

The new Ghent University career and promotion plan and its consequences for the use of course evaluations by students

1. Principles of the new career plan¹

- On Friday 7 December 2018, the Board of Governors approved a new career and promotion plan for professorial staff and the accompanying regulations.
- The current promotion model with personalised objectives based on faculty reference frameworks is no longer used. **This also means that personalised objectives, annual job descriptions, activity reports, review files and faculty professorial staff evaluation committees disappear.**
- The evaluation cycle will be simplified and will henceforth comprise
 - 1) an integration moment (at the beginning of each cycle);
 - 2) a midterm feedback interview (at least one interview after two years, optionally multiple); and
 - 3) a performance review (at the end of each cycle, after five years).
- The evaluation meeting is initiated by a **reflective report from the professorial staff member**, which looks back on the achieved results and their own performance in university core assignments and with a preview of/view on the next cycle. **Maximum freedom combined with responsibility is the leitmotif.**
- More than ever, the focus lies on **career guidance and coaching** of the professorial staff member in various career phases. Each professorial staff member receives a **tailor-made HR committee**. This committee comprises the department chair of the professorial staff member involved, a professorial staff member from the Educational Quality Control Unit, a member of the faculty board, a peer professorial staff member (full professor or senior full professor level) and an HR expert. The HR committee keeps the balance between helicopter view within a faculty and sufficient contact with the concrete work of the professorial staff member.
- The basic principles apply to **all professorial staff categories**: the evaluation of tenure track lecturers will follow the same principles as for assistant professors and associate professors in the functional career. Personalised objectives also disappear for the teachers' tenure track. For (senior) full professors, feedback interviews are not compulsory but are introduced as an option.
- More information:
<https://www.ugent.be/nl/vacatures/loopbaanpad/zap/zaploopbaan> . Attached some relevant elements from the articles.

2. Educational inspirational framework.

- In the light of this new career policy, an 'inspirational framework for education' was discussed during the Education Council of 10 December. This framework has been elaborated to support each professorial staff member in writing the aforementioned integration document and the reflection report that are part of the new evaluation cycle.

¹ This paragraph contains information as published on: <https://www.ugent.be/nl/actueel/nieuw-loopbaanmodel-zap.htm>

- The inspiration framework is subdivided into **five dimensions**. These are the teaching assignment and its quality, the supervision of bachelor's and master's theses and their quality, educational professionalisation, educational policy and education quality assurance. **Each dimension contains elements that can play a role in the assessment of education** in the career of a professorial staff member.
- The goal of this broad-based inspiration framework is to meet two often heard complaints, namely that the commitment of teaching is currently insufficiently acknowledged and that the approach that now exists is too quantitative.
- In the future it is therefore the intention that, in terms of the educational component, each professorial staff member makes an **evaluation and an assessment of how they perform within these dimensions themselves first**. The professorial staff member can choose their own focus and determine what they want to concentrate on. The self-evaluation forms the basis of the coaching and coaching process that is entirely in the hands of the **HR committees**.

3. A different view on course evaluations

- At the moment, course evaluations are used in two ways:
 - (1) within the context of **education quality assurance**, and
 - (2) within the context of **professorial staff evaluation**

However, many publications on course evaluations in higher education point to the **tension** between the perspective of **educational improvement** on the one hand and the **accountability or assessment perspective** on the other. This field of tension can give rise to unintended and negative effects such as impairing educational innovation. The new career plan means that the role of educational evaluations needs to be revised.

- The use of course evaluations has become an extensive part of the quality assurance system at Ghent University. They have been recognised as an important tool to give students a voice in the quality assurance of education for decades. It is important that course evaluations are carefully used and interpreted. **Course evaluations are not a valid content measurement of educational quality, in this case teaching quality or course quality**, they are however a report of student satisfaction and organisation of a course unit in terms of learning effect, teaching style, structure, accountability, evaluation, course material and exercises. Research shows that the scores on course evaluations are also influenced by factors that (partly) fall outside the teacher's control, such as difficulty level, group size, characteristics of the student group, the experience of the teacher, etc.
- Researchers find no linear correlation between scores on course evaluations and students' learning outcomes. The idea that learning effects are higher among highly rated teachers is not supported by research. This does not mean, however, that course evaluations do not provide valuable information: students should be given the opportunity to speak critically-constructively about the education they receive, and teachers need to be able to evaluate their education and, if necessary, make adjustments based on this feedback.

- The **primary goal** of course evaluations is therefore to provide teachers with insight into the strengths of their education and the possible points for improvement. **Course evaluations are henceforth primarily used in the context of educational development and quality assurance.** Course evaluations are no longer used to compare lecturers with colleagues (e.g. via reference group) and are detached from assessment in function of appointments and promotions. In accordance with the new career plan, it is the intention that course evaluations stimulate self-reflection among teachers with regard to the possibly strong and less strong points of their education, and that teachers themselves take actions if necessary. Teachers can see the results of all items for themselves, as well as the dimensions and also of the suggestions or comments that the students mentioned in the dimensions. Students are sensitised in the questionnaire to answer the open questions constructively and not to use derogatory language as these answers go directly to the teachers.

4. How to use course evaluations within the Educational Quality Control Unit

- With the new professorial staff regulations and the teaching framework for education, the **university-wide reference framework** for drawing up the personalised objectives for the functional career model of the ZAP (Board of Governors 19 October 2012) **disappears**, as well as all **faculty reference frameworks** for functional careers.
- The **scoring table** for the course evaluations, or any **quantitative score** to reflect the general opinion on the course evaluations (or on the educational quality), **will no longer be used**. Neither will evaluations that focus on deviations from the reference group, or on the addition, aggregation, or use of the given scores on the items.
- From a methodological point of view, the quantification of educational quality raises many questions about **validity, reliability** and the difficulty of setting precise **standards** (or benchmarks) that distinguish between high-quality and low-quality education.
- The intention is that from 2019 onwards, the results of the course evaluations will only be used by the Educational Quality Control Unit in the context of the development perspective. The Educational Quality Control Unit focuses on a **qualitative appreciation of the results** and, where necessary, formulates clear follow-up points or suggestions for improvement. Fixed quantitative calibration points or numerical lower limits are no longer used.

5. In concrete terms: FLOW course evaluations

Step 1: The **faculty selects the course units** that are included in the course evaluations. The starting point is that all course units and the responsible lecturers and co-lecturers as mentioned in the course sheet are evaluated every three years. A quicker evaluation is only possible if there is a clear reason (program review, change of teaching methods, change of lecturer,

unfavourable evaluation of the course, explicit request from the lecturer, motivated question from student representatives in the Educational Quality Control Unit and the study programme committee, ...).

Step 2: After completing the survey, the faculty will forward **all reports including open questions to each lecturer.**

All teachers are given the opportunity to respond to this evaluation within a given timeframe.

Step 3: The reports are **discussed** (together with the possible reactions) in the Educational Quality Control (sub) Unit(s) that have been put together for this purpose within the faculty. The committee will check **for which course units it deems a follow-up from the Educational Quality Control Unit necessary.**

(only in case the committee deems a follow-up from the Educational Quality Control Unit necessary):

Step 4: The committee discusses the **action plan**

- If the response from the staff member already contains a proposal for an action plan that is **sufficiently clear and complete** in the Educational Quality Control (sub) Unit's opinion, the professorial staff member is supported to carry out these actions. This step can take place via e-mail or in a conversation with the relevant professorial staff member. The committee can decide their preference. The professorial staff member involved can always request a meeting.
- If there is no reaction from the staff member or the reaction and/or the proposal for an action plan is **insufficiently clear** in the committee's opinion **and/or incomplete**, a meeting is scheduled with the professorial staff member and with the study programme committee chair and/or the Director of Studies and/or the dean to discuss an action plan and to make clear agreements for follow-up. Students can also be involved.

The committee always keeps the development perspective in mind and tries to reach agreed arrangements in consensus with the relevant professorial staff member. In both cases, the professorial staff member is also informed that the following year the course unit will be included again in the list to be submitted to the students.

6. Significance of course evaluations in the career (HR committee and fast-track)

- Professorial staff members are inspired by the inspiration framework for education when drawing up their teacher portfolio. They are free to use the results of course evaluations, evolutions in time, and any comparisons with the reference group **in their integration text, reflection report or teacher**

portfolio. Course evaluations can also be included as one of the possible elements to demonstrate excellence in education.

- The way in which course evaluations (and possible follow-up initiatives by the Educational Quality Control Unit) are included as part of the overall education assessment of the professorial staff member (within the evaluation interview) **is monitored by the representative from the Educational Quality Control Unit** within the HR committee or by the representative for education in the fast-track committee. It is ultimately up to the HR committee or fast-track committee to assess how this is being implemented in the context of the career.

7. Future content of course evaluations

Since September 2018, the 'monitoring committee' has started working on the drafting of proposals for the update of all monitoring instruments for education. Course evaluations are also included in this exercise. Among other things, this committee studies how course evaluations can be better aligned with Ghent University's educational view and how quality criteria that teachers wish to add can be taken into account.

8. References

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