

A Teaching Focused Academic: Pioneer or Patsy?

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ABSTRACT

The University of New South Wales has earmarked the building of educational excellence in the university community as a priority in its 2025 strategy. (<https://www.2025.unsw.edu.au/>). The 2025 Strategy recognises that, in the current climate of intense competition to attract students, providing ‘educational excellence’ as the foundational student experience needed to be prioritized. UNSW plans to have approximately 25% of staff in EF roles and the first cohort or 157 academics has been functioning in this capacity for approximately 18 months. Enormous has been expended in creating these positions from within the existing framework of a traditional, research intensive, academic environment.

The EF role is not the creation of UNSW, but specific features of this role, that may have been problematic for other institutions, have been specifically addressed: namely promotion, workload and potential reversion to teaching/research roles. A survey was framed using the FAQs that emerged following early discussions of EF roles within the academic community. The original cohort was asked it if their overall experience matched their expectations as per the FAQs. Preliminary results indicate that, while 100% of respondents who had applied for promotion were successful and 100% do not regret their decision to become an EF academic, there remain concerns about increased workload, unclear/unfair performance metrics and the ability to revert to a teaching/research position if desired.

Keywords: academic promotion; higher education; research; teaching metrics; workload