Executive Summary

Recent decades have seen growing calls to reform the criteria underpinning academic career progression, with concerns raised about the undervaluation of university teaching in appointment and promotion processes. A global shift is now underway, as pioneering research-intensive universities rethink how they reward teaching in academic careers and introduce initiatives that could redefine how teaching is supported and recognised across the sector.

This report is designed to inspire and inform universities seeking to transform their systems of reward for university teaching. It is structured in two sections:

> **Section A** maps the global movement for change and identifies the front-runner universities;

> **Section B** explores how these leading universities are addressing key barriers to change.

The report explores the evolving landscape of how university teaching is supported, evaluated and rewarded within academic careers. It draws on interviews with over 130 leaders and change-makers from 26 countries who are actively engaged in reshaping reward systems in their university/region.

Section A points to a sector in flux, with universities worldwide driving root-and-branch changes to how they reward university teaching. Interviewees were asked to identify universities at the forefront of this change. In all, 127 universities from 32 countries were identified. Of these, 38 institutions were identified by three or more interviewees and are referred to as the sector's *front-runners* hereafter. The 12 most frequently cited universities are presented in the chart below. As the chart indicates, the momentum for change is starting to take root in key geographic pockets, particularly Northern Europe. These far-reaching changes are driven by a range of factors, including institutional pressures (for example, rising student tuition fees and student expectations), as well as long-standing concerns about how teaching achievement is recognised in academic careers.
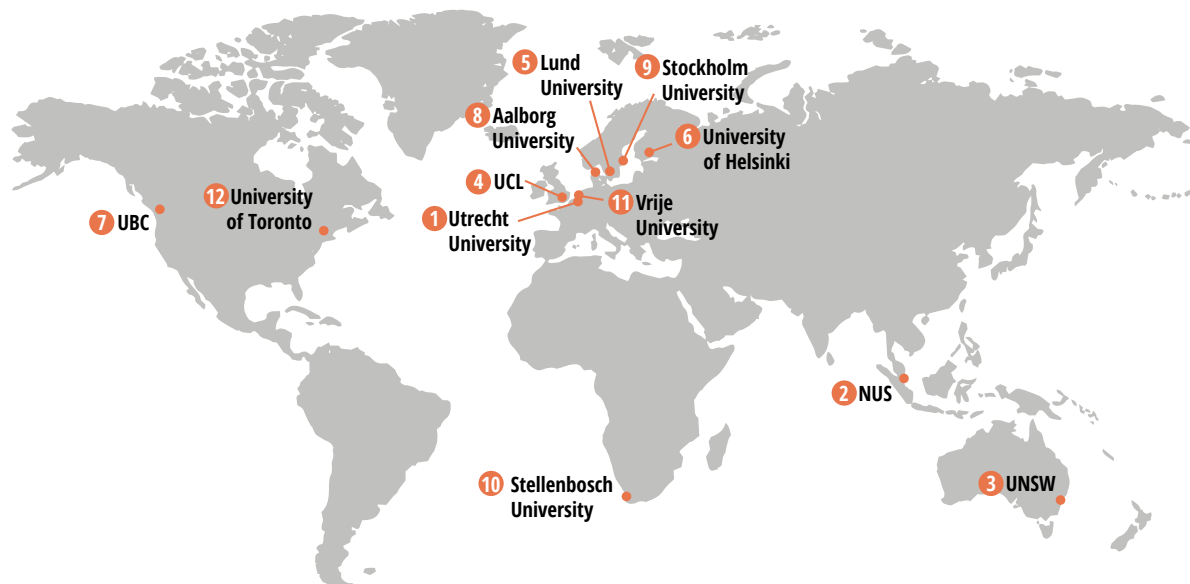
1 Utrecht University

Cited by almost one in four interviewees, Utrecht University was noted for its educational culture, blended career pathway and educational leadership programmes.

2 NUS

NUS was cited for the thoughtful redesign of its *Educator Track* career pathway as well as the *External Review Panel* established to evaluate candidates on this track.

3 UNSW Sydney

UNSW was noted for the design of its *Education Focused* pathway and its success in establishing collegial communities of practice amongst this academic group.

4 UCL

UCL was noted for the quality of its *Academic Careers Framework* that allows educational impact to play a more prominent role in academic career advancement.

5 Lund University

Lund University was commended, in particular, for the design and regional impact of the *Pedagogical Academy* in the university's Faculty of Engineering.

While practices at front-runner universities reflect their own institutional contexts and cultures, their approaches share common features. For example, cross-institutional partnerships play a major role in driving and supporting change to reward systems at almost all front-runners. Most have also adopted unified standards for university teaching that establish a shared understanding of the advancement criteria that apply across all university processes, including educational development, performance reviews, and promotion. In addition, almost all front-runners are actively embedding one or more of the following three development priorities: *collegiality* (redesigning reward systems to incentivise collaborative educational cultures and practices); *educational leadership* (establishing clear definitions, support systems and routes to career progression via educational leadership); and *flexible career pathways* (supporting and promoting diverse academic careers as shaped by individual areas of interest and expertise). These shared themes are threaded throughout the report.

Section B provides a detailed guide to how front-runners are tackling four key challenges faced by universities seeking to improve the reward of teaching in academic careers:

1. **how to design robust academic career pathways** that appropriately promote and reward advancement in university teaching throughout academic careers. Most front-runners adopt one or more of three career pathway models: *blended career track* (a flexible pathway supporting diverse academic profiles and advancement on a single track); *education-focused career track* (a high-status pathway offering education-focused academics autonomy, robust advancement criteria and diverse progression opportunities); and *the Pedagogical Merit model* (a reward system operating in parallel to formal career pathways, offering recognition and salary increases for academics who meet a threshold level of 'pedagogical competence').

2. **how to evaluate university teaching** in ways that offer a robust and transparent appraisal of an academic's educational impact and achievement during appointments and promotions. The report highlights best practices in three core elements of the evaluation process: *defining standards* (the expectations and frameworks used to benchmark achievement and progression in university teaching); *demonstrating impact* (the tools used by academics to identify and showcase their impact and achievement in university teaching); and *assessing candidates* (the capacity of appointment/promotion committees to offer a reliable and informed assessment of the candidate's impact and achievement in university teaching).

3. **how to build effective support systems** that engage all academics – across diverse profiles, career stages and areas of expertise – in effective and continuous educational development. The report examines the strategies adopted at front-runner universities to: safeguard time for academics to engage in educational activities likely to enhance their careers, beyond their assigned 'teaching responsibilities'; harmonise practices across institutional processes; promote continuous professional growth; and foster educational leadership.

4. **how to drive and support sustainable change** in the face of cultural and structural barriers that work against the effective reward of university teaching. Success at front-runner universities is associated with three interrelated strategies: building institutional cultures that value and champion university teaching; fostering cross-institutional partnerships to share ideas, establish common standards and benchmark progress; and tracking the impacts of change to demonstrate measurable benefits and guide ongoing reforms.

Taken together, the findings from Sections A and B suggest that a unified approach that promotes collegiality and diversity, and is grounded in cross-institutional collaboration, can elevate the status of university teaching. As the global higher education sector evolves, these elements will be critical for ensuring that excellence in university teaching is recognised and rewarded in academic careers. It will also facilitate the national and global mobility of a new generation of academics whose impact and achievement in university teaching can more easily be tracked and evaluated.