



## **Interdisciplinarity in Promotion Procedures Additional guidance**

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## 1 Introduction

The University has clear, balanced Grade Profiles for Academic staff that match individuals' activities and achievements to UoE grades 6-10, with respect to teaching, research and leadership/management. Reward processes have, historically, recognised contributions in these three areas.

The current Strategic Plan calls for the University to 'pioneer new and emerging areas of research across the boundaries of traditional disciplines' and links this to maximising our competitive research funding success with a new emphasis on large and cross-disciplinary proposals and a commitment to promoting flexible interdisciplinary and team working.

Colleagues who work in such an interdisciplinary<sup>1</sup> way can sometimes find it challenging to demonstrate their contributions when reward processes have traditionally been predicated on discipline-based structures.

This document provides additional guidance to users of the existing grade profiles. It aims to assist both colleagues preparing a case for promotion/reward and those evaluating such cases as members of promotion panels. This document outlines ways in which levels of quality can be assessed appropriately and fairly; it does not imply that quality standards are altered for interdisciplinary researchers.

## 2 Recognising Interdisciplinary Challenges and Achievements

We highlight here some of the characteristics and acknowledged challenges of interdisciplinary research and describe briefly how these might be manifested within the promotion process. We encourage reviewers to consider these issues when making their assessments and we encourage candidates to provide additional narrative in the recommended CV template to address these aspects where appropriate. In particular, positive indicators of interdisciplinary achievement can be evidenced by:

- joint publications, research collaborations and in reviewing requests from a wide-range of funding bodies and journals
- interdisciplinary leadership might be further evidenced by instigating collaborative working across two or more disciplines either in an academic or user/stakeholder context

### 2.1 Recognition

- The way an academic is viewed professionally is reflected by their peer network but a researcher pursuing multiple interests may have multiple – and shifting – peer networks.
- Academic recognition (e.g. in the form of prizes or membership of professional bodies) normally comes from established disciplines. Thus, indicators of recognition achieved by interdisciplinary individuals among their peers may be significant but not publicly acknowledged. There are also fewer honours and awards given by professional societies for interdisciplinary research than for disciplinary research.
- Nominations, even in multidisciplinary societies such as the Royal Society of Edinburgh, are usually initiated in disciplinary committees, so interdisciplinary researchers often obtain fellowship status later than disciplinary researchers with comparable achievements
- Interdisciplinary leadership will usually mandate sharing of credit in publications, grants, etc. which means that the team-based nature of interdisciplinary research may require increased recognition of co-investigators' roles and research activities

### 2.2 Publications

- An interdisciplinary researcher's publication record may appear to be less cohesive than that of colleagues whose work is firmly located within one discipline. They may publish in a wider variety of journals, possibly in newer journals or those not considered 'mainstream'
- Different disciplines exhibit very different traditions regarding publication: single-author monographs or journal articles are a sign of prestige in the arts, humanities and social sciences in contrast to the

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<sup>1</sup> Interdisciplinarity is not necessarily synonymous with teamwork although in many cases colleagues who consider themselves to be interdisciplinary researchers may engage in collaborative projects or in what may sometimes be termed 'team science'. However, individuals may also engage successfully in interdisciplinary research and this guidance is intended to encompass a range of experiences.

multiple, multi-author papers produced by many other disciplines. It is important to consider how the published outputs from scholars working across disciplines may differ and how they might be affected by working across these traditions

- The quantity of outputs may vary: depending on the nature of the research and the role that the individual has played in collaborative efforts, this could be manifested as more publications than usual (if they have provided specialist expertise in many different applications) or rather fewer if they have been engaged in novel, complex, interdisciplinary interactions that have taken time to come to fruition

### 2.3 Other outputs

- Interdisciplinary projects can often take longer to deliver their outcomes. This may mean that the candidate's CV may include fewer, longer grant-funded projects. Conversely, if the individual often provides specialist expertise to interdisciplinary collaborations, this may result in a wider variety of projects, giving the impression of a less cohesive career trajectory
- Interdisciplinary research is typically collaborative and researchers often need more time to develop effective networks and research strategies. It may take extra time to learn new methods, languages, and research cultures. Discipline hopping and, in some cases retraining, may mean that the individual appears to have had periods when they have been less research active and this may have an impact on their level of outputs in relation to their academic 'age'
- The contribution of an interdisciplinary researcher may be questioned by schools or sub-groups where collaborative work is not the norm. In this case, the research done by the candidate may not be valued sufficiently to compensate for a (perceived) lower output of disciplinary research
- Interdisciplinary teaching, across Schools and Colleges, may generate considerable student interest but involve activities – including academic leadership and management – that are not recognised or rewarded by the 'home' department
- Interdisciplinary researchers often tackle complex challenges of importance to technology, the economy and society so their work may particularly lend itself to knowledge exchange

## 3 History and Review

This document was produced by a working group comprising.

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It was subject to consultation with a range of senior academic colleagues across the three Colleges and published in July 2015.

It is intended that the document will evolve and grow in light of experience.

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