Academic Promotion and Progression programme

Kingston University
The APP initiative also supports important university sub-strategies such as ensuring all academic staff have a teaching qualification by 2020, development of a university-wide sustainable research culture and the achievement of key equality objectives.

The programme has broad reach with all 860 academics moving to new role profiles. There was particular impact on those at Grade 10 - nearly 300 reader and principal lecturers.

The key drivers for change were to:

- Improve alignment between university needs and academic roles.
- Introduce a career path which recognised broader academic contributions across research, teaching and learning, enterprise and professional practice rather than the traditional research route only.
- Ensure principal lecturer roles reward academic excellence, rather than steering people towards academic administration roles.
- Provide a career structure based on readiness to take on the next job rather than reflecting tenure and capability in the current job.

The aims were to:

- Encourage, support and reward academic contribution through clear academic expectations and career pathways.
- Clearly identify academic expectations and career pathways built around four key academic domains of teaching and learning, research, enterprise and professional practice.
- Introduce academic roles and titles with greater meaning, recognised nationally and internationally, enabling Kingston to recruit and retain high quality academics.
- Encourage development paths that incentivise desired behaviours; for example: striving for excellence within academic domains and a flexibility to adapt, learn, change and challenge.
What we did and why

The programme was significant and transformational with input from and involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. The role of the HR team was crucial.

Key features

- A revised academic structure comprising lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, professor.
- Consistent academic domains and career pathways for teaching and learning, research, enterprise and professional practice included in each role profile.
- New generic role profiles, replacing multiple job descriptions, and incorporating the UK Professional Standards Framework.
- Replacement of the principal lecturer and reader roles with the new, more internationally recognised, role of associate professor.
- Clearer, more robust progression criteria between the lecturer and senior lecturer roles.

The transition map below provides an outline of the career path:
The project was led by the HR department, with academic input and leadership from key colleagues across the university. An academic progression and promotion development group, including representation from every faculty, was established to support this initiative, consider feedback received and advise on the practical detail of the proposals and their implementation. Broadly, the programme had six phases:

1. **Design and approval by the senior management team**

Initial proposals outlining benchmarking, design and the high level implementation framework were drafted and initially presented to the university senior management team in July 2012. Subsequent proposals and revisions included revised design principles, timescales, assimilation process, communications, governance structure and options for pay modelling. To speed up decision making and maintain progress, a dean was empowered by the senior management team to make decisions on their behalf enabling early resolution of issues.

2. **Consultation and communication**

A three-month consultation period was held between January and April 2013. Academic colleagues were invited to consider the proposals and comment on them. In addition to trade union feedback, 148 staff provided formal feedback directly through the online noticeboard and informal feedback was also provided to HR client partners, the HR project team and through open meetings.

An area was established on the university intranet with further information including Q&As, proposed role profiles and promotion criteria for the new academic roles, and feedback forms. This was complemented by a range of communication events and information sources. Open meetings were held across all campuses, each including presentations from all deans with a Q&A session, and a total of approximately 260 staff attended one of these.

Detailed discussions were held with trade unions through either the formal university’s joint negotiating and consultative committee or a more informal joint trade union/management working party which discussed specific areas requiring more detailed consideration.

3. **Equality impact assessment**

The purpose of the equality impact assessment was to ensure the new approach to academic promotion and progression was fair and inclusive – i.e., did not unlawfully discriminate against people with protected characteristics, either within the process itself or its application. It also ensured that it promotes inclusivity through the role profiles and promotion criteria and reflects core equality and diversity values of the Research Excellence Framework, the Quality Code and the UK Professional Standards Framework.

4. **Design amendments**

Changes regarding the design and structure of academic roles and the transition arrangements were made. These incorporated many points of feedback received during the consultation and negotiation. For example:

- The promotional step from lecturer to senior lecturer was amended to retain progression, but with clearer criteria linked to the UK Professional Standards Framework.
- Initially associate professor was regarded as a transitional step to professor but then amended to allow associate professor as a permanent career choice.
- An additional, “personal to holder” point was added to the top of the senior lecturer salary scale – primarily to reflect the greater potential responsibility and to discourage grade hopping just for pay gain.
- The number of key academic domains (teaching and learning, research, enterprise and professional practice) required to achieve associate professor were changed from ‘one major plus two minor’ to ‘one major plus one minor’.

5. **Application and transition**

Workshops were also held for heads of school to enable them to help their principal lecturers and readers understand the new criteria and prepare their application for academic promotion.

The first application round for existing grade 10 staff took place autumn 2013, with the outcomes confirmed in December 2013. Additional application rounds will take place annually. Grade and salary protection applies until July 2017 (at which time any remaining principal lecturers and readers would move to a senior lecturer role).

6. **Development support**

In addition to transition and salary protection arrangements, appropriate development support is being provided for existing grade 10 staff, who did not apply, or those who were not successful. This includes support and guidance in making an application for associate professor, and support to obtain UKPSF accreditation. For example:

- A web-based portal signposting development opportunities by domain and the sources of support.
- A mentoring scheme offering 1:1 support with completing applications, identifying evidence and action planning following feedback.
- Support for heads of school to provide practical help to assist future rounds of grade 10 applications. These sessions were led by a member of the senior management team.
- A new motivating and developing people programme being piloted with the heads of school to offer practical skills and knowledge sessions in developing people, enhancing performance and giving feedback.
What impact did it have?

Short-term impact measures:

- Positive feedback from the senior management team and the vice-chancellor for delivering the project to time and to brief.
- 75% of eligible staff applied during the first application round. 70% of associate professor transition applicants were successful.
- Strong case study examples obtained in each of the four academic domains (from “live” applications) – these have formed the basis of workshops to support cohort two applicants.
- The initial equality impact assessment across the seven protected characteristics showed only one where there may be some impact. The embedded nature of equality issues within the project led to a Guardian Higher Education award for an equality and diversity project.
- Development needs were identified across the academic community; for example, feedback and coaching skills for heads of school. Kingston academic practice standards were developed alongside this work, enabling successful Higher Education Academy accreditation.
- Coaching/mentoring culture has been encouraged through a mentoring programme where successful applicants have supported colleagues from other parts of the university.

Expected medium and long term measures:

This is a transformational programme affecting all areas of Kingston university and longer term impact will be reviewed via a range of university wide measures.

These are:

- An increase in the % of internal appointments to professor across all academic domains.
- 100% of academic staff with a teaching qualification by 2020.
- Year on year increase in the % of academic staff who are returned to the REF.
- Increase in the value of successful research bids and impact of our research and enterprise.
- An improved position within the league tables, reflecting a better and more distinctive reputation for Kingston.
- A positive on-going impact on student satisfaction as staff expertise is developed in teaching and learning, enterprise and professional practice.
- An increase in staff engagement levels as academics are able to focus on their core academic disciplines; essentially being able to spend the majority of their time on their passion, which is likely to have attracted them to academia in the first place.
- Developing a stronger and more sustainable academic workforce, improving our reputation and academic sustainability.
- Enhanced skill and confidence within the head of school population in supporting staff through academic career progression generally.
Lessons learned

Much of the overall academic role framework is transferable and could be tailored to the needs of other institutions.

This includes the approach to role profiles, the incorporation of standard academic domains that build through different role levels and the reframing of academic leadership as an element within all roles rather than a role in itself.

The project serves as a case study for other institutions considering revising their academic career structure.

Learning points and challenges:

1. The post-92 contract frameworks agreement should not hinder change. There was a need to work within the spirit of the post-92 national framework, while ensuring sufficient flexibility for Kingston’s needs; in particular the desire to distribute academic leadership and management across all roles rather than primarily within the principal lecturer role.

2. Be clear on critical non-negotiable deliverables, while at the same time having sufficient room within proposals for genuine consultation and flexibility elsewhere.

3. Initial benchmarking of a number of other universities illustrated that, while a general commonality of job title existed, there was no standard pattern or consistency as to how these were distributed across spine points. Hence Kingston had to decide the most effective structure for itself, rather than adopting an off the shelf model.

4. Trade union negotiations proved to be time consuming and slow, with negative trade union reactions to change having an impact on staff perceptions. This was dealt with by consultation and inviting staff to submit their ideas directly rather than only via the trade unions (for example we ran a specific Talking Point on the subject across all faculties and departments).

5. The pace of change at Kingston has been very rapid over recent years and this project was an additional significant change, causing a great deal of anxiety and resistance among some academic staff. Ongoing implementation challenges are continuing.

6. Despite extensive communication and consultation, we learned that the initial messaging was not broad or deep enough and the time between our initial communications and follow up open days provided an opportunity for the trade union to disseminate their less constructive messages and positioning.

7. This project was highly complex and involved numerous stakeholders; for example five faculties, all with deans and heads of school who had their personal views and opinions on the best way to design and implement as well as the trade unions who were arguing strongly to maintain the status quo. This required a high level of influencing skills and co-ordination by several members of the HR team.

8. Coordination across these interests and requirements was highly time consuming and complex. Planning, timing and message management were critical when local restructures were also taking place in order to minimise message conflict with the broader APP initiative.

9. On-going implementation challenges are continuing eg appeals and there is an on-going need to ensure that new initiatives, for example the new appraisal and probation schemes, are aligned and leverage the benefits achieved by APP.

10. Reduce opportunities for inconsistent decision making eg central decision-making panels, and standardise feedback.

11. Integrating the UK Professional Standards Framework within the academic career pathway has been extremely valuable; research has shown that universities with high student satisfaction also have higher levels of teaching qualifications.

12. Introducing person specifications into the recruitment and redeployment processes to avoid academic concerns that role profiles do not replace the detail of a job description.
About the case studies

This series of case studies has been developed from the work of the Leadership Foundation and partners for the report ‘Efficiency, Effectiveness and Value for Money’ led by Professor Sir Ian Diamond and published by Universities UK in February 2015.

Partners in the ‘Diamond’ higher education workforce group (UCEA, UHR, Hefce, GuildHE, UUK and the Leadership Foundation) commissioned the case studies with support from the joint Hefce/Leadership Foundation Innovation and Transformation Fund.

Dr Lesly Huxley, director of membership and organisational development, leads the LF’s Innovation and Transformation Fund and our contribution to the HE workforce group. She said: “The leadership, development and commitment of people at all levels in higher education is fundamental to successful change and delivery of greater effectiveness in the core activity of our universities and colleges. These case studies and other work funded through the second phase of the Innovation and Transformation Fund show the importance of staff engagement and development in helping higher education institutions improve organisational performance.”

Gwen Wileman, LF Associate, who worked with the universities to develop this series, explained: “The case studies all provide powerful success stories and some real measures of impact on efficiency and effectiveness. However, the challenges of culture and complexity also come through loud and clear and there are many lessons to be learned and shared.”

About the Innovation and Transformation Fund

Acknowledging the central role of leadership in driving change, in 2012, together with Hefce, the Leadership Foundation initiated a £1m, UK-wide Innovation and Transformation Fund (ITF) to progress key themes of the first ‘Diamond Report’ on efficiency in higher education. Nine projects were funded and have now concluded.

Sir Ian Diamond was invited by the Department of Business and Innovation Skills to lead a second phase of this work early in 2014, looking particularly at organisational change and development, the higher education workforce, estates and research assets, open data and evidencing efficiency.

In 2014-15, further joint investment totalling £500,000 is supporting the sharing of existing effective practice particularly in the leadership, management and development of the higher education workforce. A key to the Innovation and Transformation Fund is in unlocking and making best use of good practice. For more information go to: www.lfhe.ac.uk/ITF

About the Leadership Foundation

The Leadership Foundation is a membership organisation that delivers leadership development and consultancy advice to higher education institutions in the UK and around the world. The focus of the Leadership Foundation’s work is to improve the management and leadership skills of existing and future leaders of higher education. The services provided include consultancy, leadership development programmes and events, including a major series of events for governors. This work is supported by a highly regarded research and development programme that underpins the leadership development programmes and stimulates innovation.

The Leadership Foundation has a small team of experienced leadership and organisational development professionals drawn from higher education, other parts of the public sector, and also from the private sector. Much of the Leadership Foundation’s work is delivered in partnership with the higher education sector and other partner organisations. www.lfhe.ac.uk

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