



Since 2011, “unpacking your chair” has been one of the first tasks undertaken by new professors at Newcastle University. The task is not as mundane as it sounds, for it is the title of a new development programme with important aims and meaningful results.

In 2004, recognising the many varied roles of today’s professor, Newcastle noted that the leadership responsibilities of the role came across as ill-defined, both institutionally and individually. An induction programme was launched to establish a dialogue between new professors and senior university leaders. The success of that led, in 2011, to the launch of Unpacking your Chair.

The workshop-based programme provides new recruits with the skills and knowledge they need to exercise their authority and to fulfil their responsibilities. They are now “much better prepared than their predecessors to exercise academic leadership”, and Charles Harvey, pro vice-chancellor and provost.

The judges shared this view. Ewart Wooldridge, founding chief executive of the Leadership Foundation for Higher education and an awards judge, said that leadership development of the professoriate was a “neglected area”. “The Newcastle initiative builds on a successful professorial induction programme, and offers workshops that empower new professors to explore different aspects of their role, seek feedback from colleagues and develop peer support networks. It provides an excellent bridge between academic leadership and institutional priorities.”