



**GHENT
UNIVERSITY**

A UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE ON REVISITING
RESEARCHERS' CAREER PROGRESSION:

GHENT UNIVERSITY'S NEW EVALUATION AND
PROMOTION MODEL FOR PROFESSORS

Rik Van de Walle, Rector

EUA workshop - May 14, 2019

Research Assessment for Researchers' Recruitment and Career Progression

MAJOR REFORM – WHY?

2018-2019: major reform in the professorial career progression model (performance, evaluation and promotion)

= outcome of an evaluation of the existing career model (2012-2017): harsh criticisms against ...

- 'metrics thinking':
 - output-driven evaluation process with quantitative indicators
 - a priori and individualized targets
- high administrative burden (annual job descriptions, activity reports, performance files, ...) and high evaluation frequency (regular evaluations, evaluation of individualized objectives, ...) ⇒ increasing academic competition, work pressure, employee dissatisfaction, burn-out, ...

→ new perspective on researchers' performance and career path: focus on ...

- trust instead of control:
 - "trust = academic freedom + responsibility": talents and ambitions of academics as a natural drive for career progression, but always as part of the group
- administrative simplification:
 - ⇒ **more time for research, teaching and other core academic activities**

GENERAL PRINCIPLES NEW VISION (1/3)

- For whom?
 - all professorial staff members (from tenure track to (senior) full prof), on a temporary or permanent contract, part-time or full-time, with a research assignment at Ghent University or an affiliated knowledge centre
- Lower evaluation rhythm:
 - standard: 5 years instead of 2/4 years before (i.e. minimum provided for by law)

Assistant Prof (TT) → Associate Prof	5 years
Associate Prof → Full Prof	2 x 5 years
Full Prof → Senior Full Prof	8 years (3 + 5 years)

- Merit- & evidence-based approach:
 - *a posteriori* global reflection (at the end of the cycle) instead of *a priori* mainly quantified objectives
 - most significant *achievements* ("What are you proud of?") instead of an exhaustive list of *output*

GENERAL PRINCIPLES NEW VISION (2/3)

- Focus on talent development, personal growth and career guidance:
 - continuous personal feedback in dialogue
(people talk to each other instead of filling in forms)
 - assessing leadership skills and people management in feedback & evaluation
 - new? HR committee for each professor
- Responsibility, collaboration and teamwork:
 - individual embedding in the larger entity of
research group / department / study programme / faculty / university
 - strategic objectives at group level
 - integration text drafted by the professor at the beginning of the cycle
 - differentiation between research / education / institutional and societal engagement
according to people's talents or strengths is allowed
 - complementarity within the group

GENERAL PRINCIPLES NEW VISION (3/3)

- Supporting tools are very light, but with a clear purpose (guide people!):
 - 3 templates:
 - integration text: my ambitions (and with relation to the larger entity)
 - reflection report: my main contributions/achievements
 - evaluation report: contributions/achievements and a global assessment (according to the HR committee)
 - 4 profiles: assistant prof, associate prof, full prof, senior full prof
 - job descriptions = indicative, non-exhaustive guidelines
 - portfolio for research, education, leadership & people management, institutional and societal engagement: NO metrics! guidelines for inspiration only

- ⇒ main idea: *"Those who perform well will be promoted, with a minimum of accountability and administrative effort and a maximum of freedom and responsibility"*

HOW? HR COMMITTEE

What?

Each professor is assigned an HR committee. Double role:

- **feedback:** career guidance, support and coaching in the different stages of the career (incl. development-oriented growth path in the field of leadership, people-oriented functioning and team collaboration)
- advisory role to the Faculty Board regarding **evaluation and promotion**

Why?

HR committee members: a **combination** of sufficiently close to the individual as well as distant enough (helicopter view e.g. faculty) and bringing in the HR perspective

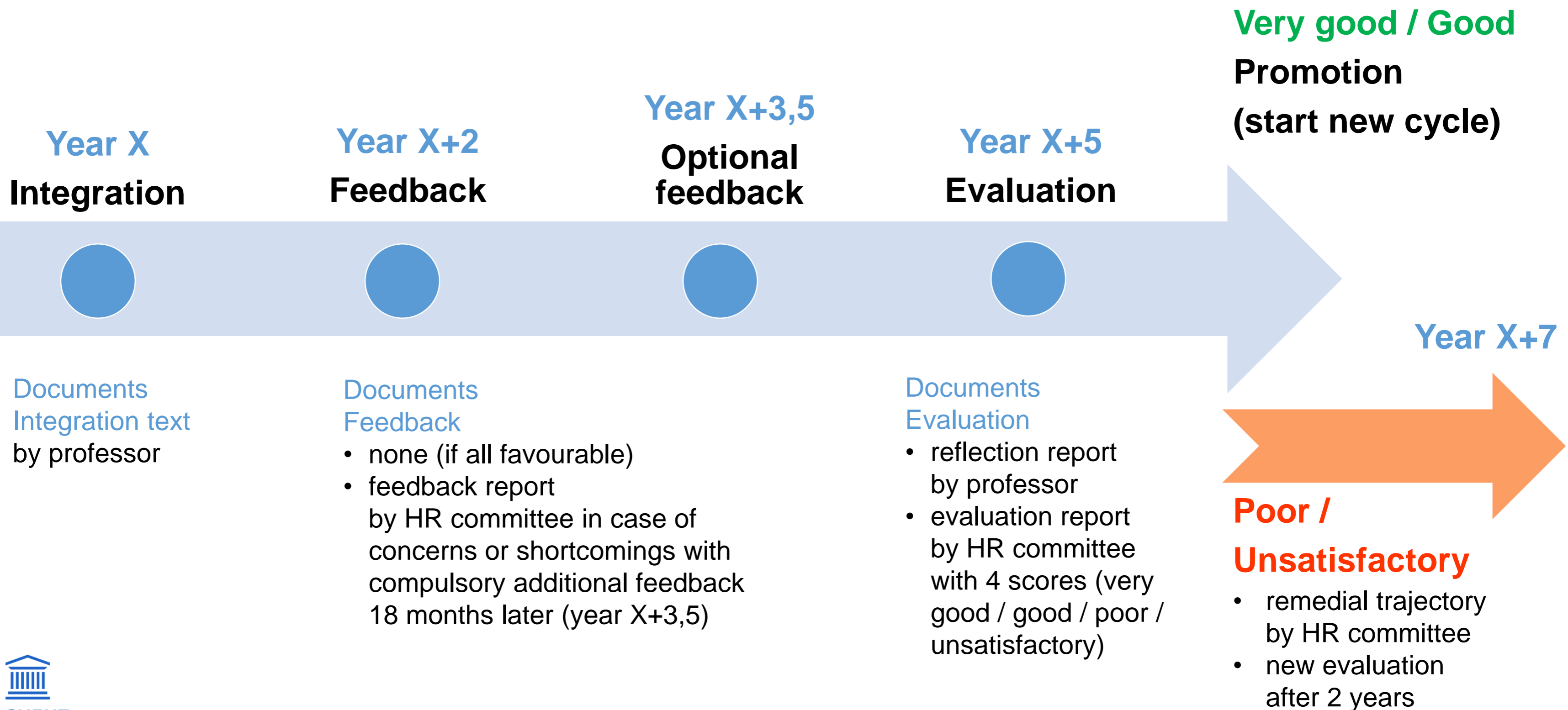
Who?

5 members:

(gender balanced)

- Department chair (= chair HR committee)
- 1 professorial staff member of the Educational Quality Control Unit familiar with educational domain
- 1 (senior) full professor familiar with research domain
- 1 member of the Faculty Board familiar with faculty objectives
- 1 HR expert (importance of leadership/management aspect)

STANDARD EVALUATION CYCLE



INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS: STEPS TAKEN (1/2)

Initial idea was part of **vision & programme** of rector/vice-rector candidate team

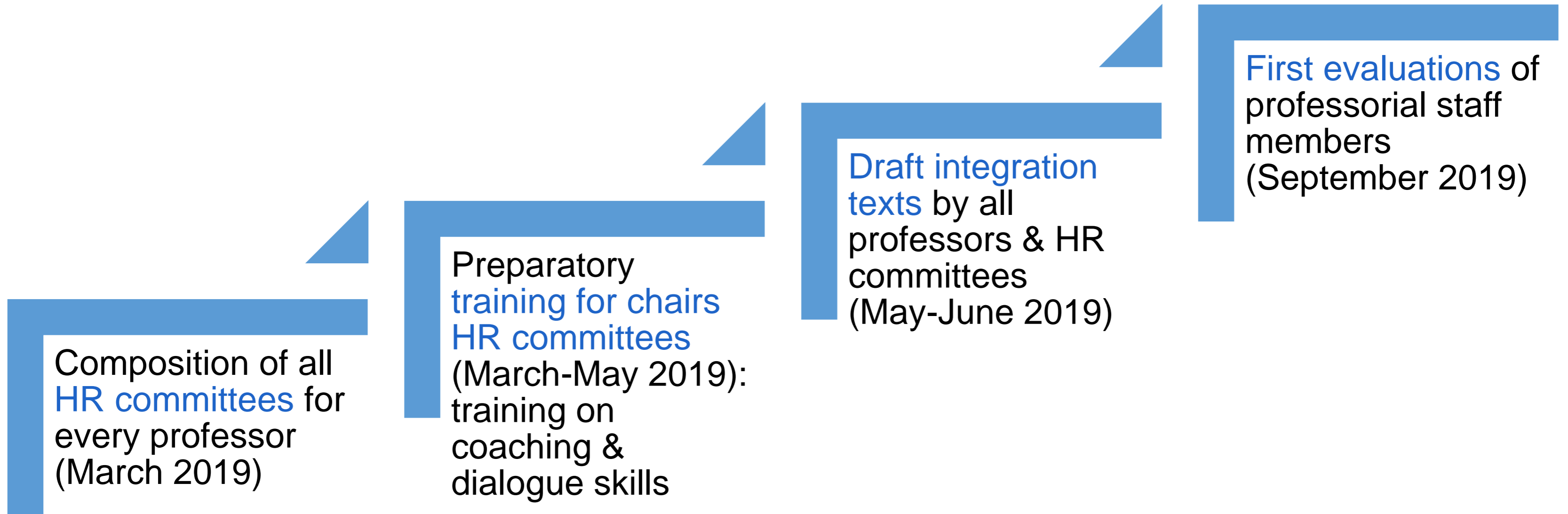
Broad stakeholder consultation:

- professors at all levels, deans, members of Young Academy, ...
- HR experts, directors, labour unions, ...

General principles in vision statement approved by Board of Governors (June 2018)

Full staff regulations approved by Board of Governors (December 2018)

INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS: STEPS TAKEN (2/2)



INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS: SUCCESS FACTORS (1/2)

- Everything starts with ... a **vision or ideas**
 - WHY do we do what we do?
 - take a holistic perspective on researchers' career progression:
more than only research assessment
→ education, dissemination, impact is equally important
 - = differentiation and complementarity is baseline of a talent-driven career model
- **Academic leadership** is crucial
 - at the university management level in the preparation phase
 - at the faculty level in the preparation/implementation phase (deans, faculty boards)
 - at the department level in the implementation phase
(department chairs in the HR committees)

INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS: SUCCESS FACTORS (2/2)

- Involve the people in the process
 - ambassadors in your target group (e.g. Young Academy):
initial believers who start the 'wave'
- Good HR expertise
 - new and evidence-based perspective on people performance systems
- Keep administration light
 - focus on the people, not the forms → HR committee talks
- Change management is
communication – communication – communication
(at all levels involved)



'We are transforming our university into a place where talent once again feels valued and nurtured'



(17-12-2018) Our university is deliberately dismantling its bureaucracy, writes the rector.

Ghent University is deliberately dismantling its bureaucracy, writes the rector.

It is a common complaint that university procedures are cumbersome and barely controllable. Furthermore, the intense competition for funding and publications, citations and grants, and the blurring of boundaries of research groups and departments. Under the new policy, Ghent University will

into its career guidance policy. Thus, the university can again become a place where talent feels valued and nurtured. We are transforming our university into a place where talent once again feels valued and nurtured.

Opinion **Big Data**
Lessons from history on the dangers of blind trust in data

Businesses and government are learning that the information they collect can mislead

JOHN THORNHILL [+ Add to myFT](#)



John Thornhill DECEMBER 31, 2018

The [Great Hanoi Rat Massacre](#) of 1902 is a classic reminder of why we need to be wary about what data we measure and reward.

Alternatively, some institutions may stop playing the quantitative game, as Ghent University appears determined to do. Earlier this month, the Belgian university [announced it](#) would downplay competitive, bureaucratically determined metrics of publications and citations used to determine funding decisions. Instead, the university rector Rik Van de Walle declared, it would foster a more collaborative culture between research groups and faculties nurtured by the academics themselves.

“Ghent University is deliberately choosing to step out of the rat race between individuals, departments and universities. We no longer wish to participate in the ranking of people,” he wrote. “A university is above all a place where everything can be questioned.”

That seems like a good place to start.

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Rik Van de Walle

Rector

More information about this topic?
www.ugent.be/professorialcareer

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