

The Gendered dimension

POSITION PAPER

on Recognition and Rewards at Maastricht
University and beyond



 Maastricht University



INTRODUCTION

FEM welcomes the discussion on Recognition & Rewards (thereafter R & R), which, with well-thought-through implementation, has the potential to lead to more fairness, diversity, and better academic work culture. As such, FEM is committed to contributing to the discussion and helping shape the policy and the debate. We recognize that many narratives and position papers have been written to provide input and feedback on the current state of the policy. This is furthermore an ongoing discussion and FEM participates in the diverse fora where R&R is being debated.

In this position paper, we focus solely on those **aspects that have a gendered dimension**. The aspect of gender plays an important role in career advancement and promotion and it is embedded deep within academia. In the following lines, we would like to discuss whether and in so how far the existing R & R vision addresses (and improves) that aspect of academic culture.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE UM PROFILES

We applaud the development of new UM profiles and congratulate HR and the R&R workgroup and all involved stakeholders on the current work. However, currently, the employee and its leadership decide on the profile and its focus components. We wonder, therefore, how it will be ensured that this will not be a gendered choice; e.g. men “pushed” towards leadership and women to service roles and teaching (as is currently often the case)? [1]

In particular, FEM fears that these narratives might in fact limit the growth capacity of academics. Especially for women, life events (e.g. children) may affect the chosen narratives. Academics (mainly women) with child-care responsibilities of young children tend to slow down their research activities, as research is a much more long-term activity than teaching. How will it be ensured that those women will not end up having a non-research narrative? **In general, how will R&R ensure a level playing field for all?**

In relation to that, looking at the data at UM, a significant challenge for academics and especially for women is passing from UD level to UHD level. Obtaining a UHD level is clearly a bottleneck, no matter the narrative. That has always been the challenge for career advancement.

1. See for instance, Susan Bartel (December 18, 2018) Leadership Barriers for Women in Higher Education: THE FIRST STEP TOWARD DISMANTLING BARRIERS IS UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE BARRIERS ARE IN THE FIRST PLACE, BizEd. Available at <https://bized.aacsb.edu/articles/2018/12/leadership-barriers-for-women-in-higher-education> and Maria Elena Hurtado (March 12, 2021) Gender inequality in higher education persists, University World News. Available at <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210312130746862>

It is not clear how the current profiles will tackle this problem, especially as the UD and UHD levels are now in one profile. One idea put forward by R&R is that whereas not all can progress to full professors, recognition, and rewards of careers can still take place at current positions. This is a progressive idea that we fully aspire to. Recognition and success do not (and should not) depend merely on the chances of a vertical climb. Nevertheless, we must stress upon the danger that **women will be the main beneficiaries of these softer 'recognitions and rewards' measures**, namely that women might be the ones receiving some recognition within their position (e.g. bonuses) while men will receive the promotion. We look forward to a close collaboration with the UM to find ways together to avoid these dangers from realizing.

We applaud that the diversity of the faculty career committee is taken into consideration as part of the enhancement of the current structures. We would like to add that it is important to provide specific trainings to these committee members and that the potential biases (e.g. gender, race, age) of these committees are monitored.

Education profile

For FEM it is not clear how (new) assessment processes/structures will support and enable cultural change from the current situation, in which education is less highly valued than research. How can it be ensured that a profile with a focus on education will not be perceived as less successful? **Since women tend to teach more than men**, [2] this could amplify the gap between the genders in academia. Moreover, several studies have shown that female teachers are more strictly assessed by student evaluations. [3] In the current absence of criteria of teaching excellence and talent within UM and the pivotal use of student evaluations, we wonder **how the assessment of the teaching narrative can avoid biased results**.

Research profile

Research is a self-driven activity in many respects and to facilitate it, one needs support, guidance and opportunities from supervisors. We acknowledge that diversity is part of the leadership focus component and the UM core values but these are all optional, the employee could demonstrate their proficiency with other evidence.

2. Erasmus Magazine Hoger Onderwijs Persbureau (March 12 2019) Female academics teach more lectures and conduct less research, Erasmus Magazine. Available at <https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/en/2019/03/12/female-academics-teach-more-lectures-and-conduct-less-research/>

3. Yvonne van der Meent (April 20 2021) De docent als schietschijf: Studenten en quêtes stellen docenten bloot aan anonieme agressie, ze discrimineren vrouwen en de uitkomsten zeggen niets over de kwaliteit van het onderwijs, AOb. Available at <https://www.aob.nl/nieuws/de-docent-als-schietschijf/>

Given the shortage of grants for research and the gendered bias reported in grant allocation, [4] we believe that the research profile should detail how the UM will offer opportunities to properly support this track. For example, we wonder whether **starting grants** will be offered to those choosing this track or whether teaching hours will be offered to reduce the amount of education.

As mentioned above, it is not clear how the research profile will ensure a level playing field for all. We would advise to detail how career breaks (e.g. due to maternity/paternity leave, caregiving, sick leave, etc.) are dealt with. In particular, from the point of view of the employee's promotion track, FEM would recommend a **post-care-leave booster grant or the possibility to temporarily reduce teaching or other tasks to free time for research**. In addition, from the research group or department's perspective, FEM would advise establishing clear policy as to how the workload of the employee that is on leave will be carried and distributed by the research group or department.

If the UM wishes to invest in strong research profiles, **supporting researchers with young children** is a sine qua non-condition to help them achieve their chosen career path. This would entail an array of measures, which could include also more indirect support, for example, reimbursement of travel costs of small children for attending conferences. Please consult our white paper on post-covid relief for more ideas. [5] We strongly believe that part of the support provided to UM to facilitate the chosen career paths must counterbalance parts of the negative effects of gender. We are looking forward to discussing more in-depth possible measures in that direction.

Leadership profile

We fully agree and support the current assessment criteria of the leadership focused profile including interpersonal relationship and D&I. We feel this is an important step forward to move from elements linked only to output and professionalism to creating a culture where the personal needs of others are understood and respected, where a better work-life balance is facilitated and personal circumstances such as pregnancy, miscarriage, a new marriage, sickness etc. can be discussed.

UM Core Values

We applaud that **D&I service work** (e.g. being part of D&I organizations or setting-up D&I initiatives) or acquiring gender-related grants, organizing gender-related activities within or without research/education is considered an explicit part of the UM core values.

4. Cruz-Castro, Laura and Luis Sanz-Menéndez (2019). Grant Allocation disparities from a Gender Perspective: Literature Review. Synthesis Report. GRANteDProject DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20350/digital CSIC/10548>and

5. FEM (2021) WHITE PAPER: Mitigating the negative effects of the Covid-19 crisis on caregivers at UM. Available at <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/diversity-inclusivity/di-organisations/female-empowerment/mitigating-negative-effects-covid>

Concluding remarks

We are looking forward to contributing actively to the dialogue around R & R and elaborating on our input. In our view, the R & R movement is a fresh wind against a stagnated academic lifestyle and we would be more than happy to strengthen it with a more robust approach towards gender-related issues.

**Signed,
The Executive Board of FEM Maastricht University**



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What is FEM doing?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, FEM proactively engaged in raising awareness of its impact on those with care responsibilities, especially women. We have encouraged women to share their stories in order to normalize care perception (including the [#FEMstories](#) on Twitter).

We also have organized two webinars (one on the impact of the [pandemic on female researchers](#) and one on [establishing a kinder research culture](#)) where researchers in these fields presented research showing the extend of the problem and suggesting solutions. Furthermore, we have successfully campaigned NWO to adjust the [VIDI deadlines](#), the ISFR, and we are currently [negotiating with the ERC Council](#) to do the same.

Next to highlight the impact of the pandemic, FEM has continued organizing lunch sessions to raise general awareness on gender diversity and has organized online training sessions on negotiation skills for women. We finally organized [an online festival for women researchers](#) to give them a platform to show their research and engage.

Contact

FEM would be happy to discuss any of the issues raised in our statement in more detail. Any questions should be directed to fem@maastrichtuniversity.nl.