



Utrecht University



# Geosciences Strategy Plan 2017-2020



**Geosciences  
Strategy Plan**  
2017-2020

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# INTRODUCTION

The Faculty of Geosciences is a successfully operating organisational unit of Utrecht University with a solid reputation both in the Netherlands and abroad. We are very proud of our performance in education and research, which has been demonstrated during various educational reviews and recognised and praised by many academic bodies. Our operational management has also proven successful and we can boast positive financial results year after year. All these achievements are primarily the result of the collective efforts of our many highly capable and motivated staff members, not only among the academic staff but also in the various support departments. These are the rewards of the quality-focused policy that the departments and the faculty have been implementing for many years now. To leave no doubt about our intentions, the title of our 2013-2016 Strategy Plan was 'Focusing on quality and sustainability' (*Kiezen voor kwaliteit en duurzaamheid*). The Faculty of Geosciences is thus rightly confident about the future and its ability to meet the challenges on its path.

The faculty is about to undertake a large-scale relocation. In the 1960s and 1970s, the faculty departments were relocated from Drift and Oude Gracht in the city centre to De Uithof. Now, nearly sixty years later, we are moving again, now to an ultramodern office building. We will also have access to two important new laboratory facilities: the GeoLab (part of Utrecht CASTEL), which we have already occupied, and the Earth Simulation Laboratory (ESL). We moved into a new education centre, the *Koningsbergergebouw* (which we share with the Faculty of Science) some time ago. This complex of buildings (known as the GEO cluster) has state-of-the-art facilities that can compete with the world's leading education and research institutions. The new buildings will provide plenty of opportunities to invest further in the highest quality education and research.

The particular composition of departments and education and research programmes (combining both natural and social sciences) make the Faculty of Geosciences a somewhat unusual institution, but we all share the same interest in the functioning of our planet ('system earth') and the interactions with human activities. We study the earth as the home of humanity from the perspective of the natural scientist, and this perspective also shapes our teaching. This concerns a wide range of geological, physical, chemical and biological processes both under and on the earth's surface, across a diversity of temporal and spatial scales. We develop knowledge in the fields of plate tectonics, mountain formation, climate processes and the occurrence of natural disasters such as floods and land subsidence. We also study the phenomenon of raw materials scarcity (energy, ores and minerals) and the availability of natural resources such as water. Our social disciplines focus on the human perspective: humans as the inhabitants of the earth. Human behaviour is reflected in all manner of influences under, on and above the earth's surface. This includes urban spatial planning and how cities function, mobility issues, the relationship between health and the human environment, social inequality, introducing and implementing innovations, responding to the energy transition, etc.

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invest in the support for the primary processes  
of education and research.*

It will be clear that these two approaches are entirely complementary and that they constitute a key interdisciplinary approach to confronting the greatest challenge for current and future generations: how can we ensure – and academically substantiate – a sustainable future for ‘system earth’?

It is no surprise that the Faculty of Geosciences is the coordinator of the Sustainability theme, and shares responsibility for shaping and implementing the research in this field with the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance. The next phase of the sustainability programme will start in 2017, while work also continues on developing the core activities and thematic hubs. Alongside broadening and deepening the faculty’s knowledge to maintain our level of excellence, the hubs must also contribute to the search for solutions to major social challenges. These include energy challenges, the development of new materials, food security in relation to water and climate, and the – often unconstrained – expansion of urban areas in relation to safety and health.

During the coming strategy phase, we will continue to develop our partnership with the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ). A logical next step will be to combine the research we conduct together with NIOZ in a virtual research centre focused on water and climate, with an important interface with research on global modelling. Global modelling and geocomputation (concerned with seismic activity, among others) are important pillars of research; and fundamental explorative research based on huge databases is expected to grow explosively in the coming years. The faculty is very active in this field and is an important partner in the Global and Geo Health Data Center (GGHDC), in which IRAS and University Medical Center Utrecht are also involved. GGHDC links databases on socio-economic conditions and healthcare parameters of individuals and groups to environmental factors such as air and water quality and noise.

The faculty is also involved in developing and continuing many other initiatives in the field of sustainability, often in collaborations with partners. As part of NWO-WOTRO, we will be contributing to the programme ‘Tackling Global Challenges through Use-Inspired Research’. Other initiatives include providing support to the Urban Futures Studio (with a grant from the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment under an existing agreement) and to the Utrecht Sustainability Institute (USI). USI focuses on the Utrecht region and has been a proven success; it has received much praise for its functioning as an intermediary in sustainability projects, particularly in the field of energy issues. The faculty is also participating in the university-wide theme ‘Institutions for Open Societies (IOS)’. The most prominent contribution comes from the Copernicus Institute, which is developing new thematic hubs for IOS. Copernicus staff members are actively involved in themes such as governance and the development of transformative innovations that address social change.

Wherever possible, we will try to forge partnerships with other important knowledge institutions and social partners in or nearby Utrecht Science Park. For example, Utrecht University and the Faculty of Geosciences will further develop and shape the partnerships with Deltares and TNO in the form of Utrecht CASTEL.

The sustainability theme is also reflected in the development of our education programme. The successful launch of the new Global Sustainability Science Bachelor's programme confirms that there is a market for interdisciplinary study programmes based on clearly defined themes. The education provided in the recently established Marine Sciences Master's programme also continues to develop and the programme has been successfully drawing international students to the university. This intake is expected to increase as the good reputation of this Master's programme becomes more widely advertised.

As the organisation continues to grow, so does the need to innovate and further invest in the support for the primary processes of education and research, i.e. the operational management of the university. The faculty has been growing strongly since 2012, and so has its staff complement. For the organisation to continue to function adequately, it will be necessary to develop and implement improvements in our operational management.

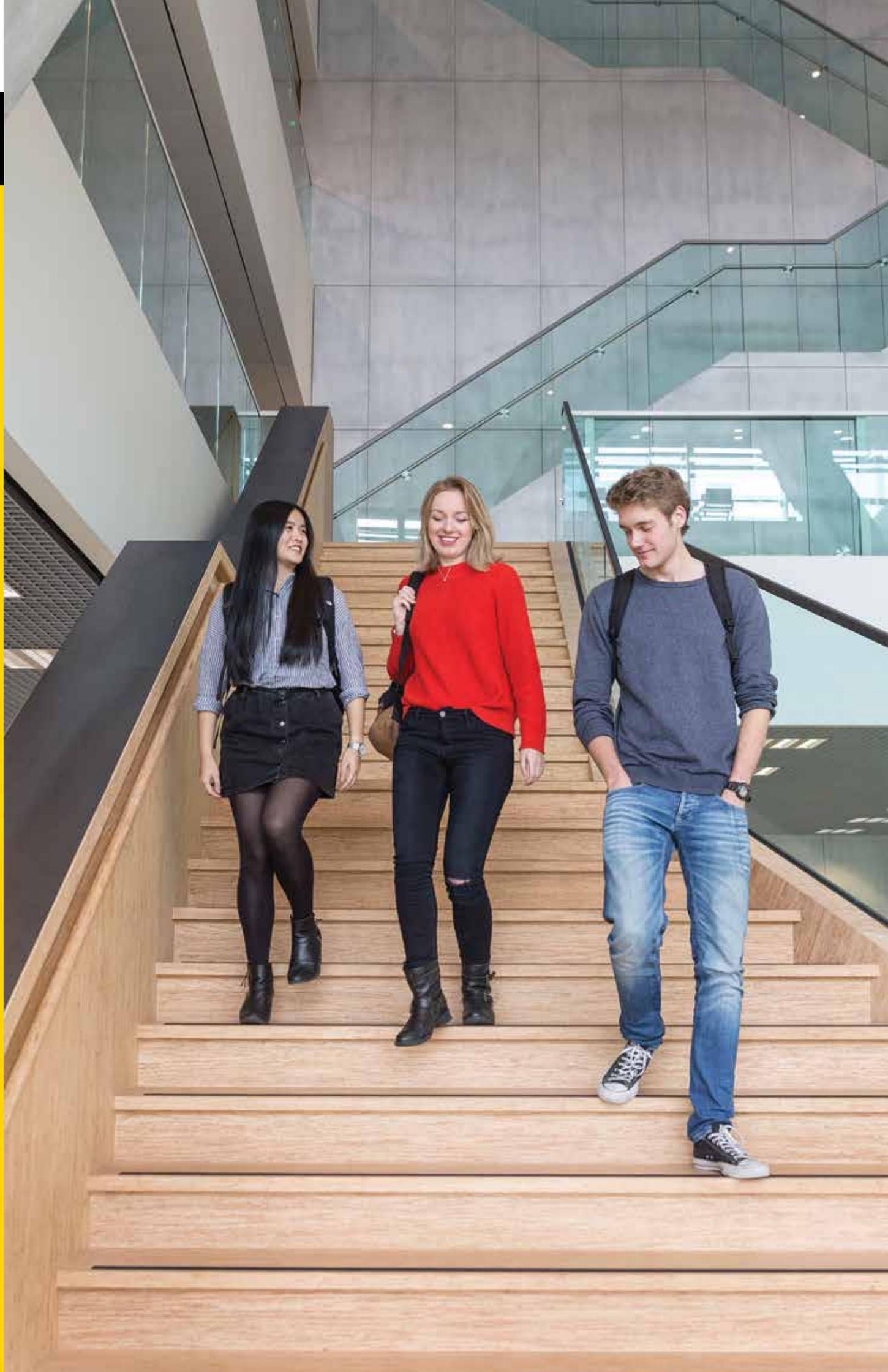
The current Faculty Strategy Plan sets out our plans and ambitions for the 2017-2020 period. The University's 2016-2020 Strategy Plan is the starting point for this Faculty Strategy Plan. The University Strategy Plan is an important source of inspiration and also sets out the framework for the faculty's strategy. Where ever possible, the faculty will strive to contribute to the goals of the University Strategy Plan. The Faculty Strategy Plan deliberately sets out a number of key spearheads per theme. The previous strategy plan was characterised by a diversity of ambitions, expressed as a series of goals and sub-goals and in some cases bound by numerical criteria, in part to meet the performance agreements made with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This gave the previous plan a somewhat instrumental character. The current plan provides a more general description of *what* we want to achieve and *how* we plan to achieve it. The *how* is included to enable us to illustrate why these ambitions are realistic and also to describe how the faculty plans to implement these ambitions (without actually becoming an implementation plan).

The strategy plan is a result of countless discussions with various faculty committees, directors, staff members and students. A great many meetings were organised, in the form of breakfast sessions and consultations with staff and students, directors of research and education, the professorial staff and the Faculty Council. External partners were also explicitly involved in the process, mainly through our Social Advisory Council, which includes representatives of the Municipality of Utrecht, Economic Board Utrecht (EBU), TNO, Arcadis, Shell, Vicrea and the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI). These parties all made an important contribution to the quality of the Faculty Strategy and helped to underpin its support base.

*The current plan provides a general description of what we want to achieve and how we plan to achieve it.*



# EDUCATION





# The right match between a student and a degree programme

The faculty's education and research are closely interrelated. The research is broad in scope, varying from the Earth's core to the urban environment, with particular emphasis on water, energy and healthy living environment. A large proportion of these research fields come together in the 'Sustainability' and 'Institutions for Open Societies' strategic themes. This research profile is reflected in various ways and at various levels in the curriculum. During the coming strategy period, the faculty intends to let the research profile be more leading in the recruitment of new students, not only to the Master's programmes, but also to attract and match more Bachelor's students. The faculty places great stake in effective matching of Bachelor's and Master's students to the degree programmes.

A successfully completed Bachelor's programme in the Geosciences is an excellent steppingstone to a Master's programme. This is why prospective students are already informed of the opportunities after the Bachelor's programme during the recruitment and matching phase. Our Bachelor's programmes produce broadly oriented academics who are explicitly invited to continue in one of the selective Master's programmes of our Graduate School of Geosciences. However, a Bachelor's degree does not guarantee admission to a Master's programme. Only suitable and motivated students are admitted on the basis of clearly and carefully formulated criteria.

## HOW?

1. The Faculty of Geosciences will examine all factors that are important to successfully participate in the Master's programmes and will tighten its admission criteria based on these.
2. Be transparent. Throughout the Bachelor's phase, students will be a) reminded that the Bachelor's programmes in Geosciences are a steppingstone to continued training, and in particular a Master's programme in Geosciences and b) informed of the requirements and with respect to admission to a Geosciences Master's programme.
3. We will continuously highlight the faculty research themes and the opportunities for Bachelor's students in our recruitment and matching campaigns.



# An inspiring and challenging learning environment

## THE STUDENTS

The faculty believes that students are best benefit greatly from in a community that is close, international and diverse. This provides them with more insight into the multiplicity of visions and approaches that exist around the world. We want the students who participate in the Bachelor's and Master's programmes to adequately reflect the international and professional communities that they will later join in their working lives. However, it is also important that they feel at home within this community.

The number of pre-university students in the Netherlands is expected to increase slightly until 2020, after which numbers will decline. The faculty wishes to retain and where possible increase its share of the global student market. To guarantee the quality of the programme, the faculty is dependent on a critical mass in terms of student numbers. With our solid international reputation in the field of education and research, the faculty expects to draw larger numbers of foreign students, so that the critical mass will be maintained and, at the same time, the student community will become more international and diverse.

## HOW?

1. The faculty's Bachelor's programmes will follow in the footsteps of the Global Sustainability Science programme by providing fully English-taught degree programmes or study paths to make them more accessible to international students. We will also develop opportunities for students who aspire to a career in a Dutch-speaking environment.
2. We will launch a project to increase the number of international students and the diversity of the student population. The starting point for admission will remain the suitability of the student for the programme.
3. We will embed international student exchange in the curricula by structuring student mobility (in cooperation with partner universities).
4. There will be a larger focus on community building in the Master's phase, for example by bringing the Master's students to the attention of the student associations and regularly organising activities that bring staff members and Master's students together.





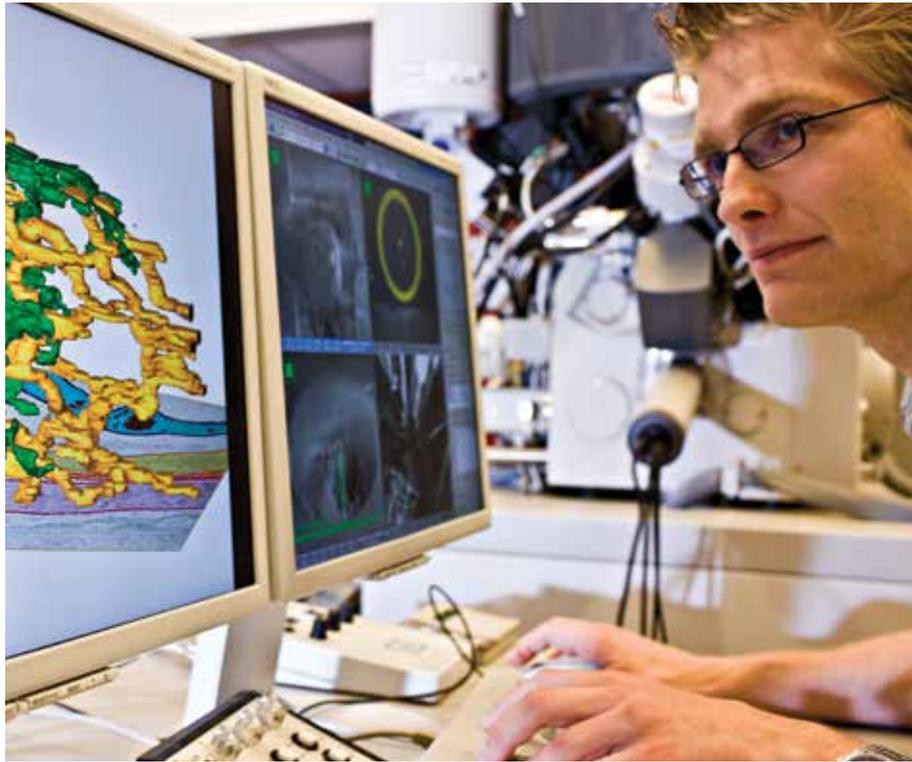
## THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The education provided by the Faculty of Geosciences is inspiring and challenging and is well adapted to the ambitions of the students. The faculty inspires and challenges its students by offering teaching methods that make the most of the available staff and resources in combination with optimum group sizes. During the coming strategy period, the faculty's education programme will not only focus on in-depth disciplinary subject knowledge, but it will also integrate this with interdisciplinary knowledge. This includes increasing attention for the development of '21<sup>st</sup>-century skills', in particular in the areas of cooperation, communication, digital skills, problem-solving skills, and entrepreneurship and creativity.

The faculty will encourage students to deploy their disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, both during and after their studies, to demonstrate their capacities as socially responsible citizens, and in particular their engagement with the wider theme of sustainability.

### HOW?

1. The faculty will continue its efforts to maintain and improve the substantive and didactic quality of the teaching. We will encourage further educational innovation (for example through blended learning) whereby we will ensure that the activities comply with a clear didactic concept and contribute to quality improvement.
2. The Bachelor's curricula will strengthen their focus on developing the research competences of the students. Best practices from research-based learning will be shared to provide an example to new initiatives in this area.
3. We will explore the opportunities to develop faculty crossing programmes at the Bachelor's and Master's levels.
4. We will invest in interdisciplinary education, for example by offering interdisciplinary courses on the faculty's themes.
5. Teaching and research during the Master's phase will be further integrated by strengthening the role of the Graduate School (including the PhD programme that falls under it).
6. We will pay extra attention to soft skills and career orientation in the Master's and Bachelor's phase and this will be explicitly described in the learning pathways.
7. There will be more attention for anchoring the Faculty of Geosciences' honours programme in the degree programmes.
8. We will continue to compare our learning environment with international benchmarks to identify areas for improvement.
9. We will consolidate the faculty's extensive offer in courses in the field of sustainability in the field of sustainability, advertise these courses to its own students more effectively, and seek cooperation with other faculties to promote our sustainability education outside the faculty.



## Professionalisation in teaching

The academic staff of the Faculty of Geosciences consider teaching professionalisation to be just as important as research professionalisation. This is why the faculty invests in increasing the recognition of teaching performance and focuses on the further professionalisation of the teaching staff. Teaching and research performance are both seen as quality indicators within the faculty's assessment and promotion policy. Senior staff with a solid foundation in both teaching and research can opt for a career focused on either research or teaching.

### HOW?

1. The faculty will make its teaching professionalisation programme more transparent and structure this in the form of learning pathways tailored to the various career phases. University programmes aimed at educational leadership, such as that of the Utrecht Centre for Academic Teaching (U-CAT), will play an important role here.
2. We will develop guidelines to ensure that teaching is fully included in the Assessment and Development (A&D) interviews.
3. We will investigate whether making the Basic/Senior Teaching Qualifications (BKO/SKO) part of a continuous training programme (instead of the endpoint of a teacher's training) will contribute to the professionalisation of the teaching staff and recognition of teaching performance.
4. We will develop scenarios for careers at Utrecht University whereby the relative percentages of time spent on teaching and research may vary. The current bandwidth of the relative percentages (20-80% to 80-20%) will be changed to 30-70% to 70-30%. We will draw up transparent quality criteria to underpin these scenarios which will be integrated in the faculty promotion policy.





# RESEARCH





# World-class geosciences research

The Faculty of Geosciences encourages a culture of excellence in all departments. Within the coming four years, we want to join the very best institutions in the world in our fields of research (insofar as this is not already the case). The basis of our knowledge is formed by curiosity-driven research. Acquiring individual grants and successful participation in the world's leading research consortia can contribute to achieving this ambition.

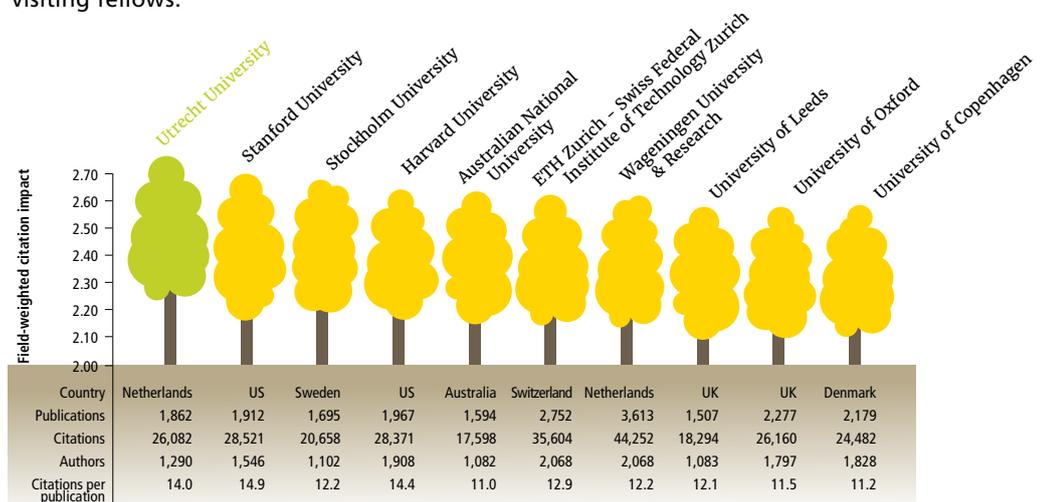
We always strive for our research to have the maximum academic impact. The quality and impact of our research must be demonstrated by citations in academic publications, acquisition of public and/or private research funding, international awards and excellent assessments of our research groups during external reviews (not only in absolute terms, but also in comparison with international benchmarks). Our research is also intertwined in various international networks.

We encourage individual performance to ensure a maximum impact, but this is always within the context of a department's research strategy.

## HOW?

1. The faculty will ensure further professionalisation of research quality assurance by drafting departmental research strategies that are linked to clear quality indicators. The departments can choose their own quality indicators for monitoring and external reviews based on the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP 2015-2021).
2. We will select international benchmarks for the departments (the 'units of review').
3. We will improve the coordination of the research (and the researchers) with international networks, among others by encouraging participation in international consortia and academic networks.
4. We will encourage participation of researchers and research groups in international consortia and academic networks and provide them with adequate support to this end.
5. We will invest in state-of-the-art research infrastructure and seek national and international investment to this end.
6. We will explicitly discuss individual contributions to the department's research programme during the A&D interview. Individual contributions to the performance of the group are also considered as part of promotion assessments.
7. We will phase out those research programmes that generate too little quality or potential, as revealed during internal and/or external reviews.
8. To increase the international appeal and image of our research programmes, we will create more opportunities to attract high-level visiting fellows to Utrecht and to enable our own staff members to travel to leading institutions abroad as visiting fellows.

Utrecht University's sustainability research in the field of climate change and ecosystems has the greatest impact worldwide. That is the conclusion of a study conducted by Times Higher Education. Utrecht's scientific publications in the category 'Environmental Sciences' between 2011 and 2015 score higher for citation impact than publications by universities such as Stanford and Harvard.





## Investing in scouting, training and coaching academic talent

There is huge international competition for the best academic talent, which is why the Faculty of Geosciences must nurture the talent it has. Transparency plays a key role here. All talented staff members must understand what their career perspectives are based on an assessment of research and teaching activities and the societal impact these generate. It is important to find the right balance between these three aspects. Over the past years, an imbalance has been created in career policy with regard to this recognition that needs to be restored.

To retain talent, the opportunities for training and coaching will need to be further professionalised, including for PhD students. Leadership skills will explicitly be included. The further development of the role of the Graduate School of Geosciences (GSG) will be of key importance for the training of PhD (and Master's) students in the coming years. The teaching in the GSG will be structured such that all students are fully prepared for the labour market.

We will also be investing in attracting external talent during the coming strategy period. It is important to maintain the right balance between external and internal talent. In this context, it is more important than ever to give our visiting scholars a warm welcome: when external talent visits us for an interview it is important to give them the impression that our university will provide them with an inspiring and challenging environment to work in.

### HOW?

1. The faculty will continue to scout for international talent, improve the selection process and help the selected foreign talents to relocate to Utrecht.
2. We will continue to professionalise the coaching and training programme for our current talent in the areas of teaching, research, valorisation and leadership.
3. We will strengthen our career policy with transparent criteria for performance in research, teaching and valorisation (see also page 28).
4. We will strengthen the role of the GSG: it will be given final responsibility for the PhD programme and will also be responsible for quality assurance. To this end, the GSG will develop a five-year strategic plan.



# Encouraging interdisciplinary research to help solve social issues

The Faculty of Geosciences wishes to deploy the faculty's research to its fullest potential by encouraging cooperation with researchers who work at the interfaces of its disciplines (interdisciplinary research). This does not only concern cooperation between the faculty's own research groups and researchers, but also with other faculties and universities. The starting point is that the research should contribute knowledge that is focused on solving social issues. Examples are the challenges associated with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the challenges of the Dutch National Research Agenda (NWA). The quality of all interdisciplinary research will always be underpinned by excellent disciplinary knowledge (see page 16).

## HOW?

1. The faculty will encourage cooperation between researchers and research groups from varying disciplinary backgrounds and also strengthen our cooperation with other faculties, in particular the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance. During the coming years, most attention will go to the strategic themes and focus areas.
2. Additional funding will mainly be deployed to encourage interdisciplinary and ground-breaking disciplinary research for which no alternative funding is available.





## Research with an impact

The faculty's research is closely involved with all manner of social issues, from the local to the global scale. In the future, our research will not only need to be relevant to successfully resolve these issues, but also make a tangible contribution to them by means of a multitude of innovative science-policy and science-practice interactions.

This will naturally require researchers and research groups to participate in local, regional, national and international networks that are socially or business oriented. Generating impact is in the interests of the group and hence it is a question of teamwork, whereby each member has their own role to play. Awareness of the social impact of research is encouraged in the PhD programme. Faculty support for researchers for the process of generating impact and communicating research findings will be further expanded.

### HOW?

1. The faculty will lead a limited number of strategic alliances at the regional, national and international levels. Additional funding can be deployed to strengthen these alliances. The alliances will focus on those Utrecht University strategic research themes in which the faculty participates.
2. We will more prominently advertise the social relevance and potential impact of the research programmes. The programmes will develop a strategy aimed at generating social impact and will periodically justify their results based on the SEP and a number of quality indicators.
3. Researchers will receive more training and coaching to enhance the role they play in promoting the social impact of academic research.
4. Experiences with generating social impact and the associated reports will be regularly shared between departments and research groups.
5. Research communication will be internationalised and focused more on research marketing aimed at primary target groups.





## Embedding research themes and methods in the degree programmes

The Master's and PhD degree programmes are breeding grounds of the talent of the future. The degree programmes are linked to the faculty's research. These programmes have a twofold relationship with the research. Not only will all new research themes and multi and interdisciplinary approaches need to be reflected in the faculty's teaching, the Master's programmes will also need to become 'creative arenas', where talented students are given the opportunity to sustain the faculty research programmes with new research ideas. This relationship between teaching and research will be intensified: where necessary, the degree programmes will be adapted to safeguard and promote the research programme. This will ensure that the creativity and innovativeness of the students and PhDs of the Faculty of Geosciences are optimally deployed and encouraged.

### HOW?

1. The departments will ensure that the various lines of research and their social profiles become more visible in the Master's programmes.
2. The skills required of the Master's and PhD students to cooperate in interdisciplinary teams will be further developed and deployed.
3. We will encourage talented Master's students to publish their research (together with their supervisors) and shape their research ideas into a PhD proposal.



# OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

The university and faculty operate in a rapidly changing environment. This environment is characterised by more flexible funding flows, heavy competition to attract talented staff members, resources and students, a greater demand for accountability and increasing internationalisation. The current trend is to forge more fluid forms of research cooperation – including the associated more complex preconditions – and there are more and more innovative education initiatives. This affects the goals and the management of our teaching and research and the impact that is generated by these. Moreover, the faculty has grown significantly in the past five years thanks to its successful teaching and research portfolio. It is unclear if and how this growth will continue during the coming strategy period.

In order to grow responsibly and be able to respond to changes, it is important to have a flexible organisation. This does not only apply to the primary processes of research and teaching, but also to our operational management. Three lines of action have been to make the faculty future-proof.



# Co-creation: improving interaction between academic and support staff

In a flexible organisation, it is essential for academic and support staff to cooperate effectively. The organisation of this corporation is no simple matter and requires continuous attention. The support staff are divided into two groups: the departmental technical support staff and the support staff who are largely embedded in the Faculty Office. These two groups of support staff are described in more detail below.

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT

In the previous strategy period we invested heavily in improving the research infrastructure. The GeoLab is now operational and the ESL is well on the way to completion. We are also working on the design and implementation of the *in silico lab* for *high-end computing*. These facilities will provide essential support to the faculty's knowledge base, with a focus on global modelling, among others. It goes without saying that the support must be adequately organised and accessible to the research groups. The balance between quality and effectiveness plays a key role here. Such matters as resource sharing, timely project cost allocation, legitimate and efficient purchasing policies and safety issues must all be properly organised. The challenge for the faculty is to develop a more professional technical support department that ensures optimum cooperation between the academic and support staff.

### HOW?

1. The ESL's support organisation will be efficiently designed, in collaboration with the researchers, so that effective cooperation between the academic and support staff is guaranteed. The starting point is the encouragement of European top research with as boundary conditions the sharing of resources in compliance with legislation and regulations.
2. IT support for researchers will be strengthened, combined and located as close as possible to the academic staff. An action plan will be drawn up to strengthen the data management system.

## **FACULTY OFFICE**

The staff of the Faculty Office are involved in preparing and implementing policy and decisions. The Faculty Office is the link between Utrecht University (the Executive Board and the University Corporate Offices) and the departments. The Faculty Office has the ambition to provide added value by combining expertise and critical mass in a partnership with the departments.

Faculty and university decisions and policy are the result of careful decision-making and, in light of the complexity of the issues, regularly involve compromise. The Faculty of Geosciences needs to conduct the debate on the usefulness and necessity of the plans *before* the decisions are taken so that we can respond adequately to a changing environment. Obviously, the decisions that are taken also need to be implemented. The decision-making phase, the implementation phase and the communication to the stakeholders need to be more distinctly separated.

The faculty plans to improve the way it implements new policy by encouraging more interaction between the academic staff and the Faculty Office and by investing in more co-creation and cooperation. An important condition for success is that there must be mutual recognition of each other's professional autonomy as part of a culture of trust. Potentials for change must be considered in collaboration, after which the chosen direction must be followed with commitment and actively and uniformly disseminated as a joint ambition.

To further optimise this process, the operational management will be redesigned with the aim of improving coordination and providing more clarity about the tasks, responsibilities and powers of the involved parties. The current structure of Utrecht University will form the starting point of this ambition. The effectiveness of the Faculty of Geosciences organisation can be increased by improving our internal communication and making it more transparent.

### **HOW?**

1. The faculty will make the current organisation future proof, whereby the Faculty Office supports the departments. To this end, we will analyse the current organisation to determine if it can achieve the organisational goals and effectively and efficiently implement the decisions.
2. We will develop a culture of cooperation and mutual trust. We will organise activities to foster mutual understanding and improve the interaction between academic and support staff of the Faculty Office.
3. We will cultivate an improvement culture and implement a permanent quality assurance system for which the academic and support staff are jointly responsible. To achieve this, points for improvement will be followed up as part of quality cycles and optimisations will be implemented jointly as part of a continuous process.
4. We will optimise standard support processes and the tasks, responsibilities and powers of the involved parties will be set down. This will provide more clarity and allow the involved parties to focus more on the most relevant issues.



## Integrated Faculty Office support: a joint focus on the primary process

The Faculty Office provides three types of support: 1) support for the primary processes of teaching and research, 2) resource management support (staff, funds, accommodation) and 3) support for the board of the University. The increasing complexity of the primary process and the growth of the faculty necessitate us to rethink the manner in which we provide support, whereby we are striving for a more integrated approach. The goal for the coming strategy period is more coordination and cooperation in teams that represent the varied expertise of the faculty. These teams will include professionals from the departments (department managers, education managers and study advisors).

Another consequence of the continuous process of change within the faculty is the huge amount of projects that are being initiated. These projects are not all equally urgent and more clarity will need to be provided in this respect. As the absorption capacity of the departments and the Faculty Office is limited, in the future, a better system of operational prioritisation will need to be applied to the projects. The prioritisation choices will need to be properly communicated to the departments and the support organisation.

### HOW?

1. The support organisation will continue to develop into a learning organisation (development of know-how in dialogue) with a more structured organisational system based on predetermined priorities.
2. The support organisation will become interdisciplinary and share a joint focus on the primary process (e.g. F&C, RSO and department managers or OSZ and C&M and programme coordinators).
3. The use of English by the support organisation will be encouraged; the mindset must become more internationally focused. This will help to involve the faculty's international community more in policy and its implementation.



## Responding to increasing demands for accountability and new legislation and regulations

The university – and hence also the faculty – are faced with increasing pressure from the government and society to account for the public investment in their activities. This increasing demand for accountability and the ensuing legislation and regulations are a ‘fact of life’. As part of its responsibility to the community, the faculty will need to anticipate this demand, respond to it as adequately as possible and find the right balance between legitimacy and effectiveness (while carefully maintaining the balance between regulation and deregulation): what is required, what is permitted and what is feasible? All communication in this respect must be transparent.

### HOW?

1. The faculty will implement more effective performance monitoring as part of planning and control cycles whereby the information can be used as input in the management process.
2. We will be critical and alert in regard to the quality, costs and added value of the new regulations. Where necessary and where possible, we will remove regulations that provide no added value to the organisation.
3. We will encourage faster compliance with the regulations and more awareness of our shared ownership of our performance. This will be supported by transparent internal communication on the frameworks and agreements, but also by holding each other accountable for the work agreements.
4. We will develop a standardised management information system together with the departments so that this information can be generated from a single location and used as input in discussions on the basis of a uniform definition.



# Sustainable business practices

Much of the faculty's research and education is focused on sustainability and the faculty wants to play a leading role in making the business practices of the university more sustainable. This ambition has been supported by the focus on sustainability in our new-build projects. The faculty is convinced that sustainable business practices will contribute to creating an inspiring working environment for students, staff and international colleagues, as well as to the visibility and credibility of sustainability as one of the faculty's strategic themes. Furthermore, an integrated sustainability vision will improve the cost effectiveness of the business practices in the longer term.

Investment in sustainable research, education and business practices will be receiving extra attention at the faculty during the coming strategy period.

## HOW?

1. We will encourage staff members and students to follow sustainable practices. The faculty believes that its staff have their own responsibility here; we are jointly responsible for contributing to the sustainable use of Utrecht Science Park.
2. We will also continue to invest in the sustainable development and operation of the new-build projects. The new buildings will be made as sustainable as possible, for example by carefully managing heating, water consumption, air circulation and lighting.
3. Together with the rest of Utrecht University, we will:
  - investigate opportunities for further sustainable energy technologies (such as solar panels);
  - minimise use of energy, water and other resources and recycle these where possible;
  - encourage the use of responsible and sustainable (organic) food products and the prevention of waste.
4. We will encourage and support the university in its objective to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030.
5. Where possible, we will develop our own sustainability goals and encourage staff members to contribute to achieving these (such as less air travel, paperless offices and teleconferencing to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions). We will use the existing knowledge of Utrecht University to encourage a culture of sustainability.





# HUMAN RECOURSES

The faculty's human resources (HR) policy gives special attention to leadership development, talent development, and encouraging long-term employment and mobility of its staff. Key themes within the HR policy are internationalisation and diversity.

Various environmental factors have an impact on the HR policy and its implementation. The dynamism of the local and international job markets make it difficult to retain talent. The collective bargaining agreement is being modernised and national legislation is changing (for example, the 'Regulation of the Legal Status of Public Servants Act' (*wet normalisatie rechtspositie ambtenaren*) and the possible introduction of 'performance-based contracts'). Furthermore, staff members face increasing workloads.

Our staff members are our human capital, which is why HR management deserves specific attention in our strategy. There are three focus areas in this respect:

- 1) Academic leadership;
- 2) The balance between the recognition of education, research and impact generation;
- 3) Recruiting, retaining and developing talent.



# Academic leadership

Academic leadership is essential for the development of the organisation, the effective deployment of our most talented staff members and the recruitment and retention of new talent. Academic leadership is about more than only research and teaching; it also entails responsible management and administration.

The identity of the organisation is an important factor in academic leadership. Various working communities have naturally evolved within the primary processes in which staff members share the same values, standards and codes of conduct. Talented researchers and lecturers can flourish in these communities and increase their impact, whereby they develop specific identities. These working communities have become linchpins for many of our staff and provide their work with meaning. The identity connects the faculty's reputation ('the outside') and its culture ('the inside'). This is an effective model for academic success and it demands strong academic leadership. But academic leadership goes even further; academic leaders are expected to take responsibility for cooperating with other organisational units and the organisation as a whole. After all, the organisation (the department and faculty) is more than an amalgamation of identities and working communities. Academic leaders perform an exemplary function and they define the culture within the organisation.

The faculty expects managers to promote a culture of good and united employership and contribute to HR management. Their role in HR effectively involves a line management function. HR responsibilities increase as a career advances and the trend is to allocate more and more HR responsibilities to managers. However, not all managers have the skills required to fulfil these responsibilities, while the staff members expect that HR matters will be dealt with adequately and in time. This will be given more attention.

An effective HR organisation also requires adequate HR support. The effectiveness of the HR organisation can be improved through more consistent deployment of HR instruments and the support for these.

## HOW?

1. The faculty will encourage academic leaders of various levels (including new managers) to participate in leadership programmes.
2. We will professionalise the coaching and supervision programme for managers. This is not limited to incumbent management; the managers of the future also need to be involved so that they can be prepared for their future responsibilities.
3. The role of the HR professionals will be more adequately structured to provide added value. They will cooperate more intensively with the departments to increase commitment to the HR strategy.
4. The Assessment & Development (A&D) cycle will place greater emphasis on the quality of the interviews. The staff inventory and the strategic staffing plan will also be deployed as HR instruments alongside A&D to motivate the staff in the long term. These instruments will be further developed and perfected in the coming years in a phased plan focussed on creating added value.
5. Alongside individual performance, the A&D interviews will also include an evaluation of the individual's contribution to the team.



# The balance between the recognition of education, research and impact generation

The formation principle principle has been abandoned in the current appointment and promotion policy for academic staff. The career opportunities this entails are bound by strict criteria. An independent promotion committee advises the dean whether these criteria have been met. Over the past decades, an imbalance has arisen in these criteria whereby the recognition of research has come to dominate. This imbalance has to be restored and the manner of recognising teaching performance and impact generation as part of career development must be made transparent. It is also important to bring recognition of research performance more into line with the SEP requirements, whereby the focus will shift to the quality (rather than the quantity) of research output. The social impact of research is also playing an increasingly important role. The following action plans have been defined to achieve the above goals.

## HOW?

### Education

1. The faculty will make the recognition of teaching achievements a structural part of the A&D interviews.
2. We will develop separate guidelines per job level for recognising teaching performance in the appointment and promotion policy. These guidelines will need to be coordinated with the BKOW/SKOW (Basic/Senior Teaching Qualifications) criteria.
3. We will create opportunities to focus university careers on either education or research. Only candidates with a solid foundation in both education and research will be applicable for such a career focus.
4. Academic leadership in education or research will play an important role in the appointment and promotion policy for careers with a focus on either of these primary processes.
5. Positions with a focus on education must be included in the strategic staffing plans of the departments.
6. The criteria set down in the 'Headlines Utrecht University professor policy' (Feb. 2015) are leading for the appointment of teaching professors.
7. The relative percentage of time spent on research or teaching for new staff members varies, with a minimum of 30% and a maximum of 70%. The appropriate percentages will depend on the capacities of the staff member in question. Staff members who have acquired one or more personal (research) grants may deviate from these percentages.

### Impact generation

1. Impact is linked to teaching and/or research and as such is always linked to the personal expertise of a staff member. This is why impact is always linked to a staff member's teaching and research performance.
2. The SEP criteria selected by the department (and linked to the strategy of the group or line of research) form the starting point for recognition of impact generation in research. Agreements are reached with all staff members on their contributions to the joint strategy and the criteria for impact generation.
3. Impact generation will also become a structural part of the A&D interviews, alongside teaching and research. The agreements reached with the staff members will form the starting point of these interviews.
4. Not all staff members contribute equally to impact creation. It is important to profit from each other's strengths and ensure that personal goals are made feasible by allocating sufficient time for them.

### Research

We will harmonise recognition of research performance in the appointment and promotion policy with the assessment criteria in the new SEP protocol (2015-2021).



## Recruiting, retaining and developing talent

### ACADEMIC STAFF

The faculty recognises talent in the areas of teaching, research and impact generation, as well as operational management and leadership talent. The faculty provides opportunities to develop talent and leadership in all these areas.

As not all staff members will have the right skills and talent to become leaders, it is important for managers to steer this process and manage their staff members' expectations. Staff members also need to take their own responsibility in the development of their careers. We will pay extra attention to female talent, including a package of support measures such as coaching, training, etc. for which additional funding is available.

Internationalisation is playing an increasingly important role in academia. The consequence of open international recruitment is that staff members who want to develop their careers within the faculty have to compete for their positions with external candidates (see also page 16). To this end, we have defined action plans for recruiting and retaining talent.

### HOW?

1. The faculty will continue to encourage the focus on diversity and internationalisation. We want to become an international community with a large diversity of talent that will enhance the quality of our education, research, impact generation and operational management.
2. When recruiting new staff members, we will consider those characteristics that are important for filling the relevant position, but also their potential for the future, whereby we will strive for the right balance between research qualities, teaching qualities and leadership potential.
3. We will pay extra attention to the recruitment and development of female talent. We will continue to improve our programme for the development of female talent. As a rule, there is always a minimum of two women on appointments advisory committees.
4. International recruitment will become standard. We will employ international recruiters to conduct reliable international labour market research for available positions where this has added value.
5. We will continue to develop as an attractive employer that provides a warm welcome to talented new staff members. Potential new staff members must be given the impression that our university will provide them with an inspiring and challenging environment to work in, with excellent facilities.

## **SUPPORT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**

The career growth of support and administrative staff cannot be limited to a department or faculty. As the formation principle applies to all support and administrative staff, the opportunities for career growth are limited. The faculty will continue to consistently implement the existing wage structure. This means that ambitious staff members will also need to look beyond the faculty for career opportunities. Alongside the academic staff, our support and administrative staff also have access to coaching and supervision.

### **HOW?**

Support and administrative staff:

1. Will be offered opportunities to develop specific skills. To this end, the faculty will provide more opportunities for training and education.
2. We will pay specific attention to the balance between workload capability and vitality to be able to make the most of our staff (bearing in mind that staff members are expected to work longer than in the past due to the increased retirement age).
3. We will take signs of excessive workloads seriously. To monitor this, we will conduct staff satisfaction surveys and where necessary develop action plans to regulate the workload and ensure a fair distribution of the tasks and responsibilities.





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