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YUFE Recognition and Reward System

T4.4 Report

YUFE Recognition and Reward System

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1. Introduction

YUFE (Young Universities for the Future of Europe) is a European university alliance that includes ten universities located in different European countries¹. According to its vision and mission, the objective of YUFE is to be a front-running European university alliance that shapes a holistic and inclusive future for European learners and the needs of society. YUFE brings together its partner universities with an aspiration of becoming a European university. Staff in the partner universities are in a crucial position in enabling the YUFE visions to become reality.

Personnel at YUFE universities include teaching and research staff and professional service staff. Staff at YUFE universities work with diverse profiles, job descriptions, educational and professional backgrounds, and individual career goals. For the YUFE university alliance, staff are *key enablers of the YUFE European University*. Competent and motivated staff are a prerequisite for high-quality teaching and research, and for the provision of high-quality support services.

YUFE universities want to invest in their staff both individually (separately by each university) and as an alliance. This report is linked to the YUFE Work Package (WP) 4, Staff Journey. The joint work on Staff Journey has started within the first funding period of YUFE. The period resulted in two tangible outcomes, *YUFE Staff Recruitment Policy* and *YUFE Staff Development Policy*. These policies include a set of shared YUFE principles in recruitment and staff development. The policies set the basis of ongoing WP4 work. The policies are also clear indications of the YUFE partner universities' long-term commitment to attracting top talent and consistently developing their existing staff.

Also, the YUFERING project of YUFE concentrated on YUFE universities' collaboration in topics relevant for staff. Among other things, the work included the development of a novel scheme for researcher assessment (*YUFE Academic Assessment Portfolio*; see Kekäle et al. 2024) and the *YUFE Competence Framework for Researchers* (Simmat 2023). In addition, the *YUFE Code of Conduct* can be seen as a leverage for fostering fair leadership and a supportive, inclusive work environment (YUFE 2024).

2. Aims and objectives

The objective of Task 4.4, YUFE Recognition and Reward (R&R) System, is

¹ The academic partners include the University of Antwerp, the University of Bremen, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M), the University of Cyprus, the University of Eastern Finland, the University of Essex, Maastricht University, Nicolaus Copernicus University, the University of Rijeka, and Sorbonne Nouvelle University.

- to take a first step towards designing and implementing recognition and reward systems for academic and professional service staff in YUFE,
- including the evaluation of current good practices, and
- giving guidance on how the YUFE partners can improve their actions considering the local conditions and regulations.

It is further stated that the created systems need to be in line with the calls for action at European and national levels. The systems will duly recognise and reward the diversity of activities, results, and outputs across the YUFE institutions and increase the visibility of joint Alliance outputs.

The systemic approach highlighted in the task description (focus on *the system* of R&R) requires that the various functions of universities' HR (e.g., recruitment, performance management, training and development) are considered and managed holistically. 'System' is here understood as a complex whole consisting of interrelated parts working together to reach a common purpose.

Recognition and reward (R&R) systems for staff are important at all organisations. They are highly important in university settings. Skilled, motivated staff are the foundation of everything a knowledge-intensive university achieves. Based on surveys (e.g., Hastwell 2025), *recognition* is consistently identified as the number one driver of good work and employee motivation. Therefore, the topic of the task described is highly important albeit also a demanding one, as we are dealing with the topic in the context of ten independent institutions located in different countries.

There is no one best way of organising a R&R system for a university. Therefore, the proposed system for the alliance rests on general systemic principles, such as consistency, logic and equal treatment. These can be applied to diverse institutional and cultural contexts.

To support the fulfilment of these objectives, this report provides

- a review of R&R approaches within the context of universities, and general guidelines in R&R,
- a review of YUFE partner universities' current approaches (current good practices) in R&R,
- a set of recommendations for the partner universities, and
- the YUFE R&R toolbox, including both piloted joint activities and further potential activities.

The report also suggests that universities' recognition and rewards systems should be considered within the broader context of the institution, considering factors, such as

European policy targets related to developing sustainable careers in academia and sound HR management.

This report acknowledges the institutional autonomy of universities in key human resources (HR) issues, constrained by national laws, and other steering mechanisms. Within these boundaries set by institutional autonomy on the one hand and by external regulatory measures on the other hand, the development of a common R&R system within the context of an alliance does not aim at changing the overarching structural foundations, but rather lays on partner universities' shared principles in R&R.

This report² provides an opportunity to document the work conducted in Task 4.4. In addition, the report also serves as training material for staff who work on matters related to R&R. The report includes the presentation of both more general principles and concrete R&R practices that are proposed for YUFE.

Task 4.4 does not have full autonomy in determining which joint R&R practices to pursue within the YUFE collaboration. It should be emphasised that formal decision-making may in some cases require a YUFE-level agreement (beyond the working group). Therefore, the aim of the report is to point out first a step towards designing and implementing a recognition and rewards system for YUFE and giving guidance on how the YUFE partners can improve their actions in R&R, as stated in the task description. To become operational, both YUFE-level and local university decision-makers would need to align with the R&R principles and approve them.

3. Background

3.1 Scope of YUFE R&R

All staff in focus

In the first funding period of YUFE, the focus on Staff Journey was especially on teaching and research staff. In the second funding period, *the extent of policies and actions was widened to cover all staff*.

This is reasonable as professional service staff make up a major share of university staff and cannot be overshadowed by the needs of teaching and research staff. Another reason is *the hybridisation of job responsibilities*, which challenges traditional distinctions between categories of staff (good examples being staff working at research support services,

² The sub-task does not have any formal deliverable set in the YUFE proposal.

university libraries, and in education-supporting roles)³. Researcher Celia Whitchurch (2009) has used the term ‘third space’ to refer to staff who do not belong ‘purely’ to either side of university staff categories, neither to teaching and research staff nor to professional service staff. Whitchurch notifies that in many cases, staff which at university staff structures belong to the administrative category often have an academic background, such as a doctoral degree and work experience in research or teaching.

³ As a result of increased expectations towards the contributions of universities, the roles of universities have extended. They now incorporate activities, such as interaction with the surrounding society. The changes have emphasised the expertise of professional service staff (Ryttberg & Geschwind 2017). The need for advanced knowledge and skills within universities is reflected in the increase in educational levels among universities’ professional service staff (Karlsson & Ryttberg 2016).

Recognising and rewarding the diversity of activities, results and outputs

In the YUFE project outline, it is stressed that the developed R&R systems should recognise and reward the diversity of activities, results, and outputs across the YUFE institutions and increase the visibility of joint Alliance outputs.

This call is aligned with *the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment* of the CoARA (2022), which encourages research performing organisations to consider researchers' diverse scholarly activities, like peer reviewing of scholarly papers, mentoring, supervision of doctoral candidates, and leadership roles, and diverse scholarly outputs, such as scholarly publications, research data, protocols, and methods. For YUFE partners as education providers it is especially important to recognise the teaching contributions of staff⁴, but also diverse contributions related to research, leadership, and engagement.

As YUFE wants to embrace a strong societal role, recognising and rewarding the diverse societal engagement activities of staff are crucial. In YUFE, many university staff work beyond their specific work roles and engage in diverse societal roles, for example, as experts in local, regional, national and international working groups and committees. University staff engage with stakeholders and citizens in research, teaching and community building in their campuses. In line with the broader calls to align societal needs with the strategic objectives of universities, YUFE is committed to fostering societal impact through research, teaching, and outreach activities among the wider society in which the universities are embedded. The objective of acknowledging diverse contributions should also acknowledge collaboration between academic and professional service staff, and individual-level mobility between the segments.

Special attention in T4.4. is given to visibility of joint Alliance outputs and activities; activities that are sometimes carried out on top of one's other job duties. The first YUFE Outstanding Staff Collaboration Award brings visibility to the joint efforts of staff across the alliance (see Section 8.1).

3.2 European policy environment

European universities operate in a highly dynamic and complex environment. There are internal and external factors that influence their R&R. Within the context of European

⁴ In universities' R&R frameworks, teaching and clinical work often tend to be left in the shadow of research (Salib et al. 2022).

university alliances, we identify the European policy landscape related to higher education and research as especially relevant.⁵

In the European Research Area (ERA), certain actions have a specific focus on staff. These include:

- ERA Action 4 on promoting attractive and sustainable research careers, balanced talent circulations, and international, transdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility across the ERA,
- ERA Action 3 on reforming the assessment for research, researchers, and institutions to improve their quality, performance and impact, and
- ERA Action 5 on promoting gender equality and inclusiveness.

The fourth ERA Action aims at finding improvements to combat detrimental effects of over-competition and the instability and poor working conditions that concern especially early career academics. Some of the sector's major problems and potential solutions under ERA 4 are presented in the *Council Recommendation (2023) on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe*.

The European Charter for Researchers is a set of general principles and requirements which specifies the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of both researchers and employers. Universities in Europe are encouraged to adhere to the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. YUFE universities have endorsed the Charter and the Code of Conduct. While the European-level principles are set at a rather general level, they provide a shared set of principles on which to build more concrete policies.

Two major European initiatives are central to address within the topic of R&R: the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and the HR Excellence in Research process and award (previously HRS4R process).

CoARA particularly focuses on responsible research assessment. CoARA is a collective of organisations committed to reforming the methods and processes by which research, researchers, and research organisations are evaluated. Among the core commitments of CoARA is the need to recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research. The diversity of contributions refers to the need to recognise not only contributions such as research publications and research funding, but also contributions related to teaching, societal engagement, and leadership,

⁵ Also, within the YUFE project outline, it was stated that the created R&R systems within YUFE, created within Task 4.4, should be in line with the calls for action at European and national levels.

for example. Most YUFE partner universities have signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA).

The HR Excellence in Research award is granted to research performing organisations that are progressing in the implementation of the principles of the European Charter for Researchers in their policies and practices. Following the principles on open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment principles is a compulsory part of the HR Excellence in Research process. All the YUFE partner universities have been awarded the HR Excellence in Research.⁶

Certain factors constrain the opportunities to plan joint R&R systems for a European alliance, such as YUFE. YUFE partner universities are autonomous organisations which have their own HR policies. The universities follow different traditions in HR policies and practices, characterised by differences in goal setting, but also institutional decision-making structures and autonomy of different sub-units (Kekäle et al. 2024). Another significant factor in Task 4.4 is universities' dependence on national or regional-level regulations in employment issues and funding procedures, including effective legislation and traditions in collective bargaining. These characteristics to a large extent constrain the possibilities for joint actions in R&R.

The collective work in YUFE R&R should consider the wider policy environment and the boundaries set by the regulatory frameworks.

4. Basic theoretical approaches

Different theoretical perspectives have been used to explain how and why recognition and rewards influence employee behaviour, performance, and well-being. The perspectives also highlight potential trade-offs between external incentives and intrinsic drivers of work. This section therefore provides the conceptual foundation needed to evaluate how recognition and reward structures shape employee motivation, engagement, and outcomes.

4.1 Extrinsic motivation and tangible rewards

One of the most prevalent approaches to R&R in organisations involves offering employees tangible, material rewards such as bonuses, opportunities for career advancement, titles,

⁶ Two Task 4.4 meetings in fall 2024 were held to focus on the topics of CoARA and HR Excellence in Research and to discuss the implications on YUFE. YUFE participants outside the Task 4.4 group but interested in the topics were welcomed to join the meetings.

and awards. These rewards carry social significance, signalling that the individual has fulfilled their responsibilities effectively and met the employer's expectations. This approach primarily focuses on material indicators of good work or performance.

The approach is based on the theory of operant conditioning by B.F. Skinner. According to the theory, behaviour is reinforced and likely to be repeated when duly rewarded. Conversely, punishments typically deter individuals from engaging in behaviours associated with negative consequences. Thus, such an R&R approach is based on punishments and rewards ('sticks and carrots'), driven by extrinsic motivation. The basic approach has been shown to work both for humans and animals, and it forms a basis for many R&R approaches. Yet the approach has been criticised in academic context as too mechanistic and for neglecting cognitive processes and ethical concerns regarding control and freedom (e.g. Staddon 2006).

4.2 Intrinsic rewards and positive psychology

This approach can be found in research findings which demonstrate that workflow increases well-being, creativity, and productivity. Flow, characterised by absorption in work, is inherently rewarding; in this approach, the work itself and task accomplishment are the primary sources of rewards and satisfaction. This dynamic particularly applies in academic work, where recognition and rewards by the employer are typically valued as a sign of respect. Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi are seen as founding fathers of this approach.

Intrinsic motivation and complete concentration on the task are associated with meaningful cognitive engagement, creativity, and enduring learning outcomes. Conversely, extrinsic motivation often correlates with shallow cognitive engagement. Certain forms of rewards may support and enhance intrinsic motivation.

Organisations can support flow and intrinsic motivation through several strategies, including:

- providing work-life balance and supporting employee well-being,
- creating environments that promote engagement, and
- satisfying basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Work becomes inherently motivating when individuals:

- enjoy the tasks they perform,
- like the people they work with, and

- find meaning and purpose in their work objectives.

4.3 Competence motivation theory

The competence motivation (CM) theory, as articulated by Elliot and Dweck (2005), emphasises the significance of social and psychological factors in driving motivation. According to this approach, feelings of competence or incompetence strongly influence motivation and rewards. People are attached to the activities in which they feel competent and capable, creating a self-reinforcing cycle in work: people recognise these areas and tend to concentrate on rewarding work. Additionally, there is social or cultural reinforcement wherein individuals prefer working with like-minded people which reinforces shared viewpoints and values, contributing to the formation of a workplace culture.

Positive outcomes and a sense of competence lead to joy and pride, whereas negative outcomes may lead to disappointment. The learning mechanism at play in CM is similar to operant conditioning, with some differences. Operant conditioning usually aims to reinforce certain behaviour, while CM operates more subtly through workplace practices. Career models can provide a structured way to channel CM.

4.4 Key takeaways

Several important points emerge from the discussion.

1. Human motivation is influenced by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors.
2. Properly matching individuals with appropriate organisational roles is crucial for optimal motivation and productivity. Even substantial material rewards may not compensate for a mismatch between person and position.
3. Recruiting intrinsically motivated individuals, especially in the case of recruiting teaching and research staff, is crucial, perhaps even the most important aspect in building a successful university (Shattock 2003).
4. The overall HR policy matters as the overall atmosphere needs to be supportive for people to do their best.
5. Effective leadership plays a critical role in providing meaningful direction. If people do not see meaning in their work, they hardly remain fully motivated, regardless of the potential material rewards they may be offered.
6. Perception of rewards is subjective and tied to individual values. Organisations need to build an overall approach to R&R, and to enhance and solve local conditions with the help of leadership.

There are several aspects in which leadership can support R&R:

- building a safe and supportive atmosphere,
- establishing and negotiating clear goals,
- facilitating decision-making processes,
- demonstrating coherent organisational values and providing guidance,
- allocating financial and human resources effectively,
- enhancing wellbeing at work,
- organising work,
- setting and framing tasks,
- supporting a positive organisational culture, and
- collaborating with external stakeholders.

5. Significance of R&R

A recognition and reward system refers to an organisational system aimed at acknowledging employees for their performance, either through monetary or non-monetary means. While the focus in this report is on the universities' R&R policies and practices, it should be noted that the wider work environment also matters. For example, recognition of good work may not only come from one's formal supervisors, but also from colleagues in diverse networks.

Investing in systematic R&R of staff has many benefits. Studies indicate that employees exhibit higher levels of engagement and productivity when their efforts are regularly acknowledged and celebrated (Jo & Shin 2025). Organisations' reward systems (including either financial or non-financial components, or both) are shown to affect employees' motivation and retention (Daly & Dee 2006; Rosser 2004). The systems also shape the priorities and decisions of teaching and research staff (Fairweather 2005). Reward systems signal institutional priorities: internally by showing what the institution values and wants to see more of and externally, indicating what the institution is and what it wants to be (O'Meara 2011, 164–165). Thus, within the competitive labour market, R&R systems provide opportunities for organisations to differentiate from others. Despite their significance, according to O'Meara (2011), R&R systems at higher education institutions are often out of alignment, overly impacted by the status system of higher education rather than institutional needs and mission.

In its most fundamental legal form, work contracts entail two key components:

- the employee fulfilling their duties according to predetermined or agreed objectives and a set of rules, and

- the employer compensating the employee with a salary for the work performed.

In addition to monetary compensation, safe and fair work conditions need to be guaranteed by the employer. This perspective perceives reward systems as *an exchange* between two parties.

While national arrangements typically address the level of minimum salaries and requirements for equal treatment, modern human resource management (HRM) systems acknowledge that minimum benefits may fall short in an individualised world, especially in cases where the demand for workforce surpasses the supply. With the freedom to switch jobs and careers if unsatisfied, employers often seek for an optimal R&R system not only to reinforce positive work behaviour and foster innovation, but also to bolster overall work output and well-being. Modern approaches to R&R aim to effectively address these needs.

From an individual perspective of an employee, the crucial questions in R&R often revolve around topics such as ‘what is in it for me’; ‘am I being recognised’, and ‘does my work align with the purpose and goals I hold for my career’. In an organisational setting, a fundamental issue is the perception of justice – whether one perceives as being treated fairly in comparison to their colleagues (O’Meara 2011).

Within a work community, in which formal leaders have considerable influence over individual employees’ benefits and their employment relationship, not only considerations of safety and the predictability of work, but also *the benevolent acknowledgment* emerges as a vital element. It provides a sense of orderliness, well-being, and affirmation in employees (‘things are in order’, and ‘I am doing the right things’), reinforcing their sense of direction and work identity.

There are various types of possible recognition and rewards, including monetary compensation, verbal praise, and public acknowledgement of good performance. Richard Sennett (2003, 64) uses the term recognition to refer to mutual respect and consideration, in the context of interaction. Recognition has been found to be crucial for employees positioned in different organisations⁷. Analysis conducted by Great Place to Work (Hastwell 2025), based on 1.7 million survey responses, underscores its significance. The findings revealed that 37 % of respondents identified ‘recognise me’ as the most important driver

⁷ The classical Hawthorne studies conducted by Elton Mayo and colleagues also highlighted the importance of social factors and job satisfaction in shaping individuals’ work performance. They suggested that employees’ productivity increased when they felt observed, recognised, or singled out for special attention, underscoring the motivational impact of recognition and social acknowledgement.

for great work. In comparison, a mere 7 % of the respondents claimed that ‘pay me more’ (increased compensation) would be the most important driver.

In addition to formal arrangements characterised by job contracts between employment parties, university organisations have special characteristics especially regarding teaching and research staff. Researchers belong to scholarly communities, which are often global in nature, characterised by specific ways of working and diverse understandings of what constitutes good research and teaching. These differences also have implications on the forms of acknowledgement. It is typical that not only the organisational affiliation but even more importantly the affiliation within one’s scholarly community carries importance for researchers (Pietilä 2018). Thus, outputs, such as publications within respected platforms, having one’s work cited by one’s peers, honours and awards handed out by the scholarly community, prestigious funding, and having one’s research findings presented at prestigious conferences may be powerful sources of acknowledgement and motivation for researchers. In a university setting, job autonomy, supported by academic freedom, sets an important prerequisite for work performance and a source of work motivation especially for teaching and research staff (Bellamy et al. 2003; Henkel 2005).

In some cases, teaching and research staff directly or indirectly participate in staff decisions by providing peer review statements and by acting as committee members in recruitment and promotion processes. Thus, as employees they are in a special position, as in many cases they may be in an active role in contributing to the reward systems (O’Meara 2011). Although institutional factors alone cannot provide job satisfaction especially for teaching and research staff, they may cause or prevent institutional criticism and dissatisfaction. Institutional factors, if perceived as unsupportive or unfair, may cause willingness to change to another institution, even if one was satisfied with their work content.

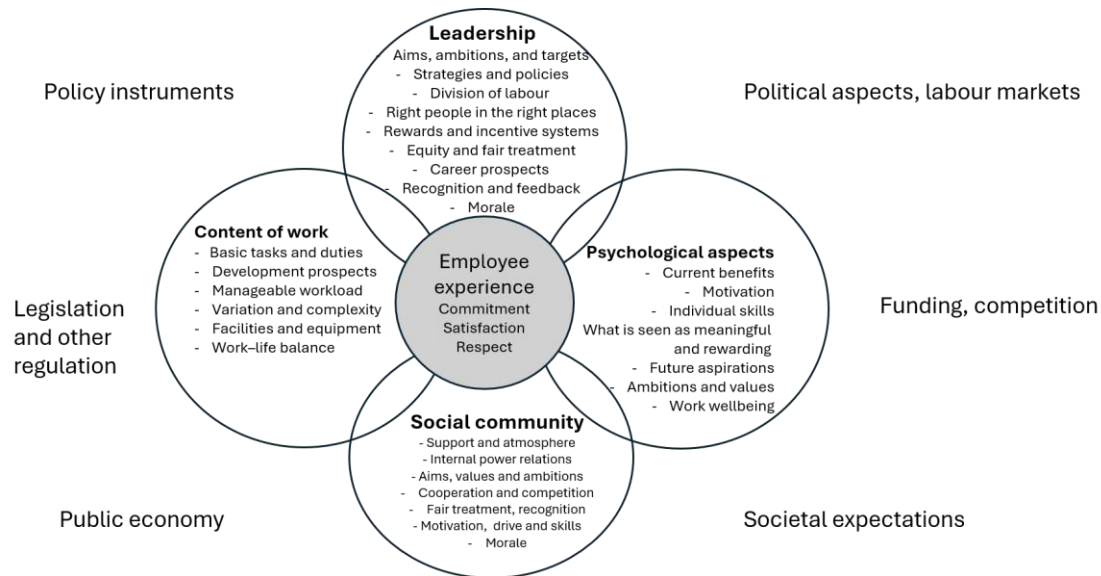


Figure 1. Recognition and rewards (R&R) as a relative system in higher education (source: authors' own).

Figure 1 highlights R&R as a relative and systemic whole. It also emphasises the context: R&R is embedded in institutional policy and culture. The system includes individual-level aspects, such as employees' expectations and aspirations for work, the nature of their work, but also group-level and community-level aspects, such as the influence of the wider social community and leadership within the workplace. Each of these elements influences how employees perceive R&R. For instance, for an employee who enjoys their work (is in the 'right position') and receives a salary increase, such an occurrence is typically perceived as a rewarding experience that positively affects work motivation. However, if it becomes apparent that colleagues with similar roles and performance have received higher pay raises, the situation may lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and demotivation. Thus, it is not solely the material bonus, for example, that matters, but rather the perception of fair treatment with respect to others and to the task (outcomes).

Therefore, approaches to R&R need to be *systematic and consistent*. Even a seemingly minor misstep, such as poorly chosen words from a leader when communicating a bonus, can significantly diminish the sense of accomplishment. Material bonuses are just one component of the overall message which constitutes the reward. As noted, recognition seems to be the number one driver of good work and employee motivation. In contrast, after achieving a certain salary level, the rewarding element of salary increases may fade.

The model emphasises the critical role of leadership in R&R: effective leadership plays a critical role in providing meaningful R&R. Leaders have a formal authority to organise work within their institutions. They must ensure equal treatment of employees, decide on the rewards, and address social problems among their work community when needed. Effective

and fair leadership is essential for fostering a positive, supportive R&R environment and maintaining employee satisfaction and motivation.

5.1 Institutional R&R practices

R&R practices are diverse. They include, for example:

- salary systems and their possibility to recognise and reward good work performance,
- other monetary incentives for rewarding good work performance, such as bonuses,
- opportunities for career advancement, both vertical and horizontal, including internal career models,
- professional development opportunities, such as training, mentoring, and opportunities for mobility,
- programs and initiatives supporting life-work balance, such as access to occupational health care, family leave programs, possibilities for flexible working hours, sport facilities,
- employee recognition, such as public recognition of good work, verbal praise,
- awards, such as teaching awards, best PhD awards, and
- modern and up-to-date working spaces and infrastructures.

At organisations, there is a need for clear, fair criteria and assessment to ensure equal treatment of employees; a principle based on legislation at the European Union and national levels. The criteria should be realistic for the employee to achieve. Ultimately, the successful implementation of any R&R practice always depends on effective leadership and legal and financial frameworks, particularly at the local and national levels.

5.2 Regulatory and cultural constraints

Despite the wide array of universities' R&R policies and practices, universities also face constraints when designing and implementing R&R. These constraints are particularly salient when working at the alliance level.

First, universities operate within the broader labour market context characterised by national and/or federal-level regulation concerning working life. There is binding regulation, such as collective bargaining agreements, that universities must follow. The level of institutional autonomy with respect to the state differs significantly between the YUFE partner universities. Regulations and agreements may leave some universities comparatively little leeway to create their own unique R&R systems. Still, R&R systems generally need to adhere to some interpretation of the principle of equal treatment adhering to the European norm of equal pay for equal work.

Second, the funding system in which the university is embedded is important. Limited financial resources may restrict universities' ability to offer competitive R&R programs. Overall, the funding of the higher education and research system may impact the incentive structures universities offer for staff. For example, performance-based research funding systems create strong incentives that shape organisational and individual behaviour within public research institutions. Universities often translate indicators retrieved from performance management systems into their internal reward structures (Jonkers & Zacharewicz 2016).

Third, institutional traditions and prevailing organisational culture may be resistant to changes in HRM. In addition, researchers located in different disciplinary fields follow their own norms concerning what constitutes good scholarly work, which limits the use of organisation-wide policies in recruitment and performance management.

6. YUFE Universities' R&R practices

YUFE universities as separate institutions already engage in diverse R&R practices to recruit and further develop and motivate their staff. To be able to build joint basic principles for a YUFE R&R system, it is crucial to know the basics of the partner universities' current R&R practices. To that end we conducted a survey in 2023 with a special emphasis on professional service staff, because professional service staff was not in the focus of YUFE during the first funding period. We received responses from altogether seven universities⁸. Below we present the findings.

The formal status of professional service staff at the universities differed. At two universities, staff were direct university employees. At the remaining five universities, there was a mixed model in place, having professional service staff with the statuses of both civil servants and university employees. The total size of the professional service staff at the universities differed ranging from c. 700 to 1,500 FTEs.

In the survey, we asked what R&R practices were in use for professional service staff, and to what extent these practices were applied 'systematically', 'to some extent', or 'not at all'.

⁸ These were the University of Antwerp, the University of Bremen, Nicolaus Copernicus University, the University of Eastern Finland, the University of Rijeka, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, and the University of Cyprus. In most cases, the Task 4.4 working group members were the respondents to the survey.

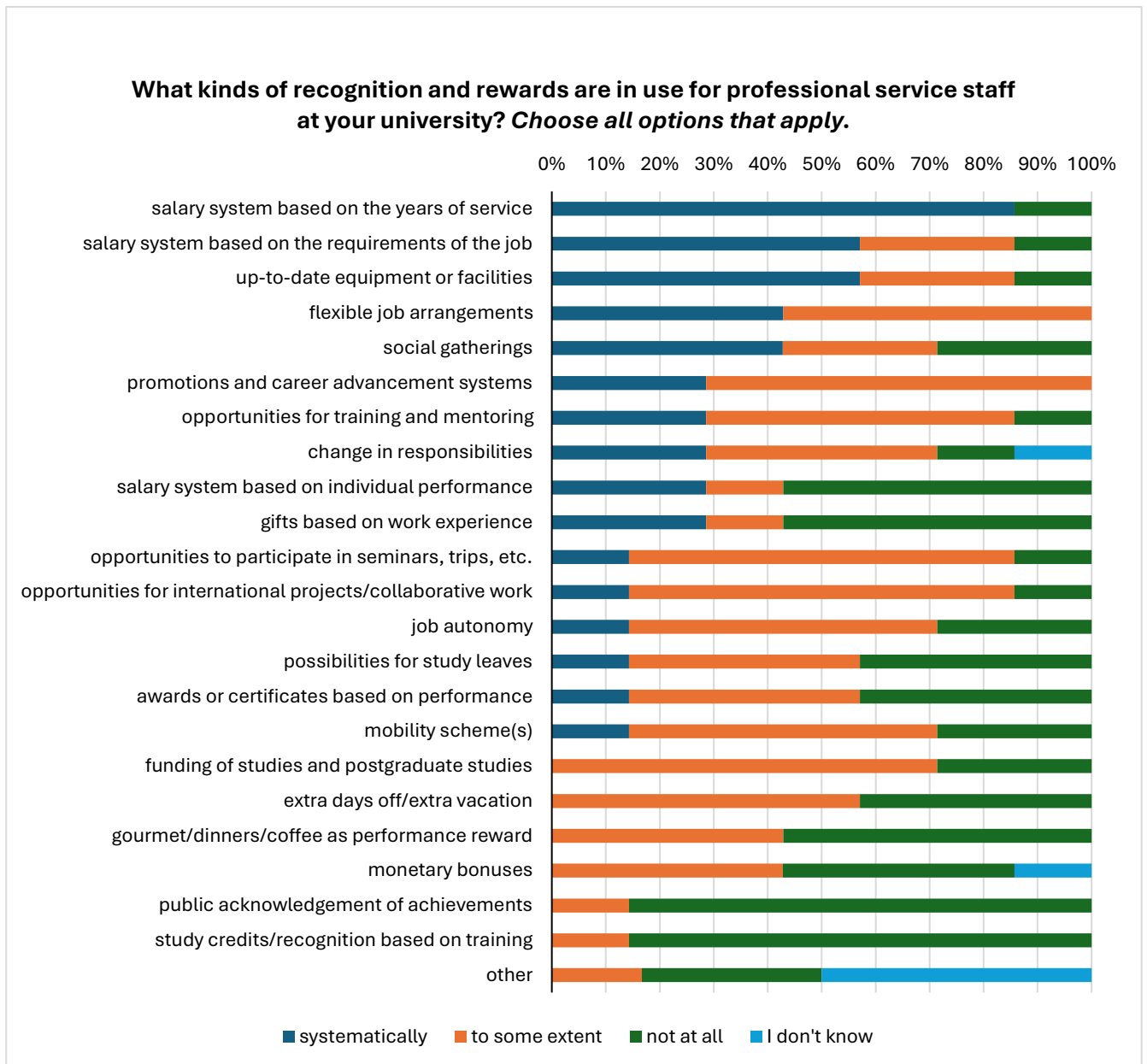


Figure 2. R&R practices in use for professional service staff.

The practices that were most often applied systematically were

- salary system based on the years of service (86 % use systematically),
- salary system based on the requirements of the job (57 % use systematically, 29 % to some extent)
- up-to-date equipment and/or facilities (57 % use systematically, 29 % to some extent)
- flexible job arrangements (43 % use systematically, 57 % to some extent),
- social gatherings (43 % use systematically, 29 % to some extent),

- promotions and career advancement system(s) (29 % use systematically, 71 % to some extent),
- opportunities for training and mentoring (29 % use systematically, 57 % to some extent),
- change in responsibilities (29 % use systematically, 43 % to some extent),
- salary system based on individual performance (29 % use systematically, 14 % to some extent),
- gifts (29 % use systematically, 14 % to some extent).

It should be noted that reward systems based only on the years of service have limitations as they do not consider the demands of the job or personal performance.

Of these, some R&R are more formal and significant for the organisation and individual employees (e.g., salary systems) compared to others (e.g., gifts). Still, the different practices reflect the scope of activities YUFE universities have in place for professional service staff. In the open-ended responses, it was mentioned that some of the practices (e.g., possibility for international collaborations, opportunities for participating in conferences) depended on the type of positions.

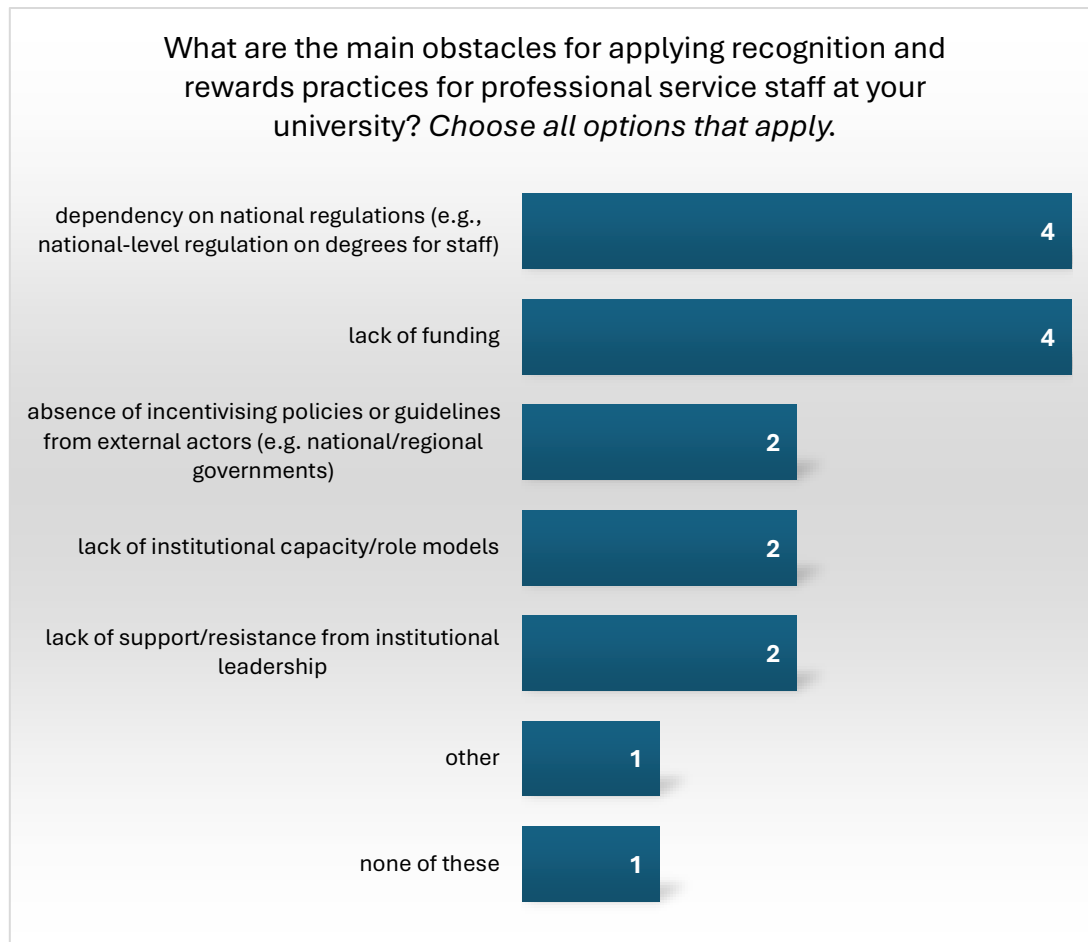


Figure 3. Main obstacles for applying R&R practices for professional service staff at the university.

Universities may have different obstacles in their operational environment that hinder them from applying certain R&R practices. Based on the survey, especially the dependency on national regulations (for example, national-level regulation on degrees for staff) and lack of funding were seen as major obstacles (Figure 3). Also, the absence of incentivising policies or guidelines from external actors, lack of institutional capacity or role models, and the lack of support or resistance from institutional leadership were seen as important obstacles at some universities.

Regarding career models or formal internal promotion procedures for professional service staff, three universities had such systems, whereas four universities did not. In the open-ended answers it was stated that some universities were bound by national- or regional-level regulation on promotions. At one university, there was a ladder in place for career development, but it was perceived as too short. At one university, there were formal internal

promotion rounds every two years, in which some individuals may become promoted (based on individual performance, the time since last promotion; constrained by the promotion budget available).

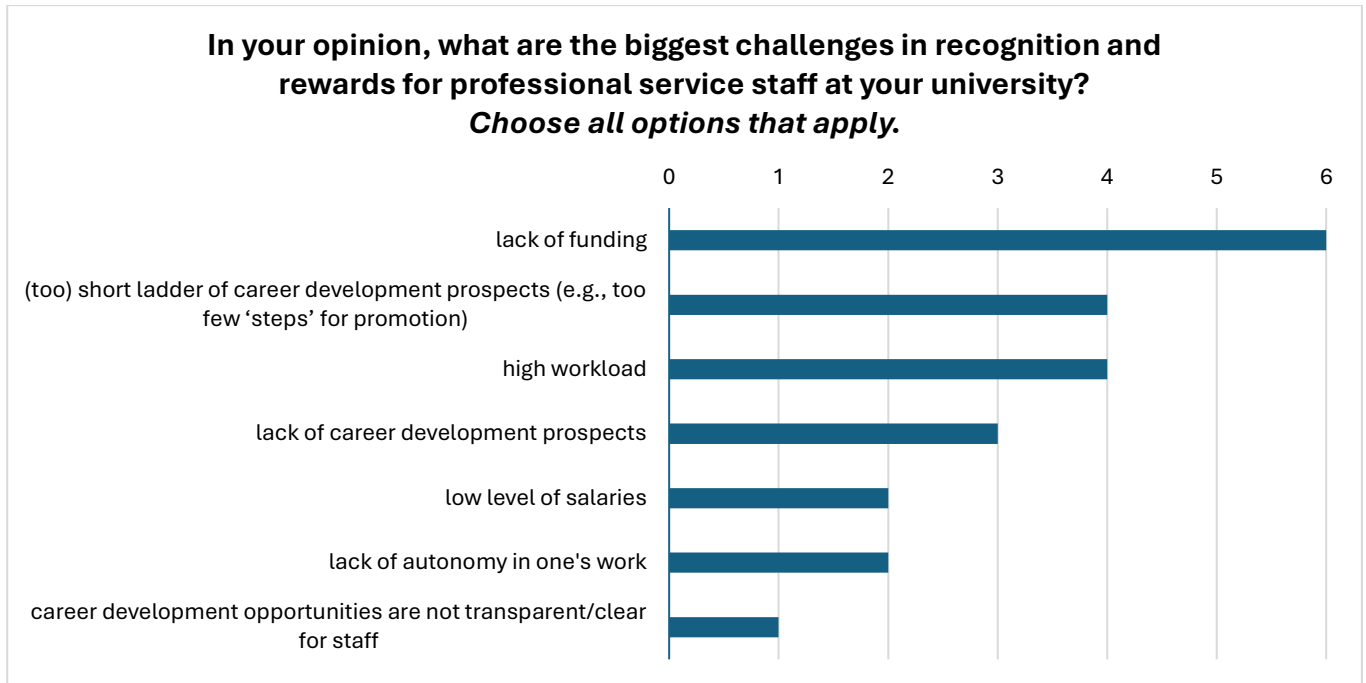


Figure 4. Biggest perceived challenges in R&R for professional service staff.

According to the responses, the biggest challenges in R&R for professional service staff were the lack of funding (identified as significant by six respondents), too short ladder of career development prospects, high workload, and lack of career development prospects. In the open-ended answers, at one university, the available budget for promotions was perceived as quite low, without no real opportunities for advancement due to the collective labour agreement.

The recruitment situation was not seen as optimal at all YUFE universities: four universities out of the seven had had problems in recruiting professional service staff in the recent year. In the open-ended questions, it was mentioned that these problems related to specific groups of staff, such as staff in the financial department, vocational workers (such as electricians), management positions, technical or IT staff. The situations differed as some respondents commented there were too many applicants per position, whereas some commented the number of applications was decreasing.

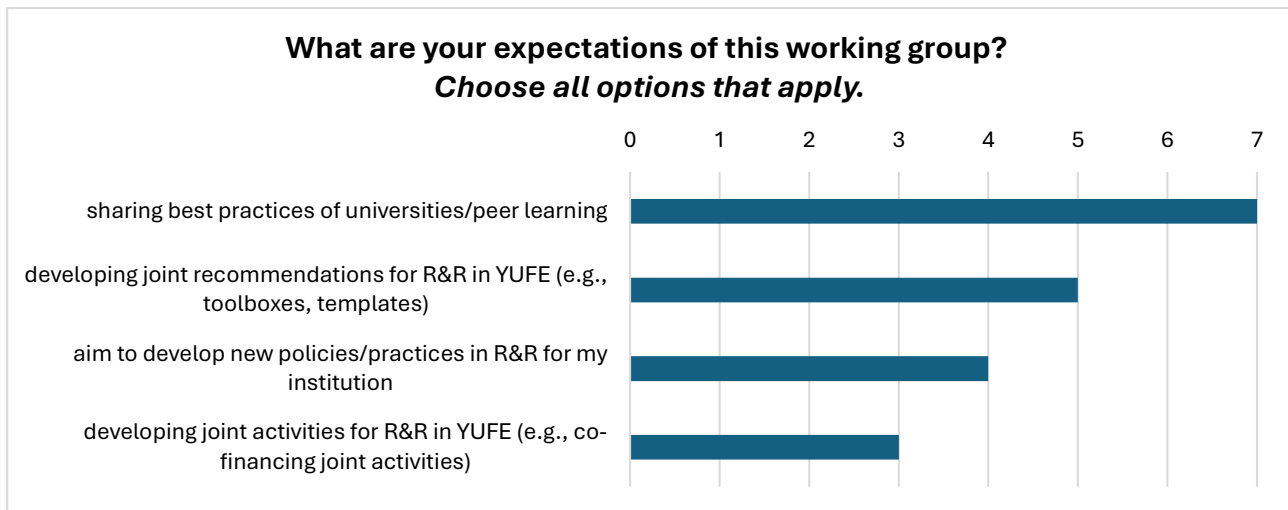


Figure 5. Expectations of Task 4.4 working group.

Last, we asked about the expectations regarding the working group (Figure 5). All respondents wished to share best practices of universities. Five respondents wished to develop joint recommendations for R&R in YUFE, such as toolboxes or templates. Four respondents wished to develop new policies or practices for one's own institution based on the group's work. Three respondents wished to develop joint activities for R&R in YUFE, such as co-financing joint activities.

7. YUFE R&R system

Our task consists of taking a first step towards designing and implementing recognition and reward systems for YUFE as an alliance. This endeavour has included the evaluation of YUFE universities' good practices. In addition, the agenda of the group included providing guidance on how the YUFE partners can improve their actions while considering local conditions and regulations.

To offer initial steps and guidance on potential R&R systems, we present one possible framework. Rather than basing the work on any theoretical model to be imposed into the independent institutions, we have identified common denominators and a model already in place in the institutions, albeit perhaps not always explicitly and critically discussed. The idea is that implementation becomes possible within the timeframe as the model already exists in the institutions in diverse forms. The fundamental issue then becomes to implement some common basic elements wisely.

It is evident that the local conditions and regulations between YUFE partner institutions vary considerably. It is positive that all YUFE institutions have adopted some form of R&R approach and aim at fostering R&R in their institutions. Despite variations, common central features in R&R can be identified and further strengthened.

The proposed general R&R system needs to be seen as ideal typical; its full utilisation may be constrained by local regulations, political considerations, and leadership dynamics. Nonetheless, it serves to highlight fundamental aspects in R&R and present them in a coherent manner, emphasising the interconnected nature of the system components.

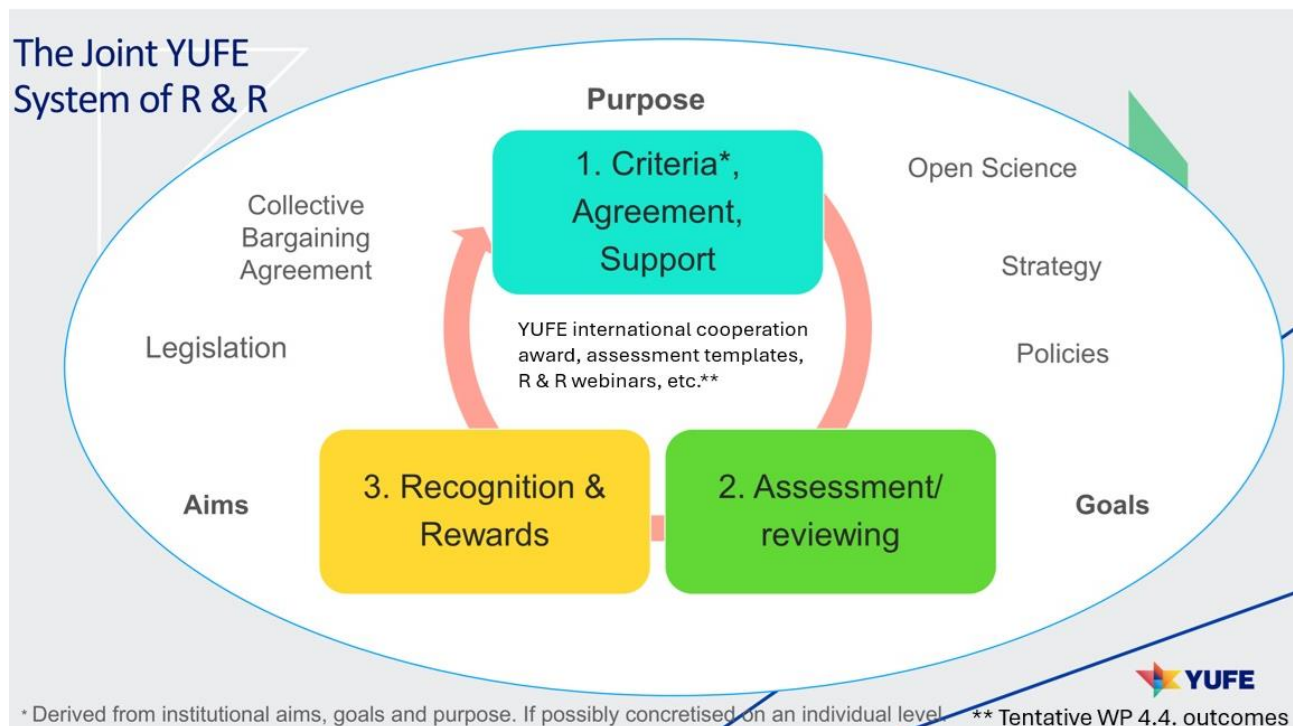


Figure 6. The general-level YUFE R&R system (source: authors' own).

The model is presented as a development cycle. It is in use in several modifications within YUFE universities (see Table 1 for examples).

Table 1. Examples of YUFE universities' R&R practices underlying the R&R system.

Examples	1. Criteria	2. Assessment	3. R&R
Maastricht University: R&R program	Agreement on researcher's duties and specialities (research, education, societal engagement)	Assessment of duties and outcomes as a part of promotion rounds after few years	Potential promotion, recognition of work done
University of Antwerp: ZAP career cycle	ZAP goal setting interview	Evaluation ZAP	Promotion ZAP
University of Antwerp: Bi-annual promotion rounds for administrative staff	Each head of department or unit decides on which criteria the promotions will be based, central committee assess the motivation for each promotion	Leadership assesses the fair allocation and persons deserving a promotion.	Promotion, recognition
University of Bremen: 1. Bonuses for professors 2. Awards for academic staff	1. Linked to Bremen Higher Education Performance Remuneration Ordinance (BremHLBV) and pertinent Ordinance at UBremen (Leistungsbezügeordnung) 2. Awards based on topic	1. Assessment of legal requirements 2. Assessment of candidates' work a) Excellence in university teaching b) Outstanding doctoral supervision c) Outstanding transfer activities	1. Bonuses 2. Awards
University of Bremen: 1. Tenure evaluation to full professorship 2. Tenure evaluation to senior lecturer / senior researcher	Tasks based on general criteria: R&D; Teaching; Self-Administration; Extra-Academic Qualifications -> tasks to be evaluated later.	1. Evaluation after 6 years by interdisciplinary committee, based on qualitative and quantitative data. 2. Evaluation after at least two years	Promotion if the criteria are met.
University of Eastern	Development discussions, collective bargaining agreement	Assessments by leaders, assessment group	Salary increases, recognition

Finland: Salary system		(demand levels) and employer	
Nicolaus Copernicus University: Bonus system	Rector's awards for chosen criteria & employees	Leadership decides based on pre-defined criteria	Bonuses

The duration of the R&R cycle may vary depending on the task and local conditions, ranging from six months to one or two years (as promotion rounds occur biannually in some YUFE institutions). There are reasons for relatively long assessment cycles. Especially in academic work, outcomes (which in work organisations must be the basis of R&R) typically develop relatively slowly. Also, among professional service staff consistency and continuity are often valued.

We identify several aspects of R&R as crucial:

1. The *criteria* need to be discussed, explained, and agreed upon. They need to be reasonable and achievable within the set timeframe and related to the skills level of the employee. This requires discussion, interaction skills, and realism from the leader. Support should be available throughout work processes (cf. the situational leadership model by Hersey and Blanchard 1969).⁹
2. There are different methods for *assessment*, no one being ultimately better than other in all situations. Assessment needs to be connected to the task being evaluated, focusing on what was initially agreed upon between the parties. Assessment should be based on fair and realistic criteria and include a long enough timeframe to be able to fulfil the expectations.
3. R&R is ultimately dependent on financial leeway and legal constraints in the organisational context. The implementation of R&R is also highly dependent on leadership skills. As noted earlier, people are most often driven by the recognition of their efforts and work performance. Monetary rewards can be connected to recognition when possible.

The model can be utilised in diverse settings as the examples above indicate. The related leadership skills can be taught and developed. The cycle of the R&R model considers the following crucial aspects (Kekäle 2015):

- **Recruitment.** Recruitment is perhaps the key issue in terms of outcomes in university settings (Shattock 2003) and a crucial prerequisite for any R&R to work.

⁹ A worst-case leadership scenario is to give impossible tasks to an individual, pressurise the situation, and leave the employee alone with the impossible task.

A person recruited needs to be interested in the work and be in the right task. According to prior research (Bentley et al. 2013), work content provides most enduring satisfaction for those academics who are in the *right* work or profession. These intrinsically motivated academics also tend to produce best results autonomously without a strong need to lead them.

- **Agreement.** The employee needs to know what is generally expected from him/her, otherwise work outcomes might be misguided. The targets or duties which R&R is based on should be negotiated and be clear for the employee. The targets should be achievable and doable, not impossible nor unachievable.¹⁰ There should be sufficient resources (e.g., workforce and time) allocated for the duties expected.
- **Support.** Support is needed throughout the work processes. Recognition is by far the most crucial aspect of R&R for employees¹¹. Local leadership has an important ‘thermostat function’ in following the process and recognising, but not constantly or unnecessarily interfering with the work.
- **Monitoring.** Any systematic R&R needs to be based on some sort of assessment of work outcomes. Assessment should not be random nor arbitrary, or the system fails and the message is lost. Assessments reveal what the de facto aspects valued by the institution are: for example, number of publications or societal impact. In this project we have developed assessment systems to recognise the contributions of both teaching and research staff and professional service staff.
- **Recognition and Rewards:** Recognition and rewards should be based on fair and robust assessments. Institutional rewarding itself can be based on promotion rounds, bonuses, salary increases, (public) recognition of good work, awards, and similar practices, depending on what practices are feasible and available. In most YUFE institutions salary systems are based on national agreements or political steering documents.
- **Correction:** A systematic policy is needed to address serious misconduct and lack of performance. Without it, the HR message is incomplete.

There are structural issues involved in R&R. For example, tension may arise between academic and managerial cultures. In their positions, professional service staff are often obliged to implement political directives and austerity measures. The basic duties of research and teaching are carried out by teaching and research staff who enjoy

¹⁰ In current institutional settings, the expectations in higher education institutions can be very high, including pressures to contribute to solving global challenges.

¹¹ As noted above, recognition was identified as more important than salary increases and promotion in the study by Great Place to Work, which captured a high number of respondents.

considerable freedom in their work. Studies demonstrate that academics are generally satisfied with their work content, but critical towards their work environment and institutional factors (Bentley et al. 2013). This tension can lead to dissatisfaction among both professional service staff and teaching and research staff, undermining efforts to establish effective R&R systems and fostering feelings of unrecognised contributions and discontent.

One potential solution to address these common tensions could involve clearly defined institutional priorities, rather than constantly changing flux of managerial directives. Additionally, implementing relatively long assessment cycles could provide staff a sense of stability and balance at work, facilitating the pursuit of crucial development goals. However, rapidly changing political directives may also undermine the coherence and stability of any R&R systems.

The model above (Figure 6) displays one possibility for a systematic R&R approach. Whether or not such a systematic approach is institutionally possible, the consisting parts of the model are nevertheless crucial and need to be considered as a part of any R&R system. The model and the discussion above underline the fact that R&R very much depend on leadership and the implicit or explicit message given by it. This task cannot be delegated to HR departments alone, as the top leadership, faculty leadership, departmental leadership and administrative heads also play their part in the shared HR function. The whole system determines the outcome: although HR often can aim at designing and implementing consistent systems, their application depends on the whole institutional leadership. R&R systems are also framed by local political and legal aspects. In any case, much can be done by improving the consistency and overall logic of the R&R systems.

8. YUFE R&R Toolbox

The working group has identified several practices and activities which are especially potential for the future joint work in YUFE. In what follows, these are presented in the YUFE R&R Toolbox.

The practices of the Toolbox are connected to the YUFE R&R system identified above (including the definition of criteria, assessment, and R&R). The practices have been selected because they have been identified as both doable and feasible in the context of the alliance and the (limited) timeframe provided.

According to the review of YUFE universities' R&R policies and practices, there are significant differences between the universities. Due to the differences and the universities' underlying institutional autonomy in employment matters, it would not be possible during

the YUFE project phase to test or implement any new comprehensive R&R system for the whole alliance. Despite these constraints, some R&R measures have been identified for pilot-testing within the alliance framework.

While the YUFE R&R system described above represents a more general scheme which underscores the significance of following certain key principles of logic and transparency in HRM, the R&R measures in the YUFE R&R Toolbox are tangible ways in which the principles of R&R can be translated into concrete practices within YUFE.

The toolbox can be used when planning forthcoming activities for the alliance. When needed, the content of the toolbox can be updated and specified according to some segments of university staff, such as professional service staff or early-career researchers.

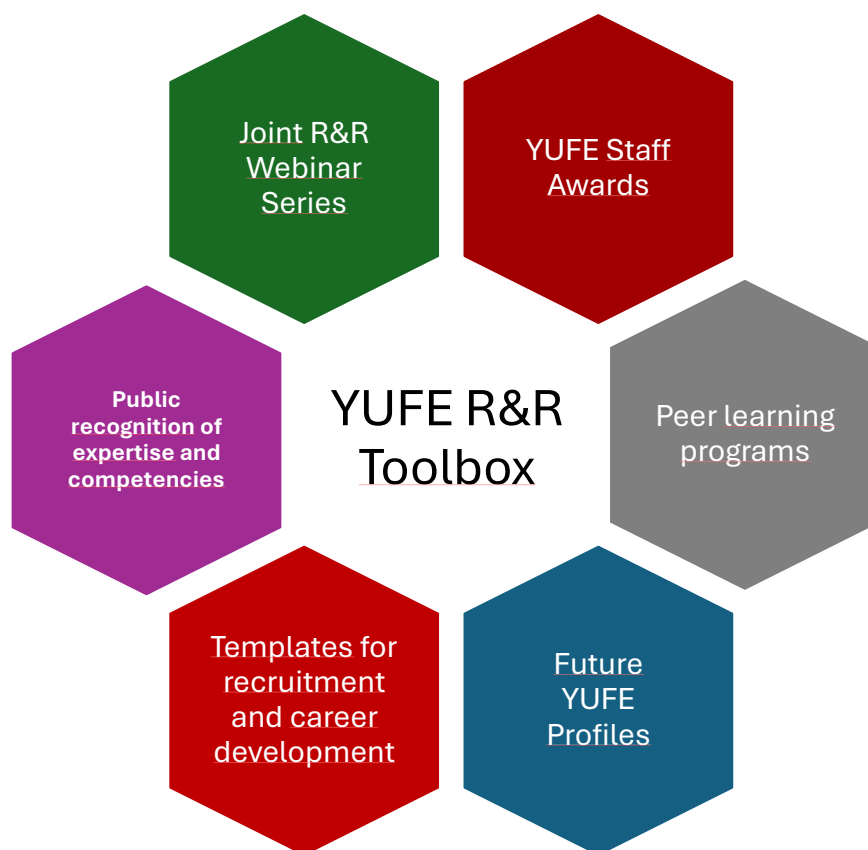


Figure 7. YUFE R&R Toolbox.

The toolbox includes the alliance's joint activities that are aligned with and that support the strategic objectives of YUFE. Two of these, the joint R&R webinar series and the YUFE Awards, were piloted in 2025 and 2026.

The aims of these activities were diverse:

- to recognise the excellent work carried out within the alliance,
- to encourage and foster further collaboration within the alliance, and
- to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and good practices in R&R.

Therefore, the activities were also expected to increase the positive visibility of YUFE.

Some of the proposed activities in the YUFE R&R toolbox are in the development stage and have not yet been piloted.

Whereas the toolbox includes activities that YUFE partner universities can take up as an alliance, universities' organisation-specific R&R practices that remain at the realm of organisational autonomy are also of interest for the joint work for the purpose of sharing of knowledge and inspiration within the alliance. Such practices include salary systems and internal career models.

8.1 YUFE Outstanding Staff Collaboration Award

Joint work within university alliances is valuable for different parties, including university alliances, partner universities, and individuals who are engaged in the collaboration. Still, collaborative work in alliances is not always sufficiently recognised and rewarded (Council of the European Union 2024¹²). Broader visibility and recognition are thus needed. Broader visibility of collaboration and its positive implications also serve the purpose of inspiring and encouraging others to take part in alliance activities, and of showing the possibilities to support and enrich one's work and professional development that lie therein.

Awards are one tangible way to bring visibility for the topic of awardees, the teams, and university alliances, and thus a tangible form of R&R. Whereas universities' R&R systems are typically based on individual achievements, recognising and rewarding *team efforts*,

¹² In the Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education (2024) it is stated: "Increasingly, strategic national and transnational activities and cooperation, such as building European Universities alliances or other forms of alliances and developing transnational educational programmes and projects, academic staff exchanges and creating education and training offers for continuous learning, require academic staff, as well as professional services staff to devote additional time and energy to those activities on top of core teaching and research. To support these activities, human resources policies, such as appraisal and promotion, need to acknowledge staff involvement in work on national and transnational cooperation and the additional workload that it may create."

It is further stated that: "This Recommendation aims to encourage better recognition of the energy and time that academic staff and other professional services staff devote to transnational cooperation activities, for example the European Universities alliances. To ensure the full roll-out of this initiative and encourage transnational cooperation activities, including the development of joint degrees, the full involvement of staff and career perspectives for academic and professional services staff involved in strategic coordination functions should be promoted. Incentivising staff to promote transnational and intersectoral mobility should also contribute greatly to the development of transnational innovative and interdisciplinary educational programmes, for the benefit of all students."

including efforts with which universities can support individuals to grow, is in the interests of YUFE.

As per our task description and to duly recognise and reward the diversity of activities, results, and outputs across the YUFE institutions we launched [the new YUFE Outstanding Staff Collaboration Award](#). In addition, the aim was to increase the visibility of joint Alliance outputs. The Award was launched in 2025.

The focus of the award was on teams that cross the boundaries of YUFE institutions, and that have already engaged in joint alliance work. The target groups of the award included *all university staff* including both teaching and research staff and professional service staff, or a combination of these. Special focus in the decision-making was put on teams that include professional service staff (identified as staff sometimes lacking formal recognition despite their significance).

The award for the teams included public recognition via active dissemination activities by YUFE and partner universities (incl. posting in websites and social media), a monetary reward of 2,000 euros to encourage continuing the collaboration, and a physical statue. In addition, team representatives of the teams selected among the Top 3 teams were invited to attend the formal ceremonies in the YUFE Annual Strategic Forum in March 2026 in Maastricht in the Netherlands.

Whereas the financial reward was only for the winning team, all willing teams were celebrated by YUFE within the webpage and social media.

Pre-selection was made in the Task 4.4 team following the evaluation criteria announced in the call text (incl. significance or novelty of the work, effectiveness and positive outcomes of collaboration, estimated impact, future plans of the teams, creativeness of collaboration, sustainability of the collaboration, potential scalability and replication in other settings, and inclusiveness of teams). All YUFE partners were invited to participate in the decision-making in the pre-selection phase, and all but one YUFE university participated. The final decision about the awarded team was made in the YUFE Strategic Council in November 2025. Overall, the quality of submissions was assessed as high.

The decision-making process included the following steps:

- Deciding on the process and the evaluation criteria (Task 4.4, June 2025),
- Suggestions for modifications (Task 4.4, YUFE Executive Committee, July 2025),
- Formal decision on the launch (YUFE Executive Committee, August 2025),
- Launch of the call (YUFE Central Office, September 2025),
- Deadline of the call (October 2025),
- Pre-evaluation of the submissions (Task 4.4, November 2025),

- Final decision (YUFE Strategic Council, November 2025),
- Communication about the decisions (YUFE Central Office, December 2025),
- Announcement of the winning team (YUFE Annual Strategic Forum, March 2026),
- Communication about all the participating (willing) teams (YUFE Central Office, spring 2026).

Altogether, ten teams participated in the call. All partner universities in YUFE were represented. The teams included members with diverse expertise and different career stages.

The award process was effective in communicating YUFE's values regarding staff collaboration. It highlighted topics that have already been the focus of joint efforts within YUFE, such as biosciences, research support services, and entrepreneurialism, and showcased the contributions staff have made in advancing these themes at the European level. A further positive outcome was the motivation it offered to teams to continue advancing and developing their work further. The teams can refer to participation in the competition in their further work, including calls for funding.

The process also succeeded in bringing visibility to collaborative work that might otherwise have remained unnoticed by a broader audience, thereby supporting greater awareness and recognition of the diverse forms of collaboration taking place across the alliance.

Looking ahead, YUFE may consider designing more targeted award calls aimed at specific staff groups, such as professional service staff or early-career researchers, to further strengthen networks and enhance the visibility of collaborative efforts across the alliance.

8.2 YUFE R&R Webinar Series

Our task included giving guidance on how the YUFE partners can improve their actions in R&R considering the local conditions and regulations. With this in mind, we conducted [four webinars on R&R](#). The webinars attracted altogether 154 participants. The webinars offered also a means to publicly recognise the successful work of the speakers and their institutions.

YUFE R&R Webinar Series ran between fall 2025 and spring 2026. Altogether four webinars were arranged¹³. The topics were suggested and their prioritisation was rated within the Task 4.4 group. Topics that received the greatest number of votes were the following:

- Universities' Career Models for Academic and Professional Service Staff,

¹³ The webinar recordings can be found [here](#).

- Open and Merit-based Recruitment – from Policy to Practice,
- Recognising and Rewarding Societal Impact, and
- Work Well-Being in Academia.

Subsequently, these topics became the topics of the webinars.

The webinar series were marketised by the YUFE Central Office via several channels, such as the YUFE newsletter, a dedicated website, event pages, and social media channels, including LinkedIn and Facebook. In addition, individual universities and individuals marketed the webinars.

The webinars were open for everyone.

The first webinar was titled Open and Merit-based Recruitment – from Policy to Practice.

Summary: [This webinar](#) explored the principles of Open, Transparent and Merit based Recruitment (OTM-R) and how universities implement them in daily recruitment practices.

Dr Karen Vandeveld, HR Director at the University of Antwerp, highlighted the European perspective, emphasising that the European principles of an open labour market should also apply to research. In fact, closed recruitment procedures can hinder European objectives related to the knowledge economy. In practice, the development of the European Research Area, with a focus on creating open and attractive labour market for researchers, aims to create a single, borderless market for research, innovation and technology across the EU. To achieve this aim, several support mechanisms have been established within the EU. These include the HR Excellence in Research process, which encourages universities to critically review and further develop their recruitment policies and practices. Open, transparent and merit-based recruitment principles are a core element of the HR Excellence in Research process.

Implementing the ambitious principles of open, transparent and merit-based recruitment is no easy task. **Marjolijn de Clerq**, a team leader in the HR department at the University of Antwerp, shared insights into how these principles are put into practice at the University of Antwerp. Among other things, openness means using channels that reach the target groups. Transparency means timely communication, provision of feedback, and use of clear selection criteria. Merit-based recruitment means the use of methods that help to effectively identify the candidate best suited to the position. The HR supports those engaged in recruitment by providing comprehensive training both in the local language Dutch and in English.

Recruitment and selection may take place in different organisational settings. **Anne Adams**, head of the Grants Office at the University of Antwerp, is the coordinator of YUFE4Postdocs. YUFE4Postdocs is a program co-funded by Horizon Europe's Marie

Skłodowska-Curie program. Two YUFE4Postdocs calls for postdoctoral researchers led to 55 recruitment decisions at nine YUFE universities. For the YUFE universities, the selection process meant a joint call, and coordinated evaluation and selection process. The selection process, along with the selection committee and evaluation criteria, were novel as they included societal aspects in addition to the core academic aspects. The innovative design illustrates how universities and their alliances may pilot new recruitment approaches, while ensuring the processes remain open, transparent and merit-based for all eligible candidates.

The second webinar was titled Recognising and Rewarding Societal Engagement and Impact.

Summary: [This webinar](#) focused on how universities **recognise and reward activities beyond traditional research and teaching contributions**. It showcased approaches to acknowledging societal engagement and impact, reflecting the growing importance of academic work that benefits society, communities, and broader stakeholders.

Professor **Saša Zelenika**, Vice-Rector for Strategic Projects at the University of Rijeka (UNIRI) finds it important that UNIRI is an active societal partner and puts a high value on knowledge valorisation and community-engaged research and innovation. This is evident in the numerous joint projects in which UNIRI is involved, connecting academic and societal partners and fostering productive, bi-directional knowledge transfer. As an example, in its CoARA Action Plan, UNIRI focuses not only on purely scholarly outputs, but also on contributions related to societal outreach and open science.

Professor **Bojana Ćulum Ilić** from the University of Rijeka continued by stressing that integrating both academic and non-academic perspectives is integral in addressing complex societal problems of our time. While many researchers have for long been active in community engagement, engagement activities have often been dependent on individual-level passion and unpaid labour instead of being institutionally recognised. Therefore, novel framing of community engagement as a core part of academic work and responsibility, with career-structured recognition and reward, is needed. At UNIRI, several measures have been implemented: institutional promotional criteria now include community engagement outputs; awards recognise successful knowledge transfer and science popularisation; special recognition is given for doctoral researchers' engagement activities, and outreach activities are communicated institutionally.

The United Kingdom's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) explicitly recognises the societal impact of research and rewards institutions that demonstrate success in this area. At the University of Essex, impact is recognised through promotion criteria from Lecturer up to Senior Professor, dedicated workload allocation, and institutional awards, noted

Research Impact Manager **Kirstii Badcock**. At the University of Essex, researchers are supported by a dedicated research impact team offering advice and coaching on generating and extending impact, integrating impact into funding applications, evidencing outcomes, and preparing RAE Impact Case Studies.

Community engagement and societal impact are also key priorities for YUFE as a university alliance. **Magdalena Stremplewska** from the Nicolaus Copernicus University leads the YUFE Work Package on Community and Civic Engagement. Like Professor Ćulum Ilić, she referred to surveys indicating that universities' third mission activities are, despite their significance, only marginally recognised in academic career evaluations. In its work, YUFE has prepared a declaration which aims to foster student and staff competencies to engage with (g)local communities, and to increase the visibility of community-engaged research and innovation. Within YUFE, recognition comes in many forms: formal acknowledgment, personal benefits such as training and visibility, and informal opportunities to share best practices.

The third webinar was titled Universities' Career Models for Recognition and Rewards.

Summary: [This webinar](#) was focused on European universities' **career structures and recognition systems** for academic and professional service staff.

Dr **Julia Sievers**, Head of Academic Affairs, presented the tenure track system at the University of Bremen. The system is targeted for researchers shortly after their doctorate. In addition, the university has a separate career track for teaching-oriented staff. From the point of view of recognition and rewards, tenure track is an interesting case, since the reward is tangible – tenured professorship. The recognition part requires the university to critically reflect on which academic achievements will be recognised, and how they will be measured. Being recruited into the position comes with support structures from the university, with mentoring and tailored training program for the individual.

Career progression in academia has traditionally been focused on research contributions, often at the expense of teaching. Supported with its [Room for Everyone's Talent policy](#) Maastricht University aspires to elevate the position of teaching as a basis for recognition and rewards. Professor, Dr **Mirjam oude Egbrink** presented the innovative career track at Maastricht University's Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences. At the faculty, academics passionate about education can apply for an educational career track, where teaching is the primary focus while scholarly research continues to be required. This career path formally recognises the value of teaching for the individual and helps strengthen the overall quality of education within the institution.

Discussion on career progression and professional development in academia is often centred on the needs of teaching and research staff. However, professional service staff

make up a major share of university staff. These staff have career development needs. Based on his research, Professor **Lars Geschwind** at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, presented insights focused on professional service staff. Over time, university professional service staff roles have changed significantly, progressing from assistant duties to positions requiring high levels of expertise. New roles have emerged in response to the increasing expectations and demands in higher education and research, in areas such as quality assurance, internationalisation, and sustainable development. Interestingly, career advancement may occur within and across categories, with professional networks and associations playing an important role. Professor Geschwind highlighted doctoral training as a form of competence development for professional service staff that offers benefits both for the individual and the university organisation.

The fourth webinar was titled Work Well-Being in Academia.

Summary: [This webinar](#) explored strategies for promoting **healthy and supportive work environments** in academia at a time when the fundamental principles of academic teaching and knowledge production are being challenged.

Today, academic freedom is under attack in many countries. It is increasingly common for researchers and teachers, especially in the social sciences and humanities, to face hate speech and harassment. Professor **Tuija Saresma** from the University of Eastern Finland provided a broad overview of the societal factors driving these growing threats to academic freedom, including the rise of authoritarianism, their detrimental implications on staff well-being, and the ways in which universities and other institutions have responded. Saresma underlined that universities must be prepared not only for an increasing number of attacks on individual teachers and researchers, but also for broader assaults on higher education, knowledge production, and science.

In her presentation, Dr **Ritta Husted**, senior leader in higher education at the University of Essex, emphasised the importance of building psychologically safe university cultures. Drawing on Amy C. Edmondson's definition, psychological safety refers to the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes. Creating psychological safety can be fostered by framing work as a learning process, acknowledging one's own fallibility, and asking lots of questions. Husted also highlighted that trust and inclusive leadership are crucial for building effective workplaces. It is important to note that recognition may come not only from superiors, but also from peers and colleagues. In her presentation, Husted offered several hands-on ideas for making universities psychologically safe workplaces.

Doctoral and postdoctoral development are central to European higher education and research policies. They are of particular interest to YUFE, which is working to develop a

distinctive YUFE approach to doctoral and postdoctoral education and training. Dr **Karla Tersago**, the Head of Antwerp Doctoral School of the University of Antwerp, leads the work package on the YUFE approach to Doctoral and Postdoctoral training. The YUFE model for doctoral learning builds on the YUFE DIOSI model, which places the doctoral candidate at the centre of the process. YUFE supports doctoral researchers both through the alliance and locally, offering a variety of formal and informal training opportunities. For postdoctoral researchers, YUFE provides training in transferable skills, such as grant writing and communication, as well as networking opportunities and career development support, including mentoring. Peer support groups created within YUFE have proven to be a valuable forum for community building and professional support.

The webinars attracted a total of 154 participants from a broad geographical and professional background representing various countries, organisations, and organisational roles.

Within YUFE, the largest number of participants came from the University of Eastern Finland (38), followed by the University of Rijeka (15), the University of Cyprus (15), Maastricht University (15), the University of Bremen (12), the University of Antwerp (12), Nicolaus Copernicus University (7), and the University of Essex (3). In addition, 34 participants were not affiliated with YUFE. Most of these participants represented European universities and universities of applied sciences.¹⁴

In total, 14 people gave presentations at the webinars. All but one speaker had an affiliation with YUFE. The speakers represented eight European universities located in different countries.

Feedback form was integrated into the email, which was sent to the registered webinar participants. However, the number of people who gave feedback was low (including altogether 11 responses for all the four webinars; response rate of circa 7 %), which is why the results are not reported in full. The feedback received was positive. In the future, feedback collection could be integrated at the end of webinars using easily accessible QR codes. This could make it easier for participants to provide feedback.

Speakers and participants appreciated the collaborative spirit during the webinars and the opportunity to hear from the practices of other universities. The following testimonials were given by one speaker and two participants.

¹⁴ In addition, three participants used acronyms in Zoom, for which it was difficult to identify any affiliation. For two YUFE universities, there were no participants, perhaps due to communication problems.

The YUFE webinar "Recognizing and rewarding societal engagement and impact" was truly amazing. The speakers were knowledgeable and shared important approaches for acknowledging societal engagement and impact. I was left with new knowledge and ideas for developing my own work in my university. Thank you to the speakers, the organizers and YUFE!

Roseanna Avento, Global Development Manager, University of Eastern Finland

These well-structured sessions seamlessly span the range from EU policy to practical implementation, making the bigger picture of change in academia feel both tangible and inspiring. Seeing best practices from other universities reminds you that we are all working to change the same system for the better – from very different angles. While the process can sometimes feel slow or isolating, being part of this European effort confirms that we are collectively moving in the right direction. A fundamental culture change in academia is underway, and this webinar series makes you feel right at the heart of it.

Andreas Bressler, Project Coordinator for Research and Innovation, Maastricht University

I greatly valued the opportunity to contribute to the YUFE R&R webinar, particularly the openness and engagement from participants. The questions and discussions were insightful and generative, offering perspectives that extended well beyond my own institutional context. This kind of cross-border exchange is essential in developing more nuanced, culturally aware approaches to wellbeing in academia. It also creates space for new ideas and practices to emerge through shared reflection.

Dr. Ritta Husted, Senior Lecturer, Head of Department & Coach, University of Essex

8.3 Frameworks for Career Development and Assessment

Leaders and supervisors across universities need practical tools that help them support staff development in ways that benefit both individuals and the university organisation.

Building on this, the YUFE working group identified a need for a more structured approach to career development discussions for professional service staff.

For teaching and research staff, recruitment was identified as a key R&R activity. To support high-quality recruitment, YUFE has developed a comprehensive approach to researcher recruitment, conceptualised in the YUFE Academic Assessment Portfolio within the YUFERING project.

Professional service staff

Supporting the career development of professional service staff requires recognising the breadth and diversity of their contributions. Staff in administrative, technical, and specialist roles often produce outcomes that are essential for universities but not always visible in traditional performance metrics. While many institutions conduct annual development discussions, practices vary. Moreover, their focus may not extend to the broader contributions individuals make to their teams, units, and the YUFE alliance, nor to their long-term career prospects.

The working group identified the need for practical, accessible tools to support structured development conversations between staff and their supervisors. These tools should help shift the focus from narrow output-based evaluation toward a more holistic understanding of an individual's impact, professional strengths, preferred ways of working, and long-term career aspirations.

The YUFE template for career development and contributions dialogue (Appendix 1) was developed to meet this end. The use of the template aims at encouraging staff to reflect on their strengths, skills, interests, and the evolving nature of their professional roles. The template guides consideration of potential career pathways, whether vertical, lateral, or developmental, as well as planning for future learning opportunities, and evolving responsibilities. Supervisors are encouraged to use the template to co-create a supportive development plan that aligns personal goals with organisational strategy. Thus, the use of the template aims at adopting forward-looking development approach rather than an evaluative one.

The template supports three organisational objectives:

1. gaining a clearer understanding of employees' strengths, contributions, and career aspirations.
 2. using this knowledge to inform organisational development and talent planning; and
 3. identifying potential candidates for future responsibilities or leadership roles.
- These objectives reflect YUFE's commitment to inclusive talent development and transparent career pathways.

The dialogue should help both parties identify:

- individual strengths and achievements,
- areas for growth and skill development,
- organisational support needs (e.g., training, mentoring), and
- potential future career directions.

This approach strengthens mutual understanding, encourages transparency, and supports staff in aligning personal development goals with organisational needs.

The structure of the template guides the discussion from past experiences toward future aspirations. Key elements include:

- **Career path and responsibilities:** Mapping the individual's trajectory and understanding the context of their current role.
- **Strengths, skills, and interests:** Highlighting capabilities that may not be visible in formal job descriptions.
- **Teamwork:** Recognising collaborative contributions, interpersonal skills, and cross-unit/cross-institutional work.
- **Leadership:** Acknowledging both formal roles (e.g., team leader, project manager) and informal leadership (e.g., mentoring, promoting inclusive practices).
- **Extended contributions:** Capturing work that goes beyond the core role, including participation in national or international initiatives, engagement in YUFE working groups, and contributions to organisational development.
- **Future career goals:** Supporting staff in identifying next steps, training needs, and long-term aspirations, including potential roles they may wish to explore.

This approach aims to ensure that both concrete achievements and more intangible contributions are acknowledged and valued.

In the YUFE context, staff often collaborate across organisational boundaries, contributing to international project teams and working groups. These cross-border collaborative contributions merit explicit acknowledgment and should be considered part of an individual's leadership and teamwork portfolio when applicable. This understanding of teamwork recognises collaborative research support, international project participation, and contributions to university-wide or alliance-wide initiatives.

Although the template was designed to support shared principles across the YUFE alliance, the template is flexible and can be adapted to suit different contexts. In any case, discussions should remain constructive, confidential, and respectful.

Teaching and research staff

The YUFE Academic Assessment Portfolio, developed within the YUFERING project of YUFE, provides a comprehensive framework for assessing teaching and research staff in recruitment processes.¹⁵

The use of the portfolio supports a holistic approach to academic career assessment, emphasising not only traditional research merits, such as research publications and competitive funding received, but also broader academic contributions related to teaching, community engagement, open science practices, and teamwork, management and leadership.

Among other things, the portfolio aims to:

- identify diverse strengths of researchers, enabling candidates to showcase diverse expertise and interests across research, teaching, community engagement, teamwork, management and leadership,
- promote responsible research and innovation principles in academic evaluation, and
- strengthen the comparability of assessment within recruitment processes,

The YUFE Academic Assessment Portfolio is included in Appendix 2.

The portfolio has been piloted in the context of European-level funding calls, in which the portfolio has been integrated into the selection processes of researchers. These include YUFE's joint YUFE4Postdocs (Y4P) programme, a postdoctoral scheme funded under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie COFUND mechanism, and the Neuro-Innovation PhD programme of the University of Eastern Finland with the support of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Cofund grant.

8.4 YUFE Peer Learning Program

Task 4.4 working group identified peer learning programs as one potential R&R practice for YUFE. Such programs were seen by the group as providing a structured yet light mechanism for knowledge exchange between staff members across partner universities. The program would aim to facilitate informal professional learning and networking among staff members who work on similar topics or share comparable responsibilities in their respective institutions.

¹⁵ The portfolio, including the description of its development, first pilot-testing, and the feedback received have been documented in the deliverables of the YUFERING project. These include [the Report on the accreditation pilot based in Open Science criteria](#) (Kekäle et al. 2024), and [the report on the YUFE Open Science Model and guidelines for researchers' evaluation](#) (Pietilä et al. 2023).

In contrast to formal mentoring schemes, a peer learning program would not be based on hierarchical relationships between mentors and mentees. Instead, it would rely on an equal and reciprocal relationship between participants. All members of a peer group would contribute their experiences and expertise and benefit from collective reflection and discussion.

The program would be particularly valuable for staff members who work on specialised topics or tasks where there are few colleagues with similar responsibilities within their own university. By connecting peers from different institutions within the alliance, participants would have the opportunity to discuss how specific work processes (e.g., related to doctoral training or research funding services) are organised elsewhere and learn from alternative approaches.

Participation in the peer learning program would be voluntary and would not include monetary compensation. The main incentive for participants would be the opportunity for professional development and an opportunity to tackle development needs of one's university, international networking, and learning from peers in other institutions. Importantly, the program would allow staff members to gain international experience without the need for physical mobility, making it accessible also to staff members who are not able to travel or participate in physical visits.

The initial outlay for the programs could be the following.

The program would begin with a call for interest. Interested participants would submit their applications through an electronic form in which they would

- describe their professional role, and
- outline areas where they would like to exchange experiences and receive peer input.

Based on the responses, coordinator of the alliance would match participants into peer groups with similar interests.

The program would start with a joint kick-off event, during which the objectives and structure of the program would be introduced. In addition, participants would receive guidelines outlining the objectives of the program, suggested meeting formats, and expectations regarding participation and documentation.

Following the kick-off event, each peer group would organise a series of online meetings over a defined period. Each group would meet at least four times or as many times as needed during the program.

Although the peer learning groups would operate largely independently, the overall process would be supported by a facilitator or coordinator. The facilitator would be responsible for organising the initial call for interest, matching participants, preparing the guidelines, and

providing a general timetable for the program. The role of the facilitator would be supportive.

To support knowledge sharing within the alliance, meetings would include documentation. Participants would prepare short summaries of the topics discussed and key insights gained. This documentation could help capture the outcomes of the discussions and potentially inform future collaboration or development of institutional practices.

As a first step, the peer learning program could be implemented as a pilot initiative. A pilot phase with a limited number of peer groups would allow YUFE to test the concept and gather feedback from participants. Based on the experiences from the pilot phase, the program could later be refined and potentially established as a regular activity within the alliance.

8.5 Future YUFE Profiles

The Future YUFE Profiles aim at outlining the emerging roles and competencies that are likely to be needed from staff members within the YUFE alliance. The profiles reflect YUFE's ambition to become a European university that encourages collaboration, innovation, and mobility across borders. The future profiles should be viewed as inspiration for staff. They also help illustrate the opportunities that working within YUFE can provide. Examples of profiles can be found in Appendix 3.

Diversity is one of YUFE's strengths, and the alliance benefits its community of staff who come from different countries, cultures, and academic traditions, and represent diverse expertise. This diversity enriches teaching practices, broadens perspectives in research, and encourages creative solutions in administrative work. It also helps prepare students and staff for a global working environment.

The primary purpose of the YUFE Future Profiles is to present forward-looking examples of how academic and professional roles may evolve in a European higher education environment¹⁶. The profiles are intended to identify competencies that will become increasingly important for staff working across YUFE partner institutions. They are also designed to inspire staff by showing how careers can develop in a European higher education and research setting.

¹⁶ It should be recognised that professional service roles differ in how much they rely on national regulations or locally defined administrative systems. Thus, mobility within YUFE may be more easily achievable for some staff members than others.

YUFE offers staff members several opportunities that extend beyond what is typically available within a single institution. One key opportunity is cross-institutional mobility, which allows staff to spend time teaching, conducting research, or developing their professional skills at another partner university. This mobility may take the form of short visits, job-shadowing activities, teaching periods, or research stays. It may also mean (longer periods of) formal employment at another university. Such experiences are likely to support the exchange of ideas and practices, strengthen collaboration, and foster a shared institutional identity across the alliance. For individual staff members, mobility between institutions provides opportunities to broaden professional networks, gain exposure to new practices and perspectives, and develop a stronger sense of belonging within a wider European higher education and research community. It also enables individuals to expand their career possibilities across partner institutions.

The future roles within YUFE are likely to benefit staff having *intercultural competencies*. It will be helpful if colleagues feel easy to collaborate across different cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary backgrounds, and to approach diverse institutional practices and norms within the alliance with openness and sensitivity.

Digital and hybrid collaboration skills will be needed as staff increasingly work together across countries through shared platforms and virtual tools. Effective *multilingual communication* will also play an important role. While English will probably remain the primary working language, multilingualism is likely to improve inclusion.

An understanding of *European higher education and research policy* will be needed for many roles, especially those that involve programme development. *An innovative mindset* will be important, as staff are likely to experiment with new models of teaching, research cooperation, and student engagement.

9 Conclusion and next steps

As a conclusion, we would reiterate that there is no one best way to organise R&R within a university. Institutional contexts vary between the YUFE partner universities, including the national legislation, funding arrangements, and other factors. The institutional autonomy of universities remains within the organisations, and collaboration within the alliance does not change this, according to our current understanding. The developed YUFE R&R model operates on a level which is common and applicable to diverse contexts, and to diverse HR operations, such as recruitment and performance management. It is, therefore, possible that the model is utilised for diverse institutional aims and goals: for example, university A aims at promoting diversity while university B intends to foster efficiency, etc. The model can be applied to fostering all such diverse goals. It is possible that YUFE will develop into

a stronger unified whole; in such a case there might be stronger unified goals and aims in the future. Deciding on this is, however, not up to the working group. Our aim at this point was to take first steps towards a system of R&R. The basic model presented is already in use, but the application could be more systematic and coherent. It could also be taught.

The YUFE R&R model is research-based and builds on common, general-level principles in R&R, such as equal treatment, fairness and transparency (given the goals aimed for). The practices in the toolbox are broadly applicable to higher education institutions and their alliances. The practices are based on the model's basic dimensions, such as definition of clear criteria, assessment procedures, and the ensuing various R&R measures.

Institutional leadership especially at the grass-roots level is perhaps the most crucial factor in successful R&R. The related leadership skills can and should be taught and developed. YUFE could develop this in a broader and more systematic manner in the future. The key building blocks of R&R identified in this work will remain crucial. Their implementation counts most. In R&R, the most important development act is to improve the every-day HR fundamentals according to the model. At the same time, it is crucial to balance between the need to set clear goals without micromanaging. Also, the fundamental value and principle of academic freedom as laid down in many national constitutions and a principle set down in the European Union's documents (European Parliament Academic Freedom Monitor 2025, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2000) emphasises the freedom of research and teaching. These principles, along with appropriate HR policies (cf. YUFE's work on Task 4.2), should guide further development.

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The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) is one of the dynamic European University Alliances, selected by the European Commission. YUFE aims to shape a holistic and inclusive future for students and learners, and their society in Europe. The YUFE Alliance strives to be the front-running Alliance of European Higher Education in which students, learners, and staff are co-leaders, co-dreamers, and co-creators. YUFE's mission is to become a successful model of a socially responsible European University.

Appendix 1. Career Development and Contributions Dialogue.

Organisational Objectives

- Get to know your employees' strengths and career goals.
- Plan potential avenues for organisational development.
- Identify potential candidates for future roles.

Aims

- Recognise the strengths and capabilities of staff.
- When possible, use this information for career development and task distribution.

Context

- Personal development discussions or equivalent conversations between employees and their supervisors.

Other Considerations

- The approach fosters mutual understanding between employer and employee regarding career opportunities and helps identify competencies and skills.
 - The template can be adapted as needed.
 - Discussions should remain constructive, confidential, and respectful.
-

Discussion Structure

1. Describe your career path so far.
2. Describe your key responsibilities and work objectives.
3. Describe your strengths, skills, and interests.
 - How would you like to improve your competencies?
 - What organisational support do you need to reach your personal goals?
4. What are your key strengths or achievements in your current position?
5. What challenges or obstacles have you faced in your current position?
6. Assess your performance in relation to your **key responsibilities**.
 - This includes self-assessment, supervisor feedback, and discussion of performance goals.
7. Describe your key strengths or achievements in **teamwork**.
8. If relevant: Describe your strengths or achievements in **leadership**.
 - How have your contributions benefitted your team or the organisation?
9. If relevant: Describe contributions **beyond your regular role**, such as supporting national or international initiatives.
10. What are your career goals for the next five years?
 - Are there particular roles or positions you wish to reach?
 - What motivates you most at work?

11. Feedback and discussion on future career opportunities.

Appendix 2. YUFE Academic Assessment Portfolio.



YUFE Academic Assessment Portfolio

To the researcher: *you do not have to have merits/achievements/outputs in all the categories. If any of the category is not relevant to you, please skip that category.*

To the recruiter: *If needed, you may add extra custom questions and/or components to the categories. You may emphasise specific categories over others according to the position in question. You may remove a specific category, which is not relevant for the position.*

1 Profile as a researcher

1A How did your interest in your research area begin? What kinds of questions have you been particularly interested in? How have your interests evolved throughout your career? (max. 1000 characters)

1B Describe your own strengths and skills as a researcher and/or as a teacher. What do you want to improve? (max. 1000 characters)

1C What is your vision for your career over the next 5–10 years? (max. 1000 characters)

1D The YUFE universities place great importance to responsible research. This includes the support of the objectives of open science. Describe how you have made research and/or education more open, and what your plans are for the future. (max. 1000 characters)

2 Main merits, achievements, and their significance

2A Research

What are your key merits or achievements in research? Describe concretely 1–3 of your key outputs in research to support your argument. Please mark the open science merits or achievements with the symbol “O”. Justify why your merits and outputs are significant. (max. 3000 characters)

2B Teaching and supervision

What are your key merits or achievements in teaching and supervision? Describe concretely 1–3 of your key outputs in teaching and supervision to support your argument. Please mark the open science/education merits or achievements with the symbol “O”. Justify why your merits and outputs are significant. (max. 3000 characters)

2C Community engagement and societal outreach

The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) is one of the dynamic European University Alliances, selected by the European Commission. YUFE aims to shape a holistic and inclusive future for students and learners, and their society in Europe. The YUFE Alliance strives to be the front-running Alliance of European Higher Education in which students, learners, and staff are co-leaders, co-dreamers, and co-creators. YUFE's mission is to become a successful model of a socially responsible European University.

What are your key merits or achievements in community engagement and societal outreach? Describe concretely 1–3 of your key outputs or examples to support your argument. Please tell explicitly how you have promoted the culture of open scholarship. Justify why your contributions are significant. Justify why your merits or achievements are significant. (max. 3000 characters)

2D Teamwork, management, and leadership

What are your key merits or achievements in teamwork, management and/or leadership? Describe concretely 1–3 of your key contributions to support your argument. Please tell explicitly how you have promoted the culture of open scholarship. Justify why your contributions are significant. (max. 3000 characters)

3 Academic age

What is your academic age (please see the guidelines)?

Appendix: Guidelines for filling in the document

Please use whole sentences when writing.

1 Profile as a researcher

In this section (1A–D), describe your background, strengths, skills, and goals.

2 Main merits, achievements, and their significance

In this section (2A–D), identify your main merits or achievements related to research; teaching and supervision; community engagement and societal outreach; and teamwork, management, and/or leadership. Explain why you think these merits or achievements, and the related concrete outputs or contributions matter.

Mark any merits in open science separately with the symbol “O”. These merits may relate to concrete outputs (e.g., open access publications or research data) or to the promotion of an open research culture (e.g., incorporating open science into one’s teaching). See examples of possible merits in open science for each subdivision (2A–D).

2A Research

In this section, describe how you have contributed to the generation of knowledge, including the creation of new ideas, hypotheses, methods, concepts, or tools.

When you describe your merits or achievements, please highlight your key outputs. Key outputs in research may include, e.g., research publications; collected data; presentations at conferences; software; simulations or codes; or new research methods.

Please indicate separately any merits or outputs in open science. Examples include open access publications; open access research data; open software/code; open research methods; and pre-registration of studies.

Explain why the merits and outputs matter. Focus on the quality and impact of research rather than the quantity or the publishing arenas. You can support your argument with indicators such as scientific prizes or awards, keynotes/invited talks, competitive research funding received, the number of citations, downloads, mentions, etc. to the most important publications you identify (mark the database you are using – Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, PlumX, Altmetric Explorer).

2B Teaching and supervision

In this section, describe how you have contributed to teaching and supervision, including the development of teaching.

When you describe your merits or achievements, please highlight your key outputs. Key outputs in teaching may be related, for example, to the courses or teaching events you have developed or taught; theses or dissertations supervised, or textbooks published.

Please indicate separately any merits or outputs in open science/education. Examples include open online courses/MOOCs; courses/lectures on open science; lectures tailored for the general public; use of open learning materials; and incorporation of open science principles or methods in the content of teaching.

Explain why the merits and outputs matter. You can support your argument with indicators, such as student feedback, teaching prizes or awards, invited lectures, or the views of open online courses/MOOCs.

2C Community engagement and societal outreach

In this section, describe how you have benefitted the wider society.

Your main merits, achievements, or outputs may be related, e.g., to how your work has contributed to the development of new innovations, policies, or business opportunities; societal discussions or services; engagement with non-academic actors in your research; or organising events for the general audience (e.g., school visits, science festivals).

Explain why the outputs/activities matter. You can support your argument with indicators, such as expert tasks in other organisations; spin-off companies or patents based on your research; new projects with non-academic partners; policy documents citing your research; utilisation of research outputs resulting from private sector collaboration as openly as possible; engaging citizens or stakeholders in one's research process; popularised publications (publications for the wider audience); television or radio appearances; magazine or news articles based on your research; research blogs; encyclopaedia articles produced (e.g., Wikipedia); encyclopaedia articles (e.g., Wikipedia) citing your research.

2D Teamwork, management, and leadership

In this section, describe how you have contributed to teamwork, management, and/or leadership, incl. your contribution to the academic community. Reflect on your contributions as a team member and as an individual.

Your main merits, achievements or outputs may be related, e.g., to projects or research teams you have led; other membership and roles in research teams; mentoring students or colleagues; internship supervisions; editorial work; peer reviewing; memberships and positions of trust in scientific communities; management positions; administrative tasks; committee work; data management or data curation; international and national mobility; organising or participating in conferences; promoting gender equality and/or diversity in academia.

Please indicate separately any merits and outputs in open scholarship. Examples include open peer reviewing (as author or as reviewer); working as editor in open access scholarly journals; voluntary work in open access repositories (e.g., ArXiv, BioRxiv); incentivising open science behaviour (e.g., assessment criteria, acknowledgments, or rewards) as a leader.

Explain why the outputs/activities matter. You can support your argument with indicators, such as creation of new projects; open science or equality/diversity awards received; feedback on teamwork or leadership.

3 Calculating the academic age

Academic age = Total number of person-years worked in research organisations since the start of postgraduate (PhD) studies – person-years during which you have been on a family/parental leave – other academic career breaks in person-years

If you have worked part-time in any year, take this into account when calculating your academic

age (e.g., 50 % of working time for the whole year corresponds to 0.5 person-years). Consider family/parental leaves which you have taken due to the birth/adoption of a child, which you have taken after the start of postgraduate (PhD) studies. Other academic breaks may include, for example, working outside research organisations, military/civil service, and other leaves.

Appendix 3. Examples of YUFE Future Profiles.



YUFE prof. serv. staff persona **HR advisor** in 2034:

Maria

Professional story:

Maria is **Finnish**, she did her **Masters in the UK** on Management with Human Resources. After being affiliated as HR policy advisor with University of Essex's HR Department, she **joined the HR Department of UNIRI** in 2028 as a HR Team leader. Since many years she's involved in **intensive and excellent collaborations with the HR Departments of the YUFE universities**, and experienced a **drastic increase in support and training activities in the YUFE network** the past years. This allowed her to follow several specialized HR trainings and job shadowing activities at UM and **UAntwerp**.

Personality traits:

Maria is an excellent **communicator** and a real **teamplayer**. Her **international orientation** and her curiosity to learn from other institutions, cultures and countries allow her to easily **establish contacts with colleagues from the HR departments** of the other YUFE universities. She loves to travel, and is very eager to **work on new ideas and activities with her YUFE colleagues** in WP4 (Staff Journey).



"YUFE makes professional staff careers on EU level possible"

Age: 36 (in 2034)

Country: Finland

Prior education: Bachelor in FIN, Master in UK

Family: Single

Top goals:

Maria hopes to return to Finland one day, and to look for an opportunity of a senior position at UEF (most likely as Head of the HR Department).

The **many experiences and insights she gained at University of Essex and UNIRI** help ensure that she will be the ideal candidate for such a position.

Concerns:

She has been away from Finland for such a long time.

She hopes to **continue collaborations with the YUFE partners** (and especially Essex and UNIRI) after returning to Finland.



YUFE prof. serv. staff persona **International office** in 2034:

Peter

Professional story:

Peter works at the **Internationalisation** Department at Essex University. He was appointed at the university in 2024 and is now in his 10th year. During this period, he **learned a lot from good practices and procedures** regarding the **onboarding of international staff at the fellow YUFE universities** and even **'copied'** some of these initiatives into his own university (a.o. the 'Welcome Center' of the University of Bremen). In the meantime, he was also **involved in several YUFE-initiatives**, including the development of a framework to stimulate exchanges of staff and students within the YUFE network.

Personality traits:

Peter is an **enthusiast adept** of the YUFE Alliance and he and his team have even been **rewarded YUFE professional staff team of the year** in 2029. He is recognized as an **innovator** on internationalization and speaks fluently English, Spanish and Dutch. He is also involved in training activities on **internationalisation practices and policies** and **uses his background and experiences to help launch other YUFE internationalisation teams**.



"YUFE is a great network for exchanging good practices"

Age: 38 (in 2034)

Country: United Kingdom

Prior education / occupation: Ms in Social Sciences in UK
Worked 2 years in private sector

Family: Married, 2 children

Top goals:

Peter is hoping to get permanently appointed as a **YUFE staff member on internationalization**, with split appointments and tasks at all YUFE universities. He hopes to combine these appointments through online activities and being on all campuses for live meetings and follow-up.

Concerns:

Peter's major worry is time management and the combination work-life balance. Especially the combination of the responsibilities within his own university and his collaborations with the other YUFE partners is a concern.



YUFE prof. serv. staff persona **doctoral school** in 2032:

Danny

Professional story:

Danny is the head of the doctoral school at UAntwerp. He has been working within YUFE from when it was first funded by the EU in 2020. He was responsible for **setting up various YUFE-projects** regarding doctoral education and the support of young researchers (incl. a **number of projects that received funding from the EU**). Thanks to his work and the work from the staff at all doctoral schools in the YUFE Alliance, PhD candidates can make use of **funding, research visits, and a wide YUFE-offer of trainings and workshops** on several topics that help them to become both excellent researchers and professionals.

Personality traits:

Danny is an **experienced and adaptable leader** known for his **strategic thinking** and effective communication. He fosters **collaboration and innovation**, emphasizing **mentorship** and professionalism. His resilient and empathetic approach helps navigate challenges while maintaining a positive and **inclusive leadership style**.



"Our YUFE community is the source for the support of young researchers in Europe"

Age: 60 (in 2034)

Country: Belgium

Prior education / occupation: Ms & PhD in Humanities

Family: Married, 2 children, 2 grandchildren

Top goals:

Danny hopes to **consolidate the support for young researchers within the YUFE Alliance**.

According to him, much more can still be done to deal with complex topics such as **inclusivity** (providing opportunities for all types of young researchers, including their **diversity**) and developing **sustainable careers** at the postdoc-level.

Concerns:

Danny is now actively looking for **high potentials in the YUFE network** to take over his position at the doctoral school within the next 5-6 years. He believes that the university would benefit from bringing in someone with experience in doctoral education policies in other European countries, to facilitate collaborations and the **installment of joint guidelines and procedures** (for instance, regarding joint supervision of PhD trajectories) within the YUFE Alliance.