

POSITION PAPER TENURE TRACK

Introduction

A tenure track is a career instrument with a focus on challenging and facilitating talented scientific personnel. As of 2009 the Executive Board of the University of Twente decided on the implementation of the tenure track system, starting with the Faculty of Science and Technology. In 2010 the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science, the Faculty of Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation, the Faculty of Engineering Technology and the School of Management and Governance started with the tenure track system, followed by the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences in 2012. To enhance the quality of the tenure track system the University of Twente, since 2012, has focused on harmonizing all related policies and regulations. The system is expected to benefit from transparent and unambiguous criteria and processes.

JA@UT is enthusiastic about the tenure track system and the benefits it offers to multiple levels of the university organization. It creates an environment for a healthy competition. It stimulates people to work to the best of their potential by providing a transparent clear system of rewards (tenure and promotion) as well as stating the risks clearly (not renewing the contract at the current university). Specifically, the tenure track system motivates individuals to:

- Pursue high quality research at the frontiers of their field, to be innovative and entrepreneurial;
- Publish in high quality peer-review journals;
- Assure on-going funding by securing competitive external funding of their research lines;
- Supervise PhD students with care to maximize their successful graduation in time as they constitute the building blocks of individual research lines;
- Increase their national and international visibility;
- Bring state-of-the-art science into teaching programs;
- Bring fresh ideas and out-of-the box thinking into the inter- and intra-faculty discussions within various committees.

In addition to strengthening individual curriculum vitae the issues listed above highly benefit professors and other colleagues within departments, faculties, and research institutes, and thus university in general. In particular, by attracting the talent by offering them a tenure track, the university receives staff that values time, efforts and each other's achievements.

The Young Academy of the University of Twente (JA@UT), of whom the majority of members are in the tenure track system, have dedicated multiple internal and external meetings to the topic.¹ The goal of these meetings was to exchange experiences with the tenure track system and to

¹ Meetings on the Tenure Track

Date	Participants
November 1, 2012	A meeting with former chair of the Executive Board of the University of Twente, Anne Flierman, on governance in general, and tenure track specifically.
February 7, 2013	A meeting with the Central Tenure Track Committee
January 16, 2014	A meeting with the new chair of the Executive Board of the University of Twente, Victor van der Chijs, raising different topics amongst which the tenure track
May 1, 2014 until June 27, 2014	Meetings with all faculty councils and the ad interim Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology. Trigger for these meetings was the Starting with the negative advise on the implementation of the tenure track system from Faculty Council of the Faculty of Science and Technology (kenmerk: FRTNW140306/GK).
August 27, 2014	A meeting with the rector about the (implementation of the) tenure track

discuss suggestions for how this career instrument could be improved. JA@UT is a strong advocate of the tenure track system within the university, and judges it as being a valuable instrument, but concludes there is still room for improvement. JA@UT recognizes, based on the experiences of its members, the points cited by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Science and Technology (kenmerk: FRTNW140306/GK).

Current issues within the tenure track system, which require improvements

Issue I: lack of support

The first issue is that the university provides little or no support to make the tenure track a success. Tenure trackers are barely facilitated, though a lot is demanded from them such as in the examples of the development of the new bachelor model (TOM), writing grant applications etc. The university provides performance criteria and assessments, but in general no thought has been put into coaching and support for the tenure tracker to excel. Making a comparison within the Netherlands, some other Dutch universities provide starting tenure trackers with one or two PhDs. The way things are currently arranged at the UT, puts our talented researchers in a disadvantaged position compared to their peers elsewhere in the country. In particular, we run a risk of decreasing the rate of successful national grant applications as the support tenure-trackers at other universities receive (e.g. a PhD) increase their chance of success in competing for grant applications.

An example representative of our university is the vast time, effort and dedication that has been devoted towards TOM. This education (load) tends to be undervalued in tenure track assessments. Involvement in TOM requires a lot of personal investment, which is not always a clear asset for a person's resume. How will the university ensure a certain amount of guaranteed research time? As well as time necessary to writing applications for prestigious grants and building a track record.

Issue II: no vision on tenure track influx and drop-outs

The second issue touches on the large influx in the tenure track system and the small amount of drop-outs. Although in general the career path is clearly structured within the tenure track, the perspective after tenure track – when one drops out of the system – is unclear. In the Netherlands there is not a multilayer academic climate as in the U.S., therefore one cannot easily apply for a position at another university. Perhaps the current tenure track system is not selective enough. Besides, having a large influx, means that the UT will be flooded with professors at one point in the future. At the same time this means there is no space left for new, upcoming talent... Some JA@UT members personally experienced that the starting criteria for becoming a tenure tracker are altered continuously, enabling them to get into the tenure track system.

Our university lacks a clear vision: do we want to select excellent researchers (top 10 %) and have hardly any drop-outs or do all researchers get an opportunity within the tenure track system resulting in much more drop-outs (and therefor fuels the need for extra efforts in guiding people to find jobs elsewhere).

Issue III: impossible for tenure trackers to be independent

The third point JA@UT would like to address is that the tenure track system is fitted to flat(ter) organizations. Right now, the position of a tenure trackers is often unclear. Sometimes they are positioned within- and sometimes outside a research group. For instance, for a tenure tracker positioned within a group the attitude of the Chair of the group is an important factor in the success of the tenure tracker.

Tenure trackers are not always on equal footing with the tenured staff (like in the American system). However tenure-trackers are still expected to demonstrate success and creativity, independently. Added to this, is that the current financial system of the UT makes it impossible for a

tenure tracker to get a clear insight in their 'own research money' and does not enable them to make strategic plans and choices.

Issue IV: unclear and inflexible regulations (even in common situations)

First of all JA@UT noticed that many tenure trackers are not informed properly about the tenure track system and the general UT-guidelines are often unknown to them. This sometimes results in researchers who are officially tenure trackers, but do not have any agreements of this on paper. Furthermore a lot of legal questions arise, which can be problematic. JA@UT discussed two specific aspects: pregnancy and length of (temporary) contracts. Tenure tracks coincide often with the period where people might want to start a family. The UT has to set up a proper set of regulations regarding extensions of tenure track contracts in case of special circumstances such as pregnancy, serious illness, etcetera. Not everyone perceives the tenure track to be flexible enough for combining a family and a research career. In addition; little attention is paid to working part time. Another issue is that the legal aspects of the temporary contract duration in relation to the tenure track are unclear. A tenure tracker often starts after a post-doc period at the UT, but with a temporary contract you can stay a maximum of six years at the same university. Should the post-doc period count, or does the tenure track start after a post-doc? The university did not yet think this through.

Suggestions for improvement

JA@UT believes that the tenure track system at UT could still play a role of a great boost in improving the quality of the research climate, both attracting and stimulating talent if the above-mentioned issues are addressed. Here are some constructive suggestions:

Suggestion I: start-up package

JA@UT first suggested an introduction of a "start-up package" for tenure trackers to the Central Tenure Track Committee at the UT. The central tenure track committee acknowledged the importance of the start-up package, and promised to explore the possibilities. More than one and a half year further in time, there is still no answer from the Central Tenure Track Committee on this matter.

JA@UT stresses that if the university wishes to stimulate talent, this might incur costs. With creating start-up packages for tenure trackers the university demonstrates its dedication and commitment to excellence and this will make it easier for tenure trackers to compete with other universities for prestigious grants. Some suggestions would be: use the Aspasia money to fund one PhD per female tenure tracker or start with a modest package (post-doc) and implement bonuses for tenure trackers who perform well. But there are multiple forms of other start-up packages possible: lab space, or freeing a tenure trackers from teaching obligations for a certain amount of time. Offering starting packages obligates the university – for financial reasons – to rethink the current hiring practice of tenure trackers (see suggestion II).

Furthermore for the evaluation of the tenure trackers it is relevant to take the educational load into account, or ensure that enough research time is guaranteed. However the criteria with which tenure trackers are being evaluated should be absolutely clear.

Suggestion II: develop a long-term vision regarding (the goals) of the tenure track system

After six years of tenure track, the pipelines are clogged and the system seems to be flooded. Invest more in guidance of possible drop outs and inform them about options and opportunities (mostly) outside of the UT. Make clear choices when it comes to accepting new tenure trackers; not all scientific personnel needs to be a tenure tracker and the ones selected should correspond to profiles that represent long term assets for the university. Furthermore, the use of tenure track potential for hiring new staff members excludes candidates who, while may not have

research ambitions, still have the potential of being excellent teachers (non-tenure-track UD position) or excellent researcher (onderzoeker).

Suggestion III: link tenure track discussions to (restarted) governance discussions

Although the governance discussion at the university has been paused until further notice, this discussion can be very relevant for a successful implementation of the tenure track. Clustering of research groups, creating a flat organizations, is essential. Within the clusters all employees with the same functions are put together (tenure tracker, professors, UD etc.) and are all on equal footing. Equal footing concerns finances, 'the right of promotion' (or co-promotion) ('het recht van promotie') and the hierarchical status. Needless to say is that this should be combined with a transparent allocation model.

Suggestion IV: make regulations absolutely clear

The fact that some legal issues, such as those regarding working part time, pregnancy, long term sick leave etc. remain unclear is surprising. At minimum, regulations and criteria of other organizations, such as the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) or the European Research Council, regarding these issues can be applied. Make sure it is clear for the tenure trackers what options they have, for example changing the criteria, or extending their tenure track. Additional policy needs to be prepared on the combination of post-doc period and the tenure track, when both contracts are with the University of Twente.

In conclusion

As mentioned JA@UT is positive about the tenure track, arguing that the whole university organization benefits from attracting and stimulating talent. The tenure track is a valuable and powerful instrument, however the implementation at the University of Twente is by far flawless.

There is one tenure track system for the whole university, but the implementation is different per – and even *within* – faculties. Equal opportunities and equal motivation are essential in the tenure track. JA@UT wishes to stress that *all* tenure trackers should be informed of the tenure track policy, the assessments and criteria. Though lately, because of an inaccurate implementation, some new potential tenure trackers must "recoup themselves" before they can start the tenure track, and are faced with constantly changing starting criteria. Current tenure trackers at the UT are not facilitated enough, which enables them to work freely on their tenure track agreements, produce sufficient publications as first or last authors, and get research projects.

The ultimate goal is to create a generally transparent system, equal for all: providing attractive perspectives with transparent promotion criteria. JA@UT hopes and anticipates that this document has giving some insight into the personal experiences of its members with the tenure track system. JA@UT is willing to further share personal experiences and provide input for improving the tenure track system.

To summarize:

Statements of the JA@UT

- Provide starting tenure trackers with a 'start-up package'
- Not all newly employed scientific personnel needs to be a tenure-tracker.
- Ensure enough research time for tenure trackers
- When evaluating tenure trackers, education tasks, need to be taking into account.

- Legal issues regarding the tenure track should be absolutely clear (such as parental leave, length of contracts etc.)
- Equal opportunities and equal motivation across faculties
- Active lobby – for instance in collaboration with the VSNU – on getting promotion rights for UHD's.
- The tenure track system should be competitive with the programs of other universities.