The Centre Administration Role: An Academic Perspective

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Research centre roles

• To aggregate internal research capability across similar disciplinary areas with a view to projecting research excellence externally.

• To ‘encourage researchers to organise their research in a manner that is consistent with the University’s mission and its goal to have world-class research conducted in a select number of areas’ (Griffith Research Centres Policy)

• To improve the university’s research performance by providing opportunities and support for balanced (40/40/20), research-intensive, and research-only staff.
Definitions

‘Administration’

•  *Process or activity of running a business, organization, etc.*

‘Academic’

•  *Relating to higher learning.*

•  *Scholarly to the point of being unaware of the outside world.*

•  *Theoretical or speculative without a practical purpose or intention.*
The academic-administration divide

- Designation of ‘academic’ and ‘non-academic’ staff signifies difference in institutional roles (e.g. ‘clock punching’ contrasted with ‘flexible work hours’ work cultures).
- But gap has narrowed in recent years with the increasingly process-driven nature of universities.
- Academics are not trained to be administrators, but then, most aren’t trained to be teachers either.
- Administrators often have had careers outside universities, but most have a tertiary qualification and are therefore familiar with the academic environment.
The academic-administration nexus

- **Research** = Pursuit and advancement of higher knowledge through scholarly rigour.

- **End**: Publication of results in reputable, high impact, refereed outlets.

- **Means**: Time and support to undertake project research.

- **Strategies**: Quarantining of time the key. Organization and focus on the task.

- Administrative support crucial at all stages of the research cycle (e.g. funding applications; editorial assistance, ethics approvals; advice on university policy regarding leave etc.).
A centre director’s perspective

▪ Role of centre directors is to balance scholarship, administration, and (in GAI’s case) significant external outreach. Hands-on strategic direction with light management touch.

▪ Where am I most reliant on my centre manager?

- Situational awareness.
- Budget management.
- Practical advice for academic staff attached to centre.
- Maintaining hierarchy of tasking among all administrative staff.
- A second pair of expert eyes.
- Advice—tactical and strategic.
Academic tips for administrators

- Working with academics *is* different. We are:
  - Thoughtful (impractical)
  - Judicious (indecisive)
  - Scholarly (we live in ivory towers)
  - Humorous (we laugh at our own geeky jokes)
  - Ethical (if we remember to fill in the right forms)

- Fulfilling key non-scholarly tasks—centre reporting, formulating *attainable* KPIs, fostering professionalism, maintaining a sense of humour, keeping administrative staff sanity intact—has a direct impact on research performance. If your academic manager doesn’t realise this, they need a career change.

- Universities are not corporations and they are not stock-in-trade businesses. To quote Glyn Davis, they are institutions that form part of ‘an international republic of learning stretching back over half a millennium with the responsibility of teaching the next generation’.
Who is in charge here?