**The long term**

Our quickly changing society demands 'lifelong learning', but the Netherlands do not yet seem to be in a hurry to achieve this. Utrecht University is trying to enhance its postgraduate offering. How can it be designed to appeal to potential participants? 'Teachers need to be aware of the fact that they are dealing with a critical and very demanding target audience.'

**Lifelong learning**
**Starting points for postgraduate education**

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In an international environment where knowledge is constantly developing at a high pace, the level of educational attainment for the working population is an important factor in the rivalry between regions and countries. Accordingly, it is essential for professionals to keep learning, and postgraduate education can play a significant role in this respect.

In the Netherlands, adult participation in (higher) education is severely lagging behind, compared to other countries with a similar level of development (WRR, 2013). The proportion of workers who study alongside their job has been fairly stable at around 16.5 percent for years, while it should be increased to at least 20 percent by 2020, according to the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR). Employers should also

**In the Netherlands, adult participation in education is severely lagging behind**

take their responsibility in this regard. Between 20 and 35 percent of employers still do not allow their employees to take part in any kind of education. That is why, in 2014, the advisory committee *'Flexibel hoger onderwijs voor volwassenen'* ('More flexible adult education') concluded that incentives are necessary in improving this participation rate.

A possible incentive would be the creation of a range of modular courses that can be taken alongside a job or allow for care responsibilities. Moreover, the Economic and Social Council (SER, 2017) is of the opinion that the learning culture in the Netherlands needs to be improved. The SER proposes an ambitious plan for a national agreement in which various parties cooperate to create a range of incentives, ranging from an individual drawing right for employees (which clarifies which funded training opportunities are available) to favourable tax conditions.

**Distinctive and inspiring**
Utrecht University wants to stimulate lifelong learning. Its Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 sets out to create a distinctive and inspiring range of lifelong learning programmes by 2020. This needs to meet the demands of alumni and professionals in staying up-to-date on insights from current research and their application in professional practice. The university is developing this range in close collaboration with social partners. By offering postgraduate education next to education aimed at a basic qualification, Utrecht University reinforces its ties with society. Moreover,

**Equality, reciprocity and co-creation are relevant concepts**

educational institutions benefit from contact with professionals, as the latter contribute (practical) knowledge. Equality, reciprocity, and co-creation are relevant concepts in this respect.

In order to realise this ambition, Utrecht University has set up the *LifeLong Learning* programme and started a project in which two faculties (Medicine and Law, Economics and Governance) and the

interfaculty Graduate School of Teaching (which provides teacher education) cooperate. They are developing a coherent approach towards lifelong learning and a corresponding didactic approach that will subsequently be tested.

Taking this into consideration, the characteristics of the target audience were explored through literature research and by inventorying the experiences with postgraduate education of both faculties and the graduate school. The literature research and the exploration also formed the basis of describing a didactic approach through which this target audience may be best served.

### Implicit knowledge

Professionals have often developed themselves into experts in executing their professional tasks through experience and by working on the quality of their task execution in a focused manner (Ericsson, 2006). Through courses and experience they have, consciously or unconsciously, gained (often procedural) knowledge that forms the basis of their expertise (Eraut, 2004). This knowledge forms the basis of the ability to recognise patterns in a split second and to act appropriately, which means they can quickly and intuitively adapt to situations that occur within their familiar domains (Ericsson, 2006).

Because a lot of the knowledge that is at the basis of their professional routine is implicit, professionals often have difficulty reflecting upon their own knowledge and routines and adjusting them if new insights demand that (Van Gog et al., 2005). The degree to which they are able to make explicit their own knowledge base and the related routines has consequences for their options and for their willingness to develop (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2014; Van Tartwijk, Wubbels & Zwart, 2017). This willingness is also a factor in the reasons for professionals to participate in postgraduate education. Their motivation may vary from intrinsic, if it is based on personal, substantive interest, to extrinsic, if education is required to improve career opportunities, or simply to maintain a competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Smid, 2001).

The target audience is characterised not only by a large heterogeneity with regard to age and prior education, but also expertise and motivation, as well as options, should participants want to combine their education with a job or care responsibilities. Additionally, this combination of learning and working often causes professionals to feel that what they learn should be applicable to their professional practice and that practical situations should provide input for new learning possibilities (Blume et al., 2010; De Rijdt et al., 2014).

An educational institution that wants to offer postgraduate education will have to set specific goals that tie in well with the requirements of this target audience.

### Educational goals

Based on the inventoried experiences and the literature research, we have formulated a number of educational goals that postgraduate education should realise. The education should help participants:

- to be up-to-date as regards the relevant subject matter;
- to develop themselves into adaptive experts;
- to know how to make their way in a community with other professionals;
- to be self-sufficient.

### Up-to-date-professionals

A quickly changing, knowledge-based society demands the accessibility of recent scientific

**The target audience is also characterised by a large heterogeneity in expertise and motivation**

insights to professionals, so they can stay up-to-date (Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004). Through university education, they will not only acquaint themselves with recent research results,

but also with new techniques that are important in their professional domain (medical techniques, for instance). In order to ensure participants can function well after finishing a postgraduate programme, the focus of the programmes will be on the process of independently maintaining their knowledge and skills (Kehm, 2001).

### Adaptive experts
The ability to adapt is one of the elements of the key concept of 'responsiveness', which is necessary for the learning economy, according to the WRR report (2013). As part of lifelong learning, we train professionals to become 'adaptive experts'. They will have the ability to solve problems in new situations where their routines fall short (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2015). This way, adaptive expertise complements routine expertise, which is used in case of familiar tasks. This is not an ability that develops automatically as a by-product of experience. Adaptive expertise requires an attitude that has to be developed and strategies that have to be learned. Professionals have to keep honing this learning attitude and these skills over the course of their careers (Mylopoulos & Regehr, 2009). Adaptive experts reinforce their capacity for innovation in their education and profession. Innovative behaviour in organisations is characterised by professionals that generate, promote, and realise ideas of their own accord (Janssen, 2003). Reflection is an important element of innovative behaviour, as it leads to the search for new solutions. Other than that, problem-solving behaviour and knowledge of the relevant subject matter are also positively related to innovative behaviour (Thurlings, Evers, & Vermeulen, 2015).

### With other professionals
In a society where virtually nobody works in professional silos and virtually everyone encounters multiple disciplines and socio-cultural contexts, the

### Every socio-cultural group uses a language that expresses and confirms its own reality

importance of boundary-crossing competencies grows. Every socio-cultural group uses a language that expresses and confirms its own reality. Those possessing boundary-crossing competencies can connect multiple, diverse socio-cultural contexts (Walker & Nocon, 2007). Socio-cultural differences lead to experiencing discontinuity, but they can also contribute to education (Bakker & Akkerman, 2014). Five learning mechanisms can be recognised in this respect: identification, reflection, coordination, and transformation (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). This that learners benefit from an open attitude towards new contexts (Walker & Nocon, 2007).

### Self-sufficient professionals
Developing and constantly revisiting your professional identity is a necessary condition for professional learning (Eteläpelto et al., 2014). Situations such as organisational reform, changes in the range of tasks or responsibilities force or require professionals to redefine their professional identity. Vice versa, changes in professional identity can also lead to changes in the job. This requires agency and manoeuvrability from professionals if they have to propose new and creative ways of working. Agency exists when professionals or communities exercise influence, make choices, and adopt a position regarding their job or professional identity (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2017, Eteläpelto et al., 2014). Individual agency and collective agency can be opposing forces. Professional agency positively correlates with innovation and creativity (Glăveanu, 2010) and is necessary for boundary crossing (Eteläpelto et al., 2014).

### Reciprocity
Participants in postgraduate education have diverse expertise, motives, and personal situations (Kehm, 2001). The education programme needs to adapt to this large variation in starting situations and make use of the rich and varied expertise that participants bring in.

In order to achieve this, it is of the utmost importance to work with highly personalised learning paths and guidance. A modular course setup is a suitable means of realising this. Learners can combine separate modules to form a personalised learning path that fits their learning objectives and the desired size of the programme.

Apart from that, it is important that postgraduate education is aligned with the professional domain (Smid, 2001). An example is linking theory with practical examples, but also the use of the language and terminology of the professional domain wherever possible. This way, what is learned can be applied in practice, and practical situations can function as input (knowledge transfer) (Blume et al., 2010; De Rijdt et al., 2013).

**It is difficult for professionals to gain access to this implicit knowledge**

Because professionals contribute a large variety of expertise, experience, and knowledge themselves, the programme is in touch with everyday practice within the respective field. The links with the labour market are reinforced even further as the network within the professional field is expanded. Owing to the reciprocity between programme and participant, both are stimulated to develop and innovate.

On the one hand, the expertise of participants in postgraduate education makes for a good starting point for development, though it also makes changing the underlying knowledge of expertise difficult, especially if this knowledge is unconscious (Van Gog et al., 2005). It is difficult for professionals to gain access to this implicit knowledge. Making implicit knowledge explicit is a process that requires attention in postgraduate programmes.

Professionals have developed routines. To become even better at their job than they already are, existing routines can be developed further by deliberately working on improving them: through deliberate practice (Van Gog et al., 2005). Activities have to suit the level of the participant. Moreover, it is of the essence that participants consciously monitor and check their own skills. This requires full concentration, effort, and reflection for a prolonged period of time (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993). Experts can manage deliberate practices themselves, while beginners will still need an external person to guide them (Van Gog et al., 2005).

Combining the expertise of professionals in learning communities results in an environment that harbours a lot of learning potential (see, for example, Wenger, 2000). Apart from the learning potential to do with encountering the views of others (compare boundary crossing: Akkerman & Bakker, 2011), the learning community also has a stimulating effect on the involvement of the participant with the programme (Tinto, 1997), and it increases the feeling of competence. Both involvement and experienced competence are important conditions for learning based on the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci 2002). The problem is that a diverse group of professionals that move through a flexible programme will not naturally form a social unity or community. The setup and didactics of the educational programme need to take this into account.

The (vast) majority of participants in postgraduate education will want to combine education with a profession or care responsibilities. They will prefer education that is organised at least partly time and location-independent. The group that only wants distance education is small. Not only is 'being expected to show' a stimulating factor in education, actually meeting others is important for forming connections and, therefore, for motivation.

An educational model that applies blended learning seems to suit this situation well. Blended learning combines face-to-face education with digital environments that allow for synchronous and asynchronous learning and working. This way, professionals can decide for themselves when and where they want to spend time on their studies (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Blended learning combined with a modular setup offers a flexible learning environment that also optimally develops

self-directed learning. A didactically strong teacher is indispensable for a setup like this. The main challenge is in providing an optimal relation between online and face-to-face activities. Properly moderating the learning process is part of this didactic approach, both in meetings and during online activities.

## High demands

Participants in postgraduate education to some extent have different characteristics than regular students. They do not only have specific demands, but they also contribute new perspectives, current and practical work-related questions, and casuistry. The didactic approach needs to take this into account. Teachers need to be aware of the fact that they are dealing with a different target audience – one that is critical and imposes high demands on the programme. The starting point of equality and reciprocity is fundamentally different compared to the initial programme. Customisation and flexibility are requirements, but the teacher simultaneously needs to ensure that

**The starting point of equality and reciprocity is also fundamentally different**

the goals of the programme are met. Utrecht University has a Start to Teach programme for its employees that are teaching for the first time, and there are courses in basic and senior qualification and a course in educational leadership for more experienced teachers. In the area of continuous professional development, attention is also given to teachers providing postgraduate education. Moreover, there will be a module on didactics in postgraduate education. Through the starting points mentioned above, we hope to offer both theoretical perspectives as well as practical handles for teachers in postgraduate education – an inspiring target audience with its own characteristics.

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