



UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

ACADEMIC HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

ROLE PROFILE

The Head of Department reports to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of their Division (or Dean in Division of Health Sciences), provides academic leadership and has primary responsibility for the operational performance of the department.

Academic departments and other units have a central role in sustaining a vital and collegial environment at the University of Otago. Heads of Department are the heart of the organisation; they have a mandate to advance and promote knowledge, critical thinking and intellectual independence in order to enhance the understanding, development and wellbeing of individuals and society. This is achieved by building on foundations of broad research and teaching capabilities, unique campus learning environments, nationwide presence and mana as well as international links.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Head of Department is responsible for:

- Providing effective leadership which inspires others and ensures that the department contributes to the University of Otago's international reputation as a research-led University
- Articulating and implementing a clear strategic vision for the department which aligns with the Division and University, while maintaining the departmental culture and values
- Fostering the pre-eminent role of research in the department and enhancing the capacity for outstanding research across all represented disciplines
- Further developing the commitment of the department to excellence in teaching and the provision of an enriching student experience
- Ensuring effective management of departmental resources
- Building effective relationships, as appropriate, between the Department and Ngai Tahu, the wider Maori community, Government, government agencies, local and regional bodies, professional organizations, and industry
- Ensuring that there is effective clinical /professional leadership in the Department.¹

¹ Applies to Heads of Department working in clinical/professional disciplines (e.g medicine, law, pharmacy, dentistry, surveying, education, physiotherapy, nursing, radiation therapy, nutrition, accountancy, physical education).

It is expected that the Head of Department will enhance their career during their appointment. This means that some of the above responsibilities and authority will be delegated to colleagues in the Department as part of sharing leadership and development opportunities, fostering inclusive decision-making and addressing successional arrangements.

PERSON SPECIFICATIONS

- Commitment to excellence in research and education.
- Proven capability as an academic leader involved in research and teaching programmes.
- Effective communication and relationship management skills with the ability to build trust and create a motivating environment for staff and students.
- Ability to identify opportunities and risks for the Department and incorporate these into strategic planning.
- Ability to make sound decisions about the use of resources in order to achieve departmental goals.
- A commitment to bi-culturalism in the development and delivery of research and teaching programmes to enhance outcomes for Maori.

Appendix 1 outlines activities undertaken by Heads of Department within differing organisational structures (Appendix 2).

APPENDIX 1:

ACTIVITIES OF ACADEMIC HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS

The nature and extent of activities undertaken by Heads of Departments vary according to different disciplines and size of Departments. It is anticipated that Heads of Department will be supported in their leadership role by academic and general staff in the Department.

People and resources

- Recognise that staff are the most important asset in the University by fostering a vibrant, diverse Department and using a consultative approach to decision-making whenever possible.
- Support and provide advice on the career development of both academic and general staff in the Department.
- Recruit and retain high-quality staff who contribute to the Department, Division and University.
- Promote and foster a positive, inclusive and collegial environment that encourages a high level of performance, communication and teamwork.
- Recognise the importance of good communication and transparency in decision-making.
- Acknowledge and reward successes achieved by students and staff.
- Ensure that an effective operational structure and workload model enable the Department to achieve strategic goals.
- Promote practices to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and students engaged in research, teaching and service.
- Ensure responsible financial, space and resource management within the Department and actively pursue opportunities to improve financial performance of the Department within the constraints imposed by the School/Division in which it is located. This includes securing an adequate, diversified funding base and minimising bureaucracy where possible.

Research and teaching

- Foster the development of academic programmes and research in the Department in order to provide an intellectually stimulating and collegial environment for students and staff which is consistent with the University's culture and values.
- Ensure that decisions are made to strengthen departmental research culture and ethos. This includes recruiting high-quality research-active staff, maintaining and developing an optimal research infrastructure, using funds to support increased research performance in strategic areas and, in some instances, withdrawing from areas where research is not strong.
- Promote strong research-teaching synergies to enhance the quality of teaching.

- Foster innovative approaches to teaching which are supported by high-quality learning facilities.
- Create an environment that supports the departmental teaching and learning plan including recruitment of “top calibre” entrants.
- Contribute to regional and national good by promoting participation of the Department in national forums and encouraging research which supports development regionally, nationally and internationally. Ensure that staff undertake these activities in an ethical, social and environmentally responsible manner.
- Ensure that the Department actively and effectively engages with national bodies, industry, political and community leaders in order to develop research and learning opportunities which may lead to collaborative partnerships and entrepreneurial activities.
- Encourage a culture of innovation, evaluation and benchmarking against similar Departments in Australasia and elsewhere.
- Advocate for, and represent, the interests and needs of the Department within the University and the Division through engagement with staff and committees across the University and within Academic and Service Divisions.

Strategy and planning

- Develop and implement a strategic plan for the Department, in consultation with other colleagues, which enhances the national and international standing of the Department and is in accord with Divisional and University strategic imperatives.
- Foster ongoing discussions with staff to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in decisions about where the Department is heading and how excellence can be achieved.

APPENDIX 2:

CONTEXT OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

The organisational structure within which Academic Heads of Department provide leadership is outlined using the following definitions.

Definition of an Academic Division

An Academic Division is a large organisational grouping of Schools and Departments covering a group of related academic disciplines which have primary responsibility for a cluster of related research, teaching and learning, programme development and community service activities.

Definition of a School or Department

A School or Department is a core academic unit comprising a number of academic and general staff focusing on research, teaching and learning, programme development and community service activities located around a discipline or group of related disciplines and/or professional functions. The function, size and structure of a School varies between the different Divisions.