

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING ACHIEVEMENT RELATIVE TO OPPORTUNITY FOR DECISION MAKERS

PURPOSE

In accordance with the University's commitment to social justice and inclusion and in recognition of the growing diversity within our talented workforce, Monash incorporates the principle of 'assessing achievement relative to opportunity' within all employment-related policies and processes. We recognise that our staff experience a range of personal, professional and other circumstances. This guideline explains how principles for assessing achievements relative to opportunity should be applied by decision-makers when making assessments of career progression or achievement.

SCOPE

These guidelines apply to decision-makers assessing staff for purposes including (but not limited to):

- academic promotion;
- confirmation of an academic appointment following a period of probation;
- performance development;
- the outside study program; and
- recruitment.

WHAT IS "ACHIEVEMENT RELATIVE TO OPPORTUNITY"?

Achievement(s) relative to opportunity is the framework that supports a fair and equitable assessment of career progression and achievements over a period of time given the opportunities available to staff.

This framework assists to ensure that the overall quality and impact of achievements is given more weight than the quantity, rate or breadth of particular achievements relative to their personal, professional and other circumstances. More specifically, this provides for the appropriate evaluation of achievements in relation to:

- the quantum or rate of productivity,
- the opportunity to participate in certain types of activities, and
- the consistency of activities or output over the period of consideration.

Achievement relative to opportunity is a positive acknowledgement of what a staff member can and has achieved given the opportunities available to them and results in a more calibrated assessment of their performance. It is not about providing "special consideration" or expecting lesser standards of performance.

In this light, the achievement relative to opportunity approach challenges a singular norm against which the performance of all staff should be measured. Instead, staff member's achievements are assessed on an individual basis, not on a comparative basis with other individuals.

DISCLOSURE OF RELEVANT INFORMATION

Staff are normally invited to specify any career impacting circumstances to enable an assessment of achievement relative to opportunity. Relevant circumstances may include (but are not limited to):

- disruptions caused by parental leave, major illness/injury, carer responsibilities, disability, and personal trauma;
- periods of part-time work, country relocation, late or non-linear entry in academia, cultural expectations, varied workload or relocation of a research laboratory or clinical practice setting or other similar circumstances that impact upon productivity;
- natural disasters such as flooding, bushfires, storms and earthquakes;
- global health issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- other emergency situations

Where a staff member's performance is being assessed (or a potential staff member for recruitment), they should be encouraged to disclose relevant circumstances. This could include current and/or past circumstances.

Some individuals may be reluctant to do this. The achievement relative to opportunity approach challenges the traditional divide between public and private and some staff may see the request to disclose this information as an invasion of their privacy. Assurances should be provided to the staff member that the information disclosed will:

- only be used for the purpose it is intended, and will form the basis of a contextual and holistic assessment of the staff member's achievements; and
- be kept confidential.

ASSESSING ACHIEVEMENTS RELATIVE TO OPPORTUNITY

You are responsible for assessing the merit of an application. This includes an assessment of how a staff member's previous experience and/or past achievements can demonstrate that they have the capacity to perform to fulfil the role at an expected level/position to which they are aspiring.

When evaluating an individual's record of achievements, factors that have affected a staff member's opportunities should be considered to avoid the inadvertent assessment against the notional standard of an uninterrupted full-time career trajectory where it does not apply.

In making your assessment, you need to consider the disclosed circumstances, working arrangements or career histories and the effect they can have or have had on the staff member's achievements. This requires assessing staff on an individual basis in terms of how well they meet the relevant expectations and not on a comparative basis with other individuals, where the tendency may be to privilege the person with the "most merit".

During 2020 in response to COVID19 the education, research and engagement contributions of many academic staff have been affected. The University is committed to appropriately recognising the extra contributions to teaching in 2020 because of COVID19 and Faculties will work to ensure this is achieved through considering the **affects** of COVID-19 relative to opportunity. In addition, the research contributions of some staff have been profoundly affected by COVID19. The University will ensure COVID19 related impacts, relative to opportunity, will be understood and recognised for the purposes of academic advancement, probation and performance.

However, assessing achievement relative to opportunity does not mean that you are 'expecting less' of the staff member. Instead, it considers the following factors:

- the quality and impact of achievements,
- the quantum or rate of productivity,
- the opportunity to participate in certain activities, and/or
- the output produced over a defined period.

For example, an academic staff member who has completed their probation period will apply to be confirmed based on achievements during that period. These achievements will inform the decision-maker of the staff member's capacity to meet performance expectations in the future.

Furthermore, this equitable approach to evaluating achievements takes into consideration how a range of relevant circumstances and diverse career histories may impact on a staff member's opportunity to participate in certain activities and how this can subsequently shape their research profile. For example, a staff member who is a primary carer of a young child with disability has not been able to accept keynote invitations or participate at conferences that require travel away from home. Disclosure of these reasons helps assessors interpret/understand the staff member's apparent lack of conference participation, their focus on publishing in journals instead and engaging in research collaborations through means that do not require travel from a home state.

Assessing achievements relative to opportunity may also involve calculating the overall time available for a given period and then measuring the performance of staff in light of this time. This approach enables a more nuanced and contextual assessment of achievements rather than placing undue emphasis on the quantity, rate or breadth of achievements over a defined period.

ASSESSING ACHIEVEMENTS RELATIVE TO ACADEMIC PROMOTION

In applying an achievement relative to opportunity approach in academic promotion, merit should be determined by assessing the staff member's past achievements relative to the opportunities available to the individual staff member and their capacity to produce work that reflects the quality and impact expected of a staff member at the level to which they are aspiring.

A staff member's application for promotion is assessed against the promotion criteria:

Promotion candidates must satisfy the promotion committee that they, in accordance with the academic performance framework:

- *have been a sustained high performer at the current level of appointment; and*
- *have the capacity to perform satisfactorily at the level to which promotion is sought.*

In addition, candidates must demonstrate that they will make an ongoing and positive contribution to, and fit within, the academic unit.

Where the promotion application includes a statement of achievement relative to opportunity, the promotion committee will not use a formula or calculation to proportionally reduce or discount the period impacted by personal circumstances.

The promotion committee should evaluate and consider the impact of the staff member's personal circumstances as part of their holistic assessment of the promotion case. This includes consideration of the following:

- quality and impact of achievements, rather than the quantity, rate or breadth;
- stage of the applicant's career and the staff member's career trajectory;
- impact of personal circumstances over the period of assessment; and
- ongoing effects on productivity and achievement beyond the period directly impacted by the staff member's personal circumstances.

ASSESSING ACHIEVEMENTS RELATIVE TO PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT

The [academic performance framework](#) articulates high level expectations for academic endeavour, adopting a consistent approach across the three key areas of academic activity – research, education and engagement.

You are asked to assess staff against the evidence provided in support of each criteria or practice elements within each of the relevant categories (research, education and engagement), whilst considering achievements relative to opportunities available.

Assessing achievements relative to opportunity may not come easily at first. Expectations of academic output are typically “metric-driven” and maintaining a balance between the integrity of performance metrics and the quality of the achievement within the context of a candidate's personal circumstances and individual working arrangements will require a shift in how decision-makers make assessments about performance.

EXAMPLES

The best way to illustrate how achievement relative to opportunity is applied is through examples.

Example 1

During a 3-year period under consideration, Person A spent 9 months in a full-time, research-only position. This was recognised as representing 9 months of 100% research opportunity. They then took parental leave for 9 months which was recognised as representing 0% research opportunity. Upon returning to work, Person A worked part-time in a research-only position which was recognised as representing 50% research opportunity. The total amount of research opportunity therefore, during the 3-year period was 18 months or 50% research opportunity. During the 3-year period, Person A produced 3 papers, of which 2 are published with a reputable journal. These 3 papers were then adjusted for opportunity (3/.50) which meant that had this person had 100% research opportunity during the whole period, they would have produced 6 papers.

In contrast, Person B, who worked full-time in a research-only position for the entire 3 years, produced 5 publications. Therefore, Person A's volume productivity, adjusted for opportunity, was greater than Person B's volume productivity. It should also be considered that 2 of the 3 papers published by Person A were with quality journals with high-impact factors.

*Noting this does not address the quality of the work or the individual's contribution to published works.

Example 2

A staff member with significant caring responsibilities for an elderly parent develops an exciting research proposal as the basis for an Outside Study Programme (OSP) application with the work to be undertaken in Melbourne. The OSP Committee agrees that the application is strong and that the staff member's research and the work of their department would be significantly enhanced without the need to travel overseas.

Example 3

A staff member returns to work after 12 months parental leave. Their research activity stops during this leave but upon their return to work, the staff member is actively supported to re-establish research projects through such things as teaching relief, mentoring and a funding of a postdoctoral fellow. This means that within 12 months of returning to work, the staff member is able to regain their research momentum. In their confirmation of probation review a couple of years later, the committee consider both the 12-month career interruption (parental leave period) as well as the first 12 months post-parental leave associated with restarting their research and loss of momentum.

Example 4

A member of staff works part-time because of caring responsibilities of a teenager with a mental illness. In their annual performance development review and planning discussion, the staff member and supervisor negotiate ways in which they can continue to be involved in a number of committees, teach on a pro-rata basis and develop a research profile consistent with their academic level and part-time status. It is acknowledged that the quantity of work produced will be less than a full-time staff member and not penalised for the reduced breadth of activities.

Example 5

A staff member with a chronic health condition is limited in capacity to attend and present at international conferences. This staff member lists a small but appropriate number of publications in good quality journals and has a high citation rate. When being assessed for promotion, the academic promotion committee determines that the candidate has demonstrated the appropriate quality and impact of performance in the overall criterion of "research" and the staff member is not penalised for having a relatively lower output of conference presentations.

Example 6

A staff member experienced a significant illness for two of the seven years spent at senior lecturer level. In an application for promotion to associate professor level, the academic promotion committee takes a 'whole of career' approach and assesses the application favourably, acknowledging that the candidate has demonstrated performance of a requisite quality although output during the two years of ill-health had been reduced.

Example 7

A staff member is ineligible to apply for government grants as a Lead Investigator as one of the eligibility criteria is that the applicant must be a citizen of the country. To circumnavigate this matter, the staff member expanded their professional network to collaborate with other academics to prepare and apply for grants. When the staff member applies for promotion, the committee should consider the circumstances that had prevented the staff from being Lead Investigator in grant applications.

Example 8: Covid-19

If a staff member has been adversely affected by COVID-19, they may wish to discuss the influence this has had on their achievements. For example, they are a teaching and research academic at the time of COVID-19. Due to the travel and distancing restrictions, they had been unable to continue their laboratory-based research and present at international conferences which has significantly reduced their research and engagement output. Given this, they have had to turn their attention to education by developing high quality, online learning for their students. As part of this, they produced resources which encouraged student engagement, participation and collaboration in a virtual environment which was later implemented by other members of their department. This approach helped to promote their performance against the Education Performance Standards and was reflected in SETU's, student results and student feedback