



Chat

Secretaries Difier and 15 others were invited to the meeting.

Thursday

Tuinkamer and Alexanderzaal left the chat.

Tuinkamer and Alexanderzaal were invited to the meeting.

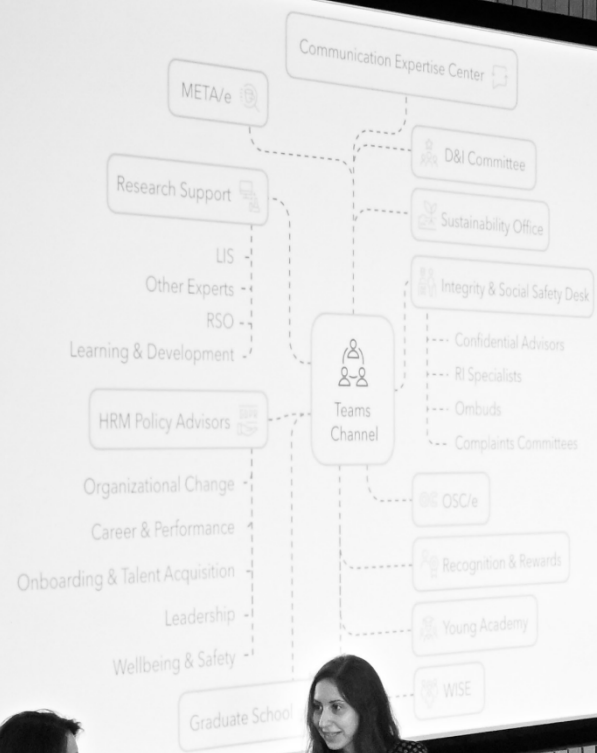
Tuinkamer and Alexanderzaal left the chat.

Today

08:33 Meeting ended: 29s

08:34 Meeting started

08:51 Ellen Peeters started recording to the cloud



Project Report: Responsible Academic Assessment at TU/e

April 20, 2026. Version 1.1.
Dr Andrea Kis & Julma Braat

RRCe
**RESPONSIBLE
RESEARCH
COMMUNITY
EINDHOVEN**

Recognizing and Rewarding Responsible Academic Practices at TU/e

Introduction

This report was commissioned by Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e) and funded primarily through the Recognizing and Rewarding Open Science (grant ID: 500.070.2423) project, by Open Science NL (NWO), with the purpose of identifying procedural challenges and opportunities for improvement within academic assessment processes, and to support the development of evidence-based, institution-specific solutions. The observations and analyses presented here reflect a systematic research effort carried out in collaboration with TU/e stakeholders and based on the university's own policies, procedures, and strategic frameworks.

Although the findings draw on examples and data from TU/e, the issues described are **not unique to this institution**. International studies and sector-wide evaluations indicate that similar challenges related to assessment quality, bias, procedural consistency, and workload occur across many universities. As such, the insights in this report should be interpreted as part of a broader academic discourse on responsible assessment rather than as criticisms directed at TU/e. Instead, they underscore **TU/e's proactive stance** in commissioning a project that many institutions have not yet undertaken and in collecting data that are rarely available elsewhere.

Where relevant, this report explicitly references TU/e policy documents - including the Academic Career Paths framework, the Recognition & Rewards vision, integrity and social-safety policies, and procedural guidelines for Selection and Assessment Committees (BACs) - to highlight the alignment between institutional ambitions and the recommendations proposed here. The overall aim is constructive: to contribute to TU/e's commitment to responsible, transparent, and inclusive assessment practices, and to support continuous improvement grounded in empirical evidence and international best practices.

List of abbreviations

ARRA	Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment
BAC	Selection and Assessment Committee (<i>BeoordelingsAdviesCommissie</i>)
CoARA	Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment
COI	Conflict of interest
DEIA	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
DORA	San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment
META/e	Eindhoven Meta-Science Center
OS	Open Science
R&R	Recognition and Rewards
RAA or RRA	Responsible academic/research assessment (used interchangeably, academic being broader)
RPG	Role-playing game
RRC/e	Responsible Research Community Eindhoven

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Executive summary

This report reviews academic assessment at TU/e, identifies compliance, financial, and reputational risks, and contrasts current practices with (inter)national standards. Recommendations for strengthening quality and reducing institutional vulnerabilities follow.

Research outcomes

The first part of the report presents results from the mixed-methods research approach used to examine assessment procedures, identify systemic vulnerabilities, and co-design the foundations for short- and long-term solutions. The research was conducted as a collaboration between academic and professional staff, ensuring diverse expertise and cross-unit perspectives. Six main themes connected to how BACs function emerged from the analysis:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| (1) Procedures, | (5) Self-management, and |
| (2) Handling transgressions, | (6) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility |
| (3) Recognition & Rewards, | (DEIA) awareness and biases. |
| (4) Interview and assessment, | |

These findings informed the design of a new training for BAC members: **Responsible Academic Assessments - From Principles to Practice**. This training supports BAC members in translating the principles of responsible academic assessment into daily practice. As part of the training, the role-playing game **Behind Closed Doors** exposes participants to realistic BAC scenarios.

To facilitate collaboration within TU/e, the **Responsible Research Community Eindhoven (RRC/e)** was launched as a digital and physical platform connecting individuals working on topics such as Open Science, Recognition & Rewards, social safety, research integrity, and sustainable academic culture. The inaugural event, Responsible Research Conversations (18 September 2025), brought together academic and professional staff to showcase ongoing efforts and strengthen the ecosystem of responsible academic practices.

Recommendations

The second part of the report presents recommendations aimed at enabling sustainable institutional development. Together, these recommendations aim to support TU/e in strengthening assessment quality, enhancing academic culture, and positioning the university as an (inter)national leader in responsible academic practices.

1. A holistic Quality Assurance (QA) framework: The primary structural challenge identified is the absence of standardized QA mechanisms across hiring, promotion, and academic management processes. Without shared standards, inconsistencies persist, increasing institutional risk.

2. Alignment and strengthening of Performance Management (PM): While several PM tools already exist, misalignment across individual and collective levels leads to unclear career pathways and underutilized opportunities for talent development. Stronger integration is essential for realizing the potential of diverse academic profiles at the team and institutional levels.

3. Community collaboration through the RRC/e: TU/e's strategic ambitions require community-driven development of academic culture. Community collaboration supports shared understanding, breaks down silos, aligns overlapping initiatives, and anchors performance management and talent development in the lived experiences and needs of the academic community.

Responsible institutions: Academic landscape

There is growing global consensus that academic assessment systems must embody the goals and principles of responsible assessment by moving beyond narrow, quantitative measures of performance. Responsible research assessment (RRA) is an umbrella term for best practices that incentivize behaviors connected to high-quality research to support sustainable, diverse, and inclusive research cultures. RRA embodies a value-driven approach aligned with organizational missions and values. It encourages practices that yield beneficial outputs, outcomes, and impact to individual researchers, organizations, research systems and cultures, as well as science and society (Allen et al., 2025).

In this report, we use the terms responsible research assessment (RRA) and responsible academic assessment (RAA) somewhat interchangeably. While RRA is the prevailing term in international agreements and policy frameworks, we employ RAA to reflect the broader scope of contemporary academic work, encompassing not only research outputs but also teaching, leadership, mentoring, service, open science practices, and societal engagement.

Failing to implement RRA carries significant risks for research integrity, institutional fairness, and long-term excellence. Traditional, metric-driven systems distort incentives, narrow definitions of success, and undervalue essential but less visible academic work such as mentoring, collaboration, and open science (OS) practices. This can lead to biased evaluations, decreased diversity, and the erosion of trust in assessment (ALLEA - All European Academies, 2023; Cagan, 2013). Without responsible assessment, organizations risk discouraging high-quality, reproducible, and societally relevant research, as well as demotivating staff whose contributions fall outside narrow quantitative metrics. Ultimately, inequitable and opaque systems hinder innovation, weaken research cultures, and compromise both institutional credibility and social impact (Allen et al., 2025).

Internationally, landmark initiatives have reshaped the debate.

- Two major declarations: **The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)** calls for abandoning journal-based metrics in assessing individual contributions. Assessment committees are asked to challenge traditional assessment practices, basing decisions on content quality rather than metrics (Cagan, 2013). The **Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA)** unites organizations in implementing responsible research assessment (RRA), emphasizing quality, transparency, diversity, and OS practices (Arentoft et al., 2022).
- The **European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity** (ALLEA - All European Academies, 2023) highlights fairness, openness, and accountability in academic careers assessment as central to research integrity.
- Reports by major funders (e.g. Wellcome, 2020) underline how unhealthy assessment systems erode trust, inclusivity, and scientific progress.

Nationally, the Dutch **Recognition and Rewards (R&R)** program has been a frontrunner in Europe. The 2019 position paper *Room for Everyone's Talent* (VSNU et al., 2019) called for valuing diverse career paths (over key areas: education, research, impact, leadership, and patient care in UMC's), prioritizing quality over quantity, embedding OS and team science, and fostering academic leadership rooted in inclusivity and social responsibility.

Our position: Drivers of social innovation

While many institutions across Europe and beyond are signatories to these principles, few have translated them into concrete, evidence-based interventions at the level of assessment committees. This positions TU/e as an international frontrunner: the institution not only expressed commitment to responsible assessment by **consistently signing and adhering to relevant agreements** throughout the past decade, including the two major international declarations outlined above (DORA in 2014 and ARRA in 2022) and aligned with the national R&R program (2019), but also initiated and **invested in policy and social innovations** in line with underlying principles.

In addition to supporting landslide initiatives, investments in **building in-house expertise** led to the embedding of dedicated CoARA, R&R, academic assessment, and OS experts within its professional workforce, which led to **early policy implementation and continuous strategy alignment**. Appointment and evaluation practices of academic staff at TU/e take place in selection or assessment committees, so-called BACs. Major developments include the establishment

of Interdepartmental Committees (IFCs) in 2017, to improve the quality of academic performance as well as development evaluation and feedback. These efforts are also visible in HR policies and programs internationally renowned for their achievements in terms of practical change, aimed at fostering diversity both in demographic characteristics such as gender (Irène Curie Fellowship, 2019) as well as academic profiles and activities (Vision and leading principles on Recognition & Rewards, 2021; Development Matrix, 2022; Biographical Sketch, 2024; TU/e policy on Teacher Careers, 2024), and furthering equality and recognition of academic staff (Career Policy Everyone Professor, 2024). See [Appendix A](#) for a complete timeline and overview.

TU/e has also **embedded and operationalized** these ambitions in its Institutional Plan 2026-2030 (Westenbrink & Lubbers, 2025). Apart from committing to centering its culture and actions around being curious, open, respectful and responsible, the plan outlines TU/e's role as a **societal actor and 4th generation university** – with a commitment to orchestrate innovation ecosystems, societal dialogues, and live up to responsibilities as leaders of change (Bogers & Steinbuch, 2023). The emphasis of a 4th generation university on open innovation ecosystems moves universities from closed knowledge institutions to active drivers of regional and societal impact, reinforcing assessment cultures that value collaboration, usability, and real-world relevance over narrow metrics. (Bogers & Steinbuch, 2023)

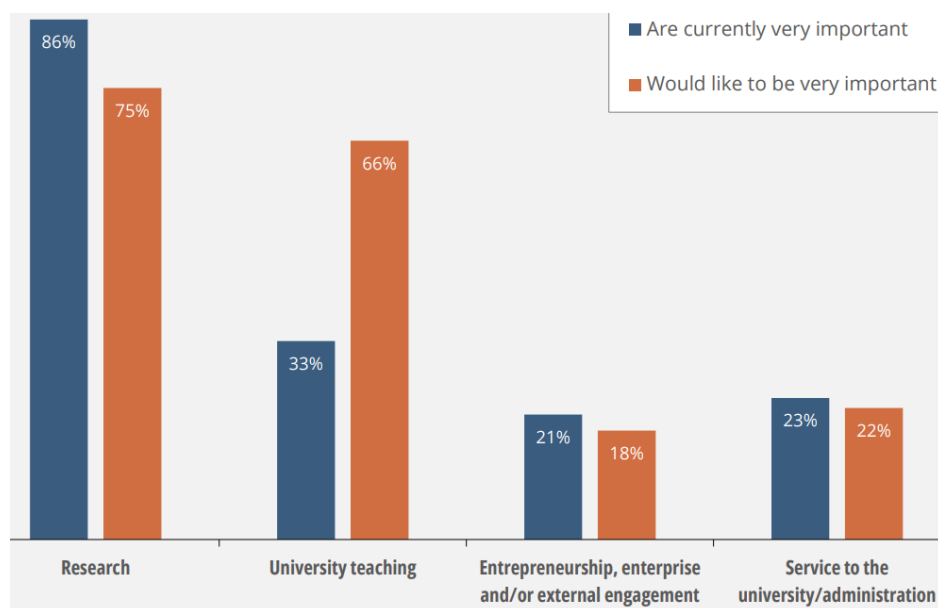
As a unique addition to the above, TU/e hosts the Eindhoven Meta-Science Center (META/e), dedicated to the **scientific study of science itself** using meta scientific methodologies and social scientific approaches to find and promote ways of improving scientific practices. It achieves this aim through education, research, public outreach, and science policy work, with META/e members drawing expertise from a wide range of backgrounds, including psychology, statistics, science policy, innovation science, and the history, philosophy and sociology of science.

This project is a continuation of these efforts, an example of managing complex, disparate processes to work in unison for social change. It is a collaboration between internal and external, managerial, professional and academic actors, diverse methodological approaches, and a range of institutional segments and funding streams.

Objectives: Challenges and solutions

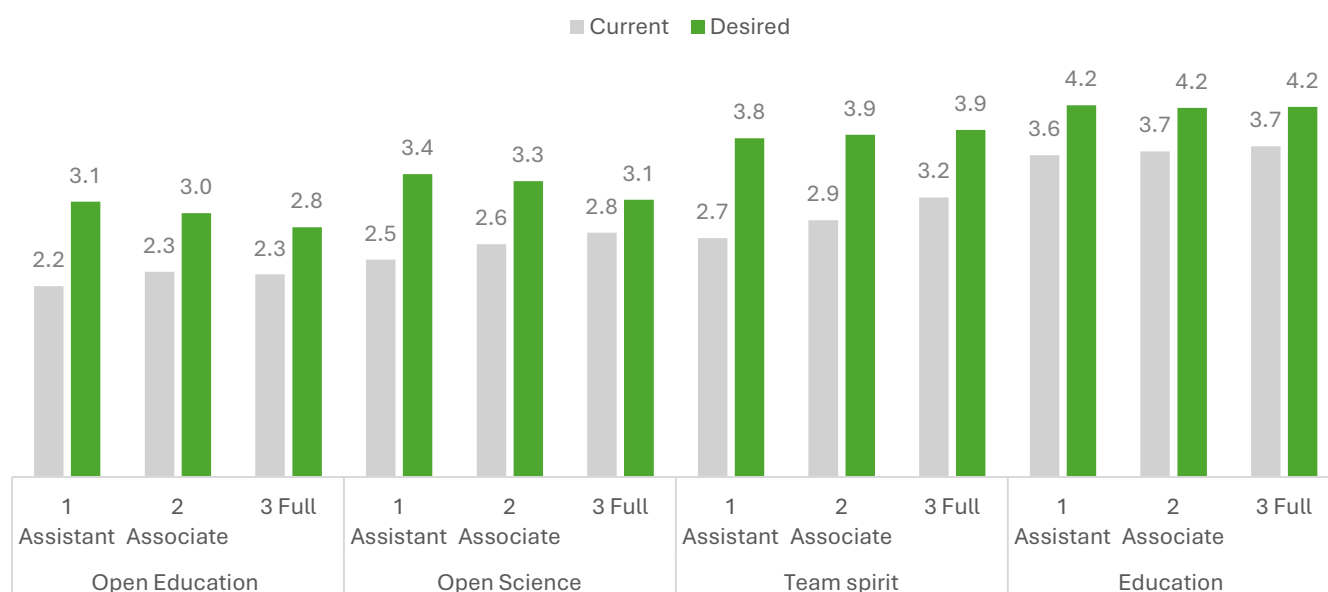
While much has been achieved, continuing to be active drivers of change is reliant on further strengthening the alignment between commitments and implementation – a challenging task given a persistent gap between the two. Feedback from TU/e community confirms urgency in aligning practice with policies, as demonstrated by reports of a mismatch between currently versus ideally valued non-research activities (Graham, 2025), especially with regards to teaching (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Proportion of respondents selecting 'very important' in response to questions on how important each activity is for promotion to full professor at TU/e and how important they would like the activities to be for promotion.



Similar wishes are highlighted in the institutional R&R Culture Barometer (Berenschot, 2024) in which TU/e participants reported perceptions of current versus wished importance of activities for promotion (Figure 2).

Figure 2 TU/e participants' responses in terms of perceived current versus desired importance of academic



In terms of solution needs, institutional reports refer to adjustments to policy, recent reports identified inefficiencies in implementation, centering attention on BACs. BACs are pivotal in shaping academic careers as well as institutional culture and norms. Internal evaluations ([Appendix A](#)) and consultations reveal several persistent challenges in the BAC process: Procedural inefficiencies and inconsistency, transparency and fairness concerns, underdeveloped competencies in (new) assessment domains, workload and training gaps, and cultural barriers.

These issues lead to frustration among assessors and candidates alike, and risk undermining the credibility of TU/e's broader policies. Earlier interventions (see examples in [Appendix A](#)) were valuable steps, but further development is required. Without in-depth understanding of these challenges and targeted interventions, the intended change cannot be sustainably embedded in the academic system. Thus, this project addresses an urgent institutional need: to strengthen the capacity of BACs to evaluate candidates in line with TU/e's strategic values and the R&R framework.

Approach

Building on the context outlined, this project tackles one of the most critical and often under-addressed levers of institutional change: assessment practices. To account for our unique institutional ecosystem and create a deep understanding of challenges, our approach combines policy alignment, empirical investigation, and evidence-informed intervention design. The project has three components:

1. Researching challenges and developing scientific evidence-based interventions for BAC members:
[Training: Responsible Academic Assessments - From Principles to Practice \(page 21\)](#)
[Role-playing game: Behind Closed Doors \(page 23\)](#)
2. Fostering community engagement to increase awareness, discussion and collaboration for (policy) change:
[Responsible Research Community Eindhoven \(RRC/e\) \(page 25\)](#)
3. Identifying responsible practices and indicators (database):
[Knowledge infrastructure \(page 25\)](#)

Methods

To examine the challenges and develop aligned interventions, we carried out empirical research connected to BAC activity between February and November 2025. The work followed an applied psychological, practice-oriented approach in which the researcher was positioned within the organizational assessment environment. This embeddedness allowed direct insight into behaviors, routines, decision-making processes, interactions, and organizational conditions influencing assessment. The focus was on processes and systems, not on evaluating individual staff or committees. Accordingly – and aligned with ethical standards – included observational examples are paraphrased or anonymized to protect confidentiality. Research only pertained to BACs, meaning that we only gained insights into hiring, promotion, and recognition practices for assistant, associate, and full professors rather than all academic staff members.

Data sources

To develop an overview of a broad range of current assessment practices, several complementary data sources were used. As preparation and basis for the empirical studies involved in the project, a document review of prior institutional reports, assessment guidelines, and R&R policy materials was combined with continued consultations with institutional HR experts specialized in policy, strategy, and R&R developments.

Empirical data collection spanned three methodological approaches, resulting in 191 discrete observational items being identified and coded. A total of 92 participants were involved in the following research activities:

1. In-depth interviews: 6 semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in assessment processes (committee members, candidates, academic leadership).
2. Observations: 80 participants were observed over a total of 8 cases of assessment meetings, including setup, candidate interview as well as presentation rounds and deliberations.
3. Discussions: 6 participants contributed to 4 facilitated group discussions and feedback sessions were organized to reflect on experiences, identify barriers, and gather input.

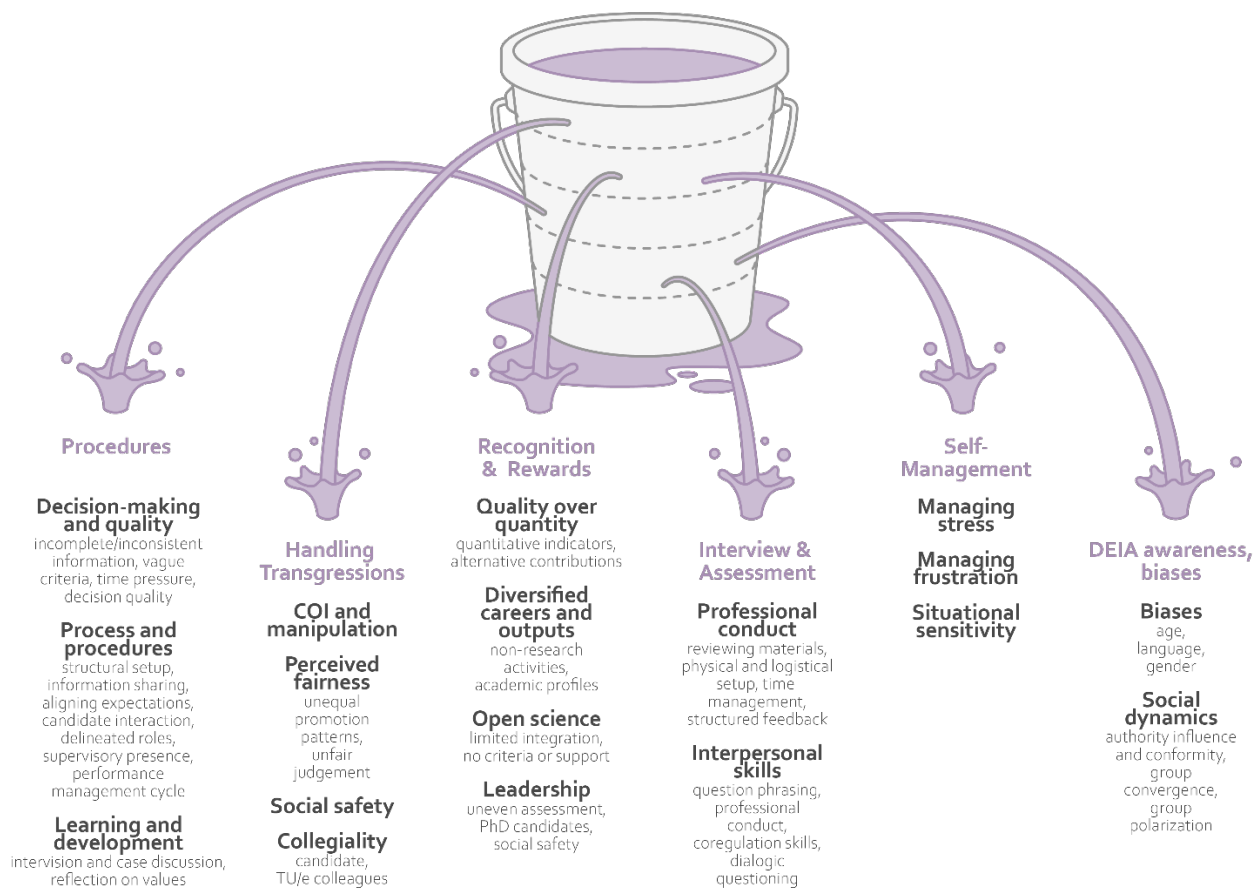
Ethical considerations

Given the applied nature of the work and the researcher's embedded (non-academic) HR position and official institutional assignment, formal ethical review board approval was not applicable within the organizational context. Permissions to observe and contribute to assessment processes were obtained from managers and BAC chairs. All participants were aware of the researcher's overarching role: to observe processes to understand and improve organizational practice. No personal performance data or identifiable information were recorded. All notes were anonymized, kept private, and focused exclusively on process characteristics and social dynamics, instead of individuals. Potential conflicts linked to the dual HR/researcher role were managed through ongoing reflexive practice and transparent communication with stakeholders. The insights gathered were used to identify systemic vulnerabilities and inconsistencies in assessment procedures, highlight strengths and good practices, develop targeted recommendations for HR strategy and policy, inform training design for BAC members, and support ongoing organizational learning and quality assurance in assessment.

Results**Overview**

Six main themes were identified via thematic analysis across observational items, each with its own sub-themes (Figure 3). Items could fall under more than one theme, with the largest number of items being associated with BAC procedures (Figure 4). Themes were used to pinpoint both good practices and system-level barriers that may hinder responsible assessments.

Figure 3 Six main themes and sub-themes used to categorize observational items



Findings show significant variation in how BAC policy is understood and applied, resulting in a mismatch between the policy's goals and how it is being implemented in practice. This variability - shaped by departmental norms and, crucially, by the approach of individual committee members and chairs - contributes to inconsistent experiences and outcomes. This report focuses on policy and intervention (especially training) related items as a basis for recommendations. Other potential uses are outlined in the anonymized dataset to aid further work on developing a database of responsible practices or supporting candidates (see Figure 5 for a ratio of items pertaining to each recommendation type).

Figure 4 Ratio of associated items per theme

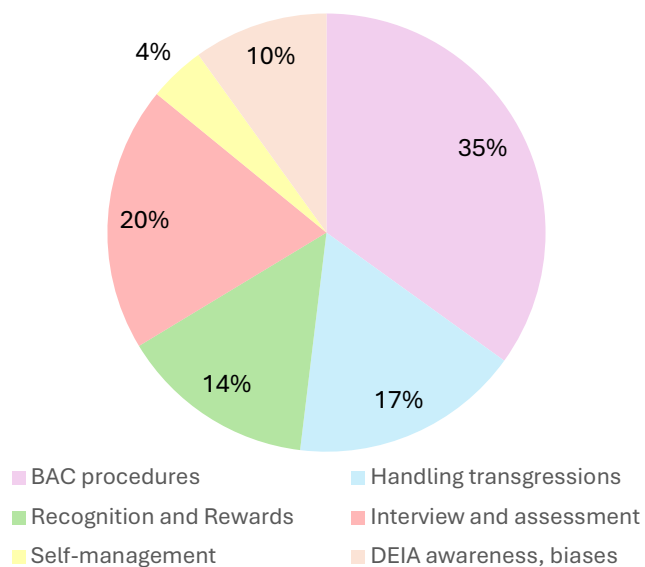
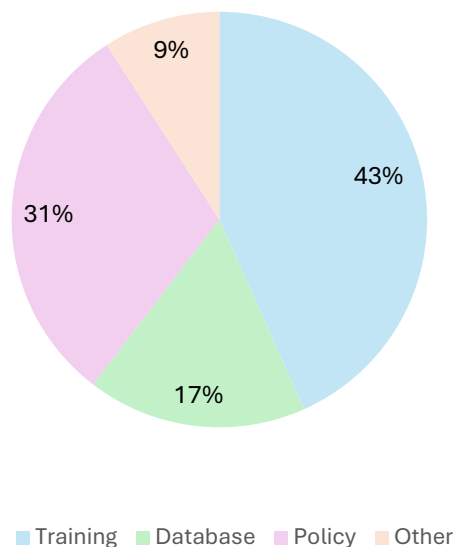


Figure 5 Ratio of associated items per recommendation type



1. Procedures

1.1. Decision-making and quality

The quality of BAC decisions depends on the interaction between available information, assessment criteria, and group dynamics. *Incomplete or inconsistent information* can undermine fairness and comparability, while *Vague criteria* increase the risk of subjective interpretation and bias.

After some deliberation on how to assess the candidate, a BAC member calls attention to a matrix on part-time positions. They point out that the criteria should be interpreted as a quantitative, not qualitative difference.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

These factors combined with *Time pressure* and other contextual inefficiencies influence the perceived legitimacy and reliability of the assessment process, and impact *Decision quality*.

The interview runs over time by 13 minutes. The process feels rushed, pressured. BAC members are asked by the chair to keep it short, not ask more questions if not absolutely needed.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

1.2. Processes and procedures

BACs operate fairly and most effectively when expectations are clear and aligned. Incongruencies may lead to increased levels of frustration, misunderstanding, and uncertainty. This is relevant in terms of *Structural setup*, the process design of the who does what and when, as well as how interactions are set up and managed.

The chair has a noticeable presence and structures the meeting. They welcome the candidate: "Let me talk you through the setup", then outline briefly the meeting goal, BAC feedback process, etc. They ask if the candidate has questions for BAC members before presenting. The setup phase seems professional; the climate is collegial.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

At the beginning, there is only a very short introduction, no question or structure discussion.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

The chair closes the interview section by reiterating next steps.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Also, how *Information sharing* is managed and how documentation is arranged matter.

Deliberation stage, a BAC member notes that the personal profile documents are not in the available files. The chair agrees, adds that the number of documents needed is confusing, they are not sure "where these went".
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Informing stakeholders about the circumstances of the setup and thus *Aligning expectations* with reality can also help mitigate stress and frustration.

A BAC member complains about not being provided lunch even though the process takes place at lunchtime.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Consistent *Candidate interaction* and standardized reporting are crucial to transparency.

Candidate cited the work of one of the BAC members in their presentation (this was taken noticeably well by the member). Another candidate was interpreted as not providing solid evidence for planned collaboration within the group (even though they did present ideas for collaboration with multiple colleagues). A BAC member asked whether both candidates knew who would be on the committee. Did they have the same information? No one answers.
(observation of two BAC procedures)

The BAC members wanted to include comments on personal well-being in the written report, such as "Do they <the candidate> put large pressure on themselves?" to note that they might require extra support in this regard.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Standardization across rules, roles, candidate data, criteria, and conflict-of-interest statements enables comparability and quality assurance.

A BAC member adds they are frustrated by the lacking description of the number of PhDs supervised in the CV (note: the information was present in the cover letter, but the committee never reflected on this). Similar comments in other BACs: uncertainty about authorship and grant roles, student evaluation, etc.
(observation of several BAC procedures)

The chair opens with questions about conflict of interest: whether BAC members have connections to the candidate.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Questions raised about M-BACs: the BAC members are uncertain about what the expected outcome should be, they comment on this several times throughout the process. When trying to formulate advice, they struggle with what they should or even could do. Some quotes reflect uncertainties:

"M-BACs shouldn't be scheduled after X months. <time retracted to anonymize data>"

"But do these only relate to the period spent at TU/e, or all together work?"

"<The candidate's> colleagues will see inequality." (due to the fast-paced progression compared to them)

"<Deciding this is> not our problem, it's a problem of the board."

"This is the only sensible decision, it's not ideal, but we accept it." "We would slow them down unfairly if they had to wait"

"Accelerated M-BACs don't work, because it's now a P-BAC basically, but not really. We don't know what it is, actually."

(observation of a BAC procedure)

Clearly *Delineated* roles - of the chair, members, IFC members, HR advisor, supervisor, and secretary - help maintain focus, balance authority, and ensure procedural integrity throughout the process.

The chair starts without setting up a structure for the line of questions: "No need for inventory of questions, people in line can adapt to what has been asked already"
(observation of a BAC procedure)

The HR advisor gives a short background summary of the candidate - what agreements they set up, how the trajectory advanced, etc. Their contribution is valued and sets a more personal tone to the meeting.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

The HR advisor cannot give sound advice, needs time to find out if the candidate already has a permanent contract: "InSite is difficult to navigate."
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Supervisory presence within BAC procedures requires careful consideration. This topic emerged across nearly all interviews, discussions, and observations as one of the most frequently debated aspects of the assessment process. Practices vary across departments: in some cases, supervisors participate in the entire internal BAC process - from preparatory discussions through candidate presentation and interview, and occasionally even during deliberations. In others, their presence is constrained, often only including a short interview before or after the candidate presentation. This model aligns with departments where close supervisory involvement is the norm.

Several arguments support the inclusion of the supervisor throughout the process. Supervisors often express a need for involvement to maintain oversight of both individual and group-level development. Their participation facilitates coherence between the BAC's advice and the department's performance management cycle. Their presence can be significant as the written advice carries significant implications for candidates' future careers, and the supervisors are responsible for implementing follow-up actions in annual reviews. They can help ensure that advice is formulated

constructively and in language that can be meaningfully integrated into future development discussions. In addition, without an alignment with the supervisor, the department board may face tension if it supports a promotion that the group chair does not endorse.

A supervisor argues for their role in the process: "<Being able to be present throughout the BAC process> gives some control over what happens. <...> Otherwise, I would have no idea what's going on"
(interview with a supervisor)

On an interpersonal level, supervisory presence can serve as a form of psychological support for candidates, ensuring that evaluations are contextualized and that candidates do not feel isolated during the process. Adding details about the candidate's well-being can also humanize the experience and aid the committee in formulating advice aligned with personal needs.

"They <the candidate> are a driven person, they want to prove themselves, which can be a downside. Setbacks can hurt them, hurt their mental health, these times I feel that I should talk with them. If they address these challenges, that's good, but otherwise they will not be as successful."
(observation of a BAC procedure)

And finally, supervisors might prefer to feel included due to the commitment and work they invest in preparing the process as well as the candidates.

"I am involved in the preparation and outcome, seems only fair to be in the meeting itself."
(interview with a supervisor)

At the same time, this involvement presents challenges. The dual role of the supervisor - as an informant to the evaluators and advocate - can blur boundaries and raise concerns about impartiality. The fear of being examined without a supportive presence should be balanced against the risk of undue influence on committee deliberations or perceived conflicts of interest. Furthermore, differences in supervision and communication styles, as well as the strength of relationship between candidate and supervisor can lead to inequalities in the influence a supervisor's words have on committee deliberations.

When questioned about PhD supervision, the supervisor helps out the candidate, answers some of the questions.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

The chair asks if the supervisor wants to say anything before questions about their impressions of the candidate. The supervisor describes the candidate using passionate language, colorful examples, and statements of strong personal preference. Some quotes: "I like their style" and "They are my cup of tea"

"I'd be disappointed if they left <because of not advancing quickly enough>" to which a BAC member replies "We don't want to be hijacked by them <the candidate>" Supervisor: "No, of course, but it is a bit of a balance"
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Including the supervisor in the whole process can also pose social safety concerns outweighing or even reversing mental health benefits for the candidate.

The supervisor is present throughout the whole process. Their presence leads to somewhat awkward moments, like when the candidate is asked about their managerial aspirations. Some BAC members reflect on the awkwardness.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Finally, strengthening the integration of BAC procedures within the broader institutional development and *Performance management cycle* could enhance continuity, clarity, and long-term alignment. At present, the connection between BAC outcomes and annual reviews varies by department, which can lead to inconsistencies in follow-up, uncertainty for candidates, and additional workload for supervisors. Embedding BAC advice (and more broadly, Recognition and Rewards-aligned criteria) more explicitly within existing development conversations would support coherent career

planning, ensure that recommendations are actionable and sustainable, and reduce discrepancies between committee expectations and departmental practice. Such integration would contribute to a more predictable and transparent assessment environment for all stakeholders.

Integration of the bio-sketch into the annual cycles is needed. It shouldn't be used just for promotion purposes but rather become a roadmap for development. This "also would be needed to allocate tasks within research groups and would also help candidates reflect on their competencies, skills, and development."

(interview with a BAC member)

One of the BAC members was present at the previous BAC for this candidate. They note that even though there were similar concerns raised, the committee asked the board to support the progression of the candidate - today the candidate was more organized than then and seems to have progressed well.

(observation of a BAC procedure)

1.3. Learning and development

Ongoing learning and reflection are essential to the development of effective assessment practices. Structured *Intervision* and *case discussions* support shared understanding and exchange of experience among BAC members. This type of peer learning fosters professional dialogue, openness, collaboration, and cross-departmental consistency.

Repeated trainings to all involved parties would be preferable, especially having an intervision, to have a dialogue, examples, and aid to recognize harmful situations, as well as the support of the peer community.

(interview with a BAC member)

"The intervision session was very helpful in the previous training."

(interview with a BAC member)

"Case discussions are important (especially for new members) to get an idea of everything."

(interview with a BAC member)

Reflection on values - such as the Recognition & Rewards principles and institutional values - anchors committee work in the broader mission of responsible and inclusive academic assessment.

During the Recognition and Rewards calibration meeting no one understood what it was or how to go through the complex process. "Freshly started IFCs then struggled, now have perspective on matters."

(interview with a BAC member)

"Our institutional commitment to values could be included in the training as a baseline or norm. <It would> allow for stronger justification of decisions."

(interview with a BAC member)

2. Handling transgressions within the BAC

2.1. Conflict of Interest (COI) and manipulation

Explicit safeguards are essential to prevent real or perceived conflicts of interest and to reduce opportunities for inappropriate influence within BAC deliberations. Several instances indicated that unclear boundaries - such as close collegial ties, prior collaborations, or hierarchical dependencies - can compromise impartiality or create the appearance of favoritism.

External BAC member (with conflict of interest) strongly pushes for promoting the candidate. When other BAC members disagree (based on the interview and concerns about interpersonal and teaching/supervision skills), the external member cuts them off and starts arguing for the candidate, repeatedly.

After some consideration, the external member pressures the process further (also citing evidence not in the candidate

*material, interview, or presentation) and in the end, BAC members agree to the promotion.
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

*After discussion, a BAC member comments that it should be noted if a member has a COI. They remark that the external member has published together with the candidate. The chair deflects responsibility ("not a role for the BAC to check COI"). The external member argues against the comments stating they signaled the COI, but it's not a strong one – they believe they can act as BAC members.
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

*The presence of the supervisor and an outspoken external member (with COI) combined with a less confident chair leads to the opposite outcome requested by most BAC members.
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

TU/e's current policy (K. Harwig, 2021) already prohibits individuals from serving on a BAC if they are a family member of the candidate, hold a personal or professional financial interest, are a direct colleague, or have previously supervised the candidate. These exclusions form an important baseline, yet they do not fully address the complexities of academic networks, power asymmetries, or social-professional pressures that may influence evaluation processes.

2.2. Perceived fairness

Perceptions of fairness are critical to the legitimacy of the BAC. Yet participants frequently described concerns related to *Unequal promotion patterns*, and *Unfair judgement*. Added to experiences with inconsistent expectations across departments, or perceived bias in the interpretation of criteria can undermine trust in the process, increase frustration, and reinforce existing inequalities. Enhancing fairness requires more explicit norms about how evidence is weighed, clearer criteria for borderline cases, and structured opportunities for BAC members to interrogate their own assumptions. Transparent communication with candidates about decision rationales further reduces ambiguity and strengthens confidence in the institution's ability to evaluate academic contributions objectively and equitably.

*Interviewee reflects on certain types of BACs being very unfair, committee members cannot raise their voices against them to achieve change.
(interview with BAC member)*
*"Their colleagues will see inequality" (as in the fast-paced progression of this candidate compared to others)
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

2.3. Social safety of the BAC

Ensuring a socially safe environment within BACs is essential for enabling members to speak up about concerns, address inappropriate behavior, and challenge biased judgement without fear of repercussions. Yet findings from the study indicate that social-safety procedures within BAC meetings are currently unclear. HR advisors, secretaries, and IFC representatives reported uncertainty about how to act when witnessing unsafe behavior and which escalation pathways apply.

*Interviewee comments on the procedure for whistleblowing – and in general, disagreeing with the process or outcome - is unclear and difficult, causes frustration.
(interview with a BAC member)*

Although TU/e has institutional whistleblowing and social-safety regulations, these are not explicitly operationalized for the BAC context, leaving responsibility diffused and sometimes deflected. Without clear protocols, individuals are left vulnerable in situations where power dynamics or departmental politics may inhibit open dialogue.

*Upon raising concerns about the integrity of the BAC procedure, committee members do not respond in substance. There are no policies or clearly outlined procedures for interruptions, questions, and concerns.
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

2.4. Collegiality

Collegiality plays a central role in maintaining the credibility and quality of BAC assessments. Transgressions in this domain may include dismissive behavior during meetings, adversarial questioning, inappropriate comments about the *Candidate* or *TU/e* colleagues, or the use of personal rather than professional judgements. These actions not only compromise the quality of assessment but also contribute to an unsafe or exclusionary climate.

"I can imagine PhDs being happy with them" (sarcastic comment on the candidate being nice)
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Lack of collegiality towards observer throughout the whole process. Logistics set up differently than all other visited BACs - no Outlook invitation, nor a list of participants conveyed even after requests.

In the beginning of the procedure, an IFC member suggests to ask for language switch from Dutch to English, to aid observer role. After requesting to do so, the chair rejects the request in Dutch. The HR advisor makes a comment about observer not being allowed to interject anyway as a justification. Response of still needing to observe, as part of the role and job goes without acknowledgement.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Promoting collegiality involves modelling professional conduct, adhering to shared norms, and ensuring that all remarks relate directly to the candidate's documented contributions or development trajectory. BAC members can support this by actively moderating discussions, redirecting inappropriate comments, and reinforcing the expectation that evaluations must remain constructive, respectful, and evidence-based.

3. Recognition and Rewards

3.1. Quality over quantity

Despite the university's commitment to Recognition & Rewards principles, many BACs continue to rely - implicitly or explicitly - on traditional *Quantitative indicators*.

The candidate presents their academic career and professional summary with an emphasis on quantitative metrics (number of publications, H-index, number of co-promoted PhDs).
(observation of a BAC procedure)

"Research assessment is still very quantitative driven (H-index, number of papers)"
(interview with a BAC member)

These metrics, while familiar, are often used as shorthand for quality and can overshadow richer evidence, including considerations about *Alternative contributions* to science.

The candidate discusses how they felt their output types were judged unfairly. They were not recognized for certain outputs, there was no alignment between what they did and what the committee wanted them to do. "I didn't conform to a mold of useless papers but created meaningful contributions"
(interview with a BAC candidate)

3.2. Diversified careers and outputs

Strongly related to the above observation, many assessors seem to struggle to operationalize and judge contributions to *Non-research activities*, such as education, impact, and leadership. Some candidates also struggle to present more than one aspect of their work.

The BAC members seem uncertain about what they should or could ask about non-research activities. They also don't have time to engage with these questions, the process is rushed, in the end, they just leave all "social" questions to HR.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

The candidate presentation focuses almost exclusively on inventions and technology, their company, prestige and status. Little time is left for research focus, educational plans, there are no qualitative markers for teaching/supervision, nothing on open science.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Best practices in presenting and recognizing *Academic profiles* emerge in some cases, but there seems to be much need for further support and improvement in assessment.

The candidate reflects on all four pillars explicitly and adds details about how they met each requirement posed earlier.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

One of the committee members explicitly mentions that the candidate can go for a different profile/path based on what they have done so far, but they should nicely write it up to represent what they have done.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

“The four profiles are not weighed similarly, and I am not in favor of quantitative weighing. A suggestion: we should look at the whole profile and think of 1) whether we want that in the organization and 2) what is the maturity level.”
(interview with a BAC member)

“What's needed: some examples of people with completely deviating profiles in comparison to standard <research> profiles”
(interview with a BAC member)

3.3. Open science

Despite OS being an explicit dimension of the Recognition & Rewards framework, it remains largely absent from BAC discussions. Observations and interviews consistently indicated that research integrity and OS only achieved *Limited integration*.

Throughout the process, there are no reflections on Recognition and Rewards criteria or open science.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

Even when included, the assessment process provides *No criteria or support* on how OS contributions should be evaluated. In combination with other concerns (like lack of time), OS output rarely seems to influence deliberations.

The candidate outlines open-source implementations of their work, collaborations on open-source tools, mentoring on computational research skills, and insights beyond experiments, and building safe and collaborative research environments. Later, a BAC member reflects on the materials presented, noting that although they must make quality-related decisions about e.g., OS materials, there is little guidance and sometimes materials are bad, but no one has the time to check.
(observation of a BAC procedure)

This gap not only leaves candidates' OS efforts unrecognized but also contributes to inconsistent assessment practices. Clarifying OS expectations within BAC procedures - supported by practical tools such as checklists, structured prompts, or OS exemplars - would enable committees to differentiate between superficial and meaningful contributions. Without such scaffolding, OS remains a rhetorical priority rather than a substantive evaluative criterion, weakening alignment between institutional values and assessment practice.

3.4. Leadership

Leadership is increasingly recognized as a core component of academic performance, yet its *Assessment is uneven* and often implicit. BAC members might ask directly related questions and candidates occasionally provide detailed evidence, e.g., connected to PhD supervision.

*The chair facilitates an explicit discussion of leadership styles by discussing this topic within the list of potential questions.
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

The candidate included a table of PhD/postdoc projects, funding, and placement of supervised candidates after they finished.

(observation of a BAC procedure)

However, BAC deliberations often default to narrow proxies, including publication output relative to the number of supervised PhDs, despite widespread acknowledgment that this metric contradicts the R&R principle of prioritizing quality over quantity.

Using PhD outputs as a quantitative proxy for performance is misaligned with the principle of focusing on quality. It also exposes risks in supervision models, sustainable academic leadership, and ethical and developmental responsibilities toward *PhD candidates*.

A BAC member comments on the candidate's low publication output compared to high number of PhDs.

(observation of a BAC procedure)

A recurring concern is the limited consideration of *Social safety* in evaluating leadership. Interviewees noted that leadership problems - particularly in supervision - may surface too late or remain invisible to BACs.

"A larger emphasis on leadership is needed - how can we help BACs evaluate this? What if the leadership aspect is problematic, do we still advance candidates? This should be important after a certain level, but not considered that much"

(interview with a BAC member)

The current process provides no systematic means to assess the supervisory climate, candidate behavior in leadership roles, or potential risks to early-career researchers. Since social safety and leadership quality are connected, better alignment is needed between BAC procedures and the university's broader social-safety and supervision policies.

4. Interview and assessment

4.1. Professional conduct

Professional conduct during interviews reflects directly on the credibility of the BAC, the department, and the university as a whole. Adequate preparation by committee members, timely review of materials, and clear communication are essential elements of a professional assessment environment and a fair and efficient process.

For most BAC members, effective preparation starts with *Reviewing materials* in advance, particularly when questions about authorship, contributions, or complex research outputs are foreseeable. When members arrive un(der)prepared, interviews shift from substantive evaluation to improvised questioning, increasing the likelihood of misunderstandings or superficial assessments.

A common issue seems to be that not all documents seem to be read by all members.

(interview with a BAC member)

The *Physical and logistical setup* of the interview shapes the candidate's experience and the overall quality of the process. Environmental factors such as room size, seating arrangements, noise levels, and technical reliability influence how well the candidate can present and how well the committee can focus:

The candidate starts the lecture in a very small, crowded room. Noise level is high, someone walks in mid-presentation.

The lecture is set up in a spacious lecture room, noise level is low.

(observation of two BAC procedures)

Similarly, interview rooms ranged from formal, hierarchical setups - with the candidate physically separated from the committee - to welcoming, well-equipped spaces that supported a more professional and comfortable atmosphere.

Interview environment: Large, circular meeting room, good amount of space, hierarchical setup with BAC members located around a large meeting table and the candidate taking place in the other end of the room.

*Interview environment: The room is well equipped, there is a panoramic conference camera, catering, and a general sense of comfort. No natural light, but glass windows facing the inside of the building.
(observation of two BAC procedures)*

Technical reliability and attention to basic meeting etiquette are also essential. Lapses - such as attending from noisy environments or failing to mute microphones - signal a lack of seriousness and reduce the perceived legitimacy of the committee:

*An online BAC member is calling from a train station. They do not mute themselves, we hear train sounds, voices, the BAC member talking to others. No one takes the initiative to (ask them to) mute themselves.
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

Clear time allocations for presentation, questioning, and closing segments help maintain focus and ensure that each candidate receives an equal opportunity to present their case. However, several observed interviews were negatively affected by insufficient *Time management*:

*Lack of time; the chair did not stop the candidate's presentation, which was very long (~35 minutes).
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

When interviews run over time or become rushed, the committee's capacity to ask relevant questions - and to deliberate meaningfully - becomes constrained. This creates pressure on both candidates and BAC members, reducing the quality and depth of the evaluation.

Finally, providing *Structured feedback* to candidates after the interview enhances transparency and supports ongoing development:

*"I always have a feedback meeting with the candidate."
(interview with a BAC member)*

Such practices illustrate how interview setup goes beyond logistics: it reflects institutional values, affects candidate performance, and shapes impressions of the university. Uneven practices between departments, groups, and BAC committees shed light on a wide variety of candidate experiences and inequalities from the very beginning of the process.

4.2. Interpersonal skills

The interpersonal skills of BAC members play a crucial role in shaping interview quality. From a psychological perspective, interviews are co-regulated interactions: both the candidate and the committee contribute to the tone, rhythm, and emotional climate of the conversation. Effective interviewing, therefore, extends beyond the content of questions - it requires deliberate use of interpersonal skills that support clarity, calm, and mutual understanding.

Co-regulation refers to the moment-to-moment adjustments individuals make in response to each other's verbal and nonverbal cues, helping stabilize the interaction and enabling both parties to communicate effectively. In the context of BAC interviews, co-regulation shows up through rapport-building, clear signaling, active listening, empathic responses, and, in general, perspective-taking. When committee members engage in these behaviors, they help the candidate remain calm enough to think clearly and respond accurately - thus improving the quality of the evaluation itself.

Several observations illustrate how the absence of co-regulation can hinder candidate performance and reduce the fairness of the interview. Perspective-taking – understanding the situation from the perspective of the candidate - can help with *Question phrasing* and reduce the use of ambiguous or culturally unfamiliar terminology:

Question: What is your opinion on social safety in the workplace? The candidate wasn't certain what the term means, nor did they have time to elaborate (question received about a 2-minute timeframe).

*Note: "social safety" as a term is not used in all countries (most notably used in the Netherlands)
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

Additionally, *Professional conduct* relies on a broader set of communication strategies, such as non-verbal behavior, introductions, and questioning styles.

A BAC member - instead of thanking the candidate for the presentation as other members did or introducing themselves - starts immediately with a question. While talking, they hug themselves with their right arm, leaning on their left elbow.

(observation of a BAC procedure)

Conversely, moments where BAC members used basic *Co-regulation skills* - mirroring tone, validating emotional difficulty, or offering supportive responses - helped restore safety and balance:

The candidate (visibly stressed) notes a painful personal reason for career delay; committee member responds empathetically: "Sorry, not my intention" <referring to the motivation of their original question>

(observation of a BAC procedure)

Even small interactional choices can shape the emotional climate. Positive nonverbal engagement, such as appropriate humor or gentle mirroring, can reduce anxiety:

BAC members react to jokes, which lightens the mood in the room.

(observation of a BAC procedure)

A co-regulation perspective also highlights the importance of *Dialogic questioning* over “rapid-fire” interrogative styles. Multiple observed interviews relied on disconnected, non-sequenced questions without follow-up:

Questions do not start a dialogue, most don't have follow-ups, a lot of one-line questions fired at the candidate without ensuring a welcoming tone or sense of curiosity. Almost no nudging or sense of curiosity, in the end, the candidate is not asked if they have questions for the committee.

(observation of a BAC procedure)

This style of questioning reduces the candidate’s ability to provide coherent, reflective responses and inhibits deeper understanding. Strong interviewing skills support the committee’s ability to ask relevant, non-leading, and well-structured questions, while also managing dynamics within the group. These skills collectively enhance the quality of information gathered and promote a more balanced and considerate assessment process. As demonstrated by some BAC members, co-regulated interviewing, a sense of mutuality and professionalism combine to better results:

It could be useful to describe the process as "mutual courting", not just testing the candidate. Reflect on how we can get what we are interested in by ensuring a sense of safety and calm, instead of interrogation.

(interview with BAC member)

Indeed, interviewing should be viewed as a two-way process: candidates form lasting impressions of the university based on their interaction with the committee. Ensuring a respectful, professional, and empathetic process contributes to the university’s ability to attract, retain, and motivate high-quality academic staff.

5. Self-management

Self-management plays a significant role in shaping the quality of discussion and decision-making within BACs. However, in line with contemporary psychological and organizational research, self-management should not be framed as an individual responsibility in isolation. Emotional responses such as stress, frustration, discomfort, or hesitation to speak up are not merely personal challenges - they are systemically shaped by processes, expectations, power dynamics, and institutional culture. Effective self-management requires both individual skills and an environment designed to support those skills through structure, clarity, and social safety.

5.1. Managing stress

Stress is a psycho-physiological response to pressure, uncertainty, time constraints, or high perceived stakes.

Psychological literature defines stress as arising when individuals perceive that the demands of a situation may exceed their available coping resources. In BAC settings, stress often emerges from work demands.

Observation throughout all cases (and backed up by discussions): High psychosocial workload on (most) involved parties. Inconsistency in how high this burden is, depending on the number of strains, motivation levels, and job resources provided.
(observation of BAC procedures)

Psychosocial workload refers to the psychological and social demands inherent in one's work - such as time pressure, emotional labor, role ambiguity, decision responsibility, and interpersonal dynamics - which, when sustained or insufficiently supported, increase the likelihood of stress responses by taxing cognitive and emotional resources.

Stress can impair cognitive processing, reduce working memory capacity, and increase reliance on heuristic rather than deliberate thinking. It can also contribute to cognitive overload, a phenomenon where the amount of information or pressure exceeds what an individual can process effectively. Cognitive overload reduces clarity, slows decision-making, and may lead to superficial rather than reflective assessments. Within BACs, stress-management skills - such as grounding techniques, brief pausing before responding, keeping focus on evaluative criteria, and maintaining a calm pace - can help support constructive participation. However, the primary buffer against stress is an enabling environment, including predictable procedures, adequate preparation time, clear roles, and a socially safe climate for speaking up.

5.2. Managing frustration

Frustration is distinct from stress. Whereas stress stems from demand, frustration emerges when progress is blocked or when individuals repeatedly encounter obstacles that prevent them from achieving a desired outcome. Psychological research describes frustration as arising when effort does not lead to expected results or when individuals perceive a lack of control. As outlined in the previous sections, committee work frequently exposes members to procedural inefficiencies, unclear criteria, and inconsistencies across departments. These recurring friction points can lead to frustration, especially when BAC members feel responsible for upholding high standards while lacking the tools or structures needed to do so effectively. Psychological research shows that frustration arises when perceived effort does not lead to expected outcomes, or when individuals experience a mismatch between their responsibility and their degree of control.

90% of BACs are pointless. In most cases we know what the outcome will be, we are just playing a game around it.
(interview with BAC member)

In the BAC context, frustration often stems from structural shortcomings rather than personal shortcomings. When members feel compelled to "hold the system together" despite known procedural gaps, emotional strain accumulates. While individual emotion-regulation strategies (reappraisal, pausing before reacting, focusing on shared goals) can help maintain constructive discussion, the burden should not fall on individuals alone. Addressing systemic sources of frustration - such as unclear norms, inconsistent practices, or missing infrastructure - reduces emotional load and supports healthier committee functioning.

*Interviewee describes their frustration over not being able to handle a situation involving a conflict of interest due to lack of clear regulations and support.
(interview with BAC member)*

Frustration can lead to irritability or withdrawal, both of which can reduce the quality of deliberation. Because frustration often reflects systemic barriers rather than personal shortcomings, it should be treated as a signal for organizational improvement, not a matter for individual resilience alone. Addressing root causes - through standardized procedures or better infrastructure - mitigates frustration more effectively than expecting individuals to suppress emotional responses.

5.3. Situational sensitivity

High-stakes academic interviews place candidates under significant cognitive and emotional pressure. BAC members play a critical role in co-creating an interactional climate in which candidates can think clearly, communicate effectively, and present their expertise with confidence. This relies on co-regulation skills (see above) and requires situational sensitivity - the ability to notice stress cues, interpret emotional signals, and adjust communication accordingly.

*After mentioning the presentation run late by a couple of minutes, the chair - seeing the confusion and discomfort of the candidate - assures them it's okay.
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

Lack of sensitivity, insensitive or provocative phrasing disrupts rapport and may undermine trust:

*The candidate recalls being asked: "When will you start doing real research?"
(interview with a BAC candidate)*

Subtle adjustments reflecting situational sensitivity can help both parties feel calm, oriented, and respected. Sensitive interviewing also reduces the risk of stereotype threat, a phenomenon in which individuals underperform when they fear being judged according to stereotypes associated with their group (e.g., gender, nationality, race). Even subtle contextual cues - abrupt questioning, competitive tone, unclear expectations - can activate stereotype threat and impair performance. Supportive engagement enhances fairness by ensuring that candidates' performance reflects their competence - not the degree to which they can manage stress in unpredictable or intimidating settings. It also strengthens the legitimacy of the BAC as an evaluative body that balances rigor with respect.

6. DEIA awareness, biases

Inclusive, fair assessment requires awareness of both individual and group-level biases as well as the subtle social dynamics that influence committee deliberations. Interviews and observations reveal that while BAC members generally strive for fairness, implicit biases, cultural misunderstandings, and social influence pressures can shape discussion in ways that disadvantage certain candidates or distort evaluation criteria. This chapter outlines how demographic biases, language and cultural factors, and intra-committee dynamics manifest within BAC settings.

6.1. Biases

Biases can emerge through explicit and subtle cues, shaping how committee members interpret candidate performance or potential. These biases may intersect demographic characteristics - age, gender, language background, or cultural identity - and can result in criterion contamination, where irrelevant personal characteristics influence evaluation.

Age-related comments occurred in multiple observations, reflecting both malevolent and benevolent forms of Age bias (ageism). Malevolent ageism includes negative assumptions about capability or adaptability:

*BAC members, during deliberation: "...and they are old". "The other candidate is more moldable maybe".
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

Benevolent ageism appears less hostile but is still paternalistic and evaluative based on age rather than merit:

*BAC member: "I don't know if this is politically correct <to say>, but I see them as a good investment"
"They are rather young, we should embed them in a way that they can develop"
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

These comments reflect underlying assumptions about flexibility, potential, or return on investment - assumptions which are not part of formal assessment criteria. Whether positive or negative in tone, age-based judgments risk undermining fairness.

Language proficiency and accent can strongly influence perceptions of competence, despite being weak predictors of actual scholarly ability.

*BAC member: "Their English was hard to follow sometimes" and "Their accent was annoying"
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

Such comments - unless clearly tied to job-relevant tasks - often reflect linguistic bias, which disproportionately affects internationals and speakers of non-dominant varieties of English. Accent bias is well documented in psychological literature as influencing perceptions of credibility, warmth, and competence, even when content quality is identical.

Biases related to *Gender* emerged in subtle but meaningful ways. Candidate presentations sometimes centered almost exclusively on male collaborators, signaling gendered norms in academic networks.

*The candidate only outlined collaborations with male colleagues in their presentation. Dozens of names and photos.
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

6.2. Social dynamics

Group-level psychological processes strongly influence BAC discussions and can amplify biases if left unchecked. These dynamics become more pronounced under time pressure, ambiguity, hierarchical differences, or strong personalities.

*"The chair role can be done by anyone, but they need "antennas" for sensing influencing dynamics."
(interview with a BAC member)*

Several observations showed clear patterns of *Authority influence and conformity*. In some cases, confident or senior voices set an early tone that others followed, even when disagreements existed.

*A BAC member argued that the candidate did not meet minimal criteria. Another member countered with positive interpersonal impressions ("But they are very mature in their responses"). As discussion progressed, criteria were gradually reframed ("That's not a hard rule"), and others shifted to support the more lenient interpretation: "I would maybe be even upset if we didn't offer them the position, so let's not be difficult about this"
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

Such drift also illustrates how *Group convergence* can override initial evaluative standards, particularly when norms are unclear or when the committee desires harmony.

Group polarization - where group discussion leads to more extreme positions - occurred in several cases. Negative comments accumulated rapidly, escalating into a near-uniform negative stance:

*The discussion was a negative pile-up, with many problematic comments and an increasingly polarized negative group attitude towards the candidate (especially from one BAC member). Some members reflected in the end "we are too negative" and "we should also come up with positives". The only positive mentioned was unrelated to competence: "They are nice".
(observation of a BAC procedure)*

Polarization reduces nuance and risks unjust outcomes, especially when catalyzed by strong personalities.

From research to intervention: methodology, logic, and design approach

The development of interventions in this project followed a translational logic grounded in theory, applied social psychology, and in the empirical realities of TU/e assessment practice. Training performance appraisers (in our case, assessment committee members) is a best practice guideline and basis to achieving accurate, fair, and legal outcomes (Gregory, 2016). From the outset, it was clear that a training program for assessment committee members would form one of the major outputs of the project; however, the precise content and the optimal format were dependent on our research outcomes. These were developed inductively, through an iterative cycle linking research insights, theoretical explanation, and practical design.

Following principles similar to the PATH model for applied social psychology (Buunk & Van Vugt, 2013) - moving from problem definition to analysis, testing of psychological mechanisms, and intervention development - the project treated the research phase not as an observational add-on, but as a diagnostic foundation. Each research finding was examined through the lens of social-psychological processes (e.g., bias, social influence, stereotype threat, co-regulation), allowing us to link behavioral patterns to underlying cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and normative mechanisms.

Three design principles guided the transition from research to intervention:

1. Interventions must target modifiable psycho-social processes, not personality traits. Examples include stress regulation, interviewing behavior, bias awareness, norm-setting, and role-related behavioral scripts.
2. Interventions must address both individual competences and systemic/structural enablers. Research showed that many difficulties were structurally reinforced (e.g., lack of role clarity, ambiguous procedures); therefore, interventions needed to blend skill-building with procedural scaffolding.
3. Interventions must support multi-level behavioral change - from cognition and awareness to attitudes, norms, behavior, and institutional culture.

The training, the role-playing game, and supporting interventions (e.g., community building, knowledge infrastructure, internal engagement) were designed as complementary levers operating across this full spectrum. Our design approach was also aligned with research on the two types of most effective trainings for assessment accuracy improvement (Gregory, 2016): rater error training, in which assessors are alerted to specific kinds of errors (e.g., biases); and frame-of-reference training, equipping assessors with the contents of each performance dimension (e.g., academic profiles).

Training: Responsible Academic Assessments - From Principles to Practice

This three-session training was designed as the central behavioral intervention emerging from the project ([Appendix B](#)). Its structure, content, and facilitation approach directly reflect the empirical findings and the psychological mechanisms identified in the analysis. In addition, drawing on theoretical insights from applied social psychology, psychology of science, and assessment research, but also on policy developments, the training strengthens both individual and collective competence in fair, transparent, and future-oriented evaluation. The training's goal is not only skill acquisition, but the strengthening of a shared cultural and normative foundation for responsible assessment across TU/e.

Behavioral change

The training integrates components that facilitate different psychological factors influencing lasting behavioral and institutional change:

1. Information - providing information on assessment, R&R, and DEIA principles, culture, biases, role definitions.
2. Awareness - exercises on self-reflection, personal patterns, implicit assumptions, and perceptual filters.
3. Values - explicit anchoring in fairness, scientific integrity, and TU/e's institutional values.
4. Attitudes and motivation - perspective-taking, group discussion, moral framing.
5. Social norms - collective formulation of good practices; modelling desired behaviors; shared language.
6. Behavioral skills - interviewing, co-regulation, managing bias moments, handling COI, maintaining safety.
7. Institutional outcomes - integration with procedures, QA principles, and policy.

This sequencing mirrors well-validated behavior-change theories and ensures that the training does more than provide information - it changes how people act. To increase engagement, insight, and transfer into practice, the training combines a range of different methods, such as live demonstrations, role-play elements, reflective breakouts, stress regulation techniques, and structured group design exercises

Development

The training was developed through an iterative, research-driven design process. While the project proposal identified a training program as one of the intended outputs, the exact format, emphasis, and learning components were deliberately not predefined. Instead, each element was shaped through cycles of evidence integration, expert consultation, and participant feedback.

Initial prototypes of individual components were piloted with a group of academic and professional staff to test clarity, impact, and relevance (Figure 6). This session and following discussions functioned as design probes, revealing which concepts resonated with participants, which required reframing, and where additional scaffolding was needed. Insights from the research phase, especially observations of BAC meetings and interviews with committee members, provided realistic situational material that could be transformed into case examples, role-play scenarios, and reflective prompts.

Figure 6 Pilot session on academic profiles (Photos by Bart van Overbeeke)



Following refinement, the full three-session training was piloted with a complete group of BAC members. Participant feedback from the pilot sessions resulted in final adjustments, including enhanced practical examples, clearer role descriptions, and improved transitions between exercises.

Structure

The training consists of three interlinked half-day sessions spread over three days. Each session targets different challenges based on the research results:

- Day 1: Broadening perspectives in assessment
Based on Recognition and Rewards, DEIA awareness and biases
Focus on broadening perspectives in assessment, exploring how quality over quantity, diverse career paths, and responsible research practices can be meaningfully recognized.
- Day 2: Navigating interpersonal dynamics
Based on Handling transgressions, Self-management
Addressing interpersonal dynamics, equipping participants to navigate group processes, power relations, bias, and emotionally complex situations in assessment settings
- Day 3: Designing effective BAC processes
Based in BAC procedures, Interview and assessment
Centering on designing effective BAC processes, connecting principles to concrete procedures, roles, and decision-making structures that support consistency, clarity, and trust

Role-playing game: Behind Closed Doors

A role-playing game (RPG) was developed as a complementary intervention to deepen skills, awareness, and collective insight into the complexities of BAC work ([Appendix B](#)). Using the anonymized observations, interviews, and thematic analysis, the RPG recreates a compressed yet realistic BAC meeting, enabling participants to encounter the social, procedural, and interpersonal dynamics that shape academic evaluations (Figure 7).

Purpose

The RPG was created in recognition of a key insight from the research phase: many of the challenges observed in BACs - such as procedural inconsistency, bias, unclear roles, social influence dynamics, pressure, and social safety concerns - are difficult to fully grasp through conceptual discussion alone. Conceptual discussions disconnected from lived experience can also lead to higher levels of backlash. Common BAC situations are experienced in the moment through interaction, tone, hierarchy, and behavior. A simulation offers a safe, low-stakes environment to make these dynamics visible, tangible, and discussable. Simulation-based approaches are effective tools for learning (Randi & Carvalho, 2013), can increase compassion and empathic accuracy through perspective-taking (Bearman et al., 2015; Chambers & Davis, 2012) as well as increase learning outcomes and motivation (Chan, 2012). As pedagogical tools, educational scenarios in which participants take on character roles have benefits including tactical and social problem solving, producing empathy and self-awareness (Bowman, 2014) as well as community building, self-improvement, and self-discovery (Shaenfeld, 2016). RPGs have been used to raise social consciousness on issues such as homelessness, immigration, and imprisonment as well as psychological training tools for professionals (Bowman, 2014).

Figure 7 Cover image for the role-playing game (Image by Andrea Kis, in collaboration with ChatGPT)



The game design was developed to harvest the potential of RPGs and bypass some of the pitfalls such as a lack of buy-in and increased workload for preparations (Haarman, 2025). Keeping in mind that the primary purpose of the game is to allow participants to experience academic assessment as a social process, a short (approximately 15 minutes) but dense scenario was developed. Pre-written scripts and prompts filled with interpersonal and procedural cues ensured that issues that often remain implicit in real committees surface. Participants step into fictional roles informed by aggregated research insights - such as a disengaged member, a dominant senior academic, an insecure first-time participant, or a chair struggling to maintain structure. Through guided reflection following the simulation, participants link these experiences to institutional obligations around fairness, collegiality, integrity, and the Recognition & Rewards principles.

Psychological and behavioral mechanisms

The RPG is more than an illustrative exercise; it activates psychological processes central to organizational behavior and applied social psychology:

Social influence and hierarchy: Participants experience how seniority, confidence, and perceived expertise influence interactions. The game highlights conformity pressures, authority biases, and the silencing of junior or professional staff.

Bias activation and stereotype cues: To demonstrate how subtle biases observed in BACs emerge (and how difficult they can be to address), the script includes phrasing related to age, accent, and research-centric thinking.

Emotional contagion and time pressure: Characters exhibit fatigue, stress, and impatience; these moods spread and affect the tone of the meeting. This parallels findings on psychosocial workload and its effects on decision-making.

Procedural ambiguity and role confusion: Chairs who skip introductions or time boundaries, IFC members who hesitate to intervene, and HR advisors who feel invisible embody empirical insights into inconsistent process execution.

Psychological safety and collegiality: The game demonstrates how even minor breaches - interruptions, dismissive jokes, informal dominance - affect comfort, openness, and fairness.

Structure

The game is structured around a fictional recruitment committee assessing an assistant professor candidate. The session is set up in four stages:

1. **Start / Preparation** – The committee gathers, sets the tone, and establishes initial expectations
2. **Presentation** – The candidate presents with a heavy focus on research, going over time
3. **Interview** – Committee members ask questions, interact, and navigate time pressure
4. **Discussion** – The candidate leaves, committee members deliberate, exposing challenges and conflicts

Finally, reflection and debriefing are conducted after the scenario finishes. Observers - who provide feedback after the game - play a critical role in noticing cues, behaviors, and group dynamics. A structured reflection following the game is a central part of the intervention. Participants are invited to step out of character and analyze: how they felt during the interaction; which behaviors enhanced or diminished fairness; how time pressure, stress, or unclear roles affected performance; how bias and group dynamics shaped the process; how the scenario connects to the six research themes; what norms and practices should guide real committees. The reflection process ensures that the simulation does not remain an isolated experience but becomes an opportunity for collective learning, norm-setting, and behavior change.

Institutional and cultural contribution

The RPG has been used across training sessions, group meetings, and other events. Its repeated application has facilitated building a shared understanding of assessment challenges, normalizing open discussion about process weaknesses, strengthening cross-departmental coherence in assessment practices, lowering defensiveness by situating issues in a fictional scenario rather than individual critique, as well as fostering a culture of reflection, fairness, and integrity in academic decision-making. As a result, the game has developed into a community-building tool as much as a pedagogical one. It provides shared vocabulary and set of reference points that help BAC members, HR advisors, IFCs, and academic leaders discuss complex issues constructively.

Other interventions

Beyond the training and RPG, the project initiated several complementary interventions designed to strengthen institutionalization, community engagement, and practical implementation.

Policy and structural interventions

- Improved guidance on BAC procedures
- Clearer role descriptions and expectations
- Integration of findings into QA and HR processes

Knowledge infrastructure

- Development of an online intranet environment: summary pages, structured guidance, links to forms, examples, templates, access to training materials and OS/R&R resources
- Database of responsible practices and indicators: in the end, we decided not to develop our own database of best practices due to the availability of similar resources. Instead, we:
 - Identified potentially relevant resources (see [Appendix B](#))
 - Compared our list of items identified in the research outlined in this report to these resourcesWe decided to not create our own database, but instead set up external collaborations to include additional items within one of the identified resources, the Academic Activities Catalogue (Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2025). As there was an almost complete overlap between our list of items and what was already included in the Catalogue, we decided that collaboration would lead to a more efficient allocation of resources.
- This supports long-term memory, consistency, and accessibility.

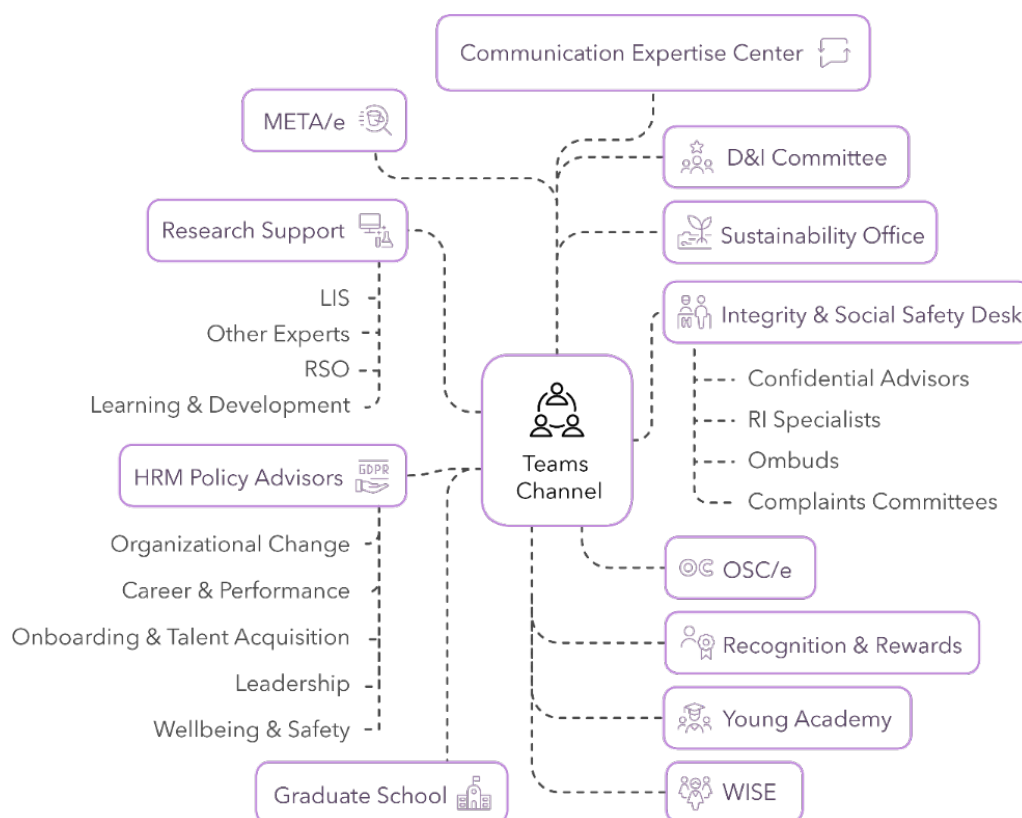
Engagement and dissemination

- Internal presentations for boards, HR, BAC members, IFCs, other communities and groups
- Workshops and facilitated sessions where elements of the RPG were played within departments
- External presentations at (inter)national meetings related to OS, integrity, and responsible assessment
- These activities simultaneously validated the research findings and fostered buy-in.

Responsible Research Community Eindhoven (RRC/e)

Community-level interventions reinforce behavioral change by shaping social norms and organizational culture, increasing visibility, and building a sense of shared ownership. Embodying the TU/e CORE (Curious, Open, Respectful, Responsible) values (Eindhoven University of Technology, 2025), the RRC/e started as a digital, collaborative space to exchange ideas on responsible academic culture at TU/e. Setup started with mapping relevant topics (e.g., social safety, research integrity, academic assessment, meta science, sustainability) and connected stakeholders within TU/e, including the META/e research group, our institutional Recognition & Rewards experts, the Open Science Community Eindhoven, HRM policy advisors, and more (Figure 8). As many different groups are represented in the RRC/e, it can become a valuable platform for dialogue to shape progression in the field of Talent Development & Retention for all staff.

Figure 8 Community map



On 18 September 2025, the RRC/e organized the kick-off event Responsible Research Conversations ([Appendix B](#)), bringing together academic and professional staff to showcase and strengthen the growing ecosystem of responsible research practices. Alongside panel and discussion sessions, the event featured interactive presentations and hands-on workshops. In this first edition, approximately 50 participants attended the event (Figure 9 and Figure 10).

Figure 9 RRC/e participant numbers as a factor of function

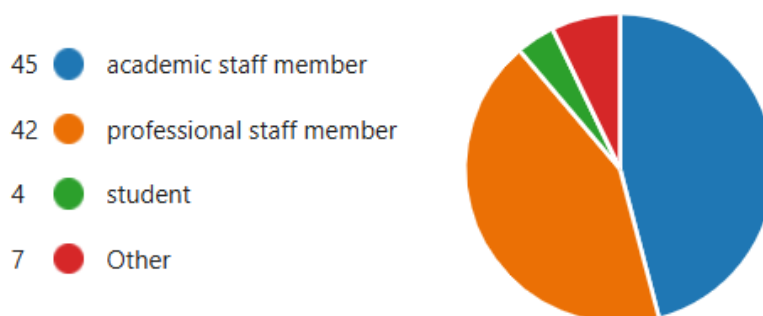


Figure 10 Pictures from the Responsible Research Conversations event (Photos by Bart van Overbeeke)



Other creative approaches

Where relevant, creative formats such as theatre-based training or guided storytelling were explored to spark reflection and openness. These formats haven't been implemented (as of the writing of this report) but have been used in other institutions to break taboos, reveal group dynamics, and create emotionally resonant learning moments - making them promising potential tools for interventions.

Recommendations

Introduction

The findings of this report expand on previously known risks and provide deeper evidence of inefficient use of resources, and vulnerabilities that may impede the university's long-term ability to attract and retain talent, advance academic excellence, and remain competitive. A *holistic quality assurance framework* is recommended as the most effective lever for resolving root causes and supporting sustainable strategic development. The second recommendation covers a *holistic approach to performance management (PM)* to strengthen talent development and retention. Thirdly, *community collaboration* is recommended to strengthen TU/e's position as an (inter)national leader in academic culture.

Quality assurance

While targeted solutions could be developed for each individual problem, the primary recommendation is to adopt a *holistic, solution-oriented approach* that addresses the underlying systemic issues rather than isolated symptoms. The most critical and recurring root cause is the *absence of standardized quality assurance (QA) mechanisms* across key hiring, promotion, and academic management processes. Without clear quality assurance standards, the identified challenges are likely to persist and intensify with growth. The following recommendations pertain to implementable quality assurance measures.

Capability building and professionalization

Training and support for BAC members

Sustained training for BAC members is essential for ensuring high-quality, consistent, and responsible assessments. This project has already contributed to this goal by designing and piloting a modular training program for core BAC members. To broaden institutional reach, the small-group format should be adapted into a scalable version suitable for HR advisors, early-career assessors, and other stakeholders involved in academic evaluation. Because the training materials are already modular, tailored selections can be integrated into leadership development programs, onboarding tracks, and the university's learning experience platform (LxP). Completing the development of complementary learning interventions - such as short demonstration videos showing effective and problematic BAC practices - will further support institutional learning. To remain relevant, all materials should be updated regularly based on evolving needs, feedback, and lessons learned from practice.

Leveraging institutional expertise and peer learning

The university already holds considerable expertise in academic assessment, much of it embodied in BAC secretaries, IFC members, and senior policy advisors. These experts are well positioned to monitor procedural quality, identify emerging concerns, and recognize strengths across committees and departments. By structuring and standardizing their observations - and consolidating them under the coordination of a QA manager (see below) - the institution can move toward a data-informed, evidence-driven understanding of how assessment processes unfold in practice. This approach supports cross-departmental consistency, strengthens learning across BACs, and enhances fairness and clarity for both candidates and assessors.

Professionalizing and upscaling the BAC secretary role

BAC secretaries play a pivotal yet often underrecognized role in ensuring procedural quality. Retraining them as process coordinators - and giving them formal QA responsibilities - would significantly professionalize oversight and improve continuity across assessment cycles. Enhanced support could include expanded preparation time, the use of standardized QA checklists, and clearer protocols for managing procedural inconsistencies. A professionalized secretary role reduces administrative burden on academic members, enhances consistency across departments, and strengthens the reliability of assessment outcomes.

Safeguarding social safety and integrity

Social safety within BAC meetings

Safe, respectful, and professionally accountable BAC environments are central to fair evaluation. At present, however, there is no standardized procedure outlining how socially unsafe situations should be addressed, documented, or escalated. This creates uncertainty among BAC members, secretaries, HR advisors, and IFC representatives, and can

leave individuals vulnerable in situations involving power asymmetries or inappropriate behavior. Developing clear procedures - covering real-time intervention, confidential reporting pathways, protections for those who speak up, and the roles of HR and managers - would meaningfully strengthen the social safety of BAC operations. Regular aggregation of concerns through HR or complaint committees can help identify recurring patterns and guide preventative measures. Integrity policy advisors should be involved in designing aligned policies and reporting frameworks to ensure institution-wide coherence.

Integrity safeguards: COI and misconduct data

Robust COI procedures and integrity checks form a key part of QA. Formal COI declarations should remain mandatory for all BAC members, accompanied by clear criteria for recusal and transparent documentation when non-disqualifying COIs arise. In parallel, the university's upcoming sanctions policy - covering misconduct in research, teaching, supervision, and professional conduct - must be integrated into BAC procedures in a privacy-compliant manner. Committees should receive only a confidential indication of concerns, with communication restricted to the chair and HR advisor. These mechanisms help ensure that assessment processes uphold institutional values and do not inadvertently reward or overlook inappropriate behavior.

Structural QA roles and responsibilities

Appointment of a dedicated QA manager

A dedicated QA manager should serve as the institutional anchor for assessment quality. This role would connect central policy expertise to departmental practice, oversee methodological quality, coordinate training development, and manage the PDCA cycle for assessment policy implementation. Responsibilities would include developing QA metrics, standardizing post-process evaluations, coordinating insights from BAC secretaries and IFC members, and identifying system-level risks. By centralizing oversight, the QA manager relieves academic leaders from operational burden, supports consistent practice, and ensures continuity across assessment cycles.

Institutionalizing the observer role

The observer role piloted in this project created valuable insights into BAC functioning that would otherwise remain invisible. However, the role also exposed vulnerabilities: unclear responsibilities, lack of structural support, insufficient psychological supervision, and inconsistent recognition of expertise. To institutionalize the observer role as a QA instrument, clear role boundaries, training requirements, ethical guidelines, and managerial support structures must be defined. When appropriately supported, observers can contribute significantly to evaluating the quality of deliberation, consistency of practice, and cultural dynamics within BACs.

Digitalization and infrastructure for QA

Adoption of AI and digital tools

Digital tools offer significant opportunities to enhance process quality and reduce administrative load. AI-supported document analysis, standardized reporting templates, and optional voice-recorded deliberations can improve consistency, support quality review, and strengthen documentation. These tools also facilitate institutional learning - provided they are implemented with rigorous attention to privacy, data security, and GDPR compliance.

Application management infrastructure

A robust digital infrastructure is necessary for transparent, efficient, and compliant assessment processes. Replacing fragmented, email-based workflows with a centralized platform - such as sharing applicant dossiers by incorporating applicant tracking systems (e.g., GradeVarbi) into the working procedure for R-BACs - will secure compliance with privacy regulations, as well as improve traceability and reduce procedural burden. Better UX design, structured templates, and optional AI-assistance can reduce applicant workload and improve dossier quality. Incorporating an explicit consent checkbox for integrity and social-safety checks enhances transparency and procedural clarity.

Harmonization of forms and documentation

Harmonizing forms, templates, and procedural steps across departments will enhance clarity for committee members and applicants and reduce unnecessary variation. Standardizing the BAC report template - including clearer guidance on components such as the IFC paragraph, sources used for BAC decisions, and COI declarations - improves readability and

comparability across cases. Unified documentation also facilitates training, reduces onboarding time for new BAC members, and supports institutional consistency.

Proactive, data-driven QA system

A future-proof QA system requires an integrated IT infrastructure capable of collecting, connecting, and analyzing data across assessment processes. At present, relevant information is dispersed across multiple systems, limiting the university's ability to conduct longitudinal evaluations or detect risks. Consolidating data enables more systematic monitoring, earlier identification of bottlenecks, and stronger evidence-based policymaking. This also supports strategic workforce planning, resource allocation, and financial efficiency by clarifying where assessment efforts produce value and where resources may be unnecessarily expended.

Optimizing committee structure, assessment, and workflow design

Committee composition and workflow optimization

BAC efficiency and quality can be significantly improved by streamlining committee composition and redesigning workflows. Reducing the number of committee members, introducing rotation mechanisms, and ensuring that only necessary members attend specific stages can reduce workload while preserving evaluative rigor. Literature on optimal assessment group sizes supports these measures. Clear scheduling logic and consistent committee design also reduce procedural variance and enhance fairness.

Streamlining assessment moments and reducing duplication

Aligning BAC procedures with the annual dialogue and broader career-development trajectory would eliminate redundant assessment moments, including the current parallel use of M-BACs (midterm BACs) and F-BACs (departmental BACs). Integrating assessments into the existing performance cycle can generate substantial resource savings while improving continuity and transparency.

Assessment best practices in hiring

Research on hiring shows that structured rubrics and deliberation prompts can increase consistency and reduce certain forms of bias - especially when applied in line with best practice recommendations. Rubrics (combined with reflection and calibration exercises) can incentivize more deliberate decision-making by slowing down deliberation processes, increase focus on salient information in early evaluation stages, mitigate some forms of bias, and enhance decision consistency (Culpepper et al., 2023). Rubrics – when developed with best practices and underlying academic structures in mind and continuously reevaluated – also have the potential to increase diversity by facilitating a more holistic view of candidates.

Rubrics can sustainably improve search and selection processes if 1) they are broken down into well-defined subcomponents in research, teaching, impact, and leadership, 2) we use different rubrics for different phases of the search 3) and incorporate DEI criteria in them, and 4) conduct calibration exercises to enhance assessment consistency among committee members, as well as 5) develop processes for rubric use (Culpepper et al., 2023). However, rubrics alone cannot eliminate structural inequalities or replace contextual judgement. Their impact diminishes when applied only at late stages, and narrow criteria may inadvertently reproduce inequities. Effective implementation therefore requires clarity about weighting, expectations, and how the full breadth of candidates' contributions - including DEI, mentorship, and OS - should be considered. Combining rubrics with structured conversation, calibration exercises, revisiting research on assessment best practices, and holistic review throughout all stages of evaluation supports more equitable and evidence-based assessments.

Performance management

While TU/e has been working toward more robust processes for the annual dialogue, BACs and academic assessment, a *holistic approach to performance management (PM)* is necessary to ensure talent development and retention. Although several processes and instruments are available, there is a *lack of alignment between individual and collective levels*, resulting in unclear development pathways for individual academics and a lack of a strategic approach to talent development. Without clear alignment of performance management tools, the benefits of diversity in career profiles at the team level will not become apparent.

Strategic alignment of assessment with career development

Alignment with the Annual Dialogue

A stronger alignment with the annual dialogue process (also in the use of the Biographical Sketch) is essential for creating a coherent and efficient performance-management system. At present, these two processes operate largely in isolation: BACs typically do not receive structured input from annual dialogue outcomes, resulting in missed opportunities for information sharing, unnecessary duplication of effort, and reduced clarity for both candidates and evaluators. This disconnect also increases administrative burden and may contribute to frustration among staff who perceive parallel processes as fragmented or inconsistent. Integrating the insights, agreements, and development goals emerging from annual dialogues into BAC deliberations - while maintaining appropriate privacy safeguards - would enhance the leanness, transparency, and perceived fairness of assessment procedures and foster stronger continuity between day-to-day management and formal academic evaluation.

Holistic view on career development

In the current state, a *holistic view of performance management* is lacking. BACs focus on promotion (vertical career development), and the efforts of academics, their managers, assessors, and the organization are centered on this assessment moment. The ideal state links performance management and career development. During the onboarding phase, academics should receive information on how to shape their careers and how to demonstrate their progress to be recognized and rewarded. They will begin building their individual academic profile, which will be recorded in their Biographical Sketch. During the Annual Dialogue, their progress and outcomes will be discussed, as well as steps for further development. As a result of the dialogue, new agreements will be made and incorporated into the Biographical Sketch, or may lead to adjustments to the individual academic profile. After several cycles, an academic assessment can take place for promotion purposes. The assessment will be used as a basis for an updated individual academic profile.

Where currently assessment is mainly focused on promotion, a regular dialogue on career development also allows room for a broadening of one's profile (horizontal career development). By integrating academic profiles into the HR system (Insite), strategic workforce planning and development will be enabled at the group level, procedures will be aligned, and QA insights to optimize processes can be collected.

Clarifying the purpose and value of the assessment moment

A clearer articulation of the purpose and value of the P-BAC assessment moment is needed to strengthen the coherence of the overall performance-management system. At present, the process places considerable weight on a single evaluative meeting, even though the outcome is highly predictable - anecdotal data suggest that only a very small proportion of candidates are not promoted. This raises important questions about what is actually being measured: is the BAC primarily evaluating the candidate's cumulative achievements, the quality of their submitted materials, or their performance during the meeting itself? The current design risks over-engineering a high-effort process that offers limited differentiation in outcomes. A more intentional approach would shift emphasis toward longitudinal development - captured through tools such as the Biographical Sketch and the Annual Dialogue - while positioning the BAC as one integrative checkpoint within a broader developmental trajectory. This reframing would help ensure that the assessment moment serves a meaningful purpose, reduces unnecessary preparation burdens, and reinforces the value of continuous reflection, planning, and career-long growth.

Integration of the Biographical Sketch across procedures

Extending the use of the Biographical Sketch in hiring procedures offers a concrete opportunity to reduce resource demands and streamline assessment workflows. The Biographical Sketch provides a concise, structured, and policy-

compliant format for presenting relevant academic contributions and achievements, and its broader adoption would help address current inconsistencies in the types and volumes of materials requested across the institution. A uniform approach would not only reduce the burden on applicants - who often face redundant or unclear documentation requirements - but would also support BAC members in making more efficient and equitable evaluations.

Strengthening the content and criteria of evaluation

Alignment with Academic Career Paths and R&R framework

In general, further alignment between policy and BAC processes ([Appendix A](#)) as TU/e's conceptualization of the R&R framework is strongly recommended. This includes refining and clarifying the quality indicators used to assess contributions across domains such as teaching, research, supervision, valorization, leadership, collegiality, team science, OS, and social safety. Using already available sources for indicators, such as the Academic Activities Catalogue (Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2025) could be helpful.

Exemplary profiles and internal recognition

Departments should actively showcase exemplary scholarly profiles across domains such as research, education, valorization/impact, and leadership, while clearly communicating that such profiles are dynamic rather than prescriptive. Increased visibility of diverse academic pathways can support staff in recognizing the breadth of contributions that constitute excellence. A recommendation co-created by our RAA pilot trainer and participants was that internal forms of lightweight recognition - for example, small acknowledgments such as "education champion" or "impact scholar of the year" during annual group events - could effectively reinforce this message. Although modest, such gestures have considerable cultural impact: they raise awareness, celebrate diversity in academic strengths, and signal alignment with the broader R&R agenda.

Teaching-related feedback

Furthermore, teaching-related feedback should be systematically integrated into assessment processes to ensure a genuinely holistic view of academic performance. This includes not only traditional classroom teaching, but also supervision, mentorship, curriculum development, assessment, evaluation, contributions to educational innovation and professionalization. Given the well-documented biases in student evaluations - particularly along gender, ethnicity, and language lines - teaching quality should not be assessed solely based on student feedback scores. Instead, institutions should adopt a more robust, multi-source approach. This could involve structured peer observations, 360-degree feedback incorporating perspectives from colleagues, teaching support staff, and supervised students, as well as reflective teaching portfolios that allow candidates to contextualize their pedagogical practice but also on other quality indicators evidencing vision articulation, student learning, educational innovations, participation in conferences or memberships, or prizes. Combining these diverse sources of information creates a more reliable and equitable picture of educational contributions while reducing the risk that any single, biased feedback mechanism disproportionately influences career outcomes.

Open Science

In relation to OS, it is advisable to begin institutional discussions on developing an inventory of OS-related best practices for use within assessment. Early conversations already hosted by our Open Science Community (OSC/e) focus on community engagement and shared understanding. Subsequent steps can potentially include formal recognition mechanisms - such as OS badges or indicators embedded within Pure - to signal and reward meaningful OS contributions. Explicitly integrating OS expectations into policy documentation, communication efforts, and training programs will further reinforce their importance. However, institutions must also examine whether BAC members can reasonably be expected to evaluate OS outputs within the current process. If this expectation is affirmed, tools like [Metacheck](#) (DeBruine & Lakens, 2026) - co-developed by members of the Eindhoven Meta-Science Center (META/e) - can assist committees by providing structured, transparent criteria for evaluating open research practices. Erasmus University Rotterdam developed an openly available [Academic Activities Catalogue](#) (Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2025) that can be used by academics to identify activities and competencies that are already represented in their profile or to strengthen their profile. Ongoing OS dialogues hosted by OSC/e and other community groups offer an additional resource base for shaping coherent refinements to assessment procedures.

Integrity and fairness safeguards

Conflict of Interest declaration

To strengthen integrity and fairness, more explicit and enforceable procedures are needed. First, all invited committee members should be required to complete a formal Conflict of interest (COI) declaration prior to accepting their role. When a relationship is judged to compromise impartiality, members should be recused; in cases where the relationship does not necessitate recusal, the COI should nevertheless be transparently documented and reported alongside the member's vote in the final assessment record.

Cases of misconduct

Second, TU/e will introduce a sanctions policy in 2026 to document substantiated cases of misconduct - not only in research, but also in supervision, teaching, and broader professional conduct. The current absence of institutional memory might enable individuals with repeated concerns to be promoted or to perform a role as a BAC member. Maintaining a centrally managed database will rest with the Integrity and Social Safety desk, given the sensitivity of data. Deans and managing directors will hold the responsible authority in departments, with committees receiving only a confidential indication of whether concerns exist. In these cases, communication should be limited to the committee chair and HR advisor to ensure maximum privacy while preventing misuse of confidentiality to shield problematic behavior.

Operational process optimization and digitalization

BAC simplification and procedural alignment

Further simplification of BAC procedures offers an important opportunity to reduce resource needs while improving efficiency, consistency, and the overall quality of assessments. Strengthening procedural alignment - both within the BAC process itself and with adjacent processes such as Annual Dialogues and hiring procedures - can make it possible to decrease the number of (senior) academics required at each assessment moment. For example, certain parts of the evaluation could be conducted by a smaller, stable core team, while other components could be delegated to trained HR advisors, BAC secretaries, or domain-specific subgroups. This redistribution of responsibilities significantly reduces the demand placed on (senior) academic staff and contributes to more streamlined, predictable workflows.

Figure 11 illustrates this contrast. **Image A** presents an ideal, streamlined state of performance management in which assessment moments are clearly differentiated and information flows coherently across interlinked processes. **Image B**, by contrast, reflects the current state, where fragmentation, duplicated tasks, and multiple parallel assessment moments contribute to unnecessary workload and procedural complexity. Aligning future practice with the ideal model not only reduces administrative pressure on academics but also enhances transparency for applicants and supports a more consistent and equitable decision-making process.

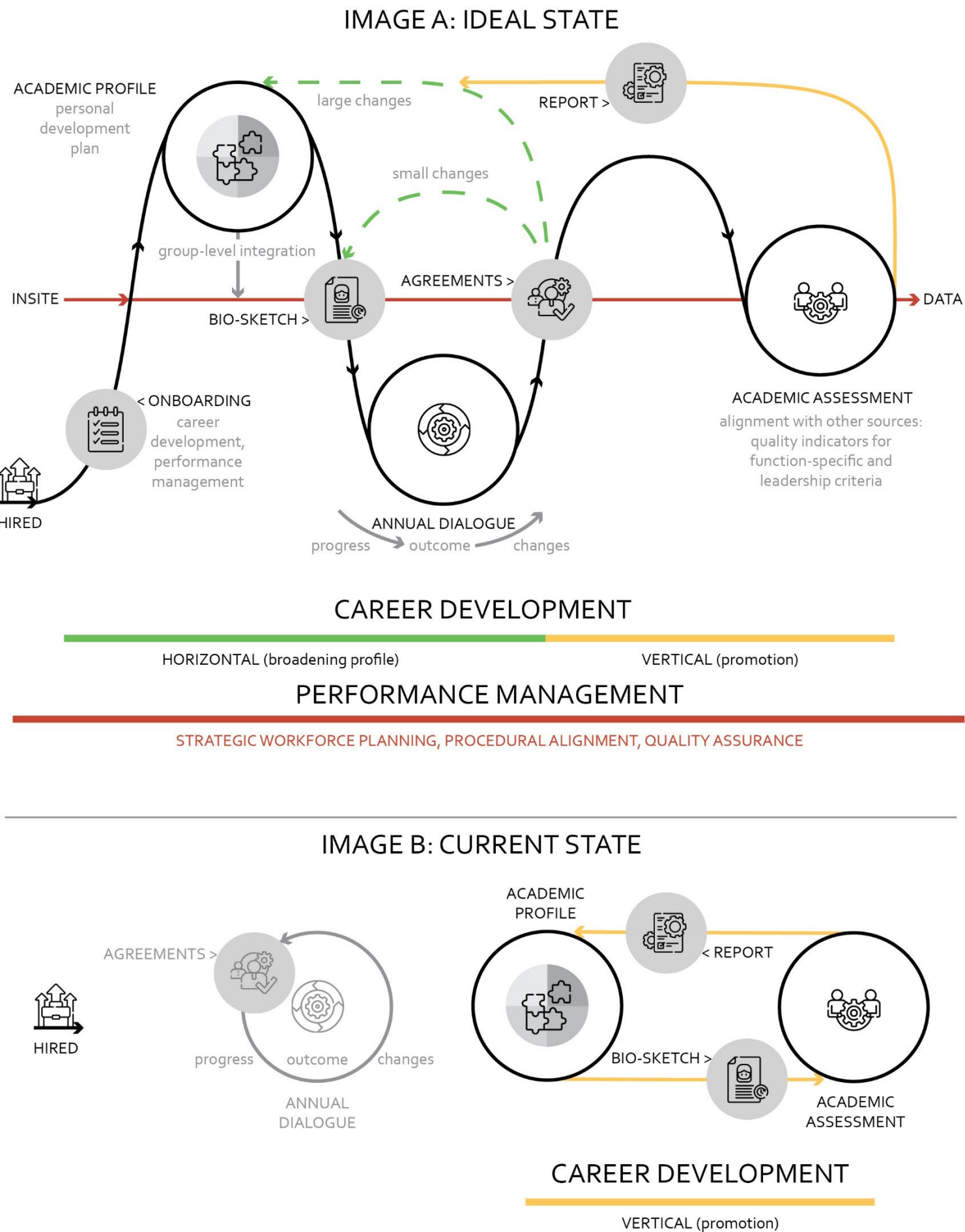
Overall, reducing the number of (senior) academics involved, restructuring the sequencing of assessment moments, and eliminating duplicated evaluative steps can substantially decrease resource use while preserving - and, in some cases, strengthening - the quality and integrity of academic assessment.

In addition to improved quality and reduced workload, such simplification brings several further advantages. Academics gain more time for reputation-enhancing core activities - including research, teaching, supervision, and societal impact - rather than spending hours navigating fragmented procedural requirements. Clearer alignment with the annual dialogue process also supports regular developmental conversations, thereby reducing staff frustration and improving the overall user experience of performance management. Embedding assessments into the annual cycle would further remove the need for separate M-BAC and F-BAC procedures altogether.

Automated workflow

Automation of the assessment process into an application workflow (InSite or other system) can achieve uniformity, but also guarantee this in the long term. An automated, uniform, and transparent workflow can reduce resource needs by eliminating duplicate documentation, but also decrease time spent on preparation and reporting by creating one central point of information to check the status and progress of the process. From a QA perspective, data can be gathered to identify bottlenecks and optimization possibilities.

Figure 11 Depiction of ideal (image A) versus current (image B) performance management structure



Community collaboration

Community collaboration in the Responsible Research Community Eindhoven (RRC/e) is crucial to advance the discussion on overlapping concepts, principles and communities. While many TU/e members are already engaging in responsible academic activities, there is a lack of alignment between initiatives, resulting in isolated pockets advancing responsible research, academic citizenship, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Connecting community members already working on topics, such as OS, Recognition & Rewards, social safety, research integrity, sustainability, and talent development, and encouraging others to engage can strengthen TU/e's position as a national and international leader in academic culture.

Performance management and talent development need to match the needs of the community. To be accepted by and embedded in practice, it needs to be developed in collaboration with the academic community. RRC/e encompasses both academic and professional staff and can become a breeding ground and accelerator for new developments to enable our objectives in talent development and retention. To develop into a mature community, it is recommended to appoint a community manager and organize an annual event highlighting current initiatives.

Dedicated community management

To move from a loose network of initiatives to a mature and self-sustaining community, RRC/e would benefit from a dedicated community manager with a clear mandate. This role should focus on mapping existing initiatives, actively connecting stakeholders across domains, and facilitating collaboration between academic and professional staff. The community manager can act as a trusted broker, ensuring that insights from ongoing practices in areas such as Recognition & Rewards, Open Science, and social safety inform institutional policy development. Over time, this role should support the transition from coordination to co-creation, empowering community members to take ownership and initiate joint projects.

Allocating structural resources for community development

Meaningful collaboration requires more than rhetorical encouragement. Structural encouragement through the allocation of resources is essential to enable participation and long-term impact. This includes dedicated time within workloads for community engagement, modest operational budgets for events and pilot projects, and support for documentation and dissemination of outcomes. Explicitly recognizing community contributions within performance management and talent development frameworks will further reinforce the value of participation and ensure alignment between institutional objectives and everyday academic practice.

Recurring dialogue and learning sessions

Regular, facilitated dialogue sessions are recommended to create shared understanding and alignment across disciplines and roles. These sessions can take the form of thematic workshops, learning communities, or cross-department roundtables focused on concrete challenges in responsible academic practices and culture. By providing a safe space for reflection and exchange, dialogue sessions can surface tensions, highlight good practices, and build a shared language. Outcomes from these sessions should feed back into policy development and implementation, closing the loop between community insights and institutional decision-making.

Together, these measures can help RRC/e evolve into a coherent, visible, and impactful community that accelerates responsible academic assessment and strengthens TU/e's academic culture.

The challenges described in this report are not unique to TU/e. Across the Dutch academic system and internationally, universities are grappling with similar issues: tensions between policy ambition and implementation, uneven assessment practices, persistent reliance on traditional indicators, workload pressures, and the difficulty of translating values such as openness, fairness, and responsibility into everyday evaluation processes. Research on academic assessment, research culture, and organizational change consistently shows that these challenges emerge wherever complex, high-stakes decision-making is embedded in long-standing institutional traditions.

The findings presented here should therefore be read not as isolated observations tied to one institution, but as contributions to a broader academic discourse on responsible assessment. The themes identified - ranging from procedural ambiguity and social dynamics to bias, self-management, and recognition of diverse academic contributions - are widely recognizable across universities. The observations, reflections, and anonymized examples collected during this project may thus be informative for a wider audience, particularly within the Dutch higher-education context, where many institutions are navigating similar transitions under the Recognition & Rewards agenda.

At the same time, this project demonstrates the value of treating such challenges as **researchable** rather than merely managerial problems. The empirical results did not remain descriptive; they directly informed the development of targeted interventions, community initiatives, and the recommendations presented in this report. By systematically linking observed practices to social-psychological mechanisms and organizational conditions, the project enabled the design of training, simulation-based learning, and quality-assurance proposals that are grounded in evidence.

One of the most consistent insights from the research is that gaps between policy and practice don't necessarily reflect a lack of commitment on the part of individuals. Instead, they arise from the interaction between norms, decentralized organizational structures, and processes that have evolved incrementally over time. Such dynamics tend to reproduce themselves unless they are made visible and addressed collectively. This is particularly true in academic contexts, where deeply ingrained ideas about excellence, merit, authority, and autonomy can persist even as policies change.

From a social-scientific perspective, this underscores why sustainable change cannot rely solely on new rules, isolated trainings, or individual champions. Change is more robust when it is supported by shared understanding, clear procedures, reflective practice, and communities that can learn together. Systems are ultimately more resilient than individuals, and cultures shift most effectively when incentives, norms, skills, and structures are brought into alignment.

It is within this broader context that TU/e's efforts should be situated. The institution operates in a challenging environment: relatively young, innovative, decentralized, and strongly interconnected across disciplines and roles. These characteristics can complicate implementation, but they also create opportunities for responsible change when they are consciously harnessed. Continued alignment with our societal responsibilities requires a willingness to reflect on academic traditions that shape assessment, decision-making, and more broadly, academic culture.

The work documented here points to the importance of complementing technological and scientific innovation with social innovation - drawing on expertise in psychology, sociology, education, and science studies to better understand how academic systems function and how they can be improved. It also highlights the central role of community: not as a soft add-on, but as a necessary condition for embedding values into practice. Training, reflective tools such as the role-playing game, and initiatives like the Responsible Research Community Eindhoven illustrate how learning, dialogue, and shared responsibility can be cultivated across professional and academic roles.

Change in academic culture is rarely linear. It can be uneven, contested, and at times ambiguous in its effects. These uncertainties are not signs of failure, but inherent features of reflective, values-driven transformation. What matters is that change is guided by evidence, supported by process, and sustained through collective effort. Sustained change relies on community and science itself. By continuing to invest in reflection, dialogue, and responsible system design, universities - at TU/e and beyond - can strengthen assessment practices in ways that are fairer, more transparent, and better aligned with the purposes of academia in a rapidly changing world.

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HRM department TU/e

2017 - Interdepartmental committees (IFCs) started

Appointment and evaluation practices of academic staff at TU/e take place in selection or assessment committees, so-called BACs (*beoordelingsadviescommissies*). BACs have been defined for different career stages, i.e. the recruitment phase (the R-BAC), the midterm phase (the M-BAC), and the promotion phase (the P-BAC). Members of the Interdepartmental Committees (IFCs) play an important role in ensuring consistency and uniformity across departments, and safeguarding equal treatment, privacy, confidentiality, and avoiding conflict of interest. The principles of the Interdepartmental Committees are set out in the career policy Excellent People Attract Excellent People (Wolk & Baaijens, 2016), the Development Track Regulation (Braat & Hendriks-Roefs, 2017), and the Appointment Procedures for Full Professors, Associate Professors & Fellows (Braat, 2018).

2019 – Position paper for Recognition & Rewards (R&R)

Dutch universities, university medical centers, and research funders jointly published a position paper that argues that the system of recognizing and rewarding academics requires modernization. Recognition & Rewards aim to enable excellence in education, research, impact, and leadership by Enabling diversified and dynamic career paths, Focusing on rewarding quality over quantity, Achieving balance between individuals and collective, Stimulating open science, and Stimulating academic leadership. TU/e dedicated resources to this initiative by installing a task force.

2021 – Instruments for BACs

To support BAC members and candidates, Example Questions (K. M. E. Harwig et al., 2021) were created to propose questions for all relevant domains of an academic career. To further a fair process and avoid conflict of interest, the Principles of Conduct for BAC members were designed.

2021 – TU/e vision on Recognition & Rewards published

The R&R task force consisting of junior, mid-career, and senior scientific staff and HR worked on a TU/e vision that is the starting point for a new academic staff personnel policy. The foundations of the vision were presented and discussed via online dialogue sessions with 150 assistant, associate and full professors (Schalkx, 2021).

2022 – Piloting a new Development Matrix and Biographical Sketch

The TU/e vision on R&R was elaborated into a preliminary development matrix. The Development Matrix (Braat, 2022) proposes academic careers with a focus on education, research or impact. For the first time, leadership and team skills were embedded in each profile and in each career stage, highlighting the importance of these topics.

The biographical sketch is a narrative, evidence-based CV. It allows academics to present their academic identity and outline how they allocate their time and focus. In the fact sheets, they can mention the indicators that support their narrative.

The pilot with the biographical sketch was evaluated positively. It stimulates reflection and gives room for diversity in profiles. The development matrix did not cater to the intended dynamics in a career. Profiles were considered static and, therefore, did not stimulate a choice for nontraditional profiles.

2023 – Blended Academic Career Paths designed

To vitalize academic careers, TU/e develops more flexible blended Academic Career Paths. All faculty are active in both education and research. Starting assistant professors get the opportunity to develop themselves first in education and research, and spend 40% of their time on these two domains; the remaining 20% is used to create their professional identity as an academic, to develop ambitions and objectives in compliance with TU/e's strategic objectives. This should reduce their work stress to excel in all domains. In later career stages, as of Assistant Professor 1, faculty need to develop and ensure a solid foundation in education, research, impact, and leadership & team skills, while also using a larger portion of their time to develop their academic identity. Individual profiles are not fixed in time and need to be determined in collaboration with the group leader and approved by the dean.

2024 - Career Policy for Teachers introduced

TU/e rewards and strengthens the position of teachers by supporting and broadening their possibilities for development and growth (Lopez Arteaga et al., 2024). Based on five leading principles, the various stages of teaching talent development are outlined in a development matrix. Its goal is to have a transparent and coherent system of career opportunities. Furthermore, TU/e stimulates collaboration in educational teams.

2024 – Biographical Sketch introduced in all departments

The Biographical Sketch is implemented in all departments and used in all assessment committees for faculty (Heijnen-Behnke & Braat, 2024).

2024 – Analyzing the P-BAC procedure

Since 2017, departments have introduced many additional steps or changes to the procedure for P-BACs for their own department. The process seems to suffer from a 'better safe than sorry' approach, which, in practice, results in potentially ineffective or unnecessary steps that extend duration, increase workload, and reduce transparency. In 2024, the HR department analyzed existing procedures to improve process quality and create a uniform, transparent way of working. Issues, root causes and possible solutions were divided into the four themes Workload, Lead Time, Quality, and Compliance. The themes show significant overlap and interdependencies and call for a holistic perspective.

2024 - Everyone Professor introduced

To further equality and recognition of academic staff, TU/e introduced the career policy Everyone Professor in November 2024 (Storm & Braat, 2025). This policy grants all assistant and associate professors the right to wear a toga in all academic ceremonies. It also grants them the right to use the title 'professor' in academic ceremonies, and when its use helps to establish their expertise. The policy also extends the possibility for assistant and associate professors to act as a supervisor (*ius promovendi*) as soon as they meet criteria that safeguard the quality of PhD supervision.

2024 - Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)

TU/e is a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), together with more than 700 research organizations, funders, assessment authorities, professional societies, and their associations worldwide. TU/e signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment in November 2022 and published the TU/e CoARA Action Plan in December 2024 (Braat & Hesping, 2024). The Action Plan is well aligned with developments in Recognition and Rewards.

2019 – 2022 -2025 Three waves of the Teaching Cultures Survey

The Teaching Cultures Survey (TCS) is an international collaboration between research-intensive universities committed to improving how university teaching is rewarded in academic careers. The short online survey focuses on the educational environment, institutional culture and commitment to teaching, the role of teaching in formal review and promotion processes, and future priorities for change to reward teaching. TU/e has taken part in all three survey cycles (2019, 2022, 2025), enabling comparisons over time (Graham, 2026). In 2025, 17 universities from nine countries took part. Survey results show a large increase in leadership commitment at TU/e. Group leaders' commitment to teaching promotes a positive assessment of teaching culture. University teaching was prioritized more in the annual review, and has become more important in professorial promotions. The strongest shift was among university leaders. Remaining challenges are significant disciplinary differences and less positive views and experiences of mid-career academics. Also, teachers provided less positive views than other academics. Strengthening leadership engagement at group level is an important lever for change.

2025 – Designing and piloting the new P-BAC procedure

Following the analysis, all departments agreed to adopt a default procedure for the P-BAC, adopt uniform ground rules and pilot a new way of working. This includes the appointment of core members in each department to ensure consistency within the department and safeguard equal treatment, privacy, and confidentiality, and avoid conflict of interest. IFC members perform the same role, but ensure consistency across departments. Both groups are the backbone of academic assessment, for whom training will become mandatory. Alternating or external members allow departments

to tailor the committee composition to the profile of the candidate, align it to their biographical sketch and add expertise on teaching to the committee.

A pilot ran from September 2025 to February 2026 in three departments to identify learning points and provide recommendations to improve the implementation of the new P-BAC procedure before implementing it in the other six departments.

2025 – Training BAC members

As part of the Recognizing & Rewarding Open Science project, the mandatory training for the core members and IFC members was developed. The training is aimed at acquiring skills, but also strengthens a shared cultural and normative understanding of responsible assessment across TU/e. This training was piloted in December 2025 and received positive feedback. The role-playing game Behind Closed Doors has become an intricate part of the training. More information on the training and role-playing game can be found in the Interventions part of this report. The training slides and RPG have been shared openly for use by other organizations.

2024 – 2026 Culture Barometer Recognition & Rewards

During the course of the R&R program, a culture barometer was conducted in 2024 and 2026 at the national level to gain insight into the progress of the ambitions of R&R. The TU/e results of 2024 were in line with the national outcome (Berenschot, 2024). Besides highlighting broad support for the program, the culture barometer also reveals some areas of concern. For example, most respondents note that they have not yet seen much change. Most of the changes experienced are policy changes, while systemic and cultural changes are experienced less. In early 2026, the culture barometer was repeated. The national and institutional outcomes were not yet available at the time of this report.

2026 – Academic Career Paths framework and implementing the new P-BAC procedure

Further developments for 2026 are the planned roll-out of the redesigned P-BAC procedure to all departments and the finalization of the policy Academics Career Paths. In Spring 2026, the pilot for the P-BAC procedure will be evaluated. Learnings will be incorporated in the final way of working, that will then be implemented in all departments. This allows departments to tailor the committee composition to the candidate profile as identified in their Biographical Sketch. The Academic Career Paths framework will be discussed with relevant stakeholders and be finalized in Fall 2026. The policy will lead to transparent principles for academic career development. The framework will be further elaborated in the revised Development Matrix, offering criteria for promotion and quality indicators at different levels.

Some of the above-mentioned documents have only been published as internal documents. They are available upon request from the authors.

Training and role-playing game

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Overview of all outputs