

The Role of Head of Department

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<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/subtext/archive.htm> subtext

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Sharing subtext's concern with an absence of letters, an opportunity presented itself with comments relating to the role of a Head of Department: 's/he does not have authority in a line management sense, but is primus inter pares, using authority granted by those over whom it is wielded'. This surely harks back to a different world. From my own recent experience, it is routine that department meetings – often cancelled, agenda vetted, and formal motions ignored – serve as a conduit for reporting decisions taken elsewhere. With the centre driven by performance indicators, traditional notions of collegiality and scholarship face similar demise. How times can change; but perhaps my experience is not typical. It would be interesting to hear from those on campus who feel that their Head of Department's role is exercised authentically by the primus inter pares model.

Charles Carter, Lancaster's first Vice-Chancellor, saw the first duty of a University as the conservation of existing knowledge through the reproduction and re-energising of ideas through scholarship and teaching. And, although the Green Paper of 1985 singled a 'concentration of research activity' and 'selectivity' in UGC allocations, Lancaster contracts of employment have maintained an equal status for scholarship: 'On appointment you will become a member of the University, which is the sole employing authority. You must pursue advanced studies or research in your subject.'

However, most recently from Lancaster, we have 'Our strategy for 2020'. Word-counts across that defining document show: 'global(ly)' 24; 'teaching' 32; 'research' 64; and 'scholarship' 0 (nil).

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