



Strengths and weaknesses of the current practice (SWOT analysis)

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Ethical and professional aspects

At Ghent University, academic freedom and independent research go hand in hand with social responsibility and civic engagement, locally and internationally. For example, in line with its institutional policy on societal value creation of research, Ghent University supports interdisciplinary research with a view to societal and economic impact through new professorships, knowledge broker positions, and thematic consortia.

Ghent University adheres to the principles of Open Science (OS) and Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), two domains that have been rapidly expanding since the 2014 HR Action Plan. In 2018, an internal OS Policy Group was established to ensure a more coherent and comprehensive approach. The current Open Access mandate is being revised following a change in the Belgian legislation.

The [Policy Framework and Roadmap for Research Data Management](#) (RDM) guides the work on guidelines and standards on storing and sharing data and on integrating new developments related to GDPR. It also introduces RDM plans that are gradually becoming mandatory. From 2019-2020 onwards, data stewards will advise researchers on RDM, for example, through individual coaching and group training. Following recent developments at the governmental level, the university decided not to invest in data management infrastructure.

All researchers and lecturers are expected to behave according to the prevailing professional standards regarding integrity and ethics. To guide this, a policy group and a [Policy Plan for Research Integrity](#) (RI) are in place. Ghent University adheres to the *European Code for Research Integrity*. Although the university's focus is on promoting good research practices, a Commission for Research Integrity is set up to deal with misconduct and questionable research practices. Guidelines are available to deal with specific aspects of RI, such as authorship. 'RI' is one of the key competencies in the Competency Framework for Doctoral Research (with different training formats for young researchers), and is a compulsory learning line in the BA/MA Competency Framework (with discipline-specific formats in different courses).

There is a legal obligation for research involving animal testing or human experiments to get approval from a university ethical committee. For all other research topics, ethical approval/advice from a university ethical committee is available whenever deemed necessary (e.g., a sensitive research topic). A [Committee for the Human Rights Policy in Internationalisation](#) was established together with a Checklist for Impact Assessment. Ghent University acts upon its 2017 [Policy Statement on the Use of Laboratory Animals in Scientific Research and Education](#).

Challenges lie in the implementation of OS and R(R)I principles. In recent years, the scope of research integrity and ethics has also widened: emerging topics such as Access and Benefit Sharing/Nagoya Protocol, Artificial Intelligence, Dual Use and Defense research require further policy making and implementation. In order to keep researchers well informed and compliant, the university is drafting a *Code of Good Research Practice* and exploring ways to make future activities and administrative processes related to R(R)I more efficient and effective, for example, by establishing an ethics office. This requires continuous engagement from the university and the research community.

Recruitment and selection

To grow as a top-quality institution and a vibrant and dynamic working environment, Ghent University must attract talented researchers from across the world. Although a dedicated OTM-R policy or Action Plan is not yet in place, many initiatives have been implemented to recruit in an open and transparent manner and select candidates based on their merits. The implementation of OTM-R principles is realised within the boundaries and framework of the legislation, which, for instance, steers the language requirements for professors.

General information about funding opportunities and research positions can be found on Ghent University's website and is communicated to targeted groups of researchers (e.g., a brochure and [website for prospective PhD candidates](#)).

Vacancies are widely distributed, published in Dutch and English and advertised on the [university's website](#), Euraxess, Academic Positions, ResearchGate and relevant domain-specific platforms. The national and international publication of vacancies is mandatory for many types of research positions (e.g., all professorial staff, all assistant academic staff and some categories of research staff with indefinite-term contracts) and is strongly recommended for all other positions (e.g., research staff on temporary projects).

An e-recruitment tool facilitates the recruitment of academic staff by streamlining the application and selection procedures. A template for vacancies was integrated into the tool, including information on job content, selection criteria, working environment, working conditions, career perspectives, applications procedures and timelines. The tool allows for a timely and efficient follow-up of the applications by HR officers, the hiring department, the selection committee and the applicants.

All PhD candidates, including those on the university's pay roll, must be enrolled as PhD students. Since 2019, the application and enrolment procedure of PhD candidates is also supported by an e-tool. This decreases the

administrative burden and allows for a better follow-up of the application procedures.

Ghent University is changing its recruitment and selection procedures – and the supporting tools – while actively communicating the OTM-R principles, and thus influencing the actual recruitment practices. An important project in 2020 is a fundamental review of the recruitment policy and practices of its professors, along the lines of its completely revisited career and evaluation model (2018). A [flyer](#) explaining the advantages of OTM-R is already available to the professorial staff. Members of selection committees are being trained in merit-based recruitment, for example, through workshops about competency-based interview techniques. Ghent University is working towards preventing bias in selection committees, for example, by avoiding gender bias in the language used in vacancies and respecting the gender balance in the selection committees.

Although Ghent University is gradually enhancing its recruitment and selection policies and practices for the different staff categories, there is still room for improvement. The university is committed to launching an OTM-R policy plan which will allow to introduce a coherent vision on recruitment and selection. Specific aspects of the OTM-R principles must be addressed, such as clearly defining the feedback mechanisms and assigning roles and responsibilities. Once the policy is clear, change management will be necessary to adjust some of the existing recruitment practices.

Working conditions

Ghent University is a pluralistic university that welcomes staff from different backgrounds and cultures, in line with the university's anti-discrimination statement. The university also has a dedicated gender policy to promote equal opportunities for women and men in academic research and a policy to integrate staff and students with a disability.

Recently, Ghent University has introduced several new onboarding initiatives to ensure that onboarding is available for new staff. The university's staff is also increasingly being trained in intercultural competencies (with a specific focus on Asia). New staff members are assigned a 'buddy' within their department, and new professors can participate in a mentoring programme. Bottom-up initiatives, especially in the Postdoc Community and the PhD Community, can also help the integration and onboarding process.

Ghent University strives to create an open, qualitative academic culture based on academic freedom and trust, feedback and coaching on the job. The university's research culture is being shaped by, among others, the [Charter for Doctoral Students and Supervisors](#), the *Quality Framework for Doctoral Education* and the fundamentally revised [career and evaluation framework for professorial staff](#) (including the university's revisited vision on research assessment).

Ghent University is committed to offering the best possible working conditions to its entire staff. The

university reshaped the [working conditions and career perspectives of Research Staff on its own payroll](#), in particular by offering indefinite-term contracts to various subgroups (e.g. researchers working as research managers). All new professorial staff members receive a 4-year starting grant, to allow them to focus on research and less on project/grant writing. Sabbatical leaves give professors the opportunity to (re)focus (on) their research. Specific attention is also paid to researchers working on temporary contracts. This has resulted among others in an increased research autonomy for postdoctoral staff. In order to optimise the time that can be dedicated to research and lower the time needed for administration and record keeping, Ghent University is taking action to decrease the administrative burden and investing in a research management system.

Ghent University is acting upon the results of surveys and research on the psychosocial welfare of researchers, which has led to, for example, the introduction of confidentiality officers and training to prevent stress and burn out. A better work-life balance is stimulated through initiatives such as working remotely and child care facilities.

It remains a challenge to attract and keep top talent from different backgrounds and cultures and increase the number of women in (top) academic positions. In this context, optimising the onboarding of new research staff is high on the university's agenda. Ghent University will continue to monitor the psychosocial welfare of researchers with the aim to further improve their wellbeing (including a good work-life balance). Ghent University acknowledges that working conditions, wellbeing and aspects such as research(er) assessment and success rates for project proposals are closely connected, and several elements still need to be improved or optimised.

Training and development

Ghent University offers training and development opportunities to researchers at all stages of their career. Doctoral candidates have access to the [doctoral training programme](#) coordinated by the Doctoral Schools, postdoctoral researchers to the [Postdoc Talent Management](#) programme, other R1-R2 researchers to the training offer of the HR department and R3-R4 researchers to the academic leadership programme. For each target group, individual coaching, mentoring and group training are available, thus fit for purpose and varied enough to reach as many researchers as possible.

Recently, the training and development offer has gained coherence and focus, without losing its flexibility to respond to new learning and development needs. Talent and competency development runs as a common thread through the programmes. A Competency Framework for Doctoral Research makes the competencies that PhD candidates (are expected to) acquire more visible for internal and external stakeholders, and gives focus to the doctoral training programme.

The capacity and diversity of the training and development offer has also grown considerably. New topics include wellbeing and stress-reduction (all researchers), intercultural (PhDs) and entrepreneurial skills

(PhDs and postdocs). Increasing attention is paid to academic teaching, especially since the introduction of mandatory training for university lecturers. Specific groups are targeted by a tailored offer, such as training sessions for deans.

(Temporary) Career mobility is also considered crucial to enhance the development of researchers. Faculty Mobility Funds support incoming and outgoing mobility. Although the main focus of these funds is on international mobility, intersectoral mobility is not excluded. Ghent University wishes to stimulate the intersectoral and entrepreneurial work experience of its junior researchers, removing regulatory and other obstacles wherever possible. Since many of these obstacles result from legislation and/or rules and regulations of funding agencies, Ghent University took the lead in the current debate with the Flemish government. For researchers on temporary contracts and bursaries, 'outward-looking' labour market activities and structural contacts with employers outside of academia have been part of Ghent University's career programmes for many years (e.g., annual job fairs for young researchers, career programmes with alumni, career days at external companies and PhD boot camps).

In the coming years, Ghent University will increasingly focus on talent management as it is one of the University-Wide Policy Choices for the future. An additional challenge is to continuously evaluate the training and development opportunities and adapt them to the changing learning and development needs, of both the researchers themselves and (especially for temporary researchers) the labour market. More emphasis should also be placed on the employability of PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers. One of the future objectives is to concentrate the rather disparate offer in one career centre. Moreover, it is the university's ambition to cater for an increasingly diverse group of researchers, including the growing number of international PhD candidates (many of whom only spend part of their research time in Ghent), the research community in the branch campus in South Korea and the growing number of more senior researchers who did not obtain their PhD at Ghent University.