Academic Career Pathway (ACP)

Guidance for Department Promotion Panels on flexibility in consideration of promotion cases impacted by Covid-19

1) Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the ability of some academic staff to undertake elements of their role, and for those who were expecting to submit promotion cases, this could delay their promotion and career progression unless some form of adjustment is put in place. This guidance highlights how the flexibility of the Academic Career Pathway framework will be utilised to support academic staff in this position.

Whilst this guidance is specifically focused on academic staff who were on track for promotion prior to the pandemic, it is recognised that all staff have made significant contributions to the University during the pandemic. Equally, the pandemic will have significantly impacted on the wellbeing of many staff. The promotion process may not be the appropriate mechanism to recognise the hard work of these staff, but HoDs and Managers should consider the full range of reward mechanisms available to recognise outstanding contribution as well as ensuring there are support mechanisms to recognise and address the strain on wellbeing that some staff will have felt.

The impacts of COVID-19 on the work of academic staff are uneven and vary in nature and impact across the University. Examples of potential impact include but are not limited to:

- The requirement to provide care due to school, nursery and other day care facility closures during lockdown (and subsequently due to continued disruption to these facilities).
- Changes to workload allocation to accommodate additional teaching and additional preparation of online teaching materials – to the detriment of research or scholarship.
- The closure of University laboratory facilities which has impacted upon the ability of an individual to undertake research.
- The restrictions on fieldwork and travel which have impacted upon the ability of an individual to undertake research.
- The cancellation of conferences and other external activities that limit the ability of academic staff to demonstrate achievement of professional standing and wider engagement.

Although many and varied, the impact of Covid-19 can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Personal circumstances beyond their control that have impacted upon the ability of an academic to undertake some aspects of their role - for example additional caring responsibilities as a knock on consequence of national lockdown.
- Changes in work allocation necessitated by the prioritisation of student facing activities, adoption of a blended learning approach and increased need for the provision of student support which have in turn impacted on workload and the ability of staff to spend time on other elements of their role.
- Changes in the workplace and external working environments that have made it harder for an academic to undertake some aspects of their role - for example closure of research facilities, inability to travel or the cancellation of conferences.

The University does not wish staff to be detrimentally impacted by personal circumstances or other factors beyond their control. The core principle therefore is that academic staff whose evidence of achievements up to March 2020 show they were close to meeting the promotion criteria in either 2020 or
2021 but who have been subsequently impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic will be treated flexibly through the promotion process. Key to this is the flexibility that is designed into the ACP framework (e.g. flexibility to adjust expectations for personal circumstances, or to allow greater flexibility in the selection of criteria). The University will use this inbuilt flexibility to recognise where academic staff have had to reprioritise their activities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2) Adjustments for personal circumstances

A number of academic staff will have been unable to work as they normally would because of specific personal circumstances related to the Covid-19 pandemic. This could include:

- having caring responsibilities due to the closure of schools and other care provision
- having additional caring responsibilities for a vulnerable relative
- mental or physical ill health resulting from the pandemic that has impacted on the ability of an individual to undertake their role for a period of time

The ACP framework already contains a mechanism for personal circumstances to be identified and taken into consideration. This is typically designed for part time staff, periods parental leave or long term sickness, but its application will be expanded to include the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Individuals who believe that their ability to work as normal has been impacted by their personal circumstances, including in ways that have adversely affected their ability to fulfil promotion criteria that they would have otherwise been able to fulfil, should cite their circumstances and the specific impact these have had on their promotion application.

Although this guidance is focused on the impact of Covid-19, the guidance and process remains the same for any individual circumstances an academic may have experienced, whether Covid-19 related or not.

Actions for individuals wishing to cite personal circumstances

Individuals who wish to cite personal circumstances should do so in the designated ‘individual circumstances’ section of the template promotion ‘summary statement’ form. The case doesn’t need to be detailed but should include the following information:

- The specific circumstance(s) that they have experienced.
  
  Example - “Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and specifically the closure of Schools, I have had significant additional childcare responsibility which has limited my ability to undertake parts of my role”

- The length of time that the circumstance(s) was in place.
  
  Example - “This additional childcare responsibility occurred from late March 2020 to the re-opening of School in June 2020.”

- The impact it had on their ability to undertake their normal academic duties.
  
  Example - “I was homeschooling for 2 days a week, effectively working 60% FTC (part time) for 3 months. Although I juggled my caring responsibilities with my role, it made it extremely difficult to identify dedicated periods of time to undertake research and writing”
• **How this has impacted on their promotion** case – specify which ACP criteria it has impacted and whether this means the affected criteria are impacted partially or fully (i.e. not possible to meet)

*Example* - “As a result I have been unable to finalise my planned journal article(s) on …………… This may affect the evaluation of the extent to which I fulfill the “High Quality Outputs” criterion unless an adjustment for this impact is made.

In addition to completing the individual circumstances section of the promotion summary statement, individuals should also use the summary statement to highlight evidence that they were on track for promotion prior to the Covid-19 pandemic under the relevant criteria that they consider to have been impacted. The summary statement template form on the ACP webpages provides brief guidance notes to aid applicants.

3) **Adjustment for changes to work allocation**

A number of academic staff will have experienced changes to their work allocation as a result of the impact of Covid-19 on teaching. The shift to a blended learning approach has created additional activity for many colleagues, and those colleagues in a learning and teaching management role will have been particularly affected by the planning and con-ordination required to support the necessary changes to teaching delivery that have occurred. While these changes in job-role focus and workload may have detrimentally impacted on some areas of the academic role such as research they may also have provided opportunity for staff to demonstrate significant achievement of teaching or leadership criteria, and many of our academic staff have done this.

**Actions for individuals wishing to cite changes to work allocation**

Individuals who wish to cite changes to work allocation should do so in the designated ‘individual circumstances’ section of the template promotion application form. The case doesn’t need to be detailed but should include the following information:

- The specific circumstance(s) that they have experienced.

*Example* - “As a Level 1 Undergraduate Coordinator I have needed to spend approximately 60% of my working time in my role due to the pandemic as agreed with my HoD. In my original WAM this was originally expected to take 10% of my time.”

- The length of time that the circumstance(s) was in place.

*Example* – “My teaching and leadership workload has increased throughout the pandemic and has taken an estimated average time of 60% between March 2020 and now”

- The impact it had on their ability to undertake their normal academic duties.

*Example* - “The additional workload has had a significant impact upon my ability to undertake research. I have lost approximately 30-40% of my normal research time over this period as a result”

- How this has impacted on their promotion case – specify which ACP criteria it has impacted and whether this means the affected criteria are impacted partially or fully (i.e. not possible to meet)
Example - “As a result I have been unable to finalise my planned journal article(s) on ............ This may affect the evaluation of the extent to which I fulfil the “High Quality Outputs” criterion unless an adjustment for this impact is made.

In addition to completing the individual circumstances section of the promotion summary statement, individuals should also use the summary statement to highlight evidence that they were on track for promotion prior to the Covid-19 pandemic under the relevant criteria that they consider to have been impacted.

4) Adjustments for other Covid-19 impacts

A number of academic staff will have experienced changes to the way they work and external changes directly related to the Covid-19 pandemic that may have adversely impacted upon their promotion case. Examples could include:

- The closure of University laboratory facilities which has impacted upon the ability of an individual to undertake research.
- The closure of national and international research facilities.
- The restrictions on fieldwork and travel which have impacted upon the ability of an individual to undertake research.
- The impact of the pandemic on research collaborators.
- The cancellation of conferences and other external activities that limit the ability of academic staff demonstrate achievement of professional standing and wider engagement.

Actions for individuals wishing to cite other Covid-19 impacts

Individuals who believe that their ability to work to fulfill the requirements of a specific criterion has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic should cite their circumstances in the individual circumstances section of the promotion ‘summary statement’ form and also specify the specific impact these have had on a specified criterion or criteria in the supporting evidence they provide in their promotion application. They should set out:

- The way in which the Covid-19 has impacted upon their academic work

Example - “Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and closure of campus, I was unable to access my laboratory for a four month period, significantly delaying my research”

- The specific ACP criteria this has impacted

Example - “This has impacted upon my ability to publish my planned journal article on my research - which is now significantly delayed”

- Specific examples of how this has impacted on their ability to fulfil the criteria.

Example - “This may affect the evaluation of the extent to which I fulfil the “High Quality Outputs” criterion unless an adjustment for this impact is made”.

In addition to completing the individual circumstances section of the promotion summary statement, individuals should also use the summary statement to highlight evidence that they were on track for
promotion prior to the Covid-19 pandemic under the relevant criteria that they consider to have been impacted.

5) Actions for Department Leadership Teams

Department leadership teams should proactively communicate with academic staff to remind them of this flexibility and consider any individual circumstances. Where these are identified, and a HoD is in agreement that the individual was close to meeting the criteria at March 2020, but has been subsequently impacted by the pandemic, then a HoD or other member of the leadership team should work with the academic staff member to determine and articulate a reasonable proposal for adjustment for the promotion case in line with the flexibility outlined below. This includes using the full flexibility around criteria selection built into the ACP framework to recognise the changes to individual roles and workload that have been required during the Covid-19 pandemic. If required, advice can be sought at any stage from the Faculty HR team and the Faculty Director of EDI.

Adjustments could include:

- Lowering the expected level of achievement against the ACP expectations in terms of volume/quantity of one or more specific criteria to take account of the impact of the mitigating circumstances presented by the individual.
- Reducing the number of criteria an individual is required to fulfil (current expectation is that a candidate for promotion demonstrates achievement of 6 out of the 10 possible criteria).
- Allowing greater flexibility in criteria selection - for example allowing an individual to be assessed with an additional research criterion substituted for an additional criterion in teaching or leadership

The case will then be submitted to the Department promotion panel. Panels will judge each case taking into account the adjustments proposed.

6) Actions for Department Promotion Panels

Department panels should consider requested adjustments cited in promotion cases and take them into account when assessing a case for promotion in order to determine whether an individual should be promoted or not.

In determining this panels should:

- Consider the information an individual has provided to evidence their achievement of the criterion. Panels consider all evidence of achievement since the date of last promotion or appointment, therefore even if a promotion application has been impacted by Covid-19, consideration of their achievements prior to the pandemic will be possible.
- The ACP framework identifies numerous indicators of performance under many of the criteria, and promotion applicants should have been able to fulfil some of them prior to the pandemic even if they haven’t been able to achieve them all As a result of Covid-19.
- Consider the past performance by the individual in each of the criteria that have been affected. If they have a successful track record of delivery then this might indicate that the individual would have been expected to fulfil the criterion were it not for the impact of Covid-19.
- Ensure that the linkage to Covid-19 is legitimate and that they were on track to achieve the necessary level of achievements in the ACP criteria prior to March 2020 - for example a journal article was near completion but has been subsequently delayed.
If required, advice can be sought at any stage from the Faculty HR team and the Faculty Director of EDI.

The panel should make a brief record of any adjustments made, specifying which criteria have been adjusted and details of the specific adjustment(s). This information should be included clearly with the promotion case (via the HoD statement) so that it can be reviewed by subsequent panels (Faculty Panel, URRP and if required any appeal panel).