

Looking back on over a decade of T@UU

Unfortunately, after more than ten years of connecting, inspiring and empowering teachers, T@UU (the Teaching Community of Utrecht University) is coming to an end, a decision that follows the recent university-wide budget cuts.

This moment invites reflection: on what we have built together, the ideas we have shared and the many ways in which T@UU has shaped teaching and learning at our university. Things we hope will remain alive, even after the financial dismemberment of the T@UU.

From a small initiative to a vibrant community

When T@UU began in 2013, its mission was simple yet ambitious: to create a space for teachers from all faculties to come together, exchange ideas and strengthen their collective voice. Early meetings focused on teaching philosophies, sharing good practices and building bridges between departments/faculties. What started as an initiative of a handful of passionate educators soon grew into a network that connected hundreds of teachers across Utrecht University. Through blogs, workshops, interviews and community events, T@UU became a living archive of teaching innovation, capturing the creativity, struggles and reflections of those who make university education what it is.

Twelve years of themes, ideas and action

Over the years, T@UU has offered a home for diverse conversations, on teaching pedagogy, policy and everything beyond. Among the many initiatives and collaborations, three projects stand out:

Lieve Willemijn (2016-2020): a special blog series where teachers could anonymously share their questions, doubts and struggles with the T@UU community and receive thoughtful advice. Topics ranged from students' wishes for more traditional teaching to sparking motivation, dealing with gossip, navigating clothing norms, coping with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and everything in between. Lieve Willemijn created a unique form of peer support, showing that vulnerability and curiosity are central to strong teaching communities.

'Ik Vertrek' Podcast (2021-2022): In this podcast, listeners meet the temporary lecturers at Utrecht University. What drives them to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to providing high-quality academic education? They were asked all about their lectures, colleagues and students. They also reflect on their position at the university. After all, temporary lecturers are often forced to leave. How do they experience this? And what are the consequences for themselves and for education? The podcast was nominated for a Academiekus and sparked discussion about temporary contracts.

Impact of budget cuts (2025): Our most recent project focused on understanding the impact of the upcoming budget cuts on university staff. In collaboration with the Utrecht Young Academy, we conducted a university-wide survey and published a report capturing the perspectives and concerns of staff across faculties and career stages. The findings shed light on anticipated effects on teaching, research, workload, job security and well-being and underline the urgent need for clear communication and meaningful involvement in decision-making. Above all, the project reaffirmed the importance of community and solidarity in times of uncertainty.

Some of the key themes that defined the past decade include:

- Community building; creating networks among teachers who often work in isolation within their faculties.
- Educational innovation; from active learning to blended classrooms and creative assessment.
- Professional development; offering spaces for reflection, peer learning and shared growth.
- Inclusivity and interdisciplinarity; exploring how diverse perspectives enrich teaching and learning.
- Policy dialogue and advocacy; speaking up about issues such as workload, recognition, and, more recently, university budget cuts.

Throughout the years, T@UU has encouraged teachers to not only teach better, but also giving them the opportunity to be heard and to have a say in how education is organized and valued.

Challenges and lessons learned

T@UU's story is also one of perseverance.

Keeping a grassroots community alive within a large institution was never easy. Funding was limited, and balancing autonomy with institutional alignment often required creative navigation. Yet, the community persisted, fueled by volunteers, intrinsic motivation and a shared belief in and passion for the importance of good teaching.

Some lessons stand out:

- **Communities need care.** Engagement doesn't happen automatically, it grows through listening, participation and recognition.
- **Visibility matters.** By consistently sharing stories, ideas and perspectives, T@UU made teaching visible and valued.
- **Institutional change starts from people.** Many initiatives that began within T@UU later found their way into broader university policies or programs.

A legacy that remains

Although T@UU concludes its journey, its impact remains tangible. The connections built, the conversations started and the practices developed over these years continue to shape how Utrecht University thinks about teaching, learning and academic community.

T@UU showed that teachers are creators of knowledge, culture and change.

To everyone who contributed, by writing a blog, joining a workshop, mentoring a colleague, or speaking up about what matters, **thank you.**

While the formal structure of T@UU may end, the need for community among teachers remains. Let us continue to meet, share, and support one another, across faculties and disciplines. And may Utrecht University continue to stimulate and facilitate spaces where teachers can connect, collaborate and shape the future of education together.