

Framework for Teaching Performances at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

1. Introduction

Teaching is a key task of the university: it not only serves to train and educate young people, but also makes a significant contribution to society.

It is with this objective in mind that Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam wishes to teach students to become engaged and conscientious academics who are eager to explore and push the boundaries of their knowledge and beliefs.

Lecturers play an indispensable role in good-quality teaching, with the quality of teaching at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam being largely determined by the quality of its lecturers. Their ability to inspire students, their teaching skills, and their ability to situate their own subject within the larger context of the programme and society – and the ability to connect this with research – forms the basis of teaching at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Ensuring these qualities according to the lecturer's WP position level is central to the staff policy that applies to lecturers within Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

The Philosophy on Education, which revolves around the four core values enshrined in the words 'open,' 'responsible,' 'personal,' and 'involved in society,' acts as a benchmark for teaching within Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. 'Open' means providing the freedom for dialogue – both between lecturers as well as between lecturers and students – that is focused on academic insights and continuous academic development. 'Responsible' is about lecturers giving students constructive feedback, processing this, and being open to continuous professionalization, both individually and as part of a team. 'Personal' teaching entails teaching in which students and lecturers alike are free to voice their own opinions without risking adverse effects on their professionalism. 'Involved in society' implies that teaching is not only concentrated on the university itself, but also that this aspect is fostered for and with stakeholders outside academic education. In light of this, lecturers are members of an academic community in which the core values of 'open,' 'personal,' and 'responsible' ensure high-quality teaching performance.

Academics is distinguished by the connection it makes between teaching and research, which is why Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam wishes to establish an explicit connection between these two aspects in an academic career. Making a strict separation between teaching and research is not advisable in any WP position. Each academic, even an academic whose career focuses on teaching, must have a basis in research and maintain this basis throughout their career. Equally, it is impossible to have a career in academics without having demonstrable experience and proven competence in teaching. However, this does not mean that an individual staff member's teaching and research performance must be at the same level at all times in his or her career. For instance, the relationship between teaching and research tasks can vary in scope or weight. That said, an academic in permanent employment may not have exclusively teaching-focused or exclusively research-focused tasks, as Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam expects each academic to be proficient in both arts and therefore have both teaching and research capabilities. Every position has an absolute minimum performance level for both teaching and research. However, the level of teaching and research performances can vary in relation to each other, allowing for the performance level in one area to be compensated by the performance level in the other.

The WP careers policy pursues the equal recognition and assessment of academics, be that in teaching or research. Both internal careers incentives and external ones such as NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) place their primary focus on developing academics' research. The quality and impact of an academic's publications and their ability to attract investments in a research budget are leading indicators of a successful academic career. By placing more emphasis than is currently the case in the WP careers policy on teaching performances, as is being done in this framework, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is improving the visibility and the career prospects of people who focus their career on the provision of teaching in a broad sense and on ensuring the quality of this teaching.

This shift of focus will balance out the attention given to teaching and research in an academic career, in turn assigning more importance to the quality of teaching.

This teaching framework has three objectives:

1. To improve the acknowledgement and visibility of teaching and teaching performances in the academic career of academics who are dedicated to providing good-quality teaching;
2. To support the professional development of academics with regards to teaching by describing this development and the required training in the different phases of their career;
3. To improve the career prospects for people who dedicate their career to ensuring that teaching is of good quality, that there are innovations in teaching, and that solutions are found to deficiencies within teaching, right up to the highest level in the organization.

2. The aim of the framework

The teaching framework is a tool used to recognize a person's progression and performance with regards to teaching, as well as to monitor these two aspects and make them transparent. This will enable academics and their supervisors to make clear agreements regarding personal development processes. On a programme and departmental level, the framework can be used to map out the teaching expertise in the body of teaching staff.

A lecturer's career develops according to three main principles:

1. the increase of his or her expertise in teaching, their own subject, and discipline;
2. his or her growing contribution to innovation, development, and quality assurance in terms of teaching;
3. an increase in the number of his or her tasks and responsibilities with regards to teaching.

The framework describes these according to five core activities, namely:

- A. Teaching performance
- B. Teaching content
- C. Degree of expertise
- D. The contribution to the educational organization
- E. Quality assurance

The academic's current level in teaching can be determined according to the nature and scope of these activities. At the same time, it becomes clear which points require improvement.

In relation to the level achieved in the aforementioned activities A to E, column two specifies the stage at which the lecturer finds himself or herself in his or her career, which formal roles he or she may fulfil at this level, as well as the nature of the career development (including training) at this level. Finally, the framework also specifies how the lecturer (column three) is expected to behave in a professional sense with respect to his or her position on the career ladder.

The framework describes four 'lecturer levels': junior, middle, senior, and expert.

The activities described and the degree of professionalization are usually of a cumulative nature, meaning that what is described at a lower level is still applicable to the lecturer's level at that moment in time. However, this does not mean that all activities need to be mentioned; it may concern an activity which the lecturer was working on in the past

A distinction is made between 'career phases' and 'career development'. The former indicates the position of the lecturers on the educational ladder, whereas the latter gives an insight into what is required in order to climb this ladder.

3. Teaching versus research in an academic career

The teaching framework specifically describes the academic's career development in terms of teaching during his or her academic career. However, teaching and research – and similarly valorization – are integral to an academic career, and performances in both areas therefore play a decisive role in the progression of an academic's career.

Describing teaching performances during a career increases the visibility of teaching as a component of a WP career, thereby preventing a situation in which the quality of teaching and the contribution to teaching by default play a subordinate role in an academic career. Nevertheless, the framework will continually focus on the connection between teaching and research as well as the connection to developments within an academic's own subject area.

Within an individual WP career, it is often the case that experience, performance, and training with respect to teaching and research (and the time dedicated to these two areas) are unequally distributed. For instance, an academic may well be an experienced researcher with a large number of publications in his or her name, yet have limited experience in the field of education. And the opposite can also be true.

This explains why the junior, middle, senior, and expert levels featured in the chart in the annex to this framework are connected to the UFO-profiles for WP as well as to the results areas of teaching and research. This has two benefits: it facilitates the monitoring of relative teaching and research levels during an academic's career and also provides a better indication of when this career is leaning more toward teaching or research. It is worth noting that, ultimately, academics are not obliged to choose between a teaching-focused or research-focused career, as a combination is still possible up to the highest position level. Alongside this, the possibility of a focus shift during the lecturer's career may mean that some periods are more concentrated on teaching or research.