



Executive Board

Dear colleagues,

On Tuesday, 10 March, you received a [letter](#) from the Executive Board with ten guiding principles in response to the appropriation of the Maagdenhuis building and the feeling that the University is gradually losing its way.

After sending this letter, many meetings were held with students and staff about, among other things, the allocation model, the creation of a faculty board, reforming the representative advisory bodies, restoring confidence, the administrative pressure caused by the accreditation system, finances, real estate and temporary contracts.

In these talks, we sought to assess whether our analysis and proposed plan of action were recognised and correct. In the meanwhile, a number of initiatives were taken within the faculties to further work out the principles (i.e. points). Moreover, the talks allowed us to make our joint plan of action more specific. This letter is meant to bring you up to speed on these developments.

On Thursday, 19 March, during the debate organised by the Central Student Council (CSR) and the Central Works Council (COR), a number of very concrete suggestions were made for further steps that we would like to adopt. We also know that some groups, such as Rethink UvA, The New University and Humanities Rally, have not yet been able to respond to our first letter. We hope to be able to incorporate their input soon.

Management culture and democratisation (points 1, 2 and 3)

The first three guiding principles – bolstering participation in decision-making, democratisation and decentralisation – touch on the essence of the problem. The examples we were given affect every layer of this organisation, from Boards of Studies to the Executive Board. The possible solutions vary greatly: from a change in the culture to reforms to the current governance structure. While views on this differ widely, it is important to come to broadly supported decisions.

To do justice to these concerns, we have chosen to form a committee which has the confidence of the whole academic community and can issue proposals to modernise the way the UvA is governed.

The committee has an independent chairperson, has expertise in the area of governance and universities, and is comprised of representation from various (action) groups. The areas which will be looked at include the structure of the current representative advisory process (including Boards of Studies), the manner in which this is used, management culture, (possible forms of) elected management, powers and composition of the representative advisory bodies, degrees of participation in policy formulation, and possibilities for consultation and direct participation. The committee will incorporate initiatives that are currently being used within the faculties and will take on board experiences in other countries.

The committee's assignment will be formulated by the Executive Board and the faculty deans in partnership with the CSR and the COR. The committee will be formed after meetings have been held with the representative advisory bodies, but also (if possible) with the different (action) groups from the academic community. The committee's assignment and composition require approval by the central representative advisory bodies. The committee must get to work as quickly as possible and will deliver its report by 31 December 2015 at the latest.

Finance and real estate (points 4 and 5)

During the talks, a great number of questions were asked about finance and real estate. They dwelt among other things on the UvA's financial stability, the effects of the allocation model and the effects of real estate development on the budget and price per square metre. Judging by the nature of the questions, we have concluded that finance and the long-running real estate policy cannot be separated.

A number of additional decisions have been made regarding financial transparency: the next framework letter (the guidelines for creating a decentralised budget) and draft budget will be made available for comments from all UvA staff and students for at least two weeks before being discussed further by the representative advisory bodies and the Supervisory Board. Furthermore, we will investigate how we can provide the academic community with access to UvAdata - for example through authorised members of the student councils and works councils and through licences on workstations in the University Library. There will be more clarity on this by 1 May 2015 at the latest.

Regarding finance and real estate, the representative advisory bodies will create a committee of experts in which external specialists will also specifically be involved. The representative advisory bodies will also formulate an assignment for this committee, in which questions raised within the academic community (including Rethink and others) will be included. This relates, among other things, to the financial aspects of the Real Estate Plan 2005-2020 (*Huisvestingsplan 2005-2020*), the UvA's financial policy and the balance between housing costs and the expenditures on research and teaching. A manageable assignment will ensure that the enquiry is concluded within six months.

As a result of the many questions surrounding real estate, we as the Board have proposed suspending decision-making on the new university library and presenting the decision on its construction to the academic community. With respect to the latter, two possibilities exist: (1) web-based open participation in combination with a right of approval for the representative advisory bodies; or (2) a consultative or binding referendum. The first fits within the current structure and possibilities, the second (currently) does not.

Teaching and research (points 6 and 7)

The talks on teaching and research were about (the measurement of) quality, more eye for reform and – in a broader sense – about space for programmes and faculties to make their own decisions.

These issues have already been a subject of discussion for some time now in the university committees on teaching and research respectively. The committees play a substantive role, have an independent position and their members originate from all the faculties. Both the University Committee on Education (UCO) and the University Committee on Research (UOC) will issue recommendations in 2015. The conclusions of these recommendations will be shared and discussed

with the academic community – the eventual elaboration will fall to the faculties, departments, institutes and programmes.

Since late 2014, a task force on education reform has been examining the question of how educational renewal could be shaped by using open educational resources aimed at strengthening research-intensive teaching and active learning. The task force will come up with ideas and advice which individual study programmes can adopt. This task force is broadly composed of representatives from various faculties. In mid-May, its first report will be released.

Academic careers and temporary contracts (points 7 and 8)

An important issue in the talks we have held concerns personnel policy, more specifically the balance between teaching and research in the assessment of lecturers and the proliferation of temporary contracts and appointments. To many observers, policy and execution hereby seem to diverge, with research being valued disproportionately.

We have taken this up with the COR's HR committee and the University Local Consultative Committee (UCLO). With the unions (representatives from CNV Publieke Zaak, FNV Overheid, AC/FBZ and VAWO/CMHF) and the COR, we have agreed on how in the coming months we will take steps to improve the legal position of employees and decrease temporary contracts and appointments. Agreements have also been made about the collection of additional qualitative data by an experienced research bureau. And a survey will be held among temporary employees on the various aspects of temporary appointments/contracts (uncertain career prospects, fewer facilities, education and training and a different pension scheme).

The above should result in the formulation of a number of policy guidelines, so that the number of temporary contracts is reduced. Some of the measures to achieve this objective might include ways to facilitate teaching careers, limiting temporary contracts to a certain career phase, or further regulations for providing a permanent contract after various temporary contracts.

Whether research-intensive teaching and the equal valuation of teaching and research is adequately included in personnel policy will also be looked at, as will the measures needed to allow implementation in accordance with the agreements made.

Maagdenhuis and The Hague (points 9 and 10)

With respect to the Maagdenhuis, we are trying to come to an arrangement with the occupiers. However, to date our attempts have not yet been successful. This is a matter for concern, especially now that we see the damage to the Maagdenhuis becoming greater.

It is our aim to keep the hall available for debates under the same conditions that apply to all other UvA rooms in which public gatherings are held. The academic community will have the lead as regards programming. In the long-run, we are considering the possibility of transforming the Maagdenhuis into an 'Academic Centre'.

The last point is a call to 'The Hague' to take responsibility. This too was also explicitly discussed during the various talks. It concerns mutual solidarity and the feeling that the Board takes a stand in the national debate and represents its own academic community.

We will be more vocal whenever we do not agree with policy decisions emanating from The Hague, and we will emphasise our objections within the context of the VSNU but also from the UvA. To start with, we will attempt to ensure that no new round of performance agreements be held. Such a new round is irreconcilable with the aim for more autonomy, self-management and trust within the academic community. Moreover, we will use forthcoming meetings with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and the permanent parliamentary committee to urge for a decrease in regulations. To this end, a meeting will take place at *the beginning of April* between faculty representatives and the Minister of Education regarding reducing the regulatory burden in the transition to a new accreditation system.

More information

By fleshing out these points, we hope to have taken the next step towards modernising the University of Amsterdam. We are extremely happy about the constructive talks - with us but especially within the faculties - that have recently taken place on these issues. We hope in the coming months to work further with you specifically, and we also hope that you will participate in the working groups or discussions that will take place in the coming period at your faculty or organisational unit, and that you will vote in the elections for the representative advisory bodies in early May.

For more information about the next steps, please see the UvA [website](#). Here you will also find fact sheets about, among other things, real estate and the allocation model. You can also leave comments and ask questions.

Kind regards,
The Executive Board,

Dr Louise Gunning-Schepers
Prof. Hans Amman
Prof. Dymph van den Boom
Prof. Huib de Jong