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Nomenclature in higher education: "non-academic" as a construct

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the nomenclature surrounding professional services staff within higher education in the UK. Taking a case study method, it uses a qualitative approach to understand the term 'non-academic' to describe the diverse range of professional services roles. Both professional services and academic staff were interviewed and there is a difference in opinions among all staff as to the views around the term. It illustrates the importance of using professional services to describe staff who may not have an academic role. It evidences respect is important to individuals in whatever role they may hold within an institution. While there are several pertinent issues currently being discussed in higher education, such as educational technology and the need for vocational qualifications, this is still an important issue that has been ongoing for many years and as such still deserves attention.

KEYWORDS

Professional services; nomenclature; academic administration; identity; relationships

Introduction

This paper takes an in-depth look at the nomenclature surrounding professional services staff in the UK. It evaluates the literature around naming conventions within higher education, before reporting on the findings of a recent research project which focused on the identity of professional services staff. The paper concludes with an overview of the findings from this study. It does not present an argument that there should be an overall naming convention within UK higher education for professional services, but it is an attempt to understand how professional services staff feel about being termed 'non-academic'. This term is still used across the UK higher education sector despite professional services being the current term used by many institutions (Shepherd, 2017; Melling, 2018).

Language underpins cultural norms, big and small D discourses that determine, impose, and project identity. Unless language is critically analysed then the construct of identity is formed based on biased stereotypes that normalise power dynamics (academic vs non-academic) and perpetuate systemic injustice. Although this debate in the UK has been ongoing for some time (Whitchurch, 2006; Henkel, 2010) it is important this debate continues as higher education evolves, so do staff roles within it. This paper

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addresses the language used around professional services staff and their perceptions of this nomenclature.

The research concentrates on higher education administrators in the UK who are under the umbrella term of professional services. The UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) definition also classes other occupations under this term including trades people and caring and leisure occupations as shown in the table below (HESA, 2018). In this paper, the term professional services is used to describe staff who are working in higher education and are not on an academic contract.

When interrogating the data, HESA (2018) break down the professional services figures into further classifications and this demonstrates the breadth of professional services roles. However, frustratingly, they do not explain what is meant by each categorisation.

Current literature

Historical naming conventions

The naming convention for professional services staff has changed over the years and 'professional services' is the current favoured terminology used in the higher education sector in the UK (Lauwerys, 2008; Whitchurch, 2008; Hogan, 2014; Shepherd, 2017; Melling, 2018). Some institutions use 'professional support' or 'professional support services' (Wallace and Marchant, 2011; Sebalj et al., 2012). In Australia, a sector wide consultation resulted in all universities using the term 'professional staff', although this is not always the case in every university (Bossu et al., 2018) and the Australian Department for Education refers to professional services staff as 'non-academic' in their statistical data (Australian Government, 2022). The Association of University Administrators (AUA), an organisation representing professional services in the UK decided to change its name in 2023 to the Association of Higher Education Professionals (AHEP) to move away from the term administrator (AHEP, 2023). Understandably, a professional body cannot keep changing its name to keep up with societal changes but given 'professional services' is now recognised as an umbrella term for all staff who work in university administration, then unsurprisingly a name change was due.

The term 'non-academic' has been historically used in higher education to define staff who do not teach, this can include programme administrators, HR and finance staff, cleaners, porters and technicians (Conway, 2000; Gornitzka and Larsen, 2004; Sebalj et al., 2012). De Sousa (2018. para. 3) states 'one might argue that the reason the term non-academic is used is because of the breadth of types of staff that operate in HE, and that it's just easier to say over any other term' (online). He then goes on to say though, given the diverse range of staff, this is lazy labelling. 'Othering' professional services staff as outside the norm echoes the work of Brekhus (2008) and Allen-Collinson (2009) who argue that 'Othering' and using the label 'non' can be associated with exclusion and the 'norm' being perceived as the privileged group. Brekhus (2008) uses the marked/unmarked framework to demonstrate othering. He argues it is useful as a way of 'expressing the asymmetrical relationship between identities … and those identities that are treated as distinct from the norm' (2008, p.1062). Brekhus (2008) references Allen-Collinson's (2006) work to illustrate how

Table 1. HESA Non-Academic staff classification.

Managers, directors, and senior officials
Professional occupations
Associate professional and technical occupations
Administrative and secretarial occupations
Skilled trades occupations
Caring, leisure and other service occupations
Sales and customer service occupations
Process, plant, and machine operatives
Elementary occupations

this framework can be used not only for race, class and gender but also for occupational groups, such as staff within higher education. Professional services staff are seen as the other to the normative academic staff who are often at the forefront of an institution.

The use of professional services or professional support is now common across a lot of the UK sector (Jones, 2018). Within the overarching term of professional services there are numerous roles and titles from administrator to manager, technician to assistant as evidenced by Table 1.

Connotations

Whitchurch (2006) argues the use of professional services can still have connotations of being a service area, there to meet the needs of others. There is an argument that both professional services and academic staff are there to service the needs of their students, within reason, given that students now see themselves as customers paying for a service.

The term 'support staff' has been used to describe professional services staff and indicates that professional services staff work at universities to provide support. However, there is still the question as to who they are supporting: the students, academics, or the university. This can be misleading to both professional services staff and academics. The view of professional services staff as a secretary who is there to undertake the administrative work of an academic is no longer viable (Szekeres, 2004). The change in nomenclature is an attempt to demonstrate this. Given the rise in research into the third space sphere, a space where a hybrid group of professionals sit alongside professional services and academic staff and undertake work in both spheres (McIntosh and Nutt, 2022); Whitchurch (2018) argues that the terminology and definitions of professional services and academics may soon become outdated. However, the history and identity tied up with academics and their space is, in in the researcher's opinion, too entrenched to alleviate itself of its naming convention.

Both Szekeres (2011) and Sebalj et al. (2012) agree that defining staff as what they are not can lead to negative implications, frustration and identity issues. Gornall (1999) argues this can also be seen as a class issue, 'the distinctions are telling reflections of the British class system, implying as they do unequal value and differences in perceived status' (1999, p.44). The perceptions on how academics and professional services staff are different is obvious when using the generic terms of each group. By using naming conventions that denigrate the importance of the role professional services play within an institution, it can devalue that contribution. According to Simpson & Fitzgerald

(2014) the idea of being 'less than' suggests that professional services staff do not have as valuable a contribution to make as academic staff to the university.

Melling's (2018) research into job titles found that even the terms administrators and coordinators were contested by professional services staff as they did not accurately portray their role and undervalued their contribution. Although the term non-academic is becoming less common in the UK (Sebalj et al., 2012), a 2016 paper from South Africa uses the term to describe all staff who are not academics (Davis et al., 2016). While international terminology is not the purview of this paper, it is interesting to note that nomenclature is different across the globe for professional services. The most similar countries to the UK in terms of university structures and terminology are the US and Australia (Whitchurch, 2009). As mentioned, some areas within Australia have changed the terminology to reflect the modern professional services structures within the country (Bossu et al., 2018). The US has a very different structure and nomenclature for its professional administration staff reflects a more blended approach to administration and academia with the two often mixing. In the case of the US, senior management are often referred to as 'academic administrators' (Whitchurch, 2009; Bossu et al., 2018).

The figured world of higher education

Holland et al. (1998, p. 52) describe figured worlds as:

> A socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others.

The culturally constructed world of academia is historical, and identities have been developed over a long period of time. However, these identities are constantly in flux due to the ever-changing nature of academia. Holland intimates that identities have been established during the evolution of higher education, and argues 'in the world of academia, being verbally aggressive may be a sign of high status and position' (1998, p.131). While this statement can be considered a generalisation, identities of both academic and professional services staff have developed organically as the system evolved. For Holland 'identities are enacted and produced, and individuals take up positions in accordance with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power, deference, and entitlement, social affiliation and distance' (1998, p.127). If the identities of professional services and academic staff are positioned in terms of power dynamics, does the term 'non-academic' devalue the position of professional services staff by othering them as outside the norm?

Figured worlds revolve around identity and the formation of the many identities which are assigned by others and ourselves. Social constructivism, within which identity is a construct formed between people and subject to social, historical and cultural factors, is an important part of the many figured worlds that inhabit education (Holland et al., 1998; Robinson, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Urrieta, 2007a; Choudry and Williams, 2017).

Summary

Nomenclature within higher education appears important to professional services staff according to previous studies on the changing dynamics of professional services. It has

played a key role in delineating workplace identities. This research attempts to understand if the terminology used within higher education has an impact on the professional identity of professional services staff. The findings will add to the debate around the use of 'non-academic' and the possible impact on identity.

Methods

Data were created via interviews across professional services and academic staff. Five professional services staff were interviewed in this research from a variety of different roles across an academic school. All five sat under a professional services contract of employment. Five academic staff were also interviewed. While this is a small number of staff within a limited scope of one academic school in a university, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) argue that a minimum of nine interviews is enough to reach data saturation and the research presented is a small case study. The academic staff all had full time academic contracts which included a workload of both teaching and research. All staff worked within an academic school within a university in the North West of England. Convenience sampling was used to access participants (Wragg, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011). The table below demonstrates the range of those staff interviewed.

It was important to the researcher to understand the nomenclature surrounding professional services from both occupational groups as different terminology is used to describe professional services within the workplace by both academics and professional services and this added an additional dimension to the research.

Interviews were transcribed manually and thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) reflexive approach. The subject positionality is important in terms of the balance of language and power (Fairclough, 2001). Fairclough (2001) highlights Foucault's work on socially constructed discourse which links into the figured world theory of positionality, that we are both the author and product of our words. Halliday (2002, p. 51) states 'meaning cannot be reported in a way that is independent of the observer because she or he has to understand what is being said and this implicates them in the subject of their research'. Gibb's (2008) discusses reactivity and the influence the researcher, a question or even body language could have on a participant. He goes on to argue that participants may respond to questions 'based on how they want to see themselves' (2008, p. 695). In the case of this research, it could also be that participants answered questions based on how they wanted to be perceived by someone they work alongside.

Limitations

There is an acknowledgement by the researcher that this is a small sample of staff but as the research was in the form of a case study, the sample size is adequate to get an understanding of the use of nomenclature within the academic school (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022), see Table 2 for details. The use of a case study was based on focusing the research within a school within a particular institution. While all higher education institutions are structured slightly differently, they encompass schools, departments, or faculties in which academics teach, and professional services staff who undertake a variety of roles. There is also an element of centralised

Table 2. Participant details.

Job Title	Academic/Professional Services	Time at Institution	Gender
Placements Manager	Professional Services	16 years	Male
Technician	Professional Services	5 years	Male
Programme Assistant	Professional Services	3 years	Female
Programme Administrator	Professional Services	15 years	Female
Programme Administrator	Professional Services	16 years	Female
Associate Dean	Academic	21 years	Male
Senior Lecturer	Academic	14 years	Female
Lecturer	Academic	4 years	Female
Head of Department	Academic	5 years	Female
Senior Research Fellow	Academic	9 years	Female

professional services administration. The findings of this research could offer insights to the situation across the sector. Yin (2018) argues case studies are useful when trying to understand a social phenomenon, why such a phenomenon exists, and are used extensively in educational research. Literature on research methodology examines how case studies can be undertaken to explore contested and complex areas of social phenomena even though the research may be situated in a wider social context (Stake, 2000, Yin, 2018). Given that the focus is on understanding and exploring experiences and interactions, rather than measuring or quantifying them, case studies are a tool that allow open questions and the chance to gather rich data to gain an in-depth understanding within a limited context (Stake, 2000, Bassey, 2002, Yin, 2018).

Nomenclature

The focus of this paper is the concept of nomenclature and how professional services, and academics perceive the term 'non-academic'. All participants were asked the same question in relation to this topic, specifically their thoughts on the term 'non-academic', a term often used to describe anyone who does not teach or undertake research.

Perceptions of the term 'non-academic' by professional services staff

As discussed in the literature, the reframing of professional services definitions has been ongoing from the mid-2000s. The use of non-academic, support staff, ancillary and administrators is now declining across the UK, the US and Australia (Whitchurch, 2017, Bossu et al., 2018). This could be linked to the increasing corporatisation of higher education in the twenty first century (Collini, 2012) or the recognition of the diverse range of titles once used across the sector (Whitchurch, 2017). The literature appears to be referring to staff in higher education administration roles, and the focus of this research is on the academic administrator. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (2018) still refers to all staff who are not classed as academic as 'non-academic'. It appears there are different definitions even within that term to the different types of role within this over-arching label (see Table 1).

The professional services staff interviewed had differing views on the terminology, but three of the respondents were indifferent about it:

> I personally don't have an issue with it.
> It doesn't offend me in any way . . . It has to be snappy, and you can understand it quick so that doesn't bother me because, you know, I'm not academic, we are not academic.

One participant had not heard the term being used before but again did not have strong feelings regarding it:

> I am not offended by it . . . It's just, ok it's like non-academic but then I don't see why, I am not ashamed of being in admin and I don't see why we can't just be called administrators, but I recognise that it's a very, very broad sort of field.

It is interesting that the participant had not heard of the term before despite the fact it is used by the university sector in certain surveys etc. Although as a part-time member of staff who has been with the institution for just over three years it had clearly not resonated.

While three of the respondents were indifferent when referred to as 'non-academics', several research papers have found that even the term 'administrator' is contested within higher education. Hogan (2014) argues that the term should be valued within higher education. Melling's (2018) research found that some professional services staff were unhappy with the title 'administrator' as it is too broad and does not define to outsiders the kind of work they undertake. In fact, there was only one professional services participant who felt that 'non-academic' was a negative way to describe the role:

> I think, it would obviously be better to use the person's job role so to refer to us as professional services instead of non-academics. I think it kind of makes you feel less important because the word non is quite negative, whereas professional services makes you feel more of a team so we're a professional services team, we're sort of separate to the academic members of staff but we're just as important, we're still a team.

This idea of being less than and othered links to the work of a number of researchers including Conway (2000); Lauwerys (2002); Szekeres (2004; 2011); Wallace and Marchant (2011); Sebalj et al. (2012) and De Sousa (2018). Sebalj et al. (2012, p. 463) writes of the 'forgotten workforce' and De Sousa (2018) argues it is lazy terminology to describe a diverse range of people and roles. Hall (1997) uses Bakhtin (1981) to illustrate the concept of othering, and how the other is needed as dialogue is created between two or more speakers, but does not belong to either. Therefore, there must be an 'other' to create meaning. By terming staff who do not teach to be 'non-academic', difference is created and therefore 'othering' is vital to this meaning.

The UK government commissioned the Dearing (1997) to focus on the future of higher education. While using the term 'non-academic', it reported on how vital professional services staff were in the support and guidance of students during their time at university. In 2012 HESA moved higher level professional services staff who had previously been referred to as 'non-academic' professionals into a category with academic staff entitled higher education professionals (HESA, 2018; Baltaru, 2019). However, they still define 'non-academic' staff as those that do not have an academic employment function. They include managers, student welfare workers, secretaries, caretakers and cleaners (HESA, 2018). By claiming this term as a definition, this is encouraging researchers and institutions to use 'non-academic' as the norm when talking about professional services staff.

While 'non-academic' is an easy way to describe a variety of staff, it does not help move the nomenclature forward to recognise the diverse range of staff who sit under this umbrella and use the term professional services. However, outside the world of higher education, there are many occupational groups with one naming convention when there are many different categories within it, doctors are one example, teachers are another. As someone who works in and is researching higher education, it is clear there is a vast difference in the roles that professional services cover, but for those with little knowledge of higher education, 'academic' and 'non-academic' are easy ways to identify a generic staff role.

The figured world of higher education seems to have limited opportunities for professional services staff to start the process of self-authoring and positioning their identity outside that which has been allocated for them. The technician in the interview group, who although a member of professional services, has career ambitions to become an academic, had already started the process of self-authoring by distinguishing academics who teach from those who research, which in his opinion is the highest position an academic can reach. He argues one can be a researcher without teaching:

> I suppose not teaching wouldn't necessarily classify you as a non-academic, obviously you can be involved in lots and lots of research and do no teaching but the pinnacle I suppose many people would say of academia would be a position in which you could do lots of research and no teaching.

The idea of academic staff being more concerned with research is backed up by Deem (2010, p. 42), who writes that 'academics, particularly those in research-intensive universities, tend to enjoy their research more than some of their other activities'. It is no surprise that the participant believes research is more important than teaching to academic staff, particularly given the money it can bring into an institution. This argument articulates the micro environments within higher education, those which encompass research staff and academic staff plus professional services.

When governmental agencies have defined professional services in a certain way, it is difficult to get those within power to view them as anything else. Allen-Collinson (2006), when writing about research administrators, states:

> In the case of academic staff, it can be argued that the power imbalance generated by their generally greater academic capital (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 272) and academic credibility enabled them to define as 'other' and 'non-academic', the research administrators.

Although Allen-Collinson was writing about research administrators, this can be applied to all professional services staff. It is a stretch for Allen-Collinson to blame only academic staff for othering professional services staff when the terminology is also generated by government organisations.

The same technician, who could be described as a third-space professional, and tutor, and therefore straddling both the academic and professional services figured worlds, could see how 'non-academic' could be useful from an institutional level. He felt it did not capture those research-intensive staff such as research assistants and fellows or roles like his that covered both areas:

> I can see how that would be a useful distinction from a university level, but I am not sure it would capture those kind of higher end researchers or even necessarily, potentially people

> like me who, you know, would my one to one teaching support count as teaching and therefore make me an academic or would it be that's not considered teaching in which case, I'm a non-academic?

The argument put forward here regarding 'non-academic' not encompassing researchers was based around the specific question of describing the term as someone who does not teach. This discussion about differentiation prompted a question around the definition of an academic which was quite difficult for him to articulate:

> An academic, for me certainly, an academic does involve doing research and trying to be at the forefront of you know, developing knowledge . . . So, there is a kind of cultural expectation for us that [XXX] academics should be doing research, for me academia has always been about being involved in the research, doing something new, asking new questions, coming up with new methods to solve problems. So, I think there's for me the crucial aspect of academia is probably a novelty, that you are doing something that is new and different and hopefully useful.

The language here is interesting, despite being a member of professional services, he uses the term 'us' to describe an academic, yet also admitted that in the standard definition, he is classed as 'non-academic'. This is where the identity of staff who straddle two roles within a third space becomes dis-jointed. It feels like he is held within professional services by a job description and line management structure, but his heart and career path are with the academic side. He is attempting to break down the barriers between the two worlds by redefining his own identity despite his current position and job description. Feather's (2015) response to Lewis's (2014) paper on academic identity was clear about the difference between the two: 'administrators are not academics, they do not teach students, which is one of the defining factors of an academic' (Feather, 2015, p. 326). This definition does not consider third space staff but remains a prevailing view, that only academic staff, by definition teach students and anyone outside that category is therefore 'non-academic'.

Identity is linked to the words that one uses to describe oneself and how they are relative to the figured world in which one resides (Holland et al., 1998). By straddling both worlds this can cause confusion and the naming conventions here are important as they can describe identity and value. Bakhtin (1986, p. 87) writes, 'when we select words in the process of constructing an utterance, we by no means always take them from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form'. In other words, what Bakhtin is arguing is that language cannot be neutral. We are always influenced by our upbringing, and those who surround us, in terms of the words we use but also how we interpret words spoken to us. The use of the term 'third space' has not yet permeated the figured world of higher education, outside of research, to an extent that is used in the same context as professional services or academic. Until there is more understanding and use of third space, those who inhabit that space will be placed in the more accepted space of academic or professional services and according to Bakhtin's (1986) argument those terms come with historic connotations and meanings.

The term 'non-academic' assigns meaning to someone who does not teach or research in its simplest form. Research indicates it is taken as an insult by professional services staff within higher education because of the identity it assigns to someone being termed 'non'. They are being described by what they are not and

therefore outside the figured world of academia. Holland et al. (1998, p. 68) use the example of an alcoholic to demonstrate the change of identity when labelled in a certain manner:

> If a drinker does accept the label of alcoholic as applying to himself and accepts and acts on the identity of an alcoholic, this transformation of identity, from a drinking non-alcoholic (normal drinker) to an alcoholic, requires a radical reinterpretation of who he is, of self.

As the third space is not currently a familiar concept within higher education (outside research) this reinterpretation must take place within the identity of a professional services staff member which can be challenging especially when working with academic staff. This paper focuses on both the research surrounding this concept and the practical use of terminology in a higher education institution. While it is prominent in research and literature (Botterill, 2018; Whitchurch, 2012; Veles et al., 2019; Veles, 2022) the concept does not appear in the organisational lexicon of many higher education institutional staff and was not familiar to many of the interview participants. The interconnectedness of both the concept/research and the understanding of those working within higher education appears limited from this study. This maybe because professional services staff within higher education are not aware of the concept and have no concerns with using the term professional services. The third space concept is more prevalent in academic developers (Bisset, 2018) and these roles were not involved in this study so widening research in this area to include academic and educational developers may offer different results. This research focuses on both the research surrounding this concept and the practical use of terminology in a higher education institution.

The traditional boundaries between academic and professional services are breaking down in certain areas, leaving staff searching for a clearer identity (Whitchurch, 2018). But where they are not, for example in school programme administration, where three of the five professional services participants work, this idea of being 'less than' does not seem to permeate, except for one participant.

Perceptions of the term 'non-academic' by academic staff

The academic staff who took part in the interviews had much stronger views on the term 'non-academic' and were more adamant in their aversion to it:

> I wouldn't say it's a very complimentary term.
> I always think defining someone by what they are not is a ridiculous way of defining somebody, define by what they are.
> I think it's simply ridiculous.

It could be argued that academic staff (this could be interpreted as a generalisation) are consciously or unconsciously complicit in the continued use of the expression by using the term within their research.

The difficulty with insider research is the tendency to assume and misread a participants intentions, particularly as the subject matter is personal (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). However, the academic staff's responses should be taken at face value and assume they are as uncomfortable with the term as research indicates professional services are. This links to the methodological issue of 'reactivity'.

A concept which can affect the validity of research as a response can be impacted by the positionality of the interviewer and the question being asked (Gibb, 2008, Cohen et al., 2011).

Naming conventions

Two of the academic staff did not like the term 'academic'. For them, the established notions of terminology and outdated practices of defining staff by their generic roles seems old-fashioned and historic, even though it is a traditional part of the figured world and nomenclature of higher education:

> The phrase 'academic' is a little bit strange as well though, but that's historical as well, but I don't really like the phrase 'academic/non-academic'.

> I think words are just as important as deeds. It's important that we need to review the terminology we use in academia or higher education and we are all professionals we should all be called professional staff and you might be on a teaching and learning [pathway] or you might be administrative but that's another thing, but people shouldn't be labelled as 'academic', 'non-academic' or 'support staff'.

It is the figured world of higher education that has perpetuated the naming conventions for both academic and professional services staff and the assumptions that are societally wrapped around these identities by the names they have been assigned. Urrieta (2007b, p. 121) argues 'in figured worlds people are ordered and ranked and power is distributed'. The naming convention of labelling professional services as 'non-academic' could reduce their power by describing them by what they are not. However, the idea of figured worlds as a constantly negotiated space (Holland et al., 1998; Hill et al., 2015) means that someone who now resides within a third space role, could move around these pre-conceived notions and naming conventions of academic and professional services spheres, from one to another and reside within both. Holland et al. (1998) use Bakhtin's 'Dialogism' to explain how we can author ourselves, within the space that we occupy and the language that constrains the space, 'the author works within, or at least against, a set of constraints that are also a set of possibilities for utterance' (1998, p.171). While there is often minimal space to move around and change identity, the space is limited for self-authoring due to the historical nomenclature claimed by higher education.

The diagram (Figure 1) below illustrates where the sector is slowly moving for third space professionals, both within the burgeoning third space figured world that is slowly being created and the historic academic and professional services worlds.

Conclusion

What this research indicates is there is a surprising indifference by professional services around the nomenclature used to describe them. It appears more important of them to be recognised for the work they do. This appears at odds with the literature and again the divide between research and organisational practices and terminology. Academic thoughts on the terminology around 'non-academic' is clearer and perhaps linked to the 'non' prefix and describing someone by what they are not.

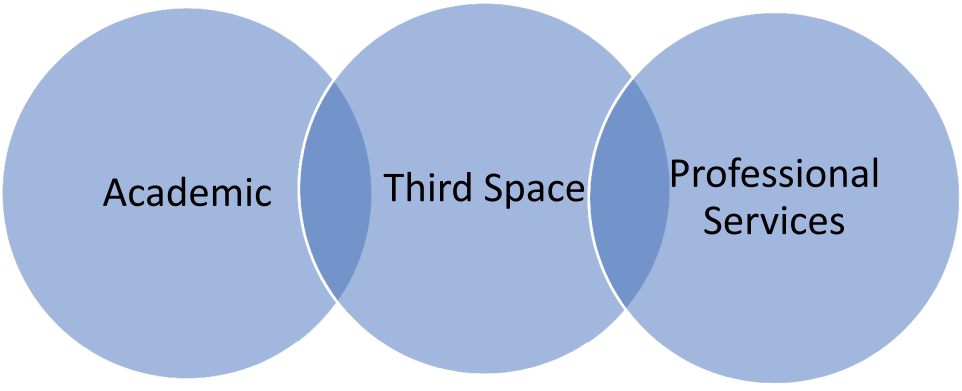

Figure 1. Venn diagram – third space Model (author model).

Negative naming conventions such as 'non-academic' links to the idea of invisible staff and can affect the identity of professional services (Szekeres, 2004; Wallace and Marchant, 2011; Sebalj et al., 2012; Akerman, 2020), although this has not been evidenced strongly within this research. As stated by one professional services staff member, 'it makes you feel less important'. Sebalj's et al. (2012) study into nomenclature within the Australian higher education sector illustrated that non-academic and general staff were the least preferred titles. The term 'non-academic' was described by Sebalj et al., (2012, p. 466) recipients as 'divisive and negative' and again the term 'othering' was used as well as the potential to increase the academic/professional services divide. Simpson and Fitzgerald (2014) argue it also gives the impression that 'non-academic' staff do not contribute to the teaching and learning, or student support which is undertaken by staff within the university. This otherness does not serve a purpose.

Current research into professional services is identifying the use of 'professional' in describing university administration roles as noted in the literature review, but the pace is slow. In an article published in October 2018, De Sousa (2018) argues that it appears to still be commonplace for the higher education sector to call professional services staff 'non-academics'. 'I've even once heard a vice chancellor, giving a talk to a room full of people saying you are not failed academics' (De Sousa, 2018, para. 2). The pace at which the change is taking place is demonstrated by Szekeres, who in her 2004 paper on Australian higher education, alluded to a change of terminology due to the professionalisation of professional services workload but in 2011 noted that '"non-academic", "support", "allied", and "assistant" nomenclatures still abound and many staff in these positions feel denigrated by these terms' (Szekeres, 2011, p. 684).

As research into the third space increases (Veles et al., 2019; McIntosh and Nutt, 2022; Veles, 2022) the term professional services is being used alongside the third space terminology as another way in which to describe a diverse group of people who work in varied roles across the higher education sector. This paper illustrates the indifference of some professional services staff regarding the nomenclature to describe them but to respect the individuals in whatever role they may hold within an institution. It also appears that academic staff feel more strongly around nomenclature to describe professional services staff and this is indicated in the

research around terminology and the move towards professional services and the third space. The conclusions in this paper need to be acknowledged within the small number of participants interviewed and the case study based in one academic school.

The author also acknowledges that her positionality as a member of professional services staff with pre-conceived ideas around terminology and the impact this could have has played a role within this paper. Given there was a relationship with the staff interviewed through proximity of working conditions, this could also have played a role in the responses from some of the participants; however, given the nature of the responses and the lack of concern by some professional services staff over the nomenclature around their role, this does not appear to be of overriding concern.

The importance of this research indicates a need for respect of roles across all elements of higher education and acknowledgement that nomenclature may have an impact on how people perceive themselves and how others may perceive them.

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