

Vision for the Programme Committee: improving education together

The Programme Committees play an important role at the University of Amsterdam. The Programme Committee is the only official body in which students and lecturers jointly discuss matters concerning the education provided by their degree programme. The Programme Committee therefore serves as a bridge between students and lecturers, and between the programme organisation and its key customers – the students pursuing the degree programme. Consequently, important topics are addressed by the Programme Committee, such as course and degree programme evaluations, reports concerning the accreditation assessment and the reaccreditation of the degree programme, the Teaching and Examination Regulations and the policy papers issued by the programme director, the College/Graduate School director or the dean. Above all, the Programme Committee is a representative advisory body where students and lecturers convene and jointly discuss ideas for improving the degree programme.

The advice provided by the Programme Committee – both solicited and unsolicited – is essential for enhancing education. The programme director or, in the event of cross-degree programme matters, the College/Graduate School director or the dean, therefore highly value the advice of the Programme Committee and are obliged to implement it and to provide justification, should they not do so. To highlight the importance of the Programme Committee as a representative advisory body, the Programme Committee has the possibility of bringing a dispute before the National Committee for Disputes concerning participation in decision-making in higher education (*Landelijke Commissie voor Geschillen medezeggenschap Hoger Onderwijs*) and in some cases it even has the possibility of lodging an appeal to the Netherlands Enterprise Court at the Amsterdam Court of Appeal. Due in part to the importance that the programme director, the College/Graduate School director and the dean attach to the advice provided by the Programme Committee, this possibility will not usually need to be invoked: any differences of opinion can be reconciled by mutual agreement; both the programme organisation and the Programme Committee are bound by a best-efforts obligation in this respect. This equally applies to resolving any differences of opinion with the other representative advisory bodies (the Faculty Student Council, the Works Council and other Programme Committee's) and other bodies attached to the faculty such as the Examinations Board. The University of Amsterdam is guided by the principle that *all* parties involved in decision-making are responsible – given that a high standard of education is in the interests of both students and lecturers – for endeavouring to seek the best possible solution by mutual agreement, and each body may hold the other parties involved accountable for fulfilling their responsibility in this area.

The Programme Committee is a representative advisory body that has the right of consent concerning the programme-specific components of the Teaching and Examination Regulations. As such, the composition of the Programme Committee is a key factor. The basic legal principle of the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) is that the Programme Committee comprises an equal representation of students and lecturers from the degree programme or the cluster of degree programmes for which the Programme Committee has been established; in the latter case, representation should endeavour to be sought from all degree programmes, where possible. The law provides that the composition of the Programme Committee should be determined on the basis of elections for both the student and lecturer contingent. Nevertheless, the dean may decide on an alternative procedure for determining the composition of the Programme Committee, which will, however, require an annual amendment of the Faculty Regulations. The Faculty Student Council and the Works Council (and presumably also the Programme Committee's in the near future) have the right of consent. If an alternative procedure for determining the composition of the Programme Committee

is chosen, a selection procedure would be a logical option. Both the elections and a selection procedure carry advantages and disadvantages, which are outlined in the advisory report issued by the Programme Group for the Strengthening of Programme Committees. Furthermore, the advisory report covers the resolution of disputes between the representative advisory bodies themselves and with the programme director, the College/Graduate School director and the dean, and at the faculties, as well as the facilities available to the Programme Committee for performing its main tasks. The starting and finishing points are that the Programme Committee unites the interests of students and lecturers, and that the Programme Committee members put the interests of the degree programme above the interests of their own body. Together we can improve education!