

# Evaluation report University College Twente

18 February 2022, Margot Kok

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## Summary

Commissioned by the Executive Board, an external evaluation was carried out on the University College Twente and the ATLAS program in the period November 2021 through February 2022. Twenty-two interviews have been conducted with different stakeholders: management, lecturers, students, alumni, supporting staff. This led to several conclusions:

- All stakeholders endorse the value of a UCT-ATLAS program in the (Dutch) educational landscape
- All stakeholders foresee the end of the ATLAS program if no changes are made.
- There are a lot of possibilities to make UCT and/or ATLAS a sustainable success in the near future
- Measures have to be made on different levels:
  - Develop and decide on a common vision on UCT and ATLAS
  - Invest in leadership on all levels
  - Implement UCT/ATLAS as a sustainable activity in the structural organization of the University of Twente, making use of regular working processes
  - Make ATLAS an innovative didactic playground again in which (young) lecturers can develop themselves
  - Invest in the wellbeing of students and staff, provide guidance and invest in onboarding

## 1 Introduction

In February 2021 a midterm evaluation *Governance and Embedding UCT/ ATLAS* took place as a progress report on the implementation of embedding the University College Twente (UCT) within the faculty ITC. The conclusion on the governance- aspect was that the current situation does not reflect the governance-model that was decided upon. The report ends with suggestions for questions to be answered during a subsequent evaluation.

Early October 2021 the Executive Board decided to have an evaluation carried out by an external expert: ir. Margot Kok. Margot Kok is director of the Education Policy department at the Science Faculty of Utrecht University and alumna of the University of Twente. The evaluation was carried out from November 2021 through February 2022.

The following main questions were addressed in the evaluation:

1. Is there an effective management of the UCT organization within the faculty ITC with proper lines of communication and accountability?
2. Are the lines of communication and accountability clear within the UCT management team and with the Faculty Board ITC?
  - a. Does the way of working work?
  - b. What is the experience concerning the functional / hierarchical relationship with the UCT academic staff?
  - c. Are there any further issues concerning the governance?
  - d. How does the (core)team experience this governance (structure)
3. Is there an effective running of the small-scale education program ATLAS?
4. Is ATLAS properly embedded (academically and organizationally) as a UT-wide program?
5. Is UCT/ATLAS properly represented in the network of University Colleges in the Netherlands?

## 2 Analysis

### 2.1 Positive aspects UCT/ATLAS

For this evaluation, 22 interviews have been conducted. All interviews started with the question: What are you proud of, what do you like about UCT and/or ATLAS? What makes you happy? Most participants were surprised by this question, but nobody had problems naming positive examples. You could see a change in attitude and feel the enthusiasm about education from every interviewee.

It is clear: All stakeholders (management, teachers, students, alumni, supporting staff) endorse the value of a UCT-ATLAS program in the Dutch educational landscape. The combination of “high tech, human touch” really takes shape in the ATLAS program. The students receive a lot of praise from all interviewees. ATLAS attracts curious, inquisitive, intelligent, involved students and teachers are so proud to work with them.

But it is also clear that there are a lot of problems within UCT, so the conversation often quickly turned to the possible areas for improvement.

### 2.2 What can be improved about UCT/ATLAS?

#### 2.2.1 UCT positioning within the University of Twente

It is difficult to properly position an interdisciplinary college in a university organization with only disciplinary faculties. In the Netherlands, there are two options to choose from. Either 1) UCT is positioned in a separate organizational unit (possibly with other university-wide initiatives), directly below the Executive Board and next to existing faculties 2) UCT is positioned in one of the existing faculties.

If option 2 is chosen, it is necessary to take extra measures to ensure a university college does not disappear within a faculty. For example: appointing a specific portfolio holder to the Executive Board, structurally putting the college on the agenda of the deans meeting and a strong collaboration is needed between the faculty dean and the college dean.

Option 2 was chosen by the University of Twente and UCT is housed within the ITC faculty. However, no clear agreements have been made about other measures. There is no structural communication between UCT and the Executive Board or the other faculties, and as a result the responsibility for UCT is not widely felt.

#### 2.2.2 UCT positioning within faculty ITC

The ITC faculty has provided UCT with a good home. A lot of work has been done for UCT by the supporting staff of ITC, e.g., recruitment, finance, human relations. Because of a lack of a shared vision on UCT, this was not always an easy task though.

In 2020 the Faculty Board of ITC started a recruitment process for a new Management Team (MT) for UCT. The duties and mandates of all MT members were well defined prior to the recruitment process. All stakeholders, including UCT teaching staff, were on board. When the MT finally got to work, the views on the roles and mandates of the individual MT members started to shift. This is a normal process, but in this case, there was hardly any communication between the ITC Faculty Board and the MT-UCT and between the new MT members themselves.

Moreover, the Faculty Board had an ambiguous attitude toward the MT of UCT. On the one hand, the MT was positioned under the Faculty Board, so the MT was accountable to the Faculty Board. On the other hand, the MT was expected to be able to operate UCT independently from the faculty as UCT is a university-wide College. This ambiguity was problematic because the MT was new and inexperienced. As a result, there was a lack of (well needed) guidance by the Faculty Board, and it was difficult for the MT to connect to other faculties and the Executive Board.

Only after several months, did the Faculty Board acknowledge these problems and started to intervene. They first spoke individually with the MT members (dean-dean, director-operational manager, board member education-program director) and later with the entire MT. However, it was not possible to reach agreements and no real action was taken.

### 2.2.3 UCT governance and organization

UCT consists of a Management Team, a teaching team (core team and junior teachers) and supporting staff. The MT is accountable to the ITC Faculty Board and manages the teaching team and supporting staff of UCT. The MT consists of a dean, a program director and an operational manager.

In the original design of the MT, the operational manager was thought of to be the formal manager of all UCT employees (both scientific staff and supporting staff). It soon became clear to everyone that this mandate of the operational manager was not workable. A much better proposal was to divide the responsibilities over the operational manager (support staff) and program director (scientific staff).

However, the Faculty Board and the MT were unable to discuss this problem in such a way that a change in the organizational structure and mandates could be made.

There was friction between the MT and the Faculty Board, but also between the MT members themselves. The MT members were not appointed at the same time. It took several months between the appointment of the dean and the appointment of the program director. Moreover, the dean was formerly one of the pioneers of ATLAS, while the program director was completely new and unfamiliar with ATLAS, University of Twente and the entire Dutch educational system. This created an imbalance in the MT, which could not be straightened out just like that. On top of that, there was no agreement on what was needed for UCT within the MT and as such a collegial management approach did not work. Because of lack in communication between the MT members, each MT member went her own way, which finally also created friction between MT and supporting staff and MT and teaching team.

### 2.2.4 ATLAS (Academy of Technology, Liberal Arts and Sciences)

In 2013, ATLAS started as a new pilot with some pioneers. The aim was to start a bachelor program where technology and society could meet: the ATLAS program. This also fitted in well with the vision of UT (High Tech and Human Touch). A new didactic approach was chosen, in which small-scale, innovativeness, self-directiveness and reflection skills would be central pillars.

A pilot normally is evaluated after a few years. In case of a successful pilot, the activity must then be embedded in the regular organization and processes. It is important to take time to maintain the new and successful aspects of the pilot while scaling the pilot into a sustainable activity. With the accreditation of the ATLAS program in 2019, a start has been made for these sustainable and workable processes, but due to changes in the UCT management, these processes have never been properly implemented, evaluated and/or further developed. It was expected that a new MT could renew this implementation process. However, in the assignment of the MT, this subject was not given sufficient priority and the Faculty Board did not provide clear directions later in the process.

In the current situation, there is no longer a shared vision on the ATLAS program. There are different views about:

- Ambition numbers of student intake and student profile
- Scope/width program (with or without humanities in core)
- The degree of self-directiveness in learning over the years
- Whether or not to grade by numbers (comparability of diplomas)
- Innovative power (holding on to first principles or further developing ATLAS didactics)

This difference in vision and the insufficient communication within the team that works for ATLAS leads to dissatisfaction and a feeling of high work pressure for all staff members.

#### 2.2.5 Hiring policy/onboarding/supervision

The current MT members are all relatively inexperienced leaders. This was noted as a risk during the recruitment process, but the (also fairly new) Faculty Board ultimately chose to appoint the MT members, under the condition that the MT members would be properly supervised and guided. It was decided to have the guiding carried out with the help of an external agency, which makes use of a management game. However, this way of onboarding/guidance was not supported by the individual MT members. At the same time, the Corona pandemic was at its peak, and it was hardly possible to meet each other in person. The guidance of the MT members almost came to a standstill after that. Some coaching still took place, but the MT was already 1-0 behind before they had even started.

Because of a high turnaround in staff, junior staff members had to perform important coordinating and leading tasks. This is possible, with sufficient guidance for this junior staff. But the MT was so busy trying to start up their own work, that they were not able to provide this guidance.

#### 2.2.6 Culture

A change of leadership normally will lead to some troubles within the team. But the scale of the troubles within UCT is currently so high that employees are hindered in their work and life (well-being).

The culture within UCT is not safe now and a lot of energy is being spent on 'the hassle' that is constantly present. There is a lot of talk about bullying, being summoned, getting too much responsibility, too little guidance. This has led to an unsafe environment at all levels. Everyone deals with this in their own way. Some flee into discussions about mandates and

agreements, some get sick, some argue, some gossip, some leave, some continue to muddle through. In all cases, interviewees say the students is what makes them go on.

In the meantime, students are becoming more and more aware of the unsafe culture among employees. On top of that they are dissatisfied about the direction UCT is going. They complain about the clarity in the program, they indicate there is too little guidance, they complain about the workload, and they are scared the ATLAS diploma is not valued at the right level by other universities.

### 2.3 Overall findings: lack of common goals

It is clear that UCT employees are not working together at the moment. Also, the different stakeholders are not aligned and follow their own route. Important differences are mentioned below:

- The Executive Board wants a well-functioning UCT, broadly supported by the entire university, with an intake of 75-150 students per year. A College with which they can profile themselves well externally and which is an innovative testing ground for other programs within the university.
- The ICT Faculty Board wants to have an independently functioning UCT that produces bachelor's graduate students who can enroll in ITC/UT master's programs. All Faculty Board members would like to help or think along with the MT UCT, but do not see a directing role for themselves.
- The MT-UCT does not have a clear and common goal. The MT members each work for themselves:
  - The *dean* mainly focuses on a new minor, with which she tries to gain broad support from the university. The minor is still in a planning phase; the UCT teachers are not involved.
  - The *program director* is busy aligning the current ATLAS program according to didactic principles
  - The *operational manager* tries to manage all processes, but actually has an impossible task as manager of both scientific and supporting staff.
- The core team would like to retain the original principles of the ATLAS pilot: a broad program for very good students (honors), self-directive learning, socially driven projects, no assessment based on numbers and reflection on own learning. They aim for a small intake of students (approx. 40 students per year). The core team believes that they should be able to make program decisions based on extensive discussions and consensus.
- The junior lecturers would like to further develop the program, even if that means to drift a little away from the original principles. They would like to do this together with student input. They indicate that the ATLAS program as is now, demands too much from students.



### 3 Conclusions and advice

All stakeholders (management, lecturers, students, alumni, supporting staff) see the value of a UCT-ATLAS program in the (Dutch) educational landscape. But all stakeholders also foresee the end of the ATLAS program and the University College Twente, if no changes are being made. The current situation is not sustainable for several reasons. But the good news is, that a lot is still possible if measures are being taken on different levels.

1. Discuss (with management, staff and students) and then decide on what ATLAS should stand for. Write down and communicate a common vision for ATLAS. Be convinced that all UCT staff members subscribe to the vision or choose to reorient on their career path.

Items that should be addressed in the vision are:

- \* Does ATLAS need to be in a College? Are there alternatives? Could ATLAS be an honors degree or a “regular” bachelor program?
  - \* What is the intake ambition of ATLAS (number and entry criteria)? What is needed to achieve this?
  - \* How broad does ATLAS need to be? And how is this communicated in recruitment means. E.g.,
    - Is humanities included in the core?
    - Should ATLAS students be able to study any course, or should restrictions be in place?
    - How much freedom are students given over the different years of the ATLAS program? Should study paths be introduced?
  - \* Should grading by numbers be reintroduced? And/or how can the ATLAS diploma better be valued?
  - \* What should the maximum workload be for students?
  - \* For which master programs does the ATLAS diploma give the proper entry requirements? Should Twente master programs develop (entry requirement) courses for the ATLAS program?
2. Invest in leadership
    - \* Appoint a UCT portfolio holder within the Executive Board and let this be the connector for the faculties and ATLAS.
    - \* Make decisions in what is expected from the Faculty Board. Is the Faculty Board responsible for UCT, or is the faculty only a support office for UCT?
    - \* Adjust the governance of UCT and ensure a better division of tasks within the MT.
    - \* Appoint an experienced interim dean UCT to get ATLAS back on track within one or two years, so the next accreditation assessment can be met with confidence.
  3. Implement ATLAS as a structural activity
    - \* Make a new business case for ATLAS
    - \* Make use of existing working processes for ATLAS
    - \* Invest in the well-being of staff. Consider how the workload of staff can be reduced and implement this.

\* Invest in the well-being of students and implement a support system.

4. Make use of ATLAS as an innovative playground for promising teaching staff  
It should be an honor to teach at ATLAS. All promising teaching staff should be able to teach at ATLAS and thus work on their Basic or Senior Teaching Qualifications. So, limit the years lecturers can teach at ATLAS, make use of a rotation schedule, invest in a good onboarding policy and work together with the Centre of Expertise in Learning and Teaching (CELT). This will lead to a permanent influx of new teaching staff coming from different faculties and guarantees the innovative capacity of ATLAS and at the same time connects ATLAS to all faculties.

## 4 Accountability

To carry out the evaluation as safely as possible and to give everyone the opportunity to give his/her opinion about UCT and ATLAS, individual interviews were held with various stakeholders: board members, management, lecturers, support staff, students and alumni. In addition, the option to request an interview has been widely shared within the teaching team. Ultimately, 22 interviews took place.

Three questions were discussed in the interviews:

1. Of which aspects of the UCT/ATLAS are you proud?
2. What aspects of the UCT/ATLAS do you think could be improved?
3. If you were able to change something, without negative consequences, what would you change for UCT/ATLAS?

In the discussions, the participant's own perspective was discussed, and the participants were asked to give explanatory examples.

Notes have been made of all interviews. The final report was written based upon these interviews.