“Academia is losing its appeal:” The role of heads of departments and senior colleagues in supporting early career academic staff retention, success and satisfaction

A presentation at the 37th Annual HERDSA Conference at Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong 10 July 2014

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Project webpage: http://akoaotearoa.ac.nz/early-career-academics
The early career project

1) Factors influencing the success, productivity and satisfaction of early career academics in NZ universities

2) Variations in organisational expectations and personal aspirations

3) Institutional and personal processes and support

4) Resources at a national and local level
Research participants

- 82 interviewees from three countries (Canada, NZ & Sweden)
- 538 respondents to a national survey sent to all early career academics in all eight New Zealand universities
- 108 respondents to a national survey sent to a sample of academic managers (Heads of Departments, Deans, Deputy/Pro/Assistant Vice Chancellors, etc)
Importance for success

*Rank the following according to which you think the early career faculty respondents said was most important to their success:*

___ A Head of Department who is committed to my success
___ Formal orientation programme for new academics
___ Formal mentoring programme for new academics
___ Senior colleagues interested in my progress & well-being
___ Opportunities to make decisions about the direction of my own research & teaching
Importance for success

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6 Senior colleagues interested in my progress & well-being

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2   A Head of Department who is committed to my success
27  Formal orientation programme for new academics
18  Formal mentoring programme for new academics
  6  Senior colleagues interested in my progress & well-being
  1  Opportunities to make decisions about the direction of my own research & teaching
### Importance to success - ECAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Opportunities to make decisions about the direction of my own research and teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>An HOD who is committed to my success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Support from HOD to apply for promotion/tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Availability of resources for conducting research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Travels funds to present papers or conduct research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Senior colleagues interested in my progress and well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Informal mentoring relationships or opportunities</td>
</tr>
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</table>
In a university no one is able to work effectively without the support of others. The crucial thing is academic freedom: support from management level that an academic is capable and responsible for her/his own research and teaching direction.
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I think that often senior managers are actually very committed to one’s success as an early career academic, but are so overloaded with strategic work/meta decision-making that they don’t get the chance to make time to discuss progress one-to-one.
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My experience here has been awesome. I was also employed for 18 months at [an Australian uni]. I felt overwhelmed and lost because the place was so big, and my workload was huge with little support or mentoring, although the people I worked with were great people. I believe my experience here has been so good because of my Head of School and Head of Programme.
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The most effective thing for me has been a monthly scheduled meeting with my HOD to keep me on track and updated and supported in all ways.
## Importance to success - managers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(9)* Good communication between university management and other academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1=</td>
<td>(12) Feedback to early career academics from manager/s about their academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(2) An HOD who is committed to early career academic success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(3) Support from HOD to apply for promotion/tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(8) Regular contact for early career academics with senior colleagues in same department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6=</td>
<td>(6) Senior colleagues interested in early career academic progress and well being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6=</td>
<td>(27) Formal orientation programme for new academics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The number in parentheses is the ranking given to the item by early career academics.
## Effectiveness of career/professional development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>ECAs</th>
<th>Managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The right infrastructure exists in my university for me to make a career here</td>
<td>3.12*</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My university offers adequate professional development opportunities</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff appraisal/review process at my university has been an effective aid to my career development</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Scale of 1-5 where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not offered</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal mentoring programme for new academics</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional assistance for early career academics in developing their teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional assistance for early career academics in obtaining external grants</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid or unpaid research leave for early career academics</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching relief in the early years of academic appointment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for early career academics to gain a tertiary teaching qualification</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although many useful support and training opportunities may exist, it is very hard to find out about anything unless you are already familiar with the procedures and who to contact. Most of this information trickles through eventually, but sometimes this is too late. For example, I have just discovered that I should have applied for sabbatical more than a year ago, so now my sabbatical is only possible more than a year later than it should have been.
Factors influencing ECA success

- Structural and organisational influences
- Prior experiences and qualifications
- Individual characteristics
Recommendations

• For managers & departments
  – Know your new staff (*Conversational Guidelines*)
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  – Provide targeted support for women
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• For universities
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  – Provide targetted support for women

• For everyone
  – Tell your own stories of ‘success’ (*Sharing Successes & Celebrating Achievements*)
Academia is losing its appeal

A poetic finale
Project funded by: