

AOb sector AE&R– position paper on real Recognition and Rewards

Background

In 2019, a joint position paper “Scope for everyone’s talent” was published by UvN, NFU, KNAW, NWO, ZonMW¹ with the aim of achieving a better balance within Recognition and Rewards (R&R, Dutch: *E&W, Erkennen & Waarderen*) for employees in the sector. The intention is to move away from the one-sided, quantitative focus on research, driven by the amount of publications and subsidies allocated. In addition, the new Recognition and Rewards system for academics strives for greater diversity of career profiles, for team-based contributions, for the making available of knowledge to society and academic leadership. VSNU² has now even produced a Recognition & Rewards magazine, and there is a national ‘Recognition & Rewards programme’ with its own fancy webpage³. Following on from this, the DJA⁴ and NLU⁵ have also published a vision.

Now, the various universities are working on local implementation of this Recognition & Rewards policy. Position papers have been drawn up by the RU⁶, UM⁷, EUR⁸, TUD⁹, TiU¹⁰, UL¹¹, RUG¹². Other universities are still working on a position paper: TUE¹³, UT¹⁴, WUR¹⁵ or UvA¹⁶ will release their papers only to their employees. If we compare and contrast the plans drawn up by the various organisations and universities (see enclosure), we do not see any great differences between them. Most of the documents place a great deal of emphasis on leadership qualities, open science and team science. In addition, diversification of academic careers is proposed.

What does AOb think about R&R? First of all, we can’t escape the impression that all the diversity and florid language makes the R&R dossier pretty indecipherable. Where the available documents get concrete, R&R seems above all to be a formalisation and a refining of the existing assessment instruments and University Job Classification System (Dutch: UFO) profiles. The latter was updated in

¹<https://www.vsnunl.nl/files/documenten/Domeinen/Onderzoek/Position%20paper%20Ruimte%20voor%20iedere%20talent.pdf>

²<https://www.vsnunl.nl/recognitionandrewards/table-of-contents/index.html>

³<https://recognitionrewards.nl/>

⁴<https://knaw.nl/nl/actueel/publicaties/Goed-voorbeeld-doet-goed-volgen-De-Jonge-Akademie>

⁵<https://www.pthunl.nl/over-ptthu/organisatie/regelingen-en-rechtspositie/v2-visie-op-de-ideale-universiteit-van-de-nlu-commissie-erkennen-en-waarderen-def.pdf>

⁶<https://www.ru.nl/onderzoek/random-onderzoek/erkennen-waarderen/>

⁷<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/nl/over-de-um/erkennen-waarderen>

⁸<https://www.eur.nl/media/98856>

⁹<https://www.tudelft.nl/over-tu-delft/strategie/erkennen-waarderen>

¹⁰<https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/nl/intranet/organisatie-beleid/erkennen-waarderen>

¹¹<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/nieuws/2021/01/op-weg-naar-een-andere-manier-van-erkennen-en-waarderen>

¹²<https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/policy-and-strategy/recognition-rewards>

¹³<https://www.cursor.tue.nl/achtergrond/week-2-13/meningen-verschillen-over-nut-erkennen-en-waarderen/>

¹⁴<https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/news/2021/4/1018333/recognition-and-rewarding-of-education?code=9540afd1>

¹⁵<https://www.resource-online.nl/index.php/2020/11/19/minder-cijfers-meer-gesprek/>

¹⁶<https://www.uva.nl/content/nieuws/nieuwsberichten/2019/11/erkennen-en-waarderen-van-wetenschappers-dat-kan-en-moet-beter.html?cb>

the summer of 2021 within the context of R&R¹⁷. Which means that, incredibly enough, R&R actually does the exact opposite of what it intends: instead of offering scope for specialisation, it dictates that members of staff have to fulfil minimum criteria in relation to teaching and research, as well as impressing in the areas of impact and leadership (and patient care within the University Medical Centres). This means that as an assessment system, R&R seems more like a further encumbrance of the current positions, rather than a genuine diversification.

In the view of AOb, the aims of R&R cannot be achieved in this way. In fact, this pushes them even further out of reach. In our opinion, very different measures are needed. Recognition and Rewards starts with a good (permanent) contract and a safe social working environment. It is also important that everyone is sufficiently appreciated in their everyday activities. This requires a working environment free from job insecurity, unreasonable division of tasks, forced overtime and unfairness. According to our vision, we should be striving for a less hierarchical university, within which career development and sustainable deployment can also be achieved by horizontal routes. Employees should be able within one and the same position to place a range of emphases in terms of teaching, research, impact and leadership. The rigid distinction between Administrative and Support Staff and Academic Staff could then be relaxed. It should be clear that we are not in favour of the refining of the current University Job Classification system profiles and levels as proposed by R&R. This would in fact mean a further reinforcement of hierarchies.

Recognition within a socially safe and equal team

How then would we like to see Recognition and Rewards implemented? Our view is given below in relation to various themes:

Team

At present, Dutch universities have a system characterised by lots of titles and a power structure within which power is extremely unequally distributed. Chair groups are led by appointed professors on whom employees (often with precarious employment relationships) are heavily dependent for their work and career prospects. The only formal participation is from the outside, through works' councils and programme committees. Such 'hierarchical' relations imply relationships that depend on power and dependency, and these can lead to abuses. Scandals involving social safety regularly come to light within the Dutch academic world. Time and again, extreme inequality of power proves to be a major contributor to this.

The solution to these problems within R&R seems to be sought in good leadership; something we can agree with. However, aiming for good leadership in itself is not enough. A focus on cooperation and self-management, realistic tasking and a transformation of culture towards a less competitive 'output culture' are just as essential. We do not need a more diverse assessment system for individual academics – which is what R&R is currently heading towards – but rather a transparent consultation system for teams, within which work agreements can be coordinated and individual employees can achieve their maximum potential. This means we need instruments that are very different from those currently being prepared. In our view, the starting point for this is a strategy at team level. The individual annual performance reviews can then be carried out in the light of these team plans. The

¹⁷ <https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/eerste-aanpassingen-erkennen-waarderen-in-functieprofielen-wetenschappers.html>

transition to a safe team-oriented working environment also demands a flatter academic organisation with fewer ranks and titles; but more on that below.

Education and research

R&R complements the movement which for some years now has been emphasising the importance of good education. Alongside the introduction of educational qualifications (such as the Branch Protocol for Quality Assurance in Research, Dutch: BKO), more and more educational (innovation) subsidies and awards are appearing. Furthermore, course and student evaluations play an ever more important role in evaluation meetings. Without a doubt it is important to appreciate good education within an institute providing academic education. The other side of this development, however, is that education – like research – increasingly becomes competitive, and individual successes become ever more important factors in determining the course of a career. This promotes individual competition between lecturers, but does nothing to improve the quality of education at the universities, nor to promote the idea of greater collaboration in teams. The same applies as far as we are concerned to research. R&R should after all respect the work implied put in by academics. This does not mean wasting countless working hours within a system of competition gone berserk, which is what the unbridled urge towards acquisition and publication lead to. Just like teaching efforts, research efforts by academics must be committed in a carefully considered manner and selectively, within teams. As far as we are concerned, this will push back individual competition in education and research.

Career

If we really want to move away from the extreme individual performance culture, we will also have to think differently about career development for academics, with more horizontal career paths instead of just (artificially created) strongly hierarchical, vertical careers with a high degree of job insecurity.

Job matrix academic personnel, current situation:

Highly diverse with a great deal of job insecurity and a lack of interrelatedness with education and research. See also the collective labour agreement for Dutch universities ('cao-nu') and the University Job Classification System (Dutch: UFO)¹⁸.

scale	E&R Position	flex	Research Position	flex	Teaching Position	flex ¹⁹
18	Professor1	4%				
16	Professor2					
14	Assoc. Professor 1	3%				
13	Assoc. Professor 2		Researcher 2	Teacher 2		
12	Asst. Professor 1	29%	Researcher 3	Teacher 3		
11	Asst. Professor 2		Researcher 4	Teacher 4		
10	Junior Lecturer		Graduate student	100%		

In concrete terms, we support the following:

- a. Early career & Tenure Track

¹⁸ For the cao and job level matrix see: https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/nl_NL/cao-universiteiten.html

¹⁹ WOPI figures 2020: https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/nl_NL/f_c_personeel_downloads.html

Academics prove themselves during the first period following their graduation, the ‘early career’ period. This may consist of a job as a lecturer (2-5 years) with a focus on teaching and obtaining an academic teaching qualification, postgraduate study (2-5 years) with a focus on research, or a combined position as a Junior Lecturer (6-7 years), with the intention to obtain a PhD and a teaching qualification. This means the position of Junior Lecturer can be seen as a Tenure Track: Following graduation, you get an appointment for 6-7 years, which can lead to a permanent position as an ‘aspiring professor’. Bringing the Tenure Track forward in this way will reduce the number of obstacles for academics with young families. The prospect of a permanent contract around the age of 30 will contribute to a better work-life balance and greater gender equality. As it is important for academics to also develop internationally, greater investments need to be made in international exchange programmes for members of staff. Other temporary appointments must be limited to coping with “illness and peak demand”. This will lead to the following job matrix: Junior Academic (teaching staff, Dutch: OWP):

- This covers the graduate students, Junior Lecturers (including Researchers 4 and Lecturers 4).

b. Staff positions

Having obtained a PhD and/or teaching qualification, it will be possible to progress through an open procedure to a staff position on the basis of a permanent contract (after a normal trial period) during which members of staff contribute to teams, whereby the interconnectedness of education, research and impact (patient care in the UMCs) is expressed at team level. At the level of individual employees, all members of staff must have the scope to be involved in education and research. This needn’t be all to the same extent. Two positions will be distinguished on the basis of the tasks assigned and the degree of work experience.

- Aspiring Professor (PhD or teaching qualification)
- Professor (PhD and teaching qualification)

All members of staff will be given the opportunity to carry out and to allocate management tasks (instead of fixed tasks) and all members of staff with a PhD will receive the *ius promovendi* (the right to award a PhD). The universities are themselves responsible as employers for their own personnel policy and the job titles they use, so in theory they should be able to achieve the expansion of the *ius promovendi* themselves^{20,21}. The responsibility for the doctoral process lies with the doctoral team, whereby the members of staff who are most involved in mentoring act as PhD supervisors and reviewers as co-supervisors.

Proposed job matrix for academic personnel:

In principle, a permanent job after obtaining a PhD. All staff with a PhD have the right to award a PhD. All staff have the opportunity to be involved in both education and research.

scale	E&R Position	permanent
11+	Staff positions: Professor / Aspiring Professor* *all members of staff with a PhD are entitled to award a PhD	Flex only where this can be justified & is essential
10	Early career: Junior lecturer focus on getting PhD/teaching qualification	Tenure track,

²⁰ KNAW (2016). [Promoveren werkt](#). Amsterdam, KNAW.

²¹ CWTS Bibliometric report (2020) [Rapportage Midterm Review uitbreiding ius promovendi](#), Leiden, CWTS.

	Lecturer focused on getting teaching qualification Doctoral Student focused on getting PhD	With prospect of permanent contract or From Work-to-Work support
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The situation has arisen at the universities that one of the permanent core activities, research, is increasingly being financed on the basis of project-based and temporary finance. Post-doc researchers, who are funded on the basis of this temporary finance, are in principle also entitled to a permanent employment relationship and an obligation to perform a (modest) teaching role. As it has proven possible in other sectors to create permanent appointments on the basis of changing, project-based finance, we argue for a reduction in personal finance, which means that raising research subsidies is principally the responsibility of the functional team rather than the individual researcher.

That the process of de-hierarchisation we describe above is an essential precondition for the creation of the teams to which such a major role is allocated in R&R, speaks for itself. We therefore anticipate that this will have an impact in terms of reduced pressure of work. After all, people working within an extremely hierarchical framework cannot easily defend themselves against excessive pressure of work; people facing bullying are less able to cope with the pressure of work. Creating more permanent positions also makes a positive contribution to the reduction of this pressure of work. This is, after all, also brought about by the current situation of hyper-competitiveness.

Conclusion & recommendations

In AOb's view, we can only really talk about 'Recognition and Rewards' if the academic organisation undergoes drastic modernisation, in such a way that the working climate at the universities is improved. As this involves an essential simplification of the current system of ranks and titles, in our view the R&R programme is not applicable to promotion. This should be focused primarily on selection during the first phase of an academic career. Annual evaluations should focus on functioning with a team and the team's ambitions, with a view to the employee's (horizontal) mobility.

The basis for all of this should be a permanent contract. Selection at the beginning of an academic career and good opportunities for training should mean that regular core activities should in principle be carried out by employees with a permanent employment relationship. The organisation must become flatter, with functional teams, instead of a finely-meshed hierarchy in which an employee can progress a small amount up the academic ladder every 3-5 years through an evaluation and assessment cycle (with accompanying targets and performance measures).

- The permanent contract is standard following successful completion of the 'early career' process.
- We will undertake a transformation towards a flatter organisational structure, with more horizontal career paths.
- We will focus on 'early career' development by reserving the Tenure Track for recently graduated academics, for example in the position of Junior Lecturer (approx. 6 years), and aim for a permanent appointment from the obtaining of a PhD or UTQ to provide a better work-life balance for 'mid-career' academics.

- We will focus the annual evaluation on the functioning and ambitions of the team, and take (horizontal) mobility into account when doing so.
- In relation to promotion, we will assess in relation to the intrinsic quality of the work provided, rather than on extrinsic measures of success (publications, grants).