STRATEGY
2020-2025
1. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
   Responsible
   Open
   Personal

2. Our priority areas
   Sustainable
   Enterprising
   Diverse

5. Research

6. Knowledge transfer

9. Successful implementation of our strategy
The university has traditionally been a beacon of academic endeavour and the sharing of knowledge. A place for free and inquiring minds. Yet, at the same time, the university’s role, position, and significance as a knowledge institute are increasingly being seen in a new light. And that raises questions.

What is Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam’s position? And, perhaps even more importantly, what does our university stand for?

We answer these questions in this VU Amsterdam Strategy for 2020-2025. In this document, we make choices based on our history, our identity, and the values that underpin every aspect of our work. The nature of these choices shed light on how we relate to the wider community, making that relationship crystal clear.

It is an ambitious and aspirational strategy. After all, we do have great aspirations, and we confidently share them with the world around us. This is because we firmly believe that together – both students and staff – we can move mountains. Because together, we are VU Amsterdam. For our part, we – the Executive Board and Deans – will make every effort to bring this strategy to fruition in the years ahead.
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam – Knowledge partner for life

We take responsibility for people and the planet by delivering values-driven education, research and knowledge transfer. We imbue students and professionals with knowledge and ‘A Broader Mind’. We pursue pioneering research, both within and across disciplines. As free thinkers with a focus on diversity, purpose and compassion, our students and staff have a deep connection with one another while being fully engaged with society as a whole. This is Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam’s mission.

We are Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

We pour our heart and soul into the education we provide. We are deeply committed to our students, striving to focus on every individual while remaining sensitive to their needs. A broad academic development is an integral part of our degree programmes. This means that our students are both well-educated and open-minded. Students with a ‘A Broader Mind’.

Our student population has always been extremely diverse. At VU Amsterdam, everyone has the freedom to be themselves. We encourage personal development by means of encounters and debate, and we believe it is vital to give people sufficient leeway for interpretation and reflection.

Our educational and research activities are closely interwoven. We combine our leading position in research with a strong societal orientation. Our research is also increasingly multidisciplinary in nature. Its multidisciplinary character profits from the fact that all academic disciplines are located on a single physical campus, which encourages mutual cooperation.

We also cooperate with partners throughout the region and outside the Netherlands. The campus is easily accessible by bus, train and metro, and it is located in the heart of the Zuidas Knowledge District – the Netherlands’ leading business district. In our pursuit of high-quality and inclusive education and outstanding research, we also cooperate with other societally-oriented European universities in the Aurora network.

Our education, research and knowledge-transfer activities have a real impact. In this way, we aim to help shape a better world. We are Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, a university to be proud of.
Reading guide

This VU Amsterdam Strategy for 2020-2025 indicates how we plan to achieve our aspirations.

The first section expresses our identity, our core values, our roots, and our view of the world.

Sections 2 and 3 highlight the most important pillars of VU Amsterdam’s strategy – our three priority areas and four profile themes. They also list those VU Amsterdam partners who are helping us to implement our strategy.

The following sections describe our strategic course, in terms of education (Section 4), research (Section 5), knowledge transfer (Section 6) and operational management (Section 7). These sections all share a common structure – we present our vision, we formulate our aspirations, and we specify our action plan. Finally, in Sections 8 and 9, we present details of our financial policy and of how we plan to implement our strategy.
1. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

RESPONSIBLE
OPEN
PERSONAL

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is a research university that has faculties in the humanities, sciences, social sciences and medical sciences. VU Amsterdam was founded in 1880, under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper, a theologian, journalist, and politician. The university was funded from private sources. The former Theological Faculty was one of the university’s first three faculties. In addition to religious studies, VU Amsterdam also had a Faculty of Arts and a Faculty of Law.
1.1 Identity

The motives that inspired our founders in those early days still serve as guiding principles today.

- **Freedom and responsibility**
  Freedom is our most cherished value. We are an independent university, yet we feel a profound responsibility to engage with society. Our researchers are key partners in societal debate, and they help give shape to public opinion based on scientific insights.

- **Pluralism**
  Drawing on our independence and sense of responsibility, we actively support the cause of pluralism in society. At our university, everyone’s views are heard, no matter how controversial they might be. Since its inception, VU Amsterdam’s academic work and convictions have reflected the diversity in society.

- **Scope for diversity of belief**
  At VU Amsterdam, we respect everyone’s beliefs, while at the same time championing people’s right to call any belief into question. That, too, is what a university is all about.

- **Intellectual education and citizenship**
  Abraham Kuyper pursued the 19th-century ideal of Bildung – broad-based intellectual and personal education. We see VU Amsterdam as a cultural centre, a community of values whose impact extends well beyond its own physical boundaries. These values underpin our organization and our research, as well as our educational and knowledge transfer activities. They also help to shape society. This is why we have always deliberately questioned the meaning, role...
We are committed to our fellow human beings, to future generations, and to contributing to an open, egalitarian and democratic society.

and responsibility of the university in its own particular context, and why we will continue to do so. We encourage our students, academic staff, and other employees to be broad minded when examining society and their personal role within it.

Identity and legal entity

VU Amsterdam operates within the framework of a legal entity – the VU Foundation. The foundation’s statutes are based on the following principle:

“The VU Foundation is based on the Association, which, building on its Christian origins, aims to contribute to a better world, where justice, humanity, and responsibility for each other and for the world are of pivotal importance. The Foundation draws inspiration from the structure of its educational and research activities, and from sharing knowledge with – and being of service to – society as a whole. It recognizes and values the role played by philosophy and purpose in this context.”

The VUvereniging promotes VU Amsterdam’s interactions with society and the development of the university’s identity.

Identity – freedom

Freedom is at the heart of our identity. The very name of our university makes reference to freedom. For us, this means the freedom to be yourself; the freedom to develop both personally and intellectually, in the direction that suits you best; freedom in education, research and knowledge transfer – off the beaten
track, unencumbered by the boundaries of individual disciplines; and freedom in scientific and societal debates.

But with freedom comes responsibility. Our freedom obliges us to work on behalf of our fellow human beings, on behalf of future generations and on behalf of an open, egalitarian and democratic society.

**Identity and A Broader Mind**

VU Amsterdam has launched a wide-ranging theme project entitled ‘A Broader Mind’. This lends substance to our special identity and permeates our core tasks of education, research, and knowledge transfer. This ideology is entirely in keeping with VU Amsterdam’s unique nature, as reflected by our diverse student population, societal orientation, and strongly interdisciplinary research. An environment like this encourages students, academics and professionals here at VU Amsterdam and elsewhere to be more broad-minded. A Broader Mind rests on the three pillars of personal development, academic expansion and societal orientation.

VU Amsterdam helps undergraduates, postgraduate students and PhD scholars, academics, and professionals – both inside the university and elsewhere – to develop into individuals with A Broader Mind. These are people who

- are aware of their own personality, motivation and frame of mind while, at the same time, being open to these qualities in others
- are able to combine in-depth professional expertise with a broad multidisciplinary view and a corresponding skill set
- are able to think critically and from different points of view
- are able to see, think and work ‘outside the box’
- as engaged professionals and skilled and informed citizens are able to help shape a better world – today and tomorrow.

A Broader Mind is a common thread that runs through this 2020-2025 Strategy. It is explored in detail in each of the following sections.
1.2 Our core values – Responsible, Open and Personal

Our core values derive directly from our identity and our history. Anyone who is part of the VU Amsterdam community will endorse these values:

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<th>Responsible</th>
<th>Open</th>
<th>Personal</th>
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<td><strong>We are committed to people and society, and want to be of service to them.</strong></td>
<td><strong>We are accessible and receptive to diversity in disciplines, cultures, ideas, nationalities, beliefs and philosophies.</strong></td>
<td><strong>We have regard and respect for every individual, and every member of our community is given due recognition.</strong></td>
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We fine-tune our educational, research and knowledge transfer activities in line with societal themes. We encourage our students and staff to work effectively and passionately to help shape a better world. In the research arena, our academics and PhD scholars display integrity and transparency. We work to make the scientific and societal impact of our activities more evident.

VU Amsterdam serves as a meeting place. Here – against a background of trust, respect and interest – differences generate new insights and innovation, sharpness and clarity, excellence and a broader understanding. This echoes throughout each of our core tasks, our operational management, and campus life. VU Amsterdam is open to its local context. Together with trusted partners, we create impact by means of education and research.

Every single member of the university community is unique and valuable, and has the opportunity to pursue personal development. People maintain relationships that are respectful, ethically sound, and engaged. We take great pleasure in educating first-year students and those who are more advanced in their academic careers. We take a dedicated and personal approach to all of our students.
1.3 The world around us

The preceding paragraphs formulate VU Amsterdam’s identity and the core values that underpin our activities in the wider world. How do we view that world? What are the key developments, in terms of how our university operates?

The world around us – the most important developments

Our educational, research and knowledge-transfer activities are shaped by societal, technological, demographic, climatic, and geopolitical developments. These developments impact VU Amsterdam’s position and significance, and the way we structure our core tasks. Most current developments fall into this category.

- Digitalization is changing the form and content of education and research. New digital and technological developments will make it possible to gather, develop, and share knowledge independently of time and place. This will create opportunities for cooperation and innovation, while at the same time fostering competition between individual knowledge institutions. The development and transfer of knowledge will cease to be the sole preserve of traditional knowledge institutions. As a result, cooperative ventures will take on new dimensions. This will also spark competition with actors from other sectors. Digitalization is triggering dramatic changes to our educational and research activities, making open science, fair data and open education the new norm. Digitalization will also transform the essence of degree programmes, through developments in Artificial Intelligence, 3D and Augmented Virtual Reality, for example. Educational curricula will have to adapt to this demand – and to demand from the job market. As a result, lecturers will need to employ different skills.

- Shift from the transfer of information to the acquisition and application of knowledge. Ongoing digital and technological developments will promote knowledge acquisition in new and different ways, not all of which will involve universities. This will bring about a major change in education, which will be less a matter of knowledge transfer and more a question of applying knowledge and developing skills. It will be important for students and professionals to critically filter knowledge from various sources of information and to assess its true worth. In addition to practical expertise, this will also require personal skills such as flexibility, self-knowledge, entrepreneurship and creativity. These skills are of fundamental importance to students and professionals who continue to learn throughout their lives. People will be increasingly exposed to differences through intercultural, geographical and interdisciplinary connections. This will require personal development, while at the same time offering many new opportunities to pursue this objective.
• **Lifelong development, and flexibility and personalization in education are becoming the new norms.** This evolution in education, in terms of increasing flexibility and a more personal approach, can be partly attributed to developments in the field of information technology and digitalization. The job market, too, is experiencing a period of dynamic change. Jobs are evolving rapidly, and the pace at which knowledge becomes outdated is accelerating. Also, many of today’s graduates and PhDs will switch careers several times during their working lives. Students and professionals will have to continually hone their skills throughout their careers, rather than resting on their laurels after graduation. Traditional teaching programmes will be unable to cater to the needs of the growing number of people who want to combine work and study. ‘Lifelong learning’ will become increasingly axiomatic, making people responsible for their own personal development.

• **Research must demonstrate its significance and have a genuine impact.** Academics and society have a shared desire for scientific research with real impact. As a result of declining confidence in public institutions, universities will increasingly have to justify their existence. At the same time, there is a growing interest among academics in finding answers to societal issues. However, this in no way detracts from the importance of basic research. The worldwide system for appraising the work of academics – which is almost exclusively based on numbers of publications and citations – is coming under increasing pressure.

• **Societal issues are increasing in scope and complexity.** We are faced with a growing number of increasingly complex societal, ecological, cultural and psychosocial issues. Natural resources are being depleted, resulting in a climate crisis, and we are reaching the limits of the planet’s ability to cope, in terms of maintaining a habitable and vital environment. The only way to meet today’s societal challenges is to boost cooperation and to embrace a combination of disciplines and views. We need more trailblazers: people who are courageous and not afraid of making mistakes. Ever more groups need a place for encounters, as well as scope for meaning, reflection and debate. The demands of knowledge, renewal and diversity call for a community that can provide freedom and security, one that also avoids or dispels individual ‘bubbles’.

• **The funding system for higher education is no longer tenable.** In recent decades, the government grant per student has fallen by 25%. At the same time, countries such as China and Germany are actually boosting their investment in higher education. Dutch universities are currently among the best in the world, in terms of research and educational programmes. The question, however, is how long this position can be sustained in the face of falling investments in teaching.
and research. Economic developments are also having an adverse impact on people’s workload and working climate, and on the well-being of PhD scholars and students. This means that we must continually assess feasibility in terms of financial and human resources as we work towards achieving our aspirations. In addition, the type of funding involved is putting increasing pressure on the humanities and social sciences.

- **The size, composition, and nature of the student population are changing.**
  The number of students with Dutch educational backgrounds will continue to rise until 2026, after which it will start to fall. We will continue to enrol increasing numbers of students from outside the Netherlands. At the same time, new Dutch students are becoming more diverse in terms of their educational, cultural, and religious backgrounds. In addition, factors such as rising rents in Amsterdam, the vagaries of the student loan system, and study loads are compelling more and more students to continue living at home.

- **The world around us – cooperation**
  There is an increasing need for us to work with partners, both in the immediate region and further afield. There is a growing trend for educational activities, research and knowledge transfer to focus on solving societal problems. As a result, cooperation with businesses, government agencies (including local agencies), other knowledge institutions, and our international partners is becoming increasingly important.

VU Amsterdam was one of the founders of the Aurora network, which functions as a meeting place for comparable European research universities. Aurora universities perform outstanding research – they are all among the top 250 in the world – and combine this tradition of excellence with a strong focus on societal impact. The Aurora network has a strong focus on high-quality, inclusive education that prepares students for international societal challenges.

### 1.4 From identity and core values to our three priority areas, four profile themes, and nine strategic aspirations

How can we structure our work in a way that will enable us to achieve our aspirations? What choices do we make in the course of our work? These questions are spotlighted in the following sections.

Our answer to the question how involves three **priority areas**. These are characteristics that are reflected in every facet of VU Amsterdam’s work, as covered in Section 2.
The profile themes, which reflect the essence of our approach, are mirrored in the three core tasks of education, research and knowledge transfer. The profile themes are listed in Section 3.

In the following sections, we formulate nine strategic aspirations that will define our focus in the upcoming years, in line with our priority areas and profile themes. These nine aspirations span the fields of education (Section 4), research (Section 5), knowledge transfer (Section 6) and organization (Section 7). This is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Summary of priority areas, strategic aspirations and profile themes.
2. Our priority areas

SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISING DIVERSE

Sustainable, enterprising and diverse – these are the priority values that govern our actions, and the essence of our education, research, knowledge transfer, and operational management.
Our three priority areas

Priority area 1. Sustainable

Our society is facing major challenges and far-reaching issues. These include climate change and the depletion of natural resources, along with issues such as increasing divisions and polarization. Then there is the information society – which is putting great pressure on personal privacy – and the dilemmas presented by robotization and artificial intelligence. To say nothing of health challenges, too little exercise, the levels of stress to which people are exposed, and the large numbers of people who feel that their lives lack meaning.

We need sustainable solutions for each and every one of these important themes. As a university, we feel that is it our responsibility to help find these solutions. This will involve addressing present-day issues without compromising the future. That is in keeping with our mission – taking responsibility for people and the planet.

We feel that the term ‘sustainable’ has very wide-ranging significance. Sustainability is about more than just the environment, it also extends to economic, human, cultural and societal aspects. After all, natural resources are not the only things that are in short supply.
Sustainability is not just about the environment, but also extends to economic, human, cultural and societal aspects.

Sustainability is also a vital issue for VU Amsterdam itself. We are making every effort to ensure that the life of our university, our community, our staff and our students is both sustainable and healthy. At the same time, we are focusing on the sustainable and efficient use of scarce resources. Being located very close to a major train station, we encourage our employees to opt for public transport rather than driving to work or using air travel for longer journeys. We measure our success in achieving our sustainability aspirations in terms of our contribution to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
We want to create added value for society. This calls for an enterprising attitude.

Priority area 2. Enterprising

We want to create added value for society. This obliges us to make full and proper use of the academic and practical expertise, competences and personal skills of PhD scholars and students, academic staff, and professionals. This calls for an enterprising attitude. At VU Amsterdam that means seeing, creating and seizing opportunities. Being creative and courageous. Taking personal responsibility. Daring to take risks and not being afraid to experiment.

An enterprising nature is also a prerequisite for successful partnerships, and for innovation and modernization in a rapidly changing world – one in which the role of the university itself is also changing. VU Amsterdam encourages our community to develop an entrepreneurial spirit as a way of making a contribution to society. In addition to educational activities, research and knowledge transfer, this entrepreneurial attitude will benefit our internal organization and support for our core tasks. We feel that entrepreneurship is the ideal attitude for resolving societal problems and for addressing a range of other issues such as diversity.
Our pioneering role within the Dutch university landscape

The members of the Dutch Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) are collectively committed to entrepreneurship. On behalf of the VNSU, VU Amsterdam is playing a leading part in this endeavour by encouraging entrepreneurship right across the board. This involves:

- Encouraging and consolidating entrepreneurship within the contexts of education, research and knowledge transfer.
- Being a partner in the ‘Holland in the Valley’ network, which enables students to complete internships with entrepreneurs and businesses in Silicon Valley. The network also allows selected student start-ups to take part in a comprehensive bootcamp programme there. It also provides networking opportunities for our hundreds of alumni there.
- Augmenting the university’s Knowledge Transfer Offices that support researchers’ knowledge-transfer activities across the entire range of domains – humanities, sciences, social sciences and medical sciences.
- Offering greater scope for knowledge-transfer activities and enhancing the approaches used to appraise researchers and accord them recognition, while also taking elements such as entrepreneurship, leadership, and results at team level into account.
- Smoothing the way for academic start-ups and scale-ups, and helping them find funding.
- A joint VSNU-Startupdelta-ACTI academic start-up competition.

Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Social Entrepreneurship involves creating societal impact through entrepreneurship. If we are to tackle the major societal issues successfully, we will need to combine expertise in a specific subject with the appropriate soft skills. Using an entrepreneurial approach, we will then be able to develop innovative solutions to social issues. Within the Aurora network, VU Amsterdam will lead the way in developing a teaching programme in this area.

Priority area 3. Diverse

People differ in terms of their ethnic, cultural or religious background, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, educational background and academic discipline. All members of the VU community must be able to bridge such differences. We want to teach them to be open-minded to the uniqueness of others. That, too, contributes to A Broader Mind.

Diversity is woven into the very identity of VU Amsterdam. At our university, we firmly believe that diversity contributes to the quality of education and research, while also benefitting cooperative ventures. We put great effort into promoting inclusiveness for all of our employees, with all of their shared differences. At VU Amsterdam we feel that every aspect of university life is enriched by diversity, especially in a world with more and more intercultural, geographical and interdisciplinary connections. We have incorporated this enrichment into the Mixed Classroom.
3. Our profile themes

The profile themes will give substance to our mission. They will also relate to the educational, research, and knowledge-transfer activities we will use to enhance our multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. We will also be continuing the four multidisciplinary profile themes set out in the previous strategy.

1. **Human Health & Life Sciences** studies the health and well-being of people, including the associated organization and funding.

2. **Governance for Society** studies the organization and governance of organizations and societies.

3. **Science for Sustainability** studies the conditions underpinning a future-proof balance between people, the environment and the economy.

4. **Connected World** studies the influence of digitalization and globalization on human, cultural, economic and political relationships.

We want everyone – students, academic staff, and society at large – to be clearer about what VU Amsterdam stands for. We will therefore be intensifying our focus on these four profile themes. This is not just a question of research activities: it is also about educational activities and knowledge transfer.
What sets VU Amsterdam’s Human Health & Life Sciences apart from the rest?

VU Amsterdam has built up a strong international reputation for research in areas such as:

a. The development, diagnosis and treatment of various forms of cancer, cardiovascular diseases, neurodegenerative diseases such as multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer’s disease, musculoskeletal disorders, depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders that have a genetic, physical and mental component.

b. The health-enhancing effects of diet and exercise, as well as the responsible promotion of physical competences in a way that excludes any risk of injury.

c. Actively involving patients in research, care and policy, and giving them an official role in these areas (public health).

The goals of Human Health & Life Sciences:

1. In the upcoming years we plan to expand boundary-transcending research still further, in cooperation with public and private partners.

2. Together with the City of Amsterdam and Amsterdam UMC, we want to pave the way for partnerships with businesses and scale-ups in this field, and to bring them all under one roof.

3. Our range of Bachelor’s degree programmes will be tailored to this theme. We will also expand the transfer of students between Bachelor’s and Master’s (or Research Master’s) degree programmes, and make the whole process more flexible.

4. We will expand the scope for Community Service Learning still further, and consolidate our postgraduate continuing education activities.

The *Human Health & Life Sciences* profile theme contributes to the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
What sets VU Amsterdam’s Governance for Society apart from the rest?

VU Amsterdam is multidisciplinary and problem-driven. It focuses on exploring issues such as:

a. Demands made on the quality of governance by emerging societal challenges such as digitalization, internationalization, new inequalities and diversity.
b. The effectiveness and efficiency of policies in specific areas.

The goals of Governance for Society:

1. Within this theme, we will smooth the way for academic knowledge transfer by consolidating expertise from a range of disciplines and applying this to specific societal issues. In doing so, we will strengthen cooperation with our social partners while also boosting our innovative research activities.

2. Over the course of the next few years we will professionalize our postgraduate continuing education programmes.

3. In rebranding our postgraduate continuing education and executive education, while developing the Amsterdam Schools of Management and Governance, we will help to further the knowledge development and professionalization of highly skilled professionals in the profit and non-profit sector.

The Governance for Society profile theme contributes to the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
What sets VU Amsterdam’s Science for Sustainability apart from the rest?
We will spotlight the entire chain of basic and applied research activities, and focus on their practical applications. Using the knowledge gained in this way, we will enable our students to help shape a better world, while preparing them for a sustainable career.

The goals of Science for Sustainability:
1. Expanding the Amsterdam Sustainability Institute (ASI), VU Amsterdam’s research institute for interdisciplinary research in the field of sustainability.
2. Knowledge transfer that has an impact on sustainability, by means of:
   a. new commercial activities in the Demonstrator Lab and the Amsterdam Venture Studio
   b. collaboration with the City of Amsterdam and Amsterdam businesses in the area of sustainability, and the new building for spin-offs and spin-ins
3. Developing a distinctive, internationally attractive range of multidisciplinary Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes on the theme of Science for Sustainability
4. Honing our international profile as one of the top institutions in the world in the area of Sustainability

Research within the Science for Sustainability profile theme will focus on the following core Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in which VU Amsterdam has a great deal of expertise:
What sets VU Amsterdam’s Connected World apart from the rest?
A unique feature of VU Amsterdam is the robust interaction between the perspectives from which Connected World is studied, such as cultural history, linguistics and artificial intelligence. In numerous externally funded projects, academics are researching connection and exclusion in forms of religion and religious history; urban environments and architecture; language processing by computers and speaking robots; and the role of social media in our society. Connected World also has a place in our degree programmes. This is reflected by a range of minors, such as Digital Humanities and Social Analytics, European History and Culture, Migration Studies and Religious Studies. Our Master’s in Text Mining will open the door to further specialization.

The goals of Connected World:
1. In the upcoming years, we will be bolstering our research effort into interactions between man and machine. The scientists involved are attempting to integrate the specific qualities of machine intelligence and human intelligence to effectively boost their collective intelligence.
2. We will apply our specific expertise in the field of natural language editing to the sciences, the social sciences, and in the School of Business and Economics.
3. We will continue to expand our educational offerings in the area of Connected World.

The Connected World profile theme contributes to the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):
In the previous section, we explain how we structure our activities in four profile themes. Details of our aspirations in the areas of education, research, knowledge transfer and operational management are set out below. First, we will briefly explore the matter of cooperation with partners in our immediate surroundings.

**Cooperation and geographical playing field**

The entire world is VU Amsterdam’s geographic playing field. We are fully aware of the need to seek targeted cooperation with partners in the region, throughout the Netherlands, and beyond.

**International**

Research is not constrained by geographical boundaries. Our researchers will cooperate intensively with knowledge institutions all around the world. VU Amsterdam’s 2020-2025 *internationalization strategy* focuses on:

1. International Relations and Reputation.
2. International Mobility for Quality.

VU Amsterdam will be cooperating with more than 100 other universities in various European research programmes and teaching programmes. We will also be cooperating intensively with other institutions in the profit and non-profit sectors. VU Amsterdam will focus specifically on South Africa, Indonesia and China. Within the Aurora Network (which was itself established by VU Amsterdam) the university will continue to engage in very special and intensive cooperative projects, which extend far beyond the boundaries of teaching and research.

**National**

At national level, too, we will continue to work hand in hand with other knowledge institutions and agencies in the fields of education, research and knowledge transfer. In the field of research, VU Amsterdam is currently leading two NWO Gravitation consortia, and participating in several others. These long-term (10-year) multidisciplinary research projects provide a launchpad for world-leading research with a truly global impact. In the field of education, we have developed a joint Bachelor’s programme in Mechanical Engineering with the University of Twente. Hot on the heels of this initial success, we are also exploring the options for joint Master’s programmes and research in the upcoming period. This would involve a multidisciplinary approach, spanning the range of disciplines available at VU Amsterdam.

**Regional**

VU Amsterdam is strongly rooted in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region. This concentration of different knowledge institutions in a relatively small area is unique. The Amsterdam region is an extraordinary landscape, because Amsterdam is such a pleasant and innovative city in which to live. The business centre of the Netherlands and Schiphol Airport – a major link to the rest of the world and a hub for international rail connections – are both situated in the immediate vicinity of VU Amsterdam. We want to explore the potential of this position still further and to join forces with other regional knowledge institutions, agencies, businesses and social partners.
4. Education

We want to excel in our three statutory core tasks – education, research, and knowledge transfer. And we want to matter. In this section we set out our vision for education, together with our aspirations and how we plan to achieve them.
4.1 Our vision for education

We train our students to be responsible, critical and engaged academics who are always trying to broaden their horizons. We strive to not only to impart knowledge to our students, but also to imbue them with wisdom. A broad perspective, ‘A Broader Mind’. Our teaching focuses on our students’ personal development, in-depth academic knowledge, and orientation on society. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is a committed, open and inclusive educational environment where teaching staff, academics, PhD scholars and students meet to collectively formulate questions and to reflect on them. These encounters make our educational activities personal – our students matter to us and we offer them customized guidance and supervision. This also means that we will continue to invest in the ongoing development of our lecturers. Wherever possible and relevant, the personal background and experience of students and teaching staff are incorporated into the educational experience. The education we provide links to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We take every opportunity to share our knowledge and experience by means of open access. In this way, we promote social progress while further augmenting our educational activities.

Our academic community is characterized by great diversity. We see this diversity as an added value, and embrace it as such. Everyone involved feels a shared responsibility for the quality of the education we provide. Our students are proud of their degree programmes and their university, while the university – in turn – is proud of its students and staff.
We educate our students to be responsible, critical and engaged academics who continually broaden their horizons.

4.2 Our educational aspirations

Our Educational Vision, our Educational Agenda, and our Educational Quality Assurance Plan (this website is only available in Dutch) are an extension of this strategy. They define VU Amsterdam’s vision of education, how that vision is translated into education policy throughout the university, and how progress towards those objectives is monitored. There are five key objectives:

1. A sharper focus on the quality of our educational activities.
2. Improving students’ academic success.
3. Developing a well-balanced and internationally appealing education portfolio.
4. Further innovation in education.
5. Further improving support for our students and our educational activities.

In line with the objectives we have formulated in the Education Agenda, the emphasis in the period covered by this strategy will be on: (1) Future-proof forms of education and (2) Lifelong Development.

Aspiration 1: Developing future-proof forms of education

We use the following approaches to develop educational activities that are both future-proof and responsive to changing demand:

a. A Broader Mind for Students.
b. Personalized and customized learning.
a. A Broader Mind for Students

Our educational activities emphasize the societal value and relevance of academic questions. We offer our students the opportunity to develop fully, from an academic, personal and societal perspective. This equips them for success in the workplace and society, and helps them to find meaningful roles in those contexts. We encourage this development by making diversity an integral part of our educational activities, and through a range of educational and multidisciplinary programmes aimed at collectively tackling societal issues. This is exemplified by the Mixed Classroom, Community Service Learning, and the promotion of Social Entrepreneurship. We also offer a study programme, developed for and by students. Using experiential learning, students from different degree programmes cooperate on societal themes and on their own personal development. We help students to develop ‘A Broader Mind’ by inviting them to reflect on who they are, how they view the world, their role in society, and how they relate to others.

VU Amsterdam is a committed, open and inclusive educational environment where teaching staff, academics, PhD scholars and students meet to collectively formulate and reflect upon questions.

In an increasingly diverse and international student population, the Mixed Classroom offers a stimulating, inclusive, international and multidisciplinary educational environment for all VU Amsterdam students.

VU Amsterdam’s Mixed Classroom harnesses differences between individuals to enrich the students’ learning experience. Our students learn to consider issues from different perspectives, and to develop an awareness of implicit associations. In this way they learn to deal with differences, and discover why difference has value. The interaction between different styles, ideas, backgrounds and perspectives expands and extends the learning process which, in turn, enhances the quality of education. The Mixed Classroom will be one of the key elements in our educational programmes.

Community Service Learning (CSL) is a form of education in which students make practical use of their academic skills to solve societal issues. Here, reflection forms an important aspect of the learning process. CSL involves close cooperation with social partners, who – together with VU Amsterdam – have a vested interest in the outcomes of this form of education.

CSL can take various forms, such as research associated with consultancy work, identifying and analysing social issues, or healthcare or welfare internships. It can also involve the empowerment of school pupils and new students, as well
as entrepreneurship and consultancy work for social partners. CSL also teaches students how to deal with diversity outside the university environment.

b. Personalized and customized learning
DVU Amsterdam aims to achieve an ideal mix of campus-based and online education. This would enable us to respond as effectively as possible to our students’ need for customized education. Education can be restructured by means of ‘unbundling’, for instance. Here, curricula are subdivided into their individual components, and students are less and less constrained by rigid educational pathways within single institutions. This would also pave the way for joint programmes with our partners, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere. We will introduce blended learning – a mix of teaching methods – and educational activities that focus purely on knowledge transfer. In due course, these will be primarily offered online.

The students’ personal contacts with teaching staff on campus will increasingly focus on expanding and applying knowledge, and on teaching and practicing academic, personal and societal skills. Working in diverse teams will play a key part here, as will analysing and solving challenging issues in multidisciplinary contexts. This will involve profound changes to the way both the campus and our teaching staff operate. It will require students to adopt a more active approach to their studies. They will need to formulate their own learning objectives and to be enterprising and responsive in terms of meeting their immediate and future educational needs.

Above and beyond our commitment to future-proof forms of education, we are committed to the further enhancement of Lifelong Development.

Aspiration 2: Enhancing Lifelong Development
People are spending more and more time studying at university. This has given rise to the concept of Lifelong Development (LLD). Alongside undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate degree programmes, there will be greater emphasis on continuing education. Academics will be required to continue the pursuit of personal development and professional knowledge. This can take place during or after their professional career, possibly in the form of career breaks.

Our aspiration is to play a meaningful part in the further development of people, the organization and society at large. Together with government agencies, businesses, and civil society, we will enable professionals and members of the public to develop the knowledge they need.

VU Amsterdam’s LLD profile is developing along the lines of academic knowledge acquisition, societal responsibility, and personal development. This unique profile enables VU Amsterdam to cooperate effectively with other Dutch universities, as members of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU).
We aspire to be an integral knowledge partner for individuals and organizations. By consolidating our knowledge and strengths, we aim to engender an integrated LLD policy throughout VU Amsterdam. At the same time, we will augment our network of alumni and partners outside the university. We will also deliver facilities that are appropriate to the needs of LLD students and this type of education. We want the world to see VU Amsterdam as an innovative university, one that is ready for anything the future may bring. A structured LLD programme selection that is fully in keeping with our profile themes is part and parcel of that aspiration. In that sense, it is an essential element of VU Amsterdam’s branding.

As part of the further development of our LLD selection, we are working towards three objectives:

- An academic institution for anyone aged 25 and above who wants to further their knowledge, either due to a need for purpose, purely out of interest, or just for the fun of it.
- Vocational and postgraduate education for higher education graduates working in businesses and semi-public organizations who are keen to keep their knowledge up to date. The range of activities at postgraduate schools, together with the Amsterdam Schools of Management and Governance, are important instruments in this regard.
- A ‘Broader Mind for Professionals’, which consists of a cross-curricular selection in the areas of high-value academic knowledge, societal commitment, and personal development.

Our own employees and lecturers need scope for lifelong development, which is important for their job satisfaction and employability, as well as for the innovative power that is needed to ensure that education continues to adapt to a world that is constantly changing. This is why we invest in the development, guidance and coaching of both our senior and junior lecturers, and why we focus on keeping workloads manageable.

A Broader Mind for Professionals

In the context of LLD, we intend to develop the ‘A Broader Mind for Professionals’ programme. Our goal is to develop a high-quality, cross-curricular range of courses. This will give professionals from the business community and the non-profit sector an opportunity to help shape a better world, through the prism of their own professional practice. VU Amsterdam wants to use ‘A Broader Mind for Professionals’ to create an inspiring framework capable of delivering cross-curricular knowledge enrichment, inspiration and diversity. In this way, we will help professionals to discover new capabilities within themselves and those around them, to open their minds and help make the world a better place.
### 4.3. How we plan to achieve our educational aspirations

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<th>What do we want to achieve by 2025?</th>
<th>How are we going to do it?</th>
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<td><strong>Developing future-proof forms of education</strong></td>
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| VU Amsterdam will offer forms of education that are future-proof in terms of content, teaching methodology, form and facilities, and that are in keeping with external developments and the needs of students. | • We will create a broad foundation for ‘A Broader Mind’ within our educational activities, while channelling ‘A Broader Mind’ into various forms of education.  
• We intend to implement Community Service Learning throughout VU Amsterdam.  
• We plan to implement the Mixed Classroom throughout our range of educational activities.  
• We will expand and optimize our mix of offline and online learning.  
• We intend to expand our selection, as well as the facilities for customized education and for personalized learning. |
| **Enhancing Lifelong Development** | | |
| VU Amsterdam will offer an LLD portfolio that matches the needs and expectations of specific target groups. | • We will offer university-level training to higher education graduates who, in the course of their professional lives, are confronted with new learning needs.  
• We will offer general education for adults.  
• We plan to renew our LLD portfolio, to make it more flexible and expanding it in line with our four profile themes.  
• We intend to give ‘A Broader Mind for Professionals’ a broad foundation in our LLD range for this group. |
| VU Amsterdam will have an LLD organization that matches the needs and expectations of specific target groups. | • We will continue to encourage and value the commitment to LLD.  
• We will rebrand our LLD activities and the related operational management activities, in line with VU Amsterdam’s statutory frameworks and aspirations.  
• We intend to train lecturers in LLD-specific teaching methodologies.  
• We plan to attune our processes and facilities to the requisite service level for this particular service. |
| VU Amsterdam will have a well-defined and widely recognized profile in LLD, in line with our identity and the four profile themes. | • We will consolidate our branding in the area of LLD.  
• We will consolidate our network of stake-holders and bolster the relationships with our alumni. |
When it comes to the core tasks of education, research and knowledge transfer, VU Amsterdam sets the bar very high indeed. This section encapsulates our vision of research, the position to which we aspire, and our ideas on how to achieve this.
5.1 Our research vision

Our educational activities are closely tied to our research work. The driving forces behind our research are scientific inquisitiveness and social involvement. By doing research, we hope to find answers to scientific and societal questions. We want to push the envelope.

VU Amsterdam is a broad-based university, where the humanities, sciences, social sciences and medical sciences are strongly developed. There is plenty of scope for basic and applied research. Our research paves the way for multidisciplinary cooperation and attracts talented individuals. The intersection and interaction of fundamental disciplines opens up new avenues of research.

We have broad research domains and a sharp focus on societally relevant issues. As a result, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary aspects play a key role in these activities. Amsterdam UMC and the Academic Centre for Dentistry Amsterdam (ACTA) are both located on our campus. These institutions promote an interdisciplinary approach in the domain of medical research, and engender interactions with the university’s other faculties.

We share our research results freely, as this boosts the reach and impact of our research. We cooperate extensively with other institutions, agencies, knowledge institutions and civil society, such as the government and the business community.

Monitoring and strengthening our academic integrity is essential for the future of our university. Research can only deliver valuable and sound results if it meets the highest requirements of replicability and transparency. These requirements are closely linked to the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), FAIR (Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reusability) and Open Science,
which we fully endorse. We fulfil our scientific and societal responsibility by being fully transparent about our research, and about the methods and interests involved. We protect people’s privacy and we stand behind our ethical principles, expecting others to hold us to the very highest standards in this regard.

5.2 Our research aspirations

Our efforts, in the years ahead, will centre on strengthening our position and focus in research and on enhancing our scientific reputation.

Aspiration 3: Strengthening our research focus

As things stand, our research work is concentrated in faculty, interfaculty, interdisciplinary and inter-university research institutes. Our teaching and research activities are also closely interwoven. Research is increasingly clustered around our four profile themes – Human Health & Life Sciences, Governance for Society, Science for Sustainability and Connected World. This is our response to societal issues at regional level (the Amsterdam clusters), national level (Dutch National Research Agenda, Top Sectors and the Digital Society), European level (European societal challenges) and beyond. Using the research institutes as hubs and the four profile themes as guidelines, we trace potential avenues of research and establish cross-connections between these themes. Each theme encompasses one or more of our research institutes, each with its own particular mission and sub-themes. Individual research institutes will select a range of programmes, based on challenges and objectives that are both scientific and societal in nature.
The four profile themes need to be more closely defined and more effectively presented. To this end, we are working to bolster internal cooperation. We are also making every effort to strengthen ties with external partners, to involve them in research (including practically-oriented research) from the outset (‘inclusive research’). In addition to ‘evidence-based practice’, we are also paving the way for ‘practice-based evidence’, while fuelling scientific knowledge with knowledge gleaned from everyday practice (and clinical practice). In this context, we are redoubling our efforts to establish new academic collaborative centres. These include the Refugee Academy in the sphere of refugees and long-term care, field labs in areas such as sport, and R&D labs together with companies – where researchers seconded from VU Amsterdam work closely with relevant partners. We harness our research institutes and relevant faculties to tackle these forms of cooperation within and between science and society.

**Aspiration 4: Improving our scientific reputation**

contributions that have a real impact on scientific and major societal issues. It can only do so if national and international audiences are made fully aware of these contributions. That will make VU Amsterdam all the more appealing to students, talented academics and lecturers (including visiting lecturers). It will also lay the groundwork for acquiring external funding for research. So the goal for 2025 is to bring VU Amsterdam’s reputation at home and abroad into line with the high level of our academic research.

Excellence is the hallmark of VU Amsterdam’s research. This is reflected by the university’s standing in the CWTS Leiden Ranking and the Shanghai Ranking Consultancy’s Academic Ranking of World Universities. We consider such recognition to be a vital and appropriate aspect of VU Amsterdam’s identity. The quality of our research and of our reputation are assessed highly, based on objective criteria such as publications and citations. When more subjective criteria are used, such as reputations among their fellow academics, the assessment is less favourable. We will therefore focus on more effective communication of the scientific and societal impact of our research, and thus hope to bring more subjective assessment criteria to a level that is more in keeping with the high quality and societal impact of our research.

However, our plans go well beyond strengthening the focus in our research and improving our scientific reputation. We also intend to develop – in the context of A Broader Mind in Academia – a new and broader approach to recognition and reward. One of our aims here is to clarify the impact of our research on society.
A Broader Mind in Academia
What VU Amsterdam stands for must resonate with what we focus on and value as a university. Appraisals of scientific output have always tended to focus on publications and citations. The A Broader Mind in Academia project is developing a more balanced vision, in terms of recognizing and rewarding academic output. In the context of this broader vision, we are increasingly measuring the quality of our research in terms of its societal impact. Here, the process of recognizing and rewarding our academic staff addresses team performance and aspects such as leadership and entrepreneurship.

Our academic results underpin numerous applications and policies in ways that are not immediately apparent to the world at large. This has led VU Amsterdam to develop a new instrument, linked to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the SDG-Dashboard. This effort is taking place in the context of the Aurora network, and within the framework of A Broader Mind in Academia. This instrument is intended to make our societal impact more evident. This will smooth the way for a more balanced assessment and appraisal of both ways of measuring research quality and output – in terms of publications and citations on the one hand, and in terms of societal impact on the other.

VU Amsterdam in the lead in terms of societal impact
To get a better picture of the impact and quality of research, the Aurora network has developed a draft impact measurement model, linked to the SDGs. As one of the main players in the Aurora network, VU Amsterdam is taking a leading part in this project. The extent to which research at VU Amsterdam contributes to the SDGs is assessed using bibliographic impact measurements. We also measure where and how the academic output of VU Amsterdam researchers is used in the social debate and in regional, national or international policy. Here in the Netherlands, VU Amsterdam has presented this model to the VSNU. Supported by every one of the country’s universities, the VSNU has now adopted the model. This will make the societal impact of each university’s academic research much more evident.
The infographic above shows how universities in the Aurora network contribute to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It draws a distinction between academic output and public interest.
## 5.3 How we plan to achieve our research aspirations

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| **Strengthening our research focus** | • We will enhance the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of research that is modelled on our four profile themes.  
• We will categorize our research in terms of these profile themes.  
• We will allocate a substantial portion of our central research resources to the task of strengthening our profile themes.  
• We will involve social partners in our practically-oriented research from the outset.  
• We will redouble our efforts to establish new academic collaborative centres, in which cooperation between everyday practice, research, training and policy plays a pivotal role.  
• We will develop a new system for recognizing and appraising our academic staff, in the spirit of A Broader Mind in Academia.  
• We will translate our four profile themes into long-term and medium-term sub-themes and objectives, which we will link to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).  
• We will commit ourselves to the sustainable funding of relevant research, by means of a VU fund, for example. |
| **Improving our scientific reputation** | • We will show the world how our research is helping to deal with societal issues.  
• In the context of the Aurora network, we are developing a bibliometric tool, the SDG-Dashboard to measure the societal impact of research publications for each Sustainable Development Goal.  
• We will improve our positions on existing (Leiden and Shanghai) and new rankings. Our improved rankings on those lists will match our ambitions, identity and strength.  
• We will use the same, uniform name in all our communications and publications: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. That will avoid any artificially low rankings due to the fragmentation of our output.  
• We will make every effort to attract pioneering top academics, particularly those specializing in our profile themes.  
• We will develop a communication strategy based on these profile themes.  
• We will make more frequent and more widely disseminated announcements about our research results and our researchers. |

VU Amsterdam will be a societally engaged research university with a clear profile in the areas of Human Health & Life Sciences, Governance for Society, Science for Sustainability and Connected World. These are our ‘profile themes’.
Knowledge transfer for the benefit of society has been identified as a university’s third core task, after education and research. In practice, that is not yet the case. In the field of knowledge transfer, too, VU Amsterdam is quite clear about the goals we are pursuing and about the resources we possess to achieve those goals. This section deals with that particular aspect. We define knowledge transfer as using scientific knowledge to create economic and societal value.
6.1 Our vision concerning knowledge transfer

Since the university was founded, in 1880, we have attached great importance to the societal impact of our research and educational activities. We feel that knowledge transfer is an indispensable element of all academic disciplines.

Entrepreneurship is essential when translating knowledge into new products, services, processes or ideas. When it comes to Social Entrepreneurship, societal impact is paramount. This type of entrepreneurship has always held special place in VU Amsterdam’s heart. The type of knowledge transfer that we have in mind involves active interaction with other societal parties. We will be more active in terms of stimulating entrepreneurship among students and staff, and more energetic in our partnerships with external parties. We are located in the Zuidas Knowledge District, which offers great opportunities in this regard. There is also a wealth of opportunities for joint ventures with businesses and organizations in the wider Amsterdam Metropolitan Region, as well as at national and international level.

Society, too, wants to see the results of investments in the university. We feel that this is only right and proper. We want the world to know about the societal impact of our educational and research activities. This is also why we are modifying the internal processes for recognizing and appraising our knowledge transfer activities.

Another part of our vision on knowledge transfer is that members of the VU community actively participate in the public debate. They help give shape to public opinion based on scientific knowledge and insights that they work on developing themselves. They maintain an open attitude and a keen sense of responsibility in this process – as is fitting for our university.
We attach great importance to the societal impact of our research and educational activities. Society too wants to see the results of investments in the university.

6.2 Our knowledge transfer aspirations

Aspiration 5: Impact through educational and research activities

Our aspiration for 2025 is to place knowledge transfer on an equal footing with education and research in our activities and policies. The same applies to the recognition and appraisal of our staff and on our campus. At the same time, we will make entrepreneurship and an entrepreneurial attitude part of everyday life for our students and staff. We will make the VU campus a major global innovation hub and an inspiring venue for our partners.

We develop our on-campus facilities, where relevant together with Amsterdam UMC and, where necessary, other partners in Amsterdam. Our Corporate Real Estate and Facilities (FCO) service department cooperates closely with the Knowledge Transfer Office IXA (Innovation Exchange Amsterdam) in this connection. We will expand IXA still further, in the sure and certain knowledge that our stage is not just Amsterdam – it is the entire world. Wherever possible, we will form partnerships with other knowledge institutions. VU Amsterdam has been a full partner in The Amsterdam Center for Entrepreneurship (ACE) since 2019. The Center is our partner for entrepreneurship development.

Our academic start-ups are developing into scale-ups that we are keen to keep in the Zuidas Knowledge District. In partnership with the City of Amsterdam and Amsterdam UMC, we will develop the requisite facilities in the Zuidas Knowledge District. These facilities will also be used for cooperative ventures with businesses in our Human Health & Life Sciences profile theme.
Our aspiration for 2025 is to place knowledge transfer on an equal footing with education and research in our activities and policies.
### 6.3 How we plan to achieve our knowledge transfer aspirations

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| The core tasks of education, research and knowledge transfer will have an equal status; they will be on an equal footing in terms of recognition and appraisal. | • Knowledge transfer will become one of the core tasks in the system we have developed for recognizing and appraising academics.  
• We will implement an integrated strategy for communications on science and knowledge transfer.                                                                 |
| Entrepreneurship and an entrepreneurial attitude will be part of everyday life for our students and staff.                                             | • We will encourage our students and staff to adopt an entrepreneurial attitude, and to display entrepreneurial behaviour and competencies. This will involve investments in courses and workshops (together with our partners in the Aurora network, ACE, and others) and ongoing efforts to make these more widely known. |
| Our campus in Amsterdam will serve as an innovation hub for the Zuidas Knowledge District, the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area and beyond.                        | • We will also invest in the demonstrator lab, the incubator and an accelerator, to enable our campus to develop into a truly innovative hub.  
• We plan to boost our knowledge transfer activities in the Human Health & Life Sciences domain in particular. This will involve cooperation with businesses and spin-outs in research projects, as well as a shared site. |
| There will be effective and adequate support for knowledge transfer activities.                                         | • We will improve the existing facilities for knowledge transfer activities. This work will include the creation of physical knowledge transfer support points, and the provision of adequate support by the Knowledge Transfer Office. |
7. Operational management – people, organization and resources

VISION 

AMBITION 

ACTION

VU Amsterdam has great aspirations in terms of the core tasks of education, research and knowledge transfer. We cannot realize these aspirations if these tasks are not properly embedded, supported, and facilitated. This section deals with those prerequisites. Here, we set out our views concerning operational management, our aspirations, and how we plan to achieve them.
7.1 Our vision of operational management

Our organization puts people at the very heart of things. Together, our academic staff and our support staff will ensure that the aspirations of VU Amsterdam become reality. Together, we want to make a difference in terms of research, as well as for our students, our partners, our clients and society at large.

As an employer, we want to help create an environment in which people can enjoy their work, while pursuing personal development goals. The goal is for members of staff to take responsibility, while keeping lines of communication as short as possible and communicating with one another transparently and honestly. Staff acknowledgement and recognition must also do justice to the values we hold dear at VU Amsterdam.

Workload and facilitating a pleasant, balanced and healthy working environment are also current topics at VU Amsterdam. Our employees have been experiencing high (and even very high) workloads for years. We recognize the importance and urgency of this issue. At the same time, it is a complex problem that expresses itself in many different ways. Making workloads more manageable will require centralized policy measures along with interventions at the faculty level. The HRM department and the units are working together to develop a programme to tackle workloads and to guarantee the sustainable employability of our people. The programme specifically emphasizes workload, recovery and the optimal use of employees' talents.

Our operational management is of pivotal importance if we are to achieve our aspirations in the areas of education, research and knowledge transfer. We operate in an environment and international context that are constantly changing. Great demands are being made of academic staff, PhD students and professionals
in support roles. The underlying factors include digitalization, increasingly fierce competition for research funding, inadequate financial resources, the pressure to publish, to provide a top-level education and to continue to innovate, to cope with growing – or falling – student numbers, increasing control/accountability and encounters with bureaucratic procedures.

If we are to achieve lasting success, we will need to constantly develop and renew our organization and business processes.

7.2 Our aspirations regarding operational management

The details of our aspirations in the areas of education, research, knowledge transfer and operational management are set out below. Our aspirations for operational management are:

6. A balanced system of recognition and appraisal within the university organization.
7. Further digitalization of our operational management, educational activities and research.
8. Further development of a bustling and innovative campus.
9. An effective and agile organization.

Further details of these aspirations are set out below.
Aspiration 6: Developing a balanced system of recognition and reward within the university organization

Until now, the universities’ system for recognition and reward has been largely biased towards achievements in research and education. Managerial and leadership tasks are generally not taken into account, and measures of actual performance often exclude knowledge transfer activities.

Lecturers are mainly appraised in terms of their individual contributions to the curriculum, and researchers for their publications and for their success in acquiring external funding. In fact, over the past few decades, it has become increasingly important for researchers to score well on measurements of individual and research-related output. Performance in that area has an enormous influence on their career. This tendency is often at odds with the factors that mainly motivate academics – curiosity, involvement with the world, and the desire to do research that serves the needs of education, the economy and society.

Our people, organization and our operational management are crucial in realizing our ambitions in education, research and knowledge transfer.

The era in which academics were appraised solely on the basis of their scientific output has come to an end. The core tasks of education, research and knowledge transfer are now of equal status. We also require our staff to display Leadership, the Art of Engagement, and an entrepreneurial attitude. The academic world also needs people with A Broader Mind. Few members of staff will have mastered every competency at the very highest level, nor will many of them aspire to be a star in all the areas of education, research, knowledge transfer and leadership. This has motivated us to develop a more diverse and balanced approach to recognition and reward, one that does justice to everyone’s talents and that distributes the workload more widely. Indeed, several years ago we started developing a framework for the appraisal of educational performance. It is now time for the next step. This will involve the appraisal of a broader set of tasks and responsibilities, covering research, educational and knowledge transfer activities, leadership, and an entrepreneurial attitude. This will enable us to coordinate our system even more effectively with the role to which we aspire.
We also want our staff to be able to devote themselves to a specific combination of core tasks – (education, research, knowledge transfer, management) for extended periods of time, before switching back to a different distribution of core tasks. The annual interview system used to monitor and support this process will be geared up to deal with this. We will also develop the tools needed to appraise people’s tasks and competencies, both individually and as part of a team. We hope to soon be blazing a new trail with a more balanced appraisal system that addresses educational, leadership, and knowledge transfer activities in addition to research.

The scope of this new recognition and reward system will extend beyond our current workforce. We will also modify our recruitment policy. This will involve appropriate and critical selection procedures, in which knowledge transfer activities, entrepreneurial and leadership/managerial competencies will carry greater weight, complementary to the skills of the candidate’s intended team. We also want to work with current staff – who were recruited on the basis of different competencies – to help them adapt to these vital changes. The development package for members of staff will be customized to meet this need.

Aspiration 7: Further digitalization of our operational management, educational activities, and research

The dizzying pace of digitalization is impacting areas such as data analysis, artificial intelligence and the ‘routine’ automation of processes. Our university is not immune to this development. It not only demands financial resources, but also requires our members of staff to demonstrate commitment and adaptability. The VU Amsterdam I-strategy, which was drawn up in 2018, identifies the key changes brought about by digitalization.

Digitalization is placing great demands on our organization. For instance, how will a greater emphasis on online learning affect the role and position of lecturers? Will lecturers increasingly be seen as guides and consultants, rather than as primary sources of knowledge? How will things change for researchers? Digitalization requires staff in all layers and sections of the organization to work and think differently. It requires staff to display digital agility and flexibility. VU Amsterdam also faces the challenge of providing a smooth and secure digital infrastructure for those students, professionals and individuals who are keen to pursue personal development.
Aspiration 8: Developing a bustling and innovative campus

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is a true campus university. Our campus is the ideal stepping stone for a close-knit community of students, staff and VU Amsterdam partners. VU Amsterdam’s campus has an inclusive, open character and international appeal. We want our campus to be a hospitable, green and inspiring environment, a place for outstanding university education, research and knowledge transfer, a setting in which people can truly feel at home.

The social campus as an important meeting place
In the coming years, we will continue to invest in high-standard, future-proof accommodation for education and research. Aside from the indispensable renovation work in terms of maintenance and energy consumption, we are committed to the creation of an inspiring meeting place. Its vibrant range of facilities will ensure that visitors to the campus will have a pleasant and enjoyable stay. The same goes for our international community of PhD scholars and students, researchers and members of staff. As a meeting place, the social campus can help international staff and students to get more involved more in the VU Amsterdam community, without making any concessions in terms of identity.

The idea is for the campus to be a hive of activity throughout the day, in the evenings, and during breaks. The wide spectrum of activities spans culture (Griffioen Cultural Centre), debate (3D, Dialogue, Debate and Diversity) and Summer Schools, including sports such as the Amsterdam Performance and Health Centre (this website is only available in Dutch), recreation and art. Wherever possible, we will link these activities to our educational and research activities, which will then contribute to the development of A Broader Mind. Many activities serve to establish connections between groups. As much as possible, the campus must form a fully integrated whole, free of any physical or social barriers.

The sustainable campus
On campus, sustainability is both visible and tangible. We will spare no effort to achieve the climate and energy transition objectives. Some people may not be aware of this, but VU Amsterdam has one of the most sustainable campuses in the Netherlands (this website is only available in Dutch). This is partly due to extra greenery and to a more sustainable image, which also make it a nicer place in which to pass the time. Everyone in the university community will truly come to experience the campus as a greener and more sustainable place.

We will become a paper-poor zone, a place where digital is the dominant theme. We are upgrading our facilities for digital gatherings – including meetings, seminars, and educational activities – to the point where travel will become
increasingly unnecessary. These upgrades will be so drastic (where possible), that lecturers and researchers will be far less likely to opt for air travel to meet with their peers.

Campus plans
In specific terms, the activities planned for the campus during the upcoming years are as follows:

- We will deliver new accommodation for the Faculty of Science. One example is the New University Building (NU), another is the VU Research Building. The NU building will house a number of offices, as well as providing space for educational, cultural and hospitality-related activities. The VU Research Building will open for business during the period covered by this strategy document. Another element of the Science accommodation upgrade will be the renovation of the Maths & Physics (W&N)-AB-building on the south side of the campus, which will be completed at a later date. The remaining section of the Maths & Physics (W&N) building will be demolished, after which new football fields will be created on this site.
- We will intensify our knowledge transfer activities and give a boost to the Zuidas Knowledge District. The character of the site will be shaped by VU Amsterdam’s profile themes on the one hand and by the strong ties with Amsterdam UMC on the other. We will augment our profile by establishing the Amsterdam Performance & Health Centre, which will focus on sport, exercise and health.
- We plan to expand the scope for start-ups, spin-ins and scale-ups. In this way, together with the City of Amsterdam and Amsterdam UMC, we intend to promote entrepreneurship and cooperation between businesses and academia.
- We will endeavour to create affordable accommodation on campus.

Aspiration 9: We will make our organization effective and agile

If we are to respond adequately to an ever-changing future, we will need an effective and agile organization. After all, there are few certainties and many unexpected developments. This demands clear choices, rapid decision-making, short lines of communication, decisiveness, taking ownership, and efficient working procedures.

We will work to create an effective and agile organization. The first step is to critically examine our existing structure and processes. Based on our vision and aspirations, we will identify the appropriate scale and optimum structure for each of VU Amsterdam’s various units.
Ours is a client-oriented and solution-oriented organization. We deliver a comprehensive range of services, with the primary processes of education, research and knowledge transfer as our guiding principles. In addition to providing standardized processes for the student desk and administration in the areas of IT, personnel and payroll, for example, we will enhance the flexibility of our support services by fine-tuning their scope and their proximity to the primary process. Our products and services will be tailored as much as possible to the needs of education, research and knowledge transfer.

We intend to introduce the principle of partnership into our daily support activities. This means that academics and support professionals will be engaged based on their expertise, transcending the boundaries of their individual units, to create comprehensive partnerships. Problem solving is a collective responsibility. This notion is based on our common goals with regard to education, research and knowledge transfer.

We will create an environment with as few rules as possible, one in which people are allowed to make mistakes. We intend to encourage experimentation and show people that we have confidence in them. The distinction between the primary process and support services will become increasingly blurred, while the interaction between support services and the faculties will be improved.

We plan to tackle major innovations on a project basis, in which the contractor and the client will be clearly specified. This will involve innovations in education, research, and knowledge transfer, in addition to activities that transcend the level of individual faculties and services. We intend to prioritize a limited number of projects every year.
## 7.3 This is how we plan to achieve our aspirations in terms of operational management

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<tr>
<th>What do we want to achieve by 2025?</th>
<th>How are we going to do it?</th>
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</table>
| Developing a balanced recognition and appraisal system for the academic world | - We will develop and implement a framework throughout the university for recognizing and rewarding people’s performance as individuals and as team members. This will enable individual academics to be assessed on the basis of their entire range of core tasks (educational activities, research, knowledge transfer and leadership). The bibliometric tool linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be used to make results in the area of knowledge transfer more visible.  
- We will develop a programme for sustainable employability, with specific emphasis on workload, recovery and the optimal use of employees’ talents.  
- Our recruitment policy will place great (or greater) emphasis on entrepreneurial and leadership/managerial competencies, as well as competencies in the area of knowledge transfer.  
- The specific details of our development package for members of staff will be in line with the requisite competences and requirements.  
- In the context of the Aurora network, we are developing a bibliometric tool, the SDG-Dashboard to measure the societal impact of research publications for each Sustainable Development Goal. |

The appraisal system and recruitment policy used by VU Amsterdam will be in line with our mission/identity and aspirations, as well as with current developments. Education, research, knowledge transfer, entrepreneurship, and leadership will all be appraised. Career paths will no longer be the sole preserve of outstanding scientists. They will also be made accessible to those who excel in other areas.
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<th>What do we want to achieve by 2025?</th>
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| Expand the digitalization of our operational management, educational activities, and research | • We will introduce Digital@VU, our new digital workplace.  
• We plan to invest in facilities for blended learning and for the professional digitalization of our educational activities.  
• We will train lecturers in blended learning, in course-based approaches for flipped classrooms, and in blended education. |
| VU Amsterdam will provide a secure environment where you can study and work – independently of time and place – on the device of your choosing. | • We plan to invest in our digital infrastructure and secure cloud solutions.  
• We will also be investing in access security for information systems, information security and system monitoring.  
• We intend to introduce facilities for the management of research data. |
| VU Amsterdam will also be using a robust and secure digital infrastructure for research, educational and knowledge transfer activities, as well as for operational management and healthcare purposes (Amsterdam UMC and ACTA). | • We plan to set up an online learning platform for both initial and post-graduate degree programmes.  
• We intend to break new ground in our educational activities. This will involve the expansion of digital assessments, online and open education, as well as interactive and activating teaching.  
• We will be scaling up successful initiatives from Network Teaching & Learning (NT&L).  
• We will be exploiting the full potential of existing systems, such as the CANVAS ecosystem, our online learning environment.  
• We will be harnessing the results of the Acceleration Agenda [this website is only available in Dutch] |
| Educational innovations will be implemented right across the board. | • We intend to select the ideal operational management platform for our educational activities, HRM, financial processes and facility processes.  
• We will also modify our student desk in line with digital developments. |
| We will be utilizing an operational management platform that is suited to an agile digital university. | |
Researchers, lecturers and other staff will be given appropriate support in the area of artificial intelligence.

- We will equip our staff to handle artificial intelligence systems, by means of knowledge exchange and by helping them to develop the required competencies.
- We plan to develop a framework of standards for the use of artificial intelligence in research, educational activities and operational management. This will be in keeping with VU Amsterdam’s core values.

The data science services to be used by academics will also be used for the purposes of operational management.

- We are committed to the Acceleration Plan’s ’Secure and reliable use of study data’ acceleration zone.
- We plan to introduce an analytics platform capable of supporting a range of data (and big data) formats.
- We will be investing in data management facilities for our support processes.

Our business processes in the areas of management and support will be fully digitized. The process involved in creating and managing our documents and files will make full use of digital technology. This means that we will be compliant with the relevant laws and regulations, and we will be able to deal with the rising tide of information efficiently and effectively.

- Our aim is to implement the long-term DigiDoc digitalization programme.
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<th>What do we want to achieve by 2025?</th>
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| **Developing our bustling and innovative campus** | • We intend to boost our campus activities, both in terms of quantity and quality.  
• We will create spaces with lats that are inclusive and accessible to everyone, including those with a disability.  
• We intend to create a setting that matches the aspirations set out in A Broader Mind. This will include spaces for teams that are diverse in composition and multidisciplinary in nature, where people can meet and cooperate with external parties, and for 3D activities (dialogue, debate and diversity).  
• We are developing the ground floor of the Care and Welfare Educational Institute (OZW) building into a new hotspot. It will include a meeting place for various groups and an International Food Court that does justice to the diverse nature of the VU Amsterdam community.  
• We will do everything in our power to persuade the City of Amsterdam to make the transition zone between the northern and southern parts of the campus natural and pedestrian-friendly.  
• We intend to continue our managerial training courses, which will enable people to pick up any indications of insecurity at an early stage and to take immediate action. |
| The campus will be a bustling, accessible, safe and diverse place in which to work and to meet others. Its wide range of appealing activities can be enjoyed by everyone at VU Amsterdam and by people visiting the university. | • We plan to make the Campusplein and the other outdoor spaces around the university greener and more sustainable.  
Against the background of this sustainable look and feel, *Green Office VU* will play an increasingly robust and prominent role. People will experience the campus as a truly green and sustainable place.  
• We will become a digital zone, and will reduce our paper consumption, energy consumption and CO₂ emissions.  
• We intend to upgrade our facilities for digital gatherings (including meetings, seminars and educational activities).  
• We will reduce our impact on the environment by traveling less and by using greener forms of transport.  
• We plan to make efficient and flexible use of space and resources. |
| The campus will become a green, sustainable and pleasant place in which to pass the time. By 2028, we will rank among the top three universities and university medical centres in the Netherlands, in terms of sustainable, affordable and reliable energy generation. | • We will create a campus layout that enables everyone to work and study flexibly and digitally.  
• We intend to expand and enrich our varied selection of study areas and teaching and learning spaces.  
• We will create flexible spaces that can be used for many different purposes.  
• We plan to offer suitable accommodation for study associations. |
| Every effort will be made to support people’s ability to work, live and study on campus, and to fully integrate these aspects of university life. | |
**What do we want to achieve by 2025?**

**How are we going to do it?**

### Effective and agile organization

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<th>An ideal scale will be identified for each of VU Amsterdam’s various units, one that is in line with VU Amsterdam’s vision and aspirations.</th>
<th>• We plan to identify an optimum scale and structure for individual faculties (and services), and to implement any changes that may be required.</th>
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<tr>
<td>VU Amsterdam will be effective and agile, and able to respond effectively to an ever-changing future.</td>
<td>• Once we have identified an optimum scale for each of the various faculties, we plan to analyse those supporting tasks and roles for which proximity or rebranding is desirable and feasible. • We intend to develop a clear procedure for prioritizing projects. • We will be using a more project-based approach, involving flexible and integrated teams with a clear mandate and effective leadership. • We also plan to focus our range of employee training programmes on skills and on project-based work.</td>
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<td>The primary process will be supported as effectively and efficiently as possible. In the area of operational management, this will involve clear decisions (including administrative decisions) and prioritization.</td>
<td>• We intend to develop the concept of partnership:  - We will implement the principle of solution-oriented partnerships.  - We plan to assist academic staff and support professionals by equipping them to work in solution-oriented partnerships. This could involve the development of expertise and competences, for example. • Wherever possible, we will either work in integrated teams or use integrated procedures in an approach that transcends individual faculties and services. • A strategic agenda will guide our operational management, and we will regularly review our priorities.</td>
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VU Amsterdam intends to pursue a financial policy that is stable, sound, and tailored to the demands of the times. In this section, we explain how we plan to structure our financial policy.
8.1 Our vision for the financial policy

If we are to realize our aspirations, it is vital for VU Amsterdam to have stable financial foundations. Our vision takes account of financial prospects on the one hand, while making allowance for the aspirations set out in this strategy on the other. In implementing our strategy, we are constrained by the university’s ‘financial playing field’ This playing field is published in our annual report which can be found on our website. In this playing field, funding for the activities and resources needed to achieve our strategic objectives is related to external financial frameworks. These external financial frameworks are primarily defined by threshold values stipulated by the Netherlands Inspectorate of Education and by covenants with external financiers. These external frameworks are complemented by a separate financial policy that guarantees our financial continuity.

The table below sets out our financial aspirations, as well as details of the external financial frameworks and of our financial policy. The implementation of this policy hinges on the annually recurring long-term budget, which is formalized in the continuity section of the university’s Annual Report. The continuity section uses an operational horizon of five years or more, and a horizon of 10 years or more for investments in assets. In effect, the current version of the continuity section represents our strategy’s financial framework. It also shows how our aspirations in the areas of education, research and knowledge transfer [as set out in our annual plan and annual budget] will be fulfilled during the year in question.
8.2 Our aspirations in terms of financial policy

The financial policy plots a financially sound course that will bring our aspirations and objectives for education, research, knowledge transfer and the organization to fruition. We intend to use our profile themes as a basis for investing in our statutory core tasks of education, research and knowledge transfer. We aspire to be a financially sound organization.

We intend to use our profile themes as a basis for investing in our statutory core tasks of education, research and knowledge transfer. We will use the following indicators as our guiding principles:

1. We intend to achieve a dynamically driven positive result of 1.5% of annual turnover. VU Amsterdam finances its investments with a sound mix of equity capital and loan capital. Given this financing policy, we may need to achieve a higher positive result in order to finance our investments.
2. We will meet the financial ratios required by external financiers:
   a. a solvency of at least 30%
   b. a debt service coverage ratio of at least 1.2 and
   c. a loan to value of up to 50%.
3. We will comply with the threshold values stipulated by the Netherlands Inspectorate of Education.
4. When repaying loan capital and equity capital – both within the organization and for external purposes – we use a Weighted Average Cost of Capital (WACC) that is equal to the cost of loan capital (including bank surcharges and after hedging the interest rate risk).
We realize our aspirations by laying down stable financial foundations.
8.3 This is how we plan to achieve our aspirations in terms of financial policy

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<tr>
<td>The aspirations and plans for education, research and knowledge transfer set out in our strategy will guide our financial policy within the university’s established financial playing field.</td>
<td>• Each year, we will prepare ongoing, long-term financial budgets/plans, both at the university level and at the level of individual faculties and service departments. These budgets/plans will be based on a five-year operational horizon and a horizon of 10 years for investments in assets. This will include the associated conversions into cash flows, ratios and financing.</td>
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<td>• As a strategic partner for education and research, we intend to invest in the area of business control.</td>
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<td>• We will adopt an active risk management strategy in which openness and transparency about risks and risk appetite are placed at centre stage.</td>
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<td>• We will make investment decisions in close consultation with each of the stakeholders, and based on scenarios that specifically address the risks involved. If necessary, we will call for second opinions.</td>
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<td>Our budgets and ratios will meet the demands of internal and external auditors and supervisors and will be structurally balanced year on year.</td>
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<td>All requisite financing for future investments will be secured.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VU Amsterdam will continue to comply with all current and future requirements imposed by the government, society and other financial stakeholders regarding financial accountability, control, transparency and legality.</td>
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We have set an ambitious strategy for ourselves. Our aspirations are rooted in our passion for high-quality teaching and research, in our pursuit of high-value knowledge transfer, and in the changes that are coming our way. Here, we are focusing on the upcoming five-year period. However, that timescale is not set in stone – we will also be scanning more distant horizons. Our financial resources and available capacity are finite. We will have to set priorities and decide which aspirations we want to achieve when – and how. We intend to tackle this issue in a structured way.
9. We will monitor the successful implementation of our strategy

Implementation
This strategy involves every part of VU Amsterdam. It is intended to be inspiring and energizing for the university as a whole, and to provide a clear framework for the future. Formulating aspirations is one thing, achieving them is something else entirely. To ensure the success of our strategy, we have devised a working method in the form of a clear and specific implementation plan for the years to come. This working method will be an ongoing process in which we set priorities in accordance with our aspirations, resources and developments in our environment.

Long-term agreements
The implementation of aspirations that can be entrusted to specific faculties or service departments will be included in their planning and control cycles. The faculties and services will draw up long-term plans in line with the contents and duration of this strategy. Their plans will show how they intend to help us implement the strategy, in keeping with their individual aspirations and starting points. These long-term plans will be ratified by agreements with the Executive Board, after which they will be monitored in the context of the annual plans.

Midterm review
Halfway through the period covered by this strategy, a mid-term review will take place. The aim will be to evaluate the strategy’s aspirations, objectives and results, so that we can profit from the lessons learned and promptly make any modifications that may be necessary. We will also review this strategy plan, which will continue to serve as our guide, but which naturally should not get out of step with the reality of the world around us, where things can change rapidly. During the period covered by this plan, there will be an ongoing review of the structures and processes that could optimize the impact of our strategy throughout the university.
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