

Supporting New Academic Staff

Questions for Departments

A recent New Zealand research project, funded through Ako Aotearoa's National Project Fund, has identified that early career academics value their independence, desire autonomy, and are generally proactive, self-motivated and resourceful. Yet, all academics will benefit from a range of support, from various people and places, in their first couple of years on the job. The questions in this document are designed to prompt a department-wide conversation about how best to support new academic colleagues. When we refer to 'Department' we mean the academic unit to which your new colleague has been appointed, and we leave you to define what this will be in your context (some may choose to focus at the programme level, for example the 'Department of Spanish,' whereas others may wish to focus on a bigger academic unit, such as the 'School of Languages and Cultures').

Questions

- How will you make sure that your new colleague meets all his/her departmental colleagues within the first month or so of arriving?
- What opportunities exist for your new colleague to meet other new academics around the university?
- What opportunities exist to meet academic colleagues in the discipline regionally, nationally and internationally?
- What mentoring opportunities (formal and informal) are available for new academics in your department and at your university?
 - Departmental buddy
 - Research and/or teaching mentoring
 - Cultural mentoring/adapting to life in a new country
 - Work-life balance mentoring (especially for new parents)
 - Other types of mentoring (social, career, service, etc)
- Without being intrusive, what do you know of your new colleagues' home lives and how that might affect their work lives? (Do they have young children or an ailing parent at home, for example?)
- How are you and other departmental colleagues demonstrating care for your new colleague?
- What could your department do to make the transition from one country to another smoother for an international academic?
- What opportunities do new academics in your department have to communicate with senior academics and staff in the department and across the university?
- How and when do your new colleagues receive feedback about their academic performance? Who might provide them with regular or intermittent (formal and informal) feedback and on which aspects of their work?
- What opportunities, if any, do new colleagues have to make decisions about their own teaching and research, and about the teaching and research direction of the department?
- What opportunities do new colleagues have to participate in decision-making processes within the department and in the wider university? How aware might they be of these opportunities?

Follow up required, by whom and when?

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Sharing Successes and Celebrating Achievements

Our research drew out some startling stories of isolation, despair, stress, strain and loneliness in academia. Of course, not all new academics will be affected by such experiences, but creating a supportive, respectful and generous departmental and institutional culture will benefit everyone, not just new academics.

Questions

- How does your department react when a department member has something published? Is it public knowledge and celebrated? How?
- When someone wins a teaching, research, service or other award, what does the department do to celebrate that win and publicise that success? How regularly are people in your department nominated or applying for and receiving such awards?
- In what circumstances do new colleagues have the opportunity to hear about more senior colleagues' pathways into and successes in academia?
- How committed are you to the academic success of your new colleagues and how do you demonstrate this commitment?
- How proactive are you about supporting early career academics' promotion aspirations and what does this support look like in practice? How might you help your new colleagues to be realistic about their expectations around promotion?
- What opportunities do new academic colleagues have to hear about what others are working on and teaching about?
- How does your department recognise each individual's contribution?

What could your department be doing more of or differently in these areas? Who should take responsibility and when?

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b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

g. _____

This poster is part of the suite of resources developed from the Ako Aotearoa-funded project *Success, productivity and satisfaction in academia: The experiences of early career academics in New Zealand*, led by Kathryn Sutherland, Victoria University of Wellington. For the full report and to download all resources go to: www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/early-career-academics



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