

Memo

Follow up evaluation trajectory University College Twente (UCT)

Date : 4 April 2022

Background information

In 2013, University of Twente (UT) started a new selective honours BSc degree programme. Inspired and informed by the University of Twente's unique profile High Tech Human Touch, the ATLAS programme was developed to address the need for a new type of engineering education (content), using a radical vision on learning (concept), under the premise that a strong community of learners is essential. These three pillars - content, concept, and community - embody the ATLAS programme. Together, they support a distinctive learning and teaching experience. A learning experience that is focused on understanding, and a teaching experience that puts students in the lead of their academic development. A profoundly different experience for students and teachers alike, comprising Technology & Liberal arts & Sciences (ATLAS).

Over the years the programme has attracted highly (multi)talented students with a broad interest in societal challenges, who were strongly motivated to contribute to finding solutions, working in teams, and making use of technology, social sciences and humanities. The programme has been highly valued by students (NSE) for several years. Alumni of ATLAS managed to successfully attend a broad range of (international) master programmes.

In 2019, the ATLAS programme was successfully accredited by NVAO. University College Twente (UCT) is the organisational unit that offers the programme ATLAS. UCT had been facing several integration issues from the start. It was not easy to fit an experimental programme with pioneering students and teachers into the broader structure and support systems of the faculty EEMCS and the UT. For that reason it was also decided in 2019 to embed UCT within the faculty ITC on the following grounds:

- The strong sense of community and international character of both student bodies
- The experience faculty ITC has in supporting complex admissions procedures, housing scholarships, etc.
- Possible synergy between ATLAS and the master programme 'Spatial Engineering'
- ITC would have a regular (bekostigd) bachelor and master programme, which would help the integration of ITC within the campus-community.

At the same time the following propositions for embedding UCT within ITC were formulated:

- ATLAS is a programme with a number of unique characteristics that need to be safeguarded
- The organisational unit UCT needs strong connections to all faculties
- UCT funding may not pose a risk to ITC's external funding
- Housing of UCT will remain part of the LTSH-programme.

When the decision was made to embed UCT into ITC it was also decided to evaluate this change after several years.

External evaluation of UCT

As agreed in 2019, an evaluation was carried out on the University College Twente and the ATLAS program in the period November 2021 through February 2022. Additional reasons to carry out an evaluation, were concrete indications and signals mainly related to unclarity in governance and decline in staff and student wellbeing. Due to the corona-measures, education and communication had to be carried out mostly online and certainly enlarged the worrying situation. For example, when the renovation of Drienerburgh as new homebase for UCT was ready, the building was closed because of the lock-down.

Commissioned by the Executive Board, an external expert conducted twenty-two interviews with different stakeholders: including management of ITC and UCT, lecturers, students, alumni, supporting staff. This led to several conclusions:

- All stakeholders endorse the value of a UCT-ATLAS program in the (Dutch) educational landscape
- All stakeholders foresee the end of the ATLAS program if no changes are made

Recommendations

There are a lot of possibilities to make UCT and/or ATLAS a sustainable success in the near future. Measures have to be made on different levels:

- Develop and/or reaffirm and decide on a common vision on UCT and ATLAS
- Invest in leadership on all levels
- Implement UCT/ATLAS as a sustainable activity in the structural organization of the University of Twente, making use of regular working processes
- Make ATLAS an innovative didactic playground again in which (young) lecturers can develop themselves
- Invest in the wellbeing of students and staff, provide guidance and invest in onboarding.

The evaluation report (see attachment) provides an extended overview of the areas for improvement in the current situation of UCT and offers four recommendations. The rector discussed the evaluation report on 1 March 2022 with the majority of the group of interviewees, including teachers, MT UCT, FB-members ITC, a student and a member of the FC ITC. The discussion was meant as a validation for the outcomes of the report. During the meeting, it became clear that the analysis of areas for improvement were broadly recognized. Furthermore, there was broad support for the recommendations.

The Executive Board supports the recommendations and supports setting up a process for implementation. The first step is to follow up on the recommendation to appoint an interim-dean, who takes the lead in reshaping ATLAS into a sustainable programme within a clear organisational UT-setting, in line with the recommendations.

Appointment of an interim dean UCT

It has become clear from the evaluation report that the challenges at ATLAS are at a systemic level, partly as a result of the chosen governance structure, its changed implementation, and a number of challenges within ATLAS that have a longer history. The current dean of UCT and chair of philosophy and science in practice at BMS, prof.dr.ir. Mieke Boon, has indicated that a different kind of expertise is needed to solve them and requires an interim trajectory. This is why she has agreed that as UCT-dean she will take a step back to make room for an interim dean who will be given the mandates to carry out the required reorganization process. She has full confidence in Heleen Miedema for that role.

Therefore the Executive Board has appointed dr. Heleen Miedema as interim dean of UCT as of 1 May for a maximum of 2 years. She is a highly experienced programme director and was the founder of the BSc. and MSc. programme Technical Medicine (TM). She obtained her PhD with a thesis on the educational design of TM. Furthermore, she is a widely recognized leader and has brought together all education in the Health domain at UT: besides technical medicine, also biomedical technology (BSc.), biomedical engineering (MSc) and health sciences (BSc. & MSc). Last but not least, she was one of the founders of the TechMed Centre and momentarily holds the position of director of education at the TechMed Centre, in which she is responsible for lifelong learning.