

VU Vision on Recognition & Rewards

About this document

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Background and scope

This document is a part of the work of the [VU Recognition & Rewards Committee](#). It describes VU Amsterdam's vision on Recognition & Rewards, which:

1. provides details on the VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands) position paper '[Room for everyone's talent](#)', and
2. contributes to the objectives of the [VU Strategic Plan for 2020-2025](#) (e.g. 'open, personal and responsible').

The modernization of our Recognition & Rewards system is embedded in national and international initiatives. Within the Netherlands, we cooperate with other universities (VSNU), the Dutch Research Council (NWO), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centre (NFU) and the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw).

The scope of this vision is currently limited to the academic staff, since this is also the scope of the VSNU position paper. Support staff is addressed when directly involved in primary tasks (e.g. laboratory assistants, data stewards).

Acknowledgements: The committee is grateful for the extensive comments that have been made on this document by a large number of people from various segments of the VU community and beyond. These comments, along with notes on how these comments have been addressed, are available for review in the ‘comment history’. This is a living document; comments and text suggestions are always welcome in the Google Doc version of this document (see the link on the first page if you are reading a PDF version).

Introduction

This vision document provides direction to our objective of developing a future-proof recruitment policy and reward system that is consistent with the mission, identity and values of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Central concepts in these efforts include the recognition and reward of diverse roles and of cooperation in teams. Education, research, valorization, open science and leadership are equally valued in the new system. However, not every staff member is necessarily expected to attain competence in all of these professional aspects. Various career paths allow academics to develop their specific talents.

We have grown accustomed to our current ways of recognizing and rewarding academic work. It is ingrained in our everyday practice in ways that we do not even notice anymore. This concise VU vision document is intended to reflect on our practice, provide insight and help to see new possibilities. As the VU community, we need to work together to make this document come alive, making it more concrete and meaningful as we work with its basic principles. We therefore hope that this document will continue to be a ‘living text’, and that this vision will be brought to life in all corners of the university. There is no such thing as a ‘one size fits all’ approach with regard to the Recognition & Reward system. As such, this document does not prescribe any rules and regulations. In practice, the various disciplines and faculties will make this vision tangible in their own manner — though with a common goal.

This vision corresponds directly to the core values of VU Amsterdam, with components including *personal* career paths, *responsible* leadership and *open* science. The vision contributes to the priority areas of VU Amsterdam: sustainability, entrepreneurship and diversity. We will assess the practical details of the vision along the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Vision

General

- This vision on Recognition & Rewards (R&R) in essence concerns *different and more flexible* ways of recognizing the contributions of the people involved, to which rewards should subsequently be attributed.
- This vision should not lead to more work for academics (e.g. by requiring them to submit more information for selection and appraisal procedures).
- In the interest of diversity, R&R should not rest solely on the assumption of a standard career path (e.g. undergraduate degree → PhD → post-doc → tenure track

→ permanent position); it should allow for variations and exceptions, such as for late bloomers, people entering and leaving the university with alternative career paths outside of academia, and “boomerangs”¹.

- The university has a limited number of tenured positions, which implies that not all potential qualified scholars can be appointed. For this reason it is essential that any appointment that could lead to a permanent position takes place through an open recruitment process that guarantees sensitivity to diversity and inclusiveness.
- The career paths of permanent staff members are personal: mobility from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor depends on individual development and not on the availability of positions. The same should ideally apply to mobility from Associate Professor to Full Professor.²
- Lecturers and post-doctoral researchers with temporary appointments are in a vulnerable position. This requires additional attention to and efforts for training, career development and expectation management, in order to enhance their career opportunities on the job market.
- All academic positions should feature opportunities for professional training, the initiation of innovation, and the development of leadership skills.
- In consultation, PhD students can use a limited part of their appointments to explore and strengthen their talents for education, administration and/or impact, in preparation for a career within the university or elsewhere.³
- This vision on R&R aligns well with the new approach to the annual talk (“jaargesprek”), which the VU introduced in 2020. The philosophy of the renewed annual consultation/appraisal is to place less emphasis on appraisal and more emphasis on career development. The input for the interview includes a reflection report (instead of a summary of achievements). Employees prepare their own proposed agendas for the points to be discussed during the annual consultation.
- Permanent staff members are expected to serve as role models and thus to take responsibility for R&R.

Emphasis on quality

- Quantitative indicators can be useful as instruments for measuring quality, yet they are a means and not an end in themselves. Referencing a quantitative measure without further elaboration is not a sufficient demonstration of a candidate’s quality. The indicators that are used should be validated; research indicators should conform to the principles of the DORA declaration.⁴
- As a rule, job requirements are defined in qualitative terms. Factsheets containing quantitative indicators (e.g. those existing for full-professor appointments) can be

¹ I.e. people who leave the scientific community to work outside of academia and return later in their career.

² A personal career path requires letting go of the staff-cohort model, in which staff members must wait for promotion until a position at the desired level becomes available. Personal career paths also imply that, in principle, upon the retirement of an Associate Professor/Full Professor, that position should be filled at the tenure-track level, thereby mitigating possible financial consequences. Assistant Professors/Associate Professors should be able to use these position titles (instead of the Dutch titles of UD/UHD) in external communication.

³ This must obviously fit within the scope of their research duties. Moreover, a dissertation is a proof of competence. The number of articles in a dissertation is thus a guideline, and not a given.

⁴ ‘Declaration on Research Assessment’, see <https://sfdora.org/>

useful for obtaining an overall impression of a candidate, but should be used in the spirit of “comply or explain” and should be accompanied by a narrative providing further details. A complete picture emerges through a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

- The information that academics are asked to submit for selection and appraisal procedures typically includes an annotated list of ‘top X’ achievements in a particular area (e.g. publications, media appearances, patents, educational innovation, leadership roles) and the team contexts (e.g. consortium, programme, management team) in which these were realized.

Balance between research, education, impact and leadership

- The permanent academic staff stands on two ‘legs’: every staff member is actively involved in both teaching and research.⁵
- The balance between teaching and research can vary from one staff member to another; it can also vary throughout the course of someone’s career. The academic grounding of permanent staff members is ensured by setting a minimum amount of teaching and a minimum amount of research. Although it can differ across disciplines, this lower limit typically ranges from 20% to 30%.
- For the recognition of teaching, the VU has developed and adopted the [Teaching Performance Framework](#).
- Valorization activities with economic and/or societal impact⁶ are recognized and rewarded as legitimate ways of performing teaching and/or research.⁷ For example, it is possible for a staff member to devote a significant part of the time for research to activities related to valorization.
- Not every individual staff member is expected to develop valorization activities. However, at the team level, teaching, research and impact should all be practised (teams are “three-legged”).
- Permanent staff members are expected to spend between 10% and 20% of their time on smaller management tasks. These duties are considered part of their regular research and teaching duties.⁸ Separate agreements are made for extensive management tasks (e.g. Head of Department, Programme Director).
- Talent policy is anchored at all levels of the university. Academic staff members are invited to profile themselves in terms of teaching, research, impact and/or leadership. Throughout their career, staff members receive coaching on personal development and competencies, and opportunities to develop themselves in particular areas (which is also a key discussion topic in the annual consultation).
- In selection and/or appraisal procedures, should clearly indicate the balance between research, teaching, impact and leadership in the dossier they submit, as well as in the allocation of time during job interviews.

⁵ For example, every staff member works on a research project, but not everyone writes grant proposals.

⁶ Societal impact can take on many forms, ranging from open-source software and public services to popular publications and opinion articles.

⁷ Examples of valorization activities within the context of teaching include contract-funded courses and programmes, community service by students and education for older people.

⁸ Research and teaching thus combine to account for 100%, including the associated institutional affairs.

Balance between individual and team

- Academics are increasingly working in teams of all types and sizes, including in national and international research projects, teaching teams, spin-offs and management teams. Staff members bring a variety of qualities into teams, together forming a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Senior academics are expected to be sensitive to the diverse individual contributions within a team, as well as to a proper balance between teaching, research, impact and leadership.
- Teaching teams (e.g. for courses or programmes) ensure balance in the distribution of tasks among staff members, with due consideration for knowledge exchange, intervision and new teaching methods.
- For young academics in particular, it is crucial for their contributions in teams to be visible. Programmes should devote attention to the rules and procedures concerning authorship (e.g. through a course on academic integrity). For example, with regard to publications, it is important for teams to give careful consideration to the list of authors and make agreements concerning contributions in an early stage. Senior staff members are expected to play a leading role in this regard.
- Academics who have made significant contributions to a research proposal but who are not mentioned in the proposal for formal reasons may include this in their CVs (e.g. as 'co-PI'), possibly accompanied by a narrative to provide clarification. The same applies to management roles (e.g. leading a work package for an EU project).
- In many cases, teams do not include only academic staff members, but also include support staff (e.g. laboratory assistants, instrument constructors, teaching staff and data managers). If significant, their contributions should be recognized and rewarded.

Academic Leadership

- Academic leadership is an essential competence that requires attention at every career stage. To this end, the university offers an appropriate and accessible range of developmental programmes.
- In '[The Art of Engagement](#)', VU Amsterdam has established four principles for academic leadership: (i) contribute to the academic community; (ii) have the courage to make decisions; (iii) be transparent and clear; and (iv) listen and provide space for growth.
- Leadership is not connected to a specific role or position, but it is a necessary condition for advancement through the academic ranks. For internal advancement, leadership capacities are assessed through a variety of means, including 360-degree feedback.
- All staff members, and particularly senior staff members, are expected to invest effort in healthy group relationships, talent development and social safety, such that everyone is able to participate and 'diva behaviour' is not tolerated.
- Senior staff members are expected to be willing to take on more extensive administrative duties (e.g. Head of Department and Programme Director) for certain periods of time. For such positions, the working hours that are allocated for institutional affairs can be temporarily expanded. Management and administration⁹

⁹ See also the draft version of '[VU Raamwerk Leidinggeven](#)' [VU Supervision Framework]

constitute a form of leadership in which an individual acts as a leader in order to manage the strategy, vision, people and resources of a specific component of the university.

Open Science

- Open Science is aimed at a more transparent manner of practicing and sharing science, with a focus on the entire scientific process: planning, data collection, analysis, publication and evaluation. Open Science benefits the quality, reproducibility and integrity of science, and also contributes to economic and societal impact (e.g. through start-ups or scientific communication).¹⁰
- Open Education is a form of Open Science in which teaching materials are shared with other lecturers, students and society as a whole.
- The transition to Open Science demands a cultural shift, which will take time and effort to achieve. Innovation and leadership that contribute to this cultural change are recognized and rewarded.
- Open access publishing is the standard for all publications.¹¹
- The sharing of research data,¹² research materials¹³ and teaching materials can promote progress in the academic community and in society as a whole.¹⁴ Efforts invested in making these materials publicly accessible should be rewarded and properly supported.
- In some cases, the sharing of teaching materials, research data and research materials is complicated, due to considerations of confidentiality, privacy and/or economic interests. In these situations, however, some form of sharing is usually possible, according to the principle of being ‘as open as possible, as closed as necessary’. Researchers who do not share their research data are expected to be able to explain their reasoning (‘comply or explain’).

¹⁰ The design of a research project should clearly reflect how the research will be shared with society (e.g. citizens, industry, government, NGOs) and how society will be involved in the process of setting up and carrying out the research.

¹¹ In 2020, this standard is difficult to apply in some disciplines. It is expected to become easier in the coming years.

¹² The [FAIR principles](#) provide a framework for sharing research data.

¹³ Examples include substances, samples, notes, instruments, software and protocols.

¹⁴ See the recent examples in relation to COVID-19.