Academic Promotion Review: Recommendations

March 2012
Review of Academic Promotion at UniSA

Background

This review was commissioned by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Peter Høj, and was conducted in accordance with Policy no. A35B.7 Review.

The purpose of the review was to:
1. 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. recommend, if applicable, changes and improvements to the Academic Promotion Policy and practices.

The review was overseen by an expert panel comprising:
- Dr Joyce Kirk (external chair)
- Professor Maureen Dollard (Director of Centre for Applied Psychological Research, Division of Education Arts and Social Sciences)
- Professor Phil Weinstein (Dean of Graduate Studies)
- Professor Milé Terziovski (Head of School, International Graduate 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 academic promotion review panel met with key stakeholder groups in September 2011 to seek their views on academic promotion at UniSA. These groups included the Vice Chancellor, two pro vice chancellors, heads of school, research leaders, HR practitioners, staff at levels B-E, deans of teaching and learning and members of the Senior Staff Promotion Committee. The panel also received feedback on academic promotion at UniSA through nine written submissions. Sixty-four staff and the NTEU provided input into the review.

Issues

The following issues formed the focus for the review:
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
   - Involvement of the Division Pro Vice Chancellors in the level D and E process
   - Quality assurance
   - 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

Further information about the issues under review is provided in the August 2011 and September 2011 stakeholder briefings which are available on the Academic Promotion web site.

Proposed changes and improvements arising from the review

The review panel reported to the Vice Chancellor and put forward 30 recommendations to improve academic promotion at UniSA. The Senior Management Group (SMG) has accepted 28 of the recommendations, with some minor amendments to provide clarification. SMG has asked for further detail to inform its decision-making on the two remaining recommendations.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTION

*The purpose of promotion*

**Recommendation 1**: The academic promotion policy states the purpose of promotion and in doing so differentiates promotion from other reward and recognition mechanisms.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

*Areas of contribution*

Under the current Academic Promotion Policy, promotion applications cover four areas - Teaching and Learning, Research, Knowledge Application and Leadership.

**Recommendation 2**: UniSA’s criteria for promotion are constructed around three areas of contribution to the University’s mission - Teaching and Learning, Research, and Engagement and Innovation.

2.2 Leadership and service are demonstrated in an application as elements within these three categories.

SMG accepted the principle of using three categories but asked for clarification of the third category.

SMG suggested that leadership and service should be demonstrated within each assessed category.

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1. The panel recognised that the University would need to clearly define what is covered and measured in each category, in particular, the engagement and innovation category.
**Expectations**

**Recommendation 3:** The University develops clear guidelines on performance expectations for promotion to each level and the measures used to inform the committees’ judgement, with an emphasis on quality and impact.

SMG accepted the principle of providing useful information and asked the Director HR to advise the Vice Chancellor about the best way to present this information without being overly prescriptive.

**Performance Management and academic promotion**

**Recommendation 4:** The University looks at the potential for closer alignment of performance management and promotion processes.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Diversity in academic activity**

UniSA’s current promotion policy requires applicants to demonstrate defined levels of performance using three descriptors: satisfactory, high and excellent. In contrast, 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.

**Recommendation 5:**

5.1 Candidates for promotion have the opportunity to accentuate their performance and strengths through allocating a weighting to each area of contribution.

5.2 The University sets minimum weightings for each area based on its expectations of academic performance across criteria and academic levels.

5.3 Promotion committees have the flexibility to vary an applicant’s weighting.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

In accepting recommendation 5.3, SMG noted that the committee should only vary weightings if that would benefit the applicant.

**Performance against opportunity**

**Recommendation 6:** The University develops new guidelines that offer greater assistance in explaining and applying the concept of performance against opportunity. These guidelines should indicate that while the quantity of output may vary due to opportunity, quality and impact still need to be demonstrated.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE TO STAFF**

**Information and support to applicants**

**Recommendation 7:** The University provides information and resources to support staff in making an application for promotion.

SMG agreed that the principle should read: “The University provides information and supports staff in making an application for promotion”.

**Recommendation 8:** The work of Ernest Boyer is no longer used as a reference point for applications.

SMG accepted the recommendation.
**Recommendation: 9** The University provides staff and their line managers with written feedback on promotion decisions based on the ratified minutes of the relevant academic promotion committee. Staff are also given the option to meet with the Chair of the committee or nominee for further feedback in those instances where applications are not successful.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

**Newly appointed staff**
The current procedures states that applicants to level B who hold a fixed term contract must have completed one calendar year of service by the closing date of application. Applicants for promotion to Research Fellow must have had 12 months continuous service with the University by the closing date for applications. This is inconsistent with promotion to any other level which does not require a specific number of years of service. **Recommendation 10:** A minimum length of service as an eligibility requirement for newly appointed Level B staff is removed.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Research-only staff**
The academic promotion information booklet states: “Externally funded research staff who are deemed meritorious will be promoted only if funding is available and approved by the relevant funding body”. **Recommendation 11:** Promotion is on the basis of merit. Applications from research staff should be considered without regard to funding sources.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Re-applications**
**Recommendation 12:** The University applies a ‘two year’ rule to unsuccessful applications, with the opportunity to dispense with this rule in exceptional circumstances.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Quotas**
**Recommendation 13:** Reference to quotas is removed from the policy.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**PROMOTION COMMITTEES**

**Committee structures**
**Recommendation 14:** The Divisions have one single committee to evaluate applications for promotion to Levels B and C.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Recommendation 15:** The University continues with a university wide senior promotion committee for applications to levels D and E.

SMG accepted the recommendation.
**Composition of promotion committees**
The panel reported that the current approach to determining membership on division committees and the senior promotion committee was problematic for a number of reasons including:
- Difficulties in co-opting staff and students to the committees
- Potential for inconsistency in decision making with changing committee membership
- Potential for conflict of interest between applicants and committee members
- Committee membership not necessarily based on skill
- The anomalous position of Level D staff evaluating the performance of applicants to Level E.

**Recommendation 16:** The membership of the Division committees for promotion to levels B and C consists of:
- Pro-Vice Chancellor (Chair)
- Dean Teaching and Learning
- Dean Research
- Vice Chancellor’s nominee from another division with consideration given to the representation of women and cultural diversity.

SMG accepted the recommendation with the last point to read ‘gender’ instead of ‘women.’

**Recommendation 17:** The membership of the university wide committee for promotion to levels D and E consists of:
- The Vice Chancellor or nominee (Chair)
- Deputy Vice Chancellor: Academic
- Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Innovation
- Two Division Pro Vice Chancellors
- One external member, at Level E with consideration given to the representation of women and cultural diversity.

SMG accepted the recommendation with the last point to read ‘gender’ instead of ‘women.’

**The role of the Division Pro Vice Chancellors in the Level D and E process**

**Recommendation 18:** The membership of senior staff promotion committee includes two Pro Vice Chancellors, determined in accordance with the number of applications from particular divisions. The Division Pro Vice Chancellors who are not on the committee would have an opportunity to present their case to the committee on the merit of applications but would not have voting rights.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Training of committee members**

**Recommendation 19:** The University looks at how it can best engage senior academic staff in preparing members of a promotion committee to ensure understanding of standards/expectations of performance for particular promotion levels and procedural fairness.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Quality assurance**

**Recommendation 20:** UniSA adopts a formal and independent moderation process to monitor overall consistency in decision making by Division promotion committees.

SMG asked the Director HR to explore whether there is a way of achieving the intent of this recommendation without a disproportionate use of resources.
Promotion out of rounds

**Recommendation 21:** Promotion outside the normal process is used in exceptional circumstances as a retention mechanism. The Vice Chancellor has the discretion to convene a meeting of the senior promotions committee to consider an application.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND ADMINISTRATION: Streamlining the process**

**The application for promotion**

**Recommendation 22:** The application for promotion consists of:
- A succinct statement of achievements and impact against the criteria of no more than four pages with an executive summary and a maximum of one page per criterion.
- A curriculum vitae. There is no limit to the length of the CV although this might be considered in the future.
- Evidence of performance, populated from the data elements in the Academic Staff Activity reports wherever possible.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Recommendation 23:** The University looks at moving to online applications.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Verifying evidence**

**Recommendation 24:** The data elements in the academic staff reports (the data suite) are used in an application to provide verifiable evidence.

SMG accepted the recommendation, noting that the term ‘data suite’ may need explanation\(^2\).

**Recommendation 25:** Details about the applicant’s teaching load are included in the HoS/Institute Directors’ report.

SMG accepted the recommendation, noting that “teaching load” will need to be defined.

**Reports**

**Recommendation 26** The University looks at how it can improve the reports prepared by the HoS/Institute Directors.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**Recommendation 27:** The confidential report from the Division Pro Vice Chancellors for applications to levels D and E is no longer a requirement.

SMG accepted the recommendation, noting that PVCs will have an opportunity to present their case to the committee (see recommendation 18).

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\(^2\) The data suite refers to a compendium of data on academic staff activity that includes occupancy information, Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), Supported Researcher Status, Research Publications, Research Supervision and current year Research Projects.
**Interviewing applicants**

**Recommendation 28:** Applicants for promotion to all levels may be interviewed. Two options are presented.

1. Offering all applicants an opportunity to be interviewed.
2. Interviewing applicants in situations where the committee needs to clarify aspects of an application.

SMG accepted option 2.

**Referees**

**Recommendation 29:** The University no longer requires applicant initiated referee reports from internal and external referees. Instead, promotion committees consider external comment from referees. The applicant, the Head of School and Pro Vice Chancellor each nominate two referees external to UniSA who are expert in the applicant’s field. Promotion committees will seek no fewer than three referee reports and may seek comment from referees in addition to those nominated to ensure the minimum number of reports is received. Applicants have the opportunity to nominate people who they don’t want to assess their application and provide reasons why.

SMG accepted the recommendation.

**RECOGNISING OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE AT LEVEL E:**

**Recommendation 30:** The University continues to recognise scholars of eminence through advancement to Professor Level E2.

SMG agreed that the panel’s recommendation has merit but is better handled outside the scope of the promotion review. SMG asked the Director HR to provide further detail and analysis about how UniSA can best recognise outstanding performance at level E.

**Implementing the recommendations**

The next steps are to incorporate the recommendations into a revised policy statement, new information resources and guidelines to support applicants, heads of schools, institute directors and committee members in the academic promotion process.

The revised policy and procedural changes will then require consultation with the broader university community, followed by approval from University Council.

Information about this consultation process will be disseminated at a later stage through the Director, Human Resources.

While this significant consultation takes place during 2012, no changes to the current academic promotion policy and procedures will be made. This will ensure that staff are clear about which criteria apply to their application. Any changes arising from the review will not come into effect until 2013.

Staff applying for promotion in 2012 should therefore refer to the current policy and information resources available on the academic promotion web page which can be viewed at http://www.unisa.edu.au/hrm/employment/promotion/acad_prom.asp

Potential applicants are encouraged to attend one of the information sessions that are detailed on the web page.