



University of South Australia
Human Resources Unit

Review of UniSA's Academic Promotion Policy

Stakeholders' briefing

Director: Human Resources

August 2011

This paper provides an initial briefing to stakeholder on issues to be considered in the review of UniSA's Academic Promotion Policy and procedures.

REVIEW OF ACADEMIC PROMOTION AT UNISA

Background and Purpose

A comparison of academic promotion policy and procedures across the sector indicates a high degree of uniformity. This is hardly surprising given universities' desire to provide some level of consistency in recognising standards of excellence across a globally mobile academy. However, there are enough differences in approach between institutions to offer some ideas for new ways of doing things and, potentially, doing them better. Over the past five years, a number of institutions have undertaken extensive reviews of promotion policy to ensure their practices accommodate changes in the academic role, are aligned with their strategic objectives, address equity concerns, aid the recruitment and retention of high performing academic staff, and are as efficient and effective as possible in a highly competitive environment.

The last major review of the University's Academic Promotion Policy was conducted in 2000/2001.¹ While minor amendments have been made to the Policy,² it is timely to undertake a formal review of the whole framework for academic promotion to test whether it:

- is informed by best practice in Australia and overseas
- has the capacity to address the current and future needs of the academic community and the institution.

Terms of Reference

The purpose of the review is:

1. to ascertain whether the University's Academic Promotion Policy and practices:
 - reflect best practice in the higher education sector, nationally and internationally
 - support UniSA's endeavours to attract, reward and retain staff to achieve its strategic goals expressed in statements such as Horizon 2020 and corporate plans
 - are sufficiently flexible to enable UniSA to respond to changing circumstances
 - employ processes and procedures that are streamlined, efficient and effective.
2. to recommend, if applicable, changes and improvements to the Academic Promotion Policy and practices.

The Policy and practices related to Academic Promotion at UniSA are articulated in the following key documents:

- [Academic Promotion Policy No: HR-26.3](#)
- [Information for academic staff applying for promotion](#)
- [Equity information for academic promotion for applicants](#)

¹ New policy adopted 18 June 2002 after a review spanning 2000/2001.

² In 2008, changes were made to the process to allow promotion committees to change an applicant's nominated level of performance if the committee determine it would advantage the applicant's case for promotion.

The scope of the Review covers promotion to:

- Lecturer Level B/Research Fellow
- Senior Lecturer Level C/Senior Research Fellow
- Associate Professor Level D/Associate Research Professor
- Professor Level E/Research Professor.

Priority areas for review are:

1. the Framework for Promotion, which includes criteria for promotion, merit, areas of contribution and performance descriptors
2. eligibility requirements
3. support and guidance to staff
4. promotion committees
5. application procedures and administration of the Academic Promotion process.

The review will focus on the following questions. These will be discussed more fully in a discussion paper.

The framework for promotion

- Are the current criteria - *teaching and learning; research; knowledge application; and leadership*- suitably distinct elements of scholarly practice to serve as stand-alone categories in which to define and assess performance?
- Is there sufficient flexibility with the current policy and practice to allow academic staff to build a case for promotion that reflects their strengths and achievements in the principal areas of scholarly activity?
- Are performance standards/expectations for promotion levels sufficiently clear to aid staff, their line manager and assessment committees in the promotions process?
- How does the University differentiate between levels gained through an appointments process and the same level achieved through the promotions process?
- Is the University sufficiently clear to potential applicants and promotion committees about how the issue of performance against opportunity is best presented and assessed?

Eligibility requirements

- Is UniSA sufficiently clear to new academic staff about the required performance levels and achievement in their new institution before they seek promotion?
- When should unsuccessful applicants be eligible to re-apply for promotion to a particular level?

Support and guidance

- Are the University's expectations of its line managers clear enough to ensure they are providing appropriate guidance on when it is the right time for their staff to seek promotion and what is needed to get there?
- How can the University best guide and support staff to enhance success in the promotion process?

Promotion committees

- Is the composition of the current promotion committees appropriate to their task and responsibility?

Application procedures and administration of the academic promotion process

- How can the University streamline the process of application for promotion to better focus the applicant's submission and to aid those on promotion committees to make a reasoned judgement on performance?

- Are the existing arrangements for external referees and assessors optimal to assist a promotion committee to make a reasoned judgement upon an applicant's performance?
- Does the University have sufficient flexibility in policy and decision-making to ensure its promotions policy aids the retention of high performing staff?
- How does the University best engage senior managers/senior staff in the academic divisions in the senior academic promotion process?
- How does UniSA ensure quality outcomes and consistency of decision-making in a devolved process?
- Where and how can the administration of the promotion process be improved?

In addition, while examination of academic career structures is out of scope for the review, there is an interest in considering whether there is capacity to create new steps and stages in the level E classification.³

Review panel

The review will be overseen by an expert panel and chaired by an external member, Dr Joyce Kirk. Dr Kirk is a consultant specialising in the tertiary education sector. Among the positions she has held are Pro Vice Chancellor Students and Vice President at RMIT (from which she has recently retired) and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney where at various times she was also Associate Dean Coursework Programs in the Faculty, Head of the School of Information Studies and Chair of Academic Board. In these different roles, Dr Kirk has implemented quality assurance principles in the design and development of courses and programs, the development of learning and support services for students and in academic governance. Dr Kirk was a member UniSA's AUQA audit panel in 2009.

Other members are:

[Professor Maureen Dollard](#), Director Centre for Applied Psychological Research, Division of Education Arts and Social Sciences

[Professor Phil Weinstein](#), Dean Graduate Studies

[Professor Milé Terziovski](#), Head of School, International School of Business

[Professor Andrew Parfitt](#), Pro Vice Chancellor, Division of Information Technology, Engineering and the Environment and Chair of the Division's Academic Promotion panels

[Professor Joanne Wright](#), Deputy Vice Chancellor: Academic and member of the Senior Academic Promotions Committee

[Professor Mandy Thomas](#), Pro Vice Chancellor: Research and Graduate Studies at the Australian National University.

The panel will meet with stakeholders over an afternoon and day on the 21 and 22 September.

Management and administration of the Review of Academic Promotion

The Review will be managed and administered by the Human Resources Unit. Any enquiries should be directed to Kath Higgins, Senior Consultant: Organisation Development, phone 22731, email: kath.higgins@unisa.edu.au

³ UniSA has already taken steps toward this with the designation of Laureate Professor.