The Rough Guide to being an Academy Visiting Professor

June 2018

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Introduction

This guide has been compiled from the experiences, insights and collective wisdom of several seasoned Visiting Professors (VPs), in addition to observations made by members of Academy staff who have been involved in administering the various programmes. It has been structured in an 'FAQ' format, addressing the most commonly asked questions that newly appointed VPs have in the past sought the answers to when they first take up their appointments.

The guide is intended to be a living document and will be updated on a regular basis as new questions and issues are raised by VPs. Any suggestions that readers may have as to new or revised content would therefore be greatly appreciated.

The original version was written by Mike Wood and the latest edition has been revised by Peter Goodhew.

A bit of jargon

Universities sometimes use different terms for essentially the same things. Here are a few examples:

The group of staff who deliver a degree programme might be a Department, a School, a Faculty, a College or occasionally even an Institute or a Centre. I shall use the word Department to mean whichever of these is responsible for delivering the degree(s) with which you are involved. Usually a Faculty or College, led by a Dean or Pro-Vice-Chancellor, contains several Departments or Schools, led by a Head (HoD or HoS). A good question is always "who holds the money?"

The degree programme (3 or 4 years long, called for example Mechanical Engineering) is likely to consists of discrete "years" each of which involves several "modules" or "units", each worth a number of credits (not the same size or number of points for a module in each university, but usually amounting to 120 credits per year). Each teaching programme or group of programmes is likely to be led by a Director of Teaching or a Course Director.

Universities in the UK tend not to use the words "course" or "class" which are more common in the USA.

Each module is typically delivered by one or two academics, with one of them leading, as the module coordinator.

In this guide we will use the words Department and module, realising that in your university other words might be in common usage. Sorry!

Degree programmes in Engineering lead to a first degree (usually BEng or MEng), a Master's degree (MSc or similar title) or a research degree (PhD or DPhil). VPs are likely to be engaged mainly with undergraduate students studying for a BEng (3-year programme) or a MEng (4-year programme), but may also be involved in MSc programmes and modules. This is not the place for a tutorial on the differences between BEng and MEng, and why an undergraduate degree might be called a Master of Engineering, but ask anyone when you have a spare half hour.

The questions, with some answers

These are in no special order – just browse them.

What is this all about?

The RAEng web site says: *This industry-into-academia initiative aims to utilise the experience of the Visiting Professors to enhance student learning as well as the employability and skills of UK engineering graduates.*

Under the scheme, senior industry practitioners deliver face to face teaching and mentoring at the host university. They may also contribute to postgraduate teaching, curriculum development (such as the development of new modules/programmes) and strategy development.

So, it is about helping with the teaching of students. What about helping with research? The primary focus of the scheme is teaching, but if your presence in the Department serendipitously helps its staff or students with their research, then this is seen as a positive side-effect.

Who are my points of contact at the University and the Academy?

Your Academic Champion (AC) will administer your appointment at the University on behalf of the Academy. Stylli Charalampous (Senior Programme Manager, Further and Higher Education) is your main contact at the Academy and will liaise with you on Academy and non-academic issues. Typically, your academic line-manager will be the Head of Department (HoD).

When and where do I start?

This should all be organised through your HoD or the Faculty centre. If you are lucky then you may have a sole occupancy or shared office. If you are not so fortunate then you may have to hot-desk with several other visiting or emeritus staff. Some Academy VPs are provided with a laptop by their host which must be dedicated to your academic workloads.

You should get a letter of appointment from the University and a formal contract of employment that needs to be signed and returned. The Academy and University have a separate contract or letter of appointment relating to your post, a copy of which you will be sent once it has been signed off by both parties. Any delay to this contract being completed will result in late payment of the award associated with your post and you are encouraged therefore to liaise with both the Academy and your AC to ensure this happens.

When you are registered formally as an academic member of staff, you will probably be given a university email address and a staff ID swipe-card. Most importantly, the Department will have to help you get your personal details into the Pensions & Payroll system thereby ensuring you are paid and any expenses you incur can be claimed.

Hiccups in contract payments can happen due either to the University not understanding completely the specialist nature of your engagement, or through internal rules which do not allow certain types of payments. You need to be vigilant and correct any misunderstandings or, in the case of restrictive regulations, highlight the conflict with your contract between the Academy and the University.

What might I end up doing?

You should have a contract which specifies your main activities and how many days you are going to commit. However, you could end up doing many different (and equally useful) things. These could include developing and delivering new lectures or even whole modules, preparing material (e.g. case studies) for others to deliver, tutoring or mentoring students, running activities such as an industrial advisory board or industrial visits, acting as an external judge for dragon's den type activities, advising on curriculum development, proposing and/or supervising undergraduate projects and many more.

Where does this Department think it is going? Is it a "research-led" university?

The Department and its governing Faculty should have a strategic plan which makes its intended direction of travel clear. Ask to see it. Many universities claim to be "research-led" or some such phrase. Ask around to try to find out what this actually means. Ask which "mission group" your host university belongs to. These might include the Russell Group, University Alliance and so on, each of which will have a slightly different mission statement. If your host is a research-led university, ask how this is made manifest in its teaching.

How can I find out what they do here already?

This is actually quite difficult. There is probably a course booklet (or on-line equivalent) which lays out the programme for its students. This will tell you the titles of the modules and maybe how they are assessed. You might want to sit in on a session or two (lectures, lab classes etc) which is usually possible if you first ask the academic running it.

The other thing to do is to have a look at past exam papers. These are usually kept (e.g. in the student office) because students like to consult them when revising. They will give you a feel for what is expected. You might also find coursework tasks, usually on the Department's VLE (virtual learning environment) which might be called Blackboard or Moodle or (more commonly) some local customised name (e.g. at Liverpool it's called VITAL). You need to get access to this for your own teaching as well as to see what others are doing.

How does anything get changed around here?

The major time constant for a degree programme is of course 3 or 4 years. If the Department proposes major changes from the programme that they advertised, the students have a right to be asked whether they agree. Of course many changes are "minor", but technically these have to be approved by some (often Faculty-level) process. If you propose to change the type of assessment (e.g. from 100% exam to 70/30 exam and coursework), the type of delivery (e.g. from all lectures to lectures, labs and a PBL - problem Based Learning session) or the syllabus, then you probably need to ask permission. This may take longer than you think: imagine that you are teaching in Semester 2 (February to May) and that in March you realise that the module is not going too well and you need to change some significant aspect of it. In April you work out how to do it better; in May you write a case to do this, and submit it to your programme director; in July (June being too busy with exam marking and meetings) they put it to the Departmental team, who come back with suggestions which you need to incorporate; you do this in July or August. You get the programme director to approve your modifications without taking it to the team again. In October the relevant Faculty committee meets and you submit your changes to it. You are lucky and it goes straight through. In November you make the changes (I hope they were not to an exam which has probably had to be submitted by now) and by Christmas you are ready to go with the modified module, which starts in late January. You were lucky – nothing went wrong and this only took a year. If you had waited until the summer vacation to start thinking about it, you would probably not have had formal permission by the next time you were scheduled to teach the module. You will not be surprised to hear that some changes never get reported!

If you want to get anything else changed, try your Academic Champion, the Departmental Administrator, the Head of Department or (probably best of all) the Chief Technician.

Where do I find my new colleagues, the staff?

You may be introduced to permanent members of faculty as part of an induction process or through some formal event such as a Departmental or Faculty meeting or social gathering. However, it is more than likely that you will need to take the initiative and introduce yourself. Taking the time to meet with each member of staff to establish a working relationship can pay dividends and the Academy strongly encourages each of its VPs to do this.

Your Academic Champion should introduce you to key people. Some Departments have a coffee room, but others don't. Some Departments have regular staff meetings, but others don't (or they are poorly attended). If neither of these works for you (especially since you will only be in the Department occasionally) then you will have to resort to knocking on doors or stopping people in the corridor. However, it is worth making the effort – it's a cliché, but a Department of Engineering **IS** its staff.

What can I expect a student to do?

Students will on the whole do what you ask of them, but remember that they will usually only do things which they perceive as being of some immediate use. They will come to your lectures or tutorials, or do your coursework, if this is easier or better than some other way of learning (and passing the exam). Most of the time they will be studying three or more other modules in parallel with yours. You need to remember that they may have an evening or weekend job and they will certainly have other coursework. Don't set deadlines during the day, or you may be encouraging the students to skip someone else's class in order to meet your deadline. Set deadlines for midnight (their last minute work is then in the evening, but they don't stay up all night!). The VLE will make it easy to do this as they can submit their work online.

What teaching methods are recommended nowadays?

There is a huge diversity of teaching methodology being deployed in the teaching of engineering. The days of the one-hour lecture, the examples class and the weekly laboratory exercise are, if not gone, at least on their way out. The emphasis is now on active, student-centred learning. For an explanation of what these terms imply (and a lot more besides) you might like to read Peter Goodhew's book *Teaching Engineering*. The latest version is available on line at **teachingengineering.liv.ac.uk** – and you can add your comments too.

In your host department you will probably find examples of Problem Based Learning (PBL), personal response systems, design-build-test exercises, team projects, on-line learning and other activities which might not have been around during your own undergraduate days. None of these is likely to be universal, and you will also find lecturers giving one-hour non-interactive lectures. This is a mixed economy, often given the rather grandiose title "blended learning" – meaning a bit of everything.

How can I best help?

As an Academy VP you should be aware that you are to some extent the academic driver for your remit; if your experience tells you that something is right for students to know before they go out into industry, then it is part of your job to pursue the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. In other words, you might have to be proactive in seeking change within your host Department.

You are likely to be most effective if you interact with a lot of staff, and get involved in activities beyond your direct remit.

Most if not all VPs develop a loyalty to their host Department and University, such that they want to contribute more through, for example sourcing and arranging student placements, industrial visits and research projects, in addition to other academic duties such as guest assessors or examiners. Any additional support that a VP can give is greatly appreciated. This is very much up to you and even if not part of your contract, should be recorded in your Annual Report.

What happens in the vacations?

The Department will probably be open and "fully functioning" throughout the year except for a few days around Easter and maybe ten days around Christmas and New Year. However, staff will usually take holidays in vacation time (indeed in some universities this is mandatory); if they are research active then vacations will be periods of increased research activity, and of course September is conventionally a major conference period. Therefore, while in principle the Department is open, you may not find the person you want. There is also a common reluctance among academics to leave notes on their door or with Departmental administrators to indicate where they are and when they expect to be back.

What rights do I have?

You should have a desk, but it will probably be in a shared area (few part-time staff have their own office). You might be asked to hot-desk, depending on your agreed days of attendance and the type of activity in which you will be engaged.

You should (indeed must) have access to a university email address and staff login, and access to the university's libraries (although you will probably use them on-line more than physically). These permissions will probably also give you access to the University's VLE (virtual learning environment).

You will probably have access to a staff dining facility (although increasingly eating facilities are communal, differentiated only by price), and sports facilities (ditto).

Your ID card may be needed to allow you access to certain areas of the Department. You will have to clarify with the Departmental administrator which areas you need access to.

Where can I park?

Now we get to the really important stuff. Parking is a contentious issue in many, indeed most, universities whether they have a city precinct or a country campus. Controlled access is almost universal and charging is commonplace. Your access might depend on whether you are a "visitor" or a "member of staff", but in either case you will probably have to pay. You need to clarify this and try to get the ID card which carries the most access permissions!

Can I get any help?

Now for some bad news! Even in the biggest universities only the most senior academics such as Deans and HoDs have a PA or secretary. There may of course be technical help available for laboratory or experimental work, and increasingly there may be an IT specialist to help you with computing issues both related to teaching and more generally (for example to help you record your lectures). Otherwise Academy VPs usually have to work on their own unless there is a specific need for support, which would probably have been identified when the contract was drawn up. This of course might not be a problem for the VP who has a very senior role within a large company; their own PA or secretary might be persuaded to help out. Otherwise – like most of your new academic colleagues – you are on your own.

If what you need is not available through an existing member of academic staff at your host university, then this may be found through the network of Academy VPs or from contacts within your company. The Academy is always more than willing to put VPs in contact with each other to share experiences and best practice, and will soon be publishing a list of VPs, together with their areas of expertise, on its web site. Aside from hosting induction workshops and an annual conference, the Academy has established a **LinkedIn Group - Royal Academy of Engineering Visiting Professors & Visiting Teaching Fellows** to promote networking between VPs, and act as a portal for regular updates on Academy activities.

Am I a real Professor?

The award of this title is solely within the gift of your host university and each has its own rules over its award. Should you wish to be recognised formally as Professor X, the best person to take this up with is your HoD.

How often do I have to report back to The Academy?

The Academy expects an annual joint report from the AC and VP. It is the ACs responsibility to make sure the Academy receives the report. There is a pro-forma (see appendix 1) on the grant management system (for anyone appointed from 2015 onwards), but basically the Academy wants to know what you did, how much time you devoted to it and what the money was spent on.

Can this VP post be extended?

You should have been appointed for a fixed term of typically 3 or 4 years. At the end of this period your post as an RAEng VP ends. You may be asked by your hosts to continue as a VP without the RAEng title and/or your host might wish to apply for another RAEng award – although they are unlikely to be awarded a further stipended award in the same area. They should discuss this with Stylli Charalampous at an early stage.

What about business cards?

There are two options: your company one and/or your university one if this available to you. Clearly your company and the University would like to highlight your link to the Academy and all Academy VPs are allowed to use the title *Royal Academy of Engineering Visiting Professor*.

Can I use the Academy logo on my business stationery or teaching materials?
http://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/visual-identity-and-style-guide
The Academy like most other organisations has specific rules over the use of its logo and you should visit the Academy website at http://www.raeng.org.uk/ for guidance. If in doubt you should contact Stylli Charalampous who will be able to give you a definitive answer. The fact you have been appointed as an Academy VP **does not** give you an automatic right to use the Academy logo for any purpose.

How do I know what subjects will be of interest by way of teaching or the depth required without knowing what the Faculty expects or values?

If you do not yet know the Department, the degree streams or the subjects taught within those streams, then it is advisable to take at least a teaching-term or semester to familiarise yourself with all these aspects before you decide on how best to support them. You will then have a much clearer idea of how you can contribute positively. It is fully expected that either the HoD or your academic colleagues will invite you into the university beforehand to experience and familiarise you with the material currently being taught.

After a careful investigative approach, you should be able to decide what fits and what doesn't. Don't panic if what you deliver is not perfect the first time; your input will evolve as you gain more experience!

What if I am not able to get the timetable slots I want?

It is not unknown for a VP to be unable to persuade module coordinators to free up the amount and phasing of time for you to do what you want to do with the students in the way you want to do it. There is a widespread "tyranny of the timetable". Unfortunately support from the Dean or HoD is sometimes insufficient to carry through actions in detail. In these cases, the VP needs to be flexible and fleet of foot to progress the objectives and should not hesitate to contact the Academy to agree a change in approach dictated by the particular circumstances and perhaps limited opportunities.

I might need some help on the Mathematics as it is a long time since I have had to manipulate the theories – what support can I get?

It is not unusual for staff and most of the students to have pretty well refined aide-memoirs by way of crib sheets on all aspects of subject theory. There is more than likely to be some form of Mathematics and other textbooks or software available to support all areas of undergraduate teaching within your host department. In the unlikely case that there are none, then you should consult the University library, from which you can borrow as a member of academic staff.

What happens if I and my host do not get on and I wish to terminate my contract?

This is a very rare, but not unheard of situation. If you do find yourself in this unfortunate situation, you need to act quickly. You should inform the Academy immediately; they may be able to resolve the situation before it becomes irreconcilable – the magic of a call from the Academy can work wonders! If the situation has totally broken down, they will act on your behalf with your host to terminate the contract amicably.

Guidelines for Annual Reports

Reporting Process
- Your Host University will be asked to submit annual / final reports to the Academy (via the grant management system) by the dates as agreed in the contract.
- The Programme Manager will check that all sections of the report have been adequately completed, including both the financial expenditure statement and deliverables against the objectives stated in the application and contract.
- The Programme Manager will take one of the following courses of action:
    - If any sections are incomplete the next payment (or if there is no financial expenditure statement) no payment will be triggered until the University submits a revised version with all the required information.
    - If all sections of the report have been adequately completed the programme manager will send the submitted reports to the Visiting Professors Management Steering Group (VPMG) for specialist review to assess both the quality of work and to confirm that satisfactory progress has been made.
        - If satisfactory then payment will be made.
        - Ask for further information if needed by the VPMG to achieve a satisfactory progress for payment.
        - If unsatisfactory with no clear action plan no further payment is made.

Reporting Criteria / Capturing Impact
All reports must be in the following format, focusing on each point listed below.

Details Date:
Name of Academic Champion:
Name of the Visiting Professor:
Name of the University:
Name of the Visiting Professor's employer:
Title of the project:

Question 1
Summarize overall progress made against deliverables through the course of the award.

Question 2
Outline activities undertaken by the Visiting Professor during in the previous year

Question 3
Outline the impact of these activities upon enhancing student learning and the employability and skills of students. *Please provide appropriate evidence such as student feedback etc.*

Financial Expenditure Statement
To be submitted as part of annual reporting.

The report should be around 2 pages in length plus any photos if appropriate and come from the University contact it should be signed off by both the AC and VP

Appendix 2

Academy Contacts

Stylli Charalampous
Senior Programme Manager, FE and HE
stylli.charalampous@raeng.org.uk
020 7766 0644

Lynette Dunford
Education Programmes Officer
lynette.dunford@raeng.org.uk
0207 766 0737