

# Outlines for the 2021 - 2026 strategic plan

*Please refer to Dutch text for definitive wording.*

**February 2020**

**UvA Executive Board**

DRAFT

## About this document

### An invitation: join us in thinking about UvA's next steps

Once every six years, universities draw up strategic plans. The UvA will do this in 2020. The new plan is an opportunity to reflect on the course we are taking as a university and to outline a number of expected developments in science and society. On the basis of this, we determine which accents we will set and which new initiatives we will undertake.

This memorandum contains the outlines of the strategic plan. The Executive Board has formulated it on the basis of the mid-term review (summer 2018) of the previous strategic plan and a large number of discussions with members of the academic community (held since the summer of 2019). The outlines will form part 1 of the future strategic plan: the ambitions for the next six years. Part 2 will contain an elaboration and translation of these ambitions into an agenda with new initiatives and additions to policy.

The purpose of this paper is to request feedback from the UvA community. Do these ambitions inspire? Do they help us to make a qualitative leap in our scientific and societal mission? Do they help to align personal and institutional ambitions? The Executive Board will present this document to various consultative bodies within the UvA. The Board will also ask for feedback via the website [www.denkmee.uva.nl](http://www.denkmee.uva.nl).

The second aim of these outlines - together with all policies already in place - is to serve as a guideline for the faculties' strategic plans 2021-2026, which will be developed in parallel.

#### **What's next with the strategic plan?**

In the period February-March, the Executive Board collects, weighs and processes the feedback on this paper. This largely completes Part 1 of the strategic plan. At the same time, Part 2 of the plan is drawn up. The intention is that each of the sub-goals (marked in the margin in this paper) is translated into an agenda. Small teams of varying composition will work out who is in charge of each sub-goal and what its implementation and monitoring will look like. In April-June Part 2 will be tested more widely within the UvA community. A decision on the strategic plan is expected in the summer of 2020, while the faculty strategic plans will be approved before the end of 2020.

## Introduction: the UvA in the 2020s

### *values*

The UvA conducts research that seeks to understand and serve the world, without committing to political, religious or other interests. We are an ambitious and creative public university in Amsterdam. We are independent, yet involved. We work towards a sustainable, prosperous future and stand for justice and equality. We listen and offer the freedom to ask questions uninhibitedly, to be curious and to debate. We do this with respect for everyone's input, background and conviction, and in an environment that is socially and intellectually safe. We will actively defend these values at all times.

### *university*

Our most important tasks are to broaden the scientific knowledge horizon of our society and to train those who will take on the challenges of our world. These tasks are the *raison d'être* of our research-intensive education, our doctoral programmes and our scientific research. In the 2020s, we expect major changes in the context of higher education and research and an increasing competition for talent.

Digitisation poses a major strategic challenge. IT is already an indispensable tool in education and testing, and is making knowledge transfer less dependent on time and place. We anticipate that digitisation will lead to further innovation and customisation in the programmes – for instance, through adaptive learning systems, AI-supported cognitive feedback or learning analytics. The position we occupy as a provider of higher education in the future will depend on how well we bring about this transition and how well we are able to make use of it. In research, digitisation transforms, extends or enriches the research methods of almost all disciplines.

There are also other challenges. For example, open science and the handling of intellectual property rights are expected to lead to major changes. In the outside world, public trust in the academy is no longer self-evident. In addition, new, wealthy players in the research market are bearing upon the position of the academy (e.g. large companies with knowledge-intensive products). Even our near-monopoly on awarding academic degrees may come under pressure. The university must redefine itself. We need to determine how we cooperate with companies and social institutions, while remaining true to our values and public position. It is very important to do this with the right coalition partners.

### *goals*

The UvA aims to remain at the forefront of science and invests in cooperation between disciplines. We are one of Europe's top universities across a wide range of disciplines. Our scientists work with the best in the world on innovative and fundamental research. Our ambition is to consolidate the strength in the individual disciplines and, from there, build stronger collaborations between disciplines for scientific and societal issues. For example, for the Sustainable Development Goals that do not respect disciplinary boundaries. It is from this strength that we train the leaders of tomorrow: the students who will soon take over the helm, both in science and in other sectors of an increasingly diverse society. Broad educational goals are reflected in the structure of our education. In that education, just as in our research, we want to be among the best. On average, the latter is not the case at the moment, as shown for instance by our drop-out and success rates and our NSE scores compared to those of other Dutch universities. As we strive for improvement, accessibility and equal opportunities in education remain of crucial importance.

### *inspiration*

Various and intricately interrelated developments around the world inspire us to dedicate ourselves fully to the innovation of our fundamental research and to improve our education offering. These include climate change, advancing communication and medical techniques, artificial intelligence,

genetic modification, increasing populism, nationalism and migration. Questions arise from these developments for which many different disciplines provide aspects of an answer: alpha-, gamma- and beta/medical sciences alike. Uniquely, the UvA has this breadth of disciplines and performs at a high level in almost all. We intend to make good use of this by inviting research groups and departments to collaborate more and by increasing our agility.

*six ambitions* In the period covered by this strategic plan, we will focus on six core ambitions. Taking into account the international context in which we operate, we want to make great strides in the improvement of research and education, and in the support thereof. These are our ambitions:

1. We prepare and educate all our students for a great start in science and society
2. We exploit the width of our knowledge for innovation in fundamental research
3. We strengthen the ties with our city and our region
4. We deepen and multiply our partnerships
5. We become magnetic for talent
6. We increase our agility as an educational and research organization

*what continues* A lot of things will 'simply' continue in the '20s, even if we do not call attention to them here. The six core ambitions indicate what we want to pay special attention to in the coming years in order to make a quality leap. In addition, we will continue to work with full force on previously agreed improvements such as:

- *Kwaliteitsafspraken* (the quality agreements) in education;
- the scientific integrity and research data management;
- the implementation of the UvA Diversity Document;
- policies regarding social safety and the introduction of an ombudsman;
- implementation of the Estates Plan and completion of the University Quarter;
- sustainability of the UvA, to meet the environmental and CO<sub>2</sub>- ambitions set for the end of the plan period and strive to make the UvA Paris-proof;
- the implementation of the HR agenda: strategic workforce planning, career development, leadership development, improvement of the annual consultations and our commitment to reducing the number of temporary appointments.

## 1.1. We prepare and educate all our students for a great start in science and society

Much has improved in education: study success has increased, there are fewer dropouts, the international classroom has been introduced and the range of interdisciplinary education and minors on offer has been widened. However, our education is not generally regarded among the best in the Netherlands. Based on the idea that education and research are closely intertwined, it is our ambition to strive in education for the same excellence we achieve in research. For the UvA, excellence in education is: a broad range (of disciplines, forms of teaching and examination), interaction between the disciplines on offer, an ambitious study culture, and curricula and lecturers that encourage students to get the best out of themselves - taking into account different levels of knowledge and (study) skills and aided by technological innovations. For this we improve:

- the interaction between students and teachers
- the involvement (commitment) and proactive attitude of the students
- the connection of the offer to the student, to our research (aided by the financial impulse discussed in ambition 2) and to society
- our offer for 'lifelong learning'

### *student-teacher*

In education, the emphasis is on student success (see also our Study Success 2.0 programme). This means that the student completes the programme successfully with qualitatively rich and meaningful learning outcomes. Effective contact between students and instructors is crucial for this; it was previously recognised in the 2019-2024 quality agreements. In the coming years, we will apply a number of evidence-informed innovations in the educational process for this purpose:

- we will increase the variety of forms of learning. This can be done by making good use of digitisation and learning in practice. The aim is to enrich the learning outcomes for students;
- we increase our use of digital tools to improve and intensify the contact between the student and the instructor about the subject matter;
- IT will also be used for activating learning (knowledge clips, feedback, support for self-study, flipped classrooms), for digital and AI-supported forms of testing, for eliminating deficiencies and backlogs;
- we strengthen the responsibility of lecturers for the supervision of students throughout the year;
- we increase the attention we give to a 'soft landing' in the first semester.

Effective contact between students and instructors promotes study success, but excellent education also requires that we no longer assume one-size-fits-all. Modern students differ in more and more ways: they have different ambitions, talents, backgrounds and levels of language proficiency (NL-EN-other), and they differ in the cultural baggage with which they enrol. For the majority of students, the way in which they learn and process information is different than it used to be. This requires teachers to adapt both themselves and their methods accordingly. We also ensure our curricula teach important academic skills, which students may not possess upon enrolment (such as multilingualism or algorithmic thinking). For students who want to distinguish themselves, we offer honour programmes and various extracurricular activities.

To realise these ambitions, we need to get to grips with the workload that education places on both lecturers and students.

### *involvement*

Excellent education goes hand in hand with student involvement: they feel co-responsible for the content of their education and are committed, both solicited and unsolicited, to their own study success. We also expect students to invest in their education as individuals and as academics. That is why we want to increase their involvement in:

- improvements in the curriculum
- the study associations and the academic community
- the participation and management of the university or faculty
- the wider environment, e.g. through community service learning

On each of these four aspects of student engagement, part 2 of the institutional plan (the implementation agenda) will contain concrete plans. Furthermore, it is preferable that students live in or close to Amsterdam, because this is where academic life takes place. That is why student housing will remain high on the agenda of our meetings with the region in the 2020s.

### *connecting our offer*

In order to provide excellent education, we must ask ourselves whether our educational portfolio is future-proof and distinctive, and how we can maintain its breadth in an affordable way. Before the end of 2022, each faculty (college/school) will make an analysis of its own educational offering and its own market share. The analysis must show how the current range of courses matches our research priorities, the four strategic themes in which we are going to invest (for research and education, see ambition 2) and demand from society as well as our stated values. We see, for example, that the demand for interdisciplinary programmes is increasing, as is the demand for mainstreaming (for example) sustainability, social justice, non-western perspectives and artificial intelligence. We want to renew and showcase the current offer of more than 100 minors, improve scheduling of minors for increased 'studiability' and make them more accessible to students from outside (students from programmes that are under the jurisdiction of other Examinations Boards and incoming exchange students).

We want to ensure that the bachelor's programmes remain on a sufficiently human scale, taking into account the available resources. We also ensure that our best scientists participate as lecturers. Furthermore, each programme must clarify the consequences of the choice for a bilingual UvA in concrete terms (which parts are offered in English and which are not?).

Master's programmes are the crowning glory of UvA's educational offering; they are the link between the development of knowledge and society. This is where the connection with our research and our research priorities (including RPAs) must be improved, as must the alignment of the master's programmes with the enrolment of students from interdisciplinary bachelors. A one-year master's degree is (too) short as a specialisation in a number of situations. That is why we will examine how a number of one-year master's programmes can be extended within the legal framework.

Finally, we will ask ourselves to what extent our education should go along with the trend of unbundling. This is the phenomenon that educational programmes are broken down into parts under the influence of digitisation. The parts are then offered by various partner institutions and can be regrouped into new offerings. In particular, subjects that are closely related to UvA-specific research lend themselves to unbundling strategies.

### *LLL*

Education does not stop after obtaining a 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 in order to first gain work experience. And graduates seek additional training geared towards their professional situation or information about the latest developments in their field of study; the knowledge from their initial education no longer lasts a lifetime. A provision of retraining and

further education courses will become a permanent mark of excellence in our education. We are extending the UvA Academy initiative to all faculties.

## 2. We exploit the width of our knowledge for innovation in fundamental research

Our research is of high quality across the board. We occupy a prominent position in almost all areas in which the UvA is active. This breadth is an important distinguishing feature of our university: we can make targeted and up-to-date choices at any time. It is our ambition to maintain and renew the quality of our fundamental research. We can innovate (partly) by working together where disciplines meet. A better understanding of how other disciplines work can inspire our own fundamental research and enrich it with new methods. In particular, developments in data science, in which our university plays a pioneering role, help to achieve this. The combination of depth and breadth also helps to provide knowledge for complex social problems. In addition, we want to create a stronger link between research and education. In the coming period, therefore, in addition to maintaining the integrity and independence of our fundamental research, the following points are important:

- more cooperation between disciplines through four strategic research themes that also have an impact on education
- a financial incentive for cooperation on these themes
- renewal of research methods using data science, among other things
- co-design of open science

*four themes*

Societally relevant research is driven by fascinated researchers and by innovations in fundamental research. This scientific innovation must arise in disciplines, but equally well at the intersections of disciplines - where the shared fascinations of scientists from different disciplines meet. In order to stimulate this, we will be putting four themes in the spotlight in the coming years, as an incentive for the renewal of research methods. For the moment, we are giving them these working titles:

- *Healthy, participating citizens*  
health and education as a basis for fair opportunities in society
- *Resilient, inclusive societies*  
resilient, prosperous and just societies and cultures
- *Responsible digital transformation*  
artificial intelligence and mankind in the digital age
- *Sustainable prosperity*  
responsible use of resources for a sustainable and prosperous future

Together, these themes showcase the breadth of the UvA and our perception of the major modern issues in which we want to and can play a role. They are therefore 'signs' of our scientific significance to society. The themes also group together the many research initiatives within the UvA and thus put our fundamental research even better on the map. For the elaboration of each of these themes, the rector, together with the deans of the faculties involved, forms a theme committee (four in total).

*impulse*

Innovation doesn't happen by itself. We will therefore make available a substantial amount from the existing budget for policy investments and from the necessary growth in government funding for research. This amount will not replace the existing provisions for RPAs, but is additional. The new

amount is intended for the start-up of research lines (RPA+) with an associated educational offering which will, over the next five to ten years:

- give content to one of the four themes and promote their interconnectedness
- be accompanied by changes in the range of education on the themes (e.g. an educational track or a minor)
- shape the renewal of research methods
- stimulate cooperation across faculty boundaries and with external public and private partners
- respond to external funding sources

The investments are intended to create a good research climate and develop new collaboration models that attract and retain authoritative scientists for the UvA. After the start-up phase, the research lines take care of their own funding (from education and through the first, second and third flow of funds). The final impulse for the four themes is thus well above the value of the start-up funds.

*data science* Data science is an important component in the innovation in fundamental research and methods. Its clever use can allow domains to develop in hitherto unimagined ways. Using data analysis, all kinds of processes can be mapped out in innovative ways (for example, by combining different types of data or using them as input for complex models). For example, data science can have a major impact on the way research is conducted. The use of methods based on data science may prove adventurous for researchers: it requires new expertise, teamwork and investment in a state-of-the-art infrastructure.

*open science* We are working actively to open up science and educational resources. This from a conviction that, as scientific research and education are publicly funded, they must therefore not be allowed to be monopolized. We see both opportunities and threats in *open science*. We must focus especially on our relationship with large, data-processing companies and on the uncertainty regarding the physical and intellectual property rights of research. That is why we work closely with other Dutch and European Universities (LERU) in the implementation of Plan S. This is a plan in which *open access* publications and opening up of research data is made compulsory for publicly funded research. It was drawn up by an international coalition of research funders (such as NWO in the Netherlands) and supported by the European Commission.

### 3. We strengthen the ties with our city and our region

There is much to be gained from stronger ties between the university and the world around us. The UvA contributes to society through knowledge transfer and through the training of a well-qualified, assertive workforce. Conversely, the outside world offers us opportunities for education (real life projects, internships, community service learning) and for scientific research (inspiring ideas, data, living labs). In particular, we want to strengthen our ties with the city of Amsterdam and the region in order to better serve the public interest and make more use of our environment. That is what this ambition is about. In addition, we are deepening and expanding our partnerships both locally and globally in order to maintain the top quality of our scientific work. The latter is elaborated in ambition 4. For the ambition described here - stronger ties with the city and the region - we want to:

- increase the visibility our significance for the city and the wider area
- strengthen relationships in the metropolitan area to gain greater mutual benefit
- capitalize on the opportunities that come with being close to other Amsterdam HE institutions

*visibility* We improve the visibility of the many wonderful initiatives that enthusiastic staff and students are already participating in within (and often in cooperation with) the municipality and the region. For this, we use both existing channels (such as OPeRA, the outreach programme to schools and dual education) and new forms. With initiatives such as *AI technology for people*, we focus on the population itself, in close cooperation with other knowledge institutions in Amsterdam.

As an international institution, we also contribute to the sustainability of the region by promoting, together with partners, the transition from a linear to a circular society. Our aim to reduce the environmental impact of our campuses and our waste streams contributes to that.

*reciprocity* Education and research (also) serve our environment and, conversely, can benefit from external cooperation in many ways. We want to better appreciate and stimulate this reciprocity: 'valorisation' of scientific work is a two-way street. As academics, we are aware of the value of our education and research for the city, but we can take greater note of what the city has to offer in the form of internships, relationships with the professional field, a good reputation with employers, access to data for research, the dissemination of research and access to external funding.

*other institutes* As UvA, we are part of a concentration of science and higher education in Amsterdam. This concentration is unique in the Netherlands, with more than 10,000 scientists and more than 100,000 students spread across the VU, institutes of NWO and KNAW, the HvA and AHK and institutions such as Sanquin and NKI-AvL. Our scientists work together with all of these institutions in all sorts of areas and to varying degrees. In the light of the four themes, we assume that these relationships can complement the breadth of the UvA, and we will look at what is needed to promote them. The merger of AMC and VUmc into Amsterdam UMC shows how important it is to take down barriers to cooperation in control models and administrations.

#### 4. We deepen and multiply our partnerships

In order to maintain the top quality of our scientific work, we want to expand our partnerships; locally, nationally and internationally. Increasing exchange with various partners has many advantages. It provides recognition for the quality of our work and enhances our reputation. It helps us disseminate and exploit knowledge. Partnerships can stimulate fundamental research and education, for example through private investments. More and new partnerships also feed into our research and education with insights, data and practical issues, as does the link with the city. As a university, we are expanding our network through, for example, start-ups of new businesses and spin-offs, through boards and committees in which scientists participate, or through our thousands of alumni who work all over the world. We want to support researchers and employees who seek external cooperation. In particular, efforts are needed in three areas:

- better showcasing our good research reputation in Europe
- entering into long-term partnerships with companies and social institutions
- investing in spin-offs and new ventures

*reputation* Both in the quality assessment (SEP) and in the funding of science, impact and cooperation are increasingly important parameters. This is not just about applied research. It's also about the innovation of fundamental research and research which is linked to societal challenges and issues. As the University of Amsterdam, we need to take advantage of our location and our good reputation

in research to make a quantum leap in joint ventures and partnerships. That requires investing (more) in external relationships and in our role in Europe's scientific 'ecosystem'. The more visible our work, the better we are able to gain funding from philanthropy.

*multi-year*

Many UvA collaborations take place on the basis of concrete projects. Our ambitions for the 2020s call for us to invest in more long-term substantive partnerships, as we have done in recent years with ARCnl, the ICAI, or the Sarphati Institute. We also want to apply this formula in other areas, such as the Knowledge Centre on Inequality of Opportunities in the City (*Kenniscentrum Kansengelijkheid in de Stad*). In addition, our scientists can play a stronger role in administrative partnerships in the scientific landscape, such as the Knowledge Coalition. This puts us in a better position to influence political decision-making in the Netherlands and Europe.

*spin-offs*

Many scientists have a keen eye for the impact and social value of their research. The UvA has produced various successful spin-offs (commercial initiatives). Examples include the sale of a spin-off in the field of image recognition and of a digital training programme for school children. In the 2020s, we want to provide a more structural basis for this. We are learning from successful colleagues how to optimize the current auxiliary structures IXA, UvA Ventures Holding, Matrix IC, Science & Business Amsterdam Science Park and ACE and how to make better use of the collaboration with other Amsterdam institutions. We also want to learn how to identify and create opportunities for successful spin-offs within our research and education.

## 5. We become magnetic for talent

The UvA's capital consists of the knowledge, talents and motivation of both scientific and support staff. To remain a broad top university, we need to retain and attract a variety of talent and to allow it to flourish. This is not easy in the competitive world of science. The ambition is to be a working and learning environment which talents with diverse backgrounds and perspectives are happy to choose for and in which they come into their own. This requires a modern and attractive employer who is in tune with today's employee. It is based on a mature working relationship with a good balance between autonomy for and responsibility of the employee. Being a good employer also means meeting the need for purpose (meaning), for a pleasant, safe, inclusive and challenging work climate, and for a good work-life balance. It also calls for a balanced appreciation of the various tasks that contribute to education and research (including the support of it) and for control of the workload and the administrative burden. We implement the established HR agenda and invest in both academic and support staff:

- leadership development as a lever for a modern and attractive workplace
- a more diverse workforce
- talent and career policy that offers scope for career differentiation, teamwork and sustainable employability of employees

*leadership*

Executives hold key positions at the UvA, which is why we continue to invest in coaching and connecting leadership. Leaders get the best out of their teams and everyone's qualities; not everyone has to do the same or be good at everything. A good leader uses characteristics such as entrepreneurship, diversity and teamwork. He or she gives employees the autonomy and ownership they deserve and that is necessary, for example to control work pressure or to balance personal and

collective ambitions. We know that tackling work pressure is difficult and requires a range of measures, partly because the problems vary per faculty and per department. We expect managers to recognise the importance of an effective design of work processes (such as examination policy or educational logistics), as described by the motto 'more value and less bureaucracy'.

*diversity*

Any talent policy incorporates the appreciation of a diverse composition of the staff body - and also of teams. Diversity enriches our academic environment with a broad spectrum of perspectives. The starting point of the Diversity Document (2019) is that the differences between people matter. We wish to attract (or promote) more employees from varying backgrounds, and therefore we must, above all, ensure equal opportunities and an inclusive learning and working environment. Appointing more female professors is a prominent goal, but we focus on diversity along multiple dimensions.

*career policy*

In recognising and valuing the achievements of our scientific staff, we look at not only (or mainly) research performance, but all facets of our work: education, research and innovation. We want to challenge scientists to perform, at some point in their careers, all core tasks of the university in varying teams (and paying attention to each other's qualities). In our remuneration and promotion policy, we pay more attention to the equivalence of the three core tasks of education, research and innovation. In the diversification of career paths, there should also be more room for the appreciation of team contributions. For support staff, we pay more attention to career development and sustainable employability.

To attract new talent, we have an employee value proposition (EVP). In other words: we actively seek out talent and compose a serious offer, while taking note of what talented people are looking for in an employer, in addition to a stimulating working environment. In terms of salary, the possibilities for this within the collective labour agreement are limited, but we can do more in terms of specific allowances, assistance with housing and career opportunities for partners. The current scarcity of talent in the field of data science and artificial intelligence has our particular attention here.

## 6. We increase the agility of our education and research organization

To remain in the vanguard of science and to educate our students so they can be the leaders of tomorrow, we have to respond to rapid changes in society. This requires a degree of flexibility that is often found in each of us, but is not easily achieved in the complex professional organization that is the UvA. That is why it is a core ambition to increase the agility and organizational power of the UvA in the coming years. This requires:

- creative, project-based ways of working
- more uniform and more effective design of processes
- reliable services with an eye for the essence of science

*creativity*

The great level of creativity of individual employees helps us to identify and seize opportunities in education and research. Making room for creativity is therefore of great importance. At the same time, we have common goals that we want to achieve. In order to achieve a good balance between these, we want to move towards more programmatic and viscous forms of work. We focus on what needs to be achieved, less on how that should be done. This requires an entrepreneurial spirit and thinking beyond (rigid) regulations. However, it is important that everyone has a clear picture of

formal constraints (legislation and regulations, finances, quality system) and where there is room for professional autonomy. This is in line with the desire to reduce the regulatory burden and to increase ownership for professionals regarding the primary process.

*uniformity*

A precondition for flexible, problem-oriented and agile working methods is that 'systems' support people as they work together across unit boundaries. In the coming years, we must continue to work unabatedly towards a more effective design of our process chains; on cooperation between the departments and between the departments and faculties. Historical differences between faculties and programmes that have no real significance, will be eliminated. We do this, for example, in the Educational Logistics (*Onderwijslogistiek*) programme. In addition, we need a different mind-set. In formal organizations, new initiatives often end up at the back of the queue for facilities, while what we actually want is to embrace them and pull them forward. If we want to promote entrepreneurship internally, we must be aware of this.

*services*

High-quality education and research require good, safe and targeted support, provided by the joint service units and within the faculties. We aim for a sincere pride in all ('at the UvA, things tend to be well organised'). We are working together on a better understanding of user requirements in existing service level agreements (SLAs) and on improved product and service catalogues. The existing multi-year development plans of the joint UvA and HvA service units are the starting point for this. Service provision will also change under the influence of digitisation. Two goals are to be pursued: first of all, more standardisation and quality in the process chains and, at the same time, a closer connection between the support services and education and research, e.g. by better linking the work of the services to faculty support and vice versa.