Radboud Universiteit
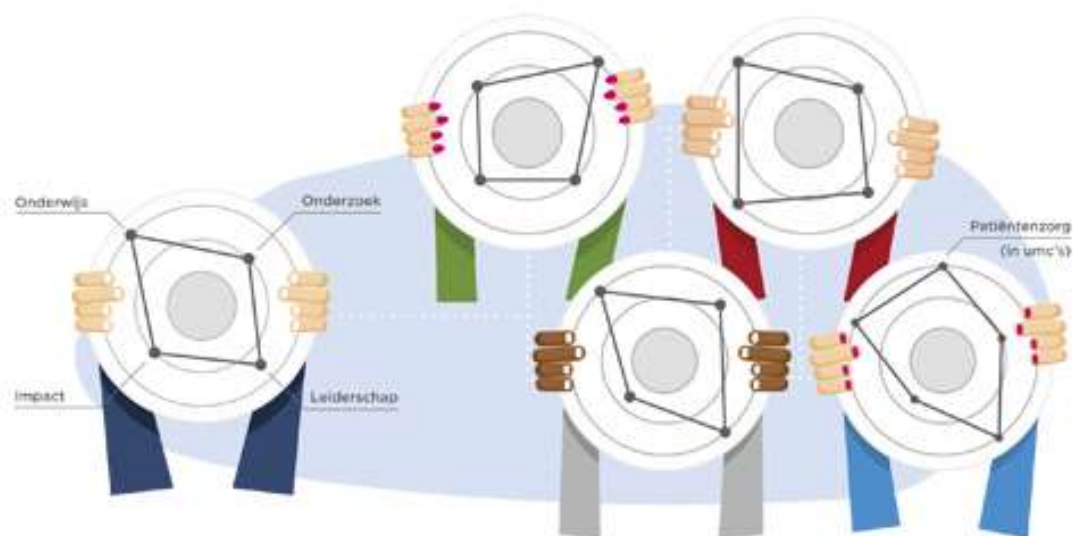
Recognition and Rewards Committee – Radboud University and Radboud university medical center

" You have a part to play!"
Recognition and Rewards in Nijmegen

'You have a part to play!' Recognition and Rewards in Nijmegen

Universities are great places to work. With immense effort and dedication, academics at Radboud University and Radboud university medical center[1] conduct research, teach and (at the Radboud university medical center) provide patient care. In so doing, we advance not only science and scholarship, but also our students, our patients and society. That's what's required of us and we all have a part to play in achieving this goal. The quality of our work is of utmost importance: how can we work together to ensure that science and scholarship flourish? And how do we ensure that academics and all those who support them can flourish at the same time?

There is good reason to ask these questions: they apply to us at Radboud University too. There is widespread concern, both at home and abroad, that university teaching and research is not organised as well as it could be and, in some respects, is not organised correctly. Too often, we employ too narrow – and therefore too restricted – a notion of what constitutes good scholarship or what makes a good academic. The prevailing view is that good science and scholarship means lots of publications, a focus on research, and being better and faster than your competitors. And that those who carry out top research, who raise lots of money to that end, and who therefore publish frequently in leading journals are the only ones deemed to be good academics. This puts pressure on people, but it doesn't necessarily lead to higher quality work.

What it does lead to, however, is a workload that is consistently too high for many of us. We urge each other on, and we sometimes go too far. Things always have to be 'higher, faster, better', but the human dimension is sometimes lost sight of. Often, we are much too focused on output, we routinely compete needlessly with one another, and professional autonomy is undermined by too much hierarchy and control. For many academics, the work-life balance is fragile. Alongside research, academics have many other tasks that tend to be underappreciated at present. This has an adverse impact on the performance of both the university and individual staff.

Each of us will experience the above problems in different ways, depending on our job, faculty or institute and on how far we have progressed along our career path. Yet many believe that the problems are so significant and widespread, and are so deeply rooted in the system of academic work (at the local, national and international levels) that radical change is needed. This is our joint responsibility.

How can we work together to ensure that all talented academics within our university continue to feel recognised and valued? How can we ensure that the university remains

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[1] For simplicity's sake, we often jointly refer to Radboud University and Radboud university medical center as 'Radboud University'.

attractive to them? How can we ensure that our academic practice, with all its various tasks, is conducted effectively? What do we believe constitutes good scholarship and how can we best organise our work, and our work and evaluation processes? These are big questions, and the answers have immediate practical implications for our day-to-day work and the way in which we organise it.

We need a richer understanding of what constitutes academic quality. We need to focus more on collaboration, career diversity and the human dimension. This won't work unless we change our organisation, structure and practices. The system by which we – implicitly and explicitly –value people's talent, efforts and involvement needs to be radically changed. What are your thoughts on this?

This discussion paper marks the start of a debate on the system of recognising and rewarding academic work and academics at Radboud University. It is designed to spark ideas and to provoke discussion and dialogue. We are hoping that it will inspire and motivate you to develop your own vision and to undertake concrete initiatives on campus and in the hospital. Let's tackle this together. You also have a part to play in this!

Text box: Nationwide discussion

Recognition and Rewards, outlined in the position paper Room for everyone's talent, is a national initiative from Dutch knowledge institutions and research funders.

Rianne Letschert, Rector Magnificus of Maastricht University, articulates the need as follows: "*The academic system is crazy. From your PhD onwards, you're expected to constantly peak: to publish frequently in major journals, provide lots of high-quality teaching, win prestigious grants despite minimal chances of success, tell the media about your research and, if possible, provide leadership. And by and large, this all has to happen between the ages of 30 and 40, when people are also wanting to start a family. That's completely crazy.*"

Another standard bearer of Recognition and Rewards is Jeroen Geurts, Chair of the Executive Board of the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMW). He will be satisfied if "*in ten years' time, we have a different and, above all, a broader definition of talent. If we stop looking down on academics who no longer do research or don't secure grants. If there's room for people's individual talents. In your university career, it should be possible to have the freedom to spend a few years focusing more on teaching or on administrative tasks.*"

What's the problem?

The current way in which we recognise and reward talent, effort and involvement seems to be out of kilter in four respects.

Firstly, there's something wrong with the way in which we evaluate the **quality** of academic work. In the recent past, there was ample reason to quantify and objectify quality to a greater extent in order to prevent arbitrariness and provide clarity. But we seem to have gone too far: we now run the risk of *reducing* the quality of our core tasks to what is measurable and objectifiable. This provides incentives for certain types of performance. It has a strong impact on the kind of work that is done and how – unfortunately, not just in a positive sense. Many academics feel that they have little room for reflection and longer-term research (slow science) because greater weight is attached to short-term research and the number of publications. One-sided quantitative evaluations of teaching don't work effectively to actually improve that teaching; lecturers regularly feel undervalued and can draw little inspiration for further development from these evaluations.

The quality of academics is often measured and assessed on an individual basis. A successful academic career often depends one-sidedly on *individual* achievements, which doesn't sufficiently acknowledge that **collaboration** between academics, support staff and students (team science) is the key to academic endeavour. This collaboration is of immense importance not only within our own university, but also between universities and between the university and social partners through open science and open education. However, collaboration is coming under pressure through too one-sided an emphasis on individual performance. That's because contributions to teamwork are currently seen as adding little to your individual quality as an academic.

In this individual assessment of your quality as an academic, there also tends to be too one-sided a focus on *research* performance. This fails to do justice to the importance of the **diversity** of our core tasks as a university and university medical center, tasks to which academics also devote themselves with great dedication: teaching, societal impact, patient care and administrative tasks. These tasks are also vital to the operation and success of our university[2]. This misguided system of assessment and appraisal has created an unfair situation in which someone who focuses on teaching, societal impact or patient care has fewer career opportunities than someone who focuses on research. Moreover, administrative tasks are viewed as a chore that keeps you from work that *will* advance your career. The specific knowledge and skills required to effectively carry out core tasks other than research are underappreciated, leading to the loss of people with talents in this area.

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[2] The 'core tasks' referred to here are the tasks we have as employees, which together contribute to the core tasks of the university as a whole.

When academics carry out core tasks, we routinely lose sight of the **human dimension**. Academics suffer under workloads[3] that are demonstrably too high and they feel that their professional autonomy is undermined due to the growing bureaucracy and control (a form of institutionalised distrust) and the oppressive hierarchy. At the same time, concerns are expressed about an unsafe working environment, with young academics in particular being most affected. This prevents academics from flourishing and does little to promote the quality of academic work. It is bad for students, for patients, for society and for academia.

How can we fix this?

We can fix this by recognising and rewarding the academic work at our university and the university medical center in a different way. This approach must be based on four principles:

Current practice	New principles:
Quality is measured by *quantitative* criteria.	A **richer understanding of quality** to evaluate our work and to reward performance, based on a balance between quantitative and qualitative measures, and aimed at transparency and fairness.
A one-sided emphasis on *individual* performance	More explicit appreciation of task **collaboration**, team performance and everyone's contributions.
One-sided emphasis on *research* performance, applicable to everyone	Recognising the importance of the **diversity** of academic tasks (teaching, research, societal impact, administrative tasks) and explicitly appreciating the corresponding talents and aspirations of staff – variable across staff and flexible over time.
Big emphasis on *hierarchy, administrative (control) processes* and *measurable performance*	Based on **the human dimension**: mutual trust, open communication and striving for a balance between professional autonomy and good governance, and between work and private life.

These principles should apply to the full range of academic staff **tasks,** wich are; **teaching, research, leadership, societal impact, administrative tasks** and **patient care. A**ll of which deserve recognition and appreciation. In no particular order.

With these principles and tasks, the message of the new system of Recognition and Rewards is that 'you have a part to play'. This includes in the quality of your work (which is

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[3] See the WOinActie report and the recent report from the Rathenau Institute.

not easy to measure), in your collaboration with others, in the combination of teaching, research, societal impact and administrative tasks that is appropriate to you, and with an explicit focus on the balance between control and autonomy and between work and private life.

What can you do?

This is simply an outline of the major shift that the university and the university medical center must make in order to balance work quality and the human dimension. We will have to act together to bring about this shift across all the explicit and implicit work and assessment processes, across all tasks and echelons at Radboud University. To start this process, we need a broad discussion and reflection on the university and the university medical center as a whole, on how we should redesign the system of recognition and rewards. This can lead to a broad-based vision with corresponding actions to turn that vision into a reality.

We invite you to reflect on the following questions:

- Do you see yourself in the above? And do you recognise the need to change the system in which we currently carry out our academic work?
- As an academic, do you feel sufficiently recognised and rewarded for your efforts and commitment? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How do you experience your role in recognising and appreciating others and their diversity of tasks? Do you think this could be better? If so, how?

Use these questions to engage with your colleagues, irrespective of your position and job within the university. You can do this at any time: at the (virtual) coffee machine, during annual appraisal interviews, in staff meetings – wherever you feel is relevant to open up the discussion. This will enable you and your department to explore your vision of recognition and rewards, and what you would like to change in practice.

The Recognition and Rewards Committee will actively encourage this discussion by organising discussion meetings (to which you are cordially invited), by providing concrete examples of how things can be done differently (see Annex 1), by listening to your concerns and suggestions, and by helping you to foster discussion in your own work setting. If you would like to take part in a discussion meeting, or if you have questions, comments or suggestions, please email us at erkennenwaarderen@ru.nl .

The aim is to jointly come up with a system of recognition and rewards that does justice to the quality of our academic work and which also supports the well-being of our academics. This calls for both a clear vision and a good deal of concrete action from all of us. We all have a part to play.

Committee

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Members

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Contact

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Annex 1. Examples Contact

Below are some positive examples for inspiration:

More flexible and personal tenure track	FNWI has a proposal for an **alternative tenure track system** whereby a Tenure Track Agreement (TTA) is drawn up at the outset in consultation between the tenure tracker, manager, institute director and dean. The TTA is a customised roadmap stating which criteria are to be met when and setting out who will supervise, what technical/analytical/other support will be available, and what form of mentoring is in place. The TTA is a living document that is used in the annual appraisal interviews and in the mid-term and final evaluations.
Principal lecturers and practitioners	In addition to principal investigators (for research), the university medical center also has **principal lecturers** (education) and **principal practitioners** (patient care), thereby demonstrating that quality of education and clinical practice are valued as highly as research quality. See here for more information.
Teaching performance as a basis for promotion	In 2018 the UK's Royal Academy for Engineering released a *Career Framework for University Teaching*, explicitly stating **how teaching can play a role in university promotions**, depending on a teacher's impact within a subject, programme/faculty, university or nationally/internationally. See also here. Earlier research by the same researcher (Dr Ruth Graham) has shown that there is considerable support within our university for greater recognition for teaching.
Open communication rather than competition	A director at our university was once given resources to support young academics in their careers. Whereas fellow directors held a competition, this director **talked to his staff**. And what happened? All the wishes could be granted using the available funds (and with money left over), without creating unnecessary competition among staff.
Open and safe culture	The chemistry department at the University of York (UK) has an explicit policy of creating an **open and safe culture** that also gives less dominant people a chance. For example, if someone in a meeting makes a point that isn't picked up and that point is then 'stolen' by someone else, going back to the person who made the original point is explicitly encouraged. This was part of a broader diversity policy, which also included more scope for part-time work, and which had a positive impact not just on diversity, but on the overall atmosphere in the department and the attractiveness of the institution for future employees. (Source: presentation Prof. Paul Walton from Donders Institute.)
No hierarchy and control	Buurtzorg, a well-known organisation, has based all its business processes on self-managing teams and its own responsibility. That means virtually **no hierarchy and almost no direct control**. We have had similar situations at our university where a department operated effectively for a long time without a manager. For more examples of organisations (including universities) that are built on trust, see Mathieu Weggeman's book *Leidinggeven aan professionals? Niet doen!*

Annex 2. Values and task matrix

The questions below can help stimulate and streamline discussion.	Tasks			
	Teaching	**Research**	**Societal impact**	**Administrative tasks**
1. How can the <u>quality</u> **of**	... teaching be evaluated, while doing justice to staff, students and the discipline and with findings that are valuable for improving teaching?	... research be assessed fairly and transparently with a view to its content, potency and relevance, without reducing it to measurable data alone, such as the number of publications and grants?	... quality of the societal impact of teaching and research be measured and encouraged, moving away from overly simple checkboxes and with an explicit focus on sharing and disclosing material and data?	... administrative tasks be measured and encouraged in a balanced way, taking into account the perspective of staff, colleagues and managers in both selection and evaluation?
2. How can <u>teams</u> **of**	... academic and support staff work together to allow individual subjects and entire programmes to flourish, and how can they receive recognition for this?	... academic and support staff work together to achieve high quality research, in which the team's result and the contributions of individuals are recognised?	... social partners, academic and support staff work together as a team on an equal footing and how can individuals who bring this about be recognised and rewarded for their societal impact?	... academic and support staff, as well as managers, be best organised, supported and led in order to make the organisation more than the sum of the individuals involved?
3. How can <u>diversity</u> **be recognised and**	... teaching, and specialisms within teaching, receive similar recognition and rewards to research, with corresponding career prospects?	... diversity in the type of research (field, publication method, duration, etc.) and the role of researchers in the research (ideas, writing, applications, etc.) be recognised and rewarded in appraisals?	... societal impact be recognised and rewarded alongside, and as a result of, teaching and research?	... administrative tasks be recognised and rewarded as tasks that are vital for the effective functioning of our university, at all levels (from committee work to the rectorship)?
4. How can the <u>human dimension</u> **be the deciding factor and**	... trust, personal contact and open communication among staff and with students help shape teaching, whereby 'teaching load' as an experience and as a management tool becomes a thing of the past?	... an open and safe atmosphere be created, where both junior and senior researchers work together on both results and personal growth, and where competition is kept to a minimum?	... how can we as a university be open to society and, in open communication, make collaborations a success, recognising all those involved and their perspectives?	... how can the major emphasis on hierarchy and control processes within the university be replaced by clarity and mutual trust, while protecting the more vulnerable where necessary?

Principles for core values