolden et al., 2012). Most of those involved in programme leadership were described in Aitken's and O'Carroll's (2020) research as dedicated and passionate educators expressing significant job satisfaction. However, this positive sentiment is balanced by frustration because of being ill-equipped to take on the role initially and experiencing inadequate recognition thereafter (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020).

Three emerging themes were identified from the initial literature review that informed this research.

1. Multiple expectations are placed on those involved in programme leadership;
2. There are various forms of university support available; and,
3. Students experience a range of support.

This initial review and my interest in my previous work experiences informed the research questions that shaped this research. The overarching research question is:

What are academic staff experiences in providing programme leadership to students in their programme?

The following two sub-research questions supported this:

• What key programme leadership challenges are experienced in supporting students during their time in the programme?

• How do academic staff experience their programme leadership strategies used to support students in making informed course and programme choices?

In conclusion, the rationale for selecting this subject is twofold. Firstly, there exists a possible gap in understanding the specific experiences of programme leaders in the context of student support, which this study aims to investigate. Secondly, understanding these experiences helps inform the development of effective policies and practices that enhance the capacity of programme leaders to facilitate student achievement, thereby improving the overall quality of higher education.

1.3 Research design

This research took place in New Zealand by administering a short survey to those associated with the leadership of 170 pre-selected programmes (Education, Health, Engineering) and interviewing three self-volunteering academics involved in programme leadership who completed the survey. This qualitative research study focused on academic staff experiences of programme leadership. A phenomenological approach informed the research design because of the focus on individual academic staff experiences. Phenomenology is a form of interpretivism that refers to how humans explain what they mean through experience (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012).

1.4 The structure of this manuscript

This first chapter has introduced the focus and rationale of this research. The following chapter is a literature review that evaluates and identifies the challenges and strategies of the academic guidance process. This is followed by the methodology chapter, which details the qualitative research methodology, including surveys and interviews with New Zealand university academic staff with programme leadership responsibility. Then, the findings chapter unfolds the realities of programme leadership roles, cross-departmental collaboration, and student support effectiveness, which are analysed within the context of their own universities. The discussion synthesises these insights with extant literature to evaluate their implications for academic and institutional practices. Finally, the study finishes with conclusive insights and recommendations for enhancing leadership efficacy and student support services while highlighting areas for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review focuses on studies and commentaries on academic middle leadership in higher education institutions (HEIs). Particular attention is given to educational leadership, which is explicitly related to university programmes. These programmes are pre-degree, undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications, usually bundled into one university department or school due to their shared knowledge base, where several departments may comprise a university faculty. Academic middle leadership can broadly be positioned to incorporate faculty leadership (sometimes known as the Dean), departmental leadership (sometimes known as the Head of Department or Head of School), and programme leadership (sometimes known as Programme Leader or Programme Director). These three tiers usually make up the structure of academic middle leadership.

This literature review starts by focusing on academic middle leadership and how this has changed in universities. The following section focuses on the expectations and responsibilities of programme leadership and how these are situated and shaped by the two layers of middle leadership that sit above, namely faculty and departmental. This lower level of academic middle leadership, programme leadership, places academics closer to students within programmes than the two other layers. This is followed by a section focusing on this interface between programme leadership and students, their retention, and programme and course selection. Finally, the chapter concludes with a section that discusses the challenges in this programme leadership–student interface.

2.2 The changing nature of academic middle leadership

Universities are the largest organisations in the educational sector and have been experiencing global growth, leading to competition between them (Bacon, 2014). This has prompted higher education institutions (HEIs) to adopt marketing principles to remain competitive (Rehman et al., 2020).

The university system has transitioned from a collegial academic one to one shaped by the principles of NPM (Wald & Golding, 2019; Youngs, 2017). NPM was first introduced in the 1980s, and universities in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand had to embrace it as part of their operations. NPM emphasises increasing enrolments for financial reasons. Through market-oriented strategies, NPM is embraced in educational organisations to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and performance measures (Narayan, 2020). HEIs often operate within a policy framework influenced by NPM principles (Narayan, 2020). Adopting a managerial system has become imperative in higher education as it emphasises goal formulation, target setting, performance measurement, and maintaining a focus on outcomes (Narayan, 2020). NPM was introduced to instil accountable management practices and drive change in the management and control of public sector organisations (Narayan, 2020).

Narayan (2019) argues that NPM dehumanises academic staff, leading them to respond robotically to demands and institutional pressures. NPM is characterised by managerialism and a commercialised approach. This has transformed education into a marketable commodity, impacting the academic aspects of the sector. Many academic staff members are critical of the NPM system, which they argue shifts the focus from education's core mission of learning towards a more business-oriented approach (Chong, Geare, & Willett, 2017). Performance metrics also create a divisive culture among staff, categorising them as winners or losers and diverting attention from teaching excellence, academic collegiality, and research quality. This situation has resulted in career anxiety and apprehension among staff members (Narayan, 2020).

Amidst these changes and the pressures academic staff face, academic leaders (programme leaders) have seen a shift in their job responsibilities, with new role expectations added. Programme leaders' responsibilities now include supporting students with programme selections, achievements, and administrative tasks. These changes may have affected their performance as academic staff toward students. For instance, Cahill et al.'s (2015) study focused on programme leader responsibilities and requirements, aiming to comprehensively understand the tasks involved and the knowledge and skills necessary for effective performance. The study also explored the

specialised training and ongoing support required for new and experienced programme leaders (Cahill et al., 2015).

Cahill et al. (2015) defined programme leaders as experienced academics or senior practitioners responsible for the daily management of specific academic programmes leading to degrees within an environment increasingly focused on performance, ensuring the quality and enhancement of student learning. Cahill et al. (2015) found that programme leaders play a very important role in the students' academic lives; they provide inspiration, guidance, support, and direction. Their study highlights the tension between academic identity and managerial responsibilities, indicating that programme leaders often feel caught between competing demands and may need more formal authority or power. This shift is symptomatic of the broader culture of managerialism and market forces in higher education, which has implications for the multifaceted nature of the programme leader role.

2.3 The role and purpose of programme leadership

The definition of the role of Programme Leader/ Programme Director, or any equivalent within academic institutions, remains to be determined. Despite research efforts dedicated to drawing out these positions' specific tasks, roles, and responsibilities, a definitive job description is yet to be established. Research indicates that programme leaders are tasked with various duties; however, the ambiguity persists, especially concerning their authority and placement in the educational hierarchy (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020; Cahill et al., 2015; Davis, 2014). These issues have possibly existed for a few decades (Seagren, 1993). A study from over 30 years ago highlights that programme leaders occupy a unique position; they are often caught between the conflicting demands of faculty and administrative duties, leading to confusion about their role identity (Seagren, 1993).

Whether this ambiguity can be addressed is questionable due to the complexity and demands of the role. Berdrow's (2010) study in the context of the United States of America's Higher Education sector underscores the importance of a deeper understanding of the department chair role, aiming to augment its efficacy through a better understanding of the requisite skills and competencies (Berdrow, 2010). Berdrow's (2010) findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the role, spotlighting

the intricate web of challenges faced by academic middle leaders, ranging from cross-departmental engagement and stakeholder pressures to the necessity for strategic interdisciplinary initiatives and time constraints. He emphasised the importance of professional development for department chairs and the need for ongoing support and resources to help them fulfil their responsibilities effectively (Berdrow, 2010).

Cahill et al. (2015) identified a range of knowledge and skills required for effective performance in the role of programme leaders in higher education. Cahill et al. (2015) categorise this range into two groups: programme-oriented skills and people-oriented skills. Programme-oriented skills include knowledge of rules and regulations, data handling, prioritising, and understanding curriculum design and quality processes. These skills are specific to the management and administration of academic programmes. People-oriented skills include leadership, communication, problem-solving, mentoring, advocating for students, and managing expectations. Cahill et al. (2015) argue that these skills are essential for building relationships, collaborating with stakeholders, and effectively leading and supporting staff and students. It is important to note the specific knowledge and skills required may vary depending on the size and complexity of the programmes and the individual levels of experience of the programme leaders (Cahill et al., 2015). The study also emphasised the need for a review of training and support for programme leaders to drive improvements in their performance.

Wald and Golding (2019) underscore the pressing need for dedicated training programmes for heads of departments within academic institutions. These individuals often step into their roles, expecting it to be a transient step in their managerial careers; yet, they usually have less relevant experience and formal training for the associated responsibilities (Wald & Golding, 2019). Such formalised training programmes should be revised, as it could potentially result in a rapid turnover of leadership, with individuals departing before they can acquire the essential skills and expertise to lead effectively.

Moreover, Walsh et al. (2009) also focus on training. Academic leaders generally require a thorough understanding of their institution's full suite of support services. The integration of these services is critical, pointing to the possible benefits of

extending training initiatives to encompass academic tutors. Awareness among academic staff of available student support services and a keen understanding of student expectations for support is crucial. This implication further signals the need for targeted training to enable staff to familiarise themselves with institutional support resources and effectively communicate and leverage them to enhance student experiences and outcomes (Walsh, Larsen, & Parry, 2009).

The position of the head of the department in a university embodies a pivotal leadership role that entails managing academic duties such as curriculum development and facilitating faculty growth through mentorship while also representing the faculty's interests to the institution and external entities, mediating between students, faculty, and the administration to ensure the department's success in alignment with university objectives (Berdrow, 2010). However, the position of middle managers in the university context has been identified as "The third space" by Whitchurch (2009) in her comparative study between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (Whitchurch, 2009). The study discusses the occurrence of third-space professionals in higher education who contribute to developing new forms of a third space between professional and academic domains (Whitchurch, 2009). Blended professionals can capitalise on a sense of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' entirely to professional or academic domains, often working in ambiguous conditions within this third space. They navigate fluid areas and ambiguous situations, working within formal, hierarchical structures while developing lateral relationships and networks. This third space allows them to offer multiple understandings of the institution, challenge the status quo, and manage the duality of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' to academic space (Whitchurch, 2009).

In some studies of programme leaders, the job role was described and explained using metaphor. For example, Pattern (2003) described programme director roles as a "weapon of mass attraction" (p.8) because the commercial imperative is subject to increase (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020). Other literature has used metaphors such as "boundary-spanner" (Hellawell & Hancock, 2010, p14), and a "rock and a hard place" (Kenny & Fluck, 2014, p.13) due to their role between academic work and the professional field (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020). Seagren et al. (1993) have identified the role of programme leaders by using the metaphor of "a block of wood" (p.2) which

describes the position of the academic leaders that are held between the demand of upper administration and institutional expectations as well as the expectation of faculty, staff, and students support (Seagren, 1993). However, Aitken and O'Carroll's (2020) study identified the position of the programme directors as an "in-between space" (p.9), which is situated between different domains or boundaries. Programme Directors often operate between academic and professional organisations and between teaching delivery and policy. They navigate the complexities and tensions that arise from these different contexts, bridging the gap between academia and the professional (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020). This in-between space requires Programme Directors to engage in boundary-spanning behaviours and practices, such as translating the demands of professional bodies into academic programmes and balancing university policies with students' needs (Kenny & Fluck, 2014). The in-between space can be challenging, as Programme Directors may face conflicting pressures and find themselves in delicate positions. However, it also presents opportunities for Programme Directors to shape and define their role, establish a niche, and contribute to developing postgraduate programmes (Aitken, O'Carroll, 2020).

Studies from Milburn (2010), Franken et al. (2015), and Maddock (2023) provide insight into the responsibilities, tensions, and expectations of such roles, often filled by department chairs, heads of departments, or associate deans. The studies collectively paint a picture of middle leadership as a role that requires a chameleonic ability to shift between various modes of operation (Franken, Penney, & Branson, 2015; Maddock, 2023; Milburn, 2010). Despite the differences in focus—Milburn (2010) emphasises role clarity, Franken et al. (2015) explore structural tensions, and Maddock (2023) critiques the lack of formal training—all studies converge on the multi-dimensional demands placed on academic middle leaders. They share similarities in identifying the leaders' roles in managing people and policies, driving innovation while maintaining operations, and developing faculty and students amid strategic considerations. However, there are nuances in their perspectives. Milburn (2010) leans towards a task-oriented framework, Franken et al. (2015) probe the inherent structural challenges, and Maddock (2023) critiques the systemic oversight in professional development. The discrepancies lie in the depth of the structural analysis and the

proposed solutions to middle leaders' challenges, indicating the complexity associated with such roles.

These studies collectively affirm that the role of the academic middle leader is integral to the functioning of higher education institutions. They underscore the need for clear role definitions, appropriate training, and support systems to fully develop middle leaders' potential. This reveals the necessity for institutional recognition of the delicate balance middle leaders must strike to effectively contribute to their organisation's success. The overarching theme is that despite the recognised importance of these roles, there remains a possible gap in understanding and supporting their complex responsibilities.

The confusion experienced by those associated with programme leadership regarding their role responsibilities and expectations is caused by an unknown description of the role and the overwhelming responsibilities involved in the job role (Davis, 2014). Therefore, this lack of job clarity and the many responsibilities and challenges lead to significant stress for individuals in these positions (Winefield, 2014). The expectations of the role are wide from all sides of the institution; the pressure of workloads and the daily routine of programme leaders can significantly impact programme leaders' psychological, emotional, and physical strain experienced in their work (Kenny & Fluck, 2014). Job stress was discussed by Winefield (2014), who focused on job stress in the academic profession in Australian universities. The study argues that academic job stress has increased significantly over the past three decades. The study emphasises the need for urgent action by senior university administrators to reduce occupational stress in academic staff members, as failure to do so can lead to adverse outcomes at both the individual and organisational levels (Winefield, 2014). The everyday stress in academic professions is mainly associated with increased workloads, reduced job security, financial pressures, lack of control or autonomy, and demands for accountability (Pace et al., 2019). These stressors can lead to negative consequences such as decreased job satisfaction, burnout, reduced performance, increased sick leave, absenteeism, and turnover (Winefield, 2014).

Academic workloads are a growing concern within the university system, influenced by a range of responsibilities extending beyond traditional expectations. Miller's (2019)

case study highlights a divergence from the ideal 40% teaching, 40% research, and 20% administrative model towards a more realistic distribution that reflects the increasing encroachment of administrative tasks on research time (Miller, 2019). This shift is echoed in findings from (Kenny & Fluck, 2014), who report a widespread sentiment among academics that designated working hours are insufficient for completing their assignments, leading to extended work periods and potential for burnout. Research by Pace et al. (2019) demonstrates that the growing bureaucratic demands on academics contribute to a negative perception of work-related well-being, as they frequently lead to work overload and stress. The consequences of this overload extend beyond mere workplace dissatisfaction, potentially causing significant psychosocial and health issues. Moreover, the actual time available for research is often overestimated by management structures that may not account for the intricacies and varying rhythms of academic work (Pace et al., 2019).

This workload may lead to an unhealthy work-life balance, psychological stress, and the potential for decreased job performance and satisfaction. An overwhelming workload not only risks individual health and well-being but also poses risks to the standards of teaching and research, potentially leading to a decline in the university's overall effectiveness and standing.

2.4 Programme Leaders Satisfaction

This section will focus on the job stress and job satisfaction of academic staff in the university and higher education setting. This includes an in-depth examination of the unique challenges and rewards experienced by academic middle leaders who find themselves navigating a complex landscape of responsibilities and expectations.

Consequently, academic middle leaders are ensnared in the middle, needing to exhibit highly refined leadership and diplomatic skills to avoid being overwhelmed by these conflicting forces (Seagren, 1993). Seagren et al.'s (1993) study recommendations suggest attention be given to providing clarity and less stress on the academic leaders through (1) defining roles and duties of academic leaders, (2) the role as a leader, (3) political influences and power dynamics affecting the role, (4) the role responsibility concerning faculty evaluation and development, (5) the impact of institutional

category and specific disciplines on the role, and (6) challenges confronting the role in the 1990s and beyond (Seagren, 1993).

The job satisfaction of being an academic leader includes a sense of achievement, mentoring colleagues, and receiving an audience with decision-makers (Bentley, Hamish, & Leo Goedegebuure, 2013, p. 3); it also involves fostering a supportive atmosphere for staff, guiding and nurturing their development, and attending to the wellness and morale of academic and non-academic staff (Bentley, Hamish, & Leo Goedegebuure, 2013). Furthermore, it includes the satisfaction of helping staff deal with personal problems, such as mental health, and achieving departmental goals through the development of people. Overall, the role should provide a sense of satisfaction from contributing to the improvement and development of the department, as well as personal and professional growth (Wald & Golding, 2019).

Academic leaders who act as middle managers may not be satisfied with their role, the complexity and challenges of the position, the stress and personal toll it takes, and the lack of formal training and support provided before and during their tenure (Bentley, 2013). Additionally, the role may be seen outside the academic career pathway, and academic staff may feel pressured to take it due to a lack of clarity regarding their motivation to become managerial (Bentley, Hamish, & Leo Goedegebuure, 2013). Furthermore, rotating the role around the department may lead to individuals accepting the role as a default without an apparent reason. This lack of clarity and intrinsic motivation may contribute to dissatisfaction with the role (Wald & Golding, 2019).

The positive aspects and benefits of being a middle manager, which may contribute to job satisfaction, are that middle managers enhance and improve the development of the department, helping departmental staff, personal advantages, and new opportunities post-headship (Bentley, Hamish, & Leo Goedegebuure, 2013). Additionally, the role provides a sense of satisfaction from contributing to the improvement and development of the department, as well as personal and professional growth. While the document does not offer specific solutions, it highlights the positive outcomes and rewards of the role, which may contribute to job satisfaction (Wald & Golding, 2019).

2.5   Programme leadership collaboration

Collegiality among academic and professional staff is essential for enhancing the student experience as it fosters shared responsibility in a group, cooperative interaction, and collaboration between colleagues (Marini & Reale, 2015). Developing collegiality among staff helps bridge the gap between students and academic staff, removes isolation among different discipline areas (Thornton, 2020), and supports students more effectively (Wojcieszek et al., 2014). Additionally, collegial relationships among staff aim to increase first-year student engagement and success (Wojcieszek et al., 2014). However, the benefits of collegiality may be hindered by challenges associated with managerialism. The benefits and challenges of collegiality between professional and academic staff are integral to understanding the evolving dynamics within higher education institutions (Kligyte, 2020). Traditionally considered a hallmark of educational governance, collegiality emphasises shared decision-making and egalitarian principles and faces substantial challenges in increasing managerialism (Kligyte, 2020). Managerialism, characterised by performance metrics, decentralised decision-making, and a focus on efficiency and accountability, can be perceived as undermining the collaborative and autonomous spirit of collegial decision-making (Wolf, 2010).

Hellawell and Hancock (2001) explore the nuanced role of academic middle managers, who navigate the tensions between hierarchical control and the preservation of collegial culture (Hellawell & Hancock, 2001). Hellawell and Hancock (2001) emphasise that collegiality remains significant in internal decision-making despite its practice's obstacles and imperfect nature. Academic managers identify the slowness and difficulty of achieving consensus through collegial methods, particularly when faced with resistance to change, indicating a desire for a more streamlined decision-making process that still respects the collegial model (Yılmaz & Kılıçoğlu, 2013).

In New Zealand, managerial practices in universities have been scrutinised for their potential to erode collegiality (Thornton, 2020). According to Chong et al. (2017), a study on change in New Zealand universities from 1985 to 2010 focused on the view of collegiality and managerialism and discussed the academic staff opinion on NPM. Academic staff views on managerialism and collegiality are heavily influenced by the

personal values of the Vice-Chancellor, suggesting a top-down effect on the perception and implementation of managerial practices (Chong, Geare, & Willett, 2017). Chong et al. (2017) explained that this could lead to a climate where academic freedom and autonomy are perceived to be at risk, and the push for efficiency can seem at odds with the inclusive decision-making that collegiality advocates (Chong, Geare, & Willett, 2017).

Overall, the literature reflects a complex interplay between the benefits of collegiality, such as fostering a participatory and democratic environment for academic staff and the challenges posed by managerialism, which can prioritise efficiency and output over the process and community engagement inherent in collegial practices. There is a co-existence of collegiality and managerialism, and the shift towards one can often be at the expense of the other, affecting the morale and productivity of both professional and academic staff (Winefield, 2014).

2.6 University support provided to both students and Programme Leaders

Milburn's (2010) list of academic leadership responsibilities in higher education has highlighted expectations of the role in implementing the New Public Management system in the UK. Students are a primary focus in higher education institutions and may be labelled customers, partners, or a number of fields (Gravett, Kinchin, & Winstone, 2019). Therefore, students (customers) may have high expectations for the quality of university learning and support services. Meeting these expectations necessitates effective leadership, particularly from individuals with academic backgrounds (Milburn, 2010). Therefore, those with programme leadership responsibility are distinct and influential in providing educational leadership (Bryman, 2012). Their influence arises from their position at the intersection of the university and the working environment, ensuring the effective integration of university policies into the curriculum (Carayannis, 2013). Programme leaders have also recognised that their academic leadership roles impact the quality of student learning and programme innovation, enabling them to translate policies into practices (Milburn, 2010).

There are positive examples of how students achieve their goals and success through student support and their programme leaders (Malik, 2000). Still, there are also

concerning results of how students withdraw from programmes because of a lack of support or insufficient awareness of how students can use the support provided by the higher education institute. For example, in a study of 191 first-year and 171 final-year students based in a New Zealand university, Buissink-Smith et al. (2010) surveyed why students chose a particular course, what advice they had received, and how aware they were of the various support provided (Buissink-Smith, Spronken-Smith, & Walker, 2010). The results of this study indicated that first-year students were unaware of the support the university would offer and relied on family-school liaison officers. In contrast, final-year students relied on enrolment packs. The expectation of advice and support they received from the university varied between whether the advice they received was helpful or not, as well as the unawareness of some students of the support provided by the university. The study also showed that some students withdrew from courses and programmes or changed their programmes. To what extent Programme Leaders could influence is unclear in this study. Therefore, the focus of this dissertation research sought to gain further understanding regarding this from the perspectives of those involved in programme leadership.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted to investigate the experiences of programme leaders in supporting student course selection and academic achievement within higher education in New Zealand. The study is associated with the growing recognition that programme leaders are critical in shaping higher education students' academic and professional paths. As the educational landscape becomes increasingly complex, the support provided by these leaders is crucial in ensuring that students not only achieve academically but are also well-prepared for the challenges they may face during their academic journey.

Coates (2015) emphasises the significance of student engagement in higher education, noting that data on student activities provide objective insights rather than subjective assumptions (Coates, 2005). This objective data is crucial for making strategic decisions in areas such as marketing and adapting to the learning needs of students. The interaction between programme leaders and students is pivotal for enhancing student engagement and, consequently, the quality of learning outcomes. HEIs focusing on engagement are better positioned to boost educational productivity by prioritising practices that elevate academic performance, leading to long-term gains in educational efficiency (Coates, 2005).

Therefore, this dissertation's methodology chapter focuses on exploring the overarching research question: "What are academic staff experiences of providing programme leadership to students in their programme?" and is supported by two sub-questions: firstly, "What key programme leadership challenges are experienced in supporting students during their time in the programme?" and secondly, "How do academic staff experience their programme leadership strategies used to support students in making informed decisions about course and programme choices?" The chosen methodology is designed to offer insights into the experiences and perceptions of academic staff in their role as programme leaders, focusing on the challenges they face and the strategies they employ. The most appropriate research study approach was opting for a qualitative research study. Qualitative research acknowledges the complexity of educational settings. It prioritises the meanings leaders assign to their

roles, offering nuanced insights into their motivations and the dynamics of student support compared to quantitative study. It is an approach well-suited for uncovering the multifaceted aspects of programme leadership and educational support structures (Crotty, 1998). According to Crotty (1998), interpretivism and phenomenology particularly benefit a qualitative research study on individual experiences. Interpretivism allows researchers to understand these experiences through the eyes of the interviewees themselves, acknowledging the subjective nature of their interpretations and how cultural norms and language influence these. Phenomenology deepens this approach by examining the lived experiences of the interviewed individuals, setting aside biases to understand the essence of their interactions and consciousness. Using these methods, the study may reveal details of individual experiences and the personal significance attributed to their roles in guiding students, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena.

To comprehensively explore this subject, the methodology chapter is structured into several key subheadings, which include: The 'Research Design' section outlines the qualitative approach adopted for this study and justify its suitability for delving into the nuanced experiences of programme leaders. In the 'Participant Selection,' the criteria and methodology used to select programme leaders for the initial survey and follow-up interviews is explained in detail. The 'Data Collection Instruments' segment elaborates on the tools employed for data gathering, such as the structure of the survey and the guidelines for the interviews. Following this, the 'Data Collection Procedure' specifies how the surveys and interviews were distributed, providing clear insight into the data acquisition methods. Ethical conduct is paramount, and the 'Ethical Considerations' section discusses the ethical standards upheld during the research, including obtaining consent and maintaining participant privacy and confidentiality. The 'Data Analysis' section describes the axial coding applied to both survey and interview responses, outlining each step taken to ensure a thorough and reliable analysis. The study's potential limitations are discussed at the end of this chapter. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary that lends transparency and depth to the research context. Finally, the chapter concludes with a 'Summary' that recaps the crucial elements of the methodology, seamlessly transitioning to the presentation of the research findings in the subsequent chapters.

3.1 Research Design

Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative research paradigm was adopted as it aligns with the need to understand the complex experiences of programme leaders in higher education. To achieve the purpose of a qualitative research paradigm, it is beneficial to use the Interpretivism and phenomenology approach to illustrate how programme leaders interpret their experiences and challenges in higher education, especially engaging with student support and achievements. Therefore, a two-phase small study research design was the most appropriate approach to gather in-depth insights and understand programme leaders' experiences. This research involved two distinct data collection and analysis phases within a relatively small-scale study. A survey (see Appendix A) was designed using the Qualtrics platform. Through the Qualtrics platform I was able to create a survey that contained 21 questions initially was given to all 170 participants, followed by three semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) to gather rich, descriptive data through face-to-face interviews, which allows for further exploration of the leaders' perspectives and the context of their strategies.

The two-phase small study research design helped me to collect preliminary data with further exploration or validation. This data collection confirmed emerging themes and member checks were conducted with participants to verify interpretations. Therefore, the phenomenologist approach was the best approach to verify interpretation because it provided more clarity in understanding how programme leaders saw things from their point of view.

The first phase of my research was a short survey sent to 170 participants, who were identified through searching for their contact details listed in their respective universities. According to Cohen et al. (2018), the advantage of surveying educational research is that surveys are a broad-scope tool used to examine a variety of subjects, such as populations or programmes, aiming to identify common characteristics. They are valued for their one-time data collection efficiency and economical nature. Surveys typically produce quantitative data, allowing for description, inference, and exploration of relationships between gender and test scores. Careful sampling is crucial for representativeness, which will be detailed in further chapters.

Twenty-one questions consisting of rating scales and short answer questions were given to all 170 programme directors/leaders (or equivalent) identified through their university websites. Therefore, the second phase of the research approach was conducted after the survey, combining the survey data with detailed, informative data from face-to-face interviews to capture the complexity of the leaders' experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

The face-to-face interviews encompass in-depth data collection with programme leaders, aiming to uncover the complications of their roles, the obstacles they face, and the support systems that could facilitate their work. This approach respects the individuality of each programme leader's experience in the context of this study on programme leader experiences in supporting student course selections and achievements. Using the interpretivism and phenomenological approach was very beneficial in analysing the data gathered from the interviews. It allowed me to understand participants' subjective experiences and perspectives. Engaging in open-ended and exploratory interviews elicited rich and detailed descriptions of the programme leader's experiences, thoughts, and emotions. This enabled me to capture the nuances and complexities of participants' lived experiences, providing an informed view of the phenomenon supporting students under investigation.

The phenomenological approach compelled me to approach the experiences of programme leaders with an open mind, free from judgment and preconceptions. This method is integral to understanding the intricate nuances of their roles without the bias of my interpretations. I am responsible for fostering a relationship based on trust and empathy, allowing programme leaders to express their realities freely and genuinely as participants in my study. I began by introducing myself to the participants and giving them a brief overview of my experience in the educational environment and my involvement in student support. I also explained the reasons for conducting this research. Additionally, I requested that they refrain from mentioning their names or the institutions where they work during the recording to maintain confidentiality. By creating this supportive environment, I enabled an authentic exchange where the essence of their experiences can emerge, ensuring that my research captures the depth and breadth of their perspectives.

Furthermore, phenomenology promotes reflexivity and self-awareness in the research process. The phenomenology approach encourages the participants to self-reflect on their biases, assumptions, and interpretations of their current role as programme leaders. This was written on the participation form under the benefits of this study. Self-reflection enhances the rigour and validity of the research, ensuring that the findings are grounded in the participants' experiences rather than the expectations, whether from me as a researcher or from the higher education institution.

3.2 Participant Selection and Data Collection

For this study, the data collection process was designed to gather insights into the experiences of programme leaders in New Zealand. The participants represent Bachelor and Postgraduate level Programme Leaders of three facilities from New Zealand universities (School of Education, School of Engineering, and School of Health). I chose three faculties for my dissertation research because it is limited to 60 points. Additionally, my work experience includes collaboration with academic faculty from Engineering and Health schools, and as a postgraduate student at an Education faculty, making these faculties more aligned with my personal experience. A survey was distributed to programme leaders who were identified through careful scanning of the seven [1] New Zealand university websites, from which their contact information was collected, a total of 170 in all. For each university website, I searched for contact details of staff whose titles were listed and identified them as having a leadership role, with programmes listed only associated with Education, Engineering, and Health. These leaders were invited by email to partake in a concise survey, estimated to take 15-25 minutes. Accompanying the survey was a participant information sheet (see Appendix C) detailing the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, the process for giving consent, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their participation. Of 170 participants, 14 responded, providing a response rate of approximately 8.2%. The 14 voluntary participants completed the survey, and exactly three out of 14 agreed to conduct a face-to-face interview. As only three were

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[1] There are eight universities in New Zealand. However, one of them does not have an Engineering or Health and Education programme.

required no other follow up or random selection of four or more volunteers was needed.

The survey was an initial mechanism to garner an overview of the programme leaders' experiences. Participants were also asked if they would engage in a more in-depth conversation through a face-to-face interview. This additional step aimed to acquire a deeper understanding of their narratives and the intricacies of their roles.

The study was designed to include face-to-face interviews with three participants. The interviews were designed to probe deeper into the themes identified in the survey responses. This number was sufficient for a detailed understanding while allowing for a manageable and focused analysis. As it transpired, three programme leaders expressed interest in further participation, aligning with the study's requirements. These willing participants were given a consent form (see Appendix D), which they were requested to sign and return to confirm their agreement to the study's terms and schedule the interview.

Each participant was accorded the respect of a personalised approach, with interviews arranged at times that suited their convenience. These discussions were intended to illuminate their professional practices and explore the emotional and cognitive dimensions of their leadership roles.

3.3 Survey and Interview Process

The survey consisted of 21 open-ended and closed questions designed to gather comprehensive information about the participants' experiences and perspectives. Questions focused on the challenges faced, strategies employed, and perceptions of their role in student support and achievement.

The survey consisted of several Likert scales and a couple of open-ended questions. The timeframe suggested to complete the study was approx. 15-25 minutes to answer the survey questions. The potential participants were contacted via emails publicly available on New Zealand university websites. A link was provided at the end of the survey, inviting participants (Programme Leaders) to be considered for face-to-face or online interviews. The interview was 40 - 60 minutes long. The interviews delved into the experiences of academic middle leaders with programme leadership responsibility,

allowing them to offer detailed accounts of how they support students and the challenges they face in doing so. The survey scale data were analysed and summarised using descriptive statistics, such as measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and variability measures, such as ranges. This process helped me draw data visualisations such as graphs and tables to generate possible response trends.

For the face-to-face interviews, a semi-structured format was adopted, allowing for a more fluid and detailed exploration of the topics. Interview questions were prepared in advance but allowed flexibility for follow-up questions and prompts based on participants' responses. Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyse the themes that emerge from the interview data, which will be coded before identifying themes. All interview questions were sent to the participants to review and to know what to expect to be asked.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using axial coding, a method suited for qualitative data analysis that allows for the identification of themes, patterns, and relationships within the data. This method involves coding the data, categorising these codes, and then reassembling the data to form a coherent picture of the underlying phenomena.

The survey's open-ended data were coded and clustered into initial themes. Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyse the themes that emerged from the interview data, which were coded before identifying themes. Coding is a method that researchers may use to construct potential links across data by breaking down segments of text data into smaller units (based on whatever criteria are relevant) and then examining, comparing, conceptualising, and categorising the data.

The coding helped me compare the findings (see Appendix E) from the survey and the interviews and look for similarities and differences to conclude what the findings mean in the context of the research purpose and the light of appropriate literature.

3.5 Limitations

This study has limitations. The study is bound to a 60-point research study, thus placing bounds on the number of interviews, and I was only limited to three

interviewed participants. The response rate for the survey could have been higher (8.2%), with only 14 programme leaders participating out of 170. This limited engagement is attributed to the timing of the survey distribution at the end of the academic year, when most programme leaders may be particularly busy and overloaded with tasks, preventing their participation. Additionally, selecting only three participants for in-depth interviews may only partially represent the diversity of experiences among programme leaders in higher education. This context underscores the need for strategic timing in data collection efforts to enhance participation rates and diversity of insights in future research.

3.6 Ethical Considerations and Compliance

Following the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) ethics policies and protocols, all participants received a consent form (see Appendix D) and the survey invitation (see Appendix F). This form outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures for interview participants, and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. All participants were anonymous, and I cannot identify who the survey participants are because all the participants will be anonymous as there are no self-identifying questions, nor can responses be traced back to an individual's email because there were no self-identifying questions in the survey.

For face-to-face interviews, participants identified themselves and were provided with a consent form (see Appendix G) detailing the specifics of the interview process, the use of their data, and confidentiality agreements. Signed consent forms were obtained from all participants before the commencement of the interviews.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodology adopted to explore programme leaders' experiences supporting student course selections in New Zealand's higher education landscape. The study aimed to deeply understand programme leaders' complex and nuanced experiences through a qualitative research approach informed by interpretivism and phenomenology. The selection of a two-phase small study data collection process, consisting of an initial survey and follow-up face-to-face interviews,

helped gather broad and in-depth insights into the challenges and strategies employed by programme leaders. Despite limitations such as a low survey response rate and the inclusion of only three participants for in-depth interviews, the methodology was designed to ensure ethical standards and foster a deep connection with participants. Focusing on programme leaders' lived experiences and subjective interpretations, this study contributed to understanding academic leadership and student support in higher education.

Chapter 4 Findings

The results and the findings are represented in this chapter. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the research utilised a two-phase small study methodology, including surveys and in-depth interviews, to verify themes and participant engagement in the study. The response rate of 8.2% from the surveys underscored the selective engagement of participants.

The initial three themes informed the design of the data-collecting tools:

1.   Multiple expectations are placed on those involved in programme leadership;

2.   There are various forms of university support available/ staff collaboration; and,

3.   Students experience a range of support.

The 21 survey questions were mainly focused on the above three themes to gain a brief understanding of each theme. Fourteen participants answered the 21 survey questions. Some of them answered the full 21 questions, and some of them left out some unanswered questions. Therefore, each question has a different count of participants.

The initial segment of the results chapter aims to identify and examine the reasons for the selection or appointment of programme leaders to their roles. Upon determining these reasons, a series of questions were proposed to participants in both the survey and interviews. These inquiries centred on the expectations, challenges, and workload associated with the role. The second section focuses on the collegiality and collaboration between programme leaders and professional staff concerning student support. The final section addresses student experiences with the support provided by programme leaders and the university at large.

The first question identified the programme leaders' level of programme support to students. This question was essential to understanding the support provided to newly enrolled students (undergraduates) and more experienced students (postgraduates).

The thirteen survey participants were responsible for leadership and student support across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (see Table 4.1 below).

Table 4.1 Area of Programme Leadership

What level of study do you provide programme support and leadership to?	No. of Participants
Undergraduate only	5
Postgraduate only	6
Both	2

4.1 Multiple expectations are placed on those involved in programme leadership.

There was a range of reasons why these survey participants moved into a role associated with programme leadership. Some participants highlighted their initial reluctance to move into such a role, with responses such as being asked or shoulder tapped. This response was evident across all areas of programme leadership, as indicated in Table 4.1 above. In conjunction with this, other survey participants referred to their expertise as a factor as to why they moved into the role, whether they were shoulder-tapped or not. In addition, one participant stated they were "looking for a new challenge", another as a "sense of purpose", and another because they "thoroughly enjoy working with students". The three interviewees provided further details. All three spoke of their reluctance to fill the vacant role.

> *I didn't apply for the job. Expression of interest went out; no one put their hand up for it, so my boss then shoulder-tapped me and said how about you? (Interviewee 1)*

> *I took on the role of programme leader when the previous programme leader burnt out and retired, and I was up and no one else wanted to do the job and really couldn't do a good job, so I was asked if I would do it temporarily. (Interviewee 2)*

I didn't accept the role. It came upon me … it seemed as if my students' reputation got around the rest of the faculty, and my students seemed to understand the direction they were going in. People started asking what I did that they didn't …. so I ended up undertaking that role for the faculty with support of our student advising team and our academic managers. (Interviewee 3)

The data has shown that most programme leaders were explicitly selected from among the academic staff and asked to take on the role even though they had not applied for it. The interviewees emphasised this, elaborating on why they were chosen by their head of school, often due to their reputation and successful interactions with students. During the interviews, the participants expressed satisfaction with their jobs and enjoyment of their work. One participant responded to a question I asked about whether they see themselves continuing in this role in the future, and their response was...

Suppose you'd asked me that four to six weeks ago, no. I was keen to get out of it. I've had enough of it already. So, I have managed to achieve a few things more recently. That achievement of those things has satisfied me and made me realise I'm doing an okay job. I hear from my colleagues over time that I'm doing a good job, so that's not including a previous programme leader. It's nice to hear that I'm doing a bit of them [sic], but I'm doing. (Interviewee 1)

Programme leaders were expected to take the role and be able to fulfil and commit to its responsibilities according to the background and experience that they were selected for. The role expectation was an important part of identifying with the programme leader and understanding how the role expectations met daily practice reality. The results have shown how many programme leaders meet their leadership expectations on a scale of 0 to 5. The findings for this question averaged 3.73/5 with a median of 4.0, indicating agreement among programme leaders that they have met their leadership role expectations. On the other hand, the semi-structured interviews regarding programme leader perceptions of their role fulfilment disagreed with this role expectation; even though they initially had a role description and understanding of the role, they also noticed extra work and expectations were added to their role. For example:

so I've worked at the university for 20 years ….. I saw lots of people in the role and had a good understanding of what was involved. My understanding of some of our systems and processes wasn't met, so the expectation that everything would be in place wasn't true. (Interviewee 1)

… a big shock to me, and the other expectation is I thought there would be a lot more leadership and teaching and learning, curriculum development and that sort of thing. It's a lot more administrative than what I hoped. A lot more report writing ensures that course leaders are reporting everything. (Interviewee 1)

first thing I expected in my role is that I would help with the new learning management system … I was supporting the roll-out of the new programmes … the problem here is that I wasn't involved in the development of the new programmes from the beginning …. so I knew that part of my role would be to support the delivery of these new programmes and within a new online space and during a pandemic there was an explicit part of the role … I also knew that my role would be to admit new students …. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee two clearly understood the expectations of the role when they initially accepted the job. However, within these expectations, there was a shift in the role to 90% of the focus on students' well-being after the pandemic. The participant enjoyed that, but at the same time, the role and responsibilities toward programme quality, support to the course, and management were left behind because of the lack of time.

I just found that 90% of my job was dealing with student concerns around their well-being, whilst I particularly feel I can do those things and enjoy them … I know that I can help; it meant everything else around programme quality and management, and support of the courses was never getting time to do." (Interviewee 2)

Third, participants focused more on the overwhelming responsibilities of this role, which was unexpected. Interviewee three didn't mind the unexpected responsibilities and identified the job as "career suicide" for new or young academics as Programme leaders;

I'm old enough to take those that are not fixed, but as a young academic, no! It would be career suicide to do what I do for the amount of time and energy I put into the students, but I know it works for them." (Interviewee 3)

Alongside the initial role expectation and what the programme leaders indicated about the reality of the role, a follow-up question was posed to learn more about the actual responsibilities and the work involved within the role. Therefore, the following section is focused on the role responsibilities and the workload involved in this role.

4.2   Responsibilities and the workload involved within the role.

The results from the survey and interviews on whether the programme leaders think they are overloaded with work and responsibilities paint a coherent picture of the workload challenges faced by programme leaders in higher education. 11 participants answered the following questions, and the average of their answers are as follows; With an average of 3.8/5, survey respondents affirmed a heavy workload, and all interviewed participants concurred that work overload is not an isolated perception but a shared reality. This consensus is partially supported with the average of 3.09/5 from survey participants. Some, but not all survey respondents, agreed that their responsibilities impede their ability to support students adequately—a sentiment echoed in the detailed responses from interviewees.

Interview participants articulated the consequences of such workload pressure, noting the diminished opportunity for valuable face-to-face interactions with students. They highlighted that the time-intensive nature of administrative and communication tasks detract from their capacity to engage directly with students and make necessary curriculum improvements. This acknowledgement from leaders themselves signals a critical tension within the role, where the administrative demands conflict with the pedagogical and supportive functions essential to student success.

> *When I first got the job, I was overwhelmed with communication, so communication from students, communication from staff, and external people was just phenomenal (Interviewee 1)*

> *I could spend all day just doing emails … I'm getting the people I've emailed responding to me, plus the new ones, and it sometimes feels like it's out of control. (Interviewee 1)*

> *The overwhelming is, I think, probably the expectations around supporting the well-being of students, so in New Zealand now we have a code of well-being… (Interviewee 2)*

The second participant also mentioned the pressure the faculty and the broader university received in making changes. This pressure suggests extra work and extra challenges in the role of programme leader.

> *We get a lot of pressure externally from faculty and broader than the faculty, so the whole university in relation to, I think, making changes. (Interviewee 2)*

> *It's very time-consuming… it's just not enough hours in the day…. It depends on how much you take on. It would be an easy part of the job if I were doing it for the papers I run. But I'm doing it for the whole faculty now, and it's crazy" (Interviewee 3)*

> *Yes, I enjoy what I am doing, but it could be better balanced, so you have to look at yourself on that and say, okay, ah, am I doing too much? Could I offload more to our academic manager and student support? (Interviewee 3)*

The three participants agreed that the programme leader role is overwhelming, attributing this sentiment to the pressure of overwhelming communication within the university system. Participant One described the role as "responsive" necessitating programme leaders to respond to all communications and approaches. Being middle managers, programme leaders act as a contact point for university departments and students, making communication a pivotal aspect of their role.

The following questions focused on the role responsibilities, task allocations, and number of students seen each semester. Programme leaders were asked about their weekly tasks, the sufficiency of time for student support, and the number of students they know each semester, which serves to correlate their workload with the quality and quantity of student engagement, highlighting the balance between administrative duties and direct student interaction which is vital for enhancing educational outcomes and programme efficacy.

4.3 Tasks Allocation and Responsibilities

The results of the survey participants indicate that programme leaders, on average, rate their ability to allocate sufficient time for student support as slightly above neutral, with an average score of 3.09 and a median of 3, suggesting a modest level of

agreement that their responsibilities allow them the time they desire to provide student support. The following question about the task allocations clearly shows that programme leaders only spend 17% of their weekly task allocation on student support (see Figure 4.1). The survey participants perceived that 57% of their time was associated with leadership, management, administrative work, and "Others" which were mainly administrative duties. For example, Participants who selected "Others" stated other tasks such as "professional service", "other roles within the university", "managing grievances and academic integrity cases", "student supervision", and "collaboration with other staff about students' concerns".

These allocation percentages are presented in (figure 4.1) below, as indicated by the green, purple and orange segments in the pie chart below.
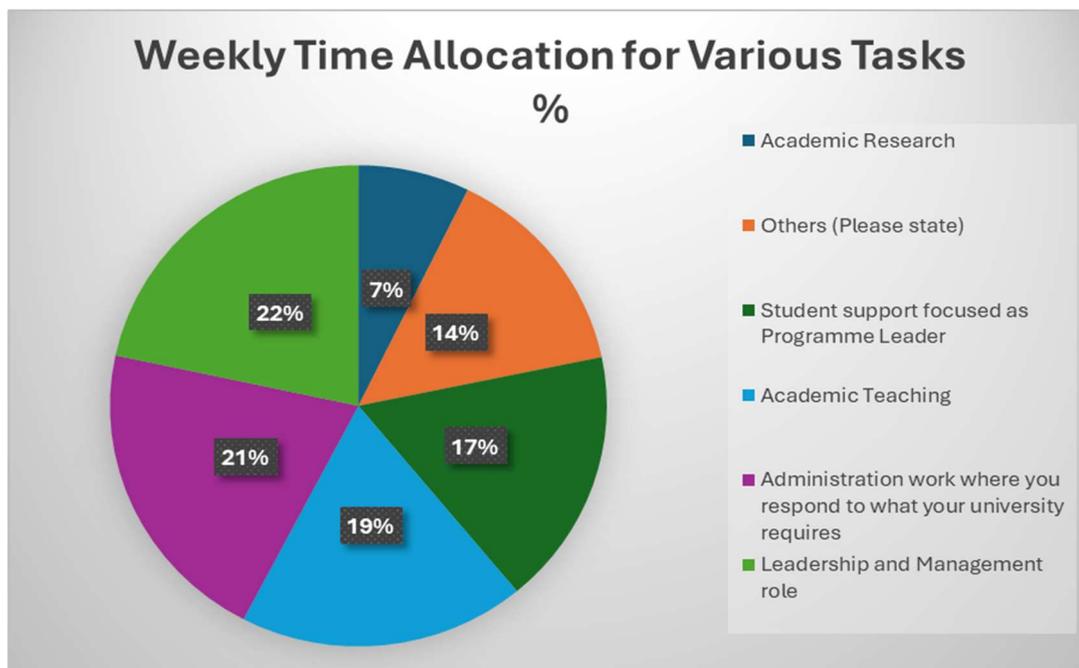
Figure 4.1 Time on tasks during a typical week

Academic research (7%) is the area of practice that needs to be attended to by these survey participants. Whether this reflects their workload allocation for research is unknown and given that this question was bounded by the term "typical week", it may be that some academic research may occur in non-typical weeks, but this was discussed with the interviewee participants. They agreed their academic research and studies have been impacted and stopped since they were assigned this role.

Yeah, it's not prioritised. It's a hierarchy of needs and getting stream [sic]. Giving people enrolled and engaged, paying fees as a high priority, and ensuring that this semester runs smoothly, but emergencies often come into play, and you have to respond to their situation …. Focus on doing something you'd like to do with the curriculum or, you know, staying at systems and processes to help make things run smoothly or easier and then, of course, the very bottom of that is my research. So, that has yet to be done at all. Since I got my doctorate, there has been no more research, so that's a significant problem. (Interviewee 1)

The programme leader's role has influenced the second participant's research activities, leading to a search for a replacement to better focus on research and address the inefficiencies of juggling both responsibilities. This dynamic between the two roles has also affected the research studies, highlighting the complexities and compromises of academic multitasking.

I took the role three years ago, and since then, it happened … no I have continued to research, and I would say that probably that's been in some ways at the cost of my programme leader role. Still, I can say that the programme leader role has impacted my research. (Interviewee 2)

Interviewee 2 is one of the few professors who is also a programme leader and is tasked with promoting a research culture among postgraduate students and their colleagues, which is a significant part of their role as a professor. They express that tasks such as recognition of prior learning are not the best use of their time, given their responsibilities related to research.

I'm employed as a professor at the university, so I'm one of the few professors who's a programme leader. I'm getting paid to promote the research culture both in postgraduate student work and in my research and supportive research and colleagues, so right now, you know, when I'm sitting down looking at recognition of prior learning, that is not the best use of my time in terms of that role of course.

The third participant agreed with how vital research is for an academic person, but the role does not allow them to conduct more research.

Yes, it does. It's very time-consuming, but PPRF funding as a way of funding academic institutions is flawed; that's ridiculous; however, that's what it is. I'm at the end of my career, so I am okay with

meeting the requirements. I'm sure the university minds, but you can't invest time in this role. It takes time to do well and something's got to give, so I've got my teaching papers that I, so I can't let them go. My research would take a hiding more than anything else because it's just not enough hours in the day. So, the university will penalise me for giving this time to the students because that is how the current funding formula works. (Interviewee 3)

This data illustrates the challenge of balancing the intensive demands of programme leadership with the responsibilities of teaching, research, and other professional services. The time dedicated to leadership and management, along with administration, points to a substantial engagement with the operational aspects of higher education, which may impinge upon the time available for research and direct student interaction.

In relation to the time associated with student support, participants also reported approximately how many students they engaged with, mainly where the support focused on course selection and programme guidance (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Approximate number of students Programme leaders meet.

Number of students seen per semester	No. of Participants
Up to 19	3
20 - 39	3
40 - 59	3
60 - 79	1
80 -99	0
100 or more	1
Total	11

The data from Table 4.2 indicates a balanced distribution of programme leader meetings with students across three categories, with most programme leaders seeing up to 59 students per semester. Meetings with 100 or more students are the least, suggesting that huge groups are less common or that programme leaders' capacity to meet with such numbers is limited.

Programme leaders recognise the potential for significant enhancements in their roles and the support they provide to students. However, they are constrained by the limited time available in their daily schedules. This is particularly evident in the emphasis all three interviewees placed on the value of face-to-face interactions with students, which they believe is crucial for delivering practical guidance. Meanwhile, following up with students who need support, and the most critical aspect of the programme leader role has yet to happen. When I inquired if the interviewees conducted follow-ups with students who sought advice or those who might miss out on such opportunities, they unanimously expressed a lack of sufficient time to connect with each student personally. They all wished for more time to engage in these impactful discussions, acknowledging the positive influence these interactions can have on students' academic outcomes.

> *I don't have time to go and check on each one. We don't have the time. We literally have over 1000 students. I'd love to do more of that. I've got great ideas in terms of cohering to have to go through the whole programme…. (Interviewee 1)*

> *They are not there often anymore because we created their pastoral role as a separate role, so that would be the person to have students on the radar and follow up with. I leave them to get in touch with me, so if I get a contact from a student to whom I've given some advice, if I don't hear from them again, that's on them. (Interviewee 2)*

Proactive follow-up with students is pivotal for their success and achievement, particularly for those who may need available university support. This topic will be delved into in the student challenges part of this section.

4.4 Professional Development

The responses from the eight programme leaders in the survey who answered this question regarding the potential benefits of a dedicated professional development training course for their roles reveal a mix of perspectives, with the majority expressing scepticism. The recurrent keywords across the responses were "structural problems", "experience", "coaching", "independent", and "processes".

A number of leaders believe a training course is optional, often citing the structural issues within the institution as a barrier that a course alone cannot address. This

response underscores a belief that challenges are systemic, requiring organisational changes, not due to a lack of individual competence. This sentiment is echoed by those who highlight their extensive experience, suggesting that their knowledge and skills are sufficient and that a course would not significantly impact their effectiveness. The semi-structured interviewees mentioned some effort in changing the system when they initially took part in the role.

> *An example is external moderation. Now, sending courses off for external moderation wasn't happening. So, I had to reinstate how we random certain committees and reinstate expectations of different paper leaders or course records; all sorts of things needed refining and reinstating. (Interviewee 1)*

> *So, what I tried to do, especially to manage student communication, was create a communication ladder to help students navigate who they needed to talk to! About what! And potentially disseminate information so they could speak to everyone. They could go to the communication ladder and go right or my queries about this right. I need to follow these instructions (Interviewee 1)*

> *I ended up suggesting that those pastoral roles should be differentiated and consistent across campuses rather than me doing pastoral on campus and a colleague doing pastoral on another campus, so now that person is doing pastoral across both campuses, and that's a much better scenario (Interviewee 2)*

> *I made that change a number of years ago because I had a number of students just randomly turn up to my classes, the ones that I was responsible for, and I went this is not going to work. This is setting them up to fail. They're in the wrong papers, which is not a good look from the university. I want to say to all of those applying for my papers that I'm involved in teaching these student advisors first. Anybody can enrol in them online. I get to see all those requests coming, and when they've got a number of them, they will call me over, and I'll go yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, great. It takes 30 seconds, but then I'll find the odd one, and they send it to me. I'm going to explore more why they want to do this, so I took their control some years ago, and that's been helpful to me personally and to the success of the papers. It's also better for the students, some of whom should never have been accepted, and I teach very specialised papers. There's something about the knowledge base from the student advisors, so if you're not in the system, you know you've got to have that knowledge. (Interviewee 3)*

However, there is a recognition of the value of coaching and a desire for more transparent processes. The solitary leader advocating for a training course points to the need for well-outlined procedures and roles, indicating a gap in shared understanding and expectations around the programme leader role. This suggests a need for better-defined responsibilities and a systemic approach to empower all staff, potentially relieving the programme leader from being the focal point for all issues.

Overall, the responses suggest that while there may be some value in professional development opportunities such as coaching, the primary need is for systemic and structural changes within the institutions. Leaders seek an environment where roles are clearly defined and supported rather than additional training that might imply deficiencies in their capabilities. This feedback can inform higher education institutions to develop targeted strategies that address the root causes of dissatisfaction among programme leaders, focusing on organisational reform rather than solely on professional development.

Programme leaders were asked how they think improvements can be made to provide more effective student support and make their role more efficient. The responses from the seven programme leaders in the survey reveal a multifaceted set of challenges and potential solutions. The keywords from their responses include "emotional intelligence", "self-management", "trust", "adult learning", "bridging courses", "clear processes", "administrative support", and "resources".

These leaders point to a perceived deficiency in students' emotional intelligence and self-management, suggesting that students might benefit from more robust personal development initiatives.

> *Delegation! I see other people taking on more responsibility because we've got a history of this role being ultimate responsibility…*
> *(Interviewee 1)*

> *.. it would be great if there was a more of a career counsellor labelled person to help some students navigate that space … (Interviewee 1)*

Interviewee two agreed to the idea when I suggested that they think the only way to make a programme leader more efficient with their role is to have someone who can assist them with the administration.

> *Yeah, that would be brilliant. Yep (Interviewee 2)*

> *..administration support would make my life much easier I could manage that I also have another role I have for the faculty as an academic and integrity officer, so I also deal with the students who've been plagiarising or using AI or other annoying things that are happening daily now, so again that's because um oh well apparently I've handled some tricky students reasonably well with the outcome has been okay I'm all sides so I got landed their job too I think if I had secretarial support they couldn't marriage the paperwork required on both sides, it would make life much easier. (Interviewee 3)*

Participants have also mentioned where they find the most support to try and carry out their programme leadership role effectively.

The responses from the programme leaders reveal a spectrum of support structures and challenges within their roles. A recurring theme is the reliance on dedicated staff directly involved in the operational work, highlighting the importance of teamwork and the value of support from "the ground up". Acknowledging support from within one's department underscores a collegial framework that is often a lifeline in the academic world.

> *I don't make any decisions personally, so I've got a team plus the heads of the department who also collaborate. (Interviewee 1)*

> *With regards to support in other ways, I think internally within the school; our programme administrators are awesome (Interviewee 2)*

Conclusively, the efficacy and focus of programme leaders on student support and research, as well as their engagement with academic tasks, are significantly enhanced by a robust collaboration with administrative or professional staff. Therefore, the following part of this section emphasises the pivotal role of professional staff in collaborating with programme leaders to deliver comprehensive student support.

4.5   Programme leaders and Professional staff collegiality.

This section examines the interactions between programme leaders and other professional staff supporting students. Five survey questions and semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore this topic. The objective was to determine how significantly professional staff influence the practices of programme leaders. After reviewing the data, an overlap emerged between professional staff and programme leaders' involvement in student support. This section's findings are summarised as follows:

- The nature of collaboration in student registration and enrolment;
- The extent of cooperation with career advisors;
- The level of collaboration in student support and well-being initiatives; and,
- The degree of collaboration in providing orientation and course information.

The first two survey questions focused on the level of collaboration in fulfilling student support responsibilities, identifying which professional staff members most frequently collaborate, and the influence of professional staff on programme leader role responsibilities.

The comparative analysis of programme leader responses regarding collaboration reveals a nuanced view of the interconnected nature of their roles. Initially, programme administrators were rated with an average score of 3.00 for collaboration, suggesting they are integral to programme leadership responsibilities. The 'Other' category, which included diverse roles from student services to senior staff, showed even more engagement, with an average of 3.29. This suggests that programme leadership is a cross-functional role that extends into various domains of the academic ecosystem.

Upon specifying the staff they collaborate with the most, there was a diverse range of responses, indicating that collaboration is not limited to a single role but is distributed across various functions within the university. Departmental admin staff, enrolment staff, lecturers, student advisors, heads of schools, university administrators, and academic administrators were all mentioned, reflecting a broad spectrum of interactions.

The finding that lecturers and departmental admin staff are frequently mentioned aligns with the understanding that day-to-day academic operations and direct student interactions are pivotal to programme leadership. The mention of enrolment and health clinic staff also suggests that programme leaders are involved in student support's academic and well-being aspects.

The interview participants confirmed these survey results and elaborated more on the support they receive from their own department professional staff but only a little from other departments. For example, interviewee one mentioned the support from another programme leader from similar programmes and clinical managers but only a little from different departments. The interviewee also mentioned how other departments would send students over or ask questions about the programme before accepting them into the programme.

> *The number of students has increased, and we have quite a big team of programme leaders to help. I could only do it for some. We have some brilliant clinical managers. We have somebody who manages students, and then I'm into the academics. Still, the way we've been structured previously is not necessarily linear, and it is a bit more hierarchical, with my position being the ultimate overseer. So I get reports from those other programme leaders to help me in their roles. We are working to flatten it to help create that space. (Interviewee 1)*

> *Very little. There's one particular programme, maybe two, that we have a really good relationship with, and when I recognise that students are unsuitable, I send them away. They also get students into their programme, hoping to transfer them to our programmes. They didn't make it into our programme in the first instance. They've been given the option of going into this other programme they've taken because it's a shared common semester. (Interviewee 1)*

> *I meet with some departments once every couple of years. With others, it's once a year; it's sometimes more than once; for instance, when we have open days, I work with them once a year. (Interviewee 3)*

However, there is also a sense of frustration regarding the influence of internal processes on programme leadership. Despite their recommendations, programme leaders feel that their opinions on student acceptance, especially in cases of internal transfers, are only sometimes heeded. This lack of control contrasts with external

transfers, where they have more authority to accept or reject students based on accurate and regulated criteria.

4.6 Professional staff influence my role responsibilities regarding student support and enrolment.

There is some discrepancy in perceptions among programme leaders regarding the influence of professional staff with their responsibilities for student support. An average of 2.56 and a median of 2 of the survey respondents disagree that professional staff influence their role; this suggests a significant portion of leaders perceive some disconnect between the input of professional staff and their responsibilities in student support. This aligns with the concerns of interview participants, who specifically mention a lack of control over student enrolment and a deficit in collaboration with administrative staff regarding student registration and enrolment.

Table 4.3 below reflects survey responses on four scenarios related to programme admissions, with counts and average agreement levels ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scenario of accepting students into a programme because it is more suitable for them had seven instances with an average agreement of 2.29 and a median of 2.0. There were 11 instances of feeling pressured to accept marginally qualifying students, with an average agreement of 2.45 and a median of 1.0. The idea of advising students to apply for a different, more suitable programme also had 11 instances, with a higher average agreement of 2.73 and a median of 2.0. Lastly, the action of rejecting students for unsuitable programmes was reported 11 times, with the highest average agreement being 3.09 and a median of 3.0.

Notably, most agreement is found with rejecting students for unsuitable programmes, indicating a commitment to maintaining programme standards. The lower median response for feeling pressured to accept students suggests that it needs to be uniformly agreed upon while it occurs. This could indicate varying degrees of institutional or personal pressure on the programme leaders from different departments.

Table 4.3 Scenarios related to programme admissions

Variable	Count	Average	Median
I accept students to the programme because this programme is more suitable for them than the one they were originally enrolled in	7	2.29	2.0
I am pressured to accept students who are marginal in meeting entry requirements	11	2.45	1.0
I may tell the students to apply for another programme because that is more suitable for them	11	2.73	2.0
I reject students when this programme is unsuitable for them.	11	3.09	3.0

The semi-structured interview participants concurred that while they believe in rejecting students when the programme is unsuitable for them, they often face challenges as internal and other departmental decisions override their judgments, leading to the enrolment of these students regardless of the participants' assessments.

> *…that's right, we can decline students, but they don't listen. Certainly, the internal transfer might not get listened to if it's an external transference. They've come from another university. We can say we're not accepting the student and don't have to. (Interviewee 1)*

> *Is it a good thing or a bad thing? Still, I don't have any control over original enrolments, so students who enrol centrally thought that entirely apply to get approved or declined centrally. We don't very rarely see any of those applications, and sometimes I'm grateful for that, and then there are other times I wish we'd been asked; there is the odd occasion when a student transfers in that we're asked even when we say this person isn't suitable they can still come up because enrolment people over role us because they want bums on seats, is unethical I think the business of getting enrolments it's so wrong. (Interviewee 1)*

> *… I believe it's wrong for us to keep taking people's money when we can see that it's not the right choice for them. There needs to be space*

for more of their career counselling, and I'm not sure that we have that at the university. (Interviewee 1)

I always need help finding the application forms. Well, in some respects, I'm grateful that I don't have to look at the hundreds of applications, and I'm thankful that they recognise. What I see from time to time is that I won't get an e-mail from the faculty office to say that this person wants to transfer into your programme. They might have a question, which might be a little information I get. I can then go into the student database and look at the student, but I don't see an actual application as much. (Interviewee 1)

I am responsible for accepting students. They are responsible within their respective departments for advising students if the student comes through them first. They have the budget and are responsible for promoting the programme I lead, but until recently, I have not had a clear idea of what they're promoting. (Interviewee 2)

When I saw the prospectus, I just went through it and talked to the people responsible for putting together the tools that help students decide whether or not they want to study on my programme. We put in much work, and I was pleased they wanted to listen. I imagine they expected me to look at what they've put together and say, " Oh yeah, that's great, okay? Still, I was like, no, you can't say this. You can't know that you got there, and please don't do this, and these are the things, yeah, so it took months more than they were expecting, but they didn't at any stage just go that's a too much not worth it. (Interviewee 2)

But they're not able to practise in the field, so we give them a qualification for which they can't get a job, and I don't think that's fair. That's much time, money and energy for a qualification that can't get them anywhere all right (Interviewee 3)

The participants expressed ethical concerns regarding enrolment practices, emphasising that their recommendations to decline unsuitable students are often disregarded in favour of filling seats, which they find unethical. They also questioned the fairness of granting qualifications to students who may need help to secure employment in their field, implying a disservice to the student's investment of time and money. Therefore, the subsequent questions asked the interview participants inquired how students are provided with accurate information about the programme

to enable them to make informed decisions and avoid enrolling in a programme that may not suit them, potentially wasting their time and financial investment.

4.7 Collaboration towards student information

The participants highlighted a collaborative issue, indicating that various university departments, such as employability labs, career advisors, and marketing teams, need a better understanding of the complex education sector to avoid misinformation. They stress the importance of providing a transparent and honest portrayal of programmes to potential students and note the effort involved in correcting inaccuracies in promotional materials. Despite infrequent inter-departmental interactions, they advocate for accurate and ethical information dissemination about programmes to aid students in making informed decisions.

> *… I've got this. You can deal with it, so push back down and say let's deal with it. And giving them the tools to know how to deal with it, so part of my role over the last year and a half has been about some professional development of staff and, of course, a lot of the staff new to university or new to this institution and so getting them up skilled and systems and processes some people are much more and happy to adapt to that than others and some people hear what you're saying but still choose to go off on their tangent and do their own thing which breaks the rules which is thing creates more work for me later on. It's a double-edged sword that the whole delegation returns to other people. (Interviewee 1)*

> *… so I have to, I don't, I haven't worked much with student advisors. Still, I've worked with the employability group, careers advisers, secondary school people, and marketing people. So they're all the people that need to understand the sector. I know it's taken me quite a lot of time to undo some of the misunderstandings they have of some very complex sectors, partly because it's difficult for a university to tell the truth about something that might impact the enrolment. Still, I think there's a moral. Universities are responsible for continuing to grow up with a profession and field, so I'm not. Still, I believe potential students need a clear and honest picture, and realising that they are coming to the university will help them engage with those challenges. (Interviewee 2)*

> *I know what I can do to advocate for making sure that the information that's provided to prospective students is correct. (Interviewee 2)*

The participants' insights emphasise significant collaborative issues within universities, particularly how departments understand and communicate complex education sector information, such as employability labs, career advisors, and marketing teams. The core problem identified is misinformation, stemming from a need for coordinated effort and understanding among these departments. This situation leads to disseminating inaccurate programme descriptions to potential students, necessitating corrections and adjustments that strain resources. The findings highlight the critical need for improved inter-departmental communication and collaboration to ensure honest, accurate information to students, aligning with ethical standards and fostering informed decision-making.

4.8 Student Experience

This section examines student interactions with programme leaders and the support they receive, aiming to quantify the number of these interactions within a semester. The initial theme seeks to understand the volume of students who consult programme leaders for guidance, which is crucial since the data suggests that many students may not seek such support, potentially leading to confusion or academic challenges. Earlier in this chapter, under the section addressing task allocations and responsibilities, programme leaders were questioned programme leaders about the number of students they engage with each semester. The reported range was 20-60 students. This figure seems relatively small, given that one programme leader reported handling thousands of new applications and managing a large body of enrolled students.

From the responses received from survey participants and the interviewees who emphasised the importance of face-to-face meetings, it was necessary to ask the following questions to determine the common reasons students come to see programme leaders and seek support and guidance. The diagram below answers this question.
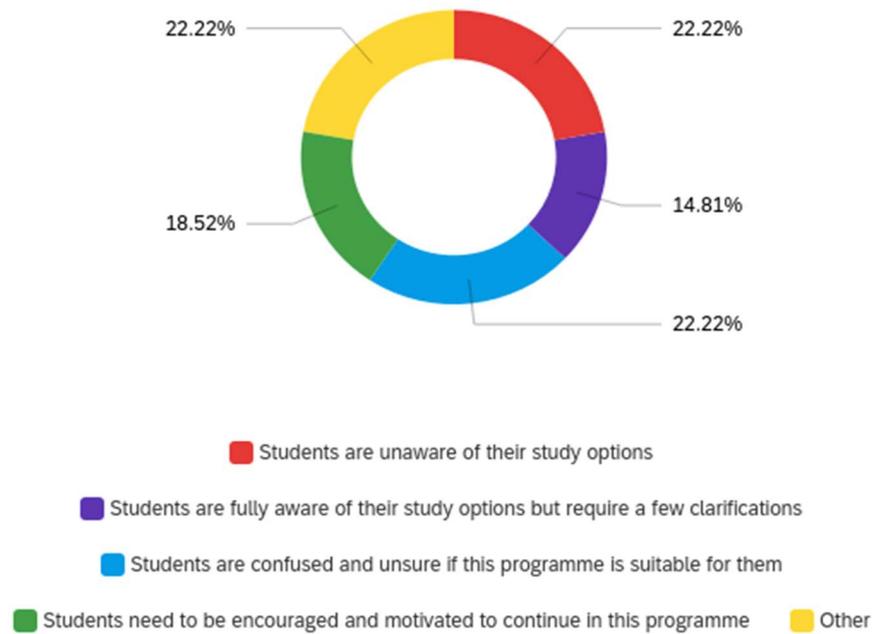
Figure 4.2 Reasons students meet with Programme leaders

The reasons include students being unaware of their study options, confusion about the programme's suitability, and the 'Others' category expands on specific issues such as technical barriers with IT systems preventing self-enrolment, continuous programme changes necessitating manual work, medical or personal problems, lack of optional courses, and lack of awareness of the implications of failing courses. This indicates that more than half of the students seeking guidance seek foundational support in understanding their academic trajectory.

Additionally, a portion, 18.52%, of students need encouragement and motivation to continue in their programmes. Fewer students, 14.81%, are clear about their study options but require further clarifications, pointing to a smaller group with a better grasp of their academic plans but still seeking expert confirmation.

The interviewee's opinions on the reasons why students do tend to come and see them was collectively agreed that students most challenged situations are "time", "living costs", and "mental health issues", especially those who are doing postgraduate studies.

Any connection between the challenges and solutions indicates that while programme leaders are aware of the hurdles they and their students face, their approach to

overcoming them is often constrained by the very nature of their role and the structure of their educational environment.

> *Most people genuinely want the qualification and want to work in this particular industry, which is excellent. We need them so that most students make the right choice. (Interviewee 1)*

Listing the challenges and why students seek support from programme leaders, the following question was designed to specify the programme leaders' practice in understanding students' ability to complete this programme.
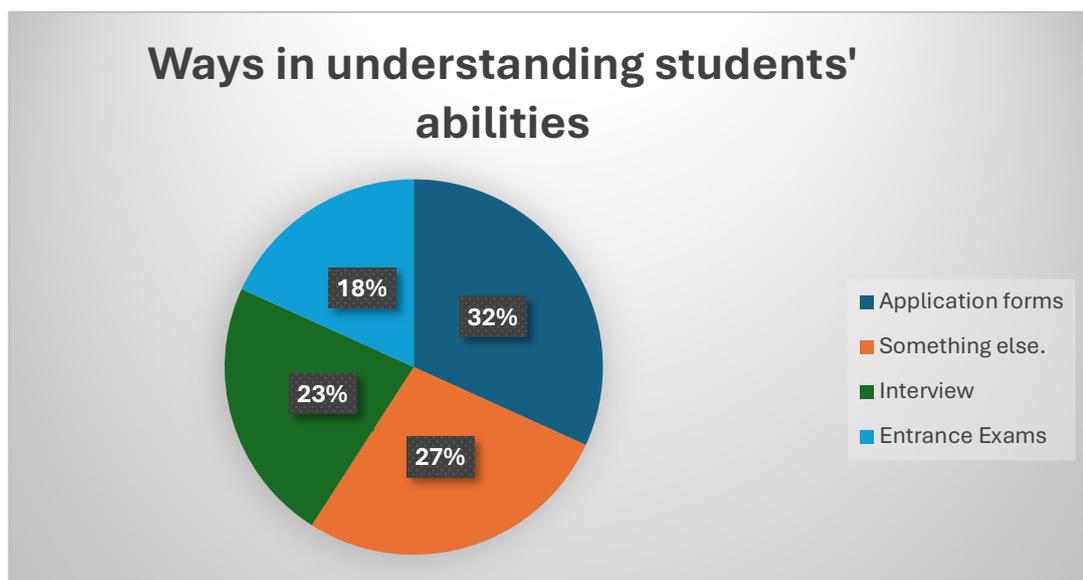
Figure 4.3 Tools for understanding students' abilities

The survey data concerning programme leaders' practices for assessing students' abilities to complete their programmes reveals a multifaceted approach to admissions decisions. The most used method, with 63.6% of programme leaders using it, is the evaluation of application forms. This suggests that the initial information provided by prospective students plays a crucial role in gauging their suitability and preparedness for the programme. While the survey indicates that a majority of programme leaders engage with application forms, interviewee responses reveal a different perspective, with some leaders expressing that they do not typically see these forms, which has been mentioned in section 4.6 of this chapter on the influence of professional staff has over the enrolment and registration. This may indicate the importance of viewing the application forms and if some programme leaders take the initiative to request to view the application forms as mentioned in section 4.6.

Another significant component in the decision-making process, as indicated by 54.5% of the respondents, involves additional, unspecified methods ('Something else'), which could encompass a range of personalised or unorthodox practices tailored to the programme's specific context. This might include informal methods or subjective criteria not captured by standardised application materials, such as a face-to-face approach. A notable practice used by 45.5% of the leaders aligns with the emphasis on personal interaction and direct assessment of candidates' capabilities and fit for the programme. Among the 'Others' responses, academic transcripts, previous enrolments, and school grades are common factors, providing a historical perspective on a student's educational performance. Some leaders also mentioned utilising emails and meetings for follow-up discussions, which suggests a hands-on approach to understanding a student's background and aspirations.

The interviewees also mentioned that face-to-face meetings can provide a significant advantage in making decisions when asked about their best approach to supporting students in making decisions.

> *My approach is to speak very truthfully about the challenges of the work that they are considering. The programme I'm on leads to the qualification that entitles them to engage in the particular work as not easy work, and it needs to be better valued socially and well paid. I talked to them about this being the truth, so they have to decide whether or not something they want to do something because it is gratifying work. I talk about my own experiences. I tend to talk about my experiences because I made career decisions and then changed them and even career decisions and change them so it helps to recognise that you can end up doing what we do in different ways and to help show them that my decision to enrol in this kind of programme many years ago has been a highly rewarding position. (Interviewee 2)*

> *.. Yep, huge; I think you're far more efficient at sorting things out, really, and I think there's nothing like personal contact, especially if you're feeling a bit anxious about coming back to study or maybe you did a degree many years ago. (Interviewee 3)*

One programme leader commented on their sporadic involvement with applications, but a thorough check on the grades and reasons for application when they engage points to a selective but in-depth review process. This may also involve discussions

about recognition of prior learning (RPL), indicating an appreciation for previous experiences and achievements outside formal education systems, which was mentioned in these two.

> *I lay out the available processes to them, usually knowing that when they submit that third enrolment application, I'm going to decline it, so the other thing is to be a reminder. We're not making those decisions so that you can go to the course features for information sometimes, so I make pretty informed decisions, but it's about emailing the students, usually like something in writing document paper communication, and that usually still hears your options. I often tell students they can transfer to another university and complete the programme here if they take you or are within our university. (Interviewee 1)*

> *..selection process! With our tools, they can come and talk to me. There is a website in our prospectus. Then, there is the student hub with advisors and career people. Our school doesn't provide anything in particular. My programme doesn't offer anything particular to help you decide on a programme selection so you would have to come to me. (Interviewee 2)*

> *I think you're far more efficient at sorting things out, and I think there's nothing like personal contact… you can put a name to a face yeah and engage in conversation I think that help sells things as well. (Interviewee 3)*

In relation to this, programme leaders were surveyed on their capacity to monitor student academic progress. The data from the survey showed that programme leaders generally feel confident in their ability to monitor academic progress, with an average rating of 3.82 and a median of 4.0, indicating a relatively high level of engagement in tracking student performance.

The participants discussed their approaches to monitoring students' academic progress, revealing a predominant reliance on end-of-semester results to identify and address student challenges. This method involves flagging students who exhibit signs of academic distress based on their final grades, initiating contact to understand their circumstances and offering the necessary support. I questioned the efficacy of this reactive strategy, suggesting the need for earlier intervention to ensure students take advantage of timely assistance. One interviewee acknowledged the merit of this

suggestion, recognising the potential benefits of proactive engagement and expressing an intention to implement such measures.

We have reporting processes at the end of each semester when grades get finalised yet and so we tend to look at which are the students should have success as well the succeeded once training get named but those that have failed and didn't complete or withdrawn they get highlighted and we note thing and then the university also has a process for reporting on students that are failing to progress and so if I get that report each end of semester and I have to go through it and identify if I know the students circumstances and I might say don't see them because I don't want them to get this right …. there's no further options for them sometimes it feels very inhumane the system sort of works in a way that they tick some boxes they processed some information's and data without they do recognise that there's a human being in it and that's what comes through me to say yes or no … the system is only as good as its weakest point and it's a human interactive system so, there is still room for errors and ring from improvements. I know the university is working on putting in systems to help expose some of the communication people are having. Okay, it's not necessarily user-friendly. It's there. (Interviewee 1)

Um, I don't do that! Well, good question. I should, but I don't know that I should. I don't feel compelled to do it. I know that I have to do it when a student fails. I have to decide and think about whether or not they are allowed to stay on the programme. When a student gets a lot of good grades, I'm told about it because we offer incentives like certificates to say top of the class. On the first day, we noticed the problem was a lack of attendance. Still, we can't confirm that a lack of attendance will lead to a bad grade at the end of each semester…… you get the final, we get the results, I find out which students are concerned about their progression, and it's a debt point that I have been involved in it…… You need to contact me after this and remind me of that because I won't forget. (Interviewee 2)

Finally, the final question given to the interviewee participants was about the student services available to students by the university. Participant One emphasised the critical role of orientation day in providing academic guidance and support, noting, however, its low attendance rates, which limits students' engagement with available opportunities. This participant also highlighted targeted support for repeating students and the creation of supportive cohorts, underscoring the importance of student initiative in accessing these services.

> *… so, during an orientation I get to influence students, so students come along at orientation and hear about the programme, and I give them some tips for success. I guess you could say it's not very well attended, but I'll say that as well, so one year, for example, is meant to have about 600 students, and I had 50. that was a significant drop. I guess that's the issue around students engaging the opportunities available so we can put in many strategies to support student success. Still, if students don't come to meet us halfway, it falls on their fears. (Interviewee 1)*

Participant Two spoke about the persistent issue of students needing to be made aware of available support despite efforts to inform them. This participant stresses the responsibility of students as adults to seek out services, noting that presence in academic settings correlates with awareness and use of services.

> *Very few students go to orientation, and very few students that go to orientation take it all in. I know our orientation tries to devise different ways of making sure that students know what I mean. There are a lot of student support services, from health and well-being services to academic services to social services, whatever, but I could be working with third-year students who have only just realised that you know. (Interviewee 2)*

> *….. they received the information in multiple modes, whether or not they've received it well. The fact that they don't know suggests they haven't received it well. I'm not quite sure what we could do better. (Interviewee 2)*

Lastly, Participant Three focused on the importance of proactive communication about support services, including introducing academic skills centres and librarians to students at the beginning of their courses. This approach aims to overcome the general unawareness and underutilisation of services, often exacerbated by students overlooking available resources.

I guess we spend time talking about utilising the services that the institution offers to ensure their success; for example, the academic skills centre is fantastic, and they should not feel negative about going to them for help to make sure that their paragraphs and sentence structure are fine…. so academic schools like I highlight them a lot and I also say if they want to be very successful they should go to the librarian who is dedicated to our faculty; she's fantastic. It just goes over how you search the databases … so I guess I push those sorts of support services and stress that their student fees paid for it. It also becomes evident when I'm doing the academic integrity role when I've got a student in front of me who has plagiarised, and I'm asking if you are aware of these services. They look at me weirdly and say no … I think those services are not obvious, or students dismiss them if they see it. (Interviewee 3)

it's all there. It's on the website, and it's all there, but you probably skim over it until you need to use it. It is our responsibility, to push that right at the beginning of our programmes to highlight. You can't sell them; you know I can't highlight them enough. They're fantastic, and you should use them. (Interviewee 3)

Across these responses, a common theme emerged. Students may miss out on vital support services due to low orientation attendance, lack of engagement, and a general unawareness of available resources. While the university makes concerted efforts to provide and promote these services, the effectiveness of these efforts is significantly hampered by students' lack of initiative to seek out and utilise the support.

To conclude this chapter, it was crucial to uncover the many challenges and strategies that programme leaders encounter while interacting with and supporting student enrolments and guiding the selection of programmes and courses. The significance of collaboration with other professional staff and the impact of such professional dynamics on their roles and responsibilities were also explored. The forthcoming chapter will serve as a discussion section, synthesising the findings and literature reviews. This synthesis aims to draw conclusions and propose recommendations to enhance the role of programme leaders and academic staff responsible for providing leadership in educational programmes.

Chapter 5 Discussion:

This chapter discusses the complexity of programme leader experiences and challenges in providing student support. The insights from the findings resonate with some of the research studies and commentaries discussed in chapter two, the literature review. The discussion is anchored in four core findings: role expectation, a "Shoulder-tapped" role, managing the load, and student challenges experienced in programme leadership. Finally, this chapter finishes with recommendations and conclusions.

5.1   Role expectation and what is experienced

Programme leaders enter their roles with initial expectations, yet the study reveals a contrast between these initial perceptions and the actual demands of the role. The reality often leads to an overwhelming workload, with many feeling pressed for time to fulfil all their responsibilities effectively. The study findings suggest programme leaders want to meet their leadership expectations, and interview narratives reveal a role expansion beyond initial expectations, leading to an administrative-heavy workload that detracts from their academic and supportive capacities. This may have an impact on the university overall and especially on the students. For example, Carayannis (2013) mentioned that academic staff play a crucial role in the design of career structures within the university and are essential in preparing students for life and work in an international context (Carayannis, 2013). Another study suggested that programme directors have a unique and influential academic leadership role that significantly impacts the quality of student learning and programme innovation (Milburn, 2010). The participants of this study have mentioned the impact of their role towards the university or the students.

Still, the values and commitment of programme leaders have to be one as a middle manager who put up with all the challenges. The role definition of programme leaders remains ambiguous; it is described as ambiguous and ill-defined (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020). However, since the 1980s and the implementation of NPM, there has been a discernible shift in programme leader roles from academic to administrative functions (Bacon, 2014). This transition was evident from the accounts of the programme

leaders interviewed and those who participated in the survey. The role shift from an academic to a more administrative focus has contributed to increased workload in programme leader daily practice. It has affected their ability to fulfil all their responsibilities and duties efficiently. According to the findings, programme leaders are heavily occupied with administrative work, reducing the time they can allocate weekly to student support and conducting their research.

As inferred from the interviews, the role of a programme leader transcends administrative duties. It enters the realm of student well-being and academic mentorship, especially in the context of unprecedented challenges that may still linger from the global pandemic. A student-centric focus, while rewarding, has led to a neglect of other aspects of programme quality and management due to time constraints. Reaper and Brown's (2020) study mentioned how academic leaders managed student well-being during the pandemic by recognising the importance of developing effective student support networks. They emphasised the need to avoid regression in widening participation policies and practices and to promote inclusive university environments (Raaper & Brown, 2020).

Moreover, the reference to the role as possible "career suicide" for younger academics by Interviewee 3 underscores the potential risks associated with the position, such as the intense time commitment and the likely impact on one's academic trajectory. This perspective highlights the need for institutions to consider the long-term implications of these roles on individual career paths and the overall health of the academic body.

In light of these findings, it is clear that there is a need for more explicit role definitions and expectations for programme leaders. Additionally, providing support systems and professional development opportunities could alleviate the pressures associated with the role and enhance the alignment between role expectations and reality. The findings suggest that while programme leaders meet their leadership expectations to a reasonable degree, the breadth and intensity of the role necessitate a re-evaluation of how these positions are structured and supported within the academic framework, particularly in terms of workload hours.

The survey findings and the semi-structured interview of the participants' answers indicate a need for more clarity in the role definition. All participants understood the

responsibilities involved as a programme leader. Still, the reality of the role was shifting away from the initial academic and management expectations to more of an administrative and consultation role. This shift in responsibilities highlights the dynamic nature of programme leadership roles, particularly in the context of crisis management, where pressing human concerns can override planned duties. The participants' experiences underscores a reality where the enjoyment of helping students is tempered by the problem that other critical aspects of the role, such as programme quality and course management, are neglected due to the significant reallocation of time and resources to address immediate student needs. This situation challenges leaders who must balance their professional objectives with urgent demands.

5.2 A "Shoulder-tapped" role

Some programme leaders were "shoulder tapped" by a manager due to their past commendable student interactions, and programme leaders shared a common dedication to providing exemplary support. Conducting three semi-structured interviews with programme leaders, I have perceived a common belief and commitment to the transformative power of education and a desire to impact student lives positively. Their dedication is evidenced by their willingness to exceed expectations and come up with solutions and changes to the system to provide the best support to their students' well-being and future students. For example, the three programme leaders I interviewed shared the same vision of "Making change" when they initially accepted the role. They have dedicated what time they have available to help students succeed.

The study by Cardno (2012) illustrates the significant benefits and effectiveness of academic leadership within educational institutions. Effective leadership positively impacts student learning experiences and outcomes (Cardno, 2012). Effective leadership can also create educationally powerful connections that focus specifically on student learning, constructive problem-solving, and development (Cardno, 2012). On the other hand, Ganser and Kennedy (2012) study of Peer Education and Leadership in Student Services within educational institutions explores the history and evolution of peer leadership roles in student services, particularly in orientation and residence life, and address the impact and future directions of peer leader-educator

roles within these functional areas. The study was conducted in the context of higher education institutions, focusing on the changing characteristics of students and the evolving specialisation of peer leaders within resident life (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). Effective academic leaders are crucial in fostering a positive learning environment by developing trust, prioritising tasks such as setting direction, leading change, and making informed decisions based on effective pedagogy (Graham & Regan, 2016). These qualities enhance the student learning experience and positively affect student outcomes (Graham & Regan, 2016). These significant skills were very apparent in the participants of this study.

The dominant reason participants cited for their acceptance of the role of programme leader was not a proactive choice but rather a response to being requested, reflective of a broader hesitation within the academic community to undertake such positions. This hesitance among potential candidates foregrounds the selection process, prioritising individuals with a distinct profile; seasoned expertise in their field and a proven track record in fostering positive student outcomes. The findings suggest that these programme leaders are distinguished by their reputations, built on their interactions and successes with students. This confluence of being highly regarded in their discipline and adept in student relations underscores the specific attributes institutions seek when appointing leaders tasked with steering educational programmes. Consequently, it reveals the implicit criteria for academic leadership roles, emphasising experience and students. In some literature reviews, which are also discussed in chapter two of this manuscript, the effectiveness of academic leaders is discussed. Academic leaders are often associated with two types of leadership behaviour: people-oriented, which focuses on fostering a collegial atmosphere, and task-oriented, which highlights the importance of focused efforts and establishing the right frameworks to accomplish tasks (Wolf, 2010).

5.3 Managing the load:

The findings indicate a need to value professional and academic staff cooperation. According to Wojcieszek et al. (2014), their study about the initiatives undertaken by the First Year Advisors at Murdoch University to improve communication between staff, showed enhanced collegiality and ensured successful enhancements in the First

Year Experience. The study aimed to develop collegiality among academic and professional university staff to effectively support students (Wojcieszek et al., 2014). Wojcieszek et al. (2014) explain how collegiality among academic and professional staff is essential for enhancing the first-year student experience. It fosters shared responsibility in a group endeavour, cooperative interaction, and collaboration between colleagues. The study outlines that developing collegiality among staff helps bridge the gap between students and academic staff, removes isolation among different discipline areas, and supports students more effectively (Wojcieszek et al., 2014).

While positive collaboration practices are ideal for enhancing student support and institutional effectiveness, the findings in chapter four indicate some lack of such collegiality in practice, revealing some need for re-evaluating institutional processes and communication channels to enhance the impact of professional staff on the programme leader capacity to support students effectively. The findings of chapter four suggest the need for more integrated approaches and a blurring of the lines between administrative and academic roles, ensuring that responsibilities for student support are shared and recognised across various functions. Studies show that collegiality could lead to more comprehensive support systems where academic and administrative staff work more in tandem to address student needs (Kligyte, 2020).

The participants mentioned the importance of professional staff in centralised university units. One participant mentioned the need for more communication with the professional staff responsible for providing initial information about the programme, which could be for many reasons. One of the reasons is that the physical locations are positioned at a distance from academics based in schools and faculties. The study by Gray (2015) discusses the location distance between academic staff and professional staff. Gray (2015) points out that while academics regard departmental professional staff with great respect, they express doubts towards those in central units, revealing a tendency to favour collaboration with professional staff at the departmental level over those at the central level (Gray, 2015).

A study by Berman and Pitman (2009) in Australian university contexts introduced the advantage of a "trained" professional staff who focus on supporting student advisory

staff. The study illustrates that professional staff with research training bring several advantages to student advisory roles. They can apply their research and generic skills to identify issues confronting the university, apply research methodologies to these issues, prepare position or policy papers, and initiate and facilitate the implementation of solutions to problems (Berman & Pitman, 2009). Additionally, they transfer their mastery of specific research methodologies and techniques from their original research field to their new area of expertise, which can benefit student consultations and advising (Berman & Pitman, 2009). Furthermore, their understanding of research culture in universities can provide for collegiality and act as a bridge in the academic-general staff divide, allowing them to contribute to the university (Berman & Pitman, 2009).

While some programme leaders from the survey conducted in this research feel that professional staff do not influence their role in student support, it is important to note that there is diversity in their experiences and practices. Some programme leaders are actively involved in the student enrolment process, exercising a degree of control by reviewing application forms. This involvement is perceived as beneficial from a student perspective, ensuring fairness and proper scrutiny in the acceptance process. This active involvement may be needed due to any external expectation a programme carries, such as registration in areas of health and education.

However, programme leaders still believe that the personal involvement strategy has downsides. Those programme leaders who adopt this hands-on approach report that it significantly increases their workload. This added responsibility suggests a potential misalignment between role expectations and the practical realities of their duties. The fact that programme leaders are engaging in tasks typically handled by admissions or enrolment staff points to the blurring of boundaries between academic and administrative responsibilities within higher education (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020).

The literature on academic workloads by Kenny and Fluck (2014) corroborates that increasing administrative tasks can lead to role overload, which may detract from other core academic and support activities (Kenny & Fluck, 2014). Therefore, institutions need to consider the balance of workload and the distribution of responsibilities to maintain the efficacy and well-being of programme leaders (Kenny &

Fluck, 2014). Kenny and Fluck (2014) have also suggested that integrating hands-on involvement in student enrolment with appropriate support, such as centralised administration and time allocation, could help mitigate the risk of role overload and burnout among academic leaders (Kenny & Fluck, 2014).

According to Pace et al. (2019) study on the relationship between workload and personal well-being, the overwhelming workload stems from complex bureaucratic processes within universities can affect the academic staff who are responsible for programme leadership well-being, contributing to increased stress levels, psychological distress, and a detrimental imbalance between work and personal life. Such an intense commitment to work responsibilities may hinder their ability to perform institutional duties effectively. The participants in chapter four mentioned that some of their fundamental tasks had not been fulfilled; for example, conducting research or providing time to meet students face to face. This workload and the stress that may be caused by it could also be why the academic staff often hesitate to take on leadership roles. Hence, there is a growing need for programme leaders to collaborate closely with professional staff to address and mitigate these issues (Pace et al., 2019).

Overall, collaboration with other staff positively impacts the role of programme leaders by filtering the number of applications they review and negatively by sometimes undermining the authority of programme leaders in student selection. This duality reflects the complexity of interdepartmental interactions within academic institutions and their influence on programme leadership.

5.4 Student challenges experienced student-focused in programme leadership.

Universities offer various support services to assist students on their educational journey. However, any possible disconnect between students and programme leaders, primarily due to leaders' extensive administrative duties, means students may miss out on crucial guidance at the outset of or during their programmes. This may leave students ill-informed about their programme choices, sometimes leading them to enrol or re-enrol for the wrong reasons.

Programme leaders face challenges in guiding students with their course selection, ensuring programme continuity, grappling with time constraints and mental health concerns, and misaligning students' expectations with academic realities while addressing broader political issues and varied student motivations. Academic leaders employ a range of strategies to counter these challenges. Some reduce their research activities to manage their workload, while others focus on enhancing communication, goal setting, and offering flexibility in programme requirements. Providing realistic perspectives to students about what they can achieve and emphasising the potential of education to overcome barriers are also cited approaches. However, motivation is sometimes seen as the student's responsibility, particularly at the postgraduate level.

Chapter Two delved into students' perceptions and experiences with academic advising at a New Zealand university, highlighting its critical role in fostering student success, achievement, and satisfaction through personalised academic and career planning support (Buissink-Smith, Spronken-Smith, & Walker, 2010). The data indicate that participants agree that early engagement and interaction with students at the onset of enrolment positively influence student outcomes. Programme leaders recognise this approach's efficacy and desire additional time to implement this supportive strategy effectively.

In some cases, programme leaders accept that not all challenges can be surmounted and instead focus on empowering students to make informed decisions. Other strategies include keeping professional staff informed and supporting those directly monitoring students.

The study by Jacklin and Le Riche (2009) searches the notion of student support in higher education, drawing on findings from a research project that considered what students understood by 'support' and what was more or less helpful for them (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009). The project drew on the perspectives of five cohorts of undergraduate and postgraduate students based in three departments of one higher education institution in the United Kingdom (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009). The support provided to students encompasses a wide range of academic and non-academic situations, including note-takers for disabled students, helpful lectures or friendly tutors for specific courses, non-university social networks for mature students, and

bursaries for less well-off students (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009). Students also received support regarding human and material resources, information, advice, guidance, and a sense of belonging or shared experiences (Jacklin & Le Riche, 2009). The findings in chapter four corroborate the importance of delivering accurate information to students, with programme leaders working in concert with the marketing team, student hubs, student advisory team, to enhance the quality of university-published material. These leaders are committed to offering precise advice and guidance, ensuring students can make informed decisions. However, they face constraints due to time limitations and administrative duties, which can hinder these critical interactions with students.

The responses from programme leaders regarding the support for their roles illustrate a complex interplay of autonomy, collaboration, and systemic barriers within academic institutions. While some find solace in the solidarity of academic staff within their departments, others lean on the university's specialised units like the Student Support Hub for managing acute cases, which points to a segmented approach to student support services. Another response was the critical importance of orientation day, not just as a formal introduction to the university but as a vital opportunity to connect students with the resources designed to ensure their success. The insights provided by the participants highlight the need for universities to find more effective ways to engage students from the onset of their academic journey, ensuring they are fully aware of and capable of accessing the support services available to them.

Students approach programme leaders with varied intentions and expectations, often seeking guidance that could significantly shape their academic journey (Malik, 2000). While they may anticipate specific advice, the insights provided by programme leaders, whether unexpectedly positive or challenging, can be instrumental to their educational success and decision-making process (Malik, 2000). Therefore, programme leaders emphasise the importance of face-to-face meetings and consultations with students, stating that personal contact is beneficial, especially for students who may be anxious about returning to study or who may have studied many years ago and are feeling nervous, such as some postgraduate students.

The leaders adopt various strategies to address these issues, such as minimising their research to free up time for student interactions, enhancing communication, and making programmatic adjustments to accommodate student needs. They also focus on setting realistic expectations for students and fostering a belief in the power of education to overcome barriers. Sometimes, they accept that they cannot solve all problems and instead aim to empower students to make informed decisions. This is coupled with supporting and informing other staff more directly involved in student monitoring, highlighting a collaborative approach to student support.

5.5 Recommendation

The study of programme leader experiences supporting student programme selection and achievement highlights a need for role clarity and workload management to enhance the efficacy of programme leadership within HEIs. Given the identified discrepancies between anticipated role responsibilities and actual duties—exacerbated by the shift towards administrative tasks—it is paramount that universities re-evaluate and recalibrate the expectations placed upon programme leaders. To address these issues, the following recommendations are posited:

To enhance the leadership and operational effectiveness of programme leaders within academic institutions, it is essential to address the clarity of role definitions and the distribution of workloads.

Firstly, a clear definition and articulation of the scope and expectations of programme leadership roles, ensuring a distinction between academic and administrative responsibilities. This can be further enhanced by developing a feedback mechanism where programme leaders can regularly discuss role expectations and adjustments with senior management to ensure alignment with evolving institutional goals and individual capabilities.

Secondly, a thorough reassessment of workload distribution is necessary to ensure a balance that supports student engagement and academic research. An accompanying recommendation could be implementing a workload monitoring system to continuously evaluate and adjust workloads to prevent burnout and maintain productivity.

Thirdly, to alleviate the administrative burden on programme leaders, previous studies with the findings of participants agree on providing centralised administrative support through additional staff or improved systems. A possibility here is integrating AI-driven tools to automate routine administrative tasks, allowing leaders to devote more time to academic and student-oriented activities.

Fourthly, empowering programme leaders with greater decision-making authority and institutional support will enable them to navigate administrative challenges effectively. This empowerment could be complemented by establishing a leadership mentorship programme, where experienced leaders mentor new programme leaders, enhancing their decision-making skills and confidence.

Fifth, offering tailored professional development opportunities will assist programme leaders in adapting to their evolving roles, especially in navigating the complexities of NPM. An extension of this recommendation could involve creating a collaborative learning community among programme leaders to share experiences and best practices in managing these demands.

Sixth, protecting specific time allocations for research activities is essential to ensure that administrative demands do not overshadow academic contributions. To further support this, granting research sabbaticals could offer programme leaders uninterrupted time for significant research projects.

Lastly, implementing robust student support systems ensures that students receive comprehensive guidance. A potential enhancement here is developing a digital platform for student engagement, which would facilitate more flexible and accessible interactions between students and programme leaders, complementing the structured framework for face-to-face meetings.

By adopting these recommendations and their potential enhancements, institutions may significantly improve programme leader working conditions and effectiveness, thereby positively impacting the academic experience for staff and students. By implementing these recommendations, HEIs may foster an environment where programme leaders can thrive as educators and administrators, ultimately enhancing student success and academic achievement.

Considering the pressing need for role clarity and effective workload management for programme leaders, further research should undoubtedly delve into refining role definitions and optimising workload balance. It is crucial to explore how delineated responsibilities and a sustainable workload contribute to programme leaders' ability to foster student success and meet institutional goals. Investigative efforts could focus on the impact of centralising administrative support and reinforcing decision-making authority on programme leadership efficacy. Additionally, examining the benefits of leadership mentorship programmes, professional development tailored to the demands of NPM, and protective measures for research time will be invaluable. Research should also assess the effectiveness of digital platforms in enhancing student-programme leader engagement. These areas of inquiry could provide empirical evidence to support implementing the proposed recommendations, ultimately improving the academic environment for both educators and students.

5.6 Conclusion

This dissertation explored programme leader experiences in supporting students with programme selection and course advice, focusing on the challenges faced and strategies employed to ensure informed decision-making by students. This investigation addressed two critical questions: the key challenges programme leaders encounter and their strategies to facilitate students' programme choices. The findings of this study provide an analysis of the dynamics involved in a comprehensive overview of the intricate dynamics involved in academic advising within HEIs.

Challenges Faced by Programme Leaders

Programme leaders face many challenges in their quest to support students effectively. A significant hurdle is the need for more administrative support, overwhelming communication demands, and stringent time constraints for personal interactions with students. The inability to access or view application forms hinders a tailored advisement process, preventing an understanding of student backgrounds. Additionally, there is an opportunity to improve collegiality between departments, which impacts the cohesive support framework essential for student guidance and retention. The overwhelming nature of these tasks, especially against research obligations, underscores a systemic issue where academic staff are overburdened and

need more time to allocate the necessary time for personalised student interactions. Job security concerns and systemic pressures further exacerbate the challenges faced by Programme Leaders. Despite these obstacles, the intrinsic reward of witnessing student success and receiving acknowledgement at the culmination of their academic journey stands out as a significant motivator for those responsible for programme leadership.

Strategies Employed by Programme Leaders

In response to these challenges, those with programme leadership responsibility have adopted innovative strategies to enhance student support and advisement. These strategies include creating a communication ladder, a strategy that one of the participants discussed in chapter four. The communication ladder can streamline interactions, delegate tasks to faculty administrators, and proactively collaborate with various departments, such as the employment team, to promote programme offerings. The initiative to review application forms personally and to implement a system for ongoing student follow-up highlights a commitment to making informed programme selection a priority. The statement "I am the tool" encapsulates a programme leader's dedication to being the cornerstone of support, emphasising the personalised approach to guiding students through their academic journey.

Conclusion

The experiences of programme leaders in supporting students with programme selection and advice are marked by significant challenges, including administrative hurdles, time constraints, and a need for inter-departmental collaboration. These challenges hinder the ability to provide personalised support, which is critical for student retention and success. However, those with programme leadership responsibilities strive to overcome these obstacles through adaptive strategies and a strong commitment to student welfare, demonstrating resilience and innovation. This study underscores the importance of institutional support and the need for systemic changes to enhance the academic advisement process. By acknowledging the critical role of programme leaders and addressing the identified challenges, HEIs can foster a more supportive and effective environment for student advice, ultimately contributing to informed programme selection and enhanced student success. Future research

should explore the impact of institutional policies on the advice process and the

potential for inter-departmental collaboration to improve student support services.

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Appendices

Appendix A *Survey Questions*

Programme Leaderships' Experiences in student support

Q1

Instructions:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Taking part in this study is voluntary. The data gathered will remain anonymous and will only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor. If you have any questions about the study, please refer to the information sheet that you have been provided via email, or contact the researcher or supervisor. By completing this survey you are giving your consent to participate. Please only provide answers to the questions you are comfortable with. Please don't provide any information about your institution name or your details or colleagues information. Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13th September, 2023, AUTEC Reference number type the AUTEC reference number 23/211

Q2 Which level of study do you provide programme support and leadership to?

○ Undergraduate (1)

○ postgraduate (2)

○ Both (3)

- -

Q3 To what extent is there alignment between your personal programme leadership role expectation compared to your current experience? Please drag the slider along to provide your response

	Strongly disagree (0)			Strongly agree (5)	
0	1	2	3	4	5

Role Description matches reality ()

Q4 In 2-3 sentences please give the reasons why you became programme leader/director or equivalent?

_____

Q5 On scale of 0 to 5 how much do you think you are meeting your own leadership role expectation?

	Not at all (0)			All the time (5)		
	0	1	2	3	4	5

University expectation of the role. ()

Q6 In your opinion, do you think you are overloaded with work and responsibilities?

	Stongly disagree (0)			Strongly agree (5)		
	0	1	2	3	4	5

Overloaded work and responsibilities ()

Q7 My Programme Leader (or equivalent) responsibilities enable me to have sufficient time to provide student support I want to provide.

	Stongly disagree (0)			Strongly agree (5)		
	0	1	2	3	4	5

Student support responsibility ()
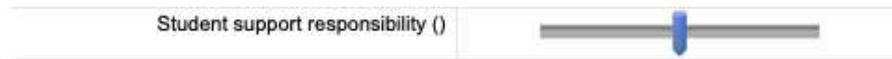
Q8 What percentage of your time you typically spend on the following tasks during a regular week? (Due to overlap in these areas of practice, all your responses do not need to add to 100%). Please move the slider according to your % answer

	0	20	40	60	80	100
Student support focused as Programme Leader ()						
Administration work where you respond to what your university requires ()						
Academic Teaching ()						
Academic Research ()						
Leadership and Management role ()						
Others (Please state) ()						
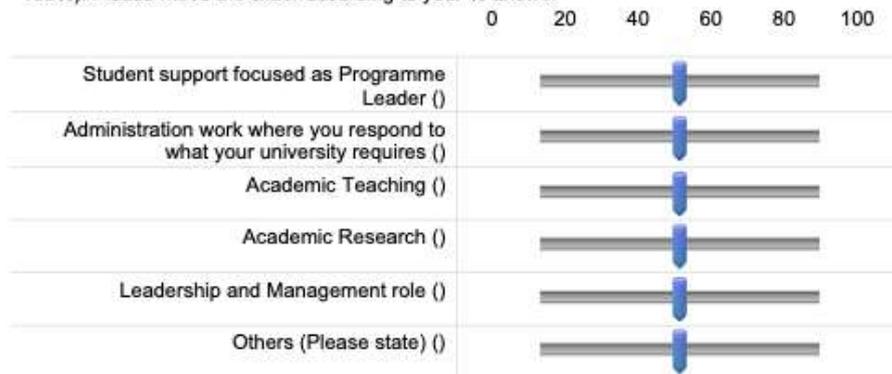
Q9 How much collaboration is involved in fulfilling your programme leadership responsibilities regarding student support?

	No Collaboration (0)			Continual collaboration (5)		
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Programme administrators ()						
Academic registrars ()						
Other (Please state) ()						
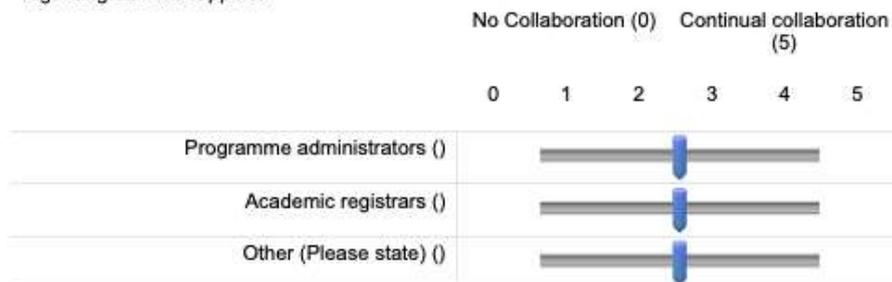
Q10 Which of these professional staff in the previous question do you collaborate with the most?

_____

Q11 Professional staff influence my role responsibilities regarding student support

	Strongly disagree (0)			Strongly agree (5)		
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Professional staff influence ()						
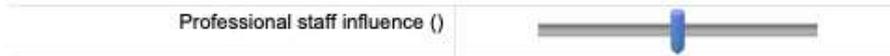
Q12 Approximately, how many students would you see in your role regarding student support (course selection and programme guidance)

	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Student numbers per semester ()											
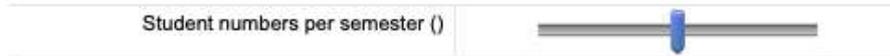
Q13 From your experiences, how do you classify the students who come to see you regarding course selection? (More than one selection can be made)

☐   Students are unaware of their study options (1)

☐   Students are fully aware of their study options but require a few clarifications (2)

☐   Students are confused and unsure if this programme is suitable for them (3)

☐   Students need to be encouraged and motivated to continue in this programme (4)

☐   Other (5) _____

Q14 On a scale of 0 to 5 how often do you agree or disagree with the following scenarios?

	Strongly disagree (0)			Strongly agree (5)		
	0	1	2	3	4	5
I may tell the students to apply for another programme because that is more suitable for them ()						
I am pressured to accept students who are marginal in meeting entry requirements ()						
I reject students when this programme is unsuitable for them. ()						
I accept students to the programme because this programme is more suitable for them than the one they were originally enrolled in ()						

Q15 My personal practice in understanding students ability to complete this programme includes. (you can select more than one response)

- ☐ Entrance Exams (1)
- ☐ Interview (2)
- ☐ Application forms (3)
- ☐ Something else. (4)

_____

Q16 I am able to monitor student academic progress in the programme.

	Strongly disagree (0)			Strongly agree (5)		
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Student Academic progress ()						
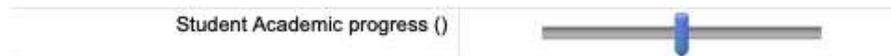
Q17 I am able to provide necessary interventions when student support is needed.

	Strongly disagree (0)			Strongly agree (5)		
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Student Academic progress ()						
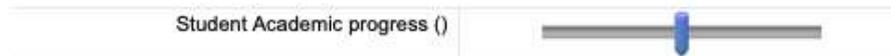
Q18 What challenges do you face in guiding students with course selection and programme continuity?

_____

Q19 How do you overcome any of the challenges you identified in Q20?

_____

Q20 Based on your experience in a programme leadership role, how do you believe improvements can be made to provide more effective student support in your programme?

_____

Q21 Where do you find the most support to try and carry out your programme leadership role effectively?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q22 In your opinion and in relation to programme leadership, do you think you would benefit from a dedicated professional development training course, and what would it be? Please justify your answer.

_____

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix B *Interview Questions*

Guiding interview questions

The overall research question for this study is:

What are academic staff experiences of providing programme leadership to students in their programme?

The following two sub-research questions support this:

- What key programme leadership challenges are experienced in supporting students during their time in the programme?
- How do academic staff experience their programme leadership strategies used to support students in making informed decisions about course and programme choices?

The following are questions that will inform the interview.

Role Expectation:

Leading question: How do your expectations of your role impact your support of students (for good or bad)?

Possible follow-up questions (if needed):

a. How do you measure the impact of your support on students' programme satisfaction and academic achievement?

b. What are some notable success stories or achievements of students that you have witnessed through your support as programme leader? Do you do any follow up with students you have consulted or advised?

c. How does your programme responsibility role have any impact on your research and teaching?

d. Based on your experiences, what would you like to personally do more of to enhance student support in programme selection and academic achievement?

Support availability:

Leading question: What specific support do you personally provide for students particularly with course and programme selection, as well as career pathways and future study?

Possible follow up questions (if needed):

a. What resources or tools do you offer students to enhance their programme selection process?

b. How do you collaborate with other departments and professional managers (eg., advisors, career counsellors) to support students in their programme selection?

c. From your experience interacting with students, what are the common reasons students may be confused about course or programme selection?

d. What strategies do you personally employ to ensure students make informed programme choices?

e. How do you facilitate the exploration of different programme options for students?

f. How do you provide academic guidance and support to students once they have selected a programme?

Student experiences

Leading question: What experiences do you think students in your programme(s) have regarding support for programme and course selection?

Possible follow up questions:

a. What are the common challenges you observe students facing when selecting a programme? Please describe.

b. In your experience, what are the key factors contributing to students' academic success within their chosen programme?

c. How do personally address the academic difficulties or challenges students face within their programme?

d. What strategies do you employ to promote student engagement and motivation within the programmes you oversee?

e. How do you assess and monitor students' progress and academic performance within their programme?

Appendix C *Participant Information Sheet*

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

3 July 2023

Project Title

Academic staff experiences of providing Programme Leadership to support students

An Invitation

My name is Sondos Ajail. I am a student in the Master of Education Programme at AUT and have been working in the educational field, especially in student support departments. I have worked as a student consultant for a franchised enrichment education organisation and as a university's student admission and registration manager. In 2023 I am working on a research project to fulfil the requirements of a dissertation for this qualification. This is an invitation to participate in this research project.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research explores the experiences of those who provide university programme leadership with a specific focus on supporting students and providing course selection guidance. This research aims to explore the experiences of those who provide university programme leadership with a specific focus on supporting students and including course selection guidance. It also aims to understand the best practices and challenges those in programme leadership face in supporting students. Understanding programme leadership practices, challenges and strategies may benefit other educators or policymakers to enhance and improve student support. The focus of the research is on academics' own personal experiences of their practices rather than a focus on university processes and support.

Various factors have influenced this research. From my previous experience working directly with programme leaders and students, I have noticed a few gaps and challenges programme leaders may face during their practice with student support. I have identified some gaps around the research of academics' middle leadership responsibilities for programmes, their work with students, and student choice. Some studies reveal that academic staff involved in programme leadership face too many responsibilities and expectations placed on their role (Cahill et al., 2015; Millburn, 2010; Murphy & Curtis, 2013). A recent systemic review of literature on middle leadership in the context of learning and teaching within universities has identified a research gap in academic middle leadership in the realm of learning and teaching at universities, and especially in the area of providing student support and guidance (Maddock, 2023).

Other studies discussed the role expectations of middle leadership and their responsibilities, for example, Cahill et al. (2015), mentioned the role responsibilities and expectations involve maintaining the quality of student education and promoting its enhancement. On the other hand, the role of those involved in programme leadership in supporting students is ill-identified, and they often find themselves at the boundaries of academic and professional work (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020). The lack of programme leaders' role description or recognition has also been identified in Bolden et al. (2012), where he identifies programme leadership positions and responsibilities as significant. For example, academic leadership positions can be a source of inspiration, guidance, support, and direction, especially for students (Bolden et al., 2012). In addition, Aitken's and O'Carroll's (2020) research findings described those who are involved in programme leadership as dedicated and passionate educators who may express job satisfaction, however, this

positive sentiment is balanced by a sense of frustration because of being ill-equipped to take the role initially and hindered by a lack of recognition.

The findings of my research will support the completion of my qualification in the Master of Education programme and may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified, and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Potential participants have been identified through the following recruitment process. Programme Leaders (or equivalent) email addresses are publicly available on the university website and have been invited to participate. This research project has specifically invited Programme Leaders (or equivalent) of three faculties from any New Zealand universities (Education, Science, Engineering, and Health). You have received this information because you meet this inclusion criteria.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you wish to participate in this research project, please use the link provided in this letter to complete the survey anonymously.

Survey responses will be accepted for two weeks.

https://aut.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/previewId/f208629b-7841-4af8-b1f7-94843a23e5c6/SV_aa5OVB1HnfZV33o?Q_CHL=preview&Q_SurveyVersionID=current

Consent information is provided at the start of the survey, and consent to participate is given by completing the survey. If you are willing and selected to participate in a follow-up interview, a consent form will be provided via email and must be completed before the interview.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice), and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can't withdraw from the study once you submit your answers. Once a survey is completed, I cannot identify who completed it, so I cannot withdraw your answers from the research.

What will happen in this research?

Participants in this research will complete a survey of between 20 – 23 questions. This survey will be completed digitally using the Qualtrics survey software. The survey consists of open questions and takes no more than 20 minutes to complete. I hope you will be able to complete this survey at a time that suits you over two weeks.

Upon completing this initial survey, you will be provided with a link to a separate survey that will allow you to indicate if you wish to be considered for a follow-up interview. Participants in the interview process are voluntary. A follow-up interview will be a 40 minutes involving 3 - 5 additional questions with the researcher. If you express interest and are selected to participate in an interview, a time will be made which is suitable for you. Interviews can take place online to minimise participation's impact on your time. Interviews will be recorded, and transcripts will be provided for participants to review.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Completing the survey or interviewing will present minimal risks. The reflective nature of the questions may result in low-level discomfort. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable.

What are the benefits?

Although there may not be any immediate benefit from your participation in the research, the experiences you share will contribute to the knowledge around programme leadership experiences. This may contribute to a better understanding of the pressures faced in role associated with programme leadership.

I plan to conduct my research and benefit or provide a sense of recognition and value to those involved in programme leadership roles. This research may identify what resources are required to improve the programme leadership and to develop more effective strategies and practices to support students in programme selection and academic achievement. Another benefit is shedding light on the challenges and the strategies of students' decision-making on programme selection. Programme Leaders (or equivalent) may use this information to create strategies to mentor and counsel students to make informed decisions and avoid withdrawal or obstacles.

This will interest people who do research and related professional development to develop and support middle leaders in higher education. Also, it will be of interest to those who are in charge of student support.

How will my privacy be protected?

As a participant, your privacy will be protected in several ways. Your privacy is protected through the protection of all data collected.

1. Throughout the research process, the data will only be accessible by myself and my supervisor.
2. After the research process, data will be stored securely by AUT for a standard period of 6 years, when it will then be destroyed.
3. In any publication of the research findings, your identity will be protected by providing pseudonyms and obscuring identifying details to protect confidentiality.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

Participation in the survey will take no more than 20 minutes of your time. If you are selected to participate in a follow-up interview, this will take an additional 40 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have 2 weeks to consider your participation in this research process. Participants will be selected from the responses received by 13th September 2023.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

When the research project is completed, you will be able to access a summary of the findings at this link
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1l8pBJDIve6s_urtZPvtzOzoHM70pWhpS?usp=drive_link

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Howard Youngs, , howard.youngs@aut.ac.nz 09 921 9999 ext 9633

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, ethics@aut.ac.nz ,+64(9) 921 9999 ext 6038..

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:.

Researcher Contact Details:

Sondos Ziad Ajail

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Howard Youngs, howard.youngs@aut.ac.nz , 09 921 9999 ext 9633

If you wish to participate in this research project, please follow this link to complete the anonymous survey (https://aut.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/previewId/f208629b-7841-4af8-b1f7-94843a23e5c6/SV_aa5OVB1HnfZV33o?Q_CHL=preview&Q_SurveyVersionID=current).

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13ᵗʰ September, 2023, AUTEC Reference number 23/211.

References:

Aitken, G., & O'Carroll, S. (2020). Academic identity and crossing boundaries: the role of the Programme Director in postgraduate taught programmes. *Higher Education Research & Development, 39*(7), 1410-1424. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1737658

Bolden, R., Gosling, J., O'Brien, A., Peters, K., Ryan, M., & Haslam, A. (2012). An academic leadership: Changing conceptions, identities and experiences in UK Higher Education. *Leadership Foundation for Higher Education - Research and Development, Series 3*, Publication 4.

Cahill, J., Bowyer, J., Rendell, C., Hammond, A., & Korek, S. (2015). An exploration of how programme leaders in higher education can be prepared and supported to discharge their roles and responsibilities effectively. *Educational Research, 57*(3), 272-286. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2015.1056640

Maddock, L. C. (2023). Academic middle leaders, middle leading and middle leadership of university learning and teaching: A systematic review of the higher education literature. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 45*(4), 357-392. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2022.2160888

Milburn, P. C. (2010). The role of programme directors as academic leaders. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 11*(2), 87-95. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787410365653

Murphy, M., & Curtis, W. (2013). The micro-politics of micro-leadership: Exploring the role of programme leader in English universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 35*(1), 34-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080x.2012.727707

Appendix D *Consent Form*

Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: **Academic staff experiences of providing Programme Leadership to support students**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Howard Youngs**

Researcher: **Sondos Ziad Ajail**

○   I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.

○   I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.

○   I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature: ....

Transcriber's name: ....

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

....

Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13th September, 2023, AUTEC Reference number 23/211.

Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix E *Interview Coding*

INTERVIEW ONE

Text	Codes and comments	Axial coding
Question: my first question is going to be basically about your expectations of the Role. What was your expectation from the beginning before you applied to that position? what was in your mind, and when you got into the position, how do you feel it did meet your expectations already? **Answer**: Sure, so I've worked at the university for 20 years and so I've been in the role two years as my second year in it. and saw lots of people in the role and kind of had a good understanding mostly of what was involved in it. I didn't apply for the job expression of interests went out then no one put their hand up for it, **so my boss at the time shoulder tap me and said how about you! and I was in the midst of finishing my Doctorate and so I gave it some thought and agreed to take the roll on starting at the beginning of last year rather than previous.** Within understanding, I have time to finish my doctorate, and so that was all able to be met um and so I was quite pleased about that because there's been a number of programme leaders you know prior to me. **My understanding of some of our systems and processes wasn't met so that expectation of everything would be in place just wasn't true.** <u>An example as external moderation now sending courses off for external moderation just wasn't happening and so I had to reinstate that reinstate how we random certain committees, reinstate expectations of different, you know paper leaders or course records, you know there's all of those sorts of things that that needed refining and reinstating.</u> The other thing that was a big bit of work that I **first did for my first got the job I was overwhelmed with communication** so communication from students, communication from staff, from external people, it was just phenomenal and you know part of that is because I've got eighteen years of experience working at this institutions so I have a huge amount of institutional knowledge and I would get a lot of inquiries anyway even when I wasn't in this role. So what I tried to do, **especially to manage the student communication, was created a communication ladder to help students navigate who they needed to talk to! about what! and potentially disseminate information so that they didn't actually need to talk to anyone.** They could just go to the communication ladder and go right or my queries about this right. I just need to follow these instructions etc. I'm still would get queries about that there is **something to be said about written instructions versus verbal communication. hearing what's written, I think does make a big difference for students we can write down the programme pathway for example and they still will query different things about it,** so yeah a lot of those queries were around you know I failed what do I need to enrol in next semester can I continue and pick this paper up alongside everything else I was doing you know all of those sort of questions there was questions about wanting to take leave absences questions that withdrawing transferring to another university then you've got the queries of students that yet students wanting to transfer in you know so it was it was quite overwhelming but I think that was probably **a big shock to me and the other expectation is I thought that there be a lot more sort of leadership and teaching and learning. and curriculum development and you know and that sort of things. it's actually a lot more Admin than what I really hoped. A lot more report writing you know making sure that course leaders are reporting all things.** 2. **Question**: my second question is have you felt that after being a programme leader have you been, or maybe I'm not going to use the word	Expectation wasn't true. External moderation to send courses off for external moderation wasn't happening. The leader had to reinstate that Overwhelmed with communication. So what I tried to do, **especially to manage the student communication, was created a communication ladder to help students navigate who they needed to talk to! about what! and potentially disseminate information so that they didn't actually need to talk to anyone.** Students still will enquire for more information even if it the full pathway was written or provided. Common enquiries; failing and enrolments. Seeking for advices. Leave absences, withdrawing. Transferring students and new students.	Role Expectation Overwhelming Communication Reinstate "Make a change" Common enquiries Shock Hierachy need Communication

INTERVIEW Two

Text	Codes and comments	Axial coding
17th October Tuesday Question 1: so we will start with our, first of all, **your role expectations**. What was our expectation of the role before you accepted the role, okay? Answer: so I took on the role of programme leader when the previous programme leader burnt out and retired, and I was up and <u>no one else wanted</u> to do the job and really can't do good job so <u>I was asked if I would do it in a temporary</u> facility so that will contextualise some of my answers a little bit but it also gives us a lot to talk about in relation to the sustainability of these roles and why it is that sometimes their roles that people do reluctantly rather than with a sense of real like <u>I want to do this to make a difference</u> in you know for <u>not just my career but for my institution and for the students</u> so so I took on the role just as we were rolling out a new programme at the start of the pandemic and with a new learning management system and the university right. critical mass of change and we didn't know it at the time but we were just about to enter into major restructuring as well within the whole university so the you know right and that <u>so quite a lot of stress around secure job security and also expectations that we would be changing</u> so so so the <u>first thing I expected my role is that I would be helping the new learning management system</u> okay so that so that the lecturers and the students were well supported and yeah um and you know changing the LMS yeah um and in that I was supporting the roll out of the new programmes now one other problems here as I wasn't involved in the development of the new programmes or the LMS really I would say LMS from now on that's the learning management systems so I was you know so I knew that part of my role would be to support the delivery of these new programmes um and within a new online space and during a pandemic the you know there was a clear part of the role I'm I also knew that my role would be to admit new students and that my role would also be to at the time at least I was given <mark>we had a separation of pastoral support for students north campus South campus</mark> okay right yeah so across the different canvases whilst I was the overall programme leader we also had <mark>someone</mark>	<u>no one else wanted I was asked if I would do it in a temporary.</u> start of the pandemic and with a new learning management system and the university <u>so quite a lot of stress around secure job security and also expectations that we would be changing</u> <u>the role expectation was completely different what's in the reality practices.</u> "first thing I expected <u>my role is that I would be helping the new learning management system</u>" Some clear information about the role. The participant suggested a change to make his role more easy and smooth	no one else wanted the role I was asked if I would do it in a temporary " to make a difference" stress around secure job security" Overwhelming. in New Zealand now we have a code of well-being Student well-being Pandemic Fair of the unknown. Why to do a course and programme. Pressure externally from faculty and wider faculty. Not a lot of support from faculty or the wider university.

Appendix F *Survey Invitation*

i

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Dissertation Research Survey

Dear Programme (Academic) Leader/Director (or equivalent),

I hope this message finds you well. I am a Master of Education student writing this email to invite you to participate in a survey for my Master's dissertation. My research aims to explore experiences of those who provide university Programme leadership with specific focus on supporting students and providing course selection guidance. The focus is on your experiences rather than university systems. Your email has been obtained via the university website.

As an academic with a programme leadership role (or equivalent), your experience and knowledge in this field are crucial in understanding the challenges and strategies in guiding students through their programme choices and academic success. A recent systemic review of literature on middle leadership in the context of learning and teaching within universities has identified a research gap in academic middle leadership in the realm of learning and teaching at universities (Maddock, 2023). Maddock's (2023) systematic review revealed that little is known regarding academic programme leadership and leaders' oversight of student experience, which includes student support. Participation in this survey may contribute to knowledge and potential improvements in student support systems and understanding of the challenges academic leaders like yourself face. A Participant Information Sheet is attached to this email for you to read first if you choose to participate.

The survey is an online questionnaire that will take up to 20 minutes. At the end of the survey, there is another invitation to a 40 minutes face-to-face interview. Please accept the invitation if you would like to share your experience and input further into this research. Your responses will be treated strictly confidential, and your identity will remain anonymous throughout the study.

Please read the participant's information sheet attached for further information about the survey and to be able to access the survey link. This will direct you to the online questionnaire, where you can provide your responses if you decide to participate. Please note that your participation is entirely voluntary.

Your contribution to this research is highly valuable, and your insights will be greatly appreciated. By participating, you will not only contribute to the broader academic

knowledge of programme leadership but also opportunity to reflect on your own experiences and how contribute to improving educational practices.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require further clarification about the research or the survey. I or my supervisor (Dr. Howard Youngs howard.youngs@aut.ac.nz) will gladly provide any additional information.

Thank you in advance for considering participation in this research survey. Your valuable insights will significantly impact understanding of programme leaderships experiences of academic staff in supporting students in programme selection and academic achievement.

Sincerely,

Sondos Ajail

AUT Student.

Student ID no. 0509669

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13 September, 2023, AUTEC Reference number 23/211

Appendix G *Face-to-face Interview Consent Form*

Consent Form

For use when interviews are involved.

Project title: **Academic staff experiences of providing Programme Leadership to support students**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Howard Youngs**

Researcher: **Sondos Ziad Ajail**

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 03 July 2023.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○   No○

Participant's signature: ....

Participant's name: ....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13ᵗʰ September 2023 AUTEC Reference number 23/211

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

Oral Consent Protocol

For use when interviews are being conducted by videoconference.

Project title: **Academic staff experiences of providing Programme Leadership to support students**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Howard Youngs**

Researcher: **Sondos Ziad Ajail**

The participant joins the videoconference

○ Do you agree to my recording your consent to participate?

If they agree, then the record function will be activated and they will be asked the following:

○ Have you read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 03 July 2023?

○ Do you have any questions about the research?

○ Do you understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that the in terview will also be audio-recorded and transcribed?

○ Do you understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (your choice) and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.?

○ Do you understand that if you withdraw from the study then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used? However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

○ Do you agree to take part in this research?

○ Do you wish to receive a summary of the research findings? (please tick one): Yes○   No○

○ Do you want me to send you a copy of the audio recording for this consent? Yes○   No○

○ Please confirm you name and contact details

Participant's name: ....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

....

I will now turn off the recording of the Consent and then will start a separate recording for the interview.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13th September 2023 AUTEC Reference number 23/211

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form