



Research Article

Employing Retired Full Professors (Emeritae and Emeriti) at Austrian Universities

Gerhard Zlabinger*

Center for Public Health, Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria.

*Corresponding author: Gerhard Zlabinger, Center for Public Health, Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria.

Citation: Zlabinger G. (2026) Employing Retired Full Professors (Emeritae and Emeriti) at Austrian Universities. In De Santo NG, Ciambelli P, Triassi M, Montuori P, Bracale UM, Bracale G, Eds. The Role of Professors Emeriti in Europe and Beyond. Int J Geriatr Gerontol 10:221. DOI: 10.29011/2577-0748.100221

Received Date: 29 January, 2026; **Accepted Date:** 09 February, 2026; **Published Date:** 18 February, 2026

Abstract

The tradition of professor emeritus has changed more than 25 years ago in Austria. When someone was appointed full professor before March 1st, 1998 he/she could be conferred with an emeritus status at the time of retirement. When appointment is done thereafter the respective person will retire as Univ. Prof. i.R. (in retirement). In contrast to a professor emeritus who could prolong employment and retain all former rights, a Univ. Prof. i.R. just remains associated with his/her last affiliation with the right to use the official email address of the university. The option to be active in teaching and research has to be agreed individually with the university/department head. In view of their substantial contribution to the further development and success of the respective university consideration could be given to an expansion of procedures how to utilize the capital of experience of retired staff members.

Full professors are recruited by universities through an elaborate appealing procedure and sometimes even search procedures to find the best suited person for this post. Thus the candidates have to demonstrate that they are eligible to fill this leading position in an adequate manner. After appointment they have to run their position in an excellent manner and have to undergo an interim evaluation after some time in order to proof that the appointment was justified and that the selected person has measured up the expectations of the university. During their subsequent employment they are mostly in a leading position and are responsible for the functioning of the respective department. Furthermore, they also contribute crucially to the further development of the university by taking active part in powerful boards and the academic senate to find adequate solutions for imminent decisions for the benefit of the university. Thus because of both the inherent competences and even more also those that have been reinforced and solidified during the years when being active in such a position this group of persons could also be regarded - in analogy to a framework within medical education - as capital of entrustable professional activities (EPA) that are able to act independently in a proper manner in a multitude of given tasks and to take over real world responsibilities in all of their specialties [1].

After retirement which nowadays is usually at the summit of

the performance and productive efficiency of full professors, universities have different approaches to make use of this capital of experiences. In the majority of cases there is a tradition of conferring an emeritus status which can be established in different ways [2].

In Austria the previous approach to confer an emeritus status has ended on March 1st, 1998. So someone was only conferred to an emeritus status when the appointment as full professor had taken place until this date. Persons that have been appointed after this cut-off date, have just been retired and are denominated as Univ. Prof. i.R. (im Ruhestand, in retirement). Before that date, to be conferred to a status emeritus was possible on the first of October that followed the 68th birthday of the respective person. Now, retirement from the specific university position has to be done on the first of October that follows the 65th birthday.

A Univ. Prof. i.R. remains associated with the last affiliation before retirement and is also listed in the staff directory as such. This fact is associated with the right to use the official email address of the respective public university and to have access to the library and scientific literature.

Regarding the possibility to do research at the former or another department the Univ. Prof i.R. has to recruit his/her funding and to

make a contract with the university in order to be able to do research and to use the facilities of the respective department. Regarding the option to be engaged in teaching further on, the responsible coordinator of the respective study module has to propose the retired colleague in case he/she is needed to provide the teaching tasks for a compulsory module. This can be for lectures, seminars and practical courses. In both research and teaching the conditions are similar for any retired employee and Univ. Prof. i.R.

If a Univ. Prof. i.R. is needed by any department in order to fulfill other tasks beyond research and teaching, he/she can be engaged as well, which would then result in an employment in parallel to the state of retirement. Since the university rector is in the end responsible for personal affairs an agreement by the leadership of the university is necessary for all contracts.

So a university can be confronted with the situation that some persons would be willing to provide their expertise and competencies to the university also after formal retirement. On the other hand a university has to make sure that there is adequate renewal and turn-over of acting persons thus giving also younger advanced colleagues the opportunity to shape the institution considering additional point of views and to open new perspectives for pending challenges. Furthermore the universities also have to take care of their management of public finances so that engagement of retired staff members will not overload the available budget.

As indicated already above, the capital of experiences inherent to retired professors could, however, still be invaluable for the university which also reflects the perspective of quite some emeriti and emeritae. This even more applies for the capital of EPAs, that reflects handling confidence and making informed business decisions out of many years of goal oriented operating experience. Furthermore these decisions have been generated on the basis of reasonable and evidence-based arguments.

Younger colleagues could profit from the experience of retired professors for a time of extended transition, but after some time they have to act on their own responsibility. This, however, would not completely exclude further advice on a personal basis but formal implementation of such processes is certainly not practicable. Given the amount of duties and obligations of actual staff members an area of activity which can easily be affected is the field of teaching in its broadest sense. While holding courses will be executed properly by the active staff members, activities like supervision and mentoring could become difficult to be scheduled appropriately because of their time consuming character. Regarding the importance and relevance of such activities for students, retired members of a university might be of great help in this instance and students could profit from their great experience in the respective speciality.

In view of the ever increasing demands on universities and in particular their staff members regarding workload and intellectual challenges it might be worth considering that such institutions try to find ways to widen their procedures how to utilize the capital of experience of retired staff members.

References

1. ten Cate O (2013) Nuts and Bolts of Entrustable Professional Activities. *J Grad Med Educ.* 5:158.
2. De Santo NG, Altucci P, Heidland A, Stein G, Cameron JS, et al. (2014) The role of emeriti and retired professors in medicine. *Q J Med.* 107:407.