

Raising your profile within your organisation

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Academic disciplines are international communities. At early stages in your career it is important to raise your profile in your chosen field and there are often many opportunities to do so. The benefits of raising your profile within your organisation, particularly outside your discipline can be overlooked.

Universities tend to have a lot of working groups, task groups, committees and a whole range of other events where academics can present or contribute. There is an expectation that academic staff will contribute at some point to university committees etc. If you see it as a chance to develop your wider career, this can be a positive opportunity rather than a chore. It can also potentially open up new career options and be a chance to meet interesting colleagues you may never have come across otherwise.

However, it can be hard to find the right people to invite to participate in these opportunities, particularly as everyone already has far too many emails. This can result in the 'usual suspects' being asked repeatedly, some people agreeing to get involved with things because they feel they have to and others feeling annoyed that they weren't asked.

Academic roles are increasingly varied. Taking time to identify how the different aspects of your role could align can make it easier to manage workloads – and expectations.

Ingredients

- Time to think.
- A friend or mentor (optional).
- Confidence to ask for things, and to say no.

Method

1. **Define your priorities.** Take a sheet of paper and draw five columns, one for research, one for learning and teaching, one for external engagement, one for the University and one for your personal vision and values. Write down your top areas of interest in each one. The 'general University-related' column can cover whatever most interests you, e.g. widening participation for undergraduate students, research training for postdocs, sustainability, gender equality, international partnerships, assessment and feedback etc.
2. **Adapt and flex your interests.** How could your interest in a topic be adapted to fit the different domains of academic roles? For example, if you are very interested in public engagement, are there any crossovers with teaching? Or opportunities to join committees or working groups to raise the profile of public engagement in your school? Or apply for public engagement funding?

Explore all the angles you can see to working on this area of interest. Do the same with other areas you have identified. Are there any new opportunities which could be worth exploring? Look for overlaps.

- 3. Consider your options.** Write down the most promising opportunities to develop your areas of interest. This might be responding to a call from a funder, teaching or developing a new course or module, doing consultancy or getting involved in a festival event, arranging a meeting with someone with expertise in that area, etc.
- 4. Prepare, then review an initial plan.** Of the options you have identified, which ones are most appealing? Are they things you can implement now or do you need to do a bit of work to develop them further? Do you have a sense of how you would like the different aspects of your role to link together? How far are you from that? What is a realistic timescale for getting there? Then check this with a critical friend. What have you missed? Are you being realistic?
- 5. Who can help?** Review your network and think about who you know in each area. Are there any gaps? Make an effort to find out more about the University by asking people for their insights and to share their networks.



6. **Look for starting points.** Could you present or chair at some internal meetings to build confidence? Do you know any people currently working on projects that you are interested in? You could meet them for a coffee and find out more about what's involved. Could you apply for a small grant to run a pilot workshop or activity? Ask people for ideas about how you could get started.
7. **Articulate your ambitions.** If there aren't current opportunities, what three things do you want people to know about you? For researchers in your field, those three things might be entirely based on your research priorities. For colleagues in a more general university role, it could be a much broader summary. Once you have your summary, then tell people! This is a simple but incredibly effective strategy. You don't even need to be very good at networking – just find people who are super networkers or have a coordinator role and get on their radar. In a huge university, people who are on the lookout for staff to involve in working groups etc often ask colleagues, particularly those in coordinator-type roles, if they can suggest anyone. If people know you are interested in a particular topic, particularly in the 'general University-related' space, they will usually try to connect you to relevant opportunities. Make it easy for people to help you.
8. **Say no to things which don't fit your interests (where possible).** Getting involved in wider University projects is usually fairly inevitable. If you are proactive about it and choose projects which align with your interests this has a double benefit: the projects may well support other areas of your work and be more interesting, and it also means you can say no to other committees or roles with no guilt as you are already making a contribution.
9. **Plan your exit strategy.** If you do something a few times, it can be a great learning experience. If you are volunteering for the same thing twenty times, it might be worth reconsidering if something else might be a better learning opportunity or a little more interesting.