

UCU response to the Academic Titles Consultation

While Imperial UCU is in full agreement that the College should develop a more outward and forward-looking approach to its structure and academic titles, we are opposed to the current proposal and the consultation process being undertaken. We would like to emphasise that members have expressed extremely strong negative feelings in response to proposal put forward.

The following feedback is aggregated from UCU Members replying via email directly to the branch and an open online meeting.

Objections to the proposal

- The use of the title “Assistant Professor” as proposed is not commensurate with other HE institutions, either globally, within the UK, or even in most Departments at Imperial itself.
- Whilst it is agreed that it is important to align our titles with those used in other countries where possible, the UK academic career system has multiple and significant differences to the US system, which seems to be the primary influence for this change.
- The proposal does not align with mappings already used at Imperial. When Imperial recruits internationally, it usually equates Lecturer with Assistant Professor, and SL with Associate Professor – see [here](#) for a current live example, with screenshot below:

Job Summary

Imperial College London invites applications for a full-time permanent faculty member at the **Lecturer (Assistant Professor)** level, who will contribute to research, teaching and service at the College’s Imperial-X (I-X) initiative. Qualified candidates may also be appointed at the **Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor)** level.

- The modifier of ‘assistant’ causes confusion amongst academics, especially those that have not worked within the US system, and is seen as an insulting title not respectful of the significant and accomplished careers of Lecturers in that it implies a helper role rather than an autonomous one. For those who do know the US system, there is an assumption that the position is of temporary duration or even that people are passing through the Senior Lecturer role on their way to the substantive post of Associate Professor. This is not the case for many Lecturers.
- Staff may believe they have a job title which is associated with a probationary position.
- If a member of staff retains their title but others around them are using the new titles then they will be disadvantaged and it may be seen as a demotion (or vice versa for Assistant Professors). The perceptions of their position outside of the organisation will be damaging to their reputation.

Objections to the consultation process

- The consultation process is flawed in not being open to staff members in the Research and Learning & Teaching job families, as many people in these positions are in situations which could see them moving into the Academic job family. There are also direct interactions and implications with proposed changes in other job families, in particular the use of Lecturer in the Learning & Teaching job family.
- It is also worth noting that correspondents have been asked to complete the consultation with incomplete information; UCU requested details on demographic data for EDI-related information which has not yet been issued.
- The consultation format is problematic with a forced-choice question implying acceptance of this proposal or adopting no changes at all. This does not allow for any clear response from those who would like to see a change in titles, but do not support this particular proposal. Further, the open text box on the feedback form is the 'short response' type discouraging longer form feedback. There is a character limit on the text box which has restricted the length of feedback.
- Many UCU members have also questioned the composition of the 19-person working group, with 15 Professors and no Readers, Senior Lecturers, or Lecturers – it is notable that the group has produced a consultation document that would apparently not affect Professors at all but would affect those at earlier career stages in the job family.
- There was a departmental-level consultation process last autumn which was inconsistently run across the College. Many Departments have not offered the opportunity for discussion on this proposal. There has been no forum made available for open discussion beyond the meeting hosted by UCU on 15 February.
- Members would like to see what other proposals were considered before this one and what bench-marking evidence was used to inform the decisions made.
- The consultation document should justify the purpose of having academic grades in the first place.

Recommendations for future steps

- It is unclear who is making the final decision on this proposal. It is felt strongly that the decision should be made by academic staff whose titles are going to change i.e. if professors remain professors then they should not have a vote on this proposal.
- There should be more time to consult fully with lecturers who will be affected by these proposed changes to the current system. The three week consultation process is not sufficient time for consideration of such an important topic.

Imperial College UCU

19th February 2024