

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

PROMOTION POLICY & PROCEDURE (ACADEMIC STAFF)

DECEMBER 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The University is committed to an academic promotions policy and procedure that values excellence and recognises the contributions of our academic staff. As part of the implementation of the Framework Agreement, all roles within the University are analysed using the National Academic Role Profiles (NARPs). Historically the University has made direct use of the NARPs as promotion criteria. This policy and procedure introduces an enhanced Promotion Criteria Framework which aims to recognise that academic activities have evolved. This incorporates key elements of the NARPs but with enriched criteria to ensure the promotions process captures the wide and varied range of activities undertaken by our academic staff across the key Pillars of Research, Education, Scholarship and Professional Practice, Engagement, Innovation & Impact, Clinical Service and Citizenship.
- 1.2 The Policy and Procedure is designed to recognise and reward excellence and contributions that support the delivery of Aberdeen 2040 aims and objectives in a fair and transparent way.

2 SCOPE

- 2.1 The policy and procedure apply to all academic staff covered by the University's academic grade profiles (the National Academic Grade Profiles) and Clinical Academic staff who are seeking promotion to academic posts grades 7, 8 and 9.
- 2.2 Separate procedural documents are in place for applications for promotion to academic posts, grades 5 and 6.

3 PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Applications for promotion will be considered annually in line with the following underpinning principles:
- Applications will be assessed in accordance with the Promotion Criteria Framework (see below).
 - The Promotion Criteria Framework is designed to recognise the varied career paths of academic staff and to provide flexibility in how applicants can provide evidence in their promotion application and seek to progress within the University.
 - Applications will be considered fairly and consistently, focusing on the criteria and evidence of qualitative and quantitative measures against these. This includes demonstration of commitment to the University's strategic vision, Aberdeen 2040, values and aims.
 - In reaching a decision about whether an application is successful or not, the University Promotion Committee will consider the application in the round. Therefore, evidence provided by applicants will be assessed against the Promotion Criteria Framework and as detailed according to the academic career track and level applied for, including the mandatory evidence requirements and baseline evidence of Citizenship. In addition, consideration will be given to additional evidence provided under other pillars, where applicants choose to provide this, as well as considering any individual circumstances provided by the applicant and/or other factors such as discipline specific matters.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 3.2 The University is committed to ensuring that all applications for promotion are fully considered on their individual merits, within a framework of equality and fairness, irrespective of contractual status of applicants.
- 3.3 The University recognises that staff who identify with protected characteristic groups may face challenges in gaining promotion due to prejudice or unfair treatment in the employment lifecycle. The University actively promotes inclusive work environments, including supporting positive action in recruitment and career progression and monitors success rates by protected characteristic in these areas.

- 3.4** The University also recognises that achieving equality of opportunity means that some applicants will need to be assessed differently. For example, where staff work part time, have had career interruptions due to caring responsibilities, ill health or disability, this period of absence, which may have affected the volume, but not quality, of outputs may need to be considered. This may particularly have been the case during the Covid-19 pandemic. Applicants wishing to declare individual circumstances on a confidential basis will be able to complete an Individual Circumstances Form as part of their application. Further information can be found in the Procedure section below.
- 3.5** To identify, address and mitigate bias in the promotions process, a social bias observer will attend the University Promotion Committee meetings. Further information about this can be found in the Academic Promotion Toolkit. In addition, in the interests of transparency, a union observer may attend the University Promotion Committee meetings. Where a union observer attends, they will also adopt the role of social bias observer. Training will be provided to carry out this role.
- 3.6** We will strive to ensure that the University Promotion Committee meetings are gender and race balanced. In addition, all members of the committees will have completed the specified training requirements outlined in the committee guidance before participating in meetings.

Conflicts of Interest

- 3.7** A Head of School or any member of staff involved in the University Promotion Committees who believes that they may have a conflict of interest will be required to declare this to HR. HR will liaise with the convenor of the University Promotion Committee to consider whether a conflict exists and establish the appropriate course of action, which will be discussed with the member of staff. This may include confirmation that no conflict of interest is considered to exist. Where it is deemed that a Head of School has a conflict of interest an alternative senior member of staff will be asked to complete the Head of School Evaluation. Where a University Promotion Committee member is deemed to have a conflict of interest, they may be asked to recuse themselves from the committee or part of discussion at the committee.
- 3.8** In the interests of transparency, the names of those involved in the University Promotion Committees will be published shortly after the closing date for applications. Applicants may refer to these lists and where they believe a committee member may have a conflict of interest, they may email hr@abdn.ac.uk detailing how they believe a conflict of interest may arise should the committee member in question be involved in the consideration of their application.
- 3.9** The Head of HR will share the detail of the email with the convenor of the University Promotion Committee and review whether, based on the evidence presented in the email, a committee member should recuse themselves from considering that application. Where it is deemed a potential conflict of interest is apparent, the Committee member will be asked to recuse themselves from discussion about the application. Where no conflict is considered, the applicant will be advised of this. There will be no further right of appeal against the decision.

4 PROCEDURE

4.1 Annual Review

- 4.1.1** Annual Review is the forum through which academic members of staff should, in discussion with their line manager, reflect on their overall career development, including consideration of applying for promotion. It is expected that staff have an annual review every year and, therefore, will have completed an annual review within 12 months of applying for promotion.
- 4.1.2** The Promotions Criteria Framework provides information about the criteria for promotion to each level within each of the academic career tracks and should be used to discuss, as part of the annual review process, how criteria should be interpreted in the specific context of a member of staff's discipline and academic career development. This will help to define what staff need to do to demonstrate the necessary level of expertise and achievement, and to plan activities over the appropriate period of time (for example over the following 12 months or a longer time horizon e.g. the next 3-5 years) to allow promotion criteria to be met. Applicants may also wish to refer to the National Academic Role Profiles as a guide in self-assessing their readiness to make an application for promotion.

4.2 Movement between academic career tracks

4.2.1 Staff who wish to apply to switch to a different career track should do so by following the Procedure to Change Academic Career Track rather than the Promotion Policy and Procedure. All applications for promotion will be considered with regard to the criteria which apply to the applicant's contract at the time of submission of the application. Where staff switch to a different career track they can subsequently apply for promotion on their new track.

4.3 Timescale – annual exercise

4.3.1 An annual promotions exercise will normally be launched in December of each year and applications considered between March and August of the following year. The effective date of successful applications will be 1 August.

4.3.2 It is accepted that, in rare and exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to review an application for academic promotion out with the normal timetable. In such circumstances, following a recommendation from the Head of School, the Senior Vice-Principal will consult with relevant Vice-Principals, before presenting a recommendation to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor and Director of People. The Principal & Vice-Chancellor will have the discretion to promote individuals, having due regard to the normal criteria used for promotion. The University will also secure a minimum of two satisfactory references (noting that in cases of a retention issue it may be necessary to move quickly while having regard to appropriate due process). All promotions approved in this way will be reported to the relevant University Promotions Committee, and the equality profile of such applications will be monitored.

4.4 Applications

4.4.1 Members of staff seeking promotion should complete the relevant application, according to the track and level of promotion they are seeking and submit this by the specified deadline to their Head of School and copy to promapps@abdn.ac.uk. It is the responsibility of applicants to demonstrate that they meet the criteria in their application and applicants should review the Promotion Application Guidance before submitting their application. Staff are also strongly advised to discuss their application with their Head of School and Academic Line Manager before submitting it.

4.4.2 All supporting evidence should be presented in the application form and no additional documents or formats will be accepted with the exception of the Individual Circumstances Form as detailed below.

Applications where staff are based in more than one School

4.4.3 Where a member of staff wishes to apply for promotion and the activities of their role sit across more than one School, the Heads of School for each area and the applicant will agree as to whether the Heads of School for each area will contribute to the preparation of the Head of School evaluation or whether one Head of School will take the lead, consulting with the other Head of School and other relevant staff as appropriate. The decision should be reached during discussion about the decision to apply for promotion.

Individual Circumstances Form

4.4.4 Staff wishing to declare individual circumstances on a confidential basis should complete the Individual Circumstances Form and send it along with their application for promotion to their Head of School, copying to promapps@abdn.ac.uk.

4.4.5 If staff wish to declare individual circumstances that they are content can be made available to all members of the University Promotion Committee they can do so via the Personal Statement included in the application form.

4.4.6 Where an Individual Circumstances Form is received, it will be sent to the HR Partner/Senior HR Partner for the School who will discuss it with the Head of School in confidence in advance of the Head of School preparing their evaluation and include reference to this in their evaluation form. If the promotion application proceeds to the relevant University Committee their individual circumstances form will be shared with the HR clerk to the University Committee who will discuss the circumstances in confidence with the convenor. No other party will have access to the individual circumstances submission.

- 4.4.7** During the University Promotion Committee meetings, the existence of the individual circumstances will be considered only if there are concerns about whether the application meets the criteria for promotion.
- 4.4.8** The Head of School, in preparing their evaluation, should consider whether individual circumstances may have had an impact. Where the Head of School does not have concerns about whether the application meets the criteria for promotion, no further action is required. Where the Head of School has concerns about the application meeting the criteria for promotion, they should consider the individual circumstances and indicate on the evaluation form by categorising as either (i) likely to have had little or no impact; (ii) likely to have had some impact or (iii) likely to have had a substantial impact.
- 4.4.9** Where a Head of School indicates in their evaluation form that individual circumstances have been submitted, the HR clerk to the University Promotion Committee and the Convenor will provide guidance to the committee on the extent to which the individual circumstances should be taken into account in assessing the application for promotion. Decisions will, thereafter, be categorised (i) to (iii) as noted above.

4.5 Consideration of applications

Head of School Evaluation

- 4.5.1** The Head of School will prepare an evaluation report for each promotion application received for their area, using the standard Head of School Evaluation Form. In doing so, Heads of School will follow the guidance which includes the requirement to initiate a consultation process with relevant senior staff in the School/other areas of the University as appropriate. Those consulted should normally include, as appropriate, the Academic Line Manager, Director of Research, Director of Education, Head of Division/Cluster/Group/ Department as a minimum.
- 4.5.2** The Head of School will forward each evaluation report to promapps@abdn.ac.uk.

University Committees

- 4.5.3** Applications will then be considered by the appropriate University Promotion Committee as outlined below.
- 1. University Committee (to consider applications to Lecturer, Advanced Research Fellow, Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow)**

Membership:

Vice-Principal (Convenor)

2 further Vice-Principals or Deans

Interdisciplinary Director

6 Senior Academic members of staff

External representative

HR Manager or Senior HR Partner (clerk)

Social Bias Observer / Union Observer (to observe only)

N.B. Membership will be balanced to have the capability to assess all Pillars, to represent a range of disciplines and every effort will be made to ensure gender and race balance.

In attendance:

Head of School (when consideration is being given to cases for their area only)

2. University Committee (to consider applications to Reader and Chair)

Membership:

Senior Vice-Principal (Convenor)

2 Vice-Principals or Deans

Interdisciplinary Director

6 Senior Academic members of staff

HR Manager or Senior HR Partner (clerk)

Social Bias Observer / Union Observer (to observe only)

N.B. Membership will be balanced to have the capability to assess all Pillars, to represent a range of disciplines and every effort will be made to ensure gender and race balance.

In attendance:

Head of School (when consideration is being given to cases for their area only)

4.5.4 There will be at least two meetings of each University Committee. During the first meeting, the Committees will consider all applications to determine, (i) for applications to Lecturer, Advanced Research Fellow, Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow, whether the criteria for promotion are met and (ii) for applications to Reader and Chair whether a prima facie case for promotion exists and, therefore, external evaluations should be sought.

4.5.5 For applications to Reader and Chair - where it is agreed that a prima facie case exists, external evaluations will be sought (see section 4.6 below).

4.5.6 For applications to Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow – where the committee considers that an external evaluation will assist in decision making (as the Committee considers the application to be borderline) an external evaluation will be sought.

4.5.7 During the second meeting of University Committee 2 (Reader and Chair), as well as the second meeting of University Promotion Committee 1 (Lecturer/Senior Lecturer, Advanced Research Fellow/Senior Research Fellow) if external evaluations have been sought, the Committees will consider external evaluations received and determine whether the applications are successful.

4.5.8 The remit of the University Promotion Committees is, therefore, as follows:

- To assess the applications and Head of School evaluation forms for each application and external evaluations, where appropriate, and determine whether applications are successful or not.
- To agree the feedback to be provided to all applicants, incorporating both the Head of School detailed evaluation and the outcome of the deliberations of the University Committee.

4.5.9 It is the normal expectation that applicants will apply for the next grade above their current one. Where an applicant makes an application for promotion two grades above their current grade, and the University Committee deems the application to be unsuccessful, the Committee may, with the consent of the applicant, consider whether promotion is merited to the grade below that which was originally applied for.

Selection of academic representatives for University Promotion Committees

4.5.10 Senior academic representatives, at professorial level, will be sought to be members of either the University Promotion Committees (as detailed at 4.5.4) or the Appeals Panel (as detailed in 4.8.4) and will serve for a maximum of four years on either.

4.5.11 Expressions of interest will be sought on an annual basis and decisions made by the Senior Vice-Principal, liaising with the Director of People, as to the appointment of representatives and on the basis of balancing the capability of the committees/Appeal Panel to assess all Pillars and seek to achieve gender and race balance.

4.6 External Evaluation requirements

4.6.1 Applicants will be asked to include a personal reference with their application.

4.6.2 Where the University Promotion Committee determines that a prima facie case for promotion to Reader or Personal Chair exists, or, in the instance of Senior Lecturer or Senior Research Fellow, where an external evaluation is required, external evaluations will be sought. The purpose of these is to enhance the decision-making process and to contribute to assessing the application against the promotion criteria. Further guidance on the selection of external evaluations is available.

4.6.3 The number of external evaluations sought will be as follows:

- For applications to Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow (where the University Promotion Committee agrees that an external evaluation should be sought) – 1
- For applications to Reader and Chair – reaching out to 3 evaluators (two national and one international where possible, otherwise a further strong UK based evaluator). Where 3 cannot be obtained, reaching a decision on the basis of 2; where 2 are supportive a third is not required.

4.6.4 For candidates for University Promotion Committee 2, the Head of School will be asked to consider who may act as external evaluators at the stage they are completing their Head of School Evaluation. The University Promotion Committee will ratify the appropriateness of the external evaluators put forward and make the final determination of the evaluators to be approached. Heads of School will then contact the external evaluators to confirm there is no conflict of interest and, subject to confirmation of this, their willingness to assist. Where there is a potential conflict of interest, this will be notified to the University Promotion Committee and an alternative proposal suggested.

4.6.5 Once suitable external evaluators have been confirmed, HR will prepare correspondence to be sent from the Head of HR, on behalf of the Convenor of the University Promotion Committees. The individual member of staff has the right to specify with justification the names of individuals whom they would prefer should not be contacted as external evaluators and this information should be provided at the time of application. They should **not**, however, be consulted about which external evaluators should be nominated.

4.6.6 The University Promotion Committees retain discretion to discount evaluations that they deem to be inappropriate or disingenuous, or where a clear conflict of interest emerges that was not apparent at an earlier stage.

4.6.7 Applicants are advised that the external evaluators will be provided with a copy of their application form to facilitate the production of a fully informed assessment of the submission.

4.6.8 In instances where an external evaluator has been contacted to provide an evaluation for the same applicant (whose application was deemed unsuccessful) in the previous two years they will be sent the original evaluation and asked to update/confirm if anything has changed.

4.6.9 In accordance with UK Data Protection legislation all evaluators will be advised that their evaluation will be released to the applicant should a Subject Access request be lodged by the applicant for sight of the evaluator's report.

4.7 Notification of outcomes

4.7.1 Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application in writing by the convenor of the University Promotion Committee, as soon as possible after this has been determined. For successful applicants this will include contractual correspondence. For unsuccessful applicants this will include detail of the right of appeal on procedural grounds.

4.7.2 For both successful and unsuccessful applicants, a meeting will be arranged with the Head of School. This will include detailed discussion of the feedback from the University Promotion Committee, incorporating the detailed evaluation prepared by the Head of School and the outcome of the deliberations of the University Committee. For unsuccessful applicants, the meeting with the Head of School should take place as soon as possible after the notification of the unsuccessful outcome.

4.7.3 Where unsuccessful, the detailed evaluation will include information about both the positive aspects of the application as well as the areas where further development is required.

4.8 Appeals

4.8.1 An unsuccessful applicant has the right of appeal against the decision made by the University Committee.

4.8.2 The appeal process is not intended to query the judgement reached on the application for promotion. Therefore, appeals will only be taken forward on the grounds of alleged procedural irregularities.

4.8.3 Notification of an appeal, clearly outlining the alleged procedural irregularity, must be made in writing to the Head of HR within 10 working days from the date of the meeting with the Head of School. The detailed grounds of the appeal should normally be lodged within 15 working days from the date of the original intimation of intention to appeal. In exceptional circumstances members of staff may seek an extension in writing to these timescales from the Head of HR.

4.8.4 Appeals will be considered as follows:

- (i) A Vice-Principal (not previously involved in the University Promotion Committees for that year) and Head of HR will undertake a review and determine whether there is a potential procedural irregularity.
- (ii) Where they determine there is no potential procedural irregularity the appeal will be rejected. This will be confirmed in writing to the member of staff and there will be no further right of appeal.
- (iii) Where they determine there is a potential procedural irregularity the case will be referred to an Appeal Panel comprising 3 senior academic members of staff not previously involved in considering the application. The Appeal Panel will determine 1 or 2 as detailed in Appendix 1. Where an Appeal Panel refers the case back to the University Promotion Committee the outcome of the University Promotion Committee will be final.

4.8.5 It is the normal expectation that appeals will be heard by the end of October in the year of the application.

4.9 Subsequent applications

4.9.1 It is anticipated that staff who have been unsuccessful in their application for promotion will not normally be ready to submit a further application in the promotion exercise immediately following the unsuccessful outcome. This recognises that staff will require a sufficient period of time to address the feedback given to them from their Head of School/University Committee and to amass further evidence before another application is made.

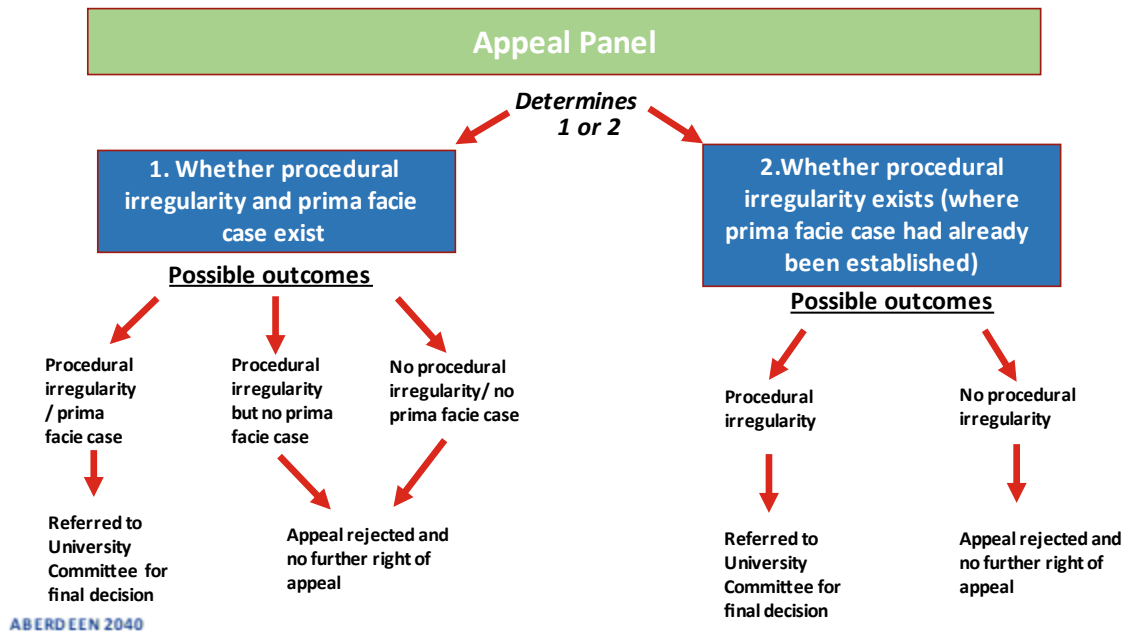
4.9.2 However, it is recognised that there may be circumstances where staff are ready to apply in the annual exercise immediately following an unsuccessful application. This may include where evidence is clearly available to show that there have been significant changes in the circumstances which constitute a substantial change in the sustained performance of the applicant.

4.9.3 A staff member who is considering applying in the annual exercise immediately following an unsuccessful application should take advice from their Academic Line Manager and Head of School before doing so.

5. PRIVACY NOTICE

5.1 The University's Privacy Notice is provided for staff applying for promotion at the University. This sets out the ways in which the University gathers, uses, stores and shares data. It also sets out how long we keep data and what rights staff have in relation to their data under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Appendix 1 – Appeals process



Policy author	Tracey White, Senior HR Partner
Date agreed (PNCC)	December 2024
Review date	September 2025