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| Academic Promotions Procedure | |  | **INSTITUTION**  *(HR/Learning Development)* |
| The RATIONALEWhat prompted you to participate in the PPR workshop? | | | |
| **Purpose** | The purpose of the review is to put in place a fair, consistent and transparent academic promotions procedure on a planned timescale. We already knew we needed to change our process for this and had started to move forward. Through the PPR we felt we could look at how the whole procedure was done across the organisation and assess collectively how well the different strands were working. | | |
| **Stakes** | For the university, this will allow workforce planning on academic titles and reduce risk of any potential claims of unfairness. For staff, this will allow a planned development process for academic title linked effectively through the PDR career and personal development planning processes, and aligned with the UK professional standards framework (PSF).  This will apply for promotions to Senior Lecturer and Principal Lecturer. (The professorial committee will remain under its current remit.) There are approx.167 academic staff (148 academic staff eligible). As part of the process review we will be looking at the number of staff within each academic title category across the University and some decisions will need to be made on the title profiles over a number of years. | | |
| **Objectives** | * To implement a fair and transparent academic promotions procedure and process with defined time scales. * To develop informative and supportive mechanism linked to career development of academic staff. * To determine budgeting for academic promotions | | |
| The PROBLEMWhat was the issue, challenge, opportunity the review focused on? | | | |
| **Context** | It was identified through our staff survey in 2013 that staff did not feel the academic promotion procedure was robust or that aspects of the process were not fit for purpose. The existing procedures had not been updated for several years. Staff involved in making the decisions through the committee felt there was an absence of clear criteria for promotion and academic staff who are the object of those decisions felt a similar dissatisfaction and sense of difficulty in applying for promotion.  When reviewing the process, it was important to us that people felt changes were being made in a way which has taken into account different aspects and different views. Certainly what we didn't want was for this to be something which was seen as an HR directive, so we made sure that we have a range of people involved in the process, which PPR lends itself well to. | | |
| **Need** | What was going wrong with the process internally were two aspects. Firstly, that it was ad hoc. It hadn't been reviewed for a number of years and with a growing emphasis within the organisation on performance drivers, we knew there were elements of the criteria for academic promotions that needed to be improved and more aligned to other systems we are using now. For instance, aligning academic promotion with the PDR process and aligning it to academic practice as well. The team there are doing a lot of work in developing standards for learning and teaching around the UK PSF so we needed to make sure that we align to that.  Secondly, the earliest design of this process a few years ago really didn't single out teaching as an important enough area, given that we’re a teaching led institution funded almost entirely by student fees; we have virtually no research income. One part of the agenda was therefore to use the process review to make it clearer to people that, in our institution, for promotion to senior lecturer or principal lecturer, teaching was the only compulsory area that we needed to see evidence of. (We’ve got a separate process for applications from reader and professor where research is more central.) Some of us felt we needed to have Fellowship of the HEA as a requirement for senior lecturer and Senior Fellowship of the HEA for principal lecturer, as this would signal to our academic community that teaching qualifications and/or fellowship of the HEA are absolutely key. | | |
| **Participants** | The process review was supported by the VC, as the absolute owner of Academic Promotions in University, while the Pro Vice Chancellor HR was its 'sponsor'.  For the workshop, we involved a team comprising 2 people from HR including our director of HR leading the group and then 2 further members of the HR team advising, supporting, contributing and then probably an equal number of academic staff including the head of academic practice. This aimed to create a balance in terms of the HR agenda and the academics agenda, as we were aware that they might be sometimes potentially different.  *"What complicates that dynamic and makes it harder to take decisions there and then [in the PPR], is that this process review group is a Working Group that reports back to the senior management team who essentially have a veto on anything and can throw a curveball."* | | |
| The SOLUTIONWhat did participating in the process review achieve for you? | | | |
| **Key understandings** | Institutional structures can have an impact on who is involved in deciding to go down a particular route with a new procedure and we certainly had to engage with many contextual factors around things that we wanted to change, many of which are still to be resolved. With hindsight, there were possibly some people who should have been involved that weren’t. It was quite a long way down the line as we started implementing this, when it was presented at a faculty meeting and there were some quite strong views by senior academics, who should really have been represented at the initial workshop.  One issue that came out of the initial review is we realised we had to do a lot more work in terms of the academic promotions criteria, making sure that it was fair, robust and standardised in some way with other universities in terms of criteria, matching it in some ways to the UK PSF and looking at how other universities were levelling the post. | | |
| **Intended outcomes** | * A robust Academic Promotions Procedure used successfully in the next round of applications to committee. * Positive feedback in the annual staff survey. * Identified links through to PDR processes and career development planning | | |
| **Light bulb moments** | Mapping it all out, I think that one of the realities this really brought home was how we were working to a very tight timescale and this process involved a lot of work that needed to be done within 4/5 months, such as looking at good practice nationally, revising our criteria as well as the process itself. When we first went into the session, the timescale I had was very broad and once we’d mapped it out and thought about all the different stages, I was able then to put more detail into that and make decisions about the actual actions we needed take to revise the process in relation to the promotions committee schedule.  By opening up the debate, not only during the workshop but in the meetings with faculty senior managers afterward, we identified there was a fundamental issue and between using promotion as a way of recognising academic achievements consistent with the UK HE sector as a whole and/or using promotion as a strategic management tool within the University. This highlighted the difference in expectations for the new promotions process. The central directorate wanted to maximise promotions potential for strategic management whereas the vast majority of academic staff expect to be promoted on the merits of their academic achievements only. This was a very fundamental discovery that we have made and one that we still haven’t absolutely resolved. It’s only the detailed discussions of process and criteria and that then throw up some issues of principle that led us to those threshold/conflicts. That’s taken up a lot of time because some of it has been controversial.  This is probably the root cause of a lengthy debate about who should be on a promotion panel as opposed to a selection panel. For example, if a faculty manager were recruiting a new principal lecturer, he would naturally be on the selection panel, so why shouldn't he be on the promotions panel to internally promote somebody to a post. | | |
| **PPR techniques** | The way the PPR terms of reference document was presented was certainly a lot more detailed and more helpful than we would normally have considered for terms of reference internally. Normally the way it would work, is one person would put it together and take it along to the first meeting and we’d have probably five minutes discussion on it if we were lucky; we might refine it little bit and that will be it.  Having a facilitator there really made us focus, why are we doing this, what we want to get out of it and obviously spend quite a bit of time actually thinking that through and I think where the link then was, was when we went to go on and think about what needed to be done as part of the project by focusing more clearly on what we wanted to get out of it, that helped to focus on how we were going to get there. Compared to other initiatives and projects drag on and go round and round in circles, it was powerful to see with PPR that you are able to sort something in a day if you get all the right people around the table.  However, in our case, the final revised process was produced quite slowly afterwards through discussion with the senior management team and faculty deans. We have been going away doing the drafting work for the guidelines and the criteria, discussing the issues in great detail and then directorate have been getting the outputs from that and asking for more details, querying certain things, rejecting things or asking us to think again and that’s been a very iterative process. It's an interesting dynamic in the way that decisions are made and having the right people in the room allows you to do all of that iterative process at once. | | |
| **Actions / next steps** | The action plan is highly dependent on the realistic timescales for implementing a new process, since we wish to avoid staff losing out if their application falls in between the old and new procedures. However, having to schedule in some very detailed research has delayed things and discussions are still on-going, but we actually have a meeting on Monday to present the final initial stages to what we call our Academic Issues Group which is quite a senior group, our faculty senior managers will be there, as well as the deputy Vice Chancellor. So things are moving along. | | |
| The RESULTWhat are the tangible outcomes & impact? | | | |
| **Immediate changes** | The PPR made us think deeper about the underlying purposes of academic promotions particularly different organisational rationales driving the process. So although we'd already created our terms of reference, the workshop focused us on what really could we achieve by doing this. In looking at defining and standardising our criteria for academic promotion, in fact we were defining excellence in learning and teaching. | | |
| **Improvements made** | It's still very much work in progress, but we know we are getting there. Whilst the timescale is challenging, we are hopeful of having an actual academic promotions committee use the new process for the next cycle. The revised criteria and procedure will be effective almost immediately, but will need to be backdated for those going through the process in the meantime.  The impetus to make the changes is also determined by the fact that we’ve put promotion on hold for quite some time whilst this is being reviewed and so there’s an external pressure from the workforce to get this sorted so that people are not held back and frustrated any longer. | | |
| **Evidence of benefits** | It comes back to the thing that everything is done in a hurry. The way this PPR and the workshop worked well is that we were actually able to spend some real quality time in thinking it through; that was a definite benefit. In practical terms, every time we do a project process review you would question if we have time to do that whole workshop approach and the answer is probably not. But certainly that did help, so it's a matter of balancing quality and time in terms of the outcomes and improvements and deciding on the cost-benefits.  The debates that ensued from the workshop outputs have been quite effective and it has preceded fairly swiftly. Thinking about some of the other things that we developed over the past several year, there are few changes as large as this one that we have executed so quickly; comparable projects have taken a lot longer.  Evidence we achieved the results are two-fold: the first will be meeting the timescale and the second will be getting positive responses from staff in terms of how did the new process works, that people feel that it’s fair and they've had the right feedback from their application. Because not everybody does get through, in the past process that was imposed, people had been saying they weren’t really getting proper feedback. So we are putting in place recording and better feedback for them, which can be used in developmental purposes. | | |
| **Unintended & unexpected** | Once we had the PPR workshop and a subsequent meeting, only at this stage we realised we needed to make sure senior academics in the faculties were on board.  There were issues around which staff grades were included in which procedures, for instance, by application only or also interview depending on the seniority and whether to include Reader in this group since it is equivalent to Principal Lecturer, or align it with the professorial committee process, which is separate. The faculty obviously had strong views on such decisions, which created a substantial discussion back and forth and slowed down making any definitive changes. Whilst we’ve mapped it all out, we will need to produce a slightly different map for the two different grades which we hadn't done originally. | | |
| **Longer term impact indicators** | The main impact of a more aligned new promotions process is it's more straight forward then to link it through to the PDR process, it will work together; so excellent performance will be excellent performance whether your working generally in your role or putting together a case for promotion. You will know you know there will be plans for your PDR of what you need to achieve. That stage will happen over a period of years, using PDR as a journey for academic staff to plan and develop themselves to get to the next promotion, whereas previously there was no link at all.  In fact, what the faculty suggested to the HR group was to link promotions very closely and directly to PDR, and there is some debate now about that. The PDR assessment matrix is a nine box grid and it was suggested that if an academic was not in one the top three 'excelling' boxes their last PDR, they should not be able to put forward an application. That is one of the key things to come out of the review, the link between the two systems, which we hadn't recognised at the beginning, that is one of the big issues that have come out of it.  The outcome of this is greater confidence as an institution in our promotions and rewards process, as a focused approach that is much more directive in what we’re looking for in both recruitment and promotion to each academic grade. This stems from re-addressing the balance between rewarding institutional contribution in very specific parameters (which we’re doing and have been doing) and also rewarding individual excellence in more traditional academic terms. | | |
| Lessons learned - what experience has been gained? | | | |
| **Prior experience** | Initially before we started to take part in the PPR, we did have a terms of reference and we had already started to look at that and determine the terms of reference which did have some outcomes for success and I think what was interesting was that then through the workshop we re-focused on those. We didn’t completely change but certainly built on. | | |
| **Participative experience** | The PPR approach certainly made us think deeper in terms of the outcomes, what we wanted to achieve and about the stakeholders it would affect and why, which definitely then created a much more robust terms of reference than we might otherwise have done. The session we did thinking through the roles was also quite useful. But it was the process mapping part that was probably the most important in terms of the level of discussion it created, including some useful disagreement, debates might be a better word, which were really quite interesting. There were one or two things that arose where there were clashes of opinions, but they were resolved.  People were working together rather than against each other and that certainly helped. No-one was critical about each other's role, it was more about different perspectives. For instance, it was issues such as who would give the feedback if somebody wasn't successful in their promotion application and if the decision was being made purely on the panel, how could the line manager be expected to give the feedback if they are not present on that panel. | | |
| **Personal skills / application to other processes** | In our own team, what we would do with the next project is probably take on board some of the aspects of PPR, but without formally doing it as a full day long workshop.  What we are hoping to offer next year as part of our learningdevelopment programme is running the workshops internally ourselves using the PPR materials. This would initially be run by staff who were in the original workshop leading the group. But more widely, we want to challenge people to use it actually to start thinking things through and offering their support. | | |
| **Success tips** | * Communication early on is important, particularly with stakeholders for whom the process directly impacts. In our case, having our faculty involved in the workshop right from the start would have help avoid having to make rather big changes a few months down the line, which was very demoralising for the group that had been working on it. However, these later iterations and refinements are inevitable, as you won't get it right first time, but obviously it's effective if you get there in the end with the right result. * In thinking about running PPRs internally, what came across to me from our own experience of the workshop structure and facilitation, is that you need to have an understanding of how to help somebody think through a PPR; you don't need to know the subject. Because you're getting the people themselves to do that work, you need the facilitation skills not the subject skills per se. * Why I think PPR worked well is because if you take the time to go through the Terms of Reference and to wrestle with the issues with the current process, it really makes you think about what you're doing in much deeper detail than we otherwise end up doing. That was really quite important as it then allows you to be much more thorough when you're mapping it out. You both capture and understand the reasons for any bottlenecks or disconnects and can agree there and then ways to simplify and streamline elements within the process. | | |