



EDUCATION-FOCUSED CAREERS

Envisioning the Stages of a T&S Career

Five profiles of progression in education-focused careers, from Associate Lecturer to Professor+



ASSOCIATE LECTURER



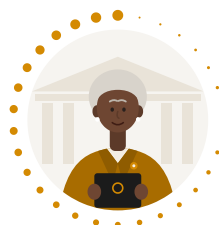
LECTURER



SENIOR LECTURER



PROFESSOR



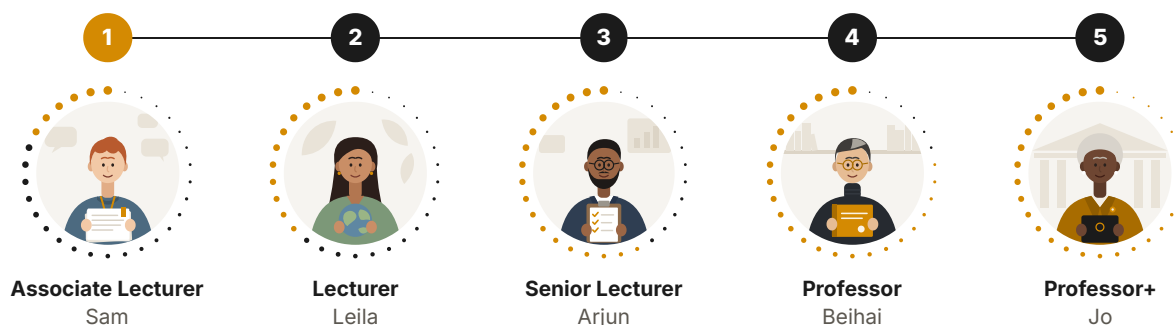
PROFESSOR+

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THE FIVE STAGES AT A GLANCE



USING THESE PROFILES

Read the profiles as stages of work rather than job titles, and map them onto your own institution's ladder. Each profile ends with a short summary of the key work at that stage. The questions in Part 03 can be used alone, with a mentor, or in conversation with your line manager ahead of a promotion round.

AI DILIGENCE STATEMENT

All written content in this resource is by ASPIRE members. Its visuals and formatting were created using a generative AI tool and checked by the ASPIRE Team, who take full responsibility for the resource.

Introduction

Most academics could sketch the research-and-teaching career without much thought: PhD, postdocs, a first monograph, high-impact journal articles, a permanent lectureship followed by a big grant, all laying the ground towards the eventual Chair. It can be harder to paint such a picture for education-focused careers.

That is why these profiles exist. It is hard to aim for a stage of a career you cannot picture. It can also be hard to envision whether a Teaching & Scholarship (T&S) career is for you if you don't know what it might look like in ten or twenty years' time. Promotion criteria will tell you what a panel will look for, but they rarely show you what the job actually looks like or how the work changes shape as a career develops.

Imagined people can help fill that gap. The profiles here – of Sam, Leila, Arjun, Beihai, and Jo – are not necessarily templates to copy, however. Instead, they are prompts to help you envision where you are, where you might go next, and how you might do things differently, stamping *your* mark on this career track. These profiles may also help you to navigate conversations with line managers, mentors, and with research-and-teaching colleagues who may know only a little of what an education-focused career is all about.

A NOTE ON TITLES

Titles can vary from institution to institution. What one institution might call an Associate Lecturer, another might call a Teaching Fellow. Some institutions might call a Lecturer an Assistant Professor and a Senior Lecturer an Associate Professor and so on. Some institutions have the title of Reader between Senior Lecturer and Professor, others don't. The profiles are best read as stages of work rather than job titles, so map them onto your own institution's ladder accordingly.

Giving one profile for each role is, of course, inherently narrowing. When you get down to the profile of Jo, who represents the Professor+ stage of an education-focused career, it is also easy to imagine someone who reaches this stage with a much less institutionally focused role and who has made a bigger mark in the world of scholarship, for example.

Nor are these careers always linear. Many education-focused colleagues arrive from elsewhere: from research-and-teaching contracts, from professional services roles, or from careers outside academia in policy, schools, industry or the third sector. Others move between part-time and full-time work, take career breaks, or step sideways before stepping up. The profiles show one route through each stage, but there are many ways in.

These profiles are deliberately general, because expectations vary between institutions and because everyone brings their own interests and drives. Whilst there are some suggested sources for general thinking about education-focused careers provided at the end of this piece, the *best* source to check is your own institution's promotion criteria.

Associate Lecturer: Sam



Sam is two years out of a PhD and on a fixed-term, 0.8 Associate Lecturer contract. Most of Sam's week is spent teaching International Relations modules other people designed: this includes seminars across first and second year, a handful of lectures, and a great deal of marking. Sam is good in the room: prepared, approachable, and increasingly confident at running discussions with twenty students who haven't all done the reading.

The job at this stage is to become an effective teacher and a reliable colleague, and to start the evidence trail of this work that will later become a promotion case. Sam is midway through the PGCert and has a peer observation booked. The fixed-term contract hangs over everything, and a lot of Sam's energy goes on making the next job application possible.

NOTABLE ASPECTS OF SAM'S WORK

- **Getting to grips with teaching.** Delivers a wide range of material in seminars and lectures on others' modules to a consistently high standard, adapting materials rather than entirely redesigning them.
- **Marking at volume.** Gives timely, consistent, inclusive feedback, learning moderation and marking criteria through practice.
- **Being there for students.** Office hours, email, signposting support services, some dissertation supervision, and some personal tutoring.
- **Learning the craft.** PGCert, AFHEA or FHEA, peer observation, and reflective notes kept for later use.
- **Joining in.** Open days, programme meetings, helping newer GTAs, and pitching the occasional suggestion for improving a module.

Lecturer: Leila



Leila has been a permanent T&S Lecturer for four years. Before academia, she spent six years working in climate policy for an NGO, and that experience runs through her teaching. She convenes three modules and redesigned one around a Climate Politics simulation, which students rate highly and colleagues have started to emulate. The step change from Associate Lecturer is ownership: Leila decides what is taught and how it is assessed, and she can explain why these pedagogical decisions were made.

She is also starting to treat her teaching as something to investigate. She secured ethical approval to evaluate the simulation, presented the findings at a subject-association teaching conference and wrote an *Active Learning in Political Science* blog post, with a sole-authored journal article currently in draft. She is collaborating with her university's professional services teams, creating a record of impact in her work. Alongside this she is the department's Student Wellbeing Lead. Her challenge is time: workload models rarely protect scholarship, and she knows the move to Senior Lecturer depends on influencing colleagues and practices beyond her own modules.

NOTABLE ASPECTS OF LEILA'S WORK

- **Owning modules.** Convenes, designs and revises modules with a clear pedagogic rationale, coordinates colleagues and GTAs to deliver teaching.
- **Designing assessment.** Introduces authentic, inclusive assessment and leads moderation on modules.
- **From practice to scholarship.** Evaluates changes, shares them internally and at teaching conferences, and produces first SoTL outputs.
- **Taking on departmental responsibility.** Holds a role that keeps things running, such as academic integrity, student wellbeing lead, exams officer, or year-group lead.
- **Looking outward.** FHEA secured, active in a subject-association teaching network, informally mentoring GTAs and new staff.

Senior Lecturer: Arjun



Arjun has been on the T&S track for eleven years and is his department's Director for Education. His work is now less about his own classroom and more about other people's (though he still feels he has a heavy teaching load!). He has led the department through periodic review, rebuilt its assessment strategy, and runs the department's teaching development sessions. His SFHEA recognises exactly this: sustained influence on his colleagues' practice.

Arjun's scholarship has matured into a recognisable strand of work on assessment literacy, with peer-reviewed articles on teaching and learning in Politics journals, including the *Journal of Political Science Education* and *International Studies Perspectives*. He still occasionally finds time to publish disciplinary research. Arjun has been awarded three small external grants and has received invitations to speak about his teaching and learning work at other institutions. He is external examiner at two universities and is bolstering his network by hosting a SoTL conference at his institution. The question now is whether to push for professor, which means leadership and reputation well beyond the department, or stay where the work feels most meaningful for him.

NOTABLE ASPECTS OF ARJUN'S WORK

- **Leading teaching and learning.** Runs a degree or major curricular initiative, including its review, redesign and overall student experience.
- **Improving others' practice.** Mentoring, peer observation, workshops and SFHEA-level influence on colleagues.
- **Owning quality.** Takes responsibility for evaluation and enhancement: student voice, NSS action plans, module evaluation data.
- **Publishing beyond the institution.** Peer-reviewed pedagogic research, principal investigator on small grants and a recognisable area of expertise.
- **Emerging national esteem.** External examining, writing job and HEA fellowship references for colleagues, subject-association roles, journal reviewing and teaching awards.

Professor: Beihai



Beihai was promoted to Professor two years ago, after spells as Director of Teaching and Learning and then Faculty Lead for Education & Students. Their case rested on two things that reinforce each other. First, institutional leadership, where they have a strong record of impact: they wrote the faculty's education strategy, led a cross-departmental assessment reform and changed how the university supports students on placement.

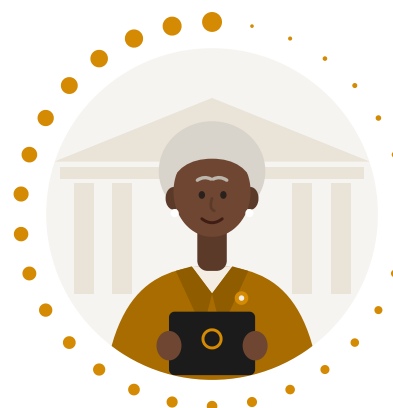
Second, a sustained body of pedagogic research with national standing and growing international reach, including a widely adopted textbook on political economy and multiple invited talks overseas. Beihai is still publishing disciplinary work but is also disseminating SoTL in broader HE-focused forums. Their most recent publication was the culmination of three years' work: a monograph entitled *Advances in Political Pedagogy*.

They are a National Teaching Fellow and PFHEA. What separates Beihai from a Senior Lecturer is scale and legacy. Beihai's work changes practice far beyond their own programme, and they bring others with them, co-authoring with early-career colleagues and mentoring several towards promotion.

NOTABLE ASPECTS OF BEIHAI'S WORK

- **Setting strategy.** Leads education strategy at department or faculty level and steers major curricular change.
- **Leading a research agenda.** A sustained, coherent programme of pedagogic research, often with co-authors and collaborators, and a record of grant capture.
- **National reputation, international reach.** Keynotes, invitations to review or teach elsewhere, materials used widely across the sector, collaborating on work across universities.
- **Building capacity.** Mentors colleagues into fellowships, scholarship and promotion, and leads networks.
- **Embedding change.** Builds the evaluation and quality systems that let good practice spread and stick.

Professor+: Jo



Jo is her university's Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education. Whilst she still gives a first-year lecture on Comparative Politics each year, her work is now overwhelmingly focused on university-wide decisions, with Politics & IR now a small part of a much bigger picture. Her days are filled with weighty decisions on curriculum frameworks, the education budget, the TEF submission, and the promotion criteria that other people are judged against.

Jo's work is centred on managing people and resources, and leaving an institutional legacy that will outlast her time in the role. Jo's reputation is international. She sits on national advisory groups, has led Advance HE and QAA projects and is cited well beyond the field of Politics & IR. Hers is the management route but it is not the only path she could have taken; she has colleagues at the same level as her who instead focused on scholarship, building international reputations for education-focused scholarship. Whilst Jo has little time to stay in contact with the discipline that she spent the first 30 years of her career specialising in, she often maintains that her training in Politics has made her uniquely qualified for the politics of life in university management.

NOTABLE ASPECTS OF JO'S WORK

- **Institutional leadership.** Leads education across the university, managing people, budgets and major portfolios.
- **Building lasting infrastructure.** Creates frameworks, academies, career pathways and policies.
- **International scholarly standing.** Major publications, international fora, awards and fellowships.
- **Shaping the sector.** Advises national bodies, regulators and professional associations on teaching and learning policy.
- **Sponsoring the next generation.** Actively opens routes for education-focused staff to reach professorship.

Reflecting on your own career

The profiles contained in this document are most useful when they prompt you to look at your own work. The questions below are a starting point, whether you use them alone, with a mentor, or in conversation with your line manager ahead of a promotion round:

01 Where are you now?

Which profile most closely resembles your own work? Which parts of the next profile's work are you already doing, perhaps without recognising it?

02 Where do you want to go?

Picture yourself ten years from now. Which path appeals more: institutional leadership, a scholarly reputation, or something else entirely? What would you need to start doing, or stop doing, to get there?

03 How will you show it off?

Of the work you do now, which parts leave a visible record of impact and which go unseen? How could you start capturing evidence of the latter?

There is no single way to build an education-focused career, and the best ones are rarely planned in full from the start. But a career is easier to shape when you can picture it, and we hope these profiles help you see yours a little more clearly: where it is now and where you might take it next.

Sources

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ABOUT

About **ASPIRE**

The ASPIRE Network is dedicated to supporting academics on the “Teaching Track” career path within Politics and International Relations, also known as Teaching and Scholarship careers. Our mission is to advocate for the recognition and advancement of Teaching and Scholarship staff, influencing universities and policymakers to enhance how this career path is structured and how professionals progress within it.

We believe that the Teaching and Scholarship track makes a vital contribution to educational excellence, enhancing student experience, attainment and achievement in higher education. Scholars in this field are driving innovative teaching practices and contributing to the development of high-quality departmental teaching programmes, and wider faculty and institutional educational policies in areas such as assessment and feedback, student voice, and inclusive practice.

Moreover, Teaching and Scholarship staff are playing a key role in advancing research and Scholarship on Teaching and Learning, helping to refine educational practices and shape future pedagogical approaches.

Still, inconsistencies in career progression and role expectations across institutions continue to pose significant challenges. The ASPIRE Network is committed to addressing these issues by creating a platform for Teaching and Scholarship staff to share experiences, best practices, and resources.

Together, we are building a community that promotes innovation, collaboration, and career development, ensuring a lasting impact on teaching quality and academic scholarship in Politics and International Relations. If you are not already a member of ASPIRE, [join today.](#)

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