

Young Academy Twente on developments in *Building Blocks*

June 2024

As Young Academy Twente (YAT), we are here to build a community of young academics, provide a safe environment to learn, facilitate a learning platform for academic leadership, and thereby strengthen the societal impact of our university. The UT is exposed to external threats, including increasing [financial deficits](#), decreasing [influx of international students](#), and—moreover—an ever-changing [demand of society](#). We are pleased to see that the [UT addresses these threats](#) and has defined a set of Building Blocks (see appendix). According to the findings of [MARAP04](#), priority should be given to re-examining how we organise our teaching, stabilising student influx, improving our OBP-WP ratio, and increasing competitive research funding to, first and foremost, resolve the [financial deficits](#).

We [feel responsible](#) to support these efforts and, herewith, we wish to offer our help in realizing the **Building Blocks that will have an impact on all early-career academics**. YAT hosts members that *i)* are employed as staff in all five faculties, ranging from assistant to associate to adjunct professors, *ii)* have demonstrated their excellence in acquiring second and third money flow of funds, and *iii)* take their role in the community as ambassadors for the UT. Accordingly, the diversity (in disciplines and career phases), academic excellence, and academic citizenship make YAT a unique stakeholder. We provide three examples of how we could contribute to the Building Blocks:

1. Contributing to “Efficiency of BSc and MSc education” (Strategic Building Block 2): We acknowledge that the current financial landscape necessitates changes in how we deliver our BSc and MSc programs. At the same time, we are concerned to not decrease the quality of education. All members of YAT are experienced and deeply involved in educational activities. Our members are distributed across the faculties: S&T (14), EEMCS (8), ITC (3), BMS (5), ET (4). We could create a **diverse panel** to support in:

- *A. Being available for questions while developing an inventory of education costs, creating insights into the affordability of our education.*
- *B. Creating feedback panels to propose methods for education innovation, maintaining educational quality amidst efficiency improvements.*

These actions can be integrated within our already existing education pillar. We note that increasing efficiency must not lose the focus on us being one university. For instance, according to the current allocation model, it would be more ‘efficient’ if mathematics would be taught within their own faculty instead of ‘allocating’ the costs for teaching mathematics to one faculty. However efficiency or affordability will be defined, we must prevent that they lead to [compartmentalization of faculties](#).

2. Contributing to “Increase second and third flow of funds” and “Focus in research on impact portfolio” (Strategic Building Blocks 4&5): We acknowledge that the current financial situation requires an increase income and a sharper focus on allocating people and resources. Each YAT member participates in, or leads, a research group. The excellence in landing research grants and developing impact of our research is evidenced by numerous grants, ranging from prestigious personal grants (Veni, Vidi, ERC StG, and ERC CoG) to large consortia grants (*e.g.*, NWA, Horizon Europe, NWO Perspectief) to valorization grants (*e.g.*, Take-off, EIC Pathfinder, ERC Proof-of-Concept). We can contribute by creating an **excellent panel** to support in:

- *A. Developing plans for attracting second and third flow of funds by creating a peer learning environment.*
- *B. Organizing ideation/matchmaking workshops, maximizing the potential of the UT to become a frontrunner on interdisciplinary themes such as, chip technology, climate, health, and security.*

These actions can be integrated within our already existing team science pillar. We note that ramping up the focus on impact portfolios of our research and teaching (specifically targeted at chip technology, climate, health and security) may increase the focus on allocation. However, an increase in second and third party projects means increasing demand for and administration. It is therefore also important to assess the results of Strategic Building Block 7 to determine whether increasing the number of research projects could enhance the use of research infrastructure and help reduce financial deficits.

3. Reducing travel costs (Operational Building Block 8): We agree that a behavioral change is necessary to both reduce the travel costs and reduce the CO₂ emissions. However, mobility and international collaborations are essential for visibility and research and teaching activities of young academics, both on individual and on organizational levels. Nevertheless, **as ambassadors** of this group of young academics, YAT members feel responsible to lead by example and shape policies accordingly. In order to do so, we would like to contribute constructively to discussions around the following themes:

- A. Cutting down costs undoubtedly also entails a reduction in travel in general and therefore a stricter evaluation whether traveling is necessary or not. This raises the question: Who decides on the necessity of the travel? Clear guidelines and support systems should be in place to ensure fairness and equity across faculties and departments, and among individual staff members. The plan should include provisions to support essential travel for young researchers, ensuring that their career development and UT's visibility are not compromised disproportionately. We are open to discuss and help shaping such policies and guidelines.
- B. Picking low-hanging fruit that does not affect the career development as mentioned under the previous point. One such example is making 2nd class train travel the default within the UT. Members of YAT already take their responsibility and have already started to travel 2nd class.
- C. The implementation of this building block is directly related to the discussion on reducing the carbon emissions that result from flying. The current SEE proposal for a UT CO₂ reduction-pricing and compensation plan intends to create a penalty for flying and an incentive for sustainability initiatives at the UT. We believe that the extra costs resulting from such a CO₂ price should be ideally used to supplement more sustainable travel alternatives, to avoid an increase in overall traveling costs. Together with the Green Young Academy (GYA) we support policy changes that encourage sustainable travel. From this perspective, we can share insights from other initiatives (e.g., the "carbon tax" at TU Delft) and aid in finding a balanced travel policy regarding sustainability, costs, and fairness.

Appendix: Building Blocks

A total of 20 building blocks, 11 strategic and 9 operational are defined

<i>Strategic projects</i>	<i>Operational projects</i>
1. Taskforce student intake	1. Optimising administrative processes
2. Efficiency of BSc and MSc education	2. Reducing external hiring
3. Focus in new study programmes	3. Healthy balance in scientific- support staff ratio
4. Increase second and third flow of funds	4. Increasing insight via dashboards
5. Focus in research on impact portfolio	5. Further development of HR programmes
6. Assessment UT Strategic Impulse Programmes	6. Optimise use of leave hours
7. More efficient use of research infrastructure	7. Assessment licences
8. Lifelong Learning (LLL)	8. Reducing travel costs
9. Review strategic collaborations	9. Increase mobility of teaching staff
10. Embrace a more agile way of working	
11. Assessment interfaculty units	