Vision on Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

The University of Amsterdam’s vision on teaching and learning evolves to reflect developments in society and the educational community, while also seeking to shape these developments. The current vision on teaching and learning dates back to 2012, and requires adjustment and elaboration in certain areas. Crucially, this updated vision on teaching and learning seeks to address the following key question: What sort of university do we want to be in 2017, and how do we go about achieving this? We organised a round of exploratory consultations within the University of Amsterdam (UvA) community on the basis of various dilemmas currently facing the higher education sector.

The UvA aims to sustain a continual dialogue on education. The vision on teaching and learning should be regarded as a dynamic vision realised in interaction with lecturers and students.

The updated version of the vision on teaching and learning aims to further define and elaborate on the starting points for education policy from 2012. The changing context and new challenges facing the higher education sector and society will also require further supplements to the previous edition.

These starting points were as follows:
1. We provide high-quality education;
2. The University actively contributes to the study success of its students;
3. The University is characterised by an ambitious academic culture;
4. Teaching and research are closely intertwined;
5. The education system provides room for both differentiation and specialisation.

These main themes remain equally relevant today. Education at the UvA is research-intensive, centred on academic development and serves to promote further differentiation and specialisation. This will require students with a specific set of attitudes (intrinsically motivated, ambitious) and further investments in the professionalisation of our lecturers. The past few years have seen efforts to address several of the aforementioned themes at institution-wide level, and further elaborate them in working groups. This has resulted in various UvA-wide initiatives aimed at further development and innovation of our general and educational policies such as UvA Matching, blended learning, the professionalisation of
teaching staff, knowledge sharing, outbound mobility and study success 2.0. The results of these reports have been incorporated into this vision on teaching and learning. As regards the issue of study success, the coming years will also see a focus on quantitative as well as qualitative ambitions. Student participation, knowledge sharing and further professionalisation have been designated as focus areas of our study success policy. As a part of the effort to further strengthen an ambitious academic culture, the UvA will be stimulating and activating its students’ learning processes over the coming years through the application of blended learning and other methods.

New developments and challenges also necessitate further updating of the vision on teaching and learning. The most important challenges and developments in this regard:

– More students than ever before are currently enrolling in academic programmes. The national debate on the accessibility and inclusiveness of our education system is in full swing, and we are seeing growing calls for better harmonisation between education and society. The diversity of our student population is also growing, with certain groups experiencing relatively high dropout rates and study completion delays.

– The past few years have seen a trend towards the further internationalisation of education. The UvA is experiencing strong growth in the number of students with international qualifications. This changing composition is also affecting the content and structure of our education.

– As a result of globalisation and technological developments, society requires both a more highly educated professional population and innovative solutions to the problems of an increasingly complex world. In order to address these needs, we will need broadly oriented graduates with advanced skills such as flexibility, complex reasoning skills, problem-solving abilities and social and communicative skills. Our graduates must also be equipped to deal with the risks inherent to our increasingly digitised society.

1 Study Success 2.0 Report, student and staff talent development, January 2017. Blend IT & Share IT Report, October 2015. Dare to Share Report, October 2015. Advisory reports, UCO Steering Group Outgoing Student Mobility, December 2015.


Developments in the field of information technology are viewed as the key to building a new world of higher education. It should be pointed out that this is not a recent debate. In the early days of the internet revolution, numerous publications already appeared on this subject. Such a world of higher education must make a fundamental shift, from an institution-centred model to a mobile, flexible, technologically solid and more student-centred model. This will involve a process whereby education that was previously packaged in coherent curricula is now unbundled and potentially offered through multiple providers.

These developments have been explored in further detail over the recent period and are described in the UvA report entitled Blend IT and Share IT. The UvA has also been exploring further options for flexible learning. The significance of this new development will have to be explored over the coming years and will require the formulation of a clear vision.

In response to the above questions and challenges, we have formulated the following four educational ambitions:

1. The UvA will focus on the development of motivated and ambitious students, by offering high-quality, innovative education.
2. The UvA is a broad research-intensive university that helps its students to acquire the skills and knowledge they will need to flourish in an increasingly complex world.
3. The UvA strives to be an open and diverse community in which every student will feel at home and receive the same opportunities.
4. The UvA assigns responsibility for its education to its lecturers where possible, focusing intensively on support, knowledge sharing and the professionalism of its lecturers.

The University aims to realise the ambitions outlined in its updated vision on teaching and learning over the coming years. In time, these ambitions should be reflected in the study programme curricula and – eventually – in the degree of

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satisfaction experienced by students and staff and quality and social impact of University of Amsterdam graduates.

**Structure**

A brief context analysis is followed by four chapters, describing the UvA’s current state of affairs for each ambition (achievements) and goals for the future (vision and objectives). The initiatives forming a bridge between this vision and objectives to actual realisation are then described separately for each ambition.

**Context**

Participation in academic education has seen a steady and significant increase since the start of the twenty-first century, and this trend is expected to continue over the years to come based on the number of 18-year-olds in the Netherlands and growing interest amongst international students seeking to study at the UvA. The number of students with international qualifications increased from 1040 to 4616 during the 2005-2016 period.

The UvA enjoyed a greater share of this growing number of students in the first decade than any other university in the Netherlands. Education demand (measured in the number of credits obtained) grew 12% faster than education budgets over this ten-year period. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science’s research budget failed to match the education budget during this time frame.

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5 The number of 18-year-olds within the overall population is expected to decline after 2022. This expectation does not factor in the generally positive net balance of emigration and immigration by young people.
Although higher education in the Netherlands is generally of a high standard, the country’s ambitions cannot be achieved without further quality improvements. According to the report by the Committee on the Future Sustainability of the Dutch Higher Education System (Veerman Committee), the rapid growth during the first decade will have to be offset by further quality improvements.

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and urgent, far-reaching changes. The UvA’s Study Success programme and Institutional Quality Assurance Audit have both been instrumental in achieving the required quality improvements.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science’s Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research sets out a long-term perspective for the higher education sector. Despite ranking amongst the world’s leading countries in terms of its higher education, the Netherlands will have to raise quality standards across the board in order to retain its leading global position. The improvement of study success rates and efforts to ensure greater appreciation for the teaching profession will remain key goals in this regard. The resources now available due to introduction of the student loans system will have to be deployed to create space for rich, small-scale learning environments that encourage socialisation, personal development and more effectively reflect the diverse talents and backgrounds of our students. Finally, we must work to strengthen our ties with society and the labour market.

The Ministry has explicitly opted against restricting access to the higher education system at Bachelor’s level, and is thus unable to offer a solution to the growing tension between education and research funding. The institutions are responsible for harmonising demand for education with their research agenda.

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1. The UvA will focus on the development of motivated and ambitious students, by offering high-quality, innovative education.

**Achievements so far**

The UvA has worked hard to promote an ambitious academic culture over the past few years. The study success programme has had a major impact. Efforts to emphasise students’ learning process while designing curricula on the basis of learning objectives have helped boost the quality of education. All faculties have also focused on active learning formats and the further intensification of teaching methods. The UvA has gained a great deal of experience with innovation projects in the area of IT in Education. These experiences have been distilled into a UvA-wide vision on the development of blended learning in support of contact teaching-based education constrained by time and place.

The UvA has also focused on educational differentiation, offering a range of honours programmes, small-scale, intensive honours lectures (Amsterdam University College, Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics), double Bachelor’s and Research Master’s programmes. We also offer university-wide disciplinary and interdisciplinary elective courses and minors for students seeking to broaden their horizon or gain more in-depth knowledge of a specific subject.

Student initiatives are appreciated and encouraged, such as the Bètabreak and Room for Discussion debate fora and the Create a Course Challenge, where students are challenged to develop and help implement a new course module.

**Vision**

The UvA offers a rich and dedicated learning environment...

The UvA offers its students a rich and dedicated learning experience that will enable them to fulfil their personal potential and put their talents and capacities to optimal use. Alongside the transfer of knowledge, experimentation, innovation, freedom and creativity are all crucial in shaping a powerful and rich learning environment with learning pathways that constantly challenge students in terms of motivation and effort. The UvA strives to continuously strengthen, orient,
reorient and challenge its students, offering them the in-depth knowledge and expertise they need to contribute to society in a conscientious, sustainable and critical manner. The UvA will continue to promote study success and student participation as a part of its efforts to achieve this goal. This means that:

- education should be challenging and stimulate students to discover their own areas of academic interest;
- education should be designed to ensure that students learn with and from their peers;
- there is sufficient opportunity for interaction between students and lecturers, including opportunities outside the regular contact hours;
- teaching and support staff help students to attain academic success by offering assistance with academic and non-academic problems and ensure a positive mutual dynamic within the degree programme;
- there is room for valuable learning experiences such as work placements and exchange programmes;
- students are required to show maximum effort. UvA students should be motivated and feel responsible for creating an ambitious academic culture.

that is innovative and challenging.

The UvA offers a broad range of degree programmes and study tracks, and continually challenges itself to improve and innovate. In addition to disciplinary and interdisciplinary curricular content, the emphasis is on our students’ learning process. This means our curricula and modules are designed with learning outcomes in mind.

Amongst other elements, we apply blended learning to stimulate the learning process. The UvA chooses to combine high-quality face-to-face education with digital teaching methods in order to activate students and stimulate their curiosity and innovative skills. As a result, students can make optimal use of their time with lecturers. Digital teaching methods are integrated into our education based on the notion that this enhances value, student experience and learning processes at our physical campuses, thus contributing to the quality of education. Amongst other methods, this can be achieved by enriching study materials with multimedia elements or opting for the flipping the classroom model whereby lectures are provided online so that contact hours can be devoted to the acquisition of more in-depth knowledge, debate or coaching.
Furthermore, the use of digital technologies allows us to offer more personalised and flexible education, thus strengthening and facilitating heterogeneous intake, such as pre-Master’s students.

Objectives

A. The UvA challenges its students to explore and develop their areas of interest, and relies on their motivation and effort.

B. The UvA will continue its efforts to promote study success and student involvement, making optimal use of our students’ talents while maximising their study success.

C. The UvA offers opportunities to explore other forms of education outside of the core discipline, enabling students to develop skills in collaboration with peers from all faculties.

D. We continually invest in the development and innovation of Honours programmes offering students the opportunity to gain more in-depth knowledge of specific subjects within a disciplinary and interdisciplinary context.

E. The UvA offers consistent support for the development of blended learning at both central and decentralised level, in order to improve the quality of teaching and encourage the application of IT-enabled teaching methods.
2. The UvA is a broad research-intensive university that helps its students to acquire the skills and knowledge they will need to flourish in an increasingly complex world.

**Achievements so far**

The UvA is a broad research-intensive university offering a wide range of disciplines. We will continue to focus on the development of a differentiated range of study programmes that reflect our research portfolio. Students in the Bachelor’s phase have the opportunity to specialise immediately, but can also choose from a broad range of interdisciplinary programmes such as the Amsterdam University College, Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics, Natural and Social Sciences, Social Sciences, Future Planet Studies, Cognition, Language and Communication and Psychobiology. The UvA also offers students in the Master’s phase a wide variety of broadly oriented and specialised programmes and research programmes, in line with our key research priorities.

The past few years have also seen the development of broadly applicable course modules emphasising the cross-over between science and society, such as TESLA and Future Now. The UvA also has an extensive range of Open UvA Lectures, including education offered by the Illustere School and broad lecture cycles on the basis of current issues. Examples of course modules include Big History, Complexity and The Next Big Thing.

The Student Careers Centre provides a broad range of information meetings, workshops and training courses for both Dutch and international students in preparation for the labour market. We also organise UvA-wide career events based around the active involvement of students and the professional field.

The UvA is working to strengthen our ties with alumni. Faculties, schools and degree programmes are offering a growing range of products, services and activities for alumni. The Alumni Relations Office and University Fund also organise the successful annual University Day for alumni. We are developing various new educational initiatives aimed at introducing our students to alumni, such as the Coach@work project.
Vision

Our Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes are based on research ...
UvA students have an inquisitive attitude. Lecturers work together to develop education that reflects the contents of the research domain. This helps to ensure a rich and highly diverse range of programmes that reflect current research projects.

Our focus on research-intensive education aims to communicate a sense of urgency and fascination for the acquisition of academic knowledge to our students, and teach them that knowledge is subject to constant change. This should not be taken to mean that the UvA exclusively aims to train academic researchers. The University wants to equip its graduates with an inquisitive mind-set and the skills they need to apply academic research and/or methods scrupulously, explicitly and judiciously to both academic and other activities. In addition to knowledge production, UvA programmes prepare students to apply what they have learned and cope with the risks and uncertainties inherent to evolving scientific insights.

Students will receive research-based education offering all the necessary research skills throughout every phase of their studies. Students will be made aware of the potential of academic education and encouraged to follow their own interests and develop specialisations. For example, our research-intensive education is designed to stimulate academic development on the basis of choice and freedom of mind.

Our research-intensive degree programmes confront students with learning materials that enrich them, while offering them the practical and verbal skills they need to flourish no matter which profession they eventually choose.

that looks beyond individual disciplines...
UvA students have a broad academic perspective. We stimulate our students to gain insight into the perspectives and expertise of various scientific disciplines over the course of their studies. This strategy is based on the notion that scientific and social challenges can seldom be resolved by a single discipline alone. The UvA's broad range of programmes offers students the opportunity to explore various academic ‘languages’ over the course of their studies, enriching their learning process and preparing them for the future.
and prepares students for the future.
UvA students make up the intellectual vanguard. Over the course of their academic development, they learn how to acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to flourish in a rapidly evolving society and work environment, while acting as responsible global citizens. Our alumni, the next generation, are equipped with the competencies they need to adjust to rapid changes in a national and global context.

The UvA strives to develop teaching methods whereby students work with social partners to create knowledge, analyse issues and solve problems (work placement, pressure cooker, outreach activities). In addition to acquiring knowledge, they also learn to share their insights.

Over the course of their studies, UvA students develop an inquisitive attitude and a critical and creative mindset as they acquire various academic skills. The curriculum focuses on both transferable skills and so-called 21st century skills, such as ICT literacy, communication and collaboration skills, intercultural skills, ethical reflection and leadership qualities.

Objectives

A. Students develop an academic attitude over the course of their studies, as they become aware of and enthusiastic about the possibilities of academic education and research. They are encouraged to pursue their own areas of interest.

B. UvA education is research-intensive, which means research is applied as a didactic concept and incorporated into the degree programme’s exit qualifications.

C. The UvA is a knowledge institution, and strives to ensure that its students develop expertise in one or more scientific disciplines.

D. Students have enough opportunities to (simultaneously) take optional subjects and/or Minor subjects and explore education beyond the boundaries of their own discipline and/or to spend a semester studying at an institution outside the Netherlands.

E. Students are equipped with the skills they need for a career in today’s global world and job market. These include: critical thinking, ethical reflection, intercultural skills, communicative skills and design thinking. These skills
are acquired both within (as a part of existing subjects) and outside of the curriculum (UvA-wide range).

F. The UvA is aware that it constitutes a (final) link in a long education chain, and actively responds to labour market demands through its involvement in the professional field and the commitment of its alumni.

G. The UvA aims to facilitate lifelong learning and seeks to offer working people the opportunity to continually develop their knowledge and skills in pace with our rapidly changing society.
The UvA strives to be an open and diverse community in which every student will feel at home and have access to the same opportunities.

Achievements so far

The UvA is highly internationally oriented, and is characterised by a heterogeneous student intake. Our student population currently includes representatives of over 100 nationalities. The UvA has an excellent student exchange network, and offers English-language education at Master’s and - increasingly - Bachelor’s level. The UvA is also a partner in the networks of leading international universities, such as LERU and U21.

The UvA is committed to ensuring effective supervision during the initial phases and has heavily invested in providing a more realistic introduction to its degree programmes through UvA Matching.

Students are introduced to the content of the degree programme and teaching methods prior to the start of their studies. This helps increase the likelihood that they will get off to a good start.

Academic student counselling also play an important role in building closer ties during the study period. Study advisers play an important role in this process. Amongst other activities, they monitor study progress and refer students to other parties in the event of personal problems. Furthermore, nearly all degree programmes have their own tutorial or mentor scheme focused on the student’s study progress and study plan. Students hold individual or group meetings with their mentor or tutors several times a year.

Student Services has invested in the UvA-wide ‘Successful Studying’ programme over the past few years. This programme is designed for students seeking to get more out of their studies or obtain additional information or knowledge to help them study effectively.

The degree programmes’ study associations also significantly contribute to our efforts to promote an academic climate and greater social cohesion between students. The study associations, some of which have histories dating back decades, represent an important supplement to our students’ social, societal and personal development. The UvA is proud of its flourishing study association culture, which it views as an integral part of the student experience.
Vision

Our education is inclusive ...
Here at the UvA, a varied student population is a matter of course. The UvA offers its students the opportunity to study in a melting pot of people, experiences, opinions and ideas. We attract students from Amsterdam and its surrounding region, the Netherlands and the wider world to our four campuses, thus connecting the local, national and international world. The UvA strives to attract students that have the potential to succeed within its academic environment, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, religion, gender or disabilities. This also requires a focus on pre-Master’s tracks aimed at promoting transfers from professional education to academic education. We strive to do justice – within the appropriate academic frameworks – to the broad range of ideas and perspectives amongst our diverse student population.

The UvA aims to help its students develop their talents, offering them the best possible chances of flourishing in society after their graduation. The UvA offers targeted support programmes for students that have the cognitive ability and determination to take part in an academic study but are hampered by deficiencies in other areas.

In line with our diversity policy, lecturers and students are encouraged to explore and compare various perspectives, both within and outside of the academic setting. Diversity is crucial to the academic debate and personal development of our students, and thus key to academic quality. Based on this principle, the UvA offers:
– an inclusive and lively research and learning environment;
– a safe, supportive and stimulating learning environment;
– a learning experience that reflects the diversity of Amsterdam and the globalised world around us.

and internationally oriented.
UvA students are internationally oriented. Part of our education takes place in an international classroom, in order to further strengthen our students’ critical thinking skills and open intellectual attitude. We apply various scientific and academic perspectives throughout all our education and challenge dominant scientific narratives. The UvA is also a bilingual university, and encourages
cross-pollination between Dutch and English-language programmes where possible. Proficiency in both the Dutch and English language is viewed as a key competence for effective participation and integration, future mobility and employability.

The UvA is committed to protecting Dutch-language education where necessary and remaining attractive to a varied group of Dutch students from the region. This focus on Dutch students and our surrounding region is important in terms of promoting both local and international diversity. The Dutch labour market is in need of internationally-oriented academics with a Dutch-language education.

Objectives

A. The UvA will continue to focus on academic and social integration during the initial phases. A focus on orientation and introduction (study choice activities and UvA Matching) will be key to our students’ study process, along with intensive student counselling during the first year.

B. The UvA is dedicated to ensuring freedom of choice and broadly accessible education. Any decisions to apply selection during the Bachelor’s or Master’s phase will be prompted by quality assurance considerations. UvA students to have completed a Bachelor’s programme within the own institution will have access to at least one Master’s degree programme at the University. On the basis of this quality target, capacity restrictions in the Bachelor’s and Master’s phase will only be applied in the case of small-scale, intensive teaching methods, degree programmes with an excessive number of applications and/or degree programmes with a limited capacity for supervision or limited labour market perspectives. The degree programmes will keep the risk of selection bias in mind during the design and implementation of their selection process, and strive to minimise/rule out this factor as much as possible.

C. The UvA will work to improve accessibility by expanding our (OPeRA-) network and collaborating with secondary education source schools in the region.

D. The UvA will offer targeted support to students with deficiencies. The UvA will work to strengthen and expand high-quality pre-Master’s programmes.

E. The UvA is developing a concept for implementation of the international classroom concept and will encourage its faculties, graduate schools and colleges
to apply this concept in practice. Our international classroom is comprised of four main components: curriculum, language policy, diversity and student experience.

F. Decisions on the language of instruction will be motivated by transparent concerns. Our language policies are always in service of the relevant degree programme’s learning objectives and outcomes. Any decisions to change the language of instruction at a Bachelor’s programme will be carefully weighed, taking account of the overall portfolio of Bachelor’s programmes and the accessibility of Master’s education.

G. All UvA staff members and students are aware of the debate on diversity and issues in the area of inclusiveness that affect education and broader society, and strive to ensure that this awareness is reflected in their actions. Our focus on social integration and inclusive community-building is reflected in the development of a diversity policy and other measures.

H. The UvA will work to improve support for students with disabilities, both in terms of curricular needs and teaching as well as the accessibility of physical campuses and digital accessibility and assistance.
4. The UvA assigns responsibility for its education to its lecturers where possible, focusing intensively on support, knowledge sharing and the professionalism of its lecturers.

Achievements so far
Effective UvA education would be impossible without capable and enthusiastic lecturers. The past few years have seen a focus on the professionalisation of lecturers and others involved in the teaching process. In addition to the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ), we have established a bilingual Advanced University Teaching Qualification (Advanced UTQ) and organised various Educational Leadership Programmes. We have developed a Student Counselling Programme for supervisors. These learning pathways and programmes serve to promote professionalism and knowledge sharing within the UvA, and have helped to create an educational community that inspires innovative new education initiatives.

The development of UvA Data and the UvAQ teaching evaluation system has enabled lecturers and teaching professionals to monitor education processes and focus on relevant targets at various levels.

Vision

The UvA has chosen to adopt a professional educational culture ... Education is one of the university’s key duties, and lecturers play a pivotal role in the education process.

Our lecturers have a high degree of intrinsic motivation. Education and research are intrinsically linked at the UvA, which values both elements equally. This appreciation is reflected in our confidence in the expertise of our lecturers and the freedom we grant them to shape their education independently – as part of a team – within the set frameworks. Our appreciation of education is also expressed in the available amount of time and resources. The UvA offers career opportunities in the areas of research and teaching. We do so by means of support programmes and clear policies, including career policy.
The UvA’s range of professionalisation programmes reflect the needs and views of its lecturers. The UvA helps lecturers to improve their knowledge, skills and attitude, thus increasing effectiveness and achieving better learning outcomes for our students. This policy does not compromise our lecturers’ freedom to express their authenticity and autonomy in any way. Our lecturers have their own personal ‘fingerprint’, ensuring that education remains inspiring to teaching staff and students alike.

in which learning from and with one another is both natural and enriching. The transfer and sharing of knowledge is a matter of course within the UvA organisation, and an integral part of our organisational culture. The sharing of didactic information and experiences from the day-to-day educational practice is key in helping our teaching professionals to provide high-quality education. This can take place at various levels, ranging from the teaching method or test to the curriculum. By sharing knowledge from all departments and faculties, teaching professionals learn from each other’s experiences, acquire new ideas and, not only perform better, but also enjoy their work more and deliver a superior product, as a result. Knowledge sharing also enhances the UvA’s social capital and innovative culture.

Objectives

A. Continued efforts to strengthen appreciation for education. Our vision on education is reflected in our career development policy, ensuring a balance between effort and appreciation.

B. The UvA is committed to investing in our culture of organisational quality. The UvA works to build a culture in which education is appreciated and a focus on educational quality is a matter of course.

C. The UvA ensures the availability of sufficient high-quality teaching and professionalisation modules in support of education and educational innovations, such as research-intensive education, blended learning, inclusive education, the international classroom, language education, etc. This range of courses is targeted at all organisational levels, from junior lecturers to professors.

D. The UvA is highly focused on knowledge sharing, as part of the effort to achieve further quality improvements at our multifaceted university.

E. The UvA will continue to invest in the development and maintenance of
quality assurance systems. This will require the continuous adjustment and improvement of programmes and data systems used to offer timely feedback on the use of information for quality improvement purposes to our lecturers and students.