

“The academic’s burden. University professors under perverse pressure?”

A young academic’s perspective

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- Member of the Young Academy but not speaking on her behalf
- 40 academics, 40 different situations, 40 opinions
- All motivated to think about the university of the future
- 1 common point of view: our profession is the most beautiful one in the world



Pressure?

- Pressure of research (finding money to sustain and increase research group)
 - partly personal choice
 - leads to publication pressure but strongly dependent on field & situation
- Pressure of teaching
 - evaluated but not rewarded

Pressure?

- Pressure of service to society
 - box needs to be ticked
 - consensus takes time
- Pressure of service to scientific community and society at large
 - no but perhaps should be higher?
 - no direct evaluation or reward
- Pressure of administration
 - will always be perceived as too high (this does not mean that it is not too high). Depends a lot on department/university & funding sources

Perverse pressure?

- From a young academic's perspective
 - Access to tenure track
 - Obtaining tenure

Access to tenure track

- Right person at right place *at right time*
- Evaluated on 'all' criteria but only research is quantifiable
 - Focus on research
 - Development of other skills is secondary

But

- Brilliant researchers not necessarily make for brilliant professors
- Reality of the profession quite different from path towards it

Evaluation overload

- Tenure Track is 2-cutting sword
- Focus on constant evaluation at time when you should be doing your most innovative & risky research
- Staying on the straight and (disciplinary) narrow is rewarded much more
- Less quantitative, more qualitative

Personal situation

- Comfortable personal position: tenured professor in Liège, part-time associate professor in Leuven
 - Move to Liège when fit with/support from Leuven department was too low
 - Now, no uncertainty about future position
 - Never compromised or did things because it might be necessary/better for career.
- Personal challenge: work-life balance
 - Married
 - mother of 2 young children



Only an academic's burden?

- Aren't we just an SME like any other?
 - Many people are just as dedicated to and/or busy with their jobs outside of academia as we are and are also not in full control of what they want to do (no matter how good the idea may be).
 - 10% chance of making it into the higher echelons is not only true for universities
- We are all curious by nature. We want to do a lot of things in parallel. So part of the pressure we bring on ourselves.