

Academic Role Profiles, Impact and Engagement – Summary of UCU Discussion, April 2016

1) Summary of Proposed Changes to Academic Role Profiles (Pathways 1, 2 and 3/Profile Level a-e) – University of Bristol

In short, the proposed revisions centre on *i)* new additions around citizenship, engagement and impact expectations, *ii)* new job titles on Pathways 2 and 3, *iii)* obligations around CREATE, the UoB academic professional development scheme, and *iv)* the insertion of indications of expectation of quality of delivery:

Pathway 1

- Addition of clauses that state, or are similarly worded, that staff should ‘participate effectively in activities to achieve engagement with research’, ‘actively develop contacts...public and private enterprises where suitable’ and ‘consistently act as a good citizen...participating fully in the daily working life of the School...behaving as a role model for others’. Also, see ‘will be expected to work in a collegial and supportive manner with academic and professional services staff at all levels in the University’.
- Addition of ‘indication of expectation of quality of delivery’. Terms such as ‘effectively’ and ‘successfully’ inserted.
- Addition of clauses that pathway 1 staff must ‘engage effectively with the University’s CREATE scheme’ with a minimum level of completion.

Pathway 2

- Change of job titles for profiles *a* and *b*. What was *Assistant* become *Associate*; what was *Associate* becomes *Senior Associate*.
- Addition of ‘good citizenship’, ‘engagement’ and ‘impact’ language and clauses.
- Insertion of ‘quality of delivery’ terms
- Removal of language pertaining to the notion of progression e.g. ‘...to prepare them to take more responsibility’

Pathway 3

- Change of job titles for profiles *a* and *b*. What was *Assistant* become *Associate*; what was *Associate* becomes *Senior Associate*.
- Addition of ‘good citizenship’, ‘engagement’ and ‘impact’ clauses.
- Insertion of ‘quality of delivery’ terms

2) Summary of Discussions Regarding the Academic Role Profiles with Bristol UCU, 22nd September 2015

Present: Chris Bertram, Fiona Ford, Neil Garrett, Colin Lazarus, Jamie Melrose, Tracey Hooper

The meeting was convened to discuss the proposed amendments to the academic role profiles, as circulated to UCU by Fiona on 20th August.

- a) UCU noted that they felt that they had not received much notice of the changes to the role profiles, and also that academic staff were unaware that they were being reviewed. Fiona confirmed that there had been consultation via HR Managers with Deans and Heads of School but she acknowledged that the consultation may not have ventured further. It was noted that the changes were not fundamental and therefore widespread consultation, whilst always desirable, was less crucial.
- b) UCU noted that the changes were reflective of changes in academic practice, were already 'in the academic ether', and not fundamental. However, they had some concerns in relation to performance management. They also advised that they have consulted with their regional officer; with members; and with their executive.
- c) UCU noted some concern about the potential for the changes, particularly those around the 'quality statements' to impact negatively on their members in relation to performance management and academic progression. They also acknowledged that the statements largely reflected assumptions that were implicit within the existing profiles.
- d) In response to a question from Chris, Fiona confirmed that there is an explicit statement associated with the role profiles indicating that staff are not expected to be doing all the activities at any one time. The actual wording is as follows (slightly amended depending on the pathway):

'It is unlikely that any single member of staff will be carrying out all the designated responsibilities at any one time but he or she would be expected to undertake most of them over a period of time. It is also recognised that the complex nature of the University means that not all these descriptors are necessarily relevant to academics in every School.'

- e) There was a discussion about the proposed changes to job titles, which were generally seen as positive, but a concern was raised that flexibility already enjoyed in Arts for P3 roles would be lost. Fiona confirmed there was no intention to remove that flexibility in Arts. Jamie said he was compiling a paper on the topic in relation to P3 role titles in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law and it was **agreed** that this would be taken as a parallel discussion.
- f) UCU noted that the changes in relation to CREATE and CPD were reflective of changes made over a year ago.
- g) There were two areas where UCU requested a change to the wording of the profiles. Fiona **agreed** a change to the wording on Pathways 2 and 3 at Level a. in relation to qualifications. The profiles would read:
 - 2. A relevant postgraduate research degree or equivalent professional qualification, or be working towards one of these, or relevant experience.

In relation to statements around: 'Effectively supervise doctoral research students to graduation, and act as internal examiner for PhD degrees', UCU have asked that 'to graduation' be removed from all such statements. Fiona has ***undertaken to consult*** on this change with the senior team.

- h) A discussion was held around academic citizenship, and whilst UCU generally welcomed the concept, they had concerns about the degree to which unrealistic expectations might be placed upon individuals in this respect. Fiona stressed that the concept of 'reasonableness' would always need to be considered where individuals felt managers were placing unreasonable expectations on them.
- i) The meeting closed with **agreement** that subject to any major concerns arising from the UCU Executive meeting later that day, and to the points noted above, UCU were content that HR proceed, albeit UCU had registered their concerns on the issues outlined above.

3) Bristol UCU Response to RED document 'Guidance and exemplars of engagement and impact'

We are writing to ask for some clarification on the new academic role profiles (ARPs) and on their use in the current and future progression and promotion rounds. A recent RED document 'Guidance and exemplars of engagement and impact' has raised a number of issues.

In this 'Guidance', could we please ask that the sentence 'the engagement must also be successful, having led to uptake of the work and outcome beyond academia' be removed?

As was noted in our discussions in September, prior to the introduction of the ARPs in November, UCU had some concerns about the new additions, for example, the language on 'impact' and 'engagement'.

While we acknowledged that these changes reflected HE sector norms, we were concerned about how they would work in terms of performance management. At the time you noted that the individual criteria would be looked at in context and indeed would not be applicable in all cases. To quote from the notes of our meeting on 22nd September, '[i]t is also recognised that the complex nature of the University means that not all these descriptors are necessarily relevant to academics in every School'.

In the RED 'Guidance', it notes the new ARPs and the new criteria as regards engagement and impact. It also provides some examples of what constitutes impact and engagement. With regard specifically to progression and promotion, the document states 'staff must have made an effort in the engagement with stakeholders and audiences ...The engagement must also be successful, having led to uptake of the work and outcome beyond academia'.

This last sentence appears to be far more stringent than the language in the ARPs. In the ARP for a Senior Lecturer it notes 'develop effective activities to achieve engagement with research, and/or impact beyond academia'; in the ARP for a

Professor it notes 'lead significant initiatives to achieve engagement with their own research and/or impact beyond academia'. The wording here, in the ARPs, is far less obligatory, more open to holistic interpretation than the language of 'must'. I note, too, the absence of 'success/successful' in the ARP criteria.

This is not simply a question of semantics. If impact/engagement is deemed to count only if successful, then this would undermine the process of engagement itself, involvement outside academia. If, to quote again from the 'Guidance', 'influencing government policy decisions' or 'commercialisation of new products' plus success are essential requisites for progression/promotion, does this mean that, for instance, unless one gets the government to adopt in full your policy brief or your product does not immediately sell, then it does not constitute a success?

In this respect, UCU would be very wary of criteria becoming strict requirements. At the very least, if impact/engagement are to be in play in progression and promotion, judgements on successful impact/engagement should be more focused on the process of that impact/engagement rather than on any concrete outcomes.

We would also be concerned if in the course of Faculty roll-out, individual Faculties added their own more stringent, target-based criteria based on the ARPs and the 'Guidance'. It is also important to note that judging from UCU members' feedback, new criteria for progression/promotion may have been discussed by Heads of School and Deans, as well amongst School/Faculty management teams, but has yet to become widely known amongst academic staff at large.