

Outcomes staff meeting about the digital agenda of the UvA



How can digitisation at the UvA support its staff members and students as much as possible? This question was the focus of the second 'campfire session' about the digital agenda of the UvA on 24 March. After an earlier meeting with students, this time the floor was given to staff members of Academic Affairs, Amsterdam Law School, the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, the Executive Staff, ICT Services, Facility Services, the Administration Centre and Information Management.

The digital agenda

Together with more than 100 focus group members and many experts, the 'digital agenda core team' has spent the past few months developing digitisation plans for the UvA. The digital agenda, which will be finalised in the coming months, will give direction to the further development of digitisation at the UvA in order to anticipate the rapidly changing world. This agenda is an elaboration of UvA's Strategic Plan 2021-2026, strategic plans of the faculties, and input from the shared service units.

Campfire session

By 'campfire session' we mean a gathering inspired by African tribal assemblies, such as the traditional Kgotla from Botswana. The chief gathers everyone around a campfire, gives a brief explanation and then puts his questions to the tribe. The meeting is all about listening and understanding. Evocative questions or debate are not allowed. At the end, the chief tells what he has learned and concluded based on the collective 'wisdom of the tribe'. In this case, Maarten Emons was the chief. He is UvA's director of Information Management and also leads the digital agenda.

It is crucial that the digital agenda actually helps students and staff. After programme leader Maarten Emons had briefly shared the main points of the draft plans, he therefore invited everyone to share their perspective on the following questions:

- Does this digital agenda match your needs and experiences as a staff member?
- What would make you even happier? What other points would really help you?

UvA staff members about digitisation

The staff members present then shared many valuable ideas. Thanks to the variety of roles and departments represented, many perspectives were covered. Here is a summary of the staff members' views and ideas for the UvA's digital agenda:

1. **Provide more overview and ensure good communications.** There are so many applications, systems, processes and security requirements that, as an employee, the overview gets lost. Create an overview of what can be found where, and where you need to be for what. Also ensure good communication about what is expected from everyone.
2. **Set up a personal onboarding dashboard for new employees,** which gives them insight into what they need to arrange in the first few weeks, how and where. At present, it takes new staff members a lot of time and effort to find out what they have to do. With such a personal dashboard, you can provide people with only the information that applies to them. For example, which tasks have been completed and what you still need to do, with explanations and videos about how something works. This way, you make it much easier for employees and you also reduce the number of requests for support.
3. **Take into account what is coming up for lecturers and create breathing space.** Create a logical set of initiatives that takes the absorption capacity of lecturers into account. Create more breathing space, for example by developing templates in groups for working methods that are transferable. It would also help if teaching were to be given a higher priority, with technology not being a burden but something that helps you to better practise your profession.
4. **In the translation to education, distinguish between large and small subjects.** For digitisation, it makes a difference whether you teach 650 people or a group of 12. This can be done, for example, by working with separate working groups for large, medium and small subjects.
5. **Make sure there is a firm commitment and dare to be stricter now and then.** Make sure that the ownership of each process is properly vested in someone who actually feels responsible. We must ensure a strong commitment to actually realise plans. Standardising processes is very difficult at the UvA because people have a lot of freedom to do things their own way. Sometimes this really gets in the way. It would be good if our leadership once in a while clearly says: 'we are going to do it like this' and then stick to it. We have to be stricter sometimes.
6. **Make sure all tools, systems and processes are user-friendly.** It is often difficult to get a feedback loop from users: if you use 200 systems, you don't want to survey the same group of people 200 times. Determine how you can organise that all systems are user-friendly.
7. **Give digitally proficient lecturers room to experiment with tools and digital resources,** with the aim of improving teaching. Currently, such lecturers are often held back, which is a pity because it slows down the development and innovation process. Clear frameworks are necessary here because you don't want to end up with "shadow IT" and lose track of data.

8. **Make it easier to give external partners access to digital systems.** Often external partners have to meet a whole series of requirements, which makes collaboration difficult. Also with LAB42, you would avoid many discussions if you made it easier to link accounts.
9. **Organise centrally which data can be deleted.** Many systems work with a lot of data that is no longer relevant. In order to reduce our ecological footprint, it would therefore be good if we could centrally control which data can be deleted.
10. **Carefully coordinate UvA's digital agenda with the HvA** (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences). After all, many services staff members support both the UvA and the HvA.

Embedding outcomes in the digital agenda

After all employees had shared their ideas, programme leader Maarten Emons withdrew with some team members, after which he came back with his conclusions.

Many points and ideas from employees are in line with the plans for the digital agenda. Such as the need for information, overview and user-friendliness. And the importance of ownership and responsibility, also for processes. There were also eye-openers. Such as that lecturers and researchers are apparently regularly limited in their space to experiment, while their innovative strength is really important. Maarten mentioned an onboarding dashboard as an example of interesting new ideas that came up. Some of the ideas mentioned fall outside the scope of the digital agenda. Examples include the freedom of faculties to make their own choices, and the priority of good teaching versus research and publishing for lecturers.

Maarten concluded the meeting by thanking the participants for coming and for their valuable contributions. He told them that he will make sure that their perspectives are taken into account in the further development of the digital agenda.

Find out more

The plans for the digital agenda are now being discussed with various bodies. We expect to be able to share a final version of the digital agenda in April or May 2022. Have you become curious about the digital agenda of the UvA? Or do you have questions or ideas? Then go to uva.nl/digital-agenda or send an email message to digital-agenda@uva.nl.