



Report on Experiences with the TRIPLE Promotion Model

Verena Seibel, Marij Swinkels, Gerbrand Koren, Chiara Fresia

Executive Summary

In 2022, Utrecht University implemented the TRIPLE promotion model, designed to broaden recognition of academic contributions and personal developments across six domains: **Team Spirit**, **Research**, **Impact**, **Professional Performance**, **Leadership** and **Education**. The Utrecht Young Academy (UYA) conducted a survey among assistant and associate professors (N = 147) to evaluate how this model is perceived in practice with regards to promotion opportunities and to provide input for improvements. The results reveal a mixed and offer a critical perspective. The TRIPLE model has strong potential to create a fairer and more inclusive recognition system. However, its current implementation is seen as unclear, uneven, and sometimes detrimental to well-being.

Key Findings

- **Transparency and clarity:** Over half of respondents reported dissatisfaction with the clarity of promotion criteria and transparency of requirements.
- **Supervisory support:** Guidance is concentrated in research and education, while the newer TRIPLE areas (impact, leadership, team spirit, professional performance) receive little to no support.
- **Well-being:** Three-quarters of respondents experienced increased pressure to perform across multiple domains, one-third reported negative effects on mental health, and half perceived that TRIPLE fosters competition among colleagues.
- **Inclusivity:** Only a minority felt that care responsibilities and international experience were adequately considered in the promotion process.
- **Career progression:** More than half of respondents indicated they had considered leaving Utrecht University due to uncertainties or frustrations with their promotion trajectory.

Recommendations

- **Make criteria transparent and predictable.** Publish promotion pathways, concrete exemplars per TRIPLE domain, and an onboarding pack for new staff to reduce uncertainty and stress.
- **Equip supervisors for all TRIPLE domains.** Provide concise training and tools so supervisors can coach on impact, team spirit, professional performance, and leadership—not only research/education.
- **Support realistic, strengths-based careers.** Encourage tailored development plans that prioritize individual strengths over across-the-board excellence to increase motivation and reduce workload pressure.
- **Embed inclusivity in assessment.** Adjust assessment windows to actual working time, value care responsibilities, and recognize achievements outside UU on par with internal ones.



1. Aim of the Study

In 2022, Utrecht University introduced a new promotion trajectory under the TRIPLE model, as part of the broader Recognition & Rewards agenda. The TRIPLE model represents a shift from traditional evaluation methods towards a more holistic view of academic careers, valuing six domains: Team spirit, Research, Impact, Professional performance, Leadership and Education.

The Utrecht Young Academy (UYA) considered it crucial to explore how this new model is being experienced by assistant and associate professors, as they are the main groups navigating promotion trajectories. The survey aimed to assess knowledge of, and satisfaction with, the TRIPLE promotion criteria; examine how the model is perceived in terms of transparency, fairness, inclusivity, and recognition of diverse contributions; and identify challenges, opportunities, and possible unintended consequences, such as pressure, competition, or mental health effects. The results were intended to provide input to strengthen the fairness, inclusivity, and effectiveness of the promotion process at Utrecht University.

2. Set-up of the Study

The UYA distributed an online survey among assistant professors (UD1, UD2) and associate professors (UHD1, UHD2) across all faculties of the university. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, in line with GDPR requirements. A total of 147 colleagues responded to the survey. Of these, one third were UD2 (33%), another third UD1 (32%), 28% UHD2, 4% UHD1, and 3% identified as 'other'. The gender distribution was 58 percent female, 37 percent male, and 5 percent preferred not to state their gender. In terms of ethnic and cultural background, 58 percent identified as Dutch, 28 percent as having another European background, 11 percent as non-European, and 3 percent as mixed or multiple backgrounds. The survey included responses from all seven faculties, with the largest groups coming from Science (33%), Social and Behavioural Sciences (28%), and Law, Economics and Governance (22%). Responses at other faculties were rather low, which should be taken into account when interpreting results. It should also be noted, that participation in this survey might have attracted colleagues with stronger views. Yet, the consistency and breadth of concerns suggest that these issues are systemic rather than incidental.

The survey combined closed and open-ended questions, covering satisfaction with the criteria, knowledge of the processes, perceptions of support and inclusivity, and the consequences of TRIPLE for well-being and career perspectives.

3. Main Results

The results of the survey reveal a mixed perception of the TRIPLE promotion process among respondents. Although many colleagues were familiar with the general principles of TRIPLE, detailed knowledge of the promotion criteria and procedures in their faculties was moderate.



37% indicated that they are very/extremely knowledgeable about the promotion criteria, whereas 33% said that they are only slightly/not knowledgeable. These knowledge gaps are directly linked to variation in reported levels of satisfaction with the promotion system, which calls for improvement. Concerns were frequently raised about the lack of **transparency and clarity of requirements**, the perceived fairness of the procedure, and the recognition of contributions beyond research. These concerns were particularly visible in faculties such as Law, Economics and Governance and Science.

Overall, 43% of respondents indicated that they are (very) dissatisfied with the current promotion model. Looking into more detail it shows that respondents are particularly dissatisfied with the (lack of) transparency of requirements within the promotion criteria (51%) as well as the (lack of) clarity of performance expectations (53%). Over 71% agreed with the statement, that they feel that the current TRIPLE model “increased pressure to excel in multiple domains” and only 20% (strongly) agreed with the statement that they felt in control of their career progression. What was particularly alarming is that 52% reported to have considered leaving their position due to challenges or uncertainties with their promotion trajectory. Overall, about 40% of respondents report being satisfied with how non-research contributions (teaching, team science, leadership, impact) are recognized. Satisfaction is comparatively higher in the Faculty of Geosciences and the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Open-ended responses indicate concerns about subjectivity in evaluations and inconsistent application of the promotion criteria. Several respondents felt that the criteria’s increased openness enables inconsistent interpretation and may leave room for ‘old-boys’ decision-making. Others pointed to perceived favouritism arising from unclear criteria. A number also noted that limited available positions make the criteria feel irrelevant in practice:

“The criteria are beside the point. They are worthless if there are no positions available—you will not be promoted despite meeting all criteria.”

Finally, some respondents reported that promotion outcomes depend heavily on bargaining skills and on the willingness of department heads to advocate for candidates. Respondents also varied strongly in their perception of their **supervisor’s support** on developing within the six TRIPLE domains. Respondents reported moderate to strong support by their supervisors in research (70%) and education (62%). Less support was perceived in the other domains with 50% indicating moderate to strong support in developing their skills in team science. Over 60 percent of respondents indicated little or no support from their supervisors in the domains impact and professional performance. This imbalance suggests that the daily practice of academic guidance at UU continues to prioritize traditional domains, despite TRIPLE’s intention to broaden the scope of recognition.



The survey also showed that **inclusivity** considerations require stronger attention by the faculties. Only about one fifth (18%) of respondents felt that care responsibilities were sufficiently considered in the promotion process. Among those who took leave due to care responsibilities the number even drops to 12%. Care responsibilities often reduce availability for travel, out-of-hours activities, and uninterrupted research time, which can depress publication, grant, and impact metrics without reflecting scholarly quality. If these aspects are not taken into account, cumulative disadvantages are likely to arise.

Another notable finding is that international experience appears under-recognized: nearly half of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with how work abroad is valued. This shows the complexity of international experience. While it is valued in principle, respondents report it is not clearly weighted in the criteria:

“The only thing that is looked at is how much money you brought in at UU. Even if you have a track record of getting funding outside UU, that is not considered.”

This poses a particular challenge for international colleagues, who gained most of their teaching and research experience abroad. Others noted a misalignment between UU’s TRIPLE criteria and external incentives that still prioritize research excellence and grant acquisition, raising concerns that additional criteria may dilute focus and create career risk in a wider system that has not changed.

International staff also highlighted that some TRIPLE domains are easier to attain for Dutch natives. For example:

“Impact is easier to reach in your own country and language.”

Limited stakeholder networks and language barriers can make public engagement more challenging for international colleagues. The position of international colleagues within TRIPLE requires more attention, also for other reasons. Whereas 43% of Dutch natives report to be (very) satisfied with TRIPLE, this is only the case for 20% of international colleagues. The variation in satisfaction holds for all aspects surveyed, from satisfaction with transparency of criteria to perceptions of fairness. International colleagues also report to receive less support by their supervisors in the domains outside of research than Dutch colleagues.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey highlights that the TRIPLE model is widely recognized as a promising step towards more balanced academic recognition, yet its full potential has not yet been realized in the eyes of many assistant and associate professors at Utrecht University. The findings suggest that while TRIPLE has set an important direction for enabling diverse career paths, further refinement and



support are needed to ensure it achieves this goal without generating additional pressures or uncertainties.

One key opportunity lies in enhancing transparency and clarity. Colleagues expressed a wish for more explicit communication about what is expected in each domain, ideally illustrated with concrete examples. Strengthening this aspect would help to build trust and confidence in the process. In addition, respondents identified room for improvement in embedding diversity considerations more firmly, particularly with regard to care responsibilities and international trajectories.

The results also point to the importance of aligning TRIPLE's breadth with staff well-being. While the model encourages reflection on multiple domains, colleagues noted that this can create a sense of increased workload. Ensuring that staff are supported to focus on their individual strengths could help alleviate this. Relatedly, supervisory support is perceived as strongest in research and education, offering a solid basis to build upon. Expanding this guidance to newer TRIPLE areas such as impact, professional performance, and team spirit would help bring the full vision of the model into practice.

Finally, the fact that a notable share of respondents have considered leaving the university underlines how important it is to continue investing in clarity, inclusivity, and support. Addressing these areas proactively presents Utrecht University with an opportunity to strengthen staff motivation, retention, and overall confidence in the TRIPLE promotion system.

Recommendations

The survey results indicate several concrete suggestions to refine its implementation and thereby enhance both staff satisfaction and institutional outcomes.

First, **strengthening transparency and clarity** is needed to increase assistant and associate's trust in the new system. More explicit communication, accompanied by concrete examples of what achievements in each TRIPLE domain look like, would make the process more predictable and accessible, and reduce uncertainties and stress. We therefore recommend a clear communication of the promotion criteria, including the various steps needed for promotion, such as the BKO, SKO, etc. These criteria need to be communicated to early newly arrived staff in particular in order for them to prepare for the pathway of their liking.

Second, we recommend to build on existing good practices in supervisory support for research and education by **expanding guidance to the newer TRIPLE areas**. Providing training and resources for supervisors to advise on impact, team spirit, professional performance, and leadership will help embed these domains more fully in everyday academic practice.



Third, the findings highlight the importance of **supporting realistic career development**. Encouraging colleagues to focus on their individual strengths, rather than expecting excellence across all domains, would make TRIPLE more sustainable and motivating in practice. This step is also crucial to reduce work pressure and retention.

Forth, there is clear potential to **embed inclusivity more systematically**. By ensuring that care responsibilities, international trajectories, and diverse professional backgrounds are consistently valued, TRIPLE will be able to better reflect the richness of its academic community. To better include care responsibilities, we recommend the department heads and promotion committees to evaluate evidence relative to available working time and adjusted assessment windows. We also advise recognizing achievements earned abroad or outside UU on an equal footing with those earned within UU.

As Utrecht Young Academy, we are hoping that this report allows Utrecht University to strengthen the TRIPLE model by ensuring that promotion processes are clear, inclusive, and supportive and will foster a stronger sense of belonging and recognition across the university.

*Do you have questions or remarks regarding the report? Please contact Verena Seibel
(v.m.k.seibel@uu.nl)*