



SFARS Position Paper -

CAREER PATHING

October 2009

This position paper addresses the management of the career path for Soft-Funded Academic and Research Staff (SFARS) at UCT.

Background

For many years the UCT 'policy' on SFARS was based on a particular conception of how research is conducted at the University, namely by the GOB-funded teaching/research academic. SFARS were employed to "support" the GOB-funded academic in his/her research activities such as for field work assistance. This resulted in a trend to employ staff on a fixed-term contract for the project or a part of the project to be paid from the project funds. SFARS, this conception of research stresses, are therefore a short-term and temporary phenomenon, subordinate to the academic teacher/researcher, who come and go with no claim on the University. This archaic understanding of the position and the contribution of SFARS to the University requires an urgent review and it is time that the University develops a policy on SFARS that recognizes the reality of how much of the research at UCT is conducted. The University has gone a little way in this direction by recognizing that research units, centres and institutes exist, but it needs to go further by dealing with the SFARS who staff those units (including those who direct units), many of whom have been employed for long periods.

This argument is made for two reasons. First, there is the obvious concern with the inequitable treatment of SFARS who make an important contribution to UCT – including teaching and supervising (see associated position papers) - but who are not adequately accommodated in the universities policies. Second, is the concern with how best to do research at UCT and to live up to its claim to be a research-led university. The scale of much of the research that is being done at the University is beyond the capacity of the teacher/researcher academic. This is why research units, centres and institutes have become established. They are sustained by ongoing, long-term demand for the research they conduct. It is critical for the research strategy of the University to recognize and build on this fact. But as important is recognition that the most critical resource for any research unit is not computers, databases or a collection of materials; it is rather the researchers that staff it. SFARS that have built up experience and expertise in a particular field, have developed one or more local and international networks with researchers and academics in the field, and who have established a profile for themselves and the unit, are an invaluable resource that needs to be supported and retained by the University if it is serious about its commitment to being research-led. This will not happen if UCT's

conception of research continues to see researchers as short-term contract labour. The latter conception of SFARS is undermining UCT's objective to be research-led.

An important way in which SFARS can be recognized and retained is to mainstream their employment by having a SFARS career path that runs parallel to the career path of the teacher/researcher academic. The important difference is that the career path for SFARS will remain soft-funded and makes no direct claim on the GOB for salaries. This means that salaries will remain independent of the RFJ scheme, although the intention would be to try to encourage equivalence in salaries (but allowing research units flexibility given their more tenuous funding situation). The system of performance evaluation that attaches to the RFJ, however, should be extended to SFARS but must be modified so that it is primarily focused on linking SFARS to the ad hominem process. So the career path for SFARS will primarily be about creating a parallel set of ranks and modifying the performance evaluation and ad hominem processes to accommodate SFARS.

However, before getting to the career path and ad hominem process an anomaly needs to be addressed. Currently, the status of researchers is somewhat confused. While most researchers are employed on academic conditions of service there are quite a few that are employed on PASS conditions. It is not clear why this is the case. Staff who are employed primarily to conduct research, and possibly do some teaching and/or supervision, should be employed on academic conditions of service, unless there are compelling reasons why this should not be the case.

Furthermore, the occupational ranks that go with the researchers categorized as PASS, which appear to have developed out of a natural sciences model, are not appropriate to researchers across the University, i.e:

Scientific Officer
Senior Scientific Officer
Principal Scientific Officer
Chief Scientific Officer

For researchers on academic conditions it seems that these designations have been replaced by:

Research Officer
Senior Research Officer
Principal Research Officer
Chief Researcher Officer

These are more appropriate for the University than the PASS categories but we propose below that further changes need to be made to them that will bring them into line with academic ranks. Researchers on academic conditions of service, which should be all researchers at UCT, should have the following career path supported by appropriately weighted performance evaluation and ad hominem systems:

Junior Researcher
Researcher
Senior Researcher
Associate Professor: Research
Professor: Research

The Junior Researcher category is a development post that can accommodate many of the inexperienced or relatively inexperienced SFARS that will still be employed on short-term contracts (note that this does not mean that a researcher employed on a short-term contract is necessarily a Junior Researcher). Promotion out of this rank will not form part of the ad hominem system and will be decided by the relevant research unit director or employing academic.

Thereafter the ranks match and would be equivalent to the academic ranks of Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor.¹ However, the ad hominem system would need to be modified to accommodate the emphasis on research and social responsiveness in the work of a researcher and the limited teaching/supervision and administration performed. In other words, a different weighting needs to be developed for the criteria in the current ad hominem systems to accommodate the different content of the SFARS job.² However, it is beyond the scope of this position paper to go into the details of the ad hominem criteria and their weighting that should be attached to each of these ranks.³

An additional aspect of a career path that needs to be considered is training and mentorship for SFARS. This is something that can be linked to the performance evaluation and which also has a strong transformation potential, i.e. to produce more Black researchers.

The following are therefore the **main recommendations** for promoting a SFARS career path:

- PASS and T2 researchers must be transferred to academic conditions of service
- Performance management needs to be extended to SFARS
- Performance criteria and job description as well as career pathing have to be provided on appointment of a new staff member

¹ Note that the Health Sciences Faculty is in the process of developing a precedent for this system.

² We do not propose an entirely separate ad hominem system. SFARS can be accommodated within the existing system if it is appropriately weighted.

³ Teaching will be the key area that needs to be addressed by the revised weighting. It is proposed that SFARS continue to be given opportunities for teaching and supervision, but that this is voluntary.

- An appropriate ad hominem system needs to be developed for SFARS with suitable weighting of criteria
- Wide communication of the above within the University so that SFARS are aware of the criteria they need to meet for their jobs and in order to get promotion
- Training and mentorship programmes should be developed to build the capacity of SFARS; line managers will need to have the capacity for mentoring so that the weaknesses identified in performance evaluations can be addressed.
- Develop, in conjunction with the SFARS steering committee, a guidance document on hiring SFARS at UCT