



# 1. Strategy: our challenges and drivers for the coming years

The UvA's strategy over the next few years is based on the challenges that we expect to face and on the forces that drive us. We had already identified these challenges before the corona crisis. The need to address them has only increased as a result.

## *Our core values*

The UvA conducts science that seeks to understand and serve the world, without being bound by political, religious or other constraints. We are an ambitious and creative public university in Amsterdam. We are both independent and engaged. We strive for a sustainable, prosperous future and champion justice and equal opportunities. We listen and give people the freedom to ask questions, to show curiosity and to debate. We do this with respect for the contribution, background and beliefs of each and every individual, and in an environment which is socially and intellectually safe. We will defend these values at all times.

## *Our challenges over the coming decade*

As a university, we are committed to widening the horizons of scientific knowledge in our society. We want to get the best from ourselves and from our students, who will soon be tackling the issues our world is facing. This is the *raison d'être* of our research-intensive education, our doctoral programmes and our academic research.

In the 2020s, we expect to face the following major challenges in the (international) field of higher education and research.

- Digitalisation is a key driver for our ambitions – even more so than we had anticipated before the corona crisis. In the field of research, the smart use of digitalisation transforms or enriches methodologies in all disciplines. By combining and analysing data, all manner of processes can be mapped in innovative ways, as input for complex models that help solve societal problems, for example. The use of research methods fuelled by data science requires investments in new expertise, teamwork and state-of-the-art infrastructure.
- In education and assessment too, digitalisation is rapidly making inroads. Even before the advent of the corona crisis, it was clear that developments in ICT would require us to further revamp the content and format of our degree programmes. We must draw up a strategic framework for the digitalisation of our education: what is the optimum mix of online and face-to-face? The better we learn to exploit this increase in digitalisation – and new opportunities like adaptive learning systems and learning analytics – the better our future position as a provider of higher education in and from Amsterdam will be.
- Managing workloads is a complex task, in which many factors play a role. One such factor is the growing pressure of accountability and regulations. We strive to find the right balance between rules and professional freedom, and between legitimacy and efficiency. A more robust quality culture may help to achieve this balance and, as a result, to keep workloads under control.
- In the Netherlands, the funding of university research is linked only loosely to the funding of education. Yet it is the combination of both that is the essence of the University. It is, therefore, up to us to control the balance between education and research. Given the growth in the previous period, further growth in student numbers is not a general objective. In some disciplines the need to maintain resilience or the connection with the research programme may constitute a good reason for targeted recruitment of students.
- A further challenge is the growing competition around attracting, retaining and training talent. It is crucial here that we recruit staff and students with different skills and backgrounds; in other words, that we actively focus on diversity, inclusion and equitability.
- Another key issue is open science: the cultural shift towards transparency and openness around research data, because this is deemed better for science than the closed practices of the past.



- Finally, there is the challenge of increasing society's trust in academia. With wealthy, knowledge-intensive players on the research market undermining the position of the traditional universities (in the field of data and pharmaceuticals, for example), this trust can no longer be taken for granted.

The University must redefine itself and innovate in ongoing dialogue between its leadership, strong Works and Students Councils and a committed academic community. Based on our core values and public position, we must find the right partners – knowledge institutes, businesses and social institutions – to enable us to achieve this.

#### *Our strength*

The UvA is a leading player in the academic world. We are unique in that we are ranked among the top universities internationally for virtually the entire spectrum of arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and medical sciences. Driven by their boundless curiosity, our scientists conduct innovative and fundamental research in collaboration with the best in the world. Our research and education are closely interlinked and inspire each other. We offer a broad range of degree programmes which take an active approach to learning and encourage student engagement. Clearly, we are keen to maintain the strengths of the individual disciplines and degree programmes. However, we can make better use of the high quality that we achieve over a broad spectrum.

#### *Our ambitions*

If we are to maintain our position as a leader across this broad spectrum of disciplines, academic innovation is essential. Innovation will come from the disciplines themselves, but we can also make better use of the variety within the UvA for this purpose. We want to collaborate more intensively between disciplines, thereby enhancing innovation in each discipline individually. And we also need to collaborate to develop integrative methods and common approaches for tackling complex global issues which do not confine themselves to the boundaries of individual disciplines: the Sustainable Development Goals, for example, pandemics, the impact of rapidly evolving communication technologies and medical techniques, artificial intelligence or genetic modification and growing populism, nationalism and migration. With our interdisciplinary knowledge and research methods, we must be able to respond in an agile way to these and future issues, through effective collaboration between departments and faculties.

The innovative nature and agility of our research will also be reflected in the degree programmes that we offer. We educate students for a society which is characterised not only by ever greater diversity and complexity but also by inequality. Our students will soon take over the helm from the current generation, in science, government and industries. We are delighted to see that the young people of today want to see a fairer and more sustainable world, and that they expect their university to lead the way on this in conjunction with them. How can we teach our students to translate their ideals into results? By providing them not only with interdisciplinary knowledge and an understanding of data techniques but also with skills that go beyond the confines of their degree programme (such as effective project management or the ability to collaborate in a diverse context). The corona crisis has precipitated a review of the teaching and learning and digital methods that we use in our degree programmes. In education, as in our research, we want to be among the best. Broad accessibility and equal opportunities will continue to be crucial in this context.

We will only be in a position to make these ambitions a reality if our organisation as a whole becomes more agile. Processes, business design and systems must help, not hinder staff and students who work or wish to work beyond the boundaries of their discipline. As things stand today, anyone who liaises in their work or studies with multiple faculties has to contend with a wide range of different procedures and practices.

In the chapters that follow, the Strategic Plan explains what is required to enable innovation in our research and education, and in the related processes and facilities.

2. Education and research: we continue to deliver top quality across the board
3. Students: we invest in excellent and inspiring education
4. Partners: we enhance our work through external collaboration
5. Responsibility: we put our public values into practice
6. Staff: we are a magnet for talent
7. Organisation: we are agile thanks to our process and governance design