



Policy framework

Non-clinical academic positions
and activity

2004-09

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Non-clinical academic positions and activity 2004-2009

Mental Health Branch
Department of Human Services

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Introduction

The Mental Health Branch of the Department of Human Services (MHB) has funded non-clinical academic positions over the last two decades. These positions have predominantly been created in research centres, institutes or universities, thereby enabling appointees to undertake ongoing teaching, research and training in various specialist areas. Recently created positions with broader advocacy and sector wide responsibilities – such as consumer and carer academic positions – may be more usefully understood as being auspiced by their employing organisations.

During 2003, a review of clinical academic positions in public mental health services was undertaken by Emeritus Professor Scott Henderson AO. While the focus of the review related principally to clinical academic positions, a number of recommendations were made which are relevant to non-clinical academic positions. Those relevant to funding and activity of such positions are addressed in this framework.

Non-clinical academic positions have been, and will continue to be, established and funded on the basis that they contribute in an ongoing way to the future development of mental health services, knowledge and research in Victoria. This framework is intended to provide general guidance to funded academic appointees and their employing organisations concerning the MHB's expectations of these positions, and how such expectations might be reflected in institutional and university arrangements in future. It also endeavours to describe the kinds of factors which may influence the establishment of new positions over the next five years.

The framework is intended to reflect that the MHB is one of a potentially large number of stakeholders with an ongoing interest in academic activity. It makes clear that as a funder of this activity, the MHB does not seek to intervene in the broader responsibilities of such positions or their ongoing relationships with employing organisations. It does, however, propose a core set of expectations which should apply to the activity of all appointees. In doing so, the framework acknowledges that the MHB has an ongoing and legitimate interest in oversighting the broader strategy for appointment of clinical and research academics, and the outcomes of appointees' work across Victoria. It also seeks to increase the influence this work can have on policy and service development into the future.

1. Ongoing MHB expectations of directly funded academic appointees

Appointees to all funded academic positions in research centres should:

- provide leadership within their research centre and the broader specialist mental health sector in relation to their area of expertise
- contribute actively to the development of the centre and the sector
- where appropriate, mentor and develop junior research colleagues within the centre and others across the specialist mental health sector
- fulfil teaching and training responsibilities in accordance with the expectations of the centre and university
- undertake high quality research, and disseminate research findings appropriately
- seek to effectively translate research knowledge and outcomes into service development and practice
- develop and/or maintain linkages and collaborative academic relationships with others in the field
- ensure their research activity is well co-ordinated with other relevant mental health research and the broader health research field.

It is acknowledged that many of the above expectations may already be incorporated in existing employment or performance review mechanisms utilised by research centres/universities. If not already addressed, the above should be explicitly incorporated in employment contract/performance review mechanisms utilised by either the university or research centre.

As part of ongoing funding of positions, it is also expected that appointees will support any MHB or related initiatives developed to increase awareness of academic activity and outcomes across the mental health service system. This may include best practice forums auspiced by the department to enable promotion of academic activities and the translation of these outcomes into improvements in practice or service delivery.

2. Consistency of appointees' funded activity with national and MHB policy

Directly funded activity by non-clinical academic appointees should be broadly consistent with the *Third National Mental Health Plan*, and where relevant, the *National Practice Standards for the Mental Health Workforce*. Such activity should also be broadly consistent with the directions and intent of the policy outlined in *New Directions for Victoria's Mental Health Services*, which draws on the framework for service delivery established in the mid 1990s.

In view of the above, activity should contribute to knowledge and understanding concerning:

- the aetiology, epidemiology and/or management of mental illness or disorder;
- development of improved responses to the needs of consumers and carers, including the development of new or improved models of care (particularly for people with high needs)
- more effective responses to increasingly complex consumer needs – particularly those associated with increasing drug use among young people with mental illness
- the establishment and maintenance of an appropriate balance between inpatient and community-based services
- management of the growing demand for mental health services and ensuring the future sustainability of services
- ongoing workforce challenges, including education, training, recruitment and retention.

A research and evaluation strategy is currently being developed by the MHB. The strategy will set out key principles and criteria to further guide research and evaluation activity by funded academics and research bodies, and will identify mechanisms for increased alignment of activity with stated priorities over time. Mechanisms for improved dissemination of research outcomes and their translation into practice will also be identified.

Pursuant to this strategy, research centres will be requested during the 2004-05 financial year to advise the MHB concerning the current and planned research, teaching and training activities of funded academic appointees, and how these activities support the future development of mental health services, knowledge and research in Victoria.

As has occurred in the past, where particular research or other academically related activity is required by the MHB for its policy, service planning, development or monitoring functions, it may seek to draw on the skills and expertise of appointees for this purpose. In such circumstances, negotiations will be undertaken jointly with the research centre, university and appointee prior to the commencement of the required activity.

3. Performance of directly funded appointees

In relation to existing and future positions:

- performance of directly funded appointees should be appraised via research centre/ university performance review procedures. Where appropriate, universities and research centres should consider joint performance management approaches;
- those aspects of the performance review process relating to MHB expectations should be reported annually to the MHB by the employer. This should occur no later than 30 September in each year the appointee is funded. The report should be a consolidated summary of directly funded academic activity during the preceding financial year, and should be in the standardised form set out at the end of this framework. This reporting will enable the MHB to better incorporate the outcomes of appointees' activity in policy development or other relevant MHB activity, and enable promotion and dissemination of the outcomes of that activity where appropriate

- where the MHB funds a position on the basis of particular activity or outcomes agreed at the time of establishment, those specific expectations should be expressly included in employment contracts/performance review procedures (whichever mechanism is considered most appropriate by the centre/university) and reported on in accordance with the above.

4. Funding arrangements

In relation to existing positions:

- academic positions should, wherever possible, be funded via funding and services agreements (FASAs) and identified as such. Where the research centre is located within a health service, it is expected that the position will be funded via the health service agreement (HSA)
- positions which are not funded via FASAs/HSAs will be considered for transfer to FASAs/HSAs during the 2004-2005 financial year. Research centres, universities and appointees will be consulted prior to any such transfer occurring
- funding for academic positions will be clearly identified under FASAs/HSAs, together with any reporting or other conditions attached to the funding
- individual contractual arrangements or other funding mechanisms should be minimised and only used in circumstances where the complexity of individual arrangements cannot be effectively incorporated into FASAs
- when current funding periods expire, and subject to agreement on further funding by the branch, any new agreement will be for a maximum period of five years, or such shorter period as agreed between the branch, incumbent and centre. Funding may be extended for a further fixed period subject to agreement between the branch, incumbent and centre prior to expiry of the agreement
- the branch reserves the right to review provision of funding at any time. Should this occur, it will be undertaken in consultation with the incumbent and the employing centre and the criteria set out at 1 and 2 above will form the basis for review.

In relation to future positions:

- the MHB will fund all new academic positions via FASAs/HSAs
- funding will be clearly identified pursuant to these arrangements, together with any standard reporting or other conditions agreed at the time of establishment
- the MHB will fund new academic positions via HSAs/FASAs for a maximum period of five years or such shorter period as agreed between the branch, incumbent and centre. Funding may be extended for a further fixed period subject to agreement between the branch, incumbent and centre prior to expiry of the agreement
- the branch reserves the right to review provision of funding at any time. Should this occur, it will be undertaken in consultation with the incumbent and the employing centre and the criteria set out at 1 and 2 above will form the basis for review.

5. Administrative issues relating to positions

In relation to current and future positions, centres and universities should co-operatively ensure that:

- expectations concerning the apportionment of research, teaching, training, administrative activities and broader sector-wide responsibilities are agreed with the appointee and identified in the employment contract or performance review system (whichever mechanism is considered most appropriate by the centre/university)
- necessary administrative support is available to all appointees to enable fulfilment of their joint responsibilities;
- where administrative and/or structural inefficiencies are identified by appointees as a result of the way in which positions have been established or managed (for example problems with accessing and maintaining information technology systems or similar administrative issues), cooperative action is taken by the centre and/or university to address these inefficiencies and minimise their impact on the ongoing performance of the appointee.

6. Establishment of future positions

New positions will be in key areas of identified need (see further below), where appointees can have an influence on a wide range of staff and services. These positions will be consistent with mental health policy priorities and initiatives as outlined at 2 above.

The following will be considered by the MHB when establishing and funding new positions:

- **clinical:** will the proposed appointment support and impact upon professions which are currently underrepresented in academic activity and leadership (eg nursing, psychology, occupational therapy, social work)?
- **non-clinical:** will the proposed appointment undertake scientific research which positions Victoria at the forefront of developments concerning the aetiology, treatment and prevention of mental illness/(disorder)? Will the proposed appointment provide advocacy and leadership which enables improved service responsiveness to the needs of consumers and carers?
- **geographical and speciality area:** is the position in a geographic area which is currently unrepresented or under-represented in relation to academic activity? Is the proposed focus of the position or specialised area of expertise currently unrepresented or significantly under-represented in relation to academic activity?
- **contextual conditions:** do the contextual conditions (eg broader recruitment and leadership-related conditions) suggest the need for a academic appointment in preference to another form of appointment?

In relation to individuals being considered for appointment to new positions, the following should also be considered by appointment committees:

- **expertise:** in addition to their academic experience and expertise, does the proposed appointee demonstrate exemplary professional standards?
Do they have an understanding of service provision to people with high and complex needs?
- **collaborative skills and approaches:** does the proposed appointee demonstrate a capacity to work collaboratively within the centre and the university environment?
- **likelihood of individual success:** does the proposed appointee's record demonstrate a likelihood of success in such an appointment over time?

In establishing new positions, consideration should be explicitly given by the MHB, research centres and universities to ways in which these positions can link effectively with other clinical, non-clinical and research academics in order to maximise potential collaborative benefits of activity, minimise isolation and provide networking and support.

Appendix: summary report on funded academic activity 2003-2004*

Research centre: [name]

Name of academic+	Summary of current research activity^+	Summary of findings and implications over reporting period ^+	Publications+	Major academic collaborations	Current training activity	Current teaching activity	Other comments	Email contact or related weblink for research activity+

* Summary information only - Centres are not required to provide extensive detail.

+ This information may be made publicly available on a centralised data base of funded research activity. If the Centre considers this information should not be publicly available, it should state this in its report.

