

Young Academy Twente on 'Talent Development Policy'

November 2022

Summary

As Young Academy Twente, we are here to build a community of young academics, provide a safe environment to learn, facilitate a learning platform for academic leadership, and thereby strengthen the societal impact of our university. We are therefore very happy to see the efforts and consideration of the team Recognition & Rewards developing the talent development policy for the UT, helping the university further develop as a healthy and inclusive workplace.

In this memo, we would like to offer our advice on the document 'Talent Development Policy' as recently shared with us by the team R&R.

(1) Talent development policy to reduce work pressure

We applaud the focus of the policy on high workloads, as this is an ever increasing problem in Dutch academia. Still, we have some questions on how the policy, particularly in talent development will keep our workloads in check. Does the recognition of other academic activities outside of direct teaching and research lead to a reduced workload? Or are we simply adding more activities and thereby increasing workload?

"At the same time, for a career advancement, an academic staff member needs to achieve sufficient performance in all domains and excel in 2 of the first 4 domains." (Talent Development Policy, page 3)

If a "sufficient" performance refers to the criteria of the UFO as they stand now, and "excel" means beyond that, then the effect of the new policy might result in more and undesirable checkboxes to be completed for a promotion—effectively adding rather than reducing the current workload. More specifically, if scientific staff is expected to deliver more than the UFO requirements on two of four domains, then the requirements in the remaining two domains should be lower than they are now.

Advice 1.1: Clearly define "sufficient performance" to facilitate academic colleagues with a focus in their work, recognizing them for their focus and hopefully decreasing their work pressure.

Advice 1.2: Clearly define "excel", with a focus on growth (by including self-reflection exercises with peers in the yearly interviews for example). We advise to focus on 'personalized' growth instead of aiming at 'excelling' as, for instance, a constant growth with whatever the speed should also enable a level of excellence.

Advice 1.3: Develop a target group that allows for testing the concrete definitions of "sufficient performance" and "excel" before its implementation. The Young Academy Twente host talents/members across all faculties and can support the development of such a target group.

(2) Choice of pillars and definition

We see that the 'Talent Development Policy' in its four categories (education, research, academic citizenship and team work) slightly deviates from the four categories as defined on national level (education, research, impact, and leadership). Alignment with national and international developments on recognition and rewards is crucial if we want people acting as ambassadors of the UT (whether they are employed or have left the university). And while we understand the need for a UT-specific story,

the argumentation for why two of the four categories differ is lacking in the current document. The risk of not having a clear definition of team work and academic citizenship yet, is that these tasks could appear inferior to education and research as is. Further zooming in on the four pillars:

Team work

We welcome a focus on team work, in line with UT principle 5: good leaders take good care of their teams. It would be helpful to underline and explain in the document that this task is an adaption of the national leadership R&R profile.

In addition, team science could be a component of 'recognition and rewards' or consortium work as currently required for many grant applications. More and more early career researchers conduct interdisciplinary research. Most of the big challenges for the future such as sustainability, safety and resilience can only be solved with interdisciplinary teams. In particular, all parts of the UT's mission for 2030 build on problems that are inherently interdisciplinary. At the same time, starting such interdisciplinary collaborations can be difficult for early career researchers, as they often build on networks and expertise early career researchers have not formed yet.

If we want Academic Citizenship and Team work to be recognized, the UT (or the R&R team) should take action to:

Advice 2.1: Include a paragraph on how leadership relates to team work (in line with the work that SEG Teams & Individuals executed), and explain why this task is chosen above the national leadership profile.

Advice 2.2: Clearly define the components or competence therein, linked to the conventionally underrecognized tasks and activities of academics especially outside of campus, and expanded beyond organizational tasks in the Talent Development Map.

Advice 2.3: Foster an environment for building interdisciplinary networks, tackling questions on how to bridge the gap between approaches in two or more scientific fields. That is, help the UT's young scientists to find collaborators, focusing on 'team science' in their research, and plant seeds for building strong networks for future large consortia grants. The Young Academy Twente organizes team science-events (Team Science @UT) and can support the development of such an environment. For instance, we could start at the level of organizing interfaculty ideation workshops to help further defining talent development policy.

Academic Citizenship

We are happy that the exact components of academic citizenship can be left open to the faculties, as these can vary among different faculties. By definition "Academic Citizenship behavior - behaviors that contribute to a group, unit, faculty performance, and their success that is not necessarily explicitly recognized by/ included in the formal reward system." However, many academic citizenship activities extend beyond the faculty. Examples are: contributions to international working groups, outreach, spin offs, international capacity building and other activities related to societal impact. These are important components of being an academic, especially given the societal focus of Shaping 2030, yet often underrecognized. Similarly, the "Talent Development Map 2.0" groups academic citizenship behavior and teamwork and leadership under the same category of "organization".

In addition, the UT has been known to be one of the most entrepreneurial universities with an unique ecosystem including Novel-T and units such as SBD, and we suggest to also consider including the third core task of Dutch universities more prominently in this task. Several of our members are very active as entrepreneurs, but recognition and inclusion of evaluation of these activities in promotion decisions is too often dependent on the department and there is no UT innovation policy that supports academics in their entrepreneurial endeavors. If we want to add a UT-unique touch to recognition and rewards, a focus on innovation will definitely help. We therefore recommend to also:

Advice 2.4: Include academic citizenship activities that have impact beyond the university in this category. For instance, take the direction set by De Jonge Akademie “Wetenschap en maatschappij” and, potentially, create alignment with the (inter)national activities regarding academic citizenship to enlarge our impact potential.

Advice 2.5: Include the third core task (innovation/valorization) more prominently in academic citizenship so that academics at the UT are not only supported by the innovative ecosystem, but also recognized for their entrepreneurial efforts.

Education

Our main question on the educational pillar is how the “multilevel multi-actor impact of teaching and educational activities” will be measured. The impact of teaching activities is complicated, and therefore depends on what the definition is of educational impact at our university. The Talent Development Map mainly focusses on aspects such as reflective approaches to teaching and improving teaching materials, and does not focus on impact.

Research

For research, the same main question as for education can be asked. We are very positive about the clearly stated desired contribution to Open Science. We therefore recommend to:

Advice 2.6: Specify ‘impact of teaching/ research’, to create clarity on how to achieve such impact. In line with moving towards a 4th generation university, education and research are entwined: Research can help developing and improving education, and better educated students could become better researchers and/or citizens which in turn leads to higher societal impact of universities.

Advice 2.7: Add contribution to cross-faculty, UT broad research vision to the tasks in both research and education. With regards to contributing to the faculty research vision, we advise to develop cross-faculty alignment of research visions and learning communities(in line with our own efforts on team science).

Impact

We see that impact as separate profile as seen in national R&R policy has been replaced by adding ‘impact-based’ to all tasks. Yet, ‘impact-based’ is not defined in the document. Without a clear definition, impact-based has no value and raises questions about room for fundamental work, which might be impact-driven but not always impact-based. What is the vision of the team R&R behind impact-based, and what kind of mindset would they like to see with different groups of academics at the UT?

Advice 2.8: Use the same definition of impact as put in Shaping 2030 and other already existing UT impact related work such as performed by ITC on theory-of-change, or SBD and S&P on utilizing the UT impact potential.

(3) Thinking ahead: implementation of the policy

We are curious to see how the framework will be implemented in the yearly Talent Talks and the tenure track policy. As the pillars leave more room for interpretation, how can we ensure that work within these pillars is fairly evaluated by all managers? With our network of early career researchers across all faculties, we would like to offer our help in evaluating best practices among faculties. Beyond, and particularly when it comes to the promotion of early career scientists after implementation, we could take advantage of our network of local young academies.

Advice 3.1: Especially for tenure trackers, we advise having a mid-term evaluation that evaluates the candidate's profile with respect to the pillars and defines the steps they expect the candidate in these pillars to take to make the promotion. Such evaluations take into account the self-assessment proposed above in **Advice 1.2**, and the target group suggested in **Advice 1.3** could take a similar role in this evaluation.

Advice 3.2: We also advise that the changes in the framework will be reflected in the tasks listed to report our hours (formerly TAS, now Unit 4). Unit 4 activities are now limited to research, education and projects, which do not reflect citizenship and teamwork activities. With regards to reducing work load, however, this implementation should not result in an ever smaller-grained hour-filling system.

(4) Decision-making Process

The implementation of Recognition and Rewards is a joint ambition shared by many colleagues in the UT-ecosystem. We believe that the Young Academy Twente could help shaping the policy from the perspective of UT's young scientists or academics. In the end, it is we who will take the baton and pass it on to the new generations.

We recognize that various colleagues have participated in the Shaping 2030 exercises and might be 'round-table tired'. However, questions centred around recognition and rewards should be addressed and discussed broadly with the UT community, and not only on higher management or dean level. Beyond the UT, and looking at the national level, as well as at the process at other universities within our network of local young academies, we see that development of policy is an inclusive process for which universities take time. To this end, we encourage the team R&R to continue their inclusive, open and transparent way of working and invite scientific staff explicitly to think along: Where are we at the UT three, five, 10 years from now with regards to recognition and rewards? How do we compare to other Dutch and international universities?

Advice 4.1: Involve the Young Academy Twente as early as possible. That is, seek consult from the YAT while the document is in a concept stage, rather than in the final stage of the implementation.

Advice 4.2: Include scientific staff from all faculties and institutes, specifically junior staff, even more in the discussion. One of the main points of the discussion nationally and internationally is international competitiveness when academia in other countries stick to current evaluation models. Moving on to rolling out R&R at the UT, we would therefore offer our help in reflecting on this challenge in particular.