



# On becoming and being...

By Professor  
Peter Hogg

## a professor

I was inspired to become an academic, and particularly a professor, in 1985 and 1986. This was as a direct consequence of working with a clinical scientist (physicist) and a professor of medicine. Initially, I was intrigued by their commitment to their work, and after a short space of time I understood why, as I too become infected with the same values and beliefs.

At that time, radiography was not a graduate profession and, as such, I was unaware of university processes and requirements and, lacking a mentor, I set my sights in a direction that I considered to be suitable to achieving an academic position, such as a professorship. The next decade and a half consisted of continuing my day job (as a nuclear medicine radiographer and subsequently as a teacher) and in my spare time I wrote articles for journals and professional magazines and also delivered many conferences papers.

With hindsight, I would advise anybody wishing to aspire in the academic world to acquire themselves a mentor/coach, because this would help with focusing time and energy into the meeting of requisite targets. My approach was shotgun and, as a consequence, certain targets were not achieved as adequately as I would have liked and others were over-hit.

On first application for promotion to professor in 2000, I was rejected because I applied to be a research professor and did not meet all the criteria. The criteria for a research professor at my university are very stringent and, generally speaking, to be able to meet them you would have to have been working full time in research, at a quite advanced level, for many years. I was not deterred in my professorial application because my vice chancellor encouraged me to re-apply under the banner of 'teaching and learning', as this was a better match for me (comprising professional work, teaching and learning and, of course, research). I reapplied and on this basis I was successful. I was appointed a professor at the University of Salford on 1 August 2002.

On appointment, I was not allocated a mentor, neither did I seek one, and, as such, the manifestation of my role was down to giving myself direction. Once again, with hindsight, I would advise any new professor to seek themselves a (professorial) mentor/coach

who would help with the focusing of work-related efforts into what the expectations of a professor would be. Thankfully, my interpretation of what a teaching and learning professor should do is in line with my university's aims and I was pleased to demonstrate this fact to my peers at my belated inaugural lecture in December 2006.

There were three points in time when I wrangled with the concept of being a professor, and maybe this 'coming to terms with professorship' was linked to attaining the position at an early age (39). Incidentally, it is quite unusual for a professor to be appointed below the age of 40. These points in time were: shortly after my appointment, and two and five years later. On appointment, I was not entirely clear what I should be doing to demonstrate my title. Consequently, I went into overdrive in my



university and professional roles. I attempted to hit targets of research professors and as many targets as possible of teaching and learning professors – and I made a reasonable attempt at both.

However, with this came a significant personal cost. For instance, the time I gave to my job was considerable, often reaching 100 hours a week. I routinely flew back from conferences on overnight flights from the States and would go straight into work. For one particular conference paper in the States, I came back by return flight, only being on American soil for 14 hours.

In terms of international presence, particularly between the summers of 2002 and 2004, I presented at many international conferences and, in a one-year time frame, I took 74 flights to places as far flung as New Zealand. In late 2003, I took on the editor-in-chief role of *Radiography*, an international peer-reviewed journal, the work of which was, and still is, conducted in the evenings. Surprisingly, in spite of all this I still continued to deliver the outcomes of my university-based roles.

### I would advise anybody wishing to aspire in the academic world to acquire themselves a mentor/coach

By the summer of 2004, when I stood down as academic head of department, I was worn out. There followed a few months of reflection, including a questioning of whether I wanted to continue as a professor, because at that time I saw the role as being far too demanding. Additionally, my family, friends and colleagues advised me that I was likely to be shortening my life expectancy with my reckless approach to life. At that stage, a pro-vice chancellor spent some time with me, in a mentorship capacity, and he helped me to re-focus on what was important and achievable.

Simply put, I acknowledged that I was human and that, as far as the professorial role went, I needed to resign myself to not being able to meet all of the professorial outcomes all of the time. Around the same time, I realised that it was important to help people establish a realistic expectation of me and, similarly, I started to acknowledge that my expectations of others were often too high.

Five years on, I am in a reflective phase again. I believe I have clarified in my own mind what a teaching and learning professor is and I have noted where I have legitimate overlap with a research professor. Even though I am becoming fairly mature as a professor, I feel I still need to identify a mentor who is sensitive to what I am about and in this regard I am on a quest to find one.

In recent times, I have engaged in discussions with consultant radiographers and I was surprised to find that we have much in common. In particular many of them too, being new to consultantships in a profession where we have a paucity of them\*,



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### I needed to resign myself to not being able to meet all of the professorial outcomes all of the time

are concerned about making sure they deliver what is expected from their post. They too reflect on their performance across a broad range of role requirements. They too constantly question themselves on whether they are making the grade and a consequence of this is that they too worry about whether their capability and output matches the role requirements.

Being a profession fairly new to academia and increasingly having more and more demanding clinical responsibilities, I suppose it is not unreasonable that in our formative years we reflect and question ourselves on whether we meet the role requirements. I suspect this critical self reflection and uncertainty will reduce over time until a point is reached when we establish ourselves more firmly in these new fields.

*\* I am not certain how many radiographers hold professorships in the UK, but I suspect it does not exceed eight.*

**Personal high as a professor:** being formally acknowledged in America for my leadership abilities (December 2003), and also being recognised by the American Society of Radiologic Technologists as a significant catalyst for the introduction of advanced practice for radiographers throughout the USA and the subsequent development of masters programmes in support of these roles (December 2006).

**Personal low as a professor:** failing at anything.

**Humility as a professor:** a week after being appointed, I gave an invited conference paper in Birmingham, Alabama, USA. I was proud of being professor and wanted to let the Americans know. The Americans said: "Peter, everybody is a professor in America – for instance, all school teachers are called professor". As such, I use the title little, and often people do not know.

**Most supportive person on becoming and being a professor:** my wife

#### About the Author

Peter Hogg is a professor at the University of Salford. He is course leader of the MSc Nuclear Medicine and of the Nuclear Medicine Image Interpretation award.

#### Acknowledgements

*Thanks to Christine Tonge, physicist, Department of Nuclear Medicine, Manchester Royal Infirmary, and Professor Peter Ell, Institute of Nuclear Medicine, University of London, for inspiring me into academia and a professorial role.*

#### Further reading

*Peter has written an extensive article on how to become a professor, the different types of appointment, and what is expected when you are in post. To read the article in full go to [www.sor.org/members/pubarchive/pub\\_search.htm](http://www.sor.org/members/pubarchive/pub_search.htm)*