THE USE OF THE TITLE ‘PROFESSOR’

A report of the policies, conventions and practices among Australian higher education providers

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Executive Summary

This report provides information about the variants, conferment and use of the title ‘Professor’ in Australian higher education institutions. Commissioned by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, its purpose is to provide background on current conventions, policy and practice in Australian public universities to assist in the development of guidelines for non-self accrediting higher education providers.

The title ‘Professor’ has come to represent a far broader set of activities, accomplishments and responsibilities than it did in the past when it was recognised as simply representing high-level academic achievement. While teaching and research are still major platforms on which professorships are awarded, at some universities an individual can win promotion to the rank of professor based primarily on their service or knowledge transfer record or on professional experience judged equivalent to outstanding academic contribution.

There are several variants of ‘Professor’ in Australian universities, including Associate Professor, Adjunct/Conjoint Professor, Emeritus Professor, Laureate Professor, Distinguished Professor and Professorial Fellow, but there is also a lack of consistency across the sector as to the styling of these titles, particularly in the case of honorary titles.

This report is based on an examination of the policies of six Australian universities (the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, Victoria University, the University of Western Australia, the University of Newcastle, Swinburne University of Technology), supplemented by brief telephone interviews and email communication with human resources and academic staff. The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) was also consulted. A picture of the variants of ‘Professor’ has been built through an examination of human resources policies and the requirements and processes of conferral of the title were primarily gained through an examination of academic promotion policies and guidelines, minimum standards statements and, in the case of the two Group of Eight (GO8) universities sampled for the report, in ‘Expectations of a Professor’ documents.

This is a small study, not a sector-wide analysis of policy and practice, and the conclusions reached here should be interpreted with caution. ‘Professor’ is an unregulated title arrived at by different pathways, conferred without reference to sector-agreed standards and criteria and, while some policy does exist with regards to the use of the title, is more often used per tacitly-agreed convention and tradition rather than by established rules and regulations.

Key Findings

• Given the absence of regulation of the academic title ‘Professor’ its use is often governed by tacit convention and tradition rather than with reference to policy. Appropriate use of the title is dependent in the main part on the ethical standards of individuals.

• Universities are more likely to have explicit policies on the use of honorary titles; however, monitoring their use is difficult and thus appropriate use is still largely dependent on individuals.
• Historically the title ‘Professor’ has been meritoriously conferred on academic grounds; however, changes to the higher education sector has wrought changes to the way the title is conferred. Professorships today are not only conferred on the basis of academic standing, but are often awarded to denote management seniority and authority.

• The title ‘Professor’ is granted at the discretion of the institution that confers it and use of the title always has an expiration date. Resignation, retirement or termination of the professorial position means the title can no longer be legitimately used. The exception to this rule is the title ‘Emeritus Professor’, which is conferred for life.

• There is consensus among universities’ policies regarding the key characteristics for the conferral of the title: all expect their professors to demonstrate leadership, eminence and distinction. However, standards differ widely between institutions as to the extent and level of achievement required. These differences are not always explicitly or formally expressed but are inherent in appointment decisions and policy interpretation.

• Conferment of the title ‘Professor’ is of mutual benefit to individuals and institutions: an individual receives an elevation in their personal status both within the sector and in the broader community while a university may garner prestige through an increase in its professoriate. This includes honorary titles which are used to maintain and reward close associates with individuals who are not employees. The university often benefits from unpaid teaching or service from such individuals, while the individual enjoys the prestige of having a university-conferred title.

• ACPET reports that no problems or issues exist with regards to the use of the title in non-self accrediting institutions, advising that use of the title is uncommon across the sector. There is no indication from ACPET’s members that they intend to begin conferring the title.

**Recommendation**

There is unevenness in the use of the title ‘Professor’ in the Australian public higher education sector and while at the time of writing there is no evidence to suggest that non-self accrediting institutions have the intention of conferring the title, it can reasonably be speculated that this issue could emerge in the future.

To avoid possible confusion and for the purposes of understanding and clarity, it is recommended that the non-self accrediting sector consider reaching a policy decision covering the use of titles in its institutions.

Whatever model the non-self accrediting sector decides to adopt, it is crucial that an academic career structure has meaning for institutions and individuals. For this reason it is important that individual institutions design their career structures with reference to other systems. The use of academic titles in public universities is founded upon both long-standing history and tradition, not to mention well-established policy and procedures.
Two possibilities might be considered for the process of conferring titles in non-self accrediting institutions should the need arise:

Model 1
Individual non-self accrediting institutions develop relationships with public universities and use the policies and processes of these institutions for the appointment of titled positions.

Model 2
Non-self accrediting institutions reach a sector-wide agreement on a career structure appropriate to the sector. This should not only include agreed titles but, importantly, standards for conferral.

There are potential advantages in both models. Model 1 has the advantage of providing a ready-made policy framework to support the implementation of a career structure. It would rely on the willingness of public universities to support non-self accrediting institutions in this way.

Model 2 provides an opportunity for the creation of title-conferral policies and processes that are relevant to the non-self accrediting sector. Readily available minimum standards and promotion policy documents of public universities may be useful initial references for such an approach.
Introduction

The size and diversity of the higher education sector makes it challenging to describe in general terms the ways in which the title ‘Professor’ is used in Australian institutions today. While university policies provide formal statements of the variants of the title and processes used to confer it, the far less tangible aspects of processes of appointment—the vagaries of policy interpretation, what might be called the ‘authority needs’ of institutions and their broader missions, not to mention the competitive market for high-level academic staff—suggest a far more variable and complex operation of high-level promotion, rank and hierarchy in Australian higher education institutions.

The challenge lies in mapping these in a rigorous and empirical way. While the scope of this report does not allow for this, it does set out the present issues and complexities involved in professorial appointments in Australia.

The way the title ‘Professor’ is used in higher education systems varies around the world. In the United States, Canada and some European countries the title is used at each level of academic achievement above postdoctoral researcher. In the United States, for example, three levels are available: entry-level is Assistant Professor with advancement to Associate Professor and then full Professor. In the USA, then, the term ‘professor’ is virtually used interchangeably with ‘academic staff’. This system has also recently been adopted by Britain’s University of Warwick as well as the National University of Singapore.

The system of academic ranks and titles in Australian public universities follows the British system. It has a series of academic levels from Level A through to Level E which correspond to the salary levels set by the Academic Salary Award (Commonwealth of Australia 2002: 14-18). While the award is binding on universities, the nomenclature they attach to each level is at the discretion of the institution. The majority of universities in Australia, however, follow the same academic career structure for general academic staff (i.e., those with both teaching and research responsibilities):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Level</th>
<th>Typical Corresponding Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Level A</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level B</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
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<td>Level C</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level D</td>
<td>Reader, Associate Professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level E</td>
<td>Professor</td>
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This report presents an account of the use of the title ‘Professor’ and its variants in the policies of six Australian universities: the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, Victoria University, the University of Western Australia, the University of Newcastle and Swinburne University. Brief telephone interviews and email communication with relevant staff assisted with clarification and questions arising from these policies. The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) was

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1 This is with the exception of the University of Western Australia which has recently changed its academic career structure to correspond with the North American system. The private Bond University also uses this model. See Appendix 1 for further detail on UWA’s new approach to academic titles.
also consulted. Academic promotion policies and guidelines, minimum standards documents and other human resources policies relevant to the use of academic titles were examined. ‘Expectations of a Professor’ documents from the University of Melbourne and the University of Western Australia also provided a picture of the post-appointment requirements of professors at these universities.

Use of the title in non-self accrediting institutions

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) was contacted in the course of this investigation for information pertaining to the use of the title ‘Professor’ in non-self accrediting institutions. ACPET then made contact with a selection of members asking for responses regarding the use of the title ‘Professor’ in their respective institutions.

Responses suggest that the use of the title among private providers of higher education is uncommon. The profile of those teaching in the private higher education sector is generally of industry professionals with extensive experience who are now teaching others in their field. These people may have academic credentials (for instance, they may have a PhD) but they are not academics.

Neither was there any indication from ACPET that the title ‘Professor’ was being used inappropriately or unethically within the sector. Indeed, only a couple of cases of the use of the title were identified: one was an Emeritus Professor from a university, the other had the title bestowed by a Chinese university. These both appear to be legitimate uses of the title.

ACPET reported that they have had no indication from their members—either in the course of their general business and among those contacted for the purposes of this report—that they had intentions to confer the title on their staff.

While ACPET reports there is no indication their members are seeking to confer the title of ‘Professor’ in their institutions, the possibility does raise a suite of issues. The use of the title in public universities is dependent on an extensive web of tradition and policy infrastructure and, while these differ in nature between universities, the long-established, tacit understandings within the sector mean the system of title and rank articulates meaningfully across institutions. Recent changes to this system at the University of Western Australia (see Appendix 1) highlight this: UWA’s system of academic titles no longer accords with those at other public universities and, it might be argued, thus have less meaning in the national context. It might be said that while a UWA academic uses the title ‘Professor’ they might be said to ‘really’ be an Associate Professor everywhere else.

The nature of the title

One of the important aspects of the title of ‘Professor’ is that it is an appointment; it is institutionally conferred and it usually has a position description of some kind. A contrasting example is the title ‘Doctor of Philosophy’ (PhD) which is conferred by an international community of scholars upon achievement of a particular standard of academic performance. It is recognition that the holder has joined their peers in this broad, international academic community. Once gained, it is able to be used for life:

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2 CSHE is grateful for the assistance and advice provided by Mr Ben Vivekanadan from ACPET.
there is no expiration date of the title, nor is it contingent on affiliation, employment or association with an institution.

‘Professor’, by contrast, relates to a particular position in a particular university and is conferred through reference to that individual institution’s classification and/or promotions standards. Importantly, it also has a date of expiration: this is the point at which employment or association with a particular institution ceases. It cannot be carried to the holder’s next position (unless, of course, the position in the new institution comes with the title) nor can it be used during periods of unemployment. The one exception to this rule is the title ‘Emeritus Professor’ which is conferred for life; however, even in this case the title can be revoked by an institution; for example, if the holder transgresses university policy.

However, the way that the title is actually used is subject as much, if not more, to unspoken tradition and convention as it is universities’ policies. For example, if an individual has had the title conferred upon them by an institution and they continue to have employment in that university, convention dictates that they can then use that title in activities—including employment—outside their first employer. For example, it would not be considered appropriate for an internationally renowned professor at one university to provide paid service to another institution under a lesser title than she is appointed at by her ‘home’ institution. A professor signing his name to a public petition would be supported by convention in using the title in this circumstance. While it is not university business, he carries the title with him while he holds the position, and thus the title, in his institution. Certainly a university may decide to institute discipline proceedings should it feel he had violated university policy, but his decision to use the title in this circumstance is, at least, traditionally legitimate.

Expansion of the profession

The Australian higher education system has changed considerably over the past decade, which has had an impact on both the numbers and expectations of the role of professor. Diversification, an increased emphasis on research output and increasing competition for students have broadened the description of professorial activity: where professorial appointments were once driven largely by research records, they now take into account a variety of activities, including teaching, service and even knowledge transfer, giving more academics the opportunity to apply for promotion based on these platforms.

In the past decade there has been a significant increase in the number of academics at Level D (Associate Professor) and E (Professor). Between 1996 and 2008, the number of academics at these levels increased by 70%, compared to those at Level C which increased 25% during the same period (DEEWR: 2008). In 2006-2007, the years the Research Quality Framework (RQF) was being rolled out by the Howard government, there was a 9.5% rise in the number of Level D and E staff in Australian universities, the greatest increase in any classification level in a twelve-year period. Thus, the number of professors has increased markedly in the past decade.

The academic marketplace

It has been suggested that a similar expansion in the numbers of professors in the United Kingdom is related to the Research Assessment Exercise (the RQF-equivalent) as the drive to publish increases academics’ research records and thus the numbers of
people eligible for promotion (see Tysome 2007). However, the recent increase in the numbers of professors in Australian universities and hence an increase in the use of the title in all its permutations is not only research-directed. Prestige also plays an important role: the title of ‘Professor’ lends an authority to research grants and public activities undertaken by an institution’s academics, effectively strengthening the university’s brand, so to speak. The more professors, it could be argued, the more prestige a university might garner for itself. This is, of course, tempered by the difference in prestige of various universities; that is, a professorship at one university does not necessarily have the same currency as one at a larger, more prestigious institution.

In this sense then, it is apt to think about the conferment and use of the title ‘Professor’ in Australian higher education as a market, where rank and title are used as currency to attract and retain high-performing staff but where titles at different universities reflect different standards and expectations. Again, while there is no empirical evidence for this, there is a tacit understanding among the higher education sector that it is generally more difficult to achieve a professorship at, for example, ‘sandstone’ universities than it is at smaller and less prestigious institutions: while minimum standards statements may be similar across Australian institutions, standards, criteria and interpretation of policy varies widely. And yet, at the same time, there are, of course, many professors in what might be considered less prestigious universities who have achieved extensive international eminence and distinction.

Pragmatically speaking, a characteristic of the conferral of the title ‘Professor’ is ultimately a mutually beneficial arrangement between individual and institution and the title has value and prestige for both parties. But the lack of a central, sector-agreed standard for professorships means the reward of the title of professor in Australian universities is neither straightforward nor particularly consistent but is instead unregulated.

Pathways to the professoriate

The title ‘Professor’ carries with it a great deal of prestige. Ultimately, it confers upon the holder the right to speak with authority and, traditionally at least, comes with the presumption that the holder has earned the right to use it through mastery of knowledge in a particular discipline.

However, there are various pathways to the acquisition of the title in Australian higher education that may not go by this traditional route. For example, some senior management positions that come with the title of ‘Professor’ do not require an extensive academic record or, in some cases, even a research higher degree. The title, however, satisfies the need to invest a university’s senior management officers with a high degree of authority and is often conferred for the period of appointment, but not beyond.

What this means, then, is that while two people with two very different professional backgrounds may have had the title conferred upon them for different reasons and in different ways, there is no way to discern between the two: between a title conferred on academic merit and one conferred for ‘authority needs’ or on the basis of extensive professional experience.

Regardless of how the title may have been achieved, once conferred the title is universal: it is able to be used across academic activities. Thus, a person who has been promoted to the position of professor by way of a senior management route can still legitimately use the title in the course of their research activities, in publications and at
conferences even though they may not have a corresponding professorial-level research record.

**The criteria for conferral of the title**

There are three routes by which the title of ‘Professor’ is conferred: appointment to a new position, internal academic promotion or by nomination in recognition of distinction. Universities express the criteria for conferral of the title through their minimum standards statements and promotion policies. All the universities sampled for this report derive their descriptions of the minimum requirements for academic levels from the Higher education Academic Salaries Award (Commonwealth of Australia 2002: 14-18) and thus these documents reflect broad consensus where minimum standard descriptions of the role of professor are concerned.

However, while minimum standards documents may define the minimum performance required of each academic level, including Professor, promotions documents refine a university’s description of what its expects of its professorial-level staff. And, while there may be differences in interpretation of policy between universities, three key elements are required to profess a discipline among the universities examined: recognition, distinction and leadership. In order to be granted the position of professor a scholar must have his or her work recognised as distinguished—certainly at the national level and possibly at the international level. As discussed above, the degree of distinction required varies between universities and even university documents, but *normally* international distinction is required in order to be granted the title of ‘Professor’.

Ultimately, the defining feature of expectations of professors in the universities sampled for this study, and the primary characteristic that differentiates the position from lower-level academic appointments, is the degree and nature of leadership. Regardless of the size or mission of the institution, universities expect their professors to be eminent leaders—all expect leadership in research, but two of the three universities expect this leadership to go further than this, both within the university itself, but also into the community beyond. Professors today may not be expected to ‘stamp on their future pupils the character of the loyal, well-bred, English gentlemen’ like their nineteenth-century predecessors (Selleck 2003: 31) however, some universities accord a distinctly social element to the appointment that requires professors to also be community leaders beyond their academic field and institution. The responsibility to foster the careers of more junior staff and to provide active leadership in the creation of research and university policy are also prominent features of the professor position in all three institutions.

Thus, for the universities examined for this report leadership in professors is expected not just in the field of research, but in several other domains. These include:

- their home department (for example, the role of Head of Department and supporting the Head of Department when they are not in the position)
- the development of curriculum and teaching
- the development of research policy

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3 While leadership in teaching is an increasingly important aspect of the professoriate for universities, because some professors are research-only and do not have significant teaching responsibilities universities do not tend to cite leadership in teaching as a *general* requirement of their professorial staff.
• their academic field generally
• the management of staff and students
• the broader community beyond the university, including in professional, government and industry sectors.

While it is possible to glean an overall picture of what these universities expect of their professors, there are also some differences in the way they have expressed the position and its roles and responsibilities. In the case of the post-Dawkins university examined for this study this makes a significance difference to the articulation of the role and responsibility of the research-only academic as it separates out its research-only staff from its research-and-teaching staff in its classification statement. While professorial-level research-and-teaching staff must have achieved national recognition and only ‘may be’ required to have achieved international distinction, professorial-level research-only staff have ‘typically’ achieved international recognition in their field of research.

Among the universities sampled for this study, the University of Melbourne makes a significant addition to its minimum standards document by including in its Professor and Associate Professor descriptions that the creation of ‘intellectual property of all types, including inventions’ may be an activity undertaken by Associate Professors and Professors. (Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual ‘Classification of Academic Staff Positions’: 280) It is not a requirement; however, the university clearly places value on this activity and is eager to promote it to its senior academic staff.

‘Expectations of a Professor’

While the position description of a professor is created through a university’s minimum standards and promotion documents, the two Group of Eight universities (the University of Melbourne and the University of Western Australia) sampled for this study also include a post-appointment description of the requirements of professors in their institutions. These documents, outline in far more detail the institution’s expectations of their professorial-level staff once they have been appointed (University of Melbourne ‘University Expectations of a Professor’ 1994; University of Western Australia ‘Role of the Professor’).

The creation of such documents suggests that, at some point, these universities have determined there is a need for greater understanding about the accomplishments, activities and profile of a professor from that institution. The University of Melbourne document states that its reason for being is due to the considerable changes to higher education in recent decades. These changes, it says, have resulted in external and internal demands and imperatives that have created confusion around what constitutes an appropriate role for professors (1). To provide some perspective: the Classification of Academic Staff Positions of the same university describes each level of academic classification in two or maybe three short paragraphs: the ‘University Expectations of a Professor’ document is three pages long. One of the primary functions of these documents is to ensure those appointed to the position of professor do not ‘rest on their laurels’.
Processes of conferral

For academic staff already employed by a university the title ‘Professor’ is conferred through the institution’s academic promotions procedure. While there are some variations in process between the institutions examined in this report, they generally follow a pattern: an applicant puts together a case for promotion under criteria that always include Research, Teaching and Learning and Leadership and Service. The University of Melbourne also includes Knowledge Transfer as one of its promotion criteria.

While much of the process echoes that for applications for any level of academic promotion, universities often require applications for promotion to Levels D and E to fulfil further requirements. They must always provide evidence for leadership, for example, and there is frequently an expectation of an extensive record of service to the university and community beyond, but they may also include a plan for continued activity, as is the case with the two research-intensive GO8 universities examined for this report. The University of Western Australia calls this statement of continued activity a ‘vision statement’ in which the applicant provides an ‘outline [of] what they plan to achieve in the next three years’ (‘Academic Staff Promotion’)

Promotion to Associate Professor and Professor is also often presided over by a higher-level committee than sub-professorial promotions. At the University of Melbourne, for example, promotion to Level E is considered by faculty-based Professorial Promotions Panels which then make recommendations to Senior Appointments and Promotions Committee. This committee (which includes the Provost, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the President and Vice-President of Academic Board) takes these recommendations into account and makes a final decision on approval for promotion to professor. (Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual ‘Promotion Committee Procedures’: 318).

Variants of Professor used in Australian universities

Associate Professor and Reader

The difference in criteria between Associate Professor and Professor is the level of leadership required. There is far less of an imperative for Associate Professors to demonstrate leadership qualities in order for the title to be conferred. The Australian Salaries Award describes the position as requiring an ‘outstanding contribution’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2002: 15) and there is an expectation that conferral of the title will normally require recognition at least at the national, if not international level.

The University of Melbourne and La Trobe University both confer the additional title of ‘Reader’ (University of Melbourne, Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual ‘Academic Promotions Policy’; La Trobe University ‘Academic Promotions Policy’). At the University of Melbourne this title is conferred on the basis of an outstanding record of research. Once the title ‘Associate Professor’ has been conferred, a decision is taken by the promotions committee as to whether the applicant’s research record warrants the further conferral of ‘Reader’.

As with the use of the title ‘Professor’, the title ‘Associate Professor’ may also be conferred with appointment to management positions in the university. At the
University of Melbourne this is the case with appointment to a Head of Department position (Regulation 7.1.R2 ‘Academic and Professional Staff Ranks and Titles’). Should the appointee not currently hold the title of ‘Associate Professor’, the title is conferred for the period they perform the role of Head of Department.

Use of the title ‘Associate Professor’ is subject to the same conventions as is the title ‘Professor’ (see ‘The nature of the title’ above).

Senior Academic Management Positions

Only two of the universities examined in this study tether the title ‘Professor’ to senior academic management positions as a matter of course (see University of Melbourne ‘Academic and Professional Staff Ranks and Titles’; La Trobe University ‘Senior Academic Officers’). Both these institutions have embedded this practice in policy and at both the positions of Dean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor all come with the title ‘Professor’ attached, while Heads of Department are appointed at Associate Professor level (if the appointee has not already attained a Level D position or beyond). This is not to say that other universities do not confer the title with appointment to a senior academic management position—certainly some of those examined for this report do; however, advice supplied suggests they do it on an individual, contractual basis, rather than through the application of policy.

The University of Melbourne’s Academic and Professional Staff Ranks and Titles regulation (7.1.R2) also reserves the University’s right to allow a person who has been appointed as a professor, but whose period of holding office has expired, to remain a professor of the University. The University will also specify the conditions under which this is the case.

This clause allows the University to both retain and reward people who have provided service to the University through performance in senior academic management positions. It may be inappropriate, for example, for a person who has held the position of Dean of a faculty for many years and who has provided extensive leadership and service over this period to return to their pre-management rank and title. Should this happen they may elect to take up a position elsewhere and the university would lose valuable experience and organisational knowledge. Retaining the title also allows them to be nominated for the position of Emeritus Professor.

Adjunct/Conjoint Titles

There is wide variation in the way the terms ‘adjunct’ and ‘conjoint’ are applied in Australian universities which has the potential to cause confusion. The titles ‘Adjunct Professor’, ‘Conjoint Professor’ and ‘Professorial Fellow’ are all used by different universities to describe the same thing: they are honorary titles that allow universities to formalise and recognise non-employment relationships with people external to the university with whom they have what is often termed ‘a special relationship’. That is, the person, who is of ‘distinction’ or ‘eminence’, makes an ongoing contribution to the university. These people may be from the community, industry or government sectors, or may be from another university.4

4 The University of Melbourne uses the term ‘adjunct’ very differently to other universities. The title may be conferred upon a university-employed Professor from one department who makes a substantial contribution to another department in the University. It does not come with any increase of salary. The title is most frequently conferred by the Faculty of Medicine. ‘Professorial Fellow’ is the title used at the University of Melbourne for honorary purposes.
Adjunct/conjoint titles are usually conferred for a period of three years, at the end of which they are reviewed and may be renewed. For adjunct/conjoint appointments at professorial level approval from the Vice-Chancellor following a recommendation by a Dean or senior executive committee is the usual mode of appointment. The appointment is unremunerated; however, universities usually reimburse expenses (such as travel costs) associated with the person’s contribution to the university. They are also often provided with office space and use of facilities at the university, funded by the faculty in which they are appointed.

The degree to which institutions have formalised policies about the use of adjunct and conjoint titles varies. Swinburne University of Technology specifies that a university affiliated person ‘must forgo their conferred title if they are appointed on a fixed term contract or in an ongoing employment position’ (‘Conferral of Titles for People Associated with the University’) and Victoria University (‘Honorary, Adjunct and Visiting Appointments’), is clear about when and how the title can be used, namely:

- during the term of the appointment;
- when carrying out any activity that forms part of the person’s contribution to the university;
- for ceremonial and courtesy purposes only;

VU’s policy also states that the person carrying the title of ‘Adjunct Professor’ ‘does not have the authority to represent or hold him/herself out to any third party that he/she acts as agent, employee or partner of the University or has power or authority to directly or indirectly to [sic] bind the University’ (6). The limitations of the Adjunct Professor title at this university, at least, are highlighted by a comparison with the title of ‘Emeritus Professor’, who is excepted from the above clause and who is, thus, by implication entitled to represent themselves as an agent of the university. Emeritus Professors at VU are also authorised to use the title in any situation where an equivalent education and research title would usually be used and are not so constrained to the ceremonial and courtesy contexts (5).

The University of Melbourne specifies that Honorary Fellows at any level, including Professorial Fellows, can use their title as long as there is no conflict of interest between their work and their contribution to the university and as long as ‘appropriate insurance and indemnification arrangements are in place.’ (Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual, ‘Honorary Appointments and University Visitors’: 80).

At the University of Western Australia, a large research university, the policy on adjunct titles covers the use of the title in grant applications and works to assure a two-way flow of benefits from the use of the title (‘Adjunct and Clinical’). Where the person may benefit in grant applications from use of the title connoting an association with this university so, too, does the university benefit if the Adjunct Professor is successful in winning research funding. If the person uses their title in grants and cites the University as their institution, all funds resulting from their part in the application must be directed through the University. In addition, all research outcomes must acknowledge the University and adjunct appointees are ‘encouraged’ to acknowledge the University in publications.

As noted previously, the adjunct/conjoint title is conferred when a person is deemed to have a ‘special relationship’ with an institution. The authority to use the title extends to the end of the appointment (usually three years), but may also be revoked earlier should it be deemed that this ‘special relationship’ is no longer in place.
The conferring of these honorary titles (that usually do not come with remuneration) is perhaps particularly useful to universities in the medical field where doctors and surgeons in hospitals make a substantial contribution to training the next generation of medical professionals. The University of Melbourne makes a useful case study in this respect as it has a large number of doctors who are not employed by the University teaching into its degree courses. Up until recently these doctors were awarded academic titles to acknowledge their significant contribution. However, the research record of a non-university practicing doctor cannot, naturally, compete with that of high-level, research-active academics in the field and so it was decided that honorary titles were more appropriate. Thus, the university receives the benefit of the knowledge and practice these doctors are able to pass on to its students, while the doctors are able to enjoy the prestige that comes with the title of ‘Professor’.

There are, however, some issues that come with these honorary titles. As stated in the policy, these honorary titles are awarded for a definitive period of time but it is difficult to monitor the use of titles after it has been deemed that the special relationship with the University has expired. Universities are also frequently explicit about the correct way to use a title to avoid any confusion that might arise as to the rank and position of the person. This is particularly so with regards to the addition of the ‘Adjunct’ or ‘Conjoint’ to the beginning of titles. of the University of Western Australia’s policy on Adjunct Professors (see ‘Use of Titles’), for example, is clear on the title should not only be used but how Adjunct Professors should be addressed, even in conversation:

In all formal University publications, minutes, etc., the full title is used e.g., Clinical Lecturer X, Adjunct Professor Y.

In all formal University communications the full title is used for the address, but the salutations may be shortened to the more familiar form, e.g.,

To Adjunct Professor Y – Dear Professor Y,…

The more familiar form is also used in conversation.

Clinical titles

Among the universities sampled for this report, clinical titles are honorary and are used when an external person from the medical field provides service to a university. Like other honorary titles, they are fixed term, usually for a period of three years. The University of Western Australia’s policy on the use of Adjunct and Clinical describes how clinical titles are considered ‘for practitioners who diagnose and/or treat patients in bedside or clinical settings’. The policy is also clear that the title should not be conferred on ‘alternative health practitioners.’

At the University of Melbourne, which has a large medicine faculty, honorary members may appointed as a clinical professorial fellow and are given the title ‘Clinical Professor’. Thus the appointment reflects the clinical foundations of the individual’s appointment, rather than suggesting the title has been conferred due to an extensive academic record.
Emeritus Professor

The title ‘Emeritus Professor’ is bestowed on retiring professors who have been deemed by a committee of the university’s senior staff to have rendered ‘distinguished service’ to the institution. At all universities except one examined for this report, eligibility for the title is dependent on the person having held a professorship at that university. In some universities this does not have to have been continuous: someone who has held a professorship earlier in their career and then retired from another university may be invited to become an Emeritus Professor of the first institution.

There are some notable exceptions to the rule about eligibility at the University of Western Australia which has a much broader criteria for the awarding of the title (‘Policy on the Award of the Title of Emeritus Professor’). As well as retiring professors, a professor who is resigning (rather than retiring) from the university in order to take up a high public office may also be offered the title. But where most other universities are unequivocal about Emeritus Professors having been members of the awarding university, ‘in exceptional circumstances’ UWA allows the title to be awarded to a retired person who has never actually been a member of the university. However, they must meet all of the three following conditions: that they have made a ‘special or exceptional contribution to knowledge’; that this contribution has been made in close association with the university, and that this association is continuing.

At all universities, one of the main considerations in decisions about conferring the title is the length of service rendered. Half the universities specify a time period of not less than ten years or normally ten years or more service, but others leave the time period open—some policies simply state that the length of service will be considered in decisions about awarding the title.

While ‘distinguished service’ is the main point of consideration in the awarding of the title of ‘Emeritus Professor’ the nature of that service differs between universities. The majority of universities examined in this study specify distinguished academic service, but not all do. The University of Newcastle’s ‘Courtesy Titles Policy’ explicitly states the definition of service may include but is ‘not exclusively academic service.’

As well as the title of ‘Emeritus Professor’, two of the universities examined for this study include a second emeritus title: Victoria University has also created the honorary title of ‘Emeritus Educator’ (see ‘Honorary, Adjunct and Visiting Appointments’). This allows members of the university who may not have formally achieved a high academic position but who are deemed to have rendered ‘distinguished educational or research service’ to continue a formal association with the University. For this post-Dawkins university whose profile includes a large VET load, the contribution of long-standing teaching staff who do not hold research higher degree qualifications is able to be recognised. La Trobe University has created the title of ‘Emeritus Scholar’ which is a similar position to Emeritus Professor but is for retiring Associate Professors or Readers (‘Professorial Appointments’). Again, the honour is conferred to recognise distinguished academic service to the university.

The usual process of conferment of such titles is by nomination by a high-level academic manager such as a Dean or a Head of School and the consideration of such nominations by a senior executive committee, which often includes the Vice-Chancellor. Some universities stipulate that the nominee must not know of the nomination until it is approved. Once the title of ‘Emeritus Professor’ is conferred it is normally for life, though it may be repealed in the event of a failure to abide by university rules and regulations. While at some universities the professoriate are members of the institution’s academic board, of the universities sampled here Emeritus
Professors are never eligible, by virtue of the title alone, to sit on institutions’ academic boards. Of the seven universities sampled there was only one exception to this: Victoria University has a policy that states that Emeritus Professors are eligible for membership of the Academic Board-equivalent (‘Honorary, Adjunct and Visiting Appointments’).

**Distinguished Titles**

Of the universities examined for this report, the University of Melbourne and the University of Newcastle confer the title of ‘Laureate Professor’ though another (the University of Western Australia) is currently working towards the introduction of the position. In both cases appointments are made through nomination rather than application, though the criteria for appointment to this position differs widely between the two. At the University of Melbourne the criteria for nomination for persons external to the University is the attainment of a Nobel Prize or equivalent (for those disciplines in which the prize is not awarded) (*Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual*, ‘University of Melbourne Laureate Professors’: 52-54). Current professors of the University may also be nominated, though a Nobel Prize is not required, they must be deemed distinguished in order to be appointed.

At the University of Newcastle both current professors and ‘prospective appointees’ are eligible for appointment to the position of Laureate Professor (‘Appointment as ‘Laureate Professor’ Policy’). The criteria for appointment are more explicit than that of Melbourne and concern excellence at recognition in research at an international level as well as potential future benefit they will bring to the University:

Appointment as 'Laureate Professor' Policy, University of Newcastle

5.1. The criteria for the award of the title shall be exceptional distinction in scholarship which may be demonstrated by:

a. an impressive portfolio of major publications with international publishers and world class journals;

b. international recognition such as prizes, awards, patents, honours, membership of one of the Australian learned academies or comparable organisations;

c. citation by a broad cross-section of peers internationally;

d. reports of referees, of which the majority are (if appropriate) international; and

e. evaluation of future potential and of benefits to the University's profile.

La Trobe University confers the title of ‘University Distinguished Professor’ upon those members of the university’s professoriate who ‘have achieved exceptional eminence and breadth of achievement in research.’ The title is conferred by University Council and a nominee’s current scholarly contributions and international standing as well as his or her potential to contribute to the university in future are taken into account.
Appendix 1. The University of Western Australia: A new style of Australian professor

The objective of being aligned to the North American and South East Asian systems of academic rank and title is one of the reasons cited by the University of Western Australia for undertaking a major overhaul of its academic classification system. The new model, implemented in 2009, gives all staff apart from Level A (which is predominately staffed by PhD students) ‘Professor’ in their title. The new career structure sees a reduction from five to four academic ranks (see Fig. 1) with all Level D and E academics assuming the title ‘Professor’. Within the professoriate there are three levels of advancement available with salary increments attached:

P1: Professor
P2: Winthrop Professor
P3: Professor Laureate and/or Named Professor.

All existing members of the professoriate at the time of the change will automatically be awarded the title of ‘Winthrop Professor’.

Fig.1 University of Western Australia, New Academic Career Structure (UWA: 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Level</th>
<th>Existing Title</th>
<th>New Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level A</td>
<td>Associate Lecturer</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level B</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level C</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level D</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Professor (P1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level E</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Winthrop Professor (P2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UWA’s argument for a change to the American system of usage of titles is based on making its career structure more recognisable to international colleagues as well as rendering itself more viable in ‘the intensified competition for staff in the international higher education arena, a competition projected to intensify over the next two decades.’ (University of Western Australia 2008: 3). It may also be making itself more attractive to high-performing staff from other Australian institutions who are able to assume a higher rank at the University of Western Australia that they are at their current employer. Someone who is an Associate Professor would suddenly be elevated to Professor, with no real change in performance expectations. The attractiveness of this to many academics working to climb the academic career ladder and for whom the carrot of a professorship has long been dangled should not be underestimated, even if the new title comes without an accompanying increase in salary.

The Australian system of academic titles, used by all universities in Australia except the private Bond University and now the University of Western Australia, is modelled on the British career structure. The University of Western Australia’s move towards the North American system was first floated in a consultation process the university undertook with staff and stakeholders. In 2007 a position paper was developed and feedback was provided and the paper has seen further iterations. The university cites three strategic benefits of the change: retaining high quality staff, international competitiveness and rewarding performance. The University is now in the
process of rolling out the new system, which will see changes to all academic titles and positions in the university for teaching and research-focused staff.

UWA is not the only university outside the USA to consider moving to the American system. In 2007 Warwick University in Britain also underwent a change to the American model and in late 2008 an Oxford academic’s call for his university to follow found its way into the national press (Newman: 2008), suggesting that the proposal has at least some traction nationally in Britain. It remains to be seen what kind of impact the University of Western Australia’s career-structure change will have on the sector, if any.
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