



Development Dialogue Report University College Groningen Ba Liberal Arts and Sciences

CROHO-number (s): 50393

Date visitation: December 3, 2018

Location:

UCG, Hoendiepskade 23/24

9718 BG Groningen

The Netherlands

Participants:

Participating on behalf of UCG: Dean UCG, Managing Director UCG, Academic Director of Education UCG, Head of Sciences Department UCG, HR Advisor UCG, Faculty Board Secretary, secretarial support

Participating on behalf of the visitation panel (including panel support): Prof. dr. Th. Engelen (panel chair), Em. prof. H.L. Boetsch, prof. S. Abraham, prof. C. Gombrich, Y. van Ingen (student member), dr. M.J.H. van der Weiden (panel secretary), dr. E. Schröder (QANU project manager)

This development dialogue is related to the external visitation of the above mentioned programme dd. December 3, 2018

Introduction

The main topic of discussion concerned the core academic staff development, especially in the framework of University Colleges (UCs), which are considered foremost as teaching institutions and not institutions where research is conducted. This raises concerns with regards to the career development of staff and their research activity. UCG believes that this issue needs to be addressed, especially due to the fact that staff is also affected in terms of workload, commitment and ongoing motivation. Moreover, this issue is of great importance as it also affects the further development of UCG as a Faculty and the Liberal Arts Education Programme it offers.

The expected outcome of the discussion would be the provision of advice and suggestions that would help UCG address the issue at hand, looking at (best) practices from other UCs in the Netherlands and abroad.

Restricted research activity at UCG

In identifying the source(s) of the problem, UCG should look at its faculty model but also its size. Conducting research in a small and autonomous faculty may be proven to be challenging since there is small capacity for research and the scope of UCG does not allow research development when comparing to other faculties and the wider University of Groningen. Nevertheless, the existing autonomy allows UCG to develop its own programmes and eventually combine double programmes (in education & research), however the lack of funds and the existing financial constraints makes this endeavour challenging. The difficulty of conducting research at UCG is especially visible in the Department of Sciences, mainly due to the lack of facilities and laboratories. The main risk for Sciences staff lies within the fact that the reduced research opportunities – and increased teaching opportunities – increase the risk of disconnection with staff's specific track of research and field of expertise. The panel suggested that this is an issue observed throughout all UCs in the Netherlands.

In early 2018, the network of UCs Deans (UCDN) have expressed their mutual concern on the matter and by means of sending a collective letter to the Board of the University. The Board of the University has reacted to this letter and acknowledged the problem, however stressing the fact that it is perceived as a wider problem of UCs.

Increasing research at UCG

The importance of developing a network of research institutions, with which UCG staff can be affiliated, is great, as it will allow them to engage in research. Nevertheless, such efforts are dependent on the existing relations of UCG with the other UoG faculties, as well as the UCG staff external network and by extension the affiliation with accredited research institutions. The Heads of Departments and Academic Directors have a pivotal role in developing these connections with other faculties.

Moreover, at the moment UCG can only offer 20% research time for core UCG teaching staff. Nevertheless, many staff members choose a teaching career within UCG, while also pursuing their research interests. During the hiring process, candidates are always asked about their connections within the RUG, which is a catalyst in developing their research time within the allocated time frame. UCG is trying to improve the current situation and find ways to assist the staff members in remaining active as researchers as well as teachers.

Professional development at UCG and UCs in the Netherlands

An issue of great importance is the difficulty of combining the teaching and research tasks in the environment of UCG but also other UCs in the Netherlands, which gives the impression of reduced possibilities for professional development for staff (i.e. professorship promotions). When comparing the Dutch UCs case against other cases, as for example UCs in the UK, the difference is significant. In the UK, professional development for UC academic staff can be achieved through teaching, innovation and leadership, and not solely through research.

It can be deduced that a change in the culture and the way UC education and UC academic staff are viewed is required. Possible solutions to remedy or improve the current situation, at least concerning UCG, may include an increase in the funds provided for research, considering an increase of promotion opportunities and eventually showcasing more appreciation for teaching.

Teacher-scholar model

UCG has been considering the teacher-scholar model, which is a US model that would apply for UCG staff. This model comprises of three components: (a) Teaching; (b) Professional development (research, conference presentation, publishing at least one paper every year); (c) Service (participation to committees). Based on the teacher-scholar model, a teacher is evaluated on teaching excellence and research, focusing on the way research is actively utilised in the methods and content of teaching. It is vital that there is a link between the teaching and research components. This model requires excellence in teaching and at the same time provides increased incentives and professional development possibilities for staff (i.e. tenure, promotions).

UCG has been considering ways of combining and connecting research and teaching within its curriculum and encouraging the development of research projects by staff and students. For instance, modules such as the Free From Assignment, Internships and Project Work (as part of the Academic Core) are stellar examples of how staff's research interests are combined or carried out through teaching. Moreover, UCG is also trying to further develop the concept of students doing their thesis on a topic related to the research of their supervisor, which could also lead to the composition of a joint article after.

In conclusion, it is important to consider the way UCG would like to develop its culture as a UC. It is clear that research should be considered in a different way within the UC model and employed in innovative ways through teaching. The US model of the teacher-scholar could potentially work for the Dutch UCs. Nevertheless a cultural change is needed, which would require time and collaboration. The UC Deans Network is a platform that could help in changing the existing culture and place the importance of recognising teaching on the table and agendas of the Dutch Universities, but also the decision makers of the Dutch Education system.