DAPHNE SNACKERS

The Dutch initiative "Room for Everyone's Talent"

MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY'S APPROACH

Currently, an academic can be successful in many areas, but not all activities and achievements are recognised and rewarded equally. Research performance, in particular assessed through quantitative measurements such as research output, citation analyses and acquired grants, has predominantly determined the career path of academics for many years. This has led to the undervaluing of other key domains that belong to the core tasks of academic institutions and to increased work pressure and competitiveness among academics. Dutch academic institutions, with Maastricht University as one of its frontrunners, have set out to address this imbalance in the assessment and development of academic careers.

1. The start of the reform

Modernising the system of recognition and rewarding

In the Netherlands, Dutch public academic institutions and research funders aspired to set up a national programme to modernise the system of recognition and rewarding, driven by all stakeholders in a collaborative way. Together with rectors Frank Baaijens (Tilburg University) and Jeroen Geurts (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), University of Maastricht (UM) president (former rector) Rianne Letschert is one of the go-getters for this Dutch movement. The 2019 position paper ''Room for Everyone's Talent: towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards for academics''[1] is the result of four agenda's and policy debates coming together. Firstly, the Netherlands has a very ambitious Open Science Agenda since 2013.[2] It is generally acknowledged that Open Science requires a reform of assessment practices. Secondly, there has been a very active academic debate about the inappropriate use of metrics in assessment under the name ''Science in Transition''[3]. Thirdly, there are heated debates about the academic culture in general, concerning, amongst other things, widely experienced work pressure, low success rates in competitive funding schemes, high dependency on externally acquired funding for career progression and a need to rebalance the way in which the Dutch reward the different contributions of academics in all its aspects. Fourth, an international network led by Ruth Graham launched the Teaching Framework that enables universities to implement career development with an emphasis on education[4]. These four developments led to a statement by the Dutch universities association (UNL), the Dutch research funders (i.e. NWO and ZonMW) and the Dutch university medical centres (NFU) in November 2018.

After extensive consultations with academics throughout the course of 2019, the UNL rectors, the funders and the NFU published the position paper ''Room for Everyone's Talent: towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards for academics'' in November 2019 during a conference from UNL and the European Universities Association (EUA). It was at this same conference that the position paper was offered to Ingrid van Engelshoven who was at that time the Dutch minister of education, culture and science.

FYI

About the Dutch academic landscape

There are 14 universities in the Netherlands. They value and enact cooperation over competition, which made it possible to have round table sessions with the fourteen Executive Boards to discuss the shared Dutch ambitions regarding the reform of the academic recognition and rewarding system.

There are two main research funders in the Netherlands: NWO and ZonMW.

The NFU consists of seven university medical centres.

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1   https://recognitionrewards.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/position-paper-room-for-everyo-nes-talent.pdf

2   https://www.openscience.nl/en

3   https://scienceintransition.nl/en/about-science-in-transition

4   https://www.advancingteaching.com/about/

2. The Dutch position paper ''Room for Everyone's Talent''

The position paper ''Room for Everyone's Talent: towards a new balance in the recognition and rewards for academics'' indicates how the Dutch aim to more broadly recognise and reward the diverse work of academic staff. This includes placing less emphasis on the number of publications, and a greater emphasis on the other domains in which an academic is active, such as education and generating societal impact. This broader form of recognition and appreciation is better suited to the current core tasks of academic institutions and society´s requirements of these organisations. The position paper outlines five main goals of the national programme:

Including a greater emphasis on all domains in which an academic is active

1. **Diversification and vitalisation of career paths** enable more diversity in career paths and profiles for academics

2. **Achieving balance between individuals and the collective** assess academics based on both their individual performance and their team performance

3. **Focus on quality** in assessments of academic performance, increasingly focus on quality, content and creativity

4. **Stimulate Open Science** disclose research designs, make data publicly available and encourage academics to put additional effort into making their research outcomes more accessible to society

5. **Encourage academic leadership** invest in good leadership at all levels, from young academics to established professors

Realising these goals creates a healthier and more inspiring working environment in which academics are valued for their specific input and talent, whether the emphasis is on research, education, leadership, impact or (where relevant) patient care. Career paths are based on talents and ambitions in each of these areas. Team members are valued more for the contributions they make to the team leading to more and better cooperation within and between teams. The impact (in all of its forms) of science is widely seen and supported. Open Science will become the norm and stimulates interaction between science and society. Academic leaders dare to promote diversity in career paths and value their employees on that basis.

» *Realising these goals creates a healthier and more inspiring working environment in which academics are valued for their specific input and talent, whether the emphasis is on research, education, leadership, impact or (where relevant) patient care.* «

3. The national programme

In early 2020, the position paper was translated into an extensive national Recognition & Rewards programme. The Recognition & Rewards (R&R) programme means a major (culture) change for all parties[5] that have signed the position paper. The programme plan is primarily aimed at developing a vision on the desired behaviour and culture, both jointly and within the various organisations.

Forming a vision both within the institutions and broadly within the sector first requires a translation of the ambitions from the position paper into a vision for each organisation. The national programme plan outlines six phases to shape the change trajectory: 1) explore and define the ambition within the organisation and formulate a vision, 2) imagine the new situation and experiment, 3) show commitment to the vision and make it meaningful, 4) make the vision concrete and develop the necessary deliverables, 5) implement new systems, processes and products, and 6) retain the newly made adjustments.

» *Forming a vision both within the institutions and broadly within the sector first requires a translation of the ambitions from the position paper into a vision for each organisation.* «

Going through all these consecutive steps is essential: if you design specific criteria too early without a clear vision, there is a danger that the rules of the game will change, but the game itself does not. Academics, committees and administrators will still be ticking off lists with slightly different content, but the behaviour that creates excessive work pressure, imbalance and the underutilisation of talent does not change.

In their individual capacities and acknowledging the different roles of the various institutions, all signatories/collaborators give substance to the national ambitions and phases in their own way and at their own pace. Several bodies are in place to provide direction to and support the Recognition & Rewards programme on a national level. The top-level management from the institutions is represented in a steering committee, a coordinating body that discusses themes especially relevant for the universities and university medical centres. A programme team contributes to the development of national products (e.g. adjustments in the national university functions framework (UFO)) and organisation of conferences. Besides, national meetings for all project managers and chairs from the various institutions[6] are organised to have thematic discussions, exchange experiences and discuss challenges.

5 All Dutch universities through the Dutch universities Association (UNL), the Dutch research funders (i.e. NWO and ZonMW) and the Dutch university medical centres (NFU).

6 All institutions are requested to install a committee working on the ambitions of the Recognition and Rewards program.

4. Maastricht University's approach to the Recognition & Rewards programme

UM's project structure: ensuring staff involvement and organisational commitment

To ensure staff involvement from the earliest phases in the programme onwards, Maastricht University (UM) opted for an elaborate project structure with substantial involvement from the academic staff whilst at the same time ensuring organisational commitment from the top-level leaders. UM has installed four committees on the domains of education, research, impact, and leadership. The chairs of these committees are academic senior leaders, predominantly faculty deans. In each committee, academics from all faculties, age groups, expertise and academic rank (from PhD to professor) are represented as members. Staff members working in UM's academic hospital (MUMC+) and involved in patient care are represented in each of the four committees to represent the perspective from clinicians. Additionally, UM has a Recognition & Rewards steering committee with the deans from all six faculties (and/ or their representatives chairing the four domain committees), the HR director, UM's Recognition & Rewards project manager and the rector. The steering committee is chaired by UM president Rianne Letschert, who is also highly involved in the programme on a national level. The steering committee safeguards the cohesion between the various domains and has an important (guiding) role in the implementation of the programme at UM.

The domains of education, research, impact, and leadership developing an UM vision of Recognition & Reward

Four domain narratives, a UM vision on Recognition & Rewards and staff involvement

The four domain committees (education, research, impact and leadership) were given the challenging task to develop a narrative for each of the four academic domains in order to get a common understanding about the domain whilst acknowledging the differences between faculties and disciplines. With representation across the six faculties and the involvement of clinicians, the committees succeeded in developing narratives[7] to present a first approach on how to recognise and reward performance within each domain. The narratives subsequently acted as input for developing an UM vision on Recognition & Rewards and were used to steer the discussion within all layers of the university on how to move forward in the implementation phase.

After very lively dialogues with all members of the four domain committees, an overarching UM vision on the Recognition & Rewards programme[8] was developed from the four domain narratives. In specifying UM's position on the modernisation of recognising and rewarding academic staff, the position paper 'Room for Everyone's

FYI

Maastricht University, the European University of the Netherlands

6 faculties
5 service centres
more than 20,000 students
over 4,800 employees
one third of UM's employees come from abroad
over 130 nationalities
Educational system: Problem-Based Learning

7   https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/recognition-rewards

8   https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/file/63362/download?token=njxzU4Pn

Talent' was linked to the values and strategic position of Maastricht University.

Staff involvement

Large scale ''Unmute-campaign'', dialogue sessions in various shapes and forms

With the produced vision and narrative documents, UM's ''Unmute-campaign'' was launched. In this campaign, staff members across the organisation, including support staff, were asked to share their thoughts, feedback and suggestions for the follow up of the programme. The members of the steering committee and domain committees initiated dialogue sessions in various shapes and forms within their respective faculties. In most faculties, major Town hall meetings – open to all staff members – were organised to have a discussion on the documents and the proceedings of the Recognition & Rewards programme at UM. Besides, several faculties discussed the narratives and UM vision very thoroughly in all their departments. Moreover, university-wide sessions, such as an ''Ask Me Anything'' session dedicated to Recognition & Rewards, were hosted. Additionally, the ''Unmute-campaign'' also offered an online platform including videos on each of the four narratives and the UM vision with the call for employees to share their thoughts and concerns either via their (faculty) leadership or via the website provided. In general, the documents were very much welcomed. People appreciated the focus on development, the idea of rewarding performances beyond the research domain and thereby the opportunity for diversifying careers. At the same time, staff members shared concerns and insecurities they still had about the new (at that time to be developed) system. Staff members wondered whether vertical career progression would be possible within all of the domains, were curious about the weighing of the various domains, made comments about the use of inappropriate indicators in some domains (e.g. the use of student evaluations as an indicator of performance within the education domain), and expressed worries about the effects of a new system on their international competitiveness. Additionally, the community provided recommendations to increase attention for differences between academic disciplines and themes such as team science, horizontal development and personal development.

UM's set-up with four committees and the large scale ''Unmute-campaign'' accomplished an enormous staff involvement in the (further) development of the programme. The feedback was used in multiple ways. Firstly, the narratives and UM vision were refined and improved. UM operated a cyclical approach in writing the narratives, discussing them, adjusting them according to the feedback after which the process started again. Secondly, the feedback served as input for a HR working group when they started developing new academic career profiles.

5. Maastricht University's Achievements so far

New academic career profiles

The four domain narratives and the UM vision on Recognition & Rewards – as well as the feedback received on these documents – served as the basis for the development of new academic profiles by a working group consisting of HR advisors, the HR director, and the programme manager. These new academic profiles address the main goals of the programme. Originally, the focus on a national level was on the academic levels[9] from assistant professors onwards. From the very first day however, UM was determined to develop new academic profiles for the positions of teachers and researchers, too.

Before deep diving into the ins and outs of the new academic profiles, it makes sense to explain the changes from a meta-level, the organisational perspective. Generally speaking, the demands placed upon a university remain unchanged. The university is expected to provide education, conduct research and, via that research, acquire external funding, deliver patient care for UM's academic medical hospitals and, with these core activities, create an impact in the broadest sense of the word. In order to do all that, good academic leaders who are properly equipped to take up such a leadership role are essential. Given the unchanged tasks and demands placed upon a university, the human resources (and therefore budget) needed[10] to fulfil them, remain unchanged as well. However, UM will change the way in which it uses those resources. Currently, (almost) every academic performs in all domains: they do research, provide education and (if applicable) patient care, create impact and are expected to take on certain leadership roles or positions. The new academic profiles aim to distribute the tasks and demands placed upon the university in a more meaningful and efficient way across the academic staff members according to people´s talents and interests in such a way that as a team, it is ensured that the demands of the organisation (and society) are met.

As for the content of the new profiles it should be known that in the past, career profiles were set up with a restrictive number of criteria to be met. This has proven to give structure but also restrictions. In many cases, the assessor and candidate handled this in a way of 'checking boxes' instead of having a dialogue focused on development. With the implementation of the new profiles and the processes related to development and assessment, colleagues engage in continuous

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Different profiles described in a narrative way plus dialogues focused on development

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9 For more information on job structures in the Dutch academic system see https://academicpositions.com/career-advice/dutch-academic-job-titles-explained and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_ranks_in_the_Netherlands

10 Bear in mind that there are high levels of experienced work pressure in the (Dutch) academic sector which is one of the reasons why additional human resources would be very desirable. The recent coalition agreement of the Dutch government provides all universities with additional funding to, amongst other things, relieve the experienced work pressure, especially for the early career researchers.

dialogue about their development. The employee takes ownership of their own development and thus takes on an active role in reflecting on their performance, gathering feedback and discussing this with their leadership. The leadership takes on a motivating role and gives honest and open feedback in order for the other to be able to develop. Also, honesty in future career development opportunities, both horizontal and vertical, is part of this. The new profiles therefore ask for dedicated commitment to talent development and providing true feedback, however difficult this may be sometimes. In order to help the envisioned transformation, the different profiles are described in a narrative way (instead of a checklist-style).

Quality is the standard

The profile for assistant, associate and full professors is composed of three building blocks. The first building block consists of four UM core values in which every member of the UM community is expected to develop themselves: academic citizenship, personal/professional leadership, teamwork and impact & Open Science. The values of impact & Open Science and personal/professional leadership encompass basic threshold levels of impact and leadership inherent to the role of any academic within UM. Since education and research form the basis of every academic career, the second building block consists of components on education and research, to establish the required basis in both domains and reaffirm UM's vision that any academic career must be underpinned by a combination of research and teaching. For academics who also perform clinical activities, patient care is viewed as an additional core activity. The third building block consists of at least three elective development components from the focus domains of education, research, leadership, impact and patient care. Each focus domain contains three standard elective development components. For a period ranging from 3 to 5 years, it is advisable that an academic focusses on one domain. Academics and their leaders should aspire to truly diversify careers. It is not the intent that an academic excels in all domains (at the same time). For those academics also working ''in practice'', be it patient care or otherwise, the elective components agreed upon should be evaluated in light of their practical experience. A person may choose as many elective components as desired for their own development. However, selecting more than three components does not constitute a better outlook towards promotion. Quality, not quantity, is the standard in this model. In agreement with their leadership, academics may add a custom component not listed among the standard elective components.

Personal growth and continuous development

The new academic profiles do justice to the wealth of talents that academics have. With the elective components in the third building block, the academic profile for assistant, associate and full professors offers room for diversification (and vitalisation) between employees, whereby employees together with their leadership ensure that the objectives within their unit (team/department/faculty) are achieved by making proper use of everyone's talents and ambitions. The focus within the profiles has shifted from quantity to quality. All profiles strive for personal growth and continuous development. In addition, an academic is not locked into a specific profile – these profiles offer the space to shift, broaden or narrow the focus during a career. So despite the connotation of a ‚fixed path' that the name ‚profile' can sometimes have, it should be emphasised that the character of these profiles is spacious and broad.

Maastricht University

Academic Profile
for Assistant, Associate and Full Professors

The overall goal of this academic profile is to align expectations as to what an academic does in the position of Assistant, Associate and Full Professor. Understanding this facilitates both the mentoring as well as the assessment approach for Assistant, Associate and Full Professors. This document serves as a guide for academics to develop their own academic careers in coordination with their leadership. The outlined approach makes room for diversification of careers, a team-oriented attitude and talent development.

The assessment of Assistant, Associate and Full Professors is conducted in line with the development-centered assessment framework and consists of three building blocks.

A **UM Core Values**
Applicable to all profiles

- Academic citizenship
- Personal / professional leadership
- Team performance
- Impact & Open Science

B **Core Activities**
Applicable to all Assistant, Associate and Full Professors

- Education
- Research
- Patient care

C **Elective Components**
Custom selection (interchangeable over periods of time)

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 |

Together with your leadership, you select at least three assessment components (for a period ranging from 3 to 5 years) from the five focus domains.

Education	Research	Leadership	Societal Impact	Patient care
Developing and innovating education	Developing and directing research	Interpersonal leadership	Involving relevant stakeholders	Contributing to improvement of quality of care
Coordinating education	Funding acquisition	Management	Interactively communicating results beyond academia	Disseminating knowledge around patient care
Disseminating educational practices	(Facilitating) co-creation in the research process	Fostering diversity and inclusivity	Encouraging opportunities to create societal value and impact	Organisation and policy roles
Custom component	Custom component	Custom component	Custom component	Custom component

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University job classification system (UFO)

In the Netherlands, there is a framework including almost all functions within a university, named the UFO-system[12]. While some universities feel that an overhaul of the UFO-system is needed in order to provide (more) room for the implementation of Recognition & Rewards, others are not convinced that such an overhaul/adjustment is necessary. UM would welcome an adaptation in the UFO-system in order to better meet the goals and ambitions of the national programme. However, the UFO-system and Collective Labour Agreement[13] in place provide opportunities for UM to experiment with new academic profiles.

The biggest challenge with the new system will be to work without standardized checklists with criteria applicable to all staff members. With the new academic profiles, it will no longer be possible, and is very undesirable (!), to continue working with standardized lists with criteria applicable to everyone. Having diversified profiles in place means that UM should adopt a personalised approach to development and assessment as well. The expectations UM has of staff members vary according to their respective profile and academics should therefore be recognized and rewarded for the explicit development components agreed upon.

The profiles for teachers and researchers contain only two building blocks: the four UM core values and the development components applicable to the specific profile. The idea behind those profiles is to broaden the career prospects for these employees. The transition from positions as a teacher or researcher to the mainstream academic track (assistant, associate and full professor) is encouraged and facilitated as more opportunities will be created to obtain a PhD and/or obtain experience in both teaching and research in a combined position. Part of these combined positions might be financed via the new funds[11] provided by the Dutch government.

A development-centred assessment approach

A system with diversified career paths requires a more personalised and development-centred approach to assessment and should balance qualitative and quantitative indicators. To this end, UM set out the ambition for a system with fair and transparent procedures and guidelines to enable the desired (culture) change in which the full scope of an academic's career is valued while focusing on their unique career path and mitigating the existing biases of both quantitative and qualitative assessment tools.

Open, fair, and tailor-made development talks

To enable a development-oriented approach in which academics are facilitated to have open, fair, and tailor-made development talks about their personal career paths, UM's existing assessment structures could be enhanced by agreeing upon a set of common principles that apply to all faculties while leaving room for faculty-specific implementation. A total of nine general principles to guardrail the processes related to development and assessment have been discussed:

1. The procedures and guidelines must be fair and transparent;

2. An academic's leadership should not be able to unjustly prevent an academic's career advancement if there are available resources and the candidate meets the standard set for promotion. For that reason, the academic's leadership should not be the sole person involved in general development talks nor should the leadership be the sole person responsible for a candidate's referral for a promotion to a

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11 https://open.overheid.nl/repository/ronl-fcd6dcb389dae70bfc3f39317ee1cf2672b302ba/1/pdf/ OCW%20-%20DEF%20Bestuursakkoord%20HOW%2014juli22.pdf (only available in Dutch)

12 https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/en_GB/job_classification_ufo.html

13 https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/en_GB/cao-universiteiten.html

faculty career committee. A minimum of three people should be involved in development talks;

3. Faculties must facilitate the opportunity for academics to discuss their development with other academics[14] with expertise in the same domains as chosen in their own profile and have a constructive dialogue on options and recommendations for further vertical and horizontal development;

4. Faculties must ensure that the academic's leadership transparently and regularly communicates the possibilities and impossibilities for vertical and horizontal growth within the organisation. It is the task of an academic's leadership to inform academics about resources, strategic ambitions and positions available based on the Strategic Personnel Planning;

5. There should be no conflicts of interest in an academic's development talks:

    · Development should not be discussed with academics who are in immediate competition for future new positions;

    · Development should not be discussed with academics who might have any other reason to unjustly prevent or propagate an academic's career advancement.

6. Special circumstances must always be taken into account in these development talks, such as pre- and post-maternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave, long-term illness, or long-term care leave. Moreover, when allocating tasks and roles to team members, appropriate attention should be given to staff with a disability or chronic illness. The Recognition & Rewards Programme has the potential to "normalise" the process by which accommodations/ adjustments are provided for staff with disabilities or chronic illnesses, as it facilitates the creation of a career path for such staff in line with their skills and limitations;

7. The people involved in an academic's development talk should provide a reference or other form of argument for an academic's promotion to a faculty career committee. This includes a solid argument based on the academic's performance based on their elected profile;

8. All domains of Recognition & Rewards should be represented in the faculty career committee and the members should be diverse in gender identification, background, ethnicity, age, etc.;

9. Faculty career committees should no longer apply a standardised set of criteria in the assessment of a candidate for promotion. The committee should instead focus on the faculty's strategy, strategic personnel planning and the resources available, and the career profile and goals set by and for the academic.

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14 The academics involved in another candidate's development talk should be of at least the same academic level as the candidate.

To facilitate the dialogue between academics and assessors on development and assessment – in line with the above principles – the UM Career Compass has been developed.

The UM Career Compass

The UM Career Compass is a document developed to guide the dialogue on both (continuous) development in the various academic domains and the four UM core values as well as (formal) assessment. The document should encourage the discussion on the evidence provided and the behaviour and performance displayed on the various development components. It should especially demonstrate the quality of an academics' work and their plans and vision for the future. All types of quality indicators may be stated, as long as they only relate to a single output item, and are transparent enough to be interpreted meaningfully. If (quantitative) indicators are used, the UM Career Compass serves to tell the story behind the indicators. In general, the use of qualitative and quantitative indicators should be balanced in an equal manner across all domains.

Good balance between personal talents and ambitions, and organisational needs and strategies

In the dialogue about an academics' development in the various academic domains and the four UM core values, it is about finding a good balance between personal talents and ambitions, and organisational needs and strategies. For the leadership, this requires a solid understanding of those organisational needs and strategies as well as being capable of having such development-oriented talks in a constructive way. UM's Leadership Academy was launched to contribute to the acquisition or strengthening of these competences in the (academic) leaders.

UM's Leadership Academy

With one of the main goals of R&R being investing in academic leadership, UM's Executive Board installed a Taskforce Professional Leadership Development and requested them to work on ideas and ways on how to organise leadership development for all staff at Maastricht University. In its work, the Taskforce Professional Leadership Development built on the work of the R&R Leadership committee, in particular on the vision on leadership in their narrative. This resulted in the launch of the Leadership Academy in January 2022. The Leadership Academy aims to give all employees, academic and support staff alike, the opportunity to further develop their leadership skills. Leadership development at all career levels is vital since UM has ambitious goals as a university.

A one size fits all approach to leadership development is not effective. There are many differences between the tasks that UM employees are responsible for in their jobs. To acknowledge these differences, the Leadership Academy will work with a framework consisting of four leadership levels (i.e. leading self, leading others, leading other leaders and leading a faculty, school, large institute) and three types of leadership (i.e personal, interpersonal and managerial) that will be combined into the UM leadership framework. Within this framework, the Leadership Academy will develop opportunities for each level and each type of leadership in co-creation with the specific target group.

6. What's ahead?

Fall 2022: start of the implementation

While writing this article (August 2022), the decision making process regarding the new academic profiles is almost completed. Agreement with the new academic profiles by the Local Consultative Body is anticipated in the near future, after which the Executive Board can formally determine upon the implementation of the profiles in all faculties. To launch the implementation of the profiles, a faculty-tour is organised during fall 2022. During these faculty-specific meetings, UM's president and rector, together with UM's programme manager, in collaboration with the steering committee member of the respective faculty, will provide faculties with the most important information and changes regarding the new profiles and will outline the requirements needed for successful implementation. Faculty Boards, leadership, department heads and others will get the opportunity to ask questions or share concerns they might have with regards to the new ways of working. After these faculty meetings, department heads are asked to – with the help of the faculty HR advisors – enter into dialogue with the members of their department about the implications of the new profiles on both the team and individual level. Moreover, Strategic Personnel Planning (SPP) is an absolute prerequisite for the successful implementation of the new profiles as both the leadership and the staff members need to have a clear understanding of the demands and strategic objectives of their unit in order to determine how to – also on an individual level – contribute to this. This implies that not only all faculties need to develop a SPP (if they haven't done so already), a SPP also needs to be developed on the level of the individual departments.

The ambition is that by the end of 2023, all academic staff members have agreed with their leadership upon a certain academic profile that guides their development for the upcoming years.

And beyond...

While the faculties are dedicated to implement the new academic profiles and related processes (i.e. development and assessment dialogues) and tools (e.g. UM Career Compass), further efforts to shape the R&R programme at UM continue.

First, staff members (leadership and academics alike) need to be trained to properly adjust to the new ways of working that the R&R programme brings along. Training on, for example, how to properly have a development-oriented assessment dialogue while using the UM Career Compass will be embedded in the Leadership Academy. Additionally, the Leadership Academy will expand its offer based on co-creation sessions with target groups. All (new) modules will – where applicable – be in line with the Recognition & Rewards body of thought.

Second, a subcommittee will explore the opportunities for horizontal development and the recognition and rewarding thereof for both UM's academics as well as support staff. Professional development

is often overly focused on the climbing of a career ladder, i.e. vertical development. This focus on vertical climbing translates itself not only in the current style of rewarding (i.e. higher positioning on the vertical ladder), but also in recognition: in the current system, there is a tendency to view active ladder climbers as more successful. This is the direct result of the fact that a vertical ladder only admits one way to advance, hence introducing an unavoidable sense of hierarchy in which staff that are high up are equated as being more successful. The dominant vertical perspective on professional development is suboptimal in many ways, both for the individual professionals in these careers and for the organisation they are part of. UM should therefore acknowledge that professional development is not just about moving upwards; it's also about moving sideways (and maybe sometimes even down slightly). This horizontal development of employees is currently receiving too little recognition and rewarding within the UM.

Finally, a tool to evaluate and monitor the progress of the implementation is being developed. UM wants to keep an open attitude towards feedback from the community, including all those involved in the change, and will facilitate opportunities for all UM employees to share their ideas and experiences about the new ways of working. UM truly wants to hear what works well and what does not work as expected or intended. Additionally, quantitative information about the implementation process, such as the number of assigned profiles and the distribution of focus domains across the faculties, will be monitored. The steering committee will regularly discuss these numbers and the feedback received and will – if necessary – make adjustments in tools, processes, etc. to address the feedback.

A national executive agreement

On a national level, the executive boards of the fourteen Dutch universities have set out a shared ambition to develop an executive agreement. They came to this consensus after a plenary meeting in June 2022 where the progress of Recognition & Rewards on a national level was discussed. In the executive agrrement, a specification and concretisation of the main R&R goals, including a set of minimum standards or requirements on a national level, will be spelled out. An example of such a requirement could be that, in order to achieve diversification and vitalisation of career paths (the first goal in the initial position paper), all universities should develop academic profiles which provide the opportunity to diversify careers through multiple career paths/focus domains being available. The endeavour of agreeing upon an executive agreement, is very valuable to, amongst other things, facilitate national job mobility and to reassure Dutch academics about the commitment to this programme on a national level.

The European Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment

It may not come as a surprise that the Dutch academic sector very much welcomes the agreement for the reform of research assessment across Europe. The European Commission, Science Europe and the European University Association (EUA) have been part of a drafting

team to develop an agreement for the reform of research assessment across Europe, as part of the wider strategic aim of reforming academic careers. The objective of this initiative is to create a coalition of organisations committed to implementing reforms of the current research assessment system. The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[15] was published on 20 July 2022. The document sets a commonly agreed direction for changes in assessment practices for research, researchers and research performing organisations, with the overarching goal of maximising the quality and impact of the research. The Agreement includes the principles, commitments and timeframe for reforms and outlines the basis for a Coalition of organisations willing to work together in developing and implementing the changes. Although the scope of the Agreement is limited to the reform of the research domain and the assessment thereof, organisations are encouraged to broaden the reform to the other domains as well. Maastricht University very much welcomes this movement in the European context, which will strengthen the believe in the national programme and may further enhance international mobility for all Dutch academics, regardless of the focus they may have in their career thereby acknowledging all academic talents there are.

A cultural change

Modernising the system of recognition and rewarding of academics is a huge culture shift. It has taken decades to create the system as it currently is and it will surely require time to change the system for the better. Although the majority of staff members has experience with the detrimental effects of the current system, not all of them are yet convinced about the actual functioning of the new, envisioned system. UM considers such an attitude to be very understandable and wants to make use of those critical opinions for the better. For that reason, UM thinks it is wise to make those affected by the change part of the change and the actual development of the new system. In this way, academics will experience the difficulties encountered when redesigning the system of recognition and rewards themselves and be able to contribute to overcoming these challenges. Moreover, through their involvement, they will become ambassadors of the change program, thereby facilitating the implementation through constructive discussions with their peers.

To conclude, it is important to realise that a culture change like this takes time, dedication and above all persistence. In the end, everyone should be convinced and, more importantly, have the experience that the envisioned change makes academia a better place for all talents. It just takes some time getting used to.

Author

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