Academic Promotions Policy Review
Notes for Staff Consultation – November 2022

Purpose

Academic promotions provide an opportunity to:
1. Recognise and reward academic staff achievement; and
2. Clearly articulate how academic staff can support ACU's Mission and help the university to achieve its strategic objectives.

Background

This document outlines proposed changes to the Criteria and Evidence Guide (see 2022 version here) and the committee's decision-making process (see 2022 version here). The Review Team drew on three sources when drafting these suggested amendments:
1. The Provost's commitment at the start of this review that any changes to the criteria would help staff to determine their readiness for promotion;
2. Suggestions raised during two rounds of staff consultation in 2021 and 2022;
3. Principles from the existing policy (see 2022 version here) that the academic promotions process will be fair, transparent, and efficient, and that applicants will be treated with dignity throughout.

This document is organised around three key issues and outlines proposals that are intended to improve the promotions process.

Issue 1: Clarity and Specificity

Staff indicated that the promotion criteria and information regarding evidence are "*very generic*" and "*not specific enough*" to guide an applicant. Members of the committee also noted this challenge, especially regarding the distinction between "major" and "outstanding" contributions. For example, in Research and Creative Works, the criteria for promotion to Level D included the following descriptors.

	Satisfactory Contribution	**Major or Outstanding Contribution**
Research and Creative Works	A Level D academic need not necessarily have been solely responsible for advances in knowledge but is expected to be a serious and experienced scholar to whom others (within and outside the University) may turn with confidence. A satisfactory contribution in this criterion will be assessed accordingly. A satisfactory contribution or commitment refers to the level of research and creative works necessary to maintain effectiveness as a Level D academic that is aligned with the application ACP and is relative to opportunity, as articulated in the performance expectations for Level D articulated in the relevant APME).	A major or outstanding contribution would involve, in addition to the level of scholarship necessary for a satisfactory contribution, original authorship of works describing advances in knowledge in the applicant's discipline or field, or the application of knowledge in original ways to problems of acknowledged importance, or original research, new expressions of knowledge or creative insight, and would require evidence that the applicant is recognised nationally or internationally in their discipline or field. An outstanding contribution would be one of unusual depth and significance, or a series of contributions sustained over an extended period of time with clear evidence of international recognition and standing.

The evidence guide includes specified indicators of quality (e.g., Field Weighted Citation Impact and quality lists), but did not provide information about what level of achievement was required on these measures:

"The quality of the work will be the critical aspect. When completing this section, you should provide evidence of the quality of achievements to support your application.
For citation disciplines, include:
- your SciVal Field Weighted Citation Impact (which is based on Scopus citation data); and
- any other relevant evidence.
For peer review disciplines, include:
- an assessment of your research quality referencing the quality journal and publisher lists utilised within the relevant Faculty; and
- any other relevant evidence."

Further, when "addressing the promotion criteria, academics… are expected to demonstrate commitment to Catholic Identity and Mission". However, no guidance is embedded within the criteria (or evidence guides) about how this statement might apply to the different aspects of academic work.

Proposed changes:

At each academic level (B-E), the draft Criteria and Evidence Guide describes three achievement standards in each of 12 proposed domains. These standards are organised in rubrics, with a description and/or specific benchmarks provided for each achievement standard. The descriptors within the rubrics specifically reference Mission. Where a specific measure of achievement is prescribed, a benchmark has also been established for each achievement standard within each academic level. When assessing applications, committee members will select the achievement standard that best represents the applicant's achievements in each domain.

Expected Benefits:

The proposed changes will ensure the criteria are clear and transparent, and applicants will know what evidence they should provide (in addition to the summary reports). Embedding Mission within the descriptors will guide staff to show how their activities and achievements align.

Issue 2: Simplicity and Efficiency

During consultation, academic staff described the process of applying for promotion as "*overwhelming*", "*overkill*", "*insanely time consuming*" and "*exhausting*". For example, in the current process staff must gather and present mandatory evidence (e.g., unit data, SELTs, and citations to research outputs). Accessing, compiling and analysing these data and then creating tables and figures is a time-consuming task for staff. Committee members also find it challenging to interpret data that is presented in a unique format in each application.

Proposed changes:

Staff will no longer need to gather and present the required evidence in some domains (i.e., Teaching and Supporting Learning, Educational Scholarship, Knowledge Creation, Research Income, and Research Training and Development). Instead, the university will provide applicants with summary reports that will include the specific required evidence from university databases (e.g., Centre for Education and Innovation SELTs database and Orion)

relating to their achievements in these domains. As the university develops its databases, evidence relating to achievements in other domains will be added to these reports.

Expected Benefits:

The reports will have at least three benefits. First, in their case for promotion, applicants will not need to present evidence provided in the reports. Thus, applicants can focus on providing a narrative that contextualises the reports' metrics. They can also describe additional activities and add evidence of achievement not already included in the reports. This will make the application process simpler and less time-consuming. Second, presenting mandatory evidence in a consistent manner will make it more feasible for the Academic Promotions Committee members to assess applications consistently and fairly. Third, by clearly specifying the mandatory metrics in the application and providing formatted summaries of these data for staff to verify and expand upon, the university is demonstrating that it values and respects the applicants' and decision makers' time and commitment.

Issue 3: Strategic Focus and Alignment with Workload Allocation

The current process requires staff to demonstrate a specific pattern of achievement across 2-3 areas of academic activity that aligns with one of the five academic career pathways (ACPs). For example, the patterns of achievement required for promotion to Level D are below.

Promotion Criteria for Associate Professor (Level D) by Academic Career Pathway

Teaching and Research	Teaching-Focussed	Research-Focussed	Research-Only	Academic Leadership/Service

1. Satisfactory evidence of Qualifications;
 2. Outstanding contribution to either:
  a. Research and Creative Works; or
  b. Teaching, Curriculum Development and Scholarship of Teaching; and
 3. Major Contribution to either:
  a. Research and Creative Works; or
  b. Teaching, Curriculum Development and Scholarship of Teaching; and
 4. Satisfactory contribution to Academic Leadership/ Service.
	1. Satisfactory evidence of Qualifications;
	 2. Outstanding contribution to Teaching, Curriculum Development and Scholarship of Teaching; and
	 3. Major contribution to Academic Leadership/ Service.
		1. Satisfactory evidence of Qualifications;
		 2. Outstanding contribution to Research and Creative Works; and
		 3. Major contribution to Teaching, Curriculum Development and Scholarship of Teaching
		 4. Satisfactory contribution to Academic Leadership/Service.
			1. Satisfactory evidence of Qualifications;
			 2. Outstanding contribution to Research and Creative Works; and
			 3. Major contribution to Academic Leadership/ Service.
				1. Satisfactory evidence of Qualifications;
				 2. Outstanding contribution to Academic Leadership/ Service; and
				 3. Major Contribution to either:
				  a. Research and Creative Works; or
				  b. Teaching, Curriculum Development and Scholarship of Teaching; and
				 4. Satisfactory contribution to either:
				  a. Research and Creative Works; or
				  b. Teaching, Curriculum Development and Scholarship of Teaching.

In addressing the promotion criteria, academics at all levels and in every ACP are expected to demonstrate commitment to Catholic Identity and Mission in the School, Faculty and University.				

In this process, contributions in one domain (e.g., research outputs) are considered alongside other contributions in that area (in this example, Research and Creative Works). Committee members must assign a rating (Satisfactory, Major, or Outstanding) for the entire area. As a result, some strategically important activities are not specifically emphasised and may be overshadowed by achievements (or lack thereof) in other domains of that area.
For example:

- In research, engagement and impact have not been separately assessed, and the emphasis in promotions has largely been placed on achievement in other domains of research (e.g., research outputs).

- Within service, institutional advancement achievements (e.g., building alumni networks and attracting consultancy income) have not been specifically assessed and may have been overlooked in favour of internal service contributions (e.g., serving on committees).

The current approach that prescribes specific patterns of achievement also may not align well with workload allocation processes. For example, staff who have changed ACP partway through the period of assessment for promotion (e.g., from teaching-focused ACP to academic leadership and service ACP) may have been allocated workload that makes it challenging for them to demonstrate the specific pattern of achievement that is required in either ACP.

Proposed Changes:

Applicants will not apply under a specific ACP. Instead, applications for promotion will be evaluated against criteria in up to 12 domains of achievement within three areas of academic activity (figure below).

NB: Applicants are not expected to achieve in all 12 domains.
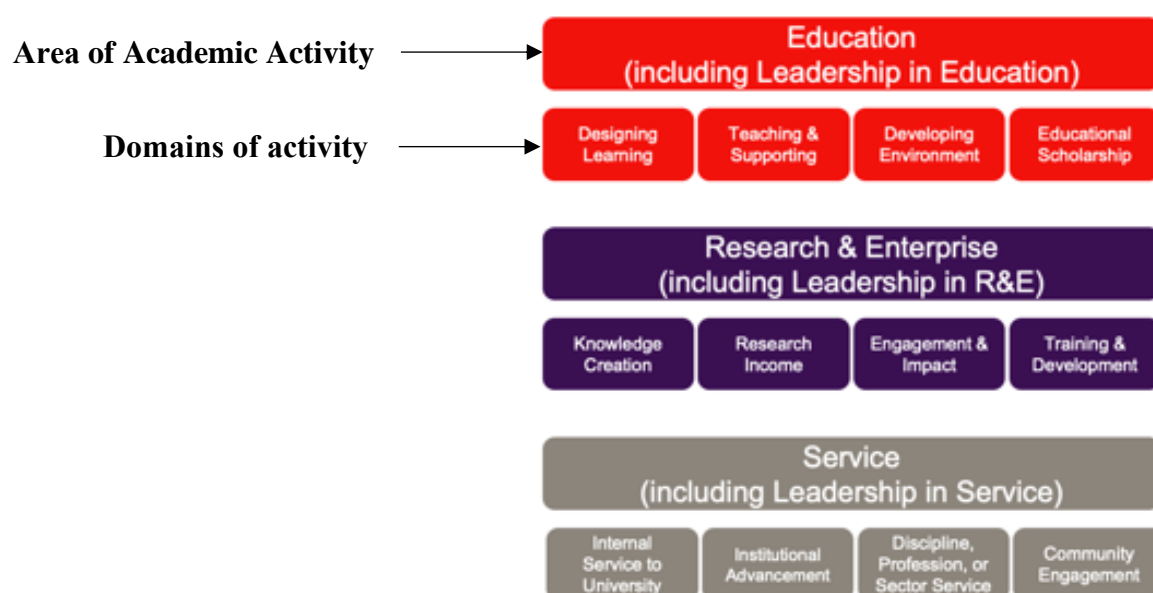
Applicants will typically achieve at a higher standard in the domains where they have been allocated greater workload. This pattern, however, will not be required. Instead, applicants will choose to provide evidence in any domain where they believe they have met Standard 1 (or above). Using the scale below, committee members will rate staff achievement in each of the domains the applicant has chosen.
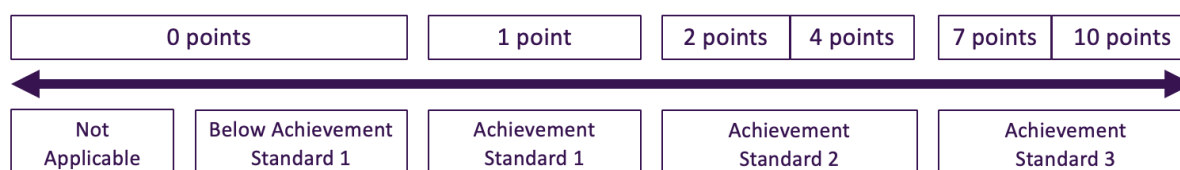
These domain level scores will be aggregated as depicted below.
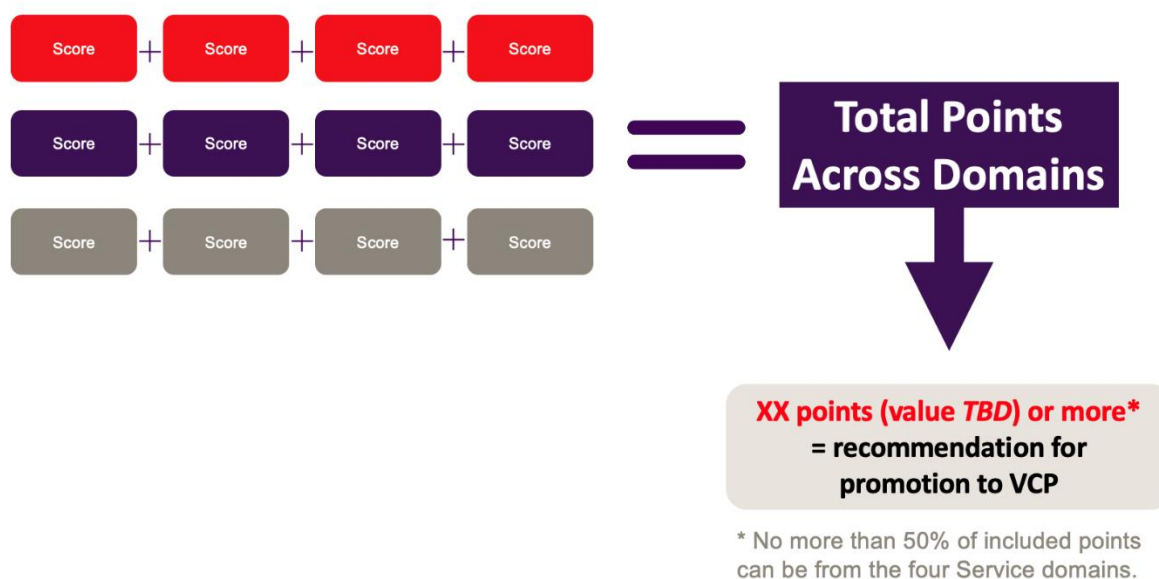
Applicants who score above the specified threshold *(XX* points – ***value to be determined** –* with no more than 50% of included points from the four Service domains*),* will be recommended for promotion to the Vice-Chancellor and President.

Expected Benefits:

The proposed changes will recognise staff who achieve in a single domain (e.g., community engagement) without the requirement to achieve across all domains in that area of academic work (i.e., Service). This flexibility will allow staff to grow into new areas where they have not previously focused, thereby supporting the university's strategic priorities. The changes will also ensure that staff are rewarded when their workload allocations have led them to achieve high standards across multiple domains, but their pattern of achievement has not been well-aligned with a single ACP. Finally, there is preliminary evidence from Macquarie University suggesting that this type of flexible, points-based system has enhanced gender equity in the academic promotions process. While the generalisability of this finding and the mechanism(s) explaining the effect are unknown, the Promotions Review Team find this possibility encouraging.