

Room for Everyone's Talent?

Diversity and Inclusion in Recognition & Rewarding

Wageningen Young Academy, October 2021

Universities in the Netherlands are developing their visions on a new balance in the recognition and rewarding (R&R) of academics, following the position paper "[Room for everyone's talent](#)" published by VSNU and others in 2019. The paper calls for each Dutch university to develop its own R&R policy that allows for diversification of career paths, finds a balance between individual and team performance, puts more focus on quality rather than quantity, stimulates open science, and encourages academic leadership. Such policies should outline and implement systematic changes that allow for more diverse and inclusive routes for academic career development and advancement. The logic behind this is that greater diversity and flexibility in academic profiles and career trajectories can lead to the recognition of a more diverse array of skills and knowledge, career scenarios and work-life balance options, broadening the current narrow definition of scholarly excellence.

We heartily welcome this new vision. But it is important to recognize that diversifying standards of scholarly excellence is not the same as (and will not automatically lead to) acknowledging and advancing diversity in terms of gender, race, disability, faith, ideology, sexual orientation, or age. In this paper, therefore, we call attention to the ways in which Gender⁺ diversity can and should be incorporated into WUR's new R&R vision and policy.¹

In line with the [Gender-SMART](#) project at WUR, we use the term **Gender⁺** to emphasize the recognition of heterogeneity among groups of people who identify with the same gender. It considers the gender dimension as intersecting with (multiple) other social dimensions such as age, race, ethnicity, class, religion, civic status, sexual orientation, health status, etc.

Recommendations

To ensure that the new R&R system is inclusive, we not only need to monitor R&R implementation with an eye on Gender⁺ diversity, but we need to put Gender⁺ diversity and inclusion center stage throughout the process. To this end, Wageningen Young Academy offers 10 recommendations, listed below, related to the development and implementation of a new R&R system and to the content of R&R policies. The motivation and justification for these recommendations are described in the remainder of the paper.

¹ Several Dutch universities have already published a vision on Recognition and Rewards. See for example the vision documents published by [Maastricht University](#), [Utrecht University](#), and [Tilburg University](#).

Recommendations for R&R policies:

1. Strive for an explicit set of clearly defined assessment criteria and indicators for the *quantity and quality of performance and team contributions*.
2. Develop guidelines/policies on the *distribution of tasks* within teams and consider distribution rules to ensure a fair allocation across individuals (e.g. by rotating tasks).
3. Broaden the definition of good *academic leadership* to include a wide spectrum of leadership styles and behaviors and offer leadership development programs that allow current and future leaders to recognize and embrace diverse forms of leadership, as well as programs specifically tailored to women and other Gender+ diverse marginalized groups.
4. Require assessment committees (including those for recruitment and promotion) to report on their decision, reflecting on *all* sets of performance indicators, including the argumentation on which the outcomes are based, and describing how Gender+ diversity was addressed.

Recommendations for R&R vision development and implementation:

5. Ensure every R&R committee has at least one member with expertise in the area of Gender+ diversity. This could be accomplished by directly involving Gender-SMART and/or by hiring external experts.
6. Request every R&R committee member, as well as chair holders and members of recruitment committees and BACs to complete an Unconscious Bias Training. This is an important part of engagement and buy-in from those involved in the R&R vision development and implementation.
7. Require R&R committees to describe how they have addressed Gender+ diversity in their plans.
8. Organize dialogues on what is high quality scholarship for people with diverse backgrounds and abilities and what are explicit and objective criteria for assessing quality in their perspective. Explicitly discuss the influence of stereotypes and biases in how employees perceive and deal with the changing R&R system. Facilitate an infrastructure that ensures involvement of all staff members in these dialogues.
9. Streamline all procedures in recruitment and career assessment processes and accompanying documents (vacancy & recruitment texts, recruitment support bureaus, externally performed assessments, BACs and R&O procedures, talent scouting, prize and award criteria) to correspond with new R&R policies, together with an information campaign in HRM and each Science Group.
10. Start immediately with collecting the necessary information in employee surveys so that data collected, analyzed, evaluated and reported are specific for Gender+ diverse marginalized groups, including cross-analysis where relevant. Ensure a monitoring and evaluation procedure to create regular feedback loops on the R&R development and implementation, using similar disaggregated data. This could be overseen by the WUR Council.

Why these recommendations?

WUR aspires to be an inclusive employer and is involved in [several initiatives](#) to enhance diversity and inclusion in recruitment and career policies, procedures and practices. We still have a lot of work to do, however, to address systematic inequalities in institutional career opportunities. This is especially clear when it comes to gender. WUR employs a low percentage of women among our academics (Figure 1). While almost 55% of our PhD graduates in 2019 were women, women accounted for only 18.5% of our chairholders. With the three Dutch technical universities, we share the dubious honor of

having fewer than 20% female chairholders (Figure 1). But in addition to this, no other Dutch university has a larger decline in representation of women from PhD graduates to the full professor level than Wageningen.²

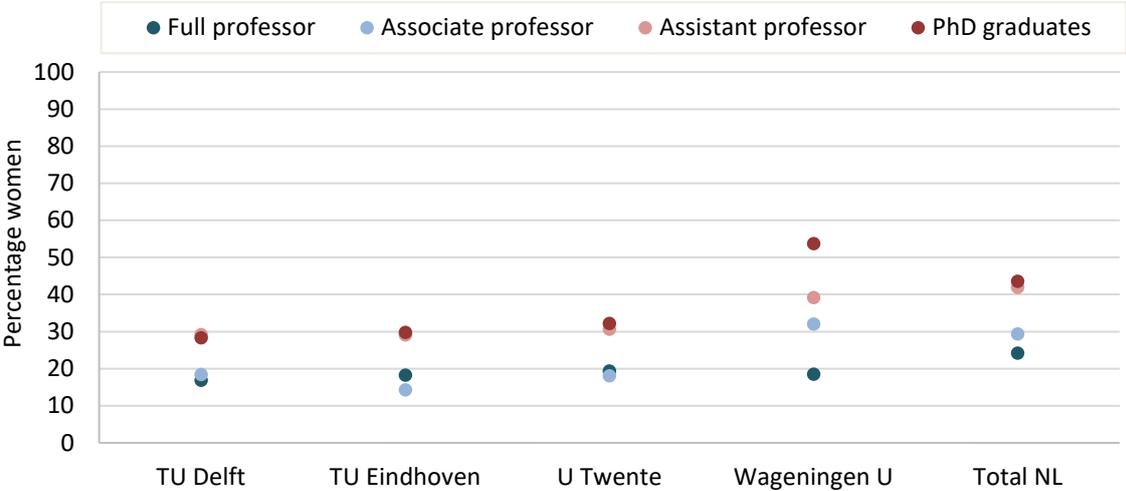


Figure 1: Percentage of women by job category, in FTE, end of 2019

Source: adapted from the LNVH Women Professors Monitor 2020, Figure 1.2.

This so-called *leaky pipeline* is also clearly visible in Figure 2, which shows the composition of all scientific staff at Wageningen University – including “Docent”, “Onderzoeker”, and Personal Professors – by salary scale. Women make up the majority of FTE up to and including scale 11 (UD2) while non-Dutch account for the majority of FTE among PhD students and scale 10. But in higher scales, their representation declines sharply. Above scale 12, the total share of non-Dutch men and women stabilizes around 15%, while the share of (non-Dutch) women falls to less than 10% in HL1. Out of 109 FTE in scale HL2 and HL1 combined, only 16 are Dutch women and 4 are non-Dutch women.

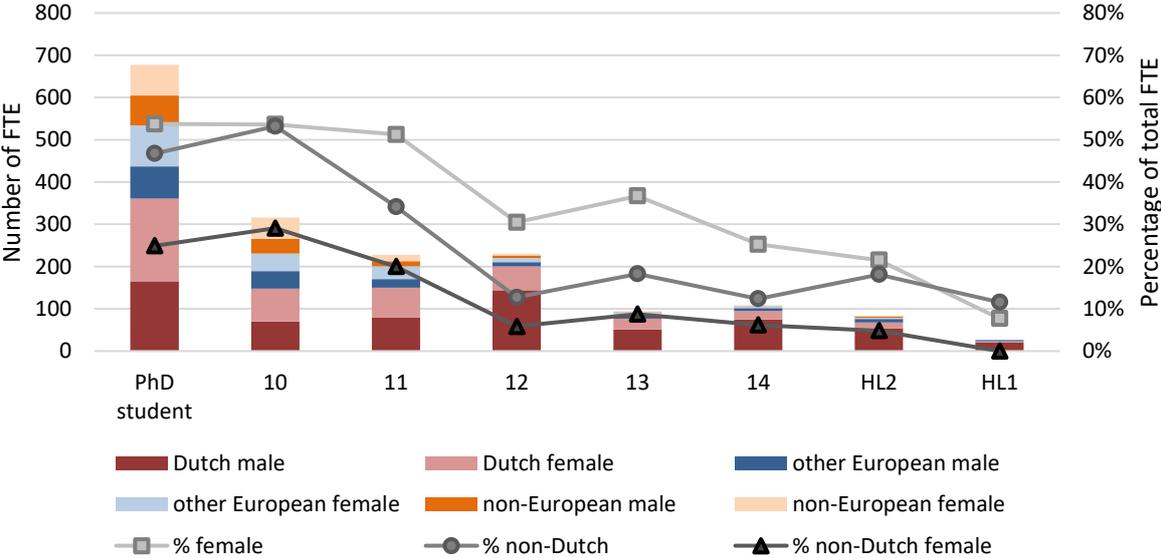


Figure 2: Wageningen University FTE per pay scale, by gender and nationality, end of 2019

Notes: Total number of FTE is measured on the left-hand side vertical axis, % of total FTE on the right-hand side vertical axis. Only PhD students with a contract at WU are included. Source: Wageningen University GenderSMART.

² Landelijk Netwerk Vrouwelijke Hoogleraren (2021), [Women Professors Monitor 2020](#), Table 1.3.

In addition to structural challenges that disproportionately affect women and other marginalized groups (such as norms related to childcare responsibilities and lack of access to networks), many of these inequalities are driven by (unconscious) biases that shape our assessment of individuals' performance. Thanks to recent initiatives at WUR, as well as national and global developments, awareness of the role of unconscious bias is growing among managers and faculty. But awareness is not enough. Policies and procedures for assessment play a large role in determining the scope for bias, and hence a new R&R system is an important opportunity to address Gender+ inequalities in career development and advancement opportunities. However, a new system can also make things worse. This is why we need to take Gender+ diversity considerations into account throughout the R&R process.

Stereotypes are generalizations about groups that are applied to individual group members who happen to belong to that group ([Heilman, 2012](#)). **Bias** occurs when these beliefs affect how an individual is assessed by others. This happens because stereotypes function as cognitive shortcuts in decision making, especially when there is limited information to inform the decision or when criteria are ambiguous. For example, gender stereotypes include expectations that men are more competent at technical tasks and possess more natural leadership attributes than women. Gender stereotypes can lead women to be held to higher standards and their accomplishments to be devalued ([Wynn and Correll, 2018](#)).

Curious about your own biases? [Try taking an Implicit Association Test.](#)

Points of attention

Without explicit attention to Gender+ diversity in the development and implementation of an R&R vision, we are concerned that certain aspects of R&R will undermine parallel efforts to increase diversity and inclusion. Below, we highlight key points of attention related particularly to the increased focus on quality, shifting balance between individual and team performance, and encouragement of academic leadership (these are three of the five central R&R pillars, in addition to the diversification of career paths and stimulation of open science).

Greater focus on quality

R&R aims to reduce exclusive emphasis on quantitative results (such as number of publications and the h-index) and increase emphasis on quality, content, scientific integrity, creativity, contribution to science and society, and acknowledgement of the academic's specific profile and domain(s) in which the academic is active.

A broader definition of success, including more qualitative aspects, is one of the ways in which organizations can increase the representation of marginalized groups. At the same time, however, explicit and objective evaluation criteria are important to reduce bias in assessment and promotion decisions. Pre-defined, explicit criteria, reduce the influence of stereotypes as they leave less discretion to evaluators (see, for example, [here](#) and [here](#)).

- There may be a tension between a greater focus on quality on the one hand, and the need for explicit and objective evaluation criteria on the other.

Another point of concern is that we have become aware of claims that the new R&R system would make it easier for women to get promoted because tenure track would become less challenging with less emphasis on publications and grants – on which women would presumably underperform – and more emphasis on “soft skills” in which women presumably perform better.

- These types of claims demonstrate how stereotypes shape our thinking and point toward the risk of increased resistance to Gender⁺ diversity and inclusion. They highlight the need for continued efforts to raise awareness on the role of stereotypes and promote a more inclusive culture in which we resolve systemic barriers faced by women and other groups, and encourage everyone to develop and apply a broad range of activities and skills regardless of their gender, ethnicity, etc.

Finding balance between individuals and the collective

R&R aims for academics to be assessed based on both their individual performance and their contribution to the team or larger organization. A new R&R system will therefore involve defining the relevant team(s) and developing measures to assess individuals' contributions to their team and organization performance. Here, an important point of attention is related to (unconscious) beliefs about gender differences in performance, which affect the perceived contribution of an individual to a team. As a result, [women get less credit for their team contributions](#). Similar processes likely apply to other marginalized groups, especially when exposed to intersecting social dimensions of inequality.

In addition, it is important to recognize that [women](#) and [racial/ethnic minority men and \(especially\) women](#) are more likely to be assigned or invited to take on non-promotable tasks (such as serving on committees, mentoring junior colleagues, etc.) within their organization. If R&R increases the value of these tasks and/or makes their value more explicit, this could enhance equality in career opportunities. It could however also justify and increase pre-existing inequalities in the distribution of non-promotable tasks. Instead, we should aim to ensure that everyone gets the same opportunity to focus their time and energy on activities that contribute to their academic profile and career opportunities.

Encouraging academic leadership

In the new R&R system, more attention will be paid to good academic leadership at all levels. Conventionally valued characteristics of "good" leadership, such as assertiveness and decisiveness, are strongly associated with stereotypical male or masculine traits. Women in leadership positions therefore face the so-called [double bind](#): if they demonstrate agentic behavior they are penalized for being bossy and masculine, while if they display stereotypical feminine behavior (empathy, modesty, nurturance) they are not considered good leaders.

At Wageningen University (and other Dutch universities), academics are actively encouraged to take courses on leadership to learn how to be more persuasive leaders, with little acknowledgement for the diversity of forms leadership may take. In addition, there is a narrow focus on leadership as an individual quality or set of competences, whereas leadership could also be seen as a [collective](#) endeavor. An inclusive R&R system would require a broader definition of academic leadership and different types of leadership development programs.

To conclude

The points of attention described above have led us to formulate our recommendations. These recommendations are largely focused on policies concerning individual career paths at WUR, which is where the new R&R system will have its biggest immediate impact. Yet, we recognize that a new R&R system alone cannot ensure inclusion and Gender⁺ diversity at WUR, which requires fundamental changes in our work culture and environment. While it is our hope that, with our recommendations, the new R&R system can contribute to these changes, Wageningen Young Academy will also continue to contribute to the broader debate and initiatives to foster inclusion and Gender⁺ diversity at WUR.