

Success in Academia? Findings from an International Research Project

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Dr Kathryn Sutherland
Associate Dean
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Email: Kathryn.Sutherland@vuw.ac.nz

<http://akoaootearoa.ac.nz/early-career-academics>

Kete Whakairo



Image from Te Papa, Museum of New Zealand website:

<http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/images>.

The early career project

- 1) Factors influencing the success, productivity and satisfaction of early career academics
- 2) Variations in organisational expectations and personal aspirations
- 3) Institutional and personal processes, support and resources



Research participants

- 1) 82 interviewees from three countries (Canada, NZ & Sweden)
- 2) 538 respondents to a survey at all eight NZ universities
- 3) 104 respondents to an academic managers' survey (Heads of Department, Deans, Deputy/Pro/Assistant Vice Chancellors, etc)
- 4) Four focus groups at four different NZ universities

Importance for success

Rank the following according to which you think the early career faculty respondents said was most *important* to their success:

- 2 A Head of Department who is committed to my success
- 27 Formal orientation programme for new academics
- 24 Availability of resources for teaching
- 4 Availability of resources for research
- 1 Opportunities to make decisions about the direction of my own research and teaching

Importance to success – early career academics

Rank	Item
1	Opportunities to make decisions about the direction of my own research and teaching
2	A Head of Department who is committed to my success
3	Support from Head of Department to apply for promotion/tenure
4	Availability of resources for conducting research
5=	Senior colleagues interested in my progress and well-being
5=	Travels funds to present papers or conduct research
7	Informal mentoring relationships or opportunities

In a university no one is able to work effectively without the support of others. The crucial thing is academic freedom: support from management level that an academic is capable and responsible for her/his own research and teaching direction

My experience here has been awesome. I was also employed for 18months at [an Australian uni]. I felt overwhelmed and lost because the place was so big, and my workload was huge with little support or mentoring, although the people I worked with were great people. I believe my experience here has been so good because of my Head of School and Head of Programme.

I think that often senior managers are actually very committed to one's success as an early career academic, but are so overloaded with strategic work/meta decision-making that they don't get the chance to make time to discuss progress one-to-one.

The most effective thing for me has been a monthly scheduled meeting with my Head of Department to keep me on track and updated and supported in all ways.

Importance to success - managers

Rank	Item
1 (9)*	Good communication between university management and other academics
1= (12)	Feedback to early career academics from manager/s about their academic performance
3 (2)	A Head of Department who is committed to early career academic success
4 (3)	Support from Head of Department to apply for promotion/tenure
5 (8)	Regular contact for early career academics with senior colleagues in same department
6= (6)	Senior colleagues interested in early career academic progress and well being
6= (27)	Formal orientation programme for new academics

* The number in parentheses is the ranking given to the item by early career academics

What matters most to early career academics?

Rank	Item	Mean
1	Autonomy in my job	1.39
2=	A job which makes a positive contribution to society	1.50
2=	My family or relationships outside work	1.50
3	Seeing students succeed	1.57
4	Job security	1.58
5	The chance to do innovative work	1.59
6	Having an income adequate to my needs	1.60
7	Other interests outside work	1.95
8	Achieving recognition by my peers	2.03
9	Helping others to better themselves	2.05
10	Being recognised by my managers as doing a good job	2.10

* Scale of 1-5 where 1 = Very important and 5 = Not at all important

What doesn't matter? Scale 1-5

Rank	Item	Mean
18	Earning a high salary	3.12
19	The status of having an academic job	3.27
20	Achieving recognition by the general public	3.30
21	Having managerial responsibilities	3.41
22	Becoming professor quickly	3.44

* Scale of 1-5 where 1 = Very important and 5 = Not at all important

Effectiveness of career/professional development

Item	ECAs	Managers
My career progress thus far has been at a good pace	2.91*	-
My career progress thus far has been well-supported by my university	2.97	-
My university offers adequate professional development opportunities	3.12	2.37
The academic appraisal/review process at my university has been an effective aid to my career development	3.49	2.31
The student evaluation process at my university has been an effective aid to my career development	3.54	2.93

* Scale of 1-5 where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree

Work/life balance

Group	Mean
New Zealand	3.11*
Women	3.09
Men	3.13

Satisfaction

Group	Mean
New Zealand	2.15
Women	2.18
Men	2.09

* Scale from 1-5 where 1 is positive and 5 is negative

How do early career academics spend their time?

The politically correct answer is one third research, one third teaching, one third service, right? The more realistic expectation is “as much research as you can do, as much as teaching as you need to, and as little service as you can get away with”.

Early Career Academic Time and Interests

Percentage time spent on...	All NZ	Men	Women
Research	44	42	45
Teaching	34	36	34
Service & Administration	21	21	20
Total	99%	99%	99%

My interests lie...	All NZ	Men	Women
Primarily in research	27	26	27
In both, leaning towards research	40	48	35
Equally in research and teaching	21	22	24
In both, leaning to teaching	8	3	11
Primarily in teaching	4	1	3
Total	100%	100%	100%

Factors influencing success

- Structural and organisational influences
 - Teaching load
 - Full-time, permanent appointments
 - Disciplinary involvement
 - Effective departmental support
 - Effective institutional engagement
 - Flexibility, rewards and benefits
 - Teaching development and mentoring

Factors influencing success

- Structural and organisational influences
- Prior experiences and qualifications
 - Has a doctoral degree (no difference if NZ or overseas)
 - Published during doctorate
 - Gained TA/tutoring, lecturing and course coordination experience during doctorate
 - Served on committees during doctorate
 - Has a teaching qualification

Factors influencing success

- Structural and organisational influences
- Prior experiences and qualifications
- Individual characteristics
 - Being male, NOT being the primary caregiver, being loyal and involved

Agency

“a capacity to identify the goals at which one is directing one’s action and to evaluate whether one had been successful”
(Taylor, cited in Edwards, 2005, p. 169)

Relational agency (Edwards 2005)

A capacity to:

- offer support and to ask for support from others
- both seek and give help when engaging with the world
- align one’s thoughts and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to respond to those interpretations

Recommendations

- For early career academics
 - Know your own strengths and needs (*Surviving and Succeeding*)
 - Develop Resourcefulness, Resilience, Respectfulness, Rest and recreation, Relationships/relational agency
- For managers & senior colleagues
 - Know your new academics (*Conversational Guidelines*)
- For departments (actually, for everyone)
 - Tell your own stories of ‘success’ (*Sharing Successes & Celebrating Achievements*)
- For universities and government
 - Improve the doctoral experience
 - Provide targeted support for women

Project funded by:



References

Edwards, A. (2005). Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 43 (3), 168-182.

Sutherland, K., Wilson, M. & Williams, P. (2013). *Success in academia? The experiences of early career academics in New Zealand universities*. Wellington: Ako Aotearoa. <http://ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/early-career-academics>