

## **Creating career paths for professors (teachers and researchers) with experience in applied research and the professional field**

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### **Executive Summary**

Globally, higher education sector is increasingly called upon to demonstrate accountability, quality, and alignment with both national and international development priorities. In Ethiopia, Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs) face a critical challenge in establishing equitable and relevant career progression systems for academic staff. A key policy concern is the misalignment between the missions of UASs, focused on practical, application-based learning, and the traditional academic promotion systems. Current guidelines inadequately recognize faculty contributions to teaching, research, and professional engagement, which limit academic staff motivation to accomplish with their full potential. Addressing this gap through a revised policy framework is essential for enhancing faculty development and institutional performance. To inform these adjustments, the proposed policy stems from international best practices, particularly from Osnabrück UAS in Germany and Savonia UAS in Finland. Osnabrück's "Tandem Professorship" model integrates academic research with industry experience, ensuring that candidates meet both academic and professional criteria. Similarly, Savonia UAS implements a dual-track system, enabling professionals from industry to teach while completing mandatory pedagogical training. These cases emphasize the importance of creating promotion systems that bridge academia and professional practice, reinforcing the relevance and impact of UASs in applied research and workforce development. Accordingly, the proposed policy adjustment in Ethiopia seeks to achieve three main goals: aligning UASs' missions with professional promotion criteria; enhancing the quality of education and research through a capable and motivated academic workforce; and strengthening university-industry linkages to reflect real-world standards. The adjustment calls for three core areas: setting minimum requirements for professional engagement, refining indicators and promotion points, and outlining implementation stages. Through this comprehensive and globally informed policy shift, Ethiopian UASs can establish a dynamic and practical promotion framework that contributes meaningfully to national development goals.

### **1. Introduction**

The global shift toward more accountable, practice-oriented higher education systems has placed increased emphasis on aligning academic structures with real-world professional standards (DAAD, 2022; Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). In Ethiopia, the Higher Education Proclamation (FDRE, 2019) and the Education Sector Development Plan (MoE, 2020) highlight the need for reforming university systems, especially within Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs), to ensure quality, equity, and relevance. However, the absence of a tailored career progression and promotion framework has limited the ability of UASs to attract, retain,

and motivate academic staff whose work blends teaching, research, and professional practice. Drawing from successful models such as the Tandem Professorship at Osnabrück UAS in Germany and the industry-based track at Savonia UAS in Finland, Ethiopia can reimagine its academic promotion system to reflect the unique mission of UASs. Therefore, this policy recommendation needs to establish a vigorous and contextually appropriate promotion framework that aligns with UASs missions, promotes professional engagement, and supports national development goals.

## 2. Policy problem statement

UASs in Ethiopia face a significant challenge in promoting academic staff through a system that reflects their unique mission of applied teaching, practice-based research, and industry collaboration. The current promotion framework largely modeled on traditional university structures, emphasizing theoretical research outputs and failing to adequately account for professional engagement, practical experience, and contributions to industry-relevant innovation. This misalignment has created barriers to equitable career progression for faculty, particularly those engaged in application-oriented activities central to UASs mandates. Without a tailored policy that redefines promotion criteria to align with the distinct goals of UASs, academic motivation, institutional relevance, and the quality of applied education and research are likely to remain inhibited. Therefore, a national policy adjustment is urgently needed to introduce a context-specific, practice-oriented promotion system that supports the professional growth of academic staff and enhances the developmental role of UASs in Ethiopia.

## 3. Opportunities of career progression adjustment for UASs

Table 1 highlights the opportunities that directly contribute to shaping a more structured and impactful career progression and promotion framework within Ethiopian UASs.

Table 1: Opportunities of career progression adjustments

Opportunity	Description
Alignment with UAS mission	Integrating the core mission of UASs (applied learning, practical research, and community engagement) into the promotion framework makes faculty career progression becomes more relevant to institutional goals, ensuring staff contributions are recognized and valued.
Integration of global best practices	Adopting international best practices, such as Osnabrück UAS's tandem professorship model and Savonia UAS's industry-based career track, informs the development of a promotion framework that values both academic and professional experience, providing a pathway for staff from academia and industry to progress.

Enhancement of university-industry collaboration	Embedding university-industry collaboration into the promotion criteria ensures faculty members with industry experience are recognized, motivating them to engage in applied research and teaching, and aligning career progression with real-world professional standards.
Professional recognition and motivation	Recognizing professional experience and contributions within the promotion system not only motivates academic staff but also supports career advancement for those who engage in industry and practical applications, improving overall academic performance.
Support for national development goals	Integrating national development priorities (such as, industrialization, innovation, workforce development) into the promotion system ensures that career progression pathways are aligned with Ethiopia's strategic objectives, creating a direct link between faculty contributions and national development.
Establishment of clear career pathways	Defining clear promotion criteria with minimum requirements, indicators, and stages creates a transparent and equitable framework for career progression, enabling faculty to navigate their professional growth with clear benchmarks and milestones.
Strengthening applied research culture	Encouraging applied research through a promotion framework that rewards industry collaboration and third-party funded projects ensures that, faculty are incentivized to contribute to innovation and practical problem-solving, linking career progress to the impact and relevance of their work.

#### 4. Challenges of career progression adjustment for UASs

Table 2 indicates challenges that must be carefully considered in the policy adjustment and implementation to ensure that the proposed career progression and promotion framework is both effective and fair.

Table 2: Challenges of career progression adjustments

Challenge	Description
Limited industry-academic collaboration	There is insufficient collaboration between UASs and the professional world, which limits the integration of industry experience into the promotion process. This gap affects the practical relevance of the promotion system and reduces faculty to engage with real-world challenges, impeding career growth.
Resistance to change	The adjustment of promotion guidelines may face resistance from both faculty and administrators, particularly in a system accustomed to traditional academic frameworks, require effective change management strategies.
Insufficient professional development support	Faculty may lack adequate opportunities for professional development, such as industry training, mentorship, or teaching qualifications. Without support structures to help faculty meet evolving promotion criteria, the career progression system may be unattainable.
Inconsistent application of promotion criteria	Even with clearer guidelines, there may be inconsistencies in how promotion criteria are applied across departments or faculty members, leading to perceptions of favoritism or inequity.

#### 5. Policy Recommendations

Recognizing the potential benefits and associated challenges, the experience on career progression outcomes can serve as valuable inputs for policy adjustment, emphasizing the following key recommendations (Table 3).

Table 3: Policy recommendations to improve career progression for UASs

Policy adjustment	Key Action	Pros	Cons	Stakeholders
Align promotion criteria with the corresponding UAS mission	Draft nationwide promotion directive to emphasize practical experience, industry collaboration, applied research, and teaching excellence	Enhances relevance of academic roles; motivates staff to engage in applied research and professional practice; strengthens industry linkage	May face resistance from faculty accustomed to traditional research-focused promotion; implementation requires policy overhaul and capacity building	MoE, industry partners, Development partners
Incorporate industry-based achievements into evaluation metrics	Formalize criteria to reward patents, consultancies, industry projects, and community impact	Encourages real-world engagement; fosters innovation and entrepreneurship; aligns with UAS mission	Difficult to standardize evaluation of diverse achievements; industry partnerships may not be equally accessible to all	MoE, Industry partners, UASs
Strengthen alumni-industry-staff pipeline	Develop a structured alumni tracking and engagement system to identify potential future staff with professional experience	Builds a pool of qualified professionals; enhances recruitment of staff with practical experience; promotes mentorship	Requires long-term investment; risk of limited alumni interest or mobility	UASs
Establish mentorship and professional development programs	Institutionalize mentorship and short-term industry attachments to prepare staff for promotion readiness	Builds staff competencies; enhances institutional reputation; supports equitable career growth	Requires resource allocation; time away from teaching duties	MoE, USs, industry mentors, development partners

## 6. References

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