

Discussion paper on assessing achievement relative to opportunity

Promotion, review or selection panels should assess achievement relative to opportunity, taking into account time spent outside the active research environment, whether through career breaks or flexible working (examples are provided below under definitions of career breaks or flexible working). Achievement relative to opportunity is an evaluative framework in which there is a positive acknowledgement of what a staff member can or has achieved given the opportunities available to him or her (is not about providing “special consideration” or expecting lesser standards of performance). It recognizes that careers may follow different pathways, providing different opportunities. The approach gives more weight to the quality and impact of achievements rather than the quantity, rate or breadth of particular achievements which in many instances are directly related to time available rather than talent, merit or excellence.

This approach applies to:

- Recruitment
- Confirmation of an appointment following a period of probation
- Performance development
- Promotion
- Internal grant applications

Panels will take into account two aspects of career breaks or flexible working; a quantitative indication of the time worked and a qualitative evaluation of the impact of any career breaks on particular activities, including recognition that the impact of a break (and caring responsibilities in particular) may continue beyond the return to work. Overall assessment will be based on an evaluation of quality and impact that takes these factors into account.

Information to include in a relative to opportunity statement:

1. **The total amount of time worked over the period since commencing any career interruptions.** Applicants should provide a table such as the one below and panels will consider achievement relative to the total time worked.

Period	Appointment	Working Months
March 2008- Aug 2008	Maternity Leave	0
Sept 2008- Sept 2010	0.5 Fractional Appointment	$0.5 \times 24 = 12$
Oct 2010- March 2011	0.2 Fractional Appointment	$0.2 \times 6 = 1.2$
	TOTAL	13.2

2. **A qualitative assessment of the impact of the career break on the applicant’s achievements.** Applicants should provide a positive acknowledgement of their achievements in the context of their particular circumstances. This may include outlining their career history and trajectory in light of the opportunities available to them. Panels will place a greater emphasis on the quality and impact of the work that the applicant has produced and is capable of producing, than the quantity and rate at which is it produced.

Impact of career breaks and flexible working

(taken from the MRC <https://www.mrc.ac.uk/documents/pdf/career-breaks-and-flexible-working-guidance/>)

In assessing the effects of career breaks or flexible working, panels will note the applicant's career trajectory and potential at the beginning of a break, relative to the stage of the applicant's career. In assessing applicants, panels will recognise that the effects on productivity of a career break, or a period of flexible working, may continue beyond the return to work. The following areas may be affected*:

- Conference presentations, seminars and publication record
- Track record of securing funding, including time to obtain preliminary data
- Maintaining networks of research contacts and research collaborations
- Recruitment of staff and research students
- Time required for training
- The ability to take up opportunities in different geographical locations
- The ability to take up courses, sabbaticals, 'visits', placements, secondments, fieldwork

Definitions of career break and flexible working

Career breaks are defined as a substantive period of time spent outside research. Reasons may include* the following:

- Personal reasons
- Trying out a new career
- Parental leave
- Ill health, injury or disability
- Caring/domestic responsibilities
- Study/training/further education

Flexible working describes any working arrangement where the number of hours worked, or the time that work is undertaken, vary from standard practice and could include* the following:

- Reduction in full time hours
- Long term partial return to work
- Job sharing
- Compressed working hours
- Term-time only working

*Lists are not exhaustive

Examples of the assessment of career breaks and flexible working

(From Group of Eight HR Directors Staff Equity Subcommittee Project
Consideration of Merit Relative to Opportunity in Employment-Related Decisions
Discussion Paper

<https://www.idmarch.org/document/Group+of+Eight/17Guc/Group+of+Eight+HR+Directors+Staff+Equity+Subcommittee+Project++Consideration+of+Merit+Relative+to+Opportunity+in+Employment%E2%80%90Related+Decisions+Discussion+Paper++20+July+This+paper+recommends+a+consistent+approach+>

A member of staff works part-time because of caring responsibilities (he has a teenage son with a mental illness). In his annual performance development review and planning discussion, he and his supervisor negotiate ways in which he can continue to be involved in a number of committees, teach on a pro-rata basis and develop his research profile consistent with his 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 he is not penalised for the reduced breadth of activities.

- A staff member with significant caring responsibilities for a son with a physical disability develops an exciting research proposal as the basis for an Outside Studies Program application with the work to be undertaken in Melbourne. The OSP Committee agrees that her application is strong and that her research and the work of her department would be significantly enhanced without travelling overseas.
- A female staff member returns to work after 12 months maternity leave. Her research productivity declines during and in the 12 month period after this leave. Upon her return to work, she is actively supported to re-establish research projects and networks through such things as teaching relief and child care support for conference attendance. In her promotion application a few years later, the leave time and the 12 month period following leave is taken into account when her overall productivity for the past 7 years is assessed.
- A staff member with a chronic health condition is limited in her 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 promotions committee determines that the applicant 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.
- A staff member experienced a significant illness for two of the seven years they spent at senior lecturer level. In his application for promotion to associate professor level, the academic promotions 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.
- A part-time professional staff member applying for a position at a higher HEW level demonstrates that her achievements are consistent, on a pro rata basis, with the expectations of performance that apply at that level to full time members of staff.
- A professional staff member competes for a higher level position. They more than met the selection criteria and have highly relevant employment experience, despite having had significant time out of the workplace for caring responsibilities and some periods of working part time. The panel takes the applicant's employment history into account when assessing their achievements and relevant experience and determines they are the best person for the role, despite the fact that another applicant with an unbroken career path on full time hours had a greater opportunity to accrue merit.

Information on unconscious bias

Panel members should ensure they are aware of unconscious bias. The following resources are suggested.

ANU paper on unconscious bias

https://services.anu.edu.au/files/guidance/Unconscious%20Bias_0.pdf

Royal Society briefing paper and short video

<https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/publications/2015/unconscious-bias/>

Appendix 1: relevant information from ANU Academic Promotions Policy

Definition from the ANU Academic Promotions Policy

Achievements relative to opportunity: Assessing achievements relative to opportunity involves giving consideration to the particular circumstances and experiences of the staff member. This supports appropriate evaluation of achievements in relation to productivity; the ability to participate in certain types of activities, and the consistency of activities or output over the period of consideration. The circumstances and experiences may include:

- family responsibilities (eg. child rearing, elder care, illness of a partner/dependent);
- a temporary or permanent disability;
- periods of part time work;
- relevant cultural expectations or circumstances; and
- absences due to ill-health or injury.

Referees are asked to comment on the **quality** of the candidate's achievements only.

Change in the ANU Academic Promotions Policy: Note, referees will be forwarded the full promotion application, including Supervisor and Research School Director endorsement and College Dean acknowledgement, but excluding the statement relative to opportunity (this was not previously specified).

1.4 Relative to Opportunity Statement

You are encouraged to ensure your application for promotion clearly articulates any personal circumstances to enable assessment of your achievements relative to opportunity.

Please indicate which relevant personal circumstances apply:

- Family responsibilities (eg. child rearing, elder care, illness of a partner/dependent)
- A temporary or permanent disability
- Periods of part-time work
- Relevant cultural expectations or circumstances
- Absences due to ill-health or injury
- Other (please specify)

Please outline your achievements in the context of the relevant personal circumstance/s and the opportunities available to you:

