

'Be aware of different career paths and how you can facilitate this'

Mariska Kleemans is associate professor and programme director of Communication Science. Until September, she is also the driving force behind educational development at Radboud University's Teaching & Learning Centre, which was set up last year, and a member of the Radboud Young Academy. A year ago, she was promoted from assistant professor to associate professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Her focus on teaching and leadership played a decisive role in this promotion.

"After my PhD, I consciously chose teaching as my main focus. In addition to Communication Science, I have also studied Educational Science. It's teaching that gives me the greatest satisfaction", said Kleemans. "I'm also definitely a better teacher than researcher, and teaching is where my heart truly lies."

Applying for a Veni grant?

This fact was highlighted for Kleemans when the time came for her to apply for a Veni grant after her PhD. "That's when I realised that, if I secured the grant, I'd be expected to do research the whole week, and that's not what I wanted at all." Kleemans decided not to apply for the grant. "That was difficult at the time because I wasn't an assistant professor yet and I didn't have a permanent contract."

For Kleemans, a teaching position in the Communication Science department was the obvious way to go. "As a postdoc (which included teaching time), I already had an important teaching role in our department. For example, I was one of the few who were interested in shaping the assessment policy, so I gradually found myself in a key position. Unfortunately, I had a temporary contract."

From assistant professor to programme director

But then five years ago, there were openings for assistant professors in Communication Science. "When I applied, there was some internal discussion about whether I was eligible because my profile as a researcher wasn't as strong". Kleemans was eventually appointed as an assistant professor because of her interest in teaching within the department.

"It was on condition that a substantial part of my time still had to be spent on research, and on work for things like grant applications. That was stressful for me at the time because my main interest was in teaching and yet I felt that I had to be a consummate all-rounder."

The situation in the Faculty of Social Sciences has changed since last year. In assessments for promotion, the Faculty's priority is no longer to look primarily at research skills but to include other aspects, in particular teaching and leadership. Kleemans: "to become an associate professor, you have to score an excellent on

teaching or research, and at least one 'good' on the other, supplemented by sound experience in leadership or valorisation, for example. I scored an excellent on teaching and leadership, and was therefore able to get promoted to associate professor and director of the Communication Science programme last year."

What needs to be done?

Kleemans is therefore an excellent example of an alternative career within academia and the new opportunities that have arisen as a result of the policy change.

Nevertheless, Kleemans feels that there is still work to be done. "For example, I won a teaching award in 2017, which really helped me, but I would have preferred it if things had been different. I believe that too little attention is still being paid to talent and motivation and too much to so-called objective criteria such as grants, awards and impact scores."

"Another barrier within our university, and to be honest I still encounter it, is that being a professor is the starting point for many positions. If there's a vacancy for a vice-dean position in our faculty, an email is only sent to professors, not to the rest of the staff."

Kleemans therefore hopes that a project like Recognition and Rewards will be less rigid. "My advice is to think less in terms of structure and hierarchy. In other words, make sure that the steering committee is made up of a wide diversity of people, and not primarily professors."

Different career paths

Kleemans also regards diversity as an important goal to achieve when it comes to roles within academia. To get more people like her into leadership positions, she believes it should be made plain that focusing on teaching is also a career path. "And then you also have to think about how you can facilitate this."

"For example, we have just taken on three assistant professors with a teaching profile within the Communication Science department. That means a 70/30 split instead of 50/50, which is the norm in our department. There are different expectations of these appointees, for example that they will work on educational innovation rather than writing Veni grant applications.

I feel that there should be more possibilities for this kind of differentiation within a position. I don't think that doing just research or just teaching is desirable. There must always be a link to guarantee the interrelationship between teaching and research. In that sense, I don't think it's black and white. But I do have an awareness of different types of career paths."