



Advice Tenure Track Evaluation

Working Group

Faculty of Science

May 2022

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# Introduction

In 2018, the Faculty Board (FB) adopted the faculty [TT policy](#), which is based on the [VU tenure track policy](#). The evaluation of this policy will take place in the spring of 2022. The evaluation will take into account the insights from [Recognition and Reward \(R&R\)](#), the changes in the [collective labour agreement](#) and, explicitly, the experiences of the current TT staff.

The working group is composed as follows:

- Chairperson: Monique van de Raapkamp (Coordinator HRM beta)
- Secretary: Najat Mahnin (HRM Beta)
- Department Head: Jan Bouwe van den Berg
- Three scientists: Juan Rojo, Marije Schaafsma & Marja Lamoree
- Two ODC members (work council): Chris Bick & Trynke Hoekstra
- HR consultants for factual data analysis and round table discussions: Michelle Springintveld (HRM beta), Lars Ferenschild (HRM beta), Ilse Ribbink (HRM beta)

## Summary

Important input for this evaluation is the response to questionnaires from some of the current TT staff, as well as from department heads and department managers and supervisors of TT staff. The responses of the TT'ers to the distributed questionnaires vary from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. The biggest issue is the uncertainty and stress caused by the long-term temporary appointment that is the starting point in the current policy, combined with high quantitative promotion/tenure criteria for acquisition and publications. Other issues that were brought up by several people, more often concern the way in which the practice runs in the departments than the policy as such. Not all departments pay specific attention to the guidance and position of TT staff, nor are the steps of the policy always followed. Some parts of the policy that seem logical and obvious (e.g. providing a TT contract and holding progress meetings and mid-term) are not implemented in some departments. Some responses about stress, uncertainty, lack of guidance or even poor treatment are disturbing. In a new policy, the implementation of this at the departmental level should be set down more firmly and be named as an explicit responsibility of the departmental heads. Together with the HR adviser, a way to monitor the implementation of the policy that is appropriate for the department can be found.

Under 3/ we present the main recommendations. Under 4/ some topics are summarised and provided with more detailed recommendations. The working method of the working group, a sketch of the current situation in figures, a comparison of TT policies in other faculties and other institutions are included in the appendices.

## 3. Main recommendations

1. Replace the current TT policy with a career track policy (CT) that assumes a permanent contract after a period of 18 months, and in anticipation of this, convert the current TT contracts into a permanent contract with CT preferably before 15 July 2022, but no later than 1 September 2022, if there is sufficient suitability. In case of doubt about suitability, the current temporary contract will remain in force.
2. Revise the TT/CT criteria to fit the [Recognition and Reward](#) and [DORA](#) policies and remove the requirement for minimum external funding.
3. In addition to formulating criteria, TT/CT should also include what support the department provides to achieve these goals.
4. Develop a faculty policy for training and evaluation of executives.
5. Embed the "hearing of the voice of TT/CT staff" in the faculty organisation, either by establishing a TT/CT council or by appointing a TT/CT contact person within the faculty.

## Detailed recommendations

### Form of contract

#### Summary

Responses from TT staff, supervisors and department heads indicate that long-term temporary employment is experienced as very stressful. The advantage of long-term temporary employment for the organisation is that there is no need for a complicated dismissal procedure if the TT criteria are not met. However, the data shows that this situation hardly ever occurs in practice. Therefore, this advantage does not outweigh the stress experienced by the TT'ers.

The CAO-NU applies the principle that academic staff enter permanent employment after a temporary employment period of no more than 18 months. The CAO does make an exception to this for TT graduates, but only if the track leads to appointment to a higher academic position. There is a difference of opinion on the interpretation of this. The employers, for example, think that UD1 is a higher job than UD2. The unions see this as one job and think that such a TT does not fall under the exception. For our TT graduates, whom we have hired as our scientific talents for the future, keeping a long-term temporary employment contract under these circumstances feels unfair.

It is perceived as problematic by candidates and heads of department that internal candidates sometimes have to leave service for six months before a temporary TT contract can be offered. When the current policy is replaced by a CT in which a permanent contract is offered after 18 months, leaving the service for six months becomes a disproportionately complicated step. We can assume that internal candidates

have a good view of suitability for the job, so that if a temporary extension is not possible, offering a permanent contract straight away does not entail major risks.

Many of the current TT staff have been appointed as UD2 on a temporary contract with a Tenure Track to UD1. But there are also some other tracks within the faculty. All recommendations in this advice relate to *all* TT contracts.

### **Recommendations**

- Replace the current TT policy of 'long-term temporary' with a Career Track (CT) policy with a duration appropriate for growth to the next position, with a permanent appointment after 18 months if proven suitable (including growth potential). Take the decision on permanent appointment after 12 months at the latest.
- Current TT staff currently employed for more than 12 months will receive a mid-term review and if they are 'on track' will receive a permanent appointment with a CT preferably before 15 July 2022 but no later than 1 September 2022. Current TT graduates who have already successfully completed a mid-term review do not need to undergo another mid-term review.
- Internal candidates who are qualified as best candidates after open recruitment and for whom an extension of the temporary contract is not possible, are immediately offered a permanent position with a CT.

## **Evaluation criteria and workload**

### **Summary**

The sometimes unclear and often high demands cause such a high work pressure for some of the TT staff that an acceptable work-life balance is not experienced, especially among people with care responsibilities at home. The impression is that a realistic estimate is not always made of the time needed to work in order to meet the criteria. A number of TT employees feel that too little or no account is taken of part-time work, leave, illness and parenthood. Furthermore, a frequently used criterion of obtaining external funding is largely beyond the control of the TT trainee. This causes a lot of stress. Finally, it is not always clear whether all criteria must be met or whether a higher performance on one criterion can be compensated by a lower performance on another criterion.

### **Recommendations**

- Include criteria incorporating R&R and DORA in the future TT/CT policy.
- Do not include TT/CT criteria over which the employee has limited influence, such as being awarded grants.
- Explicitly include in future TT/CT policy whether and how criteria can be balanced against each other ('compensation').
- The feasibility of the criteria should be tested against a realistic assessment of the working time required for each goal and the available working time for each goal.

- In the event of a change in working hours, parental leave or other changes in circumstances, the deadlines and the specification of the objectives of the TT/CT must be expressly reconsidered and, if necessary, adjusted. Particular attention should be paid to equal career opportunities for women and men.

## Evaluation process

### Summary

There is a lack of clarity among both TT staff and (to a lesser extent) managers about how evaluations (including mid-term) should proceed, who is responsible for what and what the consequences of an evaluation are.

### Recommendations

- Place the responsibility for consistently implementing the evaluation processes and providing information about them to TT/CT staff explicitly with the heads of department. Templates of promotion requirements and generic evaluation criteria should be made available and known within departments.
- Include a section on the guidance and progress of TT/CT trainees in the Strategic Workforce Plan so that Department Head and HR Advisor can, at least annually, update the situation of those employees and gain insight into how the policy is being implemented.
- The (formal) mid-term review can be abolished when all TT'ers in principle become permanent after 18 months. Of course, the CT should be a regular part of the annual interview.

## Recruitment, Onboarding & Startup package

### Summary

During the recruitment phase, not all TT'ers are informed about the VU TT-policy. It is not always clear from the vacancy text which profile is sought and what the actual teaching load is, for example. Some TT graduates are not given a TT contract (with evaluation criteria) in addition to the employment contract. It is unclear to candidates *what* is negotiable and *who* at the VU (HR or department) takes decisions about contractual arrangements *and when*. Departments deal with room to negotiate in different ways. Some TT employees experience a difference between what is discussed during the negotiation phase and what happens next when they start working, for example, in the interpretation and application of the TT criteria. Only a few departments make explicit use of the International Office (relocation officer) for foreign candidates when they start working. It is especially difficult for foreign TT graduates to find their way in the VU (and NL) education system. Only in a few departments, TT staff regularly consult directly with the MT; often there are no special TT meetings. The *startup packages* vary greatly from department to

department and sometimes from person to person. They are almost never part of the TT agreement. Some TT people indicate that the support is insufficient.

### **Recommendations**

- Include in the TT/CT agreement, as a standard feature, what support the employee can expect from the department in order to grow and meet the included criteria. Such support may include, for example, explicit funding, time reservation (e.g. for writing grant proposals), coaching, etc.
- Include a framework in the new TT/CT policy indicating what information (such as the policy itself) should be provided to candidates.
- Make sure that in addition to the employment contract, a track contract is consistently offered in which promotion criteria are defined, or share a draft track contract that is filled out in detail at the start of employment (within three months);
- Clearly record individual agreements (including changes to agreements) on career progress in the personnel file (verbal agreements are insufficient).
- When employing internationals, always use the International Office so that there is more support for foreign candidates when it comes to information such as housing and Dutch regulations.

## **Guidance & Communication**

### **Summary**

Several TT employees indicate that the individual guidance provided by their supervisor could be improved or is sometimes even completely inadequate. Not all supervisors are sufficiently accessible and they also do not always seem to be able to offer the right guidance. However, supervisors do not say that the guidance is inadequate and report that the departments pay enough attention to it. Some TT staff feel a limited sense of belonging to the department or a team. Being involved in existing teams in the field of research/education is not done systematically, which makes them feel left to their own devices, especially if they have not worked at the VU and/or in the Netherlands before.

The faculty- and VU-wide information is hard to find and is not always actively distributed within the departments. Several TT staff report that it is unclear to them what exactly the TT policy means for their daily practice (e.g. criteria on which they will be assessed and possible consequences if these criteria are not met, career tracks, the organisation of the mid-term review). Managers mainly report ambiguities about career tracks and the mid-term review.

### **Recommendations**

- Develop concrete faculty policies for training and evaluation of managers.

- In the first year, supervisors of TT/CT should organise coaching or progress meetings at least once every three months, in addition to the formal annual meeting.
- Ensure that all relevant documentation is easily accessible to TT/CT staff and supervisors in both Dutch and English.
- Before Covid, lunch meetings took place between TT people and FB. It is good to continue these meetings.
- Make it easy(er) for TT/CT employees to have their voices heard and make the specific challenges of this group of employees visible. This can be done by setting up a TT/CT network and/or TT/CT council within departments or the faculty, and/or by appointing a faculty contact person for TT/CTs.

## Social safety

Several comments were made about social safety. Some TT'ers, although it was indicated that their answers could never be traced back personally, only wanted to respond if this could be done completely anonymously. They were afraid it might threaten their tenure or career. This says something about how unsafe some TT'ers feel. Comments were also made about poor treatment by senior staff, 'not daring to say no to more tasks' because this would damage their position, and unfamiliarity with where to turn with social safety issues. Social safety is something that VU-wide and faculty-wide should work on and therefore falls outside the scope of the study group and no separate recommendations are made for it in this evaluation. Because the issues mentioned are very much related to the dependent position of the TT'ers and lack of guidance, we think that the recommendations under 1 to 5 will have a positive influence on the social safety of the TT'ers.

## Working conditions

Several comments were made by TT staff about sub-optimal working conditions such as: no private room, lack of IT support and about complicated administrative processes. Although important, these are topics that affect all employees and not specifically TT employees. We consider these issues to be 'out of scope' and do not make separate recommendations on them.

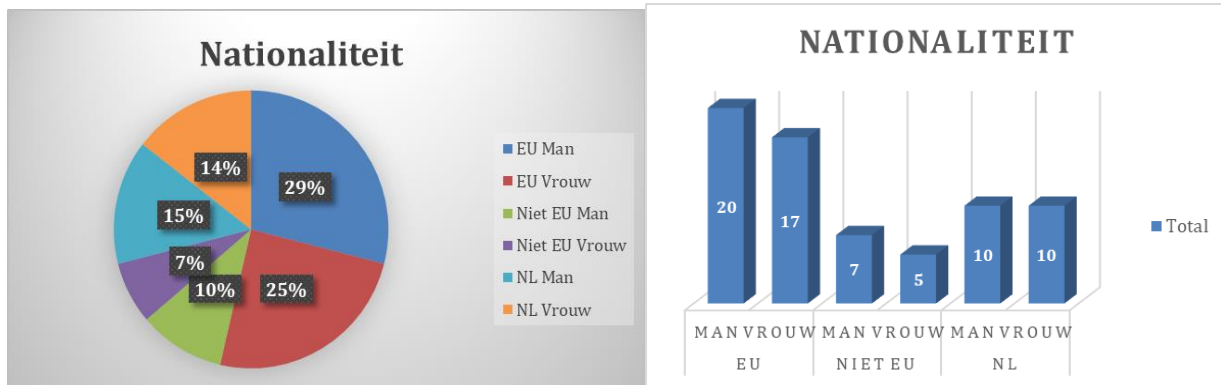
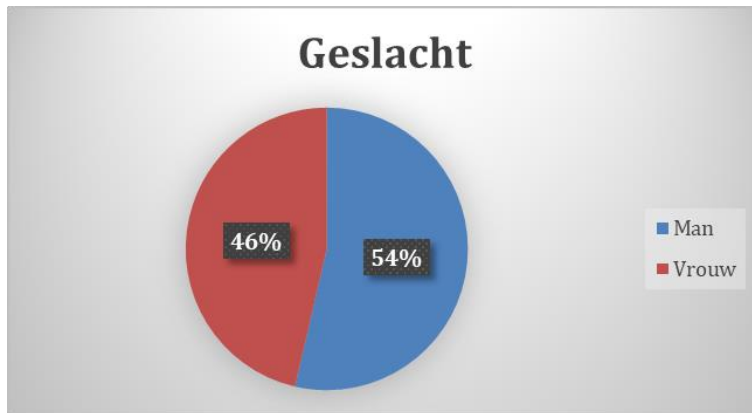


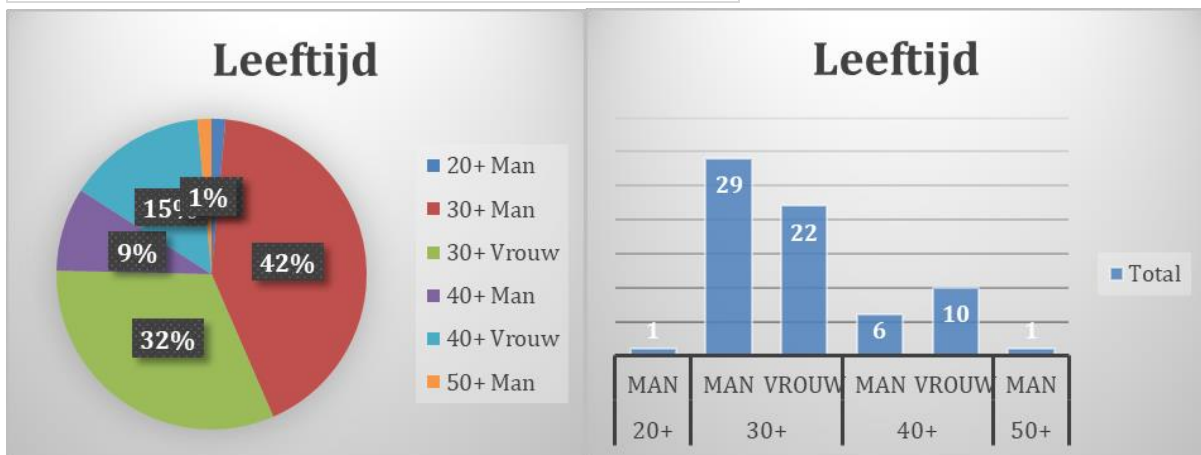
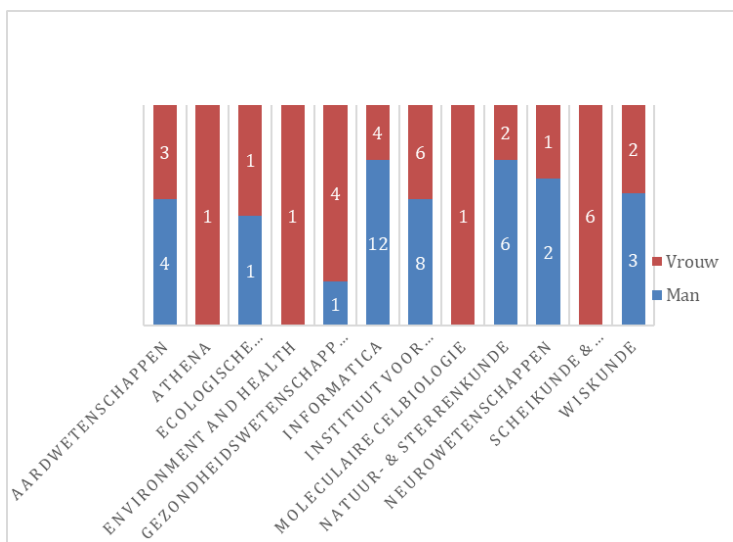
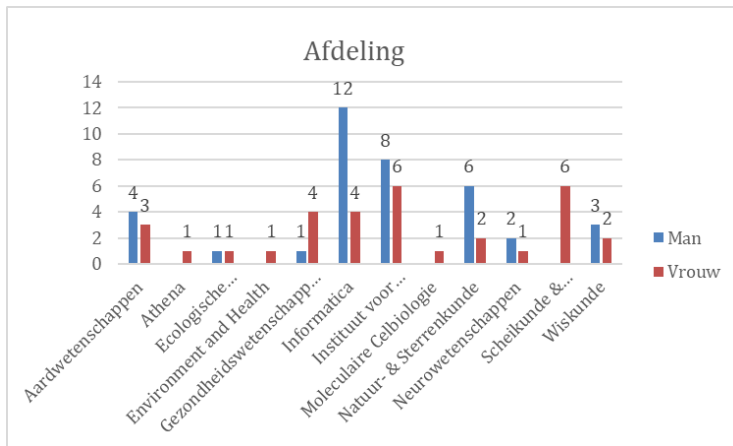
# Appendix 1.

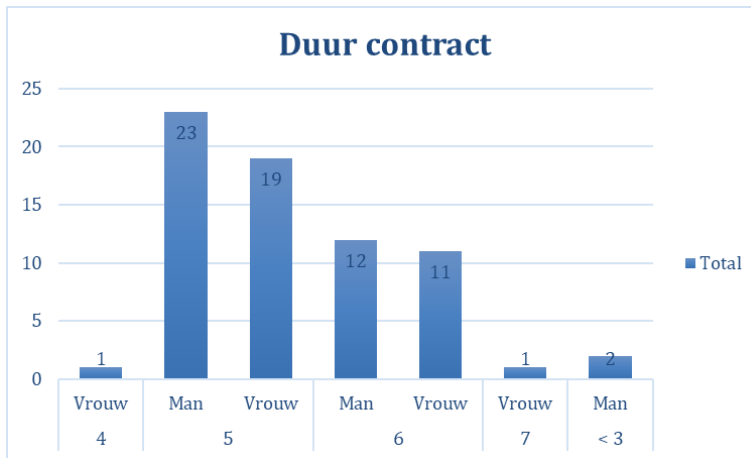
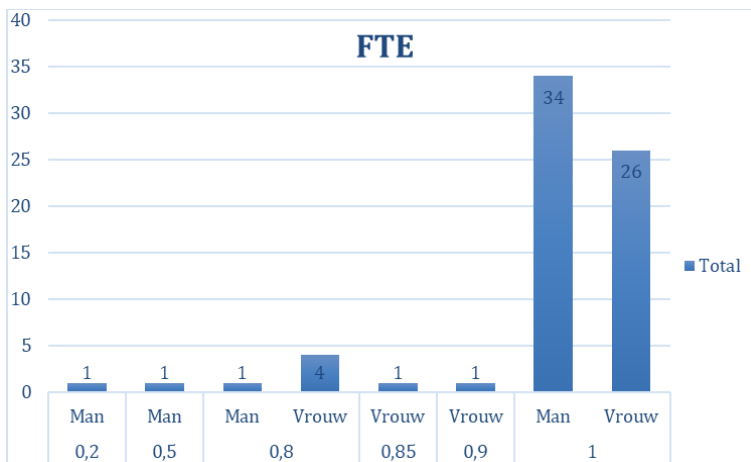
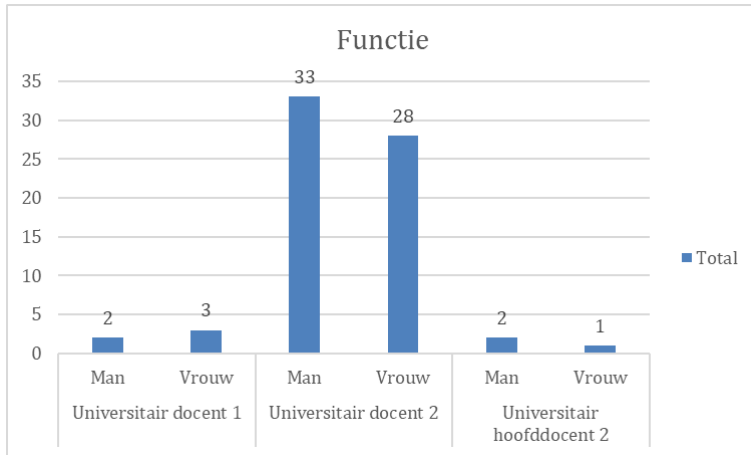
In order to get information on how the current policy is perceived by all involved, questionnaires were mailed to TT'ers and their supervisors. Of the 69 respondents, we received 29 responses from the TT staff, and 12 responses from the supervisors out of 50. In order to deepen the responses, a number of TT staff took part in two round-table discussions with members of the working group. A number of working group members looked at other TT policy documents from other VU faculties and other universities in the Netherlands for inspiration. All department heads and department managers have been questioned by HR-advisors about their experiences with the current policy in practice. All this input has led to a list of issues that we address with specific recommendations in this advice.

## Annex 2. Current situation

In January 2022, 69 employees were employed by the Science Faculty as Tenure Trackers on a one-time multi-year contract (Article 2.2a paragraph 5 of the CAO NU). Of this group, 54% are male and 46% female. The vast majority are between 30 and 40 years old and are in a track from UD2 to UD1. 20 of the 69 have Dutch nationality, 37 are non-Dutch and 12 are from outside the European Union. More detailed figures and an overview for the TT'ers per department can be found below.







## Annex 3. Comparison

In this appendix we compare the main differences and similarities between the tenure track policy documents that have been circulated within our workgroup. We aim to focus on the big picture and not on the nitty-gritty details.

TT policy document	Timescale and goal	Requirements in research and funding	Requirements in teaching	Requirements in management and supervision	Language requirements and other points
<b>Maths department, Beta Faculty @ VU</b>	5 years from UD2 TT to permanent UD1. Distinction between <b>necessary</b> and <b>sufficient</b> criteria.	Own research line with strong publication record. Substantial efforts to secure external funding, with reviewers qualifying the proposal as excellent.	BKO, positive evaluations, supervision of BSc/MSc projects	Daily supervisor of at least 1 PhD candidate. Effective in committee work.	English C1
<b>Computer Science department, Beta Faculty @ VU</b>	5 years from UD2 TT to permanent UD1. <b>Combination of objective with subjective criteria</b> , the latter being qualification of the TT to be a productive member of the department. <b>Special provisions</b> (e.g. start up package) are included in TT agreement.	Well-defined research profile, strong publication track record. International recognition. Positive track record in attracting external funding.	BKO, positive student feedback in teaching BSc and MSc courses, supervision of BSc/MSc projects. Active participation in curriculum committees and development of new courses.	Daily supervisor of at least 1 PhD candidate, ideally more. 20% of time devoted to management tasks.	Each TT is assigned a mentor (unrelated to TT committee) Demonstrate sufficient independence and personal leadership
<b>School of Business and Economics, VU Amsterdam</b>	5 years from UD2 TT to permanent UD1. 40%/60% research/education in this period. <b>Different profiles for UDs/UHDs/HGLs</b> with different emphasis in research/teaching/valorisation.	Good publication track record, well-defined research vision. Submit Veni application. Strict publication criteria, weighted by SBE Journal Weights and dewighted by the number of authors. Participate in EU/NWO research consortia. Compulsory submission to ERC / Vidi in first year of permanent contract.	BKO in three years. 60% of time is devoted to teaching. At least two different courses taught and 3 master theses supervised.	Daily supervisor of at least 1 PhD candidate	At least one of three <b>Valorisation requirements</b> fulfilled ie contact with media, consulting in business world , funding from 3rd money stream.
<b>Faculty of Social Sciences, VU Amsterdam</b>	Here we list criteria of entry to UD1 level. Non-TT UDs are not allowed. <b>Different profiles for UDs/UHDs/HGLs</b> with different emphasis in research/teaching/valorisation.	Strong publication track record: <b>at least six publications</b> in peer reviewed journals. Own research vision. Demonstrable usefulness of own research (e.g. citations). International recognition (conferences, memberships). Track record of attracting	BKO, demonstrable teaching experience applied to heterogeneous groups. Test and evaluate learning outcomes in a quantitative manner. Involved in designing and innovating courses and educational strategies.	Demonstrable experience with supervising PhD students. Strong commitment to administrative and management duties within department and faculty, including supporting senior colleagues.	Based on <b>Recognising and Valuing</b> . Following IXA course on valorisation ( <b>compulsory</b> ). Production of demonstrable products out of one's research. Demonstrably usefulness and recognition of

		research funding, minimal amount is EUR150K.			one's own valorisation products. The candidate is involved in both <b>Team Science</b> and in <b>Open Science</b>
<b>University of Maastricht</b>	<b>10 years</b> contract from UD2 TT to permanent UD1. Evaluation takes place after 5 years at most.	Strong publication track record. Active member of the national and international research community. Funding proposals accepted or positively evaluated. Specific numbers about #publications and Article Influence Scores.	BKO, positive student evaluations, contribution to teaching leadership and educational management. Ambassador of <b>problem-based learning</b> .	Positive experience with PhD supervision. Leadership skills and capability to take over management tasks.	SMART agreements will be made upon commencement of employment. <b>Valorisation efforts:</b> bring research results to the attention of policy makers and public. C1 level of English.
<b>Faculty of Sciences, VU Amsterdam</b> (template TT contract and factsheet)	<b>6 years contract</b> , eventual promotion to UD1.	Well-defined research track record and long-term vision. Contribution to the research program of the section. Submitted at least two research grant applications, awarded grants as PI by amount EUR320k or higher. 20 publications in total, of which 8 as principal author. At least 100 citations. At least one invited lecture. Referee for international journals in your area. Citation requirements vary quite a bit between departments.	BKO, teaching experience, development of a new course, successful expertise with supervision of master and bachelor projects. Teaching load is on average 50% of the time. Positive teaching evaluations required	At least one clearly defined management task within the department. PhD Supervision course preferred.	B1 level of Dutch required (but seldom enforced).