

JURY REPORT

SURF Research Support Champions 2022

While it's often researchers that are put in the spotlight, supporters are indispensable for high-quality scientific and scholarly output. They do vital work, but their work is often invisible. From an IT and data management perspective, research supporters are the bridge between researchers and research IT. The SURF Research Support Championship recognises those who have made remarkable efforts to support research within their institution.

The candidates for the award are nominated by their colleagues, by researchers and by managers. The jury determines the winners based on the descriptions in the nomination forms. First and foremost, the jury wants to stress that *all* the research supporters that were put forward by their colleagues in this year's championship are **winners**. When reading the nomination forms that were submitted, it's clear that they all have enormous added value. It is nice to see that the people who nominated these research supporters are so incredibly appreciative of them.

The diversity of the candidates was another thing that struck us. This also illustrates how diverse the field is. What is needed to provide research support, is reflected in the varied list of candidates. Those jury members who work in research, enjoyed seeing that so many people are so committed to the research they support.

However, the jury did succeed in unanimously choosing evident Research Support Champions in 3 categories. Please note that jury members refrained from judging when a candidate was employed at their own institution. To the winners we would like to say: this is not so much an award from SURF - it's really a recognition by your peers, who have taken the trouble to nominate you.

Winner in the category Universities:

Serkan Girgin, University of Twente

Serkan was nominated by multiple people: colleagues at University of Twente (UT), but also researchers abroad. He clearly has a broad network. At UT, he works as assistant professor and head of the Center of Expertise in Big Geodata Science (CRIB). He created a data analysis platform that provides easy access to a multitude of open source geo-spatial analysis methods and tools. This benefits interdisciplinary research and education at the UT.

The nominations show that Serkan really has an impact in his field. He is very visible and active in promoting open and reproducible research in the wider scientific community, at symposia, workshops, and conferences. Serkan also looks across national borders: he currently plays a critical role in the European Space Agency EO Africa project. The aim of this project is to facilitate adoption of Earth Observation and related space technology in Africa. Furthermore, the jury is pleased that Serkan is preparing a new generation, for example by teaching students to successfully run compute-intensive projects.

Some highlights from the nomination forms that we received:

“Serkan has worked with utter devotion to create a center with a cloud computing infrastructure that now many staff and students are using on a daily basis for all their computing jobs with geospatial data that do not fit on their laptop.”

“Moreover, the whole process has also given many researchers a much better understanding of what it means practically to do open science and develop verifiable open source workflows.”

“He lends an ear to everyone asking for advice, whether courseware student, MSc or PhD project, staff or project consortium. He is a careful listener and advises promptly and to the point. He also carefully thinks whether the challenges that all these people face deserve a wider or more generic solution that is worth pursuing in GI Science itself.”

“CRIB is, in my view, the yardstick for research support in data science.”

“Without his support and CRIB, my research would not have been possible.”

Winner in the category Universities of Applied Sciences:

Sarah Coombs, Saxion

Sarah was also nominated more than once, which enabled the jury to form a good impression of her work. As a Research Support Advisor she does not only support researchers from her own institution, but she is also very active nationally and internationally. She is a true expert and has played an important role in the professionalisation of data stewardship.

Among many other things, Sarah has made sure that 20 universities of applied sciences have joined forces in a Digital Competence Center (DCC) in order to work together on research support at a national level. She also advises the Vlaamse Hogescholenraad, the Flemish organisation of universities of applied sciences. In her spare time, she works on her PhD research addressing the impact of practice oriented research.

Sarah's strength is that she understands the work of the researcher. She supports them directly by providing advice and making connections between people. She also ensures that the needs felt by researchers are put on the agendas of various steering committees, think tanks and policy groups. This is essential in order to achieve a common approach to practice-based research for Open Science, and to make sure that the various institutions provide the necessary resources for this.

In the words of one of the people who nominated her:

“For years, Sarah has been putting her heart and soul into improving research support within the universities of applied sciences. She has put research support on the map both within Saxion and nationally.”

Winner in the Category UMC & Research:

Michèle Huijberts, Leiden UMC

As an information architect at the Radiology department of Leiden UMC, Michèle is a real IT key player. One example of how he enables researchers, is his role in a creating an infrastructure that automatically extracts imaging data and feeds it through a pipeline of anonymization and



curation to a research storage system. This required building connections between the hospital storage system, the MRI scanner hardware, the system for electronic patient information, and a server for imaging anonymization to comply with privacy regulations. Not only did he succeed in this difficult task, he also maintained relations with the central IT department, Philips as the vendor of the MRI scanner, and other stakeholders.

This system currently allows researchers to investigate accelerations of the MRI scanners, so that patients can be scanned in under 10 minutes rather than the current 30-60 minutes. This has tremendous implications for patient comfort, but also logistic throughput and hospital finances. The research data infrastructure also allows the sharing of data and collaborations with institutes around the world, who use similar systems.

A couple of quotes:

“With the advent of AI for medical imaging there is increasing need for tailored IT solutions. Research data infrastructure needs to be of the highest quality while conforming to privacy and good research practice standards. And scalable deep learning compute is a key necessity for our research. Michèle takes care of all these aspects. He has a keen eye for current and future trends in data-intensive research needs, and is quickly able to identify the IT systems that support these.”

“Michèle goes above and beyond to support all the digital needs in our group, from workstation installation all the way to shared national imaging storage, or the ability to make connections between hospital databases. Often coming up with solutions that we researchers only realize later is an excellent support system taking our research further. And all with enthusiasm and humor that make interactions a pleasure!”

The jury:

Ron Augustus
(chief innovation officer SURF, chair)

Joris van Eijnatten
(Netherlands eScience Center)

Petra Drankier
(NFU)

Lisa Oskam
(Promovendi Netwerk Nederland)

Hans Vossensteyn
(DCC PO/Saxion)

Jeroen Rombouts
(DCC implementatienetwerk/EUR)