



Everyone Professor! Title, professorial gown, and the doctoral degree conferral right – for university lecturers, senior lecturers, and full professors

The Young Academy

At Dutch universities, assistant professors [*universitair docenten, ud's*] and associate professors [*universitair hoofdocenten, uhd's*] largely have the same duties as full professors [*hoogleraren*], but they don't have the same rights. With its "Everyone Professor!" campaign, The Young Academy advocates separating the rights regarding PhD supervision from the job profile of *hoogleraar* and granting these rights to all *ud's* and *uhd's* as well. This requires in practice that every *ud*, *uhd*, or *hoogleraar* will be entitled to wear a professorial gown (in Dutch a *toga*), hold the title of "professor", serve on dissertation-assessment committees (at their own and other universities), can vote on whether to award the distinction of *cum laude*, and if appropriate, confer the degree of "doctor" on the PhD candidates they supervise.

Although this proposition is gaining increasingly widespread support, it has not been consistently implemented at Dutch universities. Therefore, The Young Academy has now placed the ball firmly in the court of the universities and faculties. With the present practical guide, we hope to encourage the discussion of this issue within the academic community on the road to "Everyone Professor!" The system we propose is already allowed for in the relevant Dutch legislation. And given that numerous experts and academic managers are also in favour, we think it's high time to turn an endorsed idea into actual practice.

This guide provides:

- an explanation of the idea;
- an overview of the current situation;
- an anticipatory response to some likely critical questions;
- visuals for use in discussions;
- a step-by-step plan

This guide is intended to facilitate a broad discussion within the academic community about "Everyone Professor!". We'd therefore like to hear how that discussion is proceeding within the various universities and faculties.

What is the current situation regarding PhD supervision rights?

Academic staff at Dutch universities are largely divided into three hierarchical job levels (with two sub-levels within them): assistant professors ("*ud's*"), associate professors ("*uhd's*") and full professors [*hoogleraren*]. (There are also teaching and research roles, but we'll not go into them here.) Although staff in all these positions basically hold a doctorate, teach independently, and set up and conduct their own line of research, in the Netherlands only a *hoogleraar* or *adjunct hoogleraar* may use the title of "professor".

Hoogleraren have by default a number of formal and informal rights and powers that *ud's* and *uhd's* do not have:



- The right to confer the degree of “doctor”, i.e., the *ius promovendi*. Although *ud*'s and *uhd*'s may by law hold the *ius promovendi*, it is currently granted to only a limited group of *uhd*'s and a few *ud*'s (see [this report](#)). There are conditions involved regarding the successful acquisition of research funds and previous supervision of PhD candidates.
- Membership of dissertation-assessment committees or doctorate committees (the rules vary from one university to another).
- Professorial gowns: it is only *hoogleraren* (and *adjunct hoogleraren*) who are permitted to wear their professorial gown at official academic ceremonies.
- Inaugural address: it is only *hoogleraren* who, after being appointed to their chair, can deliver an inaugural address in which they present their line of research.
- *Hoogleraren* carry greater weight when it comes to assessing scientific quality, even if they do not have the greatest expertise in assessing particular PhD candidates or their dissertation. A doctorate committee must consist of a minimum number of *hoogleraren*, and at a number of universities it is only *hoogleraren* who have a vote in assessing whether to award the distinction of *cum laude*.

Equal duties means equal rights

In terms of teaching, research, and research supervision, *ud*'s, *uhd*'s, and *hoogleraren* do the work that is comparable as regards its actual substance. They are all experts in their own field, are expected to acquire grants, lead projects, give substance to a line of research, act as a peer reviewer for articles and grant proposals, teach, ensure quality and scientific integrity, and design and supervise PhD programmes. Nonetheless, there are major differences in the rights they practice. As noted above, a *hoogleraar* may, for example, wear his or her professorial gown on official occasions, deliver an inaugural lecture, supervise PhD programmes independently, assess the quality of dissertations, and bestow the title of “doctor” on the candidate at the conferral ceremony.

The Young Academy finds it strange that these differences exist between what you *actually do* and what you are *entitled to do*. With the same duties (supervising) should come the same rights (conferring doctorates). This is why The Young Academy advocates for “Everyone Professor!” i.e. separating the rights associated with PhD programmes and academic ceremonies from the job profile of *hoogleraar*. In practical terms, we propose that every *ud*, *uhd*, or *hoogleraar* may wear a professorial gown, hold the title of “professor”, serve on dissertation-assessment committees (at their own and other universities), vote on whether to award the distinction of *cum laude*, and, if appropriate, confer the degree of “doctor” on their own PhD candidates. After all, “credit where credit’s due”.

Mind you, “Everyone Professor!” is not a plea for overall levelling out or the absence of opportunities for promotion or career paths. What we are saying is: retain job levels and allow people to progress through them based on transparent and independent assessment. “Everyone Professor!” encourages universities, faculties, and the academic community to think about opportunities for promotion and how we shape the hierarchies of duties and responsibilities.

The Young Academy sees “Everyone Professor!” as an important step towards a more balanced and healthy academic climate, in which academics of all ages and with diverse experiences and backgrounds are assessed according to their merit and abilities, and less on the basis of titles. This links up seamlessly with the ongoing debate around the Recognition and Rewards



programme. With “Everyone Professor!” , we can make optimum use of the expertise available within our universities by facilitating more appropriate supervision and assessment.

Surely this isn't a new idea?

“Everyone Professor!” isn't a new idea: in the United States and many of our neighbouring countries, the various “cosmetic differences” (title, gown, *ius promovendi*) are absent and everyone is a professor. Even in the Netherlands, there were no such differences until the 1970s. The proposition has been emphasized and supported by many in the Netherlands over the past ten years, for example by Kees Storm in his [inaugural address in 2018](#), by Rens Bod, Remco Breuker and Ingrid Robeyns (members of the *WOinActie* campaign) in their [40 propositions concerning science](#), Jan Smits in the [NRC Handelsblad newspaper](#), and Hieke Huistra in the [Trouw newspaper](#). We too, in our “Everyone Professor!” project, have been objecting for quite some time to the artificial differences in authority between academics within the Dutch system – a plea embraced [by the President of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences](#).

What problem does “Everyone Professor!” solve?

We believe that the cosmetic differences – title, gown, *ius promovendi* – are by no means innocuous. Following on from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences' report on [Social safety in Dutch Academia](#), the [Advisory Committee on Diverse and Inclusive Higher Education and Research](#) of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science recommends reducing the hierarchical structure, including by extending the *ius promovendi* to all *ud's* and *uhd's*. Removing the cosmetic differences can help flatten out this hierarchical structure, thus creating a more socially safe climate in which younger academics dare to speak out without fear of the consequences if *hoogleraren* disagree with them. That will be particularly the case if the automatic selection of *hoogleraren* for membership of working groups and committees is also abandoned and policy- and decision-making becomes more inclusive. At this moment, several things are associated “by custom or usage” with the position of *hoogleraar*. For instance, membership of administrative bodies is often reserved for *hoogleraren*, and many faculties and departments have an informal council of *hoogleraren* that advises on faculty or department policy. Although this will not automatically change when every faculty member obtains equal rights, it is worth realising that this customary right affects policy- and decision-making processes within our universities.

In addition, “Everyone Professor!” contributes to solving the 'symbolic scarcity' that has been created because the title, gown and other rights regarding PhD supervision are linked to the job profile of *hoogleraar*. In many faculties there are only limited career opportunities for *ud's* and *uhd's*. Not because they do not perform sufficiently, but because the current 'job classification system' offers insufficient room to grow to the next job profile. By introducing 'Everyone Professor!' , *ud's* and *uhd's* - who in reality take on all tasks and would be eligible for promotion if there are sufficient positions - are also given the opportunity to share and demonstrate their substantive capacities and expertise. The latter is also relevant in an international context, for example when applying for European scholarships. Having not the title of professor is then seen as a sign of inexperience, while this is not an accurate representation of the experience of the *ud* or *uhd*.

We also expect that implementing “Everyone Professor!” will make the Netherlands more attractive for talented academics. That's because when assessing the “academic climate”,



researchers (including those from abroad) attach great importance to the quality of the environment they will find themselves in and its openness, opportunities for advancement, and guarantee that they can develop independently as regards teaching and research. Being dependent on a *hoogleraar* does not reflect that desired independence and freedom to initiate and conduct independent research.

But above all, “Everyone Professor!” will increase job satisfaction because a larger part of the academic staff will have the opportunity to supervise PhD candidates and to be acknowledged for doing so. The proud moment when the doctorate is conferred is then the icing on the cake, so to speak.

Yes, but..... Some likely critical questions, with answers

As we know, every “yes, but....” is in fact a “no”. That’s why we’re providing this explanation of some potential “yes, but’s”, and why “yes, everyone *can* become a professor”, even if some details require further discussion.

Yes, but.....: Do young *UD*’s have the necessary capabilities?

In terms of actual substance, *ud*’s are indeed experts, and are able to supervise (or co-supervise) a PhD programme. It is precisely by giving them greater responsibility within the PhD programme that young *ud*’s will be able to develop the relevant leadership qualities. And if they are the primary initiator of a project, have secured the necessary funding, and have taken on the primary supervision role, then being the main PhD supervisor is a highly appropriate role for them. The Young Academy supports the obligation to be supervised by at least two supervisors (the four eyes principle). In this way, ‘experienced years’ can also be included in the supervision of a PhD candidate by choosing a colleague with more seniority and experience as the second supervisor. If funding and a project of their own are still to come, a *ud* is already perfectly able to sit on dissertation-assessment committees, wear a professorial gown and hold the title of professor, and act as assistant supervisor for the conferral of a doctorate on PhD candidates whom they have supervised. We are eager to enter the discussion with universities on how to ensure high-quality supervision of PhD candidates by supervisors within all job profiles, and how to enable experience to play a role in the composition of the doctoral supervision team.

Yes, but.....: Won’t the quality of doctorate supervision be jeopardised?

No, the [final evaluation of extension of the *ius promovendi*](#) has in fact concluded that extending the *ius promovendi* has a positive effect on the quality of supervision because it will facilitate more tailor-made arrangements as regards the composition of the supervision team, and *ud*’s and *uhd*’s, generally speaking, will have more time and scope to provide intensive supervision. Being a *hoogleraar* does not automatically make someone the best supervisor for a PhD programme. In fact, that is often not the case simply because the *hoogleraar* has little time available. It is therefore almost universal practice – fortunately – for PhD candidates to be supervised by a team of at least two supervisors. That reduces the candidate’s dependence on a single individual and increases the likelihood of effective supervision. Regardless of the composition of the supervision team, The Young Academy believes that the quality of supervision and the progress of the programme needs to be the subject of discussion and assessment.

**Yes, but....: Then surely science will sacrifice credibility?**

No, by insisting on the distinction between the titles of *ud*, *uhd* and *hoogleraar*, one implies that some academics are “more genuine” scientists than others, and that is precisely detrimental to the credibility of *ud*'s and *uhd*'s when they engage in public debate. Designating everyone a professor does justice to the reality that every academic in the Netherlands is a full-fledged scientist.

Yes, but....: Not everyone will be able to deliver an inaugural address, will they?

No, with an average of three or four doctoral ceremonies a day, there isn't the scope at many universities for all the *ud*'s, *uhd*'s and *hoogleraren* to deliver an inaugural address. So let's do things differently! Here's a suggestion: make space for forty inaugural addresses a year in each university, and let people submit a proper plan for a public lecture, from ten years after receiving their PhD. That will provide an excellent overview of what the line of research built up will contribute in the future. The advantage of this is that the moment itself can be chosen, consideration can be given to how research can be shaped over the course of the next ten years and the inaugural address itself will be more valuable.

Yes, but....: Then why not just get rid of professorial gowns completely?

Opinions differ about that. We think the most important thing is that everyone with the same duties should also have the same rights, and we therefore advocate a title, a professorial gown, and the *ius promovendi* for everyone. Wearing a professorial gown in fact emphasises the impartiality and the formal status and role of the academic (just as it does for lawyers and judges, or uniformed police officers). That status is appropriate for all academics, which is why we are in favour of every *ud*, *uhd*, and *hoogleraar* wearing a professorial gown.

Yes, but....: Then why don't we get rid of the designations *ud*, *uhd*, and *hoogleraar*?

There are various ways of shaping the hierarchy of duties and responsibilities, for example by abolishing the “ranks” of *ud*, *uhd*, and *hoogleraar*, [as proposed by Jan Smits in the NRC newspaper](#). As far as we're concerned, that's a separate issue, and one which shouldn't get in the way of extending the *ius promovendi* and the associated title of professor and the professorial gown. That's why we refer in this plan to the job profiles as we know them today.

Yes, but....: Surely we just don't have the money to make everyone a professor?

No, we don't and the scarcity of positions is a problem. “Everyone Professor!” doesn't mean that everyone will become a *hoogleraar* or receives a higher salary. The job title of *hoogleraar* is associated with substantive duties, based on experience, responsibility, competencies, vision, and achievement. In addition, an appointment often depends on the availability or creation of a position for a *hoogleraar*. “Everyone Professor!” refers to the fact that all academic staff are expected to assess the quality of research and can collaborate to supervise high-quality research. That substantive expertise is sufficient to be allowed to supervise one's own PhD candidates and assess other candidates' dissertations. And that will be reconfirmed by the title and the professorial gown that you get with it (well, get..., you can in fact spend almost a month's salary on buying one, or you can borrow it from the university).

Yes, but....: Then won't you remove the incentive to work for promotion?



No, that incentive will remain. Virtually all university researchers are very ambitious people. They tend to make things harder for themselves rather than easier. We believe everyone will remain ambitious to develop within a variety of impact profiles (teaching, leadership, clinical, social impact, and, of course, research).

Yes, but....: Isn't this contrary to law?

No, it's allowed by law. Every *ud* can be granted the *ius promovendi*. That was regulated by the [Higher Education and Research Act](#) (the "WHW") in 2017.

Yes, but.....: I had to wait fifteen years and I didn't mind that at all.

We think waiting for obtaining a right doesn't make sense. We think it's senseless and a waste if people's capacities aren't utilised. And those substantive capacities are already up to scratch in the case of a *ud* or *uhd*, and sufficient for taking on the role of main supervisor and review the content of other dissertations. Regarding the actual substance, the visible hierarchy isn't really relevant, and it's sometimes even detrimental to substantive debate.

Yes, but.....: Won't "Everyone Professor!" become just a kind of sop to prevent promotion to a more senior job profile?

No, appointment as a *ud* and promotion to successive job profiles need to take place according to clear and transparent criteria, with the university job profiles (the "UFO" profiles) and competency assessment being used. This then involves responsibilities for management of a department/faculty, for teaching, or for fulfilling other administrative positions/activities in other bodies. Mind you, in the light of "Everyone Professor!" , these job profiles do need to be revised. The timing is right because the Recognition and Rewards programme also needs to be included. We recommend in that connection that these abilities also be used to conduct a career development interview, and not just to test whether or not someone is good enough for promotion to a more senior job level. We think that better use of these approaches, a different type of development interview, and making other responsibilities within a department open for discussion can lead to greater job satisfaction and less competition for the scarce new positions of *uhd* or *hoogleraar*.

What needs to be done? A roadmap for progressing from the idea to actual implementation:

1. Talk about "Everyone Professor!" with one another, with your faculty and university boards, and with the Doctorates Board [*College van Promoties*]. Explain what "Everyone Professor!" actually means. In response to every "no" (or "yes, but....."), ask "why not?" You can send objections and suggestions to dja@knaw.nl. We will use them to update the list of "yes, but" and the points requiring action.
2. Identify regulations and procedures within which the position of *hoogleraar* is a requirement and assess whether that requirement is appropriate. Check whether it's only substantive expertise that is required, or whether it's indeed desirable for someone with more "job weight" to fill the position. Let dja@knaw.nl know which documents are concerned. We would like to compile a list of these documents so that other universities can also check them. We will start by putting [the Higher Education and Research Act](#) on the list.



3. Request that the university's doctorate regulations be amended. This includes who can act as the main supervisor, who can be on the doctorate committee and form an opinion on the quality of the dissertation, the *cum laude* arrangements, the composition of the dissertation-assessment committee and the group of "opponents" to the dissertation. N.B.: After the introduction of "Everyone Professor!" the position of assistant supervisor will be reserved for a post-doc, a *ud* with too little experience for *ius promovendi* or a staff researcher not in a *ud*, *uhd* or *hoogleraar* position. In addition, it will also always be possible to add a third supervisor.
4. Within your faculty/ graduate school, discuss what the appropriate criteria are for being assigned the *ius promovendi*, with that being dependent on experience and expertise rather than one's job profile.
5. Within your faculty/graduate school, discuss how the quality of PhD supervision can be guaranteed. Consider a "licence to supervise" for everyone with the *ius promovendi*; like a pilot's licence; this will need to be renewed regularly. Of course, this will also improve the current situation.
6. Make use of this opportunity to revise the UFO profiles and design them more broadly according to the Recognition and Rewards programme.
7. Above all, let us know if the idea is enthusiastically or sympathetically received. Send an e-mail to dja@knaw.nl.