**Guidelines for Heads of Departments/Schools:**

Supporting Performance Improvement for Academic Staff

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# Introduction

1. For the University to fulfil its ambitions as a leading international technological university, underpinned by research of international quality across our disciplines, it is essential that our Academic staff population, collectively and individually, reflect balanced excellence across the three core strategic areas of research, teaching and learning and knowledge exchange.
2. Within the University, all staff are accountable for delivering acceptable performance at a level which is consistent with their role and general [guidance for managing unsatisfactory performance](http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/humanresources/policies/Guidance_Note_for_Managers-managing_unsatisfactory_performance.docx) is available which is relevant to supporting performance improvement in all staff including academic staff.
3. In 2010 Staff Committee agreed template job descriptions and person specifications for Academic posts which outlined expectations for Academic staff roles. (These are available on the Human Resources website). These profiles promote the model of the ‘Strathclyde Academic’ as an individual who demonstrates excellence across research, teaching and learning, knowledge exchange and administration/citizenship. Staff Committee also confirmed an expectation that all Academic staff should be research-active and this message was communicated at University and Faculty levels to all Academic staff.
4. Acceptable performance through the delivery of high quality teaching, research, knowledge exchange and administration, for the roles of Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader and Professor, is outlined as a requirement within contracts of employment. This defines Academic staff duties as: “teaching, research, administrative and professional activities organised by agreement with the Head of Department to produce a reasonable balance of commitment between these duties.” This confirms the requirement for all Academic staff to undertake teaching and research and administration and professional activities including knowledge exchange.
5. The University acknowledges that a profile agreed with a Head of Department/School which is heavily aligned to one of these areas e.g. teaching is acceptable if it is for a short period; nonetheless, the University will no longer accept that Academic colleagues may, for an extended period of time, not undertake activities across all of these areas. In particular, all academic staff are expected to undertake research / knowledge exchange activity to a level which is in keeping with the requirements of an Academic staff role at their level. One critical measure of appropriate performance in research is output volume and quality indicators that contribute to the University’s success in external assessment (e.g. REF) terms.
6. As a Head of Department/School you have a key responsibility for encouraging and supporting your Academic staff to achieve a high quality research profile, for monitoring the performance levels of your staff and for pro-actively identifying and addressing any performance concerns which may arise.

# Purpose

1. This document provides guidance to Heads of Department/School on how to support Academic staff who are not currently performing at a level which is consistent with the University’s expectations. Possible approaches are outlined which are not mutually exclusive and their suitability will vary on a case-by-case basis, based on a number of factors (e.g. the individual staff member’s current profile and the departmental/faculty context).
2. These approaches may be informed by discussions which take place under relevant formal staff performance support mechanisms, these currently being the Accountability and Development Review (ADR) and, for professorial staff, the Senior Academic Review and Development (SARD) processes. Similarly, the recent REF exercise provides a means of identifying cases for which the approaches identified may be relevant.

# Initial Approach: Encouragement and Support

1. As a Head of Department/School you have a vital role to play in communicating clear performance expectations to your staff and for supporting and encouraging individuals to meet these expectations. This includes reinforcing to Academic staff the University’s position that teaching, research and knowledge exchange are contractual requirements and ensuring that, in the allocation of duties, you do not agree to a teaching commitment which fails to allow a member of Academic staff, over a sustained period, to undertake research / knowledge exchange to a level which is in keeping with the requirements of an Academic staff role at their level. Similarly it is recognised that teaching is equally a contractual commitment for Academic staff and you must therefore ensure that all Academic staff make an active contribution in this area, albeit it is recognised that there may be finite periods where you will choose to allow a member of Academic staff to concentrate on their research activity by allocating only a light teaching load.
2. Where it is established that an academic member of staff is not contributing at an acceptable level across research, knowledge exchange, teaching and learning or administration, this should be raised with the individual concerned, clarity provided regarding expected future performance and appropriate support offered to facilitate an improvement in performance. Further general guidance on how to address underperformance is outlined in the Guideline for managers on managing unsatisfactory performance (link). Specific guidance on addressing research underperformance is outlined below.

# Addressing Research Underperformance

1. With guidance from the Executive Dean and/or Human Resources as necessary, you should work with Academic staff who do not have research profiles or whose research profiles have been identified as being at an insufficient standard. This might be considered, for example, against a minimum quality threshold test of a REF GPA of 2.5 for those at Lecturer level (as used in the 2014 REF exercise) or there may be inadequate levels of research income / grant applications. In such cases, targeted support should be provided. This would involve:
2. The discussion and agreement of research projects and objectives, the delivery of which would, over a defined period, lead to a meaningful and sustainable research trajectory being established. It is recognised that individuals who have not been research active for a sustained period will require more support over a longer period to develop a satisfactory research profile.
3. In parallel with the above, the discussion and agreement of development measures that would be appropriate to support the individual in pursuing the project(s) and delivering the objectives set. Such support would normally include the assignment of a mentor for research activities and might also include ensuring that the individual is integrated into an appropriate research group and the allocation of resources on a research ‘start-up’ basis. It will be essential to review the individual’s other commitments to ensure that sufficient time is available to establish research activities, and it may be necessary to consider a period of research ‘start-up’ leave.
4. Monitoring and supporting the individual’s progress against the objectives set through regular review meetings over the course of an appropriate period. For individuals who are research active but have not yet reached a standard of research output which would, for example, enable them to be REF returnable at an appropriate level, or who have inadequate levels of research income, grant applications or PhD students, a 6 to 12 month period of monitoring and support will normally be appropriate. For staff who have had little or no research time for a sustained period, a longer period of monitoring and support of up to 18 months may be required.
5. The general [guidance on managing unsatisfactory performance](http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/humanresources/policies/Guidance_Note_for_Managers-managing_unsatisfactory_performance.docx) provides a template performance improvement plan that may be useful for documenting performance discussions.
6. Where the research profile of an academic member of staff below professorial level is unsatisfactory and they are making significant valuable contributions in other areas such as teaching, it may be appropriate to consider the option of discussing whether a consensual agreement for their transfer to a Teaching Focused Contract might be appropriate. Given the University’s ambitions as a research intensive, leading international technological university, this will be exceptional and should only be considered if there is a known requirement within the School / Department for additional teaching capacity given that the contribution to teaching following transfer would be double that expected from an academic member of staff.

# Conclusion

1. With the help of this guide and the [guidance on managing unsatisfactory performance](http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/humanresources/policies/Guidance_Note_for_Managers-managing_unsatisfactory_performance.docx), the University seeks to help line managers to informally support their staff to enhance performance which is deemed to be unsatisfactory. Should it not prove possible to secure the required improvement in an individual’s research performance, or at the least meaningful progress towards the objectives set, within a defined period, or should an individual not wish to engage in such a programme, then this should be dealt with through a formal process.
2. If a member of staff, following support and warnings as part of a more formal process, is ultimately unable to meet the performance requirements of the role, then a dismissal may need to occur. In such cases, a fair process, including evidence of, for example, developmental support, enhanced supervision, clarification of performance expectations and monitoring over an appropriate period, will be required. Line Managers utilising this informal framework in the first instance will be able to show that they have fairly supported the individual with a view to achieving satisfactory performance and with formal processes up to and including dismissal only being required when individuals remain unable to fully and competently perform within their role.

# Further Guidance

1. Please contact your Human Resources team for support in exploring and implementing these guidelines.