

## Writing Effective Statements for Career Interruption and Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARtO)

*The WRN and the Academic Promotion Team joined forces to host a Professional Development event (Thursday 18 July 2019) focusing on writing career interruption and Achievement Relative to Opportunity statements.*

Academics who have experienced career interruptions or personal circumstances that have had an impact on their opportunities to pursue academic achievements can feel at a disadvantage in applying for grants or academic promotion. There are a range of circumstances that can have an impact on the careers of both female and male academics, including parental leave and associated fractional positions, time out of the university sector, parenting and caring responsibilities, phases of part-time appointments or unemployment, recovering from physical or emotional trauma, and moving to take up jobs internationally.

Most funding bodies allow applicants to include a career interruption statement where relevant, to ensure the applicant's career experiences and performance evidence are assessed relative to opportunity. Associate Professor Sarah Spencer, Associate Professor Mary Tolcos, Dr Lei Bao and Professor Sarah Bekessy are all researchers who have successfully made use of these provisions and were generous in sharing their experiences and advice on writing effective and impactful statements.

Some key insights and practical advice included:

- Be careful not to overstate your situation; only claim genuine interruptions that can be supported by evidence – remember your reviewers are also academics and peers who experience and manage life events– they will evaluate against their own experiences
- Grant panels may be looking to see that you are still able to deliver on your outcomes – use a narrative/evidence that demonstrates you are able to be fully productive despite any career interruptions and change in circumstances – highlight your trajectory and achievements prior to any disruption and show clearly how you will match that in the future
- For Early Career Researchers, use any disruption to confirm your eligibility for ECR grants/fellowships e.g. ECRs are normally 0-5 years post PhD – utilise the Eligibility Exemption rulings and guidelines of funding schemes to call out the impact of career interruptions. Always present the circumstances in a positive narrative: e.g. while research outputs may have reduced while you undertook industry related work, this work also has the positive outcome of industry collaboration, networks and insights; similarly, an increased teaching load has improved your skills for HDR training
- When applying for grant applications, be very clear and formulaic when describing how the interruption has and/or will impact research and other outputs
- Tell the panel exactly how long the interruption was, the impact it had on your achievement, and how you would like them to use that information: e.g. If you have had a 17-month break, be clear how this has impacted on your track record - were you X% less productive, could you equate this to X publications, X funding opportunities, X HDR completions and X keynotes/conferences, based on your pre- 'interruption' trajectory
- Outline the interruption and make use of the phrase '... despite this ...' to identify the achievements you *have* made
- Remember to also discuss the impact of the initial disruption on later achievements, e.g. if you are unable to take on HDR supervisions for a particular period, this will impact on the timing of HDR completions – call this out and highlight your current HDRs supervisions and when their completions are expected
- When applying for academic promotion, it may be more appropriate to utilise Heads of School/referees to help personalise your story and help the panel gain insights into the impacts of your situation, and your resilience, rather than try to convey this in your ARtO statement
- Always use statistics and data to highlight career trajectory; consider utilising the m-index (cited publications relative to time in career, considering career interruptions, periods of leave etc.)
- Always ask mentors and supervisors for advice; they can provide examples and evidence



The Women Researchers' Network and RMIT's Academic Promotion Team would like to thank everyone who attended and contributed to the workshop's success; Nicky Eshtiaghi for hosting the session; the panellists – Sarah Spencer, Mary Tolcos, Lei Bao and Sarah Bekessy; Ann Standish, Marilyn Capper, Alice Boland, Zach Edwards, Lucy Ryan and the WRN Steering Committee.