



3. Students: we invest in excellent and inspiring education

The additional funding, portfolio analysis and vigorous digitalisation (see Chapter 2) will ensure that the degree programmes that we offer remain up-to-date and relevant. There will also be an incentive to innovate from the demand-side, i.e. from students and society. The student population is becoming ever more diverse. We want to ensure that our degree programmes reflect this diversity and the world around us. This includes giving graduates from all disciplines the opportunity to participate in lifelong learning.

In recent years our degree programmes have improved significantly: study success rates have increased, dropout rates have decreased, the ‘international classroom’ has been introduced and we have expanded the range of interdisciplinary programmes and minors that we offer. This provides us with a firm foundation as we take the next step towards excellent education with an ambitious study culture (as set out in our Vision on Teaching and Learning) in a rich learning environment that embraces intercultural perspectives.

Excellent education requires effective interaction between curricula, lecturers and students. Firstly, interaction between lecturers and students, and between students themselves, is vital. We will intensify this interaction by thinking carefully about the types of learning that we use: what can take place online and what cannot, where is face-to-face contact essential? Secondly, we must and want to pay more regard to differences between students. We already made this clear in the 2019 Diversity Policy Document. A number of the measures outlined in this document have now been put in place but there is still more to be done. Actively striving for diversity means that we no longer assume that ‘one size fits all’. Students differ from each other in terms of their experiences, their prior education, their background, their language proficiency (Dutch, English, other languages) and their cultural awareness and interest. Moreover, the majority of students learn and process information differently to the way students did ten or fifteen years ago. We embed (in the portfolio analysis in Chapter 2) inclusion in the learning objectives and course content, and adapt our didactics, teaching methods, materials and assignments accordingly. In so doing, we improve people’s ability to work with others both within and outside of the university, to think and act outside the box and to keep an open mind with regard to other people and groups in society. Our degree programmes also offer important academic skills which not all incoming students nowadays automatically have, such as reading multiple languages or algorithmic thinking. At the opposite end of the spectrum, for students who want to stand out, we offer a range of honours programmes and a number of different extracurricular activities.

We expect students to engage with their learning, with their fellow students, with the university and with their environment – both close to home and further away. We encourage this engagement in part because it increases the chances of academic success: of successful completion of the degree programme with rich and meaningful learning outcomes (see also the Study Success 2.0 programme from 2017).

Over the next few years, in line with our Vision on Teaching and Learning, we will focus on:

1. organising more intensive and smaller scale learning to enhance interaction
2. encouraging an engaged and proactive attitude in our students
3. further enriching our teaching environment through internationalisation
4. connecting a professional offering in Life Long Learning to our research



3.1 Organising more intensive and small scale education

More intensive, smaller scale learning enables effective contact between students and lecturers. Students who feel that they can be seen and heard grow in self-confidence and engage with their learning. This is even more important now that the differences between students are increasing and more and more learning is taking place remotely. More effective contact can also help prevent study completion delays and dropouts. UvA Matching and taster days (Proefstuderen) have only succeeded in improving the match between student and degree programme to a limited extent. In large degree programmes with high levels of dropout or study completion delays in particular, small-scale learning can help improve the match and avoid anonymity.

In other words, small-scale learning improves the quality of the learning processes. This is one of the three themes over which the UvA (pre-corona) has made agreements with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (in the Quality Agreements for 2019-2024). We are receiving additional funding for this. The UvA has added the majority of these funds to the allocation model; agreements on their deployment have been made with the student council of each faculty. Because, clearly, not every student goes through the same learning process, it is up to the faculties and degree programmes themselves to decide how they will make their education smaller scale and more student focused.

Even with this additional funding for education, the budget is limited. We must seek to create more interaction between lecturers and students within the overall budget (which amounts to approximately one lecturer hour per ECTS obtained). It is conceivable that the effective contact time can be increased within the same teaching load. Currently, more than half of teaching time is spent on preparation, marking and course development, i.e. not on contact with students (with, in addition, significant differences between degree programmes and faculties). The smart application of digital resources (the use of which has been precipitated by corona) and a review of the existing system of lectures and tutorials may help in this context. It is important that lecturers are given effective help with redesigning their teaching, a reduction in workload being a key factor here.

Given the available resources, teaching and learning must be as effective as possible and as enjoyable as possible for both students and lecturers. We don't want to make it cheaper, we want to make it better. A prerequisite here is that education and research are equally recognised and valued as part of the academic function. Chapter 6 of this Strategic Plan explores this in more detail.

Things to do

- Create a better balance in the ratio between contact time and total teaching time.
- Explore alternatives to the current system of lectures and tutorials.
- Differentiate learning modes to achieve a better match between student and degree programme.



3.2 Encouraging an engaged and proactive attitude in our students

Excellent education goes hand in hand with commitment and engagement: it encourages students to share responsibility for the content of their degree programme and to invest in their own academic success. In our Vision on Teaching and Learning we expect students to invest also in their personal and academic development. Students can be more involved in:

- improvements in the curriculum
- the study associations and the academic community
- decision-making and governance of the University or faculty
- our wider environment, through community service learning

Currently, it is essentially up to students themselves to take the initiative and get more from their degree programme than simply the specialist knowledge that is imparted to them. We want our students to acquire in or alongside their degree programme the cognitive and social skills which they were not entrusted with at home. After all, we are educating them to take over the helm in science and society. Students are under financial pressure due to student loans; they often have a part-time job or continue to live at home. We have noticed that, for many, this hinders participation in non-mandatory components of the curriculum, particularly where there is no immediate return (in the form of credits or financially).

We also wish to enhance the links between student and academic community and between alumnus and university. Some ten per cent of students feel involved in the University as a whole (based on the turnout in the elections for the Central Student Council). A slightly larger percentage feel involved in their degree programme or faculty and are active in a study association, for example. In the case of the programme committee, which works on improvements to the curricula, there are often insufficient candidates to allow an election to take place.

Greater involvement of students with the UvA should also mean that, after they graduate, they remain actively engaged with the University and their school or college (in particular). It is important that our alumni are kept up to date with the latest developments in research and education. Conversely, they can provide a valuable contribution in this regard, based on their experience of professional practice or as donors.

Finally, it is preferable for students to live in or close to the city of Amsterdam. This is, after all, where academic life takes place. Consequently, student housing will remain high on the agenda in our meetings with the region in the 2020s.

Things to do

- Tailor the curriculum to encourage students to participate in academic life and research.
- Formulate learning objectives which make students aware of different social backgrounds, inequalities of power and processes of discrimination and exclusion.
- Include community activities in the elective element of the curriculum, e.g. entrepreneurial activities or social activities with a learning component.
- Encourage students from all backgrounds to participate in extracurricular activities.
- Increase interaction and sharing of knowledge with alumni and the connection between students and alumni at personal level.



3.3 Further enriching our teaching environment through internationalisation

In 2020, 25% of students studying at the UvA were international students. 30% of these students came from outside the European Economic Area (EEA). Clearly, we don't yet know what the (long-term) impact of the coronavirus measures will be on these percentages. For the time being, the objectives of our 2017 Strategic Framework for Internationalisation continue to apply. This states that we want to improve the quality of our education through the 'international classroom', in order to:

- prepare students for an ever more international environment
- incorporate non-Dutch cultures, backgrounds and perspectives into our education
- encourage mutual understanding of differences in values and worldviews.

If these objectives are to be achieved, Dutch and international students must mix effectively on a day-to-day basis, not only in the classroom but also outside it (the corona restrictions pose an additional challenge in this regard).

Our student population has not only become more diverse but, since the launch of English-taught Bachelor's degree programmes and tracks, has also rapidly become more international. Compared with five years ago, there are now five times as many international students in multiannual degree programmes. This means that they live in Amsterdam for an extended period, which is good for the 'international classroom' and for the Dutch labour market. International students also provide the UvA with a network of alumni and ambassadors. All this will only happen if we give these students the opportunity to acquire positive experiences and to engage effectively with Dutch students. A warm welcome on arrival is not enough. Degree programmes must clarify what objectives they are aiming for with internationalisation and how these are reflected in the exit qualifications. Whether or not a programme is internationalised is an integral part of the portfolio analysis referred to in section 2.3. Study associations have a key role to play in activities which encourage intensive interaction between Dutch and international students.

Moreover, the aim of our internationalisation policy is not to attract more (or significantly more) students as a source of revenue. Rather it is to offer students who choose our university in the global, digital world of education a sense of context. We also work with European universities in an alliance (EPICUR) which strives to produce a new generation of European citizens and to increase student mobility through digital transformation of educational processes. Language proficiency to the internationally recognized B2 level in at least three languages is part of the programme.

The UvA is a bilingual university (Dutch/English). We expect staff and students to have a passive knowledge of both languages (to B2 level) and to have an active knowledge of one of the two languages (to C1 level). For degree programmes that deliver their teaching in Dutch or English only, the requirement to have a knowledge of the other language is not mandatory but still desirable, as it facilitates participation in academic life.

Things to do

- Work on increasing interaction between Dutch and international students, both at the start and throughout the academic year, in conjunction with the study associations.
- Offer a summer course in Dutch for new international students.



3.4 Connecting a professional offering in Lifelong Learning to our research

Knowledge acquisition doesn't stop when a student obtains their Master's degree. The boundary between initial (Master's) education and lifelong learning is blurring. Students must be able to postpone their Master's degree to gain professional experience first. And graduates in the workplace may feel a need for refresher courses, further training or information about the latest developments in their field. The knowledge they acquired during their degree programme will no longer last them a lifetime.

It is part of our societal remit to provide for these needs, thereby promoting innovation in society, long-term employability and personal fulfilment. Just like our regular degree programmes, we want to structurally link our lifelong learning offer to our research. This will enable us to reinforce the research-intensive nature of our degree and non-degree programmes. In addition, this link with research facilitates the dissemination of up-to-date research results from all faculties through our alumni or through graduates of other universities.

The structure within which this takes place is the UvA Academy. Under this shared brand, we offer short programmes for (working) adults, such as masterclasses, courses and webinars. The UvA Academy makes the latest insights from science and professional practice available to professionals. In that way, we also contribute to Amsterdam as a hub for academic knowledge and intellectual exchange.

For the UvA, the benefit of the lifelong learning offer is that:

- we contribute (as part of our public remit) to the long-term employability of academics on the labour market by equipping them for the major transitions that occur every couple of years.
- we foster the link between science and academia on the one hand and professional practice and the workplace on the other
- it reinforces the societal relevance of our education and research
- it can lead to closer collaboration with businesses and institutions regarding research and work placements
- it gives the faculties additional income to support the wide range of degree programmes that they offer

Things to do

- Include lifelong learning in the strategic choices of the teaching portfolio of each faculty.
- Further professionalise the offer through development of the UvA Academy platform and a dedicated building on the Roeterseiland Campus (catering, rooms).