

Achievement Relative to Opportunity Guideline

RMIT University is a public University and stands on Aboriginal Country of the Kulin Nation. RMIT University recognises and acknowledges the laws of Bundjil, the Kulin Nation's ancestral creator, who travels as an eagle hawk. These laws help all RMIT staff to respectfully work, live and study on Aboriginal country.

Purpose

The Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARtO) guideline outlines key principles for decision-makers in assessing staff or candidate achievements throughout employment-related decisions, including during:

- Recruitment and selection, including internal mobility and induction
- Performance review and talent review
- Career planning
- Academic Promotion.

Overview

All RMIT staff and candidates have a diverse range of personal circumstances which may require individual working arrangements and therefore career histories that challenge our ideas of the traditional approaches to work. Many individuals:

- require part-time or flexible working arrangements for a variety of reasons
- experience career interruptions due to long-term leave, time out for work in another field, community commitments and/or late entry to the workforce

Traditionally, measurements of merit and achievement may have been based on a notional standard of a full-time and uninterrupted career. This profile does not reflect contemporary employee experiences and imposes unrealistic standards by failing to acknowledge career interruptions and responsibilities outside of work. The retention of these normative expectations (no matter how inadvertently they are applied) could result in talented staff being precluded from entering and/or advancing their careers during their employment with RMIT University.

Scope

For all RMIT University decision-making processes related to recruitment, internal mobility, performance and talent review, career planning and academic promotion.

Exclusions

No exclusions.

Guidelines

1. What is Achievement Relative to Opportunity?

Achievement Relative to Opportunity is an evaluative framework in which there is a positive acknowledgement of what a staff member can or has achieved given the opportunities available to them. This is not about providing 'special consideration' or expecting lesser standards of performance. Assessing Achievements Relative to Opportunity involves considering personal circumstances (e.g. being a primary carer, living with disability), work arrangements (e.g. part-time work, adjustments) and career histories (e.g. periods of leave).

Assessing Achievement Relative to Opportunity gives consideration to the overall time or opportunity available to the staff member.

2. What are the principles of Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARtO)?

- ARtO is based on the principle that measurement of achievement should be relative to the opportunities available to develop areas of expertise and demonstrate such achievements.
- ARtO sets aside the notion of 'special consideration' which assumes an individual who does not fit an idealised conception of a worker must make special pleading for their 'limiting' circumstances. ARtO is not special consideration in this context.
- ARtO is aimed at the holistic approach to assessment of achievement by accounting for opportunity and/or recognising constraints. As such, ARtO is a more robust way of identifying, recognising, and facilitating a staff member's performance.
- ARtO assumes the conditions under which individuals work, and the affordances of those conditions, vary considerably according to factors including individual work plans, goals and priorities of an individual's work unit, and personal circumstances.
- ARtO involves undertaking an assessment of quality:
 - ensuring all relevant standards have been met
 - considering past and present personal circumstances and the effect these may have/had on time available
 - quantum or rate of productivity
 - opportunity to participate in certain types of activities, consistency of activities or output over the period of consideration.
- ARtO is an evaluative framework that calls for the measurement of:
 - the quality of work in the time available rather than the quantity of work produced, and
 - the quality and impact of achievements afforded by the particular scope of an individual workload.
- ARtO is relevant to all staff and positions throughout the Employee Lifecycle, including recruitment, performance review, work planning, development, promotion, reorganisation.
- ARtO explicitly acknowledges that personal circumstances are not static and have a material effect on the time a staff member has for work-related activity.

- ARtO maximises the application of each staff member's unique mix of knowledge, skills and attributes to work group outcomes.
- ARtO prioritises the best deployment of a staff member's competencies to enable career, knowledge and skill development.

3. Who is responsible?

ARtO Guidelines should be considered as a default universal framework in order to make decisions, rather than an optional process. ARtO rests with the decision maker(s) and individual staff member to communicate and acknowledge personal circumstances.

Managers and decision makers' responsibilities include:

- Encouraging and enabling the appropriate sharing and consideration of personal working arrangements (current and historic) and career histories that may have impacted on the individual's opportunities to demonstrate achievement.
- Maintaining appropriate confidentiality regarding the personal circumstances of all employees.
- Balancing the need to share personal information of an employee with other decision makers against the principles of ARtO. For example, ensuring decision makers are aware of an employee's career break may not require decision makers to know why the employee had a career break.
- Incorporating ARtO Guidelines in work planning and workload allocation conversations and other employment-related decision-making processes.
- Considering job design and continuing to create an enriched work environment where opportunities and breadth of work activities support career and talent development.
- Approving and maintaining records on every staff member's work plan and workload allocation following HR procedures, including any specific procedures related to ARtO.

Individual employees' responsibilities include:

- Prompting managers and decision makers that their current/historic work arrangements are/were personalised.
- Informing managers or relevant decision makers of their current/historic personal circumstances if appropriate and including their views regarding the privacy of that information.
 - Note: The ARtO approach challenges the traditional divide between public and private and some may see the request to share this information as challenging their privacy.

5. How are achievements assessed?

In making an assessment, appropriate consideration should be given to the impact of circumstances, working arrangements or career histories and the effect they can have or have had on the overall time available.

Having calculated this, appropriate consideration can then be given to:

- the quantum or rate of productivity,
- the opportunity to participate in certain activities, and/or
- the output produced over a defined period.

Assessing ARtO involves considering productivity relative to the actual time and specific opportunities available to the individual while maintaining a focus on pertinent performance standards, especially those relating to the quality and impact of the work. In this way, the staff member/applicant can be assessed on an individual basis in terms of how well they meet the relevant expectations.

Assessing ARtO does not mean that less is expected of the staff member/applicant. Quantity, rate, consistency and breadth of activities are seen as reflecting the amount of time available and is a constructive way to accurately reflect talent, merit and excellence.

It means greater emphasis is placed on the quality and impact of the work that the applicant has produced and is capable of producing, rather than the quantity and rate at which it is produced.

6. What is RMIT's position on ARtO and research opportunity performance evidence?

When assessing research achievements, decision-makers and panels are encouraged to apply the approach detailed in the [Australian Research Council \(ARC\) Research Opportunity Performance Evidence Statement](#), as summarised below.

In activating consideration of ARtO for research performance, the staff member/applicant should consider career circumstances that may have positively or negatively influenced their research productivity, for example:

- The number of years since graduation with highest educational qualification.
- The opportunities for research in the context of:
 - employment situations, including those outside academia
 - the research component of employment conditions
 - any periods of unemployment, part-time employment or other interruptions
- The additional information (for example, part-time status) needed to understand the employment situation.

- If university-based - whether the staff member is contractually a research-only, teaching and research, teaching-only, teaching and administration, research and administration, administration-only academic, research project manager or other business, engagement or leadership role.
 - If industry-based - whether or not the staff members role is industry, research and administration, research in business, or project manager or other business role. The description should indicate the percentage of time spent in each of these areas, as well as the percentage of overall time spent in these roles over the past ten years.
- The research mentoring and research support facilities available.
 - Any other aspects of career or opportunities for research that are relevant to assessment and that have not been detailed elsewhere. (e.g. any circumstances that may have limited research and publications or affected the time available to conduct and publish their research)
 - The staff member/applicant should provide a total FTE overall to take into account periods of employment breaks, part-time work, career interruptions relating to leave, time out for work in another field and/or late entry to the workforce.

7. What are the examples of Research performance evidence?

The ARC considers that evidence of performance can be articulated in a combination of ways, including, but not limited to:

- Recent significant research outputs – a list of outputs split into five categories (over a particular number of years):
 1. scholarly books
 2. scholarly book chapters
 3. refereed journal articles
 4. refereed conference papers only when the paper was published in full in the proceedings
 5. other (for example, major exhibitions, compositions or performance).
- ARC grants awarded as a Chief Investigator, Partner Investigator, Fellow or Awardee (over a particular number of years).
- Ten career-best research outputs – full reference and statement explaining and justifying the impact or significance of the output.
- Most significant contributions to the research field of this proposal. A statement of how the research has led to a significant change or advancement of knowledge in their field, and an outline of how these achievements will contribute to the proposal.

Further evidence in relation to research impact and contributions to the field (over a particular number of years) – including, but not limited to:

- Research outputs other than academic publications where other research outputs might include patents, IP licences, plant breeding rights, registered designs, other research support income, relevant consultancies, policy advice and other professional activities; and
- Description of research impact relative to opportunity and in the context of discipline/end user benefits.

9. Case studies

Achievement Relative to Opportunity can be used as an evaluation framework for all staff and potential staff. Some case studies below show how it can be applied for academics, professionals and vocational staff groups.

Recruitment

Sam is a professional staff member who has worked 2.5 days per week at another university for seven years, including taking the pro rata equivalent of six weeks leave per year to enable them to fulfil carer responsibilities. Their performance against tasks allocated to them in successive work plans shows they have consistently met or exceeded performance expectations. Sam decided to apply for a vacant full-time position at RMIT University.

- Sam provided detailed evidence of their contributions to valued work unit outcomes, particularly in administrative support to research teams and to the College postgraduate community of research practice.
- In reviewing their application for the vacant role, the interview panel focused on their contributions within the specified working arrangements, rather than a direct comparison to another candidate with full-time working arrangements.

Academic Promotion

Bruce is a Level B academic who has worked at RMIT 3.5 days per week since 2011. He completed his PhD at RMIT over 5.5 years from 2007 to 2012, opting to study part-time as he wanted to maintain involvement with a volunteer group providing support to refugees settling in Melbourne. He worked as a freelance graphic designer while studying to support himself and continues, as time permits, to take on freelance projects which he enjoys. Bruce also continues his volunteer work on weekends and 1.5 days per week.

This work is directly related to his ongoing research on refugee resettlement programs. He recognises his work patterns are unconventional for an academic. He plans to submit an academic promotion application in the next round.

He was worried that his part-time status would be considered unfavourably. He was also concerned his research outputs were low compared to full-time colleagues and that this would also count against his application. However, Bruce's Head of School paired him with a senior colleague who is assisting Bruce in three ways: first, to present his seven years of part-time work at RMIT as the equivalent of five years full-time work; second, to identify appropriate performance benchmarks against which to self-assess teaching, research and engagement activities; and third, to identify areas of lower performance for which the School is planning to provide improvement opportunities over the next 12 months.

Talent Assessment

Sumitra has had three career breaks for parental leave and on all three occasions returned part-time with a minimal research load. Opportunity for research was limited every time and it was not until her last return, and after 12 months, that a new academic manager realised there was missed opportunity to provide workload allocation to research and industry engagement which Sumitra in the past had demonstrated some incredible outcomes in the time allocated to her.

When the Head of School and Executive team came together to look at who to support with greater professional development and career support they considered not only the loss of time, career interruptions, but also momentum loss when considering the track record of Sumitra.

Sumitra is considered high potential, including during times of career break, talent and potential is considered in a 'whole of career perspective'. Her career opportunities, academic workload and design of her return to work to resume her industry and research work were negatively impacted at the time.

Secondment Opportunity

Shannon has worked part time for the last three years to care for their aging parents, including an extended one-year absence due to the death of a parent. Shannon returned and applied for a secondment opportunity but did not meet one aspect of the key selection criteria. A highly desired skill set - advanced experience and understanding of a system implemented as part of a training package for vocational education students - was not evident due to Shannon's absence over the years.

Shannon is able to provide evidence of past behaviour and aptitude in taking on and becoming proficient in new ICT skills which was supported by their past managers. Shannon's skill set could quickly be developed as part of a tailored refresher induction program. Shannon also has other areas of expertise in industry engagement which will be beneficial. Shannon is appointed over a staff member that had greater experience in the system. The panel making the decision on this internal appointment was able to document the rationale around the justification of appointing one staff member over the other, based on whole of career review.

Supporting policy

- [Employee Lifecycle Policy](#)

Supporting documents

- [Recruitment and Selection Procedure](#)
- [Induction Procedure](#)
- [Casual Employment Guideline](#)
- [Direct Appointment Procedure](#)

Version	Last updated	Authority	Author	Owner
1.0	21 st October 2021	Employee Lifecycle Policy	Senior Manager PWR	Director, Talent