

Faculty of Life Sciences: Guidance for HoD supporting letters – updated November 2018

This guidance applies for both Senior Promotions (organised at a Faculty/School level) and junior promotions (organised at a Faculty level). It should be read in conjunction with the Academic Careers Framework described at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/sites/human-resources/files/ucl-130418.pdf>

It may help to imagine you are a Dean/discussant with this letter in front of you, and that this is all the information you have on the candidate* who is not known to you. Imagine that you need to present the case succinctly but completely to the School/Faculty panel based on this letter and in doing so give the best possible assessment of the candidate against the promotion criteria. The letter needs to provide information in a layout and manner that will support this.

It helps to use (or re-use) language that is used in the promotions criteria in your letter, and to assess the candidate systematically and objectively against these specific criteria.

Value judgements ('outstanding researcher') that are backed up with objective facts ('who has published 3 high quality Nature papers in the last year and has been cited over 20,000 times') are much more effective than value judgements alone.

Achievements are assessed over the entire career to date, but take into account the trajectory relative to previous promotions. It will therefore be important to focus on achievements and trajectory in that window, while not neglecting to assess high quality achievements over a longer timescale. The trajectory of the individual is often particularly useful to highlight at junior or intermediate senior levels where this is on a strongly upward course.

It can be useful to refer to previous letters for successful candidates to identify successful structure and approach, but note that the promotions criteria for Senior academic staff changed in 2017.

Review UCL guidance on Promotions and the Academic Careers Framework at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/policies-advice/academic-careers-framework-and-promotions-processes/academic-promotions-guidance>

Aim for somewhere between one and two pages in length with appropriate use of paragraphs to help structure the letter for easy reading.

*This is of course not the case, as promotions cases are always considered with full documentation, but it helps focus on the purpose of the letter

Suggested layout (example given is for a promotion to Grade 10 Professor with a research emphasis)

[**First** para] – will help the Dean/discussant open the presentation of the case

- Introduce the person and grade and state when they were last promoted
- If appropriate, clarify nature of promotion and route sought
- Very brief summary of case, giving some sense of trajectory and overall standing
- Highlight any special circumstances that need to be taken into account

[**Second** para] – will help the Dean/discussant present the candidate against the research criteria

- State (and provide objective evidence) showing how the candidate has successfully delivered 'outstanding contributions to a subject area body of knowledge, demonstrating both the ability to sustain own research and to be successful against research competition in ways appropriate to the discipline'. This is the threshold research criterion that all at Grade 10 must meet.
- Select several of the 'core' examples described in the framework and rehearse the objective facts that support these core achievements. This is likely to include sustained success in obtaining research grants, research students successfully supervised to completion, evidence of a lead role in collaborations, and a sustained reputation within their subject community.
- Select additional 'specialist' criteria that the individual has met, giving examples.
- For each examples, where there is clear impact then describe it using the language provided in the 'indicators of impact' section.

[Third para] – will help the Dean/discussant present achievements against the teaching criteria

- Summarise overall teaching portfolio of applicant.
- Describe how the applicant meets the threshold criteria of 'active engagement with the intersection of research and education within the department, and successful involvement with teaching activity with any level of students.'
- Do not just report teaching load and breadth but report any objective evaluation of quality, and provide evidence of any innovation.
- Describe any evidence that the candidate has introduced innovative changes to the curriculum and/or made a significant contribution to the skills/knowledge base in relation to teaching and learning.
- If innovations the candidate has introduced have been generalised to other courses or Faculties this is particularly helpful to describe.
- Make sure you describe feedback that the applicant has received on their teaching and that it confirms their teaching is of a consistently high standard.

[Fourth para] – will help the Dean/discussant present achievements against the Enterprise and External Engagement criteria

- Provide evidence of activities in this area that relate to the Core (or Specialist) activities. Be as objective as possible in terms of highlighting particular activities, external audiences engaged, approaches and evaluation of impact.

[Fifth para] – will help the Dean/discussant present achievements against the Institutional Citizenship criteria.

- Highlight enabling skills and evidence of a significant contribution to the management/administration of a department/faculty at UCL or other university/educational establishment. Again, be as explicit what the objective management/administration contribution has been.
- Use the Core and Specialist activities examples to highlight the contribution of the individual.

[Fifth para] – will help the Dean/discussant wrap up the case presentation

- Summarise case briefly

Modifications to the basic letter format

For promotion on the basis of teaching to grade 10 Professor, modify the letter to stress **innovation** and **creativity** in teaching as the primary basis rather than research. Focus on how that innovation and creativity has been evaluated and has influenced or generalized to other areas, Faculties or indeed institutions. This can be difficult to write, and it may be helpful to refer to similar successful letters for previous candidates. An intensive teaching schedule is not a basis for promotion in this context. You will need to use the Core and Specialist activities part of the Careers Framework to reference in your letter.

For promotion to grade 9 Associate Professor focus on the published criteria which emphasise research and teaching achievements in the context of knowledge transfer and institutional citizenship. That is, the predominant criterion is the research and education record and it is important to demonstrate **potential** i.e. trajectory of achievement and likely future trajectory.

For promotion to grade 8 Lecturer the letter should focus on the published criteria which emphasise a balance between research and teaching in the context of knowledge transfer and enabling.

In all letters follow the approach outlined above of 'chunking' the information in paragraphs which make it easy to understand and appreciate the individual's contribution in each of the key areas against the criteria