



7 Skills Every Senior Lecturer Needs

Tips covering, administration, managing people & curriculum development

Introduction

This ebook shows academics working at lecturer level what they can expect if they apply for promotion to senior lecturer level. Additionally, it helps scholars to think long term about their career and plan what sort of academic they want to be. The ebook provides some thinking points that will encourage the self-reflexive career development essential for making this transition.

This ebook will cover:

- Administration
- Managing people
- Curriculum development
- Grant acquisition
- Admissions tutor
- Being a mentor
- Delegation

It also contains career development advice for senior lecturers, an action plan and a couple of simple 5-minute activities to help you consider your options.

What is the difference between lecturer and senior lecturer role?

Every institution requires slightly different things of its staff, however, there will be a written job specification that describes the key duties and responsibilities of staff at every level. Ask your Human Resources department or your line manager to show you these documents so that you can see what your institution expects a senior lecturer to do. This will help you to prepare a case for promotion. In order to achieve promotion you must show that you already do much of your work at senior lecturer level.



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7 key skills

You need to map your own activities to the job specification. In order to prepare for this, consider developing your skills in the following areas:

1 Administration

One of the key differences between lecturers and senior lecturers is the amount of administration involved in the job. While this is not an aspect of the role that most academics enjoy, many are very good at it. If you can demonstrate administrative competence then you will be given more responsibilities in that area. Even lecturers are required to do basic administration, such as keeping registers for their courses and marking, delivering feedback and moderating marks.

Time management is a key attribute here. Colleagues at any level who are given deadlines and who meet them with minimal fuss will earn the admiration of others and will be more easily able to achieve promotion.

Please see also:

[Improving Your Academic Administration Skills](#)

2 Managing people

Senior lecturers often have a team of people to manage. This might be postgraduate students and temporary staff teaching on their courses, researchers working on their projects or mentees to support. Therefore people management is a vital skill to acquire for an academic wishing to progress.

Personality contributes somewhat to determining whether you will be good at working with others and managing a team requires both leadership skills and working as a team player. It could prove beneficial to seek out training provided by your university to help you to develop these skills.

Please see also:

[Non-academic Skills Useful to Lecturers](#)
[Leading a Team: Practicalities and Soft Skills](#)



3 Curriculum development

Lecturers are often given some autonomy in terms of the design of the courses which they teach, but at a more senior level, academics are involved in designing the entire curriculum. This might involve reworking existing provision in line with your university's quality assurance procedures, or creating entirely new degree provision. It often requires delicate negotiations with university administrators and colleagues in your own and other departments. You may also need an awareness of provision at other universities.

Please see also:

[Designing a Degree Programme](#)

4 Grant acquisition

More senior academics spend a considerable amount of their time running large research projects. In many universities, acquiring large external grant funding is still a significant marker of progress in a scholar's career. It gives instant prestige and brings financial benefit your department.

Please see also:

[Collaborations Which Attract Research Council Funding](#)

[Large Funding Bids: Preparation and Planning](#)

5 Admissions tutor

As mentioned above, it is expected that senior lecturers will take on administrative roles. Most academics in permanent positions are asked to take on an extra role within their department inside of the first few years. Depending on the size and structure of the department you may have to do this role indefinitely or for a fixed period of time. One such role is admissions tutor. It is often the first administrative role that someone takes on when looking for promotion to senior lecturer.

5a What do admissions tutors do?

There are several aspects to the admissions tutor role. It should be noted that this role is additional to the current workload, so the academic is expected to continue teaching and researching. The duties involved may vary slightly from institution to institution depending on the administrative structure but will include:

- Liaising with administrative teams on applications from potential students
- Working with the Head of Department or Dean to decide the desired number of students
- From these discussions, deciding what the offer will be (i.e. the number of points a candidate needs to achieve in their school qualifications to be accepted onto your degree programme)
- Handling personal inquiries from interested potential students or their parents
- Judging if a candidate should be offered a place or not in certain circumstances
- Interviewing potential candidates
- Implementing government policies on the admission of students to the university, such as widening participation programmes
- Helping to run 'visit days' with administrative staff in which candidates and their parents come to your university and are introduced to the department
- Researching admissions policies (for example, how a student's qualifications affects their performance on arrival)
- Co-ordinating the clearing provision for your department ('clearing' is the period in August when A level results are released.)

The admissions tutor does not see every application to his or her department. Some courses have hundreds of applications and it would be impossible for the tutor to deal with every one personally. However, this is an important decision-making role in which you have the candidate's future in your hands so it is vital to take every part of it seriously. You will sometimes see applications that are unusual, where non-standard qualifications have been taken or where special circumstances have affected an individual's education. This is why it is so important for admissions tutors to be aware of the range of qualifications and life experiences that can bring someone to higher education. Not all undergraduate applicants are 18 year olds with A-levels!

5b Why this role will be good for your career

The role of admissions tutor has some advantages for your career, such as:

- Being involved in strategic planning at department or faculty level. This may involve attending meetings but it will do no harm to network with decision makers within your institution. Learning about the range of qualifications young people are taking and how this affects their performance and standards
- Engaging with government policies on higher education
- This is a significant role within a department and could lead to promotion. At the very least it will show that you want to be centrally involved in the life of your department
- It will look good on your CV if you want to change jobs
- You will probably get a lighter teaching load in recognition of the time spent doing this job. This might mean that you have more time for other activities such as research
- You may become the public face of your department, as you will be meeting with potential students and their parents. You might develop a flair for marketing that you never knew you had!

5c How to get a role like this

In short, you need to let your head of department or line manager know that you're open to opportunities as soon as possible. Perhaps if you have an appraisal or career development meeting coming up you could raise the issue then. Posts will periodically come up within a department and volunteers are always much appreciated as otherwise the head of department has to persuade an unwilling colleague to take on the role. Make sure that you are clear about what will be offered in return in terms of a decreased teaching load or, less frequently, a promotion. These aspects are up for negotiation. Do not assume that they will be provided without you asking for them.

6 Being a mentor

When you started out as a new lecturer, you were probably helped by a mentor, either within your own institution or from outside. At this stage in your career you should consider becoming a mentor for new staff members.

6a Who needs mentoring?

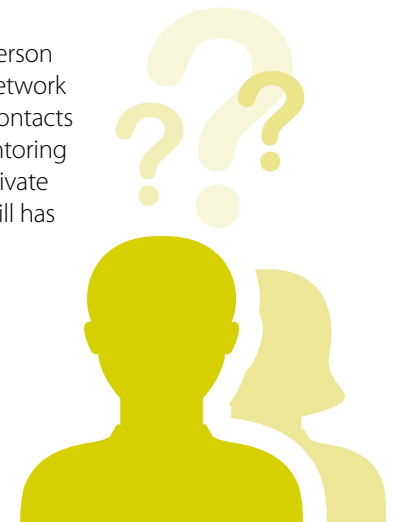
Almost anyone at any stage of their career can benefit from a mentor. In academia, your first formal mentor will be your PhD supervisor. But you also may have experienced peer mentoring systems, in which someone on a similar level of education or employment shares their experiences.

6b What makes a good mentor?

There are three distinct roles of mentorship. Practical assistance to help you achieve day to day tasks is incredibly important. To fulfil this, it is imperative that you have time for your mentee. The relationship won't work if your mentee feels that you are bothered by their questions or that you don't have time to spend with them. You should be able to support them when necessary.

A second aspect of a mentor's role is to aid your mentee in personal development. How can they achieve promotion or develop particular skills that might aid their career? This overlaps somewhat with the line manager's duties, but often a mentor will be more approachable.

A third aspect is to be a spokesperson for your mentee, to help them network and sell themselves using your contacts and experience. This type of mentoring is much more common in the private sector than in academia, but it still has a role to play, especially for early career mentees.





6c Potential problems

Boundaries: It is likely that you will become friends with your mentor too, and perhaps develop a close relationship with them. But, it is important to remember that while not in a formal position of trust, you are still bound to behave professionally. Never disclose anything that you discuss with your mentee with others unless you have been asked to do so. Honesty and trust are vital in this relationship.

Sometimes mentors and mentees do not get on. A relationship that looked perfect in theory may not work in practice because of the personalities of the two people concerned. The styles might not gel. As a manager, it is important to immediately act to solve this problem by reassigning mentor and mentee so that no one loses faith in the process itself.

Expectations: Spell out straight away what sort of mentor you will be, for example, how often you plan to meet, what advice you can provide. This is a way of managing expectations and starting the relationship in an open manner. No one will be misled into thinking that the mentoring relationship can provide something else.

Passive mentees: Encourage your mentee to be actively involved in the relationship, to articulate what they need and to work with them to achieve that. Encourage them to drive the relationship and not leave it up to the more 'senior' partner.

Time management: When agreeing to mentor other colleagues, consider how long this will take. Make sure that you allow your mentee enough time. Many relationships fail because of the unavailability of the mentor. It's your responsibility to take this commitment seriously and allow the mentee time to get to know you and work with you.

7 Delegation

One of the hardest aspects of managing other colleagues is trusting them to take some of your workload. Sharing tasks and working together towards the same goal sounds easy but some managers find it nearly impossible to give away tasks to others, while some do it too readily while offering little guidance and support. Here are some tips on how to make delegating work for you.

Excuses why not to delegate

- I don't want to shirk my responsibilities
- Others are just as busy as I am
- I'm not confident that my team will do the job as well as I would

Benefits of delegation

- Time management: in circumstances where a deadline is looming or where a project is simply too big for one person to handle, delegating work is essential otherwise it will not get done
- Developing your staff: by allowing your colleagues to have a taste of the work that you do, you can develop their skills making it easier for them to progress in their own careers. It will also make them more motivated and satisfied
- Mentoring a replacement: if you move jobs or have a period of leave, the department will not fall apart because through delegating you have allowed someone to work closely with you on your projects.

So, stop seeing delegation as a way to lighten your workload. Instead see delegation as part of your role as a manager to improve the team's time management and to develop your staff.

Tips for successful delegation

- Give a finite task that has precise, achievable goals within a particular time frame
- Explain clearly to your team what you require them to do and why
- Offer them development and training to help them to achieve this goal
- Be available to provide support during the process and feedback afterwards



7a Delegation in academic life

Successful scholars take on many tasks to boost their CV at the start of their career. After about 5 years they realise that they have accumulated so many roles that they are becoming overwhelmed. Sharing out your responsibilities not only helps you to improve your own working life, but also offers opportunities to others to develop their own career portfolios.

Of course, you are required to complete a certain workload for your department (decided by departmental management to ensure parity among colleagues) and this work is often not in your remit to delegate out to others. However, you do have some leeway.

The roles that can be shared out are: acting as reviews editor or editor of a journal; being secretary or chair of a society. Single lectures or seminars can also be offered to other staff members for their own teaching development and to enhance student experience.

Organising large projects such as running conferences or developing funding bids are also good ways of practising delegation. Also by gathering a strong team around you and sharing the workload, you have more chance of success.



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Career development for senior lecturers: where do I go from here?

Once you have reached senior lecturer level, there are three distinct career paths within academia. Deciding which one to choose requires detailed knowledge of your university, of your own skills and an understanding of where you want to be in the future regarding your day to day activities and your salary expectations.

It is also important to consider whether moving to a different university will help or hinder your career progression. Many people use a move to gain a promotion or better working conditions. Unless you are dissatisfied at your current job, a sideways move with no enhancements might be pointless at this stage. However, think big! For example, depending on your own personal and family circumstances, a move abroad might be feasible.

Possible career paths:**a** University management

For some staff, university management roles, whether acting as Head of Department, or taking on a faculty-based role such as Dean, are an ideal choice. These roles give you the opportunity to develop leadership and strategic management skills. You have a real voice in the development of your institution. You may also be required to represent the institution globally in meetings with legislators and commercial companies. These roles require a different range of skills than academic life, and they also mean that you do little or no teaching and research of your own, so make sure that this step is one that's right for you.

b Research

If research has been at the forefront of your own career so far (for example, you've already won several big research grants), then this is a potential route for promotion. Traditionally this has been the way that many scholars have reached professor-level, via the role of 'Reader'. This path often involves less teaching, at least at undergraduate level, and in some cases fewer administrative duties because research takes up much of the professor's time, sometimes away from the university.

c

All-rounder

Increasingly a third route is opening up that allows scholars seeking promotion to maintain an interest in all fields of academic activity, especially teaching. In some less innovative institutions, this can mean that promotion and higher salary may be slower in coming compared to either of the first two routes, but this is rapidly changing as the sector realises the value of having excellent teachers at all academic levels. By keeping your options open in this way, and developing your teaching skills while maintaining a research profile you will be able to pursue a promotion path that allows you to have a rich and varied work life. In the UK, teaching excellence is increasingly being recognised by more innovative institutions as vital to their reputation. This development has been enhanced by the input of the Higher Education Academy whose nationally-recognised fellowship scheme is based on achieving teaching excellence.



Action plan: how to decide which route might be for me

Now you have started to think about your career trajectory, you can make some decisions on your future direction. Two actions to take immediately are:

- Talk to more senior colleagues about their experience
- Look at the jobs.ac.uk website to assess the types of senior positions available in your field
- Consider a sideways move elsewhere if career development opportunities are poor at your institution.
- Might this be a good time to move abroad?
- Work on your CV. Make sure it is up to date at all times. Think about format and design. As your CV gets longer, you have to make sure that the vital sections are prioritised and are easily visible.
- Discuss your ideas with a mentor
- Talk to your line manager (usually a Head of Department). He or she can advise you of the promotion routes within your institution.



Also, fill in the following questionnaire. This will help you to decide which of the three routes will best suit you. Survey your career to date. Ask yourself the following questions:

Which aspect of academic life do I most enjoy?

In which aspect have I seen most success thus far?

What skills are my strongest? (for example, time management, people management, administration, team leadership)

Consider the future. In the next five, ten, twenty years, what would you like to spend your time doing? What would you most like to achieve?

In five years time my typical day will be:

In five years time a key achievement will be:

In ten years time my typical day will be:

In ten years time a key achievement will be:

In twenty years time my typical day will be:

In twenty years time a key achievement will be:



Summary

This ebook has explained the differences in job role between a lecturer and a senior lecturer at a typical UK university. The role of admissions tutor is often undertaken by scholars wanting to progress from lecturer to senior lecturer level. Developing mentoring skills is vital for senior lecturers as is an awareness of the importance of delegating as a time management tool, but more importantly as a way of developing the staff within your team. Finally, to develop your career and progress beyond senior lecturer level, you need to be self-aware and survey your experiences to date as well as planning for the future.

About the author

Dr Catherine Armstrong is Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Loughborough. She has previously held positions at the University of Warwick, Oxford Brookes University and for six years was based in the Department of History, Politics and Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her second monograph 'Landscape and Identity in North America's Southern Colonies 1660-1745' was published by Ashgate in 2013. She has also co-authored a textbook with Laura Chmielewski entitled 'Atlantic Experience: Peoples, Places, Ideas' (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and has published widely on early modern book history. Her previous jobseeking experience means that Catherine is in a great position to understand and offer her knowledge and experience to those developing an academic career.



Further reading

You may like these other ebooks from jobs.ac.uk:

[The Essential Guide to Moving Up the Academic Career Ladder](#)

An ebook with tips and tested techniques for making yourself promotion-ready

[How to Write a Cover Letter for Academic Jobs](#)

An ebook with tips and examples to create the perfect cover letter.





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