

Gazette Supplement



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Merit pay and titles for academics

Summary

In the light of the views expressed by members of Congregation (and University and college bodies) in an extensive consultation exercise in Hilary term, a clear majority of which supported the wider use of the title of professor and proposals for a new system of merit pay for academics, Council is proposing two resolutions to Congregation.

The **first resolution** is to introduce a new system of **merit pay** for academics (as detailed in para 12 below). This system would involve a permanent additional salary payment of £2,600 per annum from October 2014 to all of those in the main lecturer grades who have met the criteria for the conferment of the title of (full) professor, unless they already receive additional recruitment or retention payments at that level or above. Those in receipt of this additional payment would become eligible to apply for professorial distinction awards, alongside the substantive professors and readers who are already eligible to apply for such awards in exercises which are usually held every two or three years, under well-established procedures.

The additional payment is pitched roughly halfway between the joint maximum¹ and the professorial minimum, rewarding lecturers who meet the criteria for the conferment of the title of professor, while maintaining a differential with basic professorial salaries.

Implementation of the resolution would link the two scales for the salaries of senior academics at Oxford, creating for the first time a new, combined structure which is affordable and manageable and which would provide a route for all

lecturers through which progression is possible beyond the top of their University salary scale to the full range of additional professorial payments.

The additional payment would be made to all of those in the main lecturer grades who have already been awarded the title of professor, unless they already receive additional recruitment or retention payments at that level or above.

The next recognition of distinction exercise will be launched very shortly after Congregation's decisions on the two resolutions are reached, and the additional payment would also be made to all of those in the main lecturer grades who apply and who are deemed in that exercise to meet the criteria for the conferment of the title of professor, *whether or not they actually wish to use that title*.

A similar payment would also be made to all such lecturers who successfully apply in later recognition of distinction exercises: these will in future be held on an annual basis.

The **second resolution** is to rename the main lecturer grades '**Associate Professor**' (as detailed in para 18 below). Save where, under the existing recognition of distinction arrangements, the title of (full) professor is conferred, future appointments to these grades would be made with the title of associate professor and existing lecturers in those grades would be able to use the title of associate professor if they so wished.

Implementation of this resolution would mean that in future there would be only two levels of title for those holding senior academic posts at Oxford, namely 'Associate Professor' and 'Professor' (save that existing lecturers and readers would be able to retain the current nomenclature if they wished).

Council believes that these measures (fuller details of which are set out below) would improve the University's arrangements for recruitment and retention for the main academic career grade in Oxford; would make an important contribution to the University's arrangements for the recognition and reward of its key academics as their careers progress; and, by making additional payments widely available to distinguished academics for reasons unconnected with acute recruitment or retention issues, would make the University's arrangements for academic salaries more equitable.

Background

1 A broad consultative exercise was held in Hilary term on

(a) a proposal that with effect from 2014-15 all non-medical lecturers (UL, CUF, faculty lecturers, ULNTFs) in post who have the title of full professor should receive an additional salary payment of £2,600 per annum (unless they already receive additional recruitment or retention payments at that level or above), and that they should all then become eligible for consideration in subsequent exercises for professorial distinction awards; and

(b) a suggestion that the grade of lecturer (university lecturer, university lecturer (medical), CUF lecturer, faculty lecturer, ULNTF) might in future become the grade of associate professor.

2 Proposal (a) reflected the University's reintroduction of arrangements for merit pay for all staff after a period of suspension due to financial constraints: this prompted a reconsideration of the unfunded proposals for merit pay for academics which had been developed by the Task Force on Academic Employment and accepted by

¹The joint maximum is the combined University and college salary at the top of the scales for those on the main lecturer grades.

Congregation in 2010. Those proposals in turn reflected Congregation's approval of the introduction of the principle of differential pay for academics (following a postal vote in 2001), which had however in practice led to supplementary payments only being made on grounds of recruitment and retention, rather than for the reward of excellence in the absence of such grounds. The task force's 2010 model envisaged that only a subset of lecturers with the title of professor would receive merit pay, but on reflection the Personnel Committee and Council took the view that this would be invidious and that it would be preferable for all lecturers with the title of professor to receive a salary supplement and then to become eligible to apply for professorial distinction awards.

3 The principal arguments in favour of suggestion (b) were that the term 'lecturer' was poorly understood on the global stage, and that use of the title of associate professor would better reflect the general distinction of Oxford's senior academic staff, as well as helping recruitment, retention and external recognition.

4 Responses on these two issues were sought from individual members of Congregation, from all divisional boards, the Continuing Education Board, and the Academic Services and University Collections (ASUC), from all colleges and from the Conference of Colleges, and from the Joint Consultative Committee with the Oxford UCU. The full consultative document was issued as Supplement (1) to *Gazette* No 5012, and may be found via the section of the Personnel Services website that relates to the work of the Task Force on Academic Employment: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/staffinfo/academic/taskforceonacademicemployment.

5 The consultation exercise had a deadline of 22 April and elicited a large number of responses (which have been published, where the authors so agreed, on the same website). Replies were received from 159 individuals, as well as from all divisional boards, ASUC, three departments in the Social Sciences, 14 colleges, the Standing Committee of the Senior Tutors' Committee, and the Oxford UCU. **Broadly speaking, about two-thirds of the views expressed were in favour of (a) and (b) above.**

6 The Personnel Committee and Council have now considered reports summarising the responses that were received. Noting that the responses from the divisions and the departments and the colleges were generally positive, and that about 68% of the views expressed by members of Congregation supported proposal (a),

and about 61% of the views expressed by members of Congregation supported suggestion (b), Council has agreed to invite Congregation to approve formal resolutions on both matters, against the background of the detailed, refined versions of the proposals that are set out below.

Merit pay

7 The majority view of the respondents was that it was entirely reasonable that all lecturers upon whom the title of professor is conferred should receive an additional payment. It was felt that this would be an appropriate and simple way to reward merit, and that the availability of such a system for salary progression would help recruitment and retention. The extra payment, combined with eligibility to apply for professorial distinction awards, would also provide a mechanism to rebalance the anomalies that have resulted from individual decisions to pay super-scale salaries in acute recruitment and retention cases. It was noted that lecturers are the only staff group at Oxford currently unable in practice to enjoy salary progression on grounds of merit alone, and that this position at Oxford is unique in the higher education sector. Respondents agreed that the new system proposed would be simpler and less invidious than the task force's 2010 model: it might also be seen as more egalitarian, since it would treat equally all lecturers who met the criteria for the conferment of the title of professor, would open up super-scale salaries on grounds of merit as well as 'market', and would give all those in the current lecturer grade a route for progression to the full professorial salary arrangements.

8 It was not the case that those respondents who opposed the new proposal favoured the task force's alternative (ie, following Congregation's acceptance of that alternative in 2010, the status quo - under which only a subset of lecturers, to be selected from those with the title of professor, would receive any merit pay). Those against the new proposal tended to oppose both of these forms of merit pay, and some regretted the use of any kind of differential pay. They felt that the new proposal would simply produce more anomalies, be divisive and therefore damage morale and even retention, and produce skewed incentives - for academics generally to focus on research, rather than on teaching and good citizenship.

9 Council originally put this proposal to consultation with its support, and the responses received in the consultation have

confirmed its view - particularly given the high level of support among the individual responses, the lack of support for the task force alternative, and the pressing need to introduce fairer arrangements for academic pay. Council is clear that the University will need to continue to use differential pay in order to engage with genuine market imperatives as it seeks to recruit and retain the best academics from around the world; **alongside this, the new proposal would link the two scales for the salaries of senior academics at Oxford, creating for the first time a new, combined structure which is affordable and manageable and which would provide a route for all lecturers through which progression is possible beyond the top of their University salary scale to the full range of additional professorial payments. Council commends this proposal to Congregation.**

10 Council has approved some adjustments to the detail of the proposal which have been put forward by the Personnel Committee in the light of views expressed in the consultation exercise. A number of respondents opposed limiting merit pay to those who wished to use the *title of professor*, and Council has agreed that it would indeed be appropriate for merit pay to be available to all applicants in the current lecturer grade who meet the relevant criteria, whether or not they wish to use a professorial title. This would mean that the additional salary would be payable from 1 October 2014 to:

(a) those existing lecturers who already have the title of professor;

(b) those existing lecturers who apply successfully for the title of professor in the next recognition of distinction exercise; and

(c) those existing lecturers who, although they do not wish to use the title of professor, apply in the next recognition of distinction exercise and are judged to meet the criteria for the conferment of the title.

11 Noting other points made in the consultation responses, Council has also confirmed that careful consideration by the Personnel and Planning and Resource Allocation Committees and, in order to avoid conflicts of interest, by the external members of Council, has shown that the proposal is not only consonant with the reintroduction of merit pay for other University staff, and in line with Congregation's decision in 2001 to permit differential pay for lecturers, but also *affordable* across all of the academic

divisions, who are budgeting accordingly for 2014–15 and thereafter. Financial constraints will not affect individual decisions on the conferment of the title of professor; the expanded professorial distinction award exercises will be held regularly as resources allow, and will continue to be cash-limited; and all merit payments to academics will be equitably available across the divisions.

12 The Personnel Committee and Council have also clarified how the arrangements would apply to academics in colleges, and the **detailed, refined proposal** is as follows. With effect from 2014–15 all non-medical lecturers (UL, CUF, faculty lecturers, ULNTFs) in post who have satisfied the conditions for the conferment of the full title of professor should receive from the University an additional salary payment of £2,600 per annum (unless they already receive additional recruitment or retention payments at that level or above); and should all then become eligible for consideration in subsequent exercises for professorial distinction awards, alongside substantive professors and readers (unless they already receive additional recruitment or retention payments in excess of the level of the relevant distinction award). The same would apply to keepers in ASUC who have satisfied the conditions for the conferment of the title of professor. The same would also apply to all titular CUF/ULs and supernumerary titular CUF/ULs who have satisfied the conditions for the conferment of the full title of professor. The £2,600 payment, which is roughly half of the difference between the joint maximum and the professorial minimum, will rise after 2014–15 in line with increases in other Oxford University salaries.

Titles

13 The clear balance of opinion amongst respondents was that the consultative paper had presented a cogent argument that Oxford's current use of the lecturer title for its main academic grade was often poorly understood in much of the rest of the world of higher education, and is a barrier to attracting the best international candidates and to retaining staff of the highest quality. The suggested use of the term 'Associate Professor' was generally felt to be a clear move in the right direction, having the potential to assist in alleviating genuine recruitment and retention difficulties that Oxford is currently facing in an increasingly competitive academic market nationally and, in particular, internationally. 'Lecturer' was felt to be generally understood internationally to be a junior academic position, with little if any independent

research element; it is the entry grade for academics in most other UK institutions, but the career grade at Oxford. Beyond assisting in recruitment and retention, it was thought that the general use of the title of associate professor would be better for Oxford's academics applying for awards and for research funding (not least in the US); it would be better for public profile of Oxford academics on national committees and the like, and for their esteem, fostering 'simple academic respect'; it would help students who seek the support of their tutors in job applications and so on.

14 Opposing views disputed that the current nomenclature had any effect on recruitment and retention, or on the global profile of the University or its academic staff, or on internal morale. They suggested that the wholesale use of professorial titles would unacceptably 'devalue the currency', and felt that adopting what appeared to be American titles would be misleading and confusing, since the University would not also be adopting the American systems of tenure and career progression.

15 Their discussion of the issues in the light of the responses has clarified the view of the Personnel Committee and Council about the general principle of retitling the lecturer grade; hitherto they had been content for this to be a suggestion upon which views should be sought, but they now believe that this is a measure that Council should positively **commend to Congregation**. Council has, however, agreed to adopt some amendments to the initial outline suggestion which the Personnel Committee has proposed in the light of the consultation responses: Council believes that these amendments strengthen the case for change.

16 Council has agreed that Oxford should not use the title of *assistant professor*. The consultative document had suggested that this might be appropriate for those at the current lecturer level who had not previously held a substantive academic appointment, but Council has now agreed that it would be wrong to give the impression that any of the career-grade academic posts at Oxford were of the junior nature that the term 'Assistant Professor' implies in its normal North American usage. **This would mean that there would in future only be two levels of title for those holding senior academic posts at Oxford; namely 'Associate Professor' and 'Professor'** (save that existing lecturers and readers would be free to retain the current nomenclature if they wished).

17 Council acknowledges the point

made in the consultation that in North American use '*Associate Professor*' may have a connotation that the individual has not yet reached an expected career level; but Council does not believe that this would justify either withdrawing the suggestion that the title of professor be more widely used, or adjusting it, as some have proposed, so that the title of full professor is automatically used in all cases either on initial appointment or on reappointment to the retiring age. Council has, however, agreed that if the lecturer grade is retitled associate professor, posts should in future be **advertised** as 'Associate Professor or Professor'. This would generally reflect very well the range of the previous experience of those appointed to posts at Oxford, noting that the full title is already available on appointment in appropriate cases. Oxford's use of the grade of associate professor for most of its senior tenure-track appointments would be fully explained in **further particulars** (which would make it clear that Oxford has associate professors who are in their probationary period – as do other universities when they appoint external applicants directly to associate professorships – and other associate professors who have achieved tenure, and that there is a separate process that involves the conferment of the title of full professor at a stage of career progression that usually occurs after the tenure point). Council believes that these measures will ensure that the University attracts the fullest range of potential suitable candidates under the new arrangements, not putting off promising but less-experienced academics, nor discouraging established international academics for whom appointment as associate professor might at first sight seem a backward step.

18 The Personnel Committee and Council have also clarified how the arrangements would apply to academics in colleges and to university researchers, and the **detailed, refined proposal** is therefore as follows. The grade of lecturer (university lecturer, university lecturer (medical), CUF lecturer, faculty lecturer, ULNTF) will in future become the grade of associate professor. If they do not have the title of full professor, existing and new staff in those grades will automatically be able to use the title of associate professor. If they do not have the title of full professor, the following will also automatically be able to use the title of associate professor: titular CUF/ULs and supernumerary titular CUF/ULs; substantive readers (including clinical readers); researchers in the professorial-equivalent grade of RSIV; Wellcome Principal Research

Fellows; honorary consultant MRC directors; keepers in ASUC whose contractual duties include teaching and research; and all University researchers and ASUC staff currently holding the title of reader. All other employees of the University, and persons not employed by the University who are employed on a long-term basis by an Oxford college or by a Recognised Independent Centre or by the NHS and who are making a significant and sustained academic contribution to the University's work, may also be considered, on an individual basis, for the conferment of the title of professor (as now) or the title of associate professor, under revised arrangements for the recognition of distinction.

Arrangements for recognition of distinction

19 Council recognises that since, under the new arrangements, associate professors may wish to apply for the title of full professor, and, since those in the current lecturer grade who meet the criteria for the conferment of the title of full professor would in future receive additional pay, it will be particularly important that the **criteria and procedures** that will be used in future for the recognition of distinction are perceived as being as fair and transparent as possible, and involve fewer delays. Council has noted that the Personnel Committee has developed new, streamlined arrangements in this area. These are designed to ensure that those academics who have not achieved the title of full professor will be regularly and supportively mentored, with the intention that potential applicants have a full understanding of the standards that a successful application would need to satisfy. A particular focus in this connection in the next exercise will be lecturers who already have the title of reader: applicants with the title of reader had a significantly higher success rate among those applying for the title of professor in the last round, and the Personnel Committee hopes that many lecturers who currently have the title of reader will be able, in the next exercise, to qualify for the additional salary payment by demonstrating that they now meet the criteria for the conferment of the title of professor. There will in future be an annual recognition of distinction process, with divisional committees forwarding cases to the Senior Appointments Panel of the Personnel Committee for final decision. There will continue to be three separate thresholds for the conferment of the title of professor/the award of merit pay, relating

to research, teaching, and administration: **all** of these thresholds must be met. Those academics who have chosen not to apply in previous exercises can be assured that the standards to be applied in future rounds will be no higher than hitherto (and, as stated above, financial constraints will not affect individual decisions); and those who do not wish to use a professorial title may still apply for merit pay. The research criterion has been clarified, and an indicative list has been developed of the kinds of activities and outputs of which the University expects to see evidence in successful applications. Explicit provision is made for applicants to disclose any particular circumstances that may have had a substantial effect, over a considerable period of time, on their record of research.

Other issues

20 Council is fully aware that these proposals on merit pay and on titles do not in themselves deal with the whole range of major issues regarding arrangements for academics at Oxford. In particular, there is a pressing need for revised arrangements between the University and the colleges to develop a framework for variation of duties to support a rebalancing from time to time of the teaching, research, and administrative duties of joint appointment holders in order to address their aspirations at different stages of their careers. Discussions have been pursued throughout the last academic year, initially involving the Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Education and for Personnel and Equality and the heads of division, and then extending to the divisional contact groups with college representatives, and to the Conference of Colleges. There is considerable support for the introduction of **a common framework under which the duties of academics may be varied for extended periods with the agreement of the individuals and their faculty boards/ departments and colleges**. Where this involves a reduced teaching commitment, it will be essential that measures are put in place in each case to safeguard the quality of teaching in the subject and, in particular, to ensure that tutorial teaching and the individual academic care for undergraduates in their colleges are maintained through high-quality and properly resourced arrangements. The Personnel Committee, Education Committee, and the Conference of Colleges are developing such a framework with the aim of introducing it in time for the academic year 2014–15.

Conclusion

21 Council believes that the two resolutions now before Congregation would significantly support the University's pursuit of excellence in teaching and research, for which it relies on the distinction and dedication of its senior academics. Introducing arrangements for the financial reward of merit which are fair, simple and in practice available to a large number of academics, and modernising nomenclature, will improve the arrangements for the recruitment and retention of those academics, will better recognise and reward their career progression, and will alleviate problems that the current arrangements are causing from the point of view of equity and morale.

22 Noting the majority support that was evident on both matters in the consultation exercise, Council therefore **recommends** that Congregation approve resolutions, as glossed above, (1) to provide that from October 2014 all lecturers who have satisfied the conditions for the conferment of the full title of professor should receive a salary increment and become eligible to apply for professorial distinction awards in future exercises; and (2) to replace the main lecturer grades by the grade of associate professor.