



SUMMARY

Recognition & Rewards Culture Barometer

Summary of the second
measurement report

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Summary

In this summary [Chapter 5 of the report], we present the key findings from the second survey and the most relevant differences compared with the first survey.

Since 2020, Dutch universities, university medical centres, research institutions, and research funders have been working together through the Recognition & Rewards programme to achieve a new balance in the recognition and rewarding of academic work – one in which everyone’s talents are valued. In early 2024, a survey was conducted among academics at participating institutions to assess whether the programme’s objectives were being achieved, how staff experienced the changes, and where adjustments might be needed. The 2026 survey repeats the 2024 measurement to provide insight into the extent to which the intended culture change is being realised. The results of the second Culture Barometer can be summarised as follows, organised around three main themes:

Awareness

Awareness of the programme prior to completing the survey stood at 45%, representing an increase of 5 percentage points compared with 2024. Awareness varied across disciplines: the programme was most widely known in the Social and Behavioural Sciences and least well known in Health and Engineering. The best-known ambitions of the Recognition & Rewards programme are its focus on quality rather than quantity and its promotion of all aspects of Open Science. All ambitions receive a high level of support. Respondents from the Natural and Life Sciences, Engineering, and Economics are somewhat less supportive of the programme’s various ambitions than respondents from other disciplines. Apart from a modest increase in the proportion of academics familiar with the programme, the pattern of differences between groups is largely consistent with the findings from 2024.

Within institutions, communication about Recognition & Rewards remains limited, with the greatest attention being paid to the programme at general universities and among assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors. Communication is least prevalent in the fields of Health and Engineering. A majority of respondents feel recognised, valued, and rewarded, but for more than a quarter this is (entirely) not the case. In general, respondents feel somewhat less recognised than valued, while the sense of being rewarded remains the lowest. Full professors, medical specialists (including professor-medical specialists), and PhD candidates report the highest levels of recognition and appreciation, as do younger and older respondents compared with those in the middle age groups. Men and women report feeling more valued than non-binary staff and those who did not disclose their gender. The programme’s positive effects are most visible at the local and individual level, including greater appreciation of teaching and societal impact, more room for diverse career profiles, increased attention to teamwork and leadership, and more open annual review conversations. At the same time, respondents express significant concerns about unclear assessment criteria, the feeling that they are expected to excel in all domains, and an increased workload.

Experience

Respondents perceive the fewest changes resulting from Recognition & Rewards at the system level, somewhat more at the cultural level, and the greatest changes at the policy level. At the same time, many staff members feel that structural changes have yet to materialise. PhD candidates are more positive than average across all areas of change. Around one in ten respondents reports experiencing negative changes. Positive experiences are relatively more common in the disciplines of Agriculture and Applied Life Sciences, Engineering, and the Social and Behavioural Sciences.

At 42% of institutions, staff can choose between different career pathways. More than half of the respondents who have this option have done so and are generally positive about their experience, particularly full professors and PhD candidates. Lecturers and assistant professors are more moderately positive. Respondents in several STEM and application-oriented disciplines are also more positive than average. At the same time, there is a widespread perception that alternative career pathways offer less status, less transparent criteria, and fewer opportunities for promotion. Respondents strongly favour quality over quantity and place great value on societal relevance, but opinions are divided on whether professional development genuinely carries more weight than formal assessment.

Many staff members lack sufficient insight into the criteria used for recruitment and promotion, particularly PhD candidates and lecturers. Research continues to be regarded as the most important domain for career progression, although respondents believe that teaching, teamwork, and open practices should carry greater weight and that the relative importance of research could be reduced somewhat. This picture has changed little since 2024. Respondents also feel that success in securing research funding is given too much weight and call for a more tailored approach that takes individual talents, ambitions, and career stages into account.

In the areas of teamwork and culture, a modest positive shift is visible in 2026 compared with 2024. More staff members report that managers recognise everyone's contribution to team success and that team objectives are discussed more frequently, although respondents remain cautious about the idea that collective achievements should be valued more highly than individual ones. A large majority view their own work as contributing to team and institutional goals. This group is almost unanimous in describing collaboration with colleagues as motivating and rewarding. In more than half of all teams, providing feedback to one another is considered normal practice, although this is still not the case in around one-fifth of teams.

As in 2024, support for Open Science in 2026 is considerably stronger than support for Open Education. Open-access publishing (75%) and data sharing (60%) are widely encouraged and show a modest increase, while the sharing of educational materials continues to lag behind and perceived encouragement has even declined slightly. Full professors, medical specialists (including professor-medical specialists), researchers, and PhD candidates are more likely than other groups to feel encouraged to engage in Open Science, whereas lecturers report no additional encouragement with respect to Open Education. In certain disciplines, such as Agriculture and Applied Life Sciences, Engineering, and Education, levels of encouragement are above average, while Economics and Law lag behind.

With regard to leadership, there is slightly more attention to leadership development in 2026 than in 2024, and respondents are somewhat less likely to feel that managers lack sufficient time to fulfil their leadership responsibilities. More than half report being encouraged to develop personal leadership skills and observe attention being paid to team development. Full professors, researchers, and PhD candidates are more positive in this regard than assistant professors and lecturers. Overall, the findings point to gradual and partly positive cultural change, but also to persistent concerns about structural embedding and recognition.

Concerns and opportunities

In 2026, a substantial proportion of respondents express concerns about the Recognition & Rewards programme, in many cases to a greater extent than in 2024. Concerns include doubts about the practical feasibility of the programme's ambitions, unequal recognition of different career profiles, and the potential impact on the quality of teaching and research. Academics also report feeling pressure to become a 'jack of all trades' and one-third of respondents believe that international mobility may be hindered. Associate professors, assistant professors, and lecturers are particularly likely to express career-related concerns, as are staff in the disciplines of Economics, Law, Social and Behavioural Sciences, and Language and Culture.

Men are less concerned about recognition but more likely to express concerns about declining quality. Women and non-binary respondents are more likely to report concerns about appreciation. Staff aged between 30 and 50 report the highest levels of concern, while respondents aged 55 and over are relatively more likely to fear a decline in quality. Concerns are also reported more frequently by staff with permanent contracts and by respondents with a non-Dutch nationality. These patterns are largely comparable to those observed in 2024, although there has been a slight increase in some areas.

Where expectations of the Recognition & Rewards programme were predominantly positive in 2024, experiences in 2026 paint a more moderate picture. In 2024, almost half of respondents expected the programme to increase their enjoyment of work; by 2026, only 15% report actually experiencing this benefit. The anticipated reduction in frustration has likewise materialised only to a limited extent. For two-thirds of respondents, workload has remained unchanged, but almost one-third report an increase. Associate professors and assistant professors report higher levels of frustration and workload, whereas PhD candidates and researchers are more likely to experience positive effects. Negative effects are reported more frequently in the Natural and Life Sciences, Economics, Social and Behavioural Sciences, and Language and Culture, while respondents in other disciplines more often report positive effects. Younger respondents tend to be more positive; from the age of 35 onwards, negative experiences become more common. Managers and staff with permanent contracts report higher levels of frustration and workload. Women are on average slightly more positive than men, while non-binary respondents report greater levels of frustration.

Respondents broadly support the ambitions of Recognition & Rewards, but they also point to a gap between policy and practice. Although a broader range of talents is intended to be recognised and valued, traditional criteria such as publications and grant funding continue to play a decisive role in appointments and promotions. According to respondents, structural factors – including high workloads, budget cuts, uncertainty about permanent appointments, and competitive funding mechanisms – hamper implementation. Without clear and transparent criteria and sufficient resources, there is a risk that the programme will remain largely symbolic or lead to greater subjectivity. At the same time, respondents view Recognition & Rewards as a necessary cultural change, provided that its principles are applied consistently and visibly in policy, leadership, and career development.

Final comments

The Recognition & Rewards programme was known to fewer than half of the respondents before they completed the survey. Awareness has nevertheless increased compared with 2024. Levels of awareness vary across institutions and disciplines. Respondents support the programme's ambitions and observe its effects in practice, for example in policy developments, leadership, and a growing emphasis on quality. At the same time, the results reveal substantial differences between groups and point to an increase in concerns about the programme. Survey participants also repeatedly emphasise that the programme can only succeed if the necessary conditions are in place.

The findings provide valuable guidance both for the programme itself and for participating institutions. They highlight areas where greater focus may be needed and point to opportunities for strengthening positive effects and creating the conditions required to mitigate negative ones and support successful implementation.



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