

Research Appointments Guideline

Section 1 - Background

(1) Research staff can be employed as either Academic or Professional Staff. This Research Appointments Guideline (Guideline) has been developed for Executive Deans, Directors of Research Institutes, and Heads of Schools to provide guidance in determining the most appropriate employment classification for a role. The classification of a role as either Academic or Professional is important to the University as it creates the workforce profile necessary to support research outcomes for the University.

(2) There are Academic Staff in roles that are expected to undertake research and where this is the need of the organisation the roles would have an Academic Career Pathway (ACP) of Teaching and Research, Research Focused or Research Only. Similarly, the University's workforce profile must consist of Professional Staff who are expected to support the research activities and related work that is being undertaken by the research academics. A distinction could be that the research support person would not normally be named author or co-author of the research. The classification of a role as either Academic or Professional is critical when external agencies assess the University's research performance. However this Guideline does not preclude a Professional Research Staff member being recorded as a named author where this is possible based on the nature of their involvement in the research project.

(3) Australian Catholic University (ACU) is required to provide research data to [Excellence in Research for Australia](#) (ERA) for all researchers. This can include researchers who hold teaching-focused and, for example, emeritus and adjunct positions and who publish outputs in the relevant assessment period. The ERA submission must also include in the count of staff, all of those who are classified in the ACPs of Teaching and Research, Research-Focused, or Research Only irrespective of whether they publish. Therefore, it is important that:

- a. academic staff in these ACPs are performing (or have the potential to perform) academic work that produces research outcomes that are counted by ERA;
- b. staff who are undertaking duties that are inherently professional staff work (and are therefore not likely to be producing research outcomes recognised by ERA) are not included in the count of staff for the ERA submission.

(4) Research is defined as the creation of new knowledge and / or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes.

(5) Correct classification of an appointment based on the nature of the work to be done in the role also ensures a range of employment policies and practices are appropriately applied to staff. To illustrate this, there are different management practices in ACU and employment conditions / provisions in the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement 2017-2021](#) (the Agreement) and supporting Policies and Procedures which apply to Academic and Professional Staff including Probation, Promotion, Salary Scales for both Academic and Professional Staff, Performance Planning and Review processes and Working Arrangements. [Appendix A: Conditions of Employment for Academic and Professional Research Staff - Comparison](#) provides a brief overview of these highlighting some of the important differences in employment provisions between the classifications.

(6) Included in this Guideline is a checklist to assist the supervisor / hiring manager in determining the appropriate classification (Academic or Professional) for a new position. In addition, guidance is included for the hiring manager

who is considering options if it is identified that a currently occupied position may have been incorrectly classified at the time of appointment.

(7) [Appendix B: Classification Structure – Research Positions, Role Descriptors and Responsibilities by Level](#) includes a classification structure for ACU Research Staff, which is based on the existing classification descriptors detailed within Schedule 3 of the Agreement. Also listed are typical activities by level for research staff both Academic and Professional, as guided by the Academic Performance Matrices and Evidence Framework and the DWM Descriptors, respectively.

Section 2 - Process and Checklist for determining a research role as either Academic or Professional Staff

(8) Following is a checklist that will assist the hiring manager determine the classification, ACP and level of the required role. The appointment needs to meet certain criteria and expectations of performance.

(9) The clarification of the work activities to be undertaken by the role or position should occur prior to a Position Description being developed, and a new job request being submitted through Manager Online. Please note, for Professional Staff appointments there is a policy requirement to complete a 'Position Classification Request' (PCR) to confirm the Higher Education Worker (HEW) Level of the role prior to advertising the position. Further information about the classification process is found at [Appendix A: Conditions of Employment for Academic and Professional Research Staff - Comparison](#).

(10) Before developing a Position Description and / or submitting a job request, consideration should be given to the following:

- a. Does the requirement for the new position or role arise as a result of an external research grant?
 - i. If yes – is the nature of appointment of staff specified as part of the grant application (e.g. the Chief Investigator will be Professor X who will be supported by two new research assistants)? Has there been a specification that the research assistants will be either Academic or Professional Staff?
 - ii. If yes – the recruitment must follow the requirements of the conditions in the research grant application as once the final document is signed by ACU, the research grant forms a contract between the University and the granting body.
 - iii. If no – what research work activities will be undertaken by this position or role?
 - iv. If the activities involve the staff member actually undertaking the research, then an Academic Staff appointment may be appropriate (see question 3 below). If the activities will be supporting the research being undertaken by either Academic Staff or other researchers (e.g. conjoint appointees who are researchers in a hospital); then a Professional Staff appointment may be more appropriate. Please refer to [Appendix B: Classification Structure – Research Positions, Role Descriptors and Responsibilities by Level](#) which shows by level, classification standards and typical responsibilities for both Academic and Professional Staff. This will provide guidance for the supervisor / hiring manager in determining the nature of the role, whether Academic or Professional Staff.
- b. Does the requirement for the new position or role arise as a result of ACU requirements, including being funded by ACU – e.g. through the ACURF?
 - i. If yes – is there a specification on the ACURF grant application that the work will be supported by a research assistant?
 - ii. If yes – the recruitment must be consistent with the approved ACURF application.
 - iii. Has there been a specification that the research assistants will be either Academic or Professional Staff?

- iv. If no – identify what research work activities will be undertaken by this position or role?
 - v. If the activities are actually undertaking the research, then an Academic Staff appointment may be appropriate. If the activities will be supporting the research being undertaken by either Academic Staff or other researchers, then a Professional Staff appointment may be more appropriate. Again, please refer to [Appendix B: Classification Structure – Research Positions, Role Descriptors and Responsibilities by Level](#) which shows by level, classification standards and typical responsibilities for both Academic and Professional Staff. This will provide guidance for the hiring manager in determining the nature of the role whether Academic or Professional Staff.
- c. If consideration is being given to making an academic appointment in a Teaching and Research, Research-focussed or Research-only ACP, then in light of the University’s Research Intensification Strategy have the following issues been considered?
- i. What is the anticipated level of the appointment? If the anticipated level will be Lecturer (Level B) or higher, under the University’s requirements the successful candidate can be required to demonstrate that they have the qualifications and experience to meet the following criteria:
 - Meets the ACU definition of Research Active ^[1]
 - Has a record of undertaking independent research activities
 - Has published in Quality journals and / or achieved a level of citations which are appropriate to the Field of Research and / or the Faculty has a reasonable expectation of the successful candidate achieving a x3 research workload allocation within a year after commencement with ACU. Further details can be found in the Research Performance Review and Plan and Research Performance Review and Plan Guidelines
 - Meets the performance expectations of the Academic Level and ACP with reference to the Academic Performance Matrices and Evidence Framework.
- d. If consideration following step 3 above is that the work provides support for research rather than conducts research then a Professional Staff appointment is appropriate.
- i. [Appendix B: Classification Structure – Research Positions, Role Descriptors and Responsibilities by Level](#) will assist the nominated supervisor and / or hiring manager in determining the level of Professional Staff role which will be required when developing a position description and/or classifying the role prior to advertisement.

[1] Definition of Research Active: An Academic Staff member whose ACP is either Research-focussed or Research-Only is required to meet the University’s definition of “Research Active”. The ACU Research Active Definition has been developed in accordance with the requirements of the Higher Education Standards Panel, and is designed to support the University’s research intensification strategy. Further information is found in the [Research Active Definition Policy](#).

Section 3 - Conditions of employment for all research staff involved with either conducting or supporting research (Academic or Professional)

(11) ACU has one Enterprise Agreement (the Agreement) that establishes the conditions of employment for both Academic and Professional staff. Status and title are often at play as are the aspirations and likelihood of employment at other Universities. While there is significant similarity, there are a few areas where employment conditions / provisions differ between Academic and Professional Staff.

(12) Some of the areas of difference include: Fixed Term Employment, Probation and Promotion, Performance,

(specifically the Research Performance Review and Plan [RPRP]), ACPs, Academic Workload and Flexible Working Arrangements. [Appendix A: Conditions of Employment for Academic and Professional Research Staff - Comparison](#) provides a brief overview of these highlighting some of the important differences in employment provisions between the classifications.

Specific provisions that apply to all research staff whether Academic or Professional

Classification of Roles

(13) All Research Staff must be appointed in accordance with the requirements of the Agreement, a research position or role must be classified in accordance with either the DWM Classification Descriptors for Professional Staff, or the Minimum Standards for Academic Levels (MSALs) found in Schedule 3 of the Agreement. A selection of the key DWM Descriptors and MSALs can be found in [Appendix B: Classification Structure - Research Positions, Role Descriptors and Responsibilities by Level](#).

(14) In the case of Academic Staff, the Academic Performance Matrices and Evidence Framework is consistent with the MSALs and provides clearer guidance on the requirements of Academic Levels and ACPs. The Framework therefore supports and informs the classification of academic positions.

Fixed-term Appointments

(15) The Agreement ^[2] defines fixed-term employment as follows:

- a. Fixed-term employment means employment for a specified term or ascertainable period, for which the instrument of engagement will specify the starting and finishing dates of that employment (or instead of a finishing date, will specify the circumstance(s) or contingency relating to a specific task or project), upon the occurrence of which the term of the employment will expire. Fixed-term employment may be on a full-time, fractional or part-time basis.

[2] The definition of fixed-term employment is consistent with section 386(2) of the [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)](#).

(16) The Agreement provides that the University may employ staff under a specific category of fixed-term employment where those staff members are directly undertaking research activities:

- a. Research means work activity by a person engaged on research only functions for a contract period not exceeding five (5) years. Such a contract may be on a continuing contingent basis which is contingent upon the provision of funding (6.7.23).

(17) The critical factor for consideration is the “work activity” to be undertaken. A staff member who is undertaking research or directly supporting that research may be employed on a fixed-term contract of employment for up to 5 years. Where a staff member is not directly supporting or undertaking the research, (e.g. the role of an Executive Assistant to the Director of a Research Institute), this category of fixed-term employment cannot be used. Whilst the Agreement does not limit the number of times a staff member may be employed under the ‘research’ category, each fixed term contract expiry and new employment offer will be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the [Employment of Fixed Term Staff Policy](#).

(18) A continuing contingent contract is one where the University guarantees that the contract of employment will continue as long as the funding for the role or position continues. Such funding is normally externally based as the University would not normally offer a fixed-term contract which is supported by internal funding, (i.e. the role or position is reliant on student fee income). A continuing contingent contract will need to include a review date which is linked to the external funding grant or arrangement. If the funding is to cease at any time, the University is required to

invoke the notice provision of the contract, and provide the staff member with the required notice (or payment in lieu thereof) that the contract will end on a certain date due to the funding for the role no longer being available or not being guaranteed beyond a certain date.

Renewal and non-renewal of research based fixed-term contracts of employment

(19) Prior to the expiry date of the contract or at the review point of a continuing contingent contract, a decision must be made about whether or not further employment will be offered. Where a decision is made to not offer further employment or not to continue with the continuing contingent contract; the staff member must receive notice of that decision or payment in lieu thereof. Further information about notice periods and severance payments please see section 6.7.2.4 of the Agreement.

Casual Research Staff

(20) In addition to employing research staff on fixed-term contracts of employment, research staff members may also be engaged on a casual basis as follows:

- a. Casual academic researcher: The minimum salary paid to a research Academic Staff member engaged to undertake research-only related activities and employed on a casual basis will be an hourly rate derived from the full-time rates set out in Schedule 1, Part A, together with a 25% loading. This loading is in compensation for the casual nature of the appointment and all leave entitlements including personal leave, public holidays, annual leave, long service leave and annual leave loading.
- b. Casual Professional Staff: The minimum salary paid to a Professional Staff member employed on a casual basis will be the ordinary rate per hour derived from the full time rates as set out in Schedule 1, Part B, together with a loading of 25%. The minimum period of engagement for casual Professional Staff is three (3) hours; other than for casual Professional Staff members who are students who are expected to attend the University on that day in their capacity as a student who have a minimum engagement period of one (1) hour.

Superannuation Arrangements

(21) The Agreement provides the following superannuation arrangements for casual and fixed-term staff:

- a. Employer superannuation contributions for casual staff and for staff engaged on an initial fixed-term contract of employment up to twelve (12) months shall be the minimum required superannuation guarantee rate.

Therefore a staff member who is engaged either as a casual or employed on a fixed-term contract of employment for a period of less than 12 months will receive the minimum required superannuation guarantee rate (currently 9.5%).

Section 4 - Next Steps where a change of ACP or classification of role is being considered

(22) Where a staff member has been employed as an academic researcher, and due to their employment history or position responsibilities the staff member is unlikely or unable to meet for example:

- a. the probation criteria set out in their employment contract;
- b. the Research Active definition; and / or
- c. quality research outcomes enabling them to receive a X3 workload allocation as a result of the RPRP process.

(23) Then consideration should be given to either:

- a. changing the staff members ACP to better reflect their research performance and contribution to other academic activities, or

- b. re-classifying the role to a Professional Research Staff role (if there are no grant requirements that the role is academic).

Option 'A':

(24) Changing the staff members ACP is normally only achieved through the Academic Performance Review and Planning (PRP) Process. A provision to allow a variation to the staff member's ACP is contained in the Agreement at Section 5.2.4.5 'Nothing in this agreement prevents a staff member from being required to change their Academic Career Pathway in accordance with the Performance Review and Planning Program for Academic Staff process' and section 5.2.4.6 also contains this clause: 'A variation to an Academic Career Pathway can only be approved by a member of the Executive'. (Sections 5.2.4.5 and 5.2.4.6 respectively);

(25) The supervisor needs to consider whether the change in pathway would provide the opportunity for the staff member to meet the MSALs and performance expectations outlined in the Academic Performance Matrices and Evidence Framework for the academic level. It is the expectation of the University that the pathway and associated performance and development objectives agreed in the PRP discussion should support the staff member's achievement of the MSALs and Academic Performance Matrices and Evidence Framework for that academic level. This also assists the staff member's development should they wish to be considered for promotion to the next academic level. If this is not the case and the duties and responsibilities of the required position more closely reflect those of a Professional Staff Research role (See [Appendix B: Classification Structure – Research Positions, Role Descriptors and Responsibilities by Level](#)) then consideration needs to be given to changing the staff member's classification from Academic to Professional Staff.

Option 'B':

(26) Re-classifying the role to a Professional Research Staff role. Following are options based on the type of employment contract:

Options when the contract is fixed term:

(27) Depending on the length of the fixed-term contract, an option is to wait until the Academic Staff member's fixed-term contract of employment is due to expire, and then provide the staff member with formal notice that they will be offered a new contract of employment as a Professional Staff member. This option is consistent with the requirements of the Agreement for the University to provide written notice of its intention to renew employment upon the expiry of the contract, i.e. the new offer of employment can be in a different role and involve a different classification. The new employment contract can be to a professional research position for the required term or a term of up to five (5) years. Please note, a Position Classification Request and classification of the role in line with the [Position Classification for Professional Staff Policy](#) would need to occur before an offer of employment can be made for the Professional Staff position. Further information about the classification process for Professional Staff is contained in [Appendix A: Conditions of Employment for Academic and Professional Research Staff - Comparison](#).

- a. The salary to be offered will be based on the classification of the work to be undertaken as a Professional Staff position. If there is a difference between the previous salary paid (e.g. as a Level A/B academic) and the salary that will be paid under the new contract (e.g. as HEW Level 7); there is discretion for a salary loading to be paid as part of the contract of employment. This is normally up to 20%. The payment of such a salary loading must be approved in advance by the delegated officer who will be the relevant member of the Senior Executive (with advice from the Chief People Officer or nominee). The payment of a salary loading can be restricted to a certain time period. [Appendix C: Salary Rates By Level - Academic and Professional Staff 2016-2017 - Comparison](#) shows a comparison of academic and professional staff base salary rates 2016 to 2017.

(28) In circumstances where an Academic Staff member's fixed term contract of employment still has several years to run, the University can make a further offer of employment before the contract is due to expire. In such

circumstances, the replacement employment contract can be to a Professional Research position for a term of up to 5 years. The Annual Performance Planning and Review (PRP) discussion provides the opportunity for this and other possible options to be discussed with the staff member. Further information about the PRP process can be found at [Appendix A: Conditions of Employment for Academic and Professional Research Staff - Comparison](#).

- a. As per clause(28), where there is a difference between the salary previously paid and the classification and salary of the Professional Staff role, consideration can be given to providing an additional salary loading as appropriate.
- b. Please note, however, that the staff member is not compelled to accept the new offer of employment. Should the new offer of employment not be accepted, the staff member continues their current appointment as an Academic Staff member for the term of that appointment. The staff member however is expected to demonstrate performance that meets or exceeds the requirements of the Academic Performance Matrices and Evidence Framework (which are consistent with the MSALs) for the Academic Level and ACP. If the staff member's performance does not meet or exceed these standards the [Managing Unsatisfactory Performance Policy](#) may apply.

(29) Where the Academic Staff member's position is continuing (as the nature of the employment contract is a contractual term) a change to the type of contract could be deemed to result in a change which has a significant effect on the staff member's employment. This type of change to the staff member's employment contract would therefore need to be managed in accordance with clause 8.4.1 'Principles and Practices of Change Management' of the Agreement. The Agreement does provide options for management of change that may be deemed as 'minor' to be managed at the local level through direct discussion and consultation with affected staff. Where the change may result in more significant affects and consequences, a more formal process which ensures the principles of change management should occur. Please see section 8.4.1 of the Agreement for further information on how this type of change is conducted. People and Capability will assist the supervisor / Faculty to ensure the proposed change is conducted in accordance with the Principles and Practices of Change Management outlined in the Agreement.

Professional Staff member seeking employment in an academic role.

(30) In circumstances where a Professional Staff member seeks to be considered for an Academic role they can apply for any vacant academic positions advertised in accordance with the [Recruitment and Selection Policy](#).

Section 5 - Appendices

- (31) [Appendix A: Conditions of Employment for Academic and Professional Research Staff - Comparison](#).
- (32) [Appendix B: Classification Structure – Research Positions, Role Descriptors and Responsibilities by Level](#).
- (33) [Appendix C: Salary Rates By Level - Academic and Professional Staff 2016-2017 - Comparison](#).

Status and Details

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Responsible Executive	Patrick Woods Chief Operating Officer
Responsible Manager	Angelle Laurence Chief People Officer
Enquiries Contact	Bernardine Lynch ER and Safety Committees and Policy Officer <hr/> People and Capability