

Lunch lecture about the Tenure Track System on 29 October 2015

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A tasty free lunch and a very interactive discussion about the tenure track system illustrated the latest lunch lecture organized by the VLAG PhD council. 30 VLAG PhD candidates joined the lecture to discuss together with Ineke Ammerlaan (Management board AFSG), Elke Scholten (assistant professor in tenure track at FPH) and Gerry Jager (assistant professor in tenure track at HNE) the current tenure track system at Wageningen University.

Ineke first presented the tenure track system with its structure and requirements. The tenure track system was introduced in 2009 by former Rector Magnificus Martin Kropff. The principle of this career policy is to provide room for top talent. The policy goal is to enhance the quality of scientific research and education at WU. Talented academics that deliver top quality can become professor holding a personal chair. The idea is that this will attract and motivate top level academics. Every three years a 'tenure tracker' is evaluated by a committee based on publications, education, grant money, number of PhD candidates, and their vision. The complete tenure track takes ideally 12 years (two levels as assistant professor, two as associate professor) and will result in a personal chair within a research group if all criteria are met and positively evaluated.

Even though the evaluation criteria are not flexible, motivations for starting a tenure track can be different in practice. Elke Scholten wanted to stay in academia, combining both research and education. Due to missing alternatives, she decided to go for the tenure track system. Gerry Jager, on the other side, deliberately chose Wageningen University and the tenure track, aiming at an academic career resulting ultimately in a personal chair. At this moment, Wageningen University does not offer alternative academic careers focussing more on personal interests and strengths like an emphasis on teaching or an emphasis on research. Further compromises might have to be made in terms of your field of research, depending on the vision of your chair group and funding parties. Even though tenure trackers are sometimes competing for the same grants, interdisciplinary research by joining forces might help to secure funding.

The start of a tenure track position depends on the financial situation of the research group, among others. The position as a tenure tracker is paid by the research group, but in general the tenure tracker has to apply and aim for funding of PhD candidates with help of his chair holder (to build up an own group). If he/she doesn't succeed, possibly delays in his/her research output (publications) may occur.

During the lunch lecture, it was also discussed that workloads are clearly (between 25-50%) above the official weekly hours. While this might be related to the high requirements and expectations of a tenure tracker, it is of course also person specific and might further depend on the topic (education, grant writing, research, PhD supervision) or research group. In our opinion, it remains debatable whether this discrepancy between official and aimed weekly hours should be just accepted as part of the tenure track system or any other higher position outside the university.

It is worth mentioning that academic careers and in particular tenure tracks differs from country to country, and also from university to university. Staying in academia can thus have different forms depending on where an academic career is pursued.

Finally, Elke and Gerry were asked if they would have chosen for Tenure Track if alternative employment would have been available. Both indicated that they would still choose for Tenure Track, because of the growth opportunities the TT-system offers.

This lunch lecture gave very useful and interesting insights into the tenure track system at Wageningen University by shared experiences of assistant professors Gerry Jager and Elke Scholten, complemented with outlining the general structure and requirements by Ineke Ammerlaan. The high involvement of PhD candidates by their questions showed that there is not only a strong interest in academic careers, but also in the conditions and requirements connected to them.



Introduced in 2009 by Martin Kropff: WU aims at excellence, Room for top talent

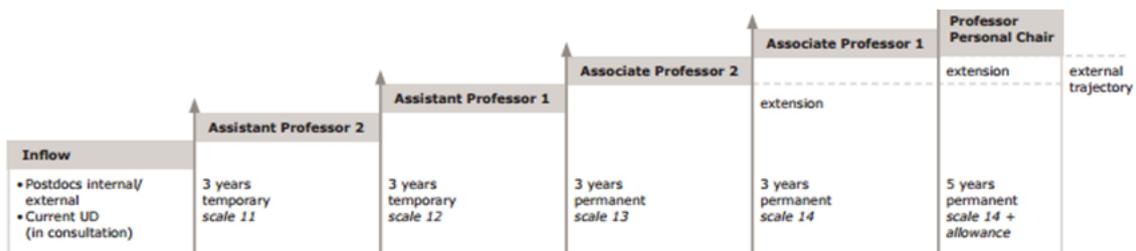
no financial restrictions, no competition

'This career policy ensures that Wageningen University can attract ambitious and talented academic staff from all over the world. If a young talented scientist applies for a position, it is not just for the position of Assistant Professor, but for a great career opportunity. Talented academics that deliver top quality can become Professor holding a Personal Chair. That attracts and motivates top level academics.



Prospect

- to become professor holding a personal chair
- within 12 years (if starting at Assistant Professor level)
- Provided the assessment procedures are passed



If not: the position will end

(minimal) assessment criteria UD2

- Education : 560 hrs/yr (0,3 fte), UTQ (BKO), course evaluations > 3.7, assessment by chair holder : good or excellent
- Research: 2 Q1 pub/yr, av. supervision 1.5 PhD/yr, increasing with career steps
- Acquisition results, from UHD2: 4 new PhD-projects in 6 years
- Personal competences (management, teamwork)
- Vision on own scientific field, research objectives
- International visibility and recognition

Teaching and research qualities are equally important

Support on social skills by Leeuwendaal (company for training and coaching)