

## Learning through Networks

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This research explores how academics capitalise on their personal learning networks for professional learning. The project identifies authentic learning spaces, identifying critical sources of knowledge and support required for effective teaching.

The study included participants representing three different HE contexts from the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands. This mix of countries and contexts allowed us to examine the role/implication of networks for academics' learning and support across diverse academic cultures.

This investigation adopts a personal network perspective, which allows us to explore academics' significant learning and support relationships across multiple settings, whether embedded in formal and informal structures of professional learning, within or beyond institutional boundaries, or in personal acquaintanceships.

### Research Findings

When directing their own professional learning, academics draw upon two types of personal networks: interest-driven and task-specific. Resources embedded in these personal networks include expertise, information and guidance, on which academic draw upon to carry out work-related tasks and to solve problems related to teaching and other academic responsibilities.

A high proportion of academics' significant learning and support relationships are based within and limited to the boundaries of local institutions, representing approximately 63% of all contacts elicited. Results highlight disciplinary differences in terms of the composition of networks.

Personal networks facilitate the acquisition and development of different types of knowledge and skills. Knowledge was in the domains of pedagogical, instructional, curricular knowledge, as well as enhancing

self-appraisal, curriculum planning and technology skills.

Professional learning activities commonly used by academics included informal discussions, making inquiries, sharing experiences/resources, collaborating, and following peers' postings in social media.

The changes academics applied to their teaching practices tended to relate to modifications of teaching strategies.

The findings show that Academics personal networks have hallmarks of homophily, physical proximity and density, marked by closely-knit learning and support relationships. Even if such network structure promotes trust and common values, it inhibits flow of novel ideas, a diverse array of knowledge, expertise and insights, thus limiting opportunities for learning, change and innovation.

### Project team

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### The Caledonian Academy

The Caledonian Academy is a research centre in Technology Enhanced and Professional Learning at Glasgow Caledonian University, UK.