

Vision statement and principles: New career path and evaluation policy for professorial staff

Approved by the Board of Governors, 1 June 2018

*“Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts”
(Albert Einstein)*

This text includes a vision of the general principles underlying the career path and the promotion possibilities for professorial staff members at Ghent University. As such it aims at an adapted configuration for the functional career model for professorial staff (2012-2018).

In a next stage, the professorial staff regulations will be adjusted in accordance with the new principles. Additionally, a university-wide roadmap will be drawn up which allows for a uniform application of the principles in this vision text. In particular, this roadmap will determine the terms and conditions with regard to the timing of evaluations and feedback, the composition of the evaluation committees and the method of supplying the necessary materials to support the ex post reporting on the performance of the previous evaluation period.

1. Objective

The aim is to develop a career model for professorial staff in which the interests of the individual and those of the institution (as a whole) are optimally aligned and reinforce each other. Specifically, the model should **stimulate individual professorial staff members by means of a functional career path to develop and use those talents and qualities which Ghent University needs as an institution to provide excellent education, research and institutional and societal engagement.**

The new career policy for professorial staff is based on mutual trust instead of exerting control. In this context, promotion is the norm: those who perform well will be promoted. With this policy, Ghent University wants to create a positive, stimulating work environment and establish a culture of feedback for the long run. The future career and promotion policy for professorial staff explicitly aims at giving more room to the talents of individual staff members and to join these with the objective of the university.

Since 2012, various 'models' with regard to the professorial career at Ghent University have existed side by side: the tenure track system (for assistant professors), the functional career (for assistant professors and associate professors), the flat career (for associate professors and full professors), the

fast track trajectory (an accelerated promotion procedure for associate professors to the grade of full professor). In 2017, 5 years after its introduction, the system of personalized objectives to promote in the functional career was thoroughly evaluated.

The aim is to bring the career model for professorial staff back into line with the basic philosophy, namely a career policy which is challenging, high-quality and stimulating, based on a vision and result expectations per professorial staff member, emphasizing collegiality and teamwork, with equal attention to research, education and other institutional and societal engagement but with sufficient consideration for the uniqueness of the context, of the academic field and of the environment of the professorial staff member.

The new philosophy of the functional career model for professorial staff makes it possible to view the future career and promotion policy for professorial staff as a whole and to extend its principles to other existing career models for professorial staff categories, such as the tenure track system for assistant professors. This also implies that assistant professors in tenure track will be recruited, guided and evaluated in the same way as other professorial staff members.

2. General principles of a new framework for the career model for professorial staff

Various proposals and visions have been on the table since 2017. As an alternative, we propose the following general starting points for drafting a new professorial career model, based on and in line with the principles approved by the Board of Governors on 2 June 2017:

- i. A good career policy starts from **clearly defined job profiles for professorial staff in 3 job groups or levels**: assistant professor/associate professor/(senior) full professor. In a transparent career policy, Ghent University a priori establishes what it expects from its professors at each job level in generic terms of responsibilities, performance and result areas. This is the 'functional' aspect of the career model for professorial staff. As seniority increases, a professor is expected to make an increasingly important contribution and take on responsibilities at the group level (this could be, for example, the research group, the study programme, the department, the faculty or the institution as a whole). See also point 3 below.
- ii. A good career policy measures the performance of individual professorial staff members against **the strategic objectives of the larger entity/entities** of which the professor is a member. An individual can be active at different group levels (i.e., the research group or multiple research groups, the study programme(s), the department, the faculty, the institution and so on) and can therefore contribute to the objectives of these different groups.¹ Promotions are decided based on the **results achieved a posteriori**, and not based on a priori (exactly quantifiable) individualized objectives. This allows for diversity in talent and, thus, **differentiation of profiles** (e.g., focusing on research or education), which contribute to achieving **a broad spectrum of objectives at the group level**. Central to this are

¹ For the strategic objectives of Ghent University - at the organizational level - regarding research: see, for example, <https://www.ugent.be/intranet/en/research/organisation> and <https://www.ugent.be/en/research/research-evaluation.htm>.

For the strategic objectives of Ghent University - at the organizational level - regarding education: see, for example, <https://www.ugent.be/en/ghentuniv/principles/educational-strategy>.

At the faculty level, reference is made to the strategy and the faculty policy plans for research and education.

the concepts of 'responsibility' and 'generosity': individual commitments are made with the projected strategy and objectives of the group in mind. Working in a context of academic freedom also means taking up the responsibility to achieve the group objectives. Leadership and feedback at the different levels (group-faculty-university) are essential. Leadership refers to, on the one hand, managing academic and supporting staff within research and education in a result- and people-oriented fashion, and, on the other hand, taking up administrative (supervising) mandates/roles/positions. Depending on their own strengths and qualities and in a manner which complements the group, professorial staff members will focus on one or both of these elements.

- iii. A good career policy is based on **trust** in the performance of the individual professorial staff member. As a result, the performance review procedure does not consist of an a priori calculation model to exert control, but is rather a **combination** of an **interim reflection and career guidance** and a **personalized evidence-based retrospective**, including a vision on the future, clearly embedded in the group objectives and the profile description of the current job level of the professor:
 - **interim feedback and reflection moments** including, amongst others, performance reviews *en cours the route* (standard 2 years after the start of each cycle at the level of assistant and associate professor; with optionally a second interim feedback session after 18 months) as a form of positive, stimulating and caring career guidance and coaching of the professorial staff member 'on the job'; this interim career guidance is a task for HR experts in talent development, feedback and performance management *together* with people who work closely together with the professorial staff member and who have a clear understanding of and are familiar with the research/education field in which the professorial staff member works;
 - **at the end of a cycle**, a professorial staff member is asked to provide substantiated accountability about the results achieved and the performance. The aim is **vision- and strategy-driven ex post accountability**. This includes a brief reflection on the own progression in the core assignments and not an exhaustive, detailed enumeration of all activities and output. Quantitative accountability is purely supportive and subordinate to qualitative, evidence-based accountability. Indicators within the sub-domains are not a yardstick (or pure objectives) in itself, but are only provided by the institution as a guideline or tool for the professorial staff member to prepare the accountability. In addition to a review of the performances delivered at a certain job level, the candidate is also asked for a vision of the future or a preview of the challenges the professorial staff member wants to tackle in the next job level (i.e., how does the candidate see his/her future?). The responsibility for this analysis lies with the professorial staff member. The evaluation is done by internal and external parties together (from the professor's close circle and from the HR domain, respectively). These are the same people who were part of the interim feedback, so that these two stages are not separate worlds.
- iv. The **fixed promotion cycles** (5 years / 2 x 5 years / 8 years) are retained. At the own request, a professorial staff member can extend the cycle and postpone the assessment. Periods of illness, maternity leave and thematic leave must also be taken into account (i.e., in the argumentation about the performance delivered within the given period). Being promoted is positive. The fundamental principle is as follows: those who perform their duties properly, in accordance with the responsibility within the strategic objectives at the group level and the

qualitative/quantitative criteria associated with the job profiles/levels, will be promoted to a higher degree after a fixed term, irrespective of any competition with colleagues. In other words, this means that promotion becomes the norm.

- v. In 2018, the **fast track procedure** (accelerated promotion from associate professor to full professor) will be applied for the first time, as provided for in the current regulations for professorial staff. A new procedure will be developed in the future. Projected date of entry into force: 1 October 2020.
- vi. At the same time, an **adjusted HR support programme is being developed to remedy** where necessary. If someone performs less well, this should be communicated early enough, for example, during additional interim feedback sessions, so that adjustment and coaching is still possible. An unfavourable evaluation must be well motivated and supported by a personalized HR support programme (and the possible promotion is postponed to a new evaluation moment).
- vii. In addition to the evaluations in the context of the functional career, there are also regular periodic evaluations based on the job descriptions. These are organised every 2 (assistant professor and associate professor in the first salary scale) or 4 years (associate professor in the second salary scale, full professor and senior full professor), respectively, and additionally after each first (temporary or tenured) appointment or promotion. This is more frequent than the Codex prescribes.² The aim is to align the practice at Ghent University with the minimum frequency as provided for in the Codex. In order **to reduce the planning burden** as much as possible, we will ascertain whether it is possible to combine these two evaluation moments (the regular evaluation as provided for in the Codex and the evaluation in the context of the functional career).
- viii. A good career model leaves room for diversity and flexibility:
 - **diversity in core tasks and within activity domains is possible:** in addition to research and education, institutional and societal engagement is applauded and, within those domains, there is differentiation between activities/results. Leadership and people management is important in research and education, including the guidance of young researchers (with respect to their research/education but also regarding their development potential and career prospects). The functional career model for professorial staff thus not only serves the professorial staff, but also benefits the young researchers under their guidance. In this way, the career policy for professorial staff consistently echoes the career policy which Ghent University has been rolling out for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers in the last 10 years. These policies can mutually reinforce each other.
 - There is **room for flexibility:** New challenges in education, unexpected research findings, 'high-risk' or 'failed' research (failures or dead ends) can be reported in the performance review. This is not restricted by a priori fixed objectives. As a result, there is room for change, innovation and adjustment. We want to encourage more collaboration, not only by committing to objectives at the group level, but also by

² Art. V.46 : "At least every 5 years there must be an evaluation of how each member of the academic staff fulfilled his or her task in the previous evaluation period. The evaluation procedure should provide for a right to appeal to independent appeal bodies. The procedure must fully guarantee the rights of the staff member. However, in contravention of the provisions of the first sentence, an evaluation must take place 3 years after the first appointment."

giving space to multidisciplinary research and education. Creativity and out-of-the-box thinking lead to groundbreaking and innovative research and education, which will also benefit the university in the long term.

3. Professorial profiles: a generic job description

A good career policy starts from **clearly defined job profiles for professorial staff in 3 job groups or levels**: assistant professor/associate professor/(senior) full professor.

Inspiration for these generic job profiles was derived from the university job classification system (UFO), which was developed by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU, the counterpart of the Flemish Interuniversity Council, VLIR) and in which all profiles - also for academic staff up to the highest level - have a generic job description (see https://www.vsnu.nl/en_GB/job_classification_ufo.html).

Starting points:

- The functional career model for professorial staff is a model that is built up in stages: in each job level, **the acquired knowledge, competencies and skills** from the previous job levels are built upon. These are not always repeated in the model, but are *inherently present in each level*.
- As a professor is promoted in his academic career, **the focus shifts from performance at the individual level (own research and education) to performance at the group and institutional level (and possibly beyond)**. For assistant and associate professors the focus is on increasing the level of expertise in educational and research performance; for (senior) full professors the emphasis shifts towards broader employability, more responsibility and higher expertise in leadership and strategic management (at the group and institutional level).
- An approach which focuses on the individual talent as well as the myriad of tasks assigned to a group or team and by extension to the institution makes a **differentiation of profiles** possible (and desirable). In the profile descriptions set out below, responsibilities and result areas are listed, but this does not mean that all elements must be included or that all aspects must be satisfied to the same extent. Depending on the own strengths and the corresponding dedication to the academic core tasks of research or education, someone can be promoted who is “excellent at research/good at education” or “good at research/excellent at education.” Leadership is vital both in research and in education and should increase in terms of responsibilities as an individual gets promoted, particularly from the level of full professor/senior full professor. In addition to research and education being the most important core tasks, institutional and societal engagement is also evaluated in the professorial career. Excellence in the field of institutional and societal engagement alone is not a sufficient reason to get promoted, but clearly provides added value and encompasses a separate activity domain.
- The career policy for professorial staff should be viewed as a holistic approach, in other words, in connection with the HR and career policy for other staff categories (e.g., policy on doctoral students, postdoctoral and other research staff) and roles (e.g., policy on department chairs). A career model for professorial staff is therefore part of an **inclusive HR policy for all researchers**. Being part of an inclusive policy

also implies that the philosophy of a new promotion policy for professorial staff must be extended to a **good recruitment policy** and practice for professorial staff, for example, at the time of recruitment no longer considering A1-publications as a decisive criterion, but explicitly testing the suitability of the individual in the group and the environment in which he/she will end up.

- The context in which a professor works on research and education is by definition international. Those who are promoted have therefore proven themselves in an international context and are integrated in **relevant academic and non-academic networks at a local, national or international level**.
- Apart from the function-specific profiles, professorial staff members must comply with **generic technical competencies** (e.g., language proficiency in accordance with the decree requirements) and **generic behavioural competencies** (e.g., collaboration, integrity and result orientation), in accordance with the core values of the institution.

For a full description of the job profiles per level, see the “Professorial Staff Regulations”.