



Iedereen (Everyone) Professor

The Maastricht Young Academy was pleased to read the opinion piece authored by Jan Smits, Dean of the Law Faculty, entitled "[Weg met de hoogleraar: iedereen professor](#)" (NRC, 15 Feb 2023). Smits advocates for abolishing the hierarchical Dutch academic rank system in favour of giving us all the title of "professor", and allowing career progression to move forward via pay grades and scales. We agree that the only viable option is "*iedereen professor*".

A similar view is shared by the academic education union AOb in their [position paper](#) on Recognition & Rewards, as well as by the president of the KNAW, Marileen Dogterom ([KNAW News Column](#), 6 Feb 2023). Dogterom focuses on Assistant and Associate Professors being granted *ius promovendi* (the right to be the main supervisor and to confer doctorates), but does not call for abolishing academic ranks. Like Smits, the AOb union explicitly proposes the abolishment of rank titles.

Reserving the title "Professor" for only those in the latest stages of their career and not allowing it to be used by Assistant or Associate Professors is out of place in international academia and serves little positive purpose. While we have heard some arguments in favour of retaining the *status quo*, we do not find these arguments convincing. The stratification of professorial ranking does not reflect real differences in the nature and quality of our work. Further, the administrative and social implications of rank titles create tangible barriers to advancement for early career academics, both within the university and at an international level.

With the current stratification of titles, some academics lose out on the enriching experience of being the main supervisor (*promotor*) of PhD researchers, despite having appointments as Assistant and Associate Professors and, often, years of expertise in conducting and coordinating research. This impacts us both internally and externally. While Maastricht University grants Associate Professors *ius promovendi*, which is an improvement upon the situation in many other Dutch universities, they still cannot use the title of Professor. Internationally, as we join or lead research consortia, or participate in projects such as conferences or collective publications, we appear to be lesser than scholars of our same experience and calibre because they are "Professors" and we are not. This may have serious implications for our competitiveness for research funding or our access to scientific opportunities. In both situations, scholarship in the Netherlands suffers, as do our individual careers. This is not how it is done elsewhere, and we can think of no advantage to gatekeeping the title of "Professor".

As we move forward with new models of Recognition & Rewards that acknowledge the important and valid *differences* in our career pathways, we believe the time is right to champion what we *share*. In an era where inclusivity and diversity are increasingly important in academia, it is crucial that we take steps to ensure that all individuals are given equal opportunities to succeed and make a meaningful impact in their fields of study. We are all academics and we should share a title that reflects that. The Maastricht Young Academy therefore supports the proposal to abolish the exclusivity of the title "Professor": it would be a move towards a more egalitarian workplace for us all.

— The Maastricht Young Academy (27 February 2023)

