



## Writing your senior teaching application (SKO): tips and tricks

Irma Meijerman – Senior Fellow, Centre for Academic Teaching & Faculty of Science  
Hetty Grunefeld – Educational Consultancy & Professional Development  
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At Utrecht University (UU), academics applying for a senior qualification in teaching (SKO) have very different experiences and CV's. Academics make their own choices in their personal development and specialise in different aspects of Teaching and Learning. Some choose tasks (or are asked to perform tasks) in the area of organisation and management, while others show a special interest in developing their teaching and take colleagues along in educational innovation. If these tasks are performed at "senior" level, all these academics are eligible to apply for an SKO. Their different and unique experiences will result in a very personal portfolio. It is, amongst others, for this reason that (for most departments and Faculties) no examples of, or structured guidelines for, SKO portfolios are provided.

This document is aimed at academics working towards their SKO application. It provides ideas and tips to clarify what is expected for an SKO and to ease the process of writing a portfolio. As a basis, we use the criteria in the UU framework for teaching qualifications (<https://intranet.uu.nl/en/basic-teaching-qualification-senior-teaching-qualification> – new version of the criteria to be expected in 2021), and our experience since 2014 as consultants, mentors and assessors for colleagues working on their SKO portfolio.

### Portfolio for an SKO application

In short, an SKO application consists of your CV, a self-reflective text, your vision about education, and several attachments. The CV provides an overview of your experience as a senior teacher/academic. The self-reflective text addresses the criteria that you have to possess at a senior level. The education vision describes your view on good education, considered at course transcending level. The attachments are examples or illustrations of your work at senior level, and provide evidence of the statements you make about yourself (e.g. feedback from colleagues, students, reports you have written).

### Assessment criteria and senior level

The criteria of an SKO to be addressed in the portfolio are, professional qualities, subject area qualities, teaching qualities, organisational and managerial qualities, and (in the 2021 version) qualities regarding outreach. When in doubt whether your experience is sufficient to start writing your portfolio, or whether one or more criteria are still insufficient, we recommend to write a personal development plan (PDP) for your SKO. In a PDP one's experience regarding all criteria is addressed, and ideas are added for gaining more experience at SKO level. It is a good idea to ask for feedback on your plan by your departmental or faculty BKO-SKO assessment committee. Some assessment committees (e.g. Pharmacy, veterinary science) even have an obligation or strong recommendation for

handing in such a personal plan. Information about specific requirements can be found on intranet.

The two most important indicators for obtaining an SKO are that you have participated in activities that exceed course level and that you have shown a form of leadership in education.

Exceeding course level means that you have been involved in course exceeding activities, for example as coordinator of a bachelor- or master programme, member of committees such as the examination committee or programme committee ('OAC'), coordinator of a 'through-line' (leerlijn). Other course transcending activities could include involvement in curriculum development, in educational innovation projects (e.g. USO-projects), and/or educational research.

Leadership in education means that you have shown leadership in education, for example as chair of a project(group), educational team, and/or educational committee. Coaching of other teachers is also an aspect of leadership and seniority in teaching.

The differences between a BKO and SKO are summarized in the table below (source: UU framework for BKO and SKO, version 2009).

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>BKO</b>	<b>SKO</b>
Subject area	Satisfactory knowledge of the field of study for teaching and for developing teaching material	In-depth knowledge and vision of the field of study and its context
Professional	Stimulating learning climate, ability to motivate, and reflection on own functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- View of university education in its social context</li> <li>- Up to date with developments in university teaching</li> <li>- Able to write a well-considered, underpinned vision about education</li> </ul>
Teaching	Designing, providing, testing, and evaluating teaching at course level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broad knowledge and experience of different types of teaching methods</li> <li>- Experience of developing teaching that extends across multiple courses</li> <li>- Coach other teachers</li> <li>- Publications/share material</li> </ul>
Organisational	Organisation of courses in cooperation with colleagues	Giving inspirational leadership in relation to the organisation and implementation of teaching and teaching innovations at a study programme, faculty, and/or university level

## Tips and tricks: advice for writers of an SKO application

### 1. The start

- Use the specific criteria and procedures for your faculty, or sometimes even department, that can be found at intranet. The Centre of Academic Teaching lists links to the specific criteria on their website (<https://www.uu.nl/en/education/centre-for-academic-teaching/senior-teaching-qualification-sko>).
- Start with making an overview of all your activities related to education and teaching. This can be in the form of an 'Annotated CV'. Write down all the activities you can think of and add to this some remarks in how you believe these activities contribute to your seniority as a teacher. Ask yourself the question to which criteria(s) the activities contribute and why. Don't underestimate yourself. Often activities are forgotten or considered of less importance for obtaining an SKO, while if you think further, they definitely contribute to one or more aspects of seniority in teaching.

For the 'Annotated CV' you can use different formats, for example:

- A table with projects/experiences in the first column. In the next columns you describe for each projects aspects such as when did it take place, size of the project, what was your task, what made this project/task senior, for which part(s)/criteria do you think this is an excellent example (subject area, professional, teaching, organisational)?
- Or: A Curriculum Vitae with a more elaborate description of your work
- Or: A series of stories about relevant (learning) experiences in recent years
- Or: A number of *critical incidents* important for how you have developed as a senior teacher
- Or: ... (make your own format)...
- Have a critical look at your 'Annotated CV'. To what extent do you already fulfill the criteria in your opinion? If so, you can start writing your portfolio. If not, what actions do you have to take? What aspects are missing or are not yet sufficient? How can you solve this? Make a plan, and talk to your manager, supervisor or colleagues about possibilities. Can you be involved in certain activities? Can you take some initiatives of your own? If you start an initiative, how can you involve others and create support? How does this initiative contribute to the quality of teaching within your department or programme? And how does it contribute to your seniority? Make a personal development plan to work out these ideas, and (if mandatory or strongly recommended) hand it in with your BKO-SKO committee for feedback (see also above).
- Find a mentor. It can be stimulating and inspiring to talk with someone who can support you, give feedback on your portfolio, and discuss development possibilities with you. The mentor does not have to be someone from your own department, you can choose anyone you like.
- Find colleagues and form a peer-group. Working together, reading each-others portfolio and give feedback to each-other can be stimulating, inspiring and especially motivating. It relieves you from the feeling that you all have to do it on your own.

### 2. Write your SKO application: outline

- When you start writing your SKO application you can take the criteria as a lead and have chapters, one for each criterion, and a chapter with your educational vision.

- Describe what makes you a senior teacher within each chapter and provide examples. That could mean that you mention a specific activity for two or even more of the criteria. For example, suppose you are coordinating a master programme. This activity could be used to demonstrate several of your qualities, for example your seniority at subject area level: you have to have in-depth knowledge of your subject to be able to make decisions about the content of the programme and align the different courses of the programme. It can also be used to demonstrate your leadership or your teaching qualities, because to be able to coordinate a programme you have to show leadership (e.g. guiding teachers involved) and teaching qualities (e.g. teaching methods in the programme). Your annotated CV will help you decide how and where to refer to which tasks.
- To make a start with your reflection, or in addition to your main chapters, you can look in-depth at one or two of your main activities at senior level, and write about them explaining what this activity means for your seniority. So, in the previous example of the master programme you write a case description in which you describe the activity (being responsible for a master programme), your role and responsibilities, your actions and how and what you learned from them. Did you get feedback on your role? Would you do things differently the next time (and why)? Be honest, ask feedback, look deeply to your own role, and decide afterwards if and how you want this text to be part of the portfolio. Some texts can be too personal to include, but certainly help with writing the self-reflective part of the portfolio.
- Be creative. Make your SKO application your own, by choosing what works best for you. Sometimes that could even mean that you choose a whole different set-up, maybe even digital or a video. As long as it shows that you are senior in teaching most of the time there are no real rules. To be sure, if you want to approach it in a completely different manner, check this with the assessment committee of your faculty or department on forehand.

### **3. Write your SKO application: education vision**

- A vision about education and/or teaching and learning should be well-considered and as much as possible, underpinned with educational literature. The vision can be about higher education in general, but also a specific aspect of higher education, like discipline related education, on-line learning, student-activating learning, or educational policy. Choose a topic of your own interest. For example, if you are coordinator of a master programme, you most likely have a vision about your master in the area of teaching methods you find relevant for your students or even the position of the subject within society.
- Leading questions that have been helpful for others are: How would the programme (or part of it) look like if you had a free hand to change the current programme? What do you value in the programmes/courses that you teach, and why? Which developments do you see currently in society or the labour market, now or in the near future, and related to education (of course), and how should your department deal with these? What are your main points you consider if you are asked to look at the educational quality of a change or innovation proposed by colleagues?

- Do show why your ideas and your education vision are worthwhile. Using literature to underpin the statements you make is important, although a vision is not a literature review. Your vision should be *research-informed*.

#### 4. Write your SKO application: attachments

- Collect evidence of your seniority by gathering feedback and illustrations about the statements you make. Think about asking colleagues and/or students to write some feedback about how you function as a teacher or leader within education. It is helpful if you ask them specifically where you want to have feedback about (e.g. your didactic skills, your role as a chair of committee, your part in a course)

#### 5. Support

Educational Consultancy & Professional Development of the UU provides several supportive opportunities (<https://www.uu.nl/en/node/547/from-basic-teaching-qualification-bko-to-senior-teaching-qualification-sko>):

- From BKO to SKO: A half day meeting, in which the meaning of “seniority in education” is explored by looking at role models and the SKO criteria. Activities and experiences are examined that are typically part of an SKO application. After the introductory meeting you can discuss your next step(s) with the course leaders.
- SKO-portfolio track: A series of meetings in which each of the criteria are discussed. Literature will be provided and discussed, and related to your own experience. Participants value the exchange of ideas and examples, and find it useful in compiling their application.
- SKO-writing retreat: Two days in peace to concentrate on writing your application. The course leaders are available to read your texts and provide you with feedback and support you, for example with finding suitable literature.
- Sometimes a short consultation and some feedback is all you need to start or finish your SKO application. Teachers with questions about their SKO can ask for a Professional Consult at the Centre for Teaching and Learning (<https://www.uu.nl/en/ecpd/professional-consultation>).
- More support opportunities are being developed (October 2020).