Review of UniSA’s Academic Promotion Policy

Stakeholders’ briefing no. 2

September 2011
This paper provides further information on key issues for the review and examples from the sector to inform stakeholder discussion with the review panel on Thursday 22 September.

Background

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

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.

Review panel

The review will be overseen by a panel 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.

Priorities for review
The main areas of focus are:
1. The Framework for Promotion
   - Areas of contribution
   - Expectations
   - Diversity in academic activity
   - Performance against opportunity
2. Support and guidance to staff
   - The role of line managers in the academic promotion process
   - Information and support to applicants
3. Eligibility requirements
   - Re-application for promotion
   - Newly appointed staff applying for promotion
4. Promotion committees
   - Composition of committees
   - Promotion out of rounds
5. Application procedures and administration of the Academic Promotion process
   - Use of external referees
   - Streamlining the process
6. Recognising outstanding performance at Level E

Questions and discussion

1...THE FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTION

Areas of contribution
UniSA’s criteria for promotion is constructed around four areas of contribution to the University’s mission:
- teaching and learning;
- research;
- knowledge application; and
- leadership.  

Are these suitably distinct elements of scholarly practice to serve as stand-alone categories in which to define and assess performance?

In many respects, knowledge application has suited an institution that retains a strongly applied focus and leadership is a critical element of successful scholarly endeavour. However, there are contrasting views about whether the leadership category needs to remain as a stand-alone criterion or whether it might be better considered as an element of both teaching and learning, and research.

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1 Applicants to level B are not expected to provide evidence of leadership but may choose to demonstrate how their performance has been acknowledged at the local, national or international level.
A similar concern has been raised about knowledge application, which it has been suggested, should be knowledge transfer.

Given this, does the University require any more than two overarching criteria for promotions – teaching and learning, and research – with emphasis placed within these two categories on leadership or knowledge application/knowledge transfer? If so, what might any additional criteria be and how do these address distinct forms of scholarly activity?

**Sector comparisons**
Table 1 in the appendices provides a summary of the areas of academic activity that form the basis of the criteria for academic promotion for nine Australian universities surveyed in the review exercise.

**Expectations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promotion</th>
<th>Teaching and Learning / Research / Knowledge Application</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To level B</td>
<td>Performance must be satisfactory in all areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To level C</td>
<td>Performance must be either high in all areas or excellent in one area, high in another and satisfactory in the third area.</td>
<td>University, State and emerging National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To level D</td>
<td>Performance must be at least excellent in one area, high in the others</td>
<td>University, State and National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To level E</td>
<td>Performance must be at least excellent in one area, high in the others</td>
<td>University, State, National and International</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptions of performance levels and examples of evidence are outlined in the *Information for Academic staff applying for promotion* booklet, pages 19-20 and pages 23-33.

A number of universities have sought to provide applicants with more guidance on performance expectations including what might constitute high and excellent performance across the range of scholarly activity. This is an area for potential improvement at UniSA that would benefit applicants, their line managers and promotion committees.

**Examples from the sector**
La Trobe University’s Academic Promotions Evidence Matrix and the Australian National University’s Academic Profiles are provided in appendix 2.
Diversity in academic activity

Would the academic promotions framework benefit from greater flexibility in acknowledging applicants achievements in distinctive areas of scholarship?

Would the introduction of weightings, or some other mechanism, aid this?

Examples from the sector
Reflecting the increased specialisation of the academic role, a number of universities utilise weightings, within set parameters, to allow applicants to specify the importance they wish to assign to particular areas of contribution. The Queensland University of Technology, University of Queensland and Melbourne University are examples.

This contrasts with promotion policies that require applicants to perform at a defined level of excellence against all or a majority of the institution’s promotion criteria. UniSA, Curtin and RMIT use this approach in their policies.

Melbourne’s policy makes specific reference to the role of teaching and research: “As part of the Growing Esteem strategy, the University explicitly acknowledges the diversity of activity that typifies its academic staff. Whilst acknowledging diversity, the normal expectation is that outstanding teaching and research are the foundation for an academic career. Although a level of achievement in research is no longer a mandatory requirement for promotion, the norm is that a member of the academic staff whose prime focus is teaching or knowledge transfer demonstrates that their contribution is underpinned by outstanding scholarship.”

Staff at the University of Western Australia whose contributions are primarily in research or teaching and learning rather than in all three areas of teaching, research and service, may consider applying for promotion to Professorial Fellow (Research or Teaching and Learning). All applicants to Professorial level positions need to demonstrate contributions in the area of service.

Performance against opportunity

Is the University sufficiently clear to potential applicants and promotion committees about how the issue of performance against opportunity is best presented and assessed?

UniSA’s equity information for academic promotion for applicants provides detailed equal opportunity information which is intended to inform the academic promotion process. The University of Melbourne has more generic guidelines which aim to:

- encourage promotion applicants to describe relevant personal circumstances and working arrangements and their impact on career progression and performance
- provide guidance to promotions committee members on assessment of performance against opportunity.

Is UniSA’s equal opportunity information helpful or would new guidelines offer greater assistance in explaining and applying the concept of ‘performance against opportunity’?

Melbourne’s guidelines are provided in appendix 3.
2 ...SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE TO STAFF

The role of line managers in the academic promotion process

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?

Examples

The University of Western Australia outlines the role of the Head of School in the academic promotions process. This goes beyond their role in providing a HoS report and nominating referees/assessors to include:

- providing advice to and counselling all staff members about their promotion aspirations, and the timing of their promotion applications;
- encouraging applications from women, as an under-represented group in promotion applications, and providing them with the appropriate guidance and encouragement;
- discussing the application with the staff member, and if necessary, providing guidance on the preparation of the application.

Amongst other things, La Trobe’s responsibilities for HoS/ and equivalent in the academic promotion process includes:

- identifying qualified staff and encourage applications;
- offering well-informed and current advice to applicants seeking promotion;
- identifying potential assessors;
- in consultation with the applicant’s Performance Enhancement and Development Scheme (PEDS) supervisor, providing written confirmation of the applicant’s performance in each area against his or her Level, agreed workload allocation and type of appointment;
- submitting a written evaluation from the relevant professor(s) of the discipline (or senior members of the discipline) in relation to the discipline, including the quality of scholarly publications and research, and contributions to the curriculum;
- together with the Dean, providing advice and assistance for unsuccessful applicants aimed at overcoming the reason/s for their lack of success.

Information and support to applicants

How can the University best guide and support staff to enhance success in the promotion process?

Obviously, any changes to the academic promotion policy and procedures will be reflected in revised information to applicants.

In revising the information for applicants, a decision to be taken is the continued use of Ernest Boyer’s work which infuses all of the resources provided to support academic promotion. Boyer was adopted as a key reference resource as part of the last review. It was intended to assist staff to better express their achievements across a wider range of scholarship covering research, teaching, practice and synthesis. However, the practical effect of the use of Boyer’s work over the years has, arguably, had the opposite effect. Despite good intentions, the use of Boyer in the University’s advice to applicants has most often served to obfuscate rather than clarify what is required from them and Boyer’s work does not appear to inform the decisions taken by committees.
3...ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Re-application for promotion

When should unsuccessful applicants be eligible to re-apply for promotion?

At UniSA, in cases where an application has previously been made for promotion and was unsuccessful, the applicant is required to highlight evidence of progress and achievement across all promotion criteria since the submission of the last application. There are no restrictions on when an application can be re-submitted.

However, it is not unusual in the sector for a university to apply a ‘two year wait rule’ with the opportunity for a committee to dispense with this rule and, in close cases, to recommend that the applicant comes back within a year e.g. pending the acceptance of a key paper, a book etc.

New staff applying for promotion

Is UniSA sufficiently clear to newly appointed academic staff about the required performance levels and achievement in their new institution before they seek promotion?

It is not uncommon for an institution to expect applicants to have one or two years of service since appointment before seeking promotion. UniSA’s current policy provides no guidance on this matter.

4...PROMOTION COMMITTEES

Composition of promotion committees

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

Current composition of promotion committees

Promotion to Associate Professor (Level D) and Professor (Level E) Committee

The promotion committee recommends to Council who approves the appointments. The promotion committee consists of:

- Chair: Vice Chancellor's nominee
- Vice Chancellor (or nominee)
- Deputy Vice Chancellor: Academic (or nominee)
- Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Innovation (or nominee)
- one senior external academic at Level E or equivalent standing (VC's nominee)
- two Professors elected by the Professors, a term of two years
- two Associate Professors (at Level D) elected by the Associate Professors, a term of two years

In attendance: Director: Human Resources (or nominee)

Division Promotion to Senior Lecturer (Level C) Committee - Divisional Committee

The promotion committee recommends to the Vice Chancellor who approves the appointment. The promotion committee consists of:

- Pro Vice Chancellor of Division as Chair
- one senior academic nominated by the Vice Chancellor, a term of two years
- one academic staff member appointed by Division Board at Level C or above, a term of two years
- two members of academic staff from the Division at Level C or above, elected by academic staff from the Division, a term of two years
- one student member of Division Board
Division Promotion to Lecturer (Level B) Committee - Divisional Committee

The promotion committee recommends to the Vice Chancellor who approves the appointment. The promotion committee consists of:

- Pro Vice Chancellor of Division as Chair
- one senior academic nominated by the Pro Vice Chancellor of Division, a term of two years
- one academic staff member appointed by Division Board at Level B or above, a term of two years
- one member of academic staff from the Division at Level B or above, elected by academic staff from the Division, a term of two years
- one student member of Division Board

Promotion out of rounds

Does the University have sufficient flexibility in policy and decision-making to ensure its promotions policy aids the retention of high performing staff?

A number of universities have documented procedures for dealing with out of rounds promotions to ensure retention of high performing academic staff.

5...APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE ACADEMIC PROMOTION PROCESS

Use of external referees

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?

The current requirements for the various levels of promotion are:

- Promotion to Level B/Research Fellow: two referees, one of whom must be external to the University.
- Promotion to Senior Lecturer or Senior Research Fellow: three referees, one of whom must be external to the University.
- Promotion to Associate Professor, Associate Research Professor, Professor or Research Professor: three referees, one of whom shall be external to the University and one of whom shall be internal to the University. Applicants for promotion to Professor or Research Professor should be able to demonstrate an international standing. This should be considered when nominating appropriate referees.

Views vary among people who have been a part of promotions committees about the value of applicants’ seeking referee reports. Applicants themselves have also questioned if this is the most efficient way to source external views and assessment.

As an alternative approach, stakeholders in the promotion process - this could be the applicant, their line manager and/or the more senior manager - provide a list of potential referees/assessors who are expert in their field. In these cases, applicants usually have the opportunity to nominate referees who they do not want to assess their application, and provide reason why. External assessor reports are usually confidential to the promotion committee.
Streamlining the 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?

Approaches by other universities

A number of universities provide strict page limits on aspects of the promotion application to highlight and focus a staff member’s most important achievements. Clarity around expectations should assist both applicants and committees in this process.

Where and how can the administration of the promotion process be improved?

Some examples in the sector include:

- online applications e.g. Curtin and QUT
- focused templates for Head of School/line manager and assessor reports
- guidelines for Heads of School
- guidelines for assessors/referees

6…RECOGNISING OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE AT LEVEL E

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

Example

ANU has levels Professor E2 and Distinguished Professor E3. Nominations are from the supervisor of an eminent staff member and are considered by the Senior Academic Promotions Committee. Remuneration details for Professor E2 positions are contained in the Academic Staff Salary Scales in ANU’s Enterprise Agreement. Remuneration details for Distinguished Professor are outlined in the Procedure: Distinguished Professor and Professor E2. The procedures are available at http://policies.anu.edu.au/procedures/distinguished_professor_and_professor_e2_anu/procedure

Queensland University, QUT and Macquarie each have policies on Distinguished Professors. The criteria for Distinguished Professor compares to the criteria for UniSA’s Laureate Professor.
### TABLE 1: ACADEMIC PROMOTION CRITERIA AND AREAS OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Teaching and supervision which includes:</th>
<th>Research and scholarly activity which includes:</th>
<th>University service, management and leadership which includes:</th>
<th>Professional and community service, management and leadership which includes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Trobe</td>
<td>Teaching and supervision which includes:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- subject teaching,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- laboratory or studio-based teaching,</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- supervision of individual students in clinical placements, and of honours theses,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- supervision of postgraduate research higher degree students.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macquarie</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- teaching performance</td>
<td>research performance</td>
<td>- contributions to the University, faculty and/or department community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- leadership in learning and teaching</td>
<td>leadership in research</td>
<td>- contributions to community and professional organisations, government agencies, NGOs, public intellectual discussion and the general community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- student-focussed learning and teaching</td>
<td>research mentoring and training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- research-enhanced learning and teaching</td>
<td>research collaborations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- scholarship of teaching.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtin</td>
<td>Teaching and learning including scholarship</td>
<td>Research/creative works</td>
<td>Leadership (Leadership that impacts positively on Curtin’s strategic directions as applied to duties of the appropriate level)</td>
<td>Service (Demonstrated excellence in service in line with Curtin’s strategic directions as applied to duties of the appropriate level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUT</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Research and Scholarship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Research and Scholarship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>UQ</td>
<td>UWA</td>
<td>ANU</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Contribution to Teaching and Learning (experience and achievement in teaching)</td>
<td>Research (advancement of the discipline)</td>
<td>Knowledge Transfer (engagement in the mutually beneficial and bi-directional exchange of knowledge with the broader community with direct links to teaching and research)</td>
<td>Leadership and Service (in the activities of the discipline, the University or the broader community).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UQ</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Scholarship of teaching</td>
<td>Research and creative works</td>
<td>Service and engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWA</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>Research and scholarship and/or other relevant creative work</td>
<td>Service (which is considered under the headings of academic citizenship, professional leadership in the University and, community leadership and service)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANU</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Research or creative activity</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix 2:**
La Trobe University Academic Promotion Evidence Matrix (these are best printed in colour)

La Trobe University Academic-Promotions


ANU – Academic Profiles

ANU Academic Profiles.pdf

[http://policies.anu.edu.au/procedures/academic_promotions/procedure](http://policies.anu.edu.au/procedures/academic_promotions/procedure) (refer to appendix 3 of the ANU Academic Promotion procedure)

**Appendix 3**
University of Melbourne Performance against Opportunity Guidelines

Guidelines-PerformanceAgainstOpportunity.pdf
