Academic Promotions Process: Options for Change

Background

A key objective for any University is to attract, develop and retain high quality academic staff.

Academic promotion is probably the most important route to recognise and reward staff achievements. All academic staff, other than those on casual appointments, are eligible to apply for academic promotion when they believe their career progress has achieved sufficient merit.

The Academic Promotions Committee (APC) has previously undertaken a review of the current UWA Academic Promotions Process to consider opportunities for improvements to give a more efficient system, reflective of UWA's strategic intent for staff profiles and activities (Appendix 1).

This consultation paper identifies a number of issues within the current process, and provides options for improvement, drawn partly from the experience of peer universities. This paper collates the information presented in previous reviews, to identify and address four (4) possible areas for change and improvement:

1. Frequency of the promotions process
2. Role of the APC
3. Structure and content of promotion criteria
4. Length of documentation to be prepared

1. Frequency of Committee Meetings

Current State

The current procedure allows applicants to submit their promotion application at any time during the year. The ongoing nature of the process can result in a loss of comparability between candidates from cognate disciplines, an increased administration workload, and, presents a missed opportunity for clear consistent communication to candidates when applying for promotion. This often manifests in weaker cases for promotion, unacceptably long turnaround times for application reviews, and confusion for applicants around the process and its requirements.

Improvement Initiatives

Running a less frequent review process can address the concerns raised above, and will present the opportunity to drive an improved applicant experience and better compliance with expectations.

The following factors will be taken into consideration:
- The appropriate frequency[1].
- Whether the frequency of application should be consistent across all levels[2].

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[1] See University of QLD - https://ppl.app.uq.edu.au/content/5.80.12-promotion-academic-staff-levels-d annual process.

[2] See UNSW https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/academicpromotionsprocedure.pdf Two processes run each year, split by application level.

- Whether the open and closing dates should be consistent across all levels[3].
- Whether it is appropriate to retain current provisions for "fast track" promotions, or include revised provisions for out of cycle promotions with strict eligibility criteria.
- The nature of the Academic Promotions College and the role of trained Academic Promotions Advisors[4] including whether any specific support will be provided for teaching intensive roles[5].
- How any change from monthly to a less frequent process would be communicated to staff and how to manage the transition for any applications currently (or soon to be) underway.
- Changes to the nature of the online application process to minimise the administrative double handling that currently occurs[6].

Views on all of these issues are sought.

2. Role of the APC and role of the Assessor

Current State

All cases for promotion are currently considered by a central committee. The respective roles of the Academic Promotions Committee and the external assessors are currently not tightly defined, with a significant weighting placed on the views of external assessors. The requirement to seek and utilise the same volume of external input at all levels (currently four reviews) adds additional complexity to administering the process, without clarity on the role and/or weighting of external information.

The APC meets monthly, with much of the focus on disseminating applications received for the month to assessors. This approach does not allow time for the committee to properly explore and recommend process improvements and criteria updates. Any changes made to the frequency and/or focus of committee meetings would allow for an examination of how the time of the APC can be better utilised to ensure improved effectiveness, efficiency, and a continuous monitoring and review of the promotions process.

Improvement Initiatives

Creating clarity on the role of the APC and the nature of information provided by applicants and assessors will assist in speeding up the process, whilst maintaining its integrity.

The following factors will be taken into consideration:
- Consider having faculty-based Promotions Committees empowered to scrutinize and recommend promotion to Levels B, C and D providing for greater domain expertise locally into decisions. Decisions to be ratified by APC.
- More clearly define responsibility of committee(s) for reviewing the case and recommending promotion, supported by external referees.
- In conjunction with amended criteria (see below) create a simpler more user-friendly tool for external assessors to use, to improve participation rates and turnaround times, whilst allowing for a robust side-by-side comparison between applications.

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[3] See University of Sydney http://syd https://ppl.app.uq.edu.au/content/5.80.12-promotion-academic-staff-levels-dney.edu.au/provost/promotions.shtml one annual process, with staggered return dates based on level.

[4] See University of QLD https://staff.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/human-resources/performance-review/academic-promotion mandatory seminar attendance for all applicants.

[5] See University of Sydney https://sydney.edu.au/education-portfolio/educational-innovation/

[6] See recommendations from Carolyn Oldham document – November 2017

- Create an online application form for applicants to use which provides specific guidance on the questions to be answered and the evidence that is required, in place of the current academic portfolio system[7]. Ensure applicants have the ability to provide evidence of their achievements in each area, as well as the quality and impact of their contribution.
- Consider segmentation of evidence requirements and volume by level.
- Consider reviewer requirements by level, to allow greater discretion for approval of lower level applications (A to B, for example) without external input.
- Provide clear guidelines for the operation of the APC, with a specific focus on process improvement built into the role of the committee.
- Determine meeting schedule for APC (continue with monthly or move to less frequent meetings).
- Streamline the process through electronic pathways, with automatic system prompts to reviewers to ensure efficiency and minimise administrative burden.

Views on all of these issues are sought.

3. Structure and Content of Promotion Criteria

Current State

The most significant problem with the current system is the structure and content of the promotion criteria, which fails to accurately reflect the UWA strategic intent for staff profiles and activities.

The current process is evidence based, and requires an assessment from both the APC and (in some cases) external assessors against the University's expectations. However, these criteria are not a complete representation of the University's expectations, and do not adequately address those staff in teaching intensive roles.

The two main issues that arise from this are:
- An inability to reward excellence for teaching intensive staff, due to current criteria requiring applicants to specifically address scholarship in the area, limiting the potential for advancement and recognition of some staff.
- The current criteria do not formally address issues such as influence, impact and engagement.

Improvement Initiatives

- Revise the current academic promotions framework to formalise and include criteria for influence, impact and engagement.
- Consider how impact, influence and engagement will interact with the existing categories in any future framework[8].

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[7] See University of QLD https://staff.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/human-resources/performance-review/academic-promotion online academic portfolio.
See Monash University https://www.monash.edu/academic-promotion/candidates/application-forms academic promotion form.
[8] See Monash University https://www.monash.edu/academic-promotion/tools-and-resources/standards "Engagement" as a broad inclusive category of the current UWA "Service" as well as influence and impact.
See UNSW https://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/academicpromotionsprocedure.pdf "Social Engagement, Global Impact and Leadership".
See University of Sydney http://sydney.edu.au/provost/pdfs/Guidelines_for_Applicants_2018_FINAL.pdf "Governance, Leadership and Engagement".

- Determine how applicants provide sufficient evidence to support achievement against the criteria, as well as how any assessors should provide feedback in these areas.
- Allow for alternate weighting of criteria under the framework to ensure those individuals engaged in teaching intensive roles have a clear path to a practitioner excellence promotion, without the requirement to address scholarship[9].
- Develop and implement a clear matrix which outlines promotion criteria and works in conjunction with the application and assessors tools described in the section above. Consider whether this matrix will require applicants to demonstrate achievement at a certain level across all areas, and/or whether there will be minimum standards of performance.

Views on all of these issues are sought

4.   Length of Applications

Current State

Academic portfolios include an enormous quantity of information and it is an interesting point as to how much of this actually influences the decision of a panel or referees. Improvements in the effectiveness of decision making may be achieved through more concise impact/outcomes focused applications, i.e. rewarding significant achievement rather than volume of activity.

Improvement Initiatives

- Consider a more tightly limited statement of achievement against each relevant category with a clearer focus on impact and/or outcome rather than volume.

- With reference to above, consider limiting to 'X' best activities in each category, for example five best publications with statement of significance supported with evidence.

- Provide clear guidance that only achievements since appointment or previous promotion are to be considered

Views on all these issues are sought.

Proposed process

1.   Consultation with Academic Staff over September/October 2018 period

2.   Development of revised criteria, framework for promotions and process/policy improvements: October/December 2018

3.   Implementation between February/March 2019.

4.   All changes commence from April 2019.

5.   Initiate any further review and evaluation, as required.

See "Draft – Guideline on Providing Evidence to Support Promotion Application 1/6/16" which proposes the three areas be 1) Learning and Teaching 2) Research, K T, Impact and Enterprise, and 3) Service, Management and Leadership.
[9] See University of QLD https://ppl.app.uq.edu.au/content/5.70.17-criteria-academic-performance three specific pathways up to level E across teaching intensive, research intensive and teaching / research positions.

Proposed timeline

Process	Timeline

1. Consultation with Academic Staff
   a. Executive
   b. Academic Board
   c. Education Committee
   d. Research Committee
   e. Senate
   f. Academic Consultative Committee
   g. Academic Promotions Committee
   h. Focus Groups
      i. Heads of School Workshop
      ii. Associate Deans
      iii. Academic Levels B and C
      iv. Academic Levels D
      v. Professoriate Level E
      vi. Academic Promotions College advisers
      vii. Senior Leadership Forum
      viii. All Staff Forum
	September – October 2018

2. Development of revised criteria, framework for promotions and process/policy improvements	October – December 2018
3. Implementation	February – March 2019
4. All changes commencement	April 2019
5. Initiate further review and evaluation	Post implementation, as required

Staff participation and feedback in the consultation process is also invited by:

- Emailing sdvc@uwa.edu.au
- Visiting the Academic staff promotion website http://www.hr.uwa.edu.au/working/academic for updates on the consultation process.

Professor Simon Biggs

Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor

21 August 2018

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Appendix 1

**NETWORK FILE LOCATION: MACINTOSH
HD:USERS:CAROLYN:DROPBOX:CURRENT:UWA:1B. ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS
COMMITTEE:REVIEW OF PROMOTIONS PROCESSES:ACADEMIC PROMOTION
PROCESS REVIEW V1.1.DOCX**

DOCUMENT STATUS

X	Draft			Ready for Review			**Final**

DOCUMENT MODIFICATION HISTORY

Ver	Primary Author(s) (name and position)	Description of Version	Date Completed	Provided To
1.0	Carolyn Oldham Acting Chair, Academic Promotions Committee	Summary of recommendations from APC Special Meeting on 21 Nov 2017	26 Nov 2017	Academic Promotions Committee, Prof. Helen Wildy, (Dean of Education) Ms Lucette Cant (APC-EO)
1.1	Carolyn Oldham Acting Chair, Academic Promotions Committee	Recommendations about meeting frequency and reporting functional indicators added Correction to on-line application process	28 Nov 2017	Vice-Chancellor

DOCUMENT APPROVAL

Approved By (name & position)	Signature	Date

BACKGROUND

The current UWA Academic Promotion processes create significant challenges, including:

1. Increased processing times: Over 2016-17, the time from submission of promotion application to the Head of School through to the Letter of Promotion from the Vice-Chancellor, has increased, in some cases reaching 12 - 18 months. This is not acceptable.
2. Difficulty finding suitable external assessors: An increasing amount of time is spent finding external academics who are willing to act as assessors, and then chasing those assessors for their reports.
3. Increased complaints about promotion criteria confusion: Comments are passed back to the APC from both assessors and applicants, about the lack of clarity of UWA's promotion criteria. The existing criteria do not fully reflect UWA's strategic intent for staff profiles and activities e.g. there is little in the criteria that relates to influence, impact or engagement.
4. Addressing promotion criteria: Currently the Academic Portfolios are resource intensive for both applicant, and assessors, however they typically do not address promotion criteria. This makes them less useful to the assessors, but a significant work load for applicants.
5. Teaching-intensive promotion pathways: UWA's promotion pathway for teaching-intensive staff requires streamlining and more clarity. In particular, a promotion pathway for teacher-practitioner is required, particularly for teaching-intensive academic staff.
6. Executive support: Executive support for the Committee has been reduced since a (partial) move to on-line promotion applications occurred. However, a significant manual case-load still exists for all levels of promotion, predominantly liaising with HoS to nominate assessors, confirming assessor availability and chasing their reports. The current executive support is not sufficient to manage the case-load.
7. Vice-Chancellor's approvals: VC's approval is currently required for both sending out applications to assessors and for final promotion decisions, for all academic levels. This can cause delays in the process.

With these challenges in mind, the Academic Promotions Committee (APC) reflected on their own experiences as assessors for promotion application in other universities, and also reviewed the following documents:

- University-side standard descriptors (UWA)
- Guidelines for academic staff – UWA teaching criteria framework (UWA)
- Integration of scholarship, research and professional activities with teaching and supporting learning (UWA)
- Academic Promotion Process Map (UWA)
- Providing evidence to support promotion applications – 2016 discussion paper (Matthew Knight, UWA)
- Academic career benchmark and indicators (University of Melbourne)
- Assessor's Report Template Level D (University of Adelaide)
- Classification Standards, EBA Extract (University of Adelaide)
- Criteria for Promotion (Griffith University)
- Application and Case for Promotion Form (Griffith University)
- Application for Academic Promotion template (Royal Holloway, University of London)
- Professorial Banding Criteria Matrix (Royal Holloway, University of London)

With the objective of streamlining UWA's academic promotion processes, the APC is recommending the following changes to our processes and also a revised framework for academic promotion. A draft promotion matrix-in-a-page is provided (Appendix A), along with process maps to enable comparison of current and proposed promotion pathways (Appendix B).

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in general are achievable <u>within current resources</u>, with two exceptions:

1. Website developer time is required to establish on-line promotion application forms, on-line promotion assessment forms and on-line system of reminders.
2. Initial contact with potential assessors would be the responsibility of the Head of School (rather than the APC-EO).

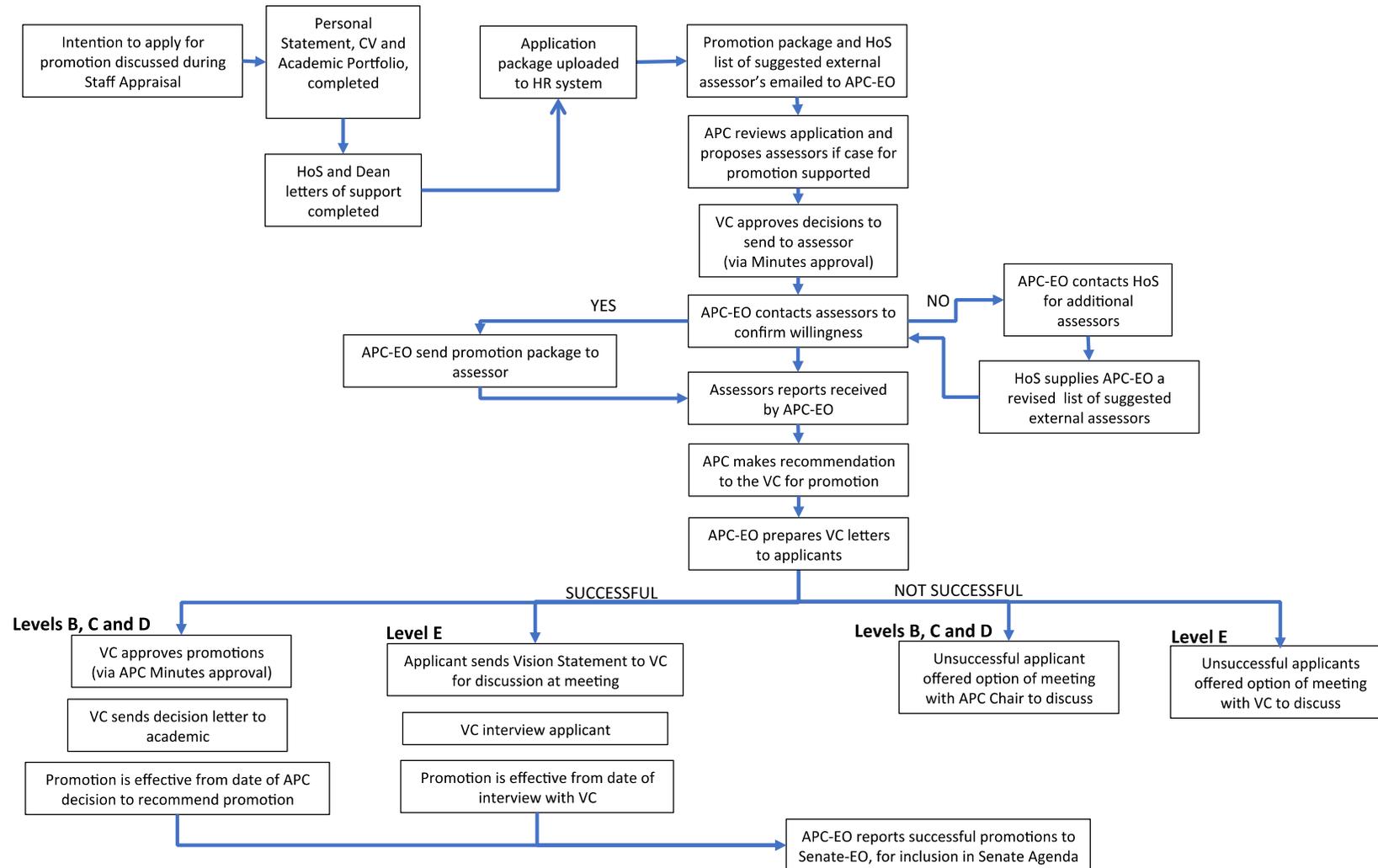It is expected that implementing the recommendations will reduce time spent by:

1. applicants preparing case for promotion,
2. assessors undertaking review of case for promotion,
3. APC members reviewing cases, and
4. APC-EO managing case-load.

	Current System	Recommended change
1.	Academic Portfolios are required.	Remove need for Academic Portfolio as part of promotion package. Replace with an on-line "Case for Promotion".
2.	Academic Portfolios are very long and often repeat information already stated in Personal Statement and CV. Very frequently neither personal statement nor Portfolios address promotion criteria.	Create on-line application form that specifies questions to be answered, with word limits for each section, to ensure applicants address promotion criteria through provision of evidence. Applicants nominate relative weights of the four academic domains. Will need appropriate forms for each academic level.
3.	Promotion criteria currently scattered across multiple websites, are confusing for both applicants and assessors. Current information on promotion is lengthy and convoluted.	Develop a "matrix-on-a-page" to provide clear and concise criteria for promotion, and examples of evidence that could be used in making a case for promotion. See Appendix A for a draft matrix-in-a-page.
4.	Current academic domains are 1. Teaching and learning; 2. Research; and 3. Service. There is no mention of "sphere of influence", nor "engagement and impact". Leadership development is implied though not explicit.	Include developing "sphere of influence" and "leadership capability" as expectations (along with "skill development"). Also add "Engagement and Impact" as the fourth academic domain (along with 1. Teaching and Learning, 2. Research and research training, 3. service).
5.	Applicant submits their package and HoS and Dean comments all at the same time. We get complaints from Applicants that it can take months to get comments back from HoS and Dean, after they have submitted their material to the HoS/Dean.	Applicants submit their Case for Promotion, and CV online. The application then passes electronically to a) HoS and then b) Dean for comments. HoS and Dean to be prompted for comments by system.
6.	Promotion for teaching-intensive staff required significant scholarly activity in teaching and learning.	Remove the requirement for teaching-intensive applications to also address scholarship in the area. Add examples of evidence that demonstrate increasing influence and impact of teaching.
7.	Assessors do not have a template assessment form to complete. Level and depth of assessment is highly variable. Assessors often take longer than timeframe requested.	Create on-line assessment form, with specific questions (and word limits). Assessors are given a deadline of 30 days. System prompts and reminds assessors for their reports.
8.	Applications for promotion to Levels B and C are sent out to three assessors: 2 external for research, and 1 (generally) internal for teaching. VC approves of promotions to Levels B and C.	APC to manage promotions to Level B and C. An assessment will be sought from within UWA on teaching performance. APC makes recommendation, and APC Chair approves.

9. Applications for promotion to Level D are sent out to four assessors: 3 external (2 international, 1 Go8 or equivalent) for research, and 1 (generally) internal for teaching.	For Level D, only three assessors sought: one international, one Go8, and 1 for teaching.
10. Applications for promotion to Level E are sent out to four assessors: 3 external (2 international, 1 Go8 or equivalent) for research, and 1 (generally) internal for teaching.	For Level E, four assessors sought, two international, one Go8, and 1 for teaching (*no change*)
11. APC-EO contacts HoS-nominated assessors (after decision by APC) to confirm they are willing and available. If not, APC-EO contacts HoS for additional nominations, and continues the loop until they find sufficient assessors for the application.	HoS to nominate five assessors to APC, having contacted and confirmed their willingness to assess application.
12. VC approves APC meeting minutes, and the applications are sent to assessors.	APC makes decision which applications go out to assessors, without requiring formal approval of APC minutes by VC.
13. VC approves promotion to Level D.	APC makes decision on Level D promotion based on assessors' reports.
14. VC makes final decision on Level E promotion, on the basis of APC recommendation and interview. If approved, promotion dated from interview with VC.	VC makes final decision on Level E promotion, on the basis of APC recommendation and interview (*no change*). If approved, promotion backdated to relevant APC meeting.
15. APC meets ten times per year (Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, Aug, Sept, Oct, Nov, Dec)	APC to meet bi-monthly (Mar, May, Aug, Oct, Dec).
16. APC does not report functional indicators and promotion outcomes.	APC to report annually to Academic Board, (to-be-specified) functional indicators and promotion outcomes.

LEVEL	EXPECTATIONS			Examples of supporting evidence			
				ACADEMIC DOMAIN			
	Skills	Sphere of influence	Leadership capability	TEACHING AND LEARNING	RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING	SERVICE	ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT
A	Acquiring academic skills and building achievements	Students, unit, discipline	Informal leadership	Response to student evaluation Review of teaching and curriculum effectiveness Curriculum redesign and innovation Advancement of student equity and support of diversity Publication of education texts and resources Leadership of teaching teams Innovation grants External consultancies on teaching and learning Scholarly publication on teaching and learning Awards and prizes for teaching (national, international) Leadership of major teaching programs Invited keynotes (international, national) Mentoring of less experienced teachers Input into national teaching and learning policies National or international course review panel National or international accreditation review panel	Scholarly publications: Journal articles, book chapters, books, conference papers Commissioned reports Creative outputs HDR student supervision and completions National competitive research grant Industry grants Commissioned research National/international research-based consultancies Leadership of research teams Invitations to review research proposals Invitations to review research outputs Editorships and curatorships Invited keynotes (national, international) Patents and commercialization Awards and prizes (national, international) Mentoring less experienced research staff Expanding research capacity across UWA Leadership of major research projects Election to learned academy	Active engagement in academic management of Discipline, School, Faculty. Active engagement in academic management at UWA level. Leadership of academic committees at Discipline, School, Faculty level. Active engagement in academic management of UWA. Leadership of academic committees at UWA Leadership of academic or professional committees at national level. Service on ARC, NHMRC, HERDSA, ERA review panels Contribution to Faculty and UWA outreach activities Effective management of a research group, discipline, school or faculty Effective leadership of academic portfolio at school, faculty level Effective leadership of academic portfolio or strategic initiative at UWA level Mentoring of new or junior staff	Membership of external company boards or equivalent. Engagement with external communities for long-term mutual benefit. Membership of committees of inquiry and expert panels. Development of community, industry and cultural partnerships. Influence on professional practice Contribution to policy making at state, national level Public recognition, honorary status and awards for professional or community service.
B	Well-established academic skills and strong academic performance	Above, plus School	Emerging leader				
C	Mastery of academic skills and excellent performance	Above, plus Course, Faculty	Emerging leader				
D	Distinguished achievements and performance, recognized at national or international level	Above, plus UWA, national	Leader of people				

APPENDIX B: a) Process Map – Current

APPENDIX B: b) Process Map – Proposed