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We face huge challenges. As a university and as a society. Human mobility and accessibility are increasing throughout the world, and communication is intensifying. Developments in science and technology are offering more and more people more and more opportunities. At the same time, though, the effects of international conflicts are being felt in the very heart of our society, and the destruction of nature is continuing unabated. In this rapidly changing world, is there still a place for the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)?

Yes there is. And perhaps more than ever before. The VU looks further. Takes that extra step. But in what direction? When we look further, what do we actually see?

Science is not value-free. Our founders knew that, which is why they established the VU in the first place. For more than a century now, that conviction has been expressed through our far-reaching commitment to society. Through the way we embrace diversity. Through our service to the community. And through our open attitude, our aversion to ivory towers and closed bastions.

That is who we are and what we do. But why do we do it?

I am certain that, in looking further, we as the VU are looking to a better future. But that is anything but assured. After all, the challenges around us are complex and wide-ranging. Through our research, by asking the right questions and by finding answers, we are helping our society to make better choices. And with our education we are training people who are eager to embrace the future and the myriad opportunities it represents. People who want to work on a world in which we, the human race, are
more united. People who share the conviction that they have a real contribution to make, that they can help find sustainable solutions to today’s problems – and tomorrow’s.

That sounds ambitious. And it is. Wherever there are great ambitions, inevitably there are tensions too. Tensions between where we stand now and where we want to be. Certainly, they do exist here at the VU, those tensions. But we are capable of more than perhaps we think. We are not starting from scratch, after all. By striking the right balance between established policy and innovative new ideas, a huge amount is possible. That will not achieve itself, though. What we intend to accomplish over the coming years, and how, is set out in this Strategic Plan.

Jaap Winter
Chair, Executive Board
HOW DO WE MANAGE OUR NATURAL RESOURCES?
LINKING KNOWLEDGE WITH SUSTAINABLE CHANGE
HOW DO WE STAY HEALTHY?
MOVING FROM THE BURDEN OF DISEASE TO THE GUIDANCE OF LIFESTYLES
HOW DO WE GOVERN ACROSS ESTABLISHED BOUNDARIES?
RESEARCH INTO NEW DEFINITIONS OF LEADERSHIP
HOW DO WE COPE WITH NEW KINDS OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP?
NEW ISSUES RAISED BY THE DIGITIZATION OF OUR SOCIETY
WHERE DOES THE SOURCE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LIE?
NEW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LIFE, EARTH, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES
Ever since its foundation in 1880 as the first “free university” in the Netherlands, the VU has pursued a distinctive approach to science. We start by asking social and scientific questions, then look for the answers. We do not do that alone, but always in collaboration with partners in the wider world. That is why we say, “VU: looking further!” Our goal is a clear one: to turn ourselves and each other into conscientious, pioneering scholars and into responsible, critical citizens. Through our academic education and research activities, we are helping to build a better world. That is a commitment to society, and above all a challenge to ourselves.

The VU is ambitious in its educational and research work, encouraging the free and open communication of ideas. We stand for universal values such as academic freedom and independence. We are a knowledge-based institution with an open culture and a strong sense of community, and we set great store by the normative and philosophical aspects of science.

Science is not value-free. In fact, it is by combining knowledge with values that we create the scope needed for a deeper understanding of the issues facing society, and for their resolution. We endeavour to solve problems in an interdisciplinary manner. With innovative, sustainable solutions. We encourage our students, our tutors, our researchers and other staff to deepen and to expand their knowledge. To push back their own boundaries and to look further: beyond the individual, beyond their own discipline and beyond the short term.
We are convinced that the quality of our education and research can only benefit from drawing in a wide range of opinions, principles, backgrounds and philosophies. The VU faces up to issues of diversity, and is successful in that. It is what makes us different from other universities. Diversity creates focus, it produces new insights and it triggers scientific innovation. It is what makes us an academic community within which we challenge one another to take a stance and to display our involvement in wider society. This we do through debate and discussion, conducted in a spirit of openness and curiosity, with genuine personal interest in each other and a shared engagement with the world. Through its research and education, the VU seeks to make a real contribution to the society of tomorrow – a society that is truly diverse, with people from all parts of the world meeting and working together.

**Diversity creates focus, it produces new insights and it triggers scientific innovation.**

We are personal, open and responsible

We can sum up our identity in three core values: personal, open and responsible.

**Personal**

Student or scientist, ancillary worker or tutor: everyone at the VU matters as a person. It is not just the curriculum and the literature which count, but also our lecturers, the men and women who make it all happen. This personal aspect is expressed in many different ways, including one-to-one supervision of graduation projects and small-group teaching.

**Open**

The VU is open to diversity. We provide an inspiring meeting place for people from different disciplines, of different nationalities and with different views of the world. We give them the space to interact by, for example, debating such questions as how personal philosophical outlook affects the practice of science. Confrontations of this kind produce new insights, create focus and clarity, and bring about scientific advances. Which we share with society.
Thanks to modern imaging techniques like PET (positron emission tomography) scanners and state-of-the-art tracers, we are now able not only to see the human skeleton and organs in sharp, fine detail, but even to check that their biological functions are working properly.

The VU Medical Center (VUmc) is currently developing more advanced PET technology that will enable doctors to detect diseases earlier, to better plan and monitor therapies and to improve their understanding of disease mechanisms. Moreover, we are one of the first centres in the world able to image drugs inside the body and so determine whether or not they are working. This should help us to develop more efficient – and hence cheaper – medicines, and to offer the patients of the future personalized therapy.

Participating researcher
Guus van Dongen
Responsible

The VU creates a climate that allows and encourages its students and staff to take personal responsibility for their work. For students that means more than just taking charge of their own academic success and preparations to enter the world of work – it is also about making a meaningful contribution to the academic and wider communities. A focus upon responsibility also helps to counter excessive bureaucracy and to maintain the right personal-professional balance. We account for the quality of our work in a transparent manner, both internally and publicly.

Our profile:

four themes

How science relates to society – and vice versa – is changing all the time. Science is increasingly being challenged to justify its role in the world. As a university, we have to ask ourselves how best we can deal with this trend. How do we integrate academic, scientific and technological advances into our culture, and what do they mean for people, their values and their identity? Over the next few years, the VU will be paying particular attention to strengthening the bonds between science and society. In exploring societal issues and seeking solutions for them, we have adopted four themes with which to profile ourselves:

1. Governance for Society
2. Human Health & Life Sciences
3. Connected World
4. Science for Sustainability

By aligning our research and educational activities with these themes, we are clarifying our profile as a university for students, researchers, the business community, financing bodies, governments and other partners. In part, the four themes have been formulated on the basis of our established identity and core values. Not only do they make us more recognizable, they also encourage greater cooperation across disciplinary boundaries.

Together we can achieve more

The VU seeks to connect with society. By joining forces with other institutions in various educational and research domains, together we are improving our results, enhancing our national and international appeal to academic talent and reinforcing our role as a partner for both commercial and non-profit organizations.
The VU is deeply rooted in the Amsterdam region, a position of strength that we intend to exploit in pursuit of our national and international ambitions. We perform a vital role as a regional provider of higher education, but we also offer much more than that. In terms of the scientific knowledge we generate, our social contribution to the community (by providing Community Services) and our input into the local economy (through the Amsterdam Economic Board, for example), we are a key stimulus for the region.

Amsterdam is the academic heart of the Netherlands, with two universities, four other providers of higher education, two teaching hospitals and dozens of research institutes. As a member of the Amsterdam Academic Alliance (Amsterdamse Academische Alliantie, AAA), we want to make this wealth of education and knowledge as accessible as possible for students, researchers, private companies and public institutions. But we will only achieve that by working more closely together, and investing collectively. Some degree courses at different institutions are complementary, for example, whilst others have joined forces. That is not an easy process, however. It is one without beaten paths to follow, so every step has to be taken with care. But the opportunities it presents are too great to ignore.

It is not only outside the VU that we are looking for cooperation. Internally, too, we are creating the space needed for collaboration and dialogue. We seek out debate, even when solutions are not easily arrived at. We respect the fact that opinions can differ. We encourage our students and staff to speak out, and to take on an active role within the university community. Our participation structures play an important role in this, helping to forge a firm connection between staff and students on one side and management on the other. Through them, we reinforce our collective thinking, strengthen our support base and guide our institution. A strongly positioned Works Council and Student Council contribute to shared responsibility, embracing administrators, staff and students. We have therefore designed them in such a way that they reflect the VU-specific situation and established processes. Staff and student representatives are always involved in decision-making processes,
and given the material support they need to fulfil that role effectively – even when that is not a formal requirement. With regard to additional powers, agreements will be reached concerning the rights of the representative bodies. This encourages both sides to engage in dialogue about our direction as an institution from an early stage.
OUR AMBITIONS
Our tutors are engaged and inspired

The quality of the tutor is key to the quality of the education we provide. A good tutor directs the learning process, challenging and inspiring the student. Good education is characterized by feedback, too, given at the right moments and at every level of learning. It is also essential to make use of activating teaching methods, new technologies and appropriate forms of testing and examination. The VU gives its tutors space befitting their profession, and facilitates them in their teaching work. The best tutors are those who play an active role in curriculum development and who continue to develop their own didactic abilities. We support them in this, without wishing to be prescriptive. Tutors do not operate in isolation, but are part of an educational team. They should be visible and approachable, so that students receive the personal guidance and supervision they need.

Our students develop across a broad front

Student development is about much more than acquiring academic knowledge and skills. It also embraces personal maturation, the development of social skills, strengthening their sense of responsibility and – a particular determinant of our identity as a university – philosophical reflection upon professional scientific practice. To help shape this process, every undergraduate programme includes an academic core syllabus which lays the foundation for these academic skills. The core syllabus addresses the university’s identity and translates its core values into everyday practice.
In education, as in research, the VU wants to encourage the development of talent. We therefore urge our students to apply themselves across a broad front, outside the university as well as within its walls. Not only does this enrich our community, it prepares the student for the role they will one day play in wider society. Those who have demonstrated a particularly high degree of motivation have the chance to broaden or deepen their studies, or to take part of their degree abroad. The VU offers its students many opportunities, but it also demands a lot of them. Studying here is not an easy ride. Students are responsible for their own progress and academic success, and are made to account for them throughout their educational career.

We have developed a vision of education which places a strong emphasis upon investigative learning. Asking the right questions is at least as important as giving the right answers. The close links between our education and research activities keep the quality of education high and ensure that students are constantly being challenged intellectually. Undergraduates come into contact with research; postgraduates make a demonstrable contribution to it. Those taking research Master’s degrees, in particular, are likely to be considering an academic career, either at the VU or elsewhere. Wherever they choose to pursue that, we train them to become successful, committed and conscientious researchers.

Our PhD candidates receive a quality education

PhD candidates make an important contribution to the research work undertaken at the VU. To equip them properly for this task, we also offer them a high-quality educational curriculum. This includes elements tailored to their own discipline and research. It is designed to impart academic skills and expertise that are important both within and outside the university.

We have a professional educational organization

Professional organization is essential to the provision of good academic education. The basic organizational unit for tutors and academics is the degree programme. But this consists of more than...
HOW DO WE CARRY ON LIVING WELL ON OUR PLANET?
RESEARCH INTO SUSTAINABLE SOURCES OF ENERGY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS
just a curriculum: it is a coherent package of courses and learning activities, compiled on the basis of carefully considered and described learning objectives. It also incorporates effective tools for monitoring the quality of its individual components, their mutual relationships and the final outcome. Where practical, degree programmes are clustered organizationally into “colleges” or “schools”. Programme directors and tutors are supported in a professional manner.

Our students are engaged with society

The VU trains engaged, conscientious scholars who are constantly exploring and pushing back boundaries. Developing students’ sense of social solidarity is part of our academic core syllabus, which encourages them to reflect upon their future responsibility in the world. Participation in university representative bodies and taking up executive positions with student organizations help them acquire good, balanced decision-making skills and foster their broader development. We urge students to play an active part in the community, in the broad sense of the word, and provide them with the support they need to enable them to combine those commitments with their studies. Undergraduates can also make a direct contribution by joining the Community Services programme, in which they work with postgraduates and tutors on issues brought to us by partners in the community. Activities take the form of research on a work placement or for a dissertation, or tackling problem-oriented educational assignments. In this way students are able to apply their academic skills in the service of the local or regional community, and are encouraged to enhance their skills in such areas as leadership, cooperation and personal development.

The Community Services programme also fosters boundary-transcending interdisciplinary collaboration and international exchanges and it can act as the trigger for follow-up research. Crucially, too, this programme is anchored in education and research and is tailored to the VU’s profile themes.

We educate a broad student body

We realize that, in the future, more and more postgraduate students will come to us from the world of work rather than progressing directly
from a Bachelor’s degree programme. Alongside courses for “regular” students, therefore, the VU also offers a wide range of programmes for those from different backgrounds. In this way we are making our contribution to lifelong learning, through postacademic and executive education, as well as fulfilling our ambitions in respect of educational valorization by offering specific courses for the professional market. In both cases we set high standards for the quality of provision, only ever attaching our name to programmes that satisfy our own strict criteria. One special characteristic of our postacademic education is that it is closely linked to our research activities and mainstream teaching. In this domain we seek out niches which tie in with our four profile themes and allow us to present the latest academic and scientific insights.

Our alumni build important bridges between the academic world, the business community and other academic institutions

We invest in lifelong relationships

The VU invests in long-term relationships with its former students. Alumni have access to a special environment in which they can keep their knowledge up to date and follow the latest developments in their own discipline. After they have graduated, we continue to provide them with challenging, stimulating and innovative knowledge, and with new contacts to help them in furthering their careers. Our alumni build important bridges between the academic world, the business community and other centres of knowledge. They know better than anyone the value of a the VU education, so we involve them actively in profiling ourselves as an institution where talent is allowed to shine. Many of them also play an active role in creating work-placement opportunities for our students.
WHAT WE CONSIDER HEALTHY IS CHANGING ALL THE TIME. INTEGRATED RESEARCH METHODS COVERING DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF NUTRITION, EXERCISE AND HEALTH
<table>
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<th>Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td>The VU offers meaningful, challenging academic and postacademic education of a high quality. Through our teaching, we make a substantive contribution to the society of today and tomorrow by training students to fill important positions within it. We achieve the performance targets agreed in 2011 with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.</td>
<td>1  Percentage of second-year undergraduate enrollees obtaining their Bachelor’s degree within a total of four years of study.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2  Level of student satisfaction (National Student Survey and Educational Evaluations).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3  Tutor quality (BKO/SKO teaching qualifications and Educational Evaluations).</td>
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<td>4  Percentage of degree programmes rated “satisfactory” or higher in accreditation inspections and mid-term reviews.</td>
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<td>5  Number of “socially meaningful” positions held by the VU alumni (Alumni Monitor).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6  Percentage of undergraduates taking part in Community Services programme.</td>
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<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>1  Improve student success rates.</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<td>2  Improve the quality of our education.</td>
<td>• We flexibilize our undergraduate education so that it is easier for students to transfer</td>
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<td>3  Enhance the societal impact of our education.</td>
<td>between programmes, both vertically and horizontally.</td>
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<td>4  Strengthen student-tutor ties.</td>
<td>• We encourage students to engage actively with their studies and to take greater responsibility</td>
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<td>5  Increase our contribution to lifelong learning and the dissemination of</td>
<td>for their own academic success.</td>
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<td>our academic knowledge by expanding our range of postacademic education.</td>
<td>• We develop a recognizable and appealing educational offering for “non-regular” students.</td>
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<td>6  Strengthen ties with our alumni.</td>
<td>Society</td>
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<td>7  Increase students' sense of responsibility for their own academic</td>
<td>• We implement a form of “Community Services”, closely linked to undergraduate studies.</td>
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<td>success.</td>
<td>• We link our Master’s degrees with our research programmes addressing societal themes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• We improve the visibility of our postacademic education and strengthen support for it.</td>
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<td>• We create a structural and sustainable alumni policy.</td>
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<td>Tutors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• We deploy our tutors in line with their own strengths, which includes ensuring that they are</td>
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<td>well-trained and remain so throughout their teaching careers.</td>
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<td>• We value education and research equally.</td>
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<td>• We invest in the development of didactic, English-language and educational leadership skills.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• We improve the quality of our education by enhancing the role and the position of our tutors.</td>
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<td>Teaching</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• We set aside an annual budget, from central funds, for innovative interfaculty education.</td>
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<td>• We strengthen support for education and our degree programmes.</td>
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<td>• We implement internal quality assurance procedures throughout the range of our degree</td>
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<td>programmes, including postacademic programmes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• We strengthen the organizational structure of our education.</td>
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<td>• We create favourable conditions for good postacademic education, so that the range of courses</td>
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<td>is expanded, their visibility is improved and the number of participants increases.</td>
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We conduct fundamental and socially relevant research

At the VU, there is room for both pure and applied research. We pursue scientific depth as well as solutions to problems in the real world. That combination reflects our identity and core values. And it is accentuated by the four core "profile themes" guiding our researchers: Governance for Society, Human Health and Life Sciences, Connected World and Science for Sustainability.

We focus upon quality and relevance

The VU has a solid research structure. For the most part, this work is conducted within interdisciplinary research institutes under the managerial responsibility of the deans of the participating faculties. The quality of research is measured using the national Standard Evaluation Protocol (Standaard Evaluatie Protocol, SEP). To ensure its constant improvement, we have selected a number of comparable European universities to set ourselves against, and from which we wish to learn. This form of inter-institutional reflection adds depth to the discussion about rankings, which are also important from an international perspective. We consider our score in the Leiden Ranking, which assesses universities according to the impact of their research, a reliable indicator of our international position.
Research quality is closely bound up with scientific integrity. In both our undergraduate and our postgraduate teaching, we pay considerable attention to the ethical and methodological aspects of research. Increasing domestic and international competition for budgets forces us to look critically at the substance of our research work. For our faculties and institutes, that means refocusing and readjusting from time to time.

We set great store by the accessibility of our research output, both publications and data. These are important in ensuring that our work is visible, checkable and reproducible. With the amount of data being generated now increasing exponentially, we face challenging new research opportunities. This demands responsible management during the research itself, and long-term storage afterwards. The VU is a strong proponent of maximum accessibility for its output by means of open-access publication, especially when the underlying research has been publicly funded.

**Research valorization is a core task**

Through their research, the scientists and academics at the VU make a meaningful contribution to societal advancement. In the future, a diminishing flow of direct government funding will in part be allocated according to efforts and results in the field of valorization. Both Dutch and European financing programmes now require specific consideration of this aspect, in line with the nature of the discipline concerned. Apart from that, valorization performs an important function in assuring the relevance to society of the research we conduct within our four profile themes. We therefore view and organize it in close harmony with our educational and research activities. The Innovation Exchange Amsterdam (IXA) combines expertise from various academic institutions in the region, and supports researchers in monetizing their scientific knowledge. Robust interaction with the wider society requires a constant exchange of knowledge, values and needs between academics and the outside world. Our researchers seek actively to engage in dialogue about societal issues, research, and the results of that research. This in turn helps them to translate societal needs into relevant new research.
In Europe alone, some 45,000 forest fires break out each year. Globally, an area the size of the EU is razed. As part of the Science for Sustainability theme, we are investigating the flammability of different types of vegetation in a special fire lab at the VU. And in various places around the world we are measuring emissions of greenhouse gases caused by fires. By linking these two datasets, we can improve fire prevention regimes and predict how forest blazes will affect the world’s climate and the quality of the air we breathe.
Research and education reinforce one another

At the VU, research and education are closely connected. Research feeds education, a process that forces us to present our results with clarity and sound justification. The constantly changing employment market also demands that these links be strong. Technological advances and the evolution of society require such qualities as critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving ability – qualities which research is excellent at imparting. An independent, personal research project is therefore a standard component of all our Master’s degree curricula. Students are taught about state-of-the-art research and expected to participate in ongoing projects. For the most talented, with a demonstrable interest in scientific investigation, we open the path to a career in this direction with the opportunity to read for a research Master’s degree within one of our profile themes. Even those students not intending to stay in research must gain a good understanding of what it entails, what its possibilities are and where its boundaries lie. This is because we consider it hugely important that all our graduates be able to assess research results critically and to make use of them in their future lives.
### Our ambition

The VU is a leading research university, making a distinctive academic contribution to the resolution of key issues in society. We generate new scientific knowledge, disseminate it, apply it and pass it on to our students, so that they are able to play their part in meaningful societal advances.

### Indicators

1. Percentage of the top 10 per cent of scientific publications (Leiden Ranking).
2. Benefits of research financed by or in partnership with companies and public institutions.
3. Number of publicly disseminated output results.
4. Percentage of journal articles available in open access.

### Objectives

1. Improve the valorization and accessibility of knowledge related to fundamental scientific and societal issues.
2. Foster a multidisciplinary approach to both fundamental and applied research, based upon our conviction that the former is essential to the latter.
3. Continue to incorporate scientific research into our educational activities.
4. Strengthen the organization of our research activities, centring them on our profile themes.
5. Foster dialogue with wider society about our research.

### Approach

**Research quality and relevance**

- We support our researchers proactively and financially in securing national and international grants.
- We encourage our researchers to publish in open access, and facilitate them in doing so.
- We select ten European universities for comparison and strategic discussion.

**Valorization and profile**

- We organize our interdisciplinary research structure in line with our four chosen “profile themes”.
- We establish research Master’s degree programmes within each of our profile themes.
- We encourage our researchers to interact with non-academic groups, and facilitate them in doing so.
- We encourage our researchers to enter into public and private partnerships for research and valorization, and facilitate them in doing so.

**Research-education links**

- Our professors and top researchers take part in undergraduate education.
- Our tutors are in a position to forge links between research and education.
We challenge our students to perform to the best of their ability

We challenge our students to develop their talents as effectively as they can, and to push back their own boundaries. Our talent policy does not focus exclusively upon the relatively small group of students who perform outstandingly and are most motivated to succeed; we challenge everyone to do their very best. Students are encouraged to pursue their own personal and academic development in both breadth and depth. Those with above-average commitment and ability are given the opportunity to excel on selective élite programmes and by taking research Master’s degrees. The VU does all it can to ensure that the right students are in the right places, deploying such instruments as personal counselling, matching, the mandatory recommendation on continued study (Bindend Studieadvies, BSA), the enhanced language test and the Summer School. In challenging students to make the most of their studies, we also encourage them to undertake extracurricular activities that help them develop into critical, independently minded scholars.

We offer our academic staff opportunities

The VU is able to attract and retain excellent tutors and researchers. We offer the prospect of career advancement with the help of an extensive range of personal and professional development activities that reflect our strategy and the qualities demanded of academic personnel in today’s world; as well as excellent research performance, they include teaching
abilities, valorization, entrepreneurship and leadership abilities. To reward and inspire our best talent, we operate incentive schemes in both the educational and the research domains. Outstanding teaching performance paves the way for a professorial appointment. And through the University Research Chair we recognize excellent researchers with the potential to become leaders in their field. In principle, appointments of postdoctoral talent are made within a so-called tenure-track scheme, involving clear performance agreements.

*We offer our academic staff the prospect of career advancement.*
A few years ago, a “hard core” of just 600 offenders in Amsterdam were accounting for more than 2500 arrests a year. What is the best way to tackle a group of this kind, and who should be involved in dealing with them?

The VU conducted a network analysis which brought together over 35 partners from the public, semi-public and private sectors. This created an effective network, which has cut recidivism amongst the “top 600” by more than 50 per cent. But this approach also raises new questions. How should complex networks of this kind be organized and led when they lack a hierarchy? What role can ordinary members of public play when the network is so complicated? And who supervises the network and its individual members, and how? We have taken up all these questions and are now working to resolve them in partnership with the organizations involved.

Participating researchers
Goos Minderman
Katherine Diaz
**Oure ambition**

A culture of ambition, challenge and development prevails at the VU. We have a keen eye for talent. We set high standards for our students and staff, but also enable them to develop to the best of their ability.

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<tr>
<td>1 How stimulating students find their curriculum (National Student Survey).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Percentage of students taking part in selective élite programmes.</td>
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<td>3 Percentage of staff taking part in personal and professional development programmes.</td>
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<td>4 How challenged staff feel (Employee Survey).</td>
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**Objectives**

1 Strengthen our educational portfolio through programmatic diversity, adapted to the needs of different student groups.
2 Create an environment in which students and academic staff can develop to the best of their ability.
3 Make sure that the right students are in the right places.

**Approach**

**Students**

- We offer a broad palette of educational activities and teaching methods, so that students feel challenged to develop their talents to the full.
- We design our degree programmes in such a way that they appeal to students from elite streams in secondary education.
- We offer selective élite programmes at the undergraduate level.
- We encourage and facilitate extracurricular activities.
- We assign professors to undergraduate teaching.
- We ensure the right match between student and degree course.
- We use our talents as a source of inspiration, to encourage our students to make the most of their own abilities.

**Staff**

- We acknowledge educational and research talent through incentive schemes.
- We work with tenure tracks and career tracks.
- We develop excellent leadership skills through training and dedicated supervision.
Diversity enriches our education and research

The composition of the population is changing fast. Diversity is a fact of life, and at the VU an intrinsic value, a theme which forms part of our identity. We create room for diversity because we are convinced that the quality of education and research benefits from inclusiveness in terms of background, nationality, philosophical and religious outlook, world view, political conviction, gender, lifestyle, learning style and physical circumstances.

In a world which is becoming more culturally pluriform, this means that we want to train scholars capable of interacting effectively with people from different cultures and including a variety of perspectives in their professional mindset. In our research work, we want to develop knowledge which is not biased towards our own cultural context but does justice to the pluriformity of the wider world. We believe that a diverse research group tends to produce results of a higher quality. We want to provide an inclusive learning and working environment which, because of the very differences present within it, fosters maximum creativity and talent development. Thanks to this vision, the VU trains its students to be successful in the pluriform society of tomorrow.

Developing expertise in diversity and education

Our responsibility does not end with the presentation of a degree certificate or the publication of a research paper. The VU believes that it also has a part to play in building bridges between the academic world and the employment market. That reflects our efforts to put science to
the service of society, in a meaningful way. In particular, we very much see ourselves in a central role when it comes to developing

*In our academic research, we want to develop knowledge which is not biased towards our own cultural context.*

diversity in education. On this point we are working with other academic institutions around the world, as well as with organizations in the Amsterdam region. Diversity is a core topic of conversation with our international partners in nations where that is an especially prominent issue. We share our knowledge on the subject, and learn from experiences elsewhere.

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**Our ambition**

The VU makes the most of its academic community’s diversity, in terms of background, philosophical and religious outlook, political conviction, gender and lifestyle, to enrich the quality of our education and research. Our culture is in an inclusive one, so that every student and member of staff feels part of the university.

**Indicators**

1. How inclusive our students find their learning environment.
2. How inclusive our staff find their working environment (Employee Survey).
3. Reflections of diversity in the societal contribution made by our alumni, in their work and their public roles (Alumni Monitor).
4. Number of publication by teams diverse in their composition.
5. Level of staff diversity.
Objectives

1. Increase the diversity of our workforce.
2. Increase the diversity of our junior research community by ensuring that a wider range of Master’s degree graduates stay on to take a PhD.
3. Increase diversity awareness amongst our staff.
4. Improve the intercultural competencies of our students.
5. Reduce the proportion of ethnic-minority students dropping out or falling behind in their studies.
6. Increase the proportion of ethnic-minority graduates entering employment relevant to their qualifications.
7. Improve the societal impact of our graduates in respect of diversity.

Approach

Policy
- We organize staff recruitment, selection, training and appraisal activities in such a way that they support the creation of a diverse workforce as effectively as possible.
- We address diversity during the induction of new staff.
- Where possible, we facilitate religious and philosophical diversity in both staff and students.
- We scan our cultural climate on a regular basis, and take action to ensure that it allows room for differences.
- We intensify our collaboration with other universities with a successful diversity policy.
- We develop joint platforms to share experiences and best practices in the field of diversity with other academic institutions in the Netherlands and abroad, with local government and with the regional business community.

Awareness
- We support our staff in dealing with diversity issues through training and supervision, including the BKO and SKO teaching qualifications.

Diversity in education
- We provide an intensive and appropriate introductory programme, with diversity at its heart.
- At the undergraduate level, we provide proactive student support with particular attention for those at risk of falling behind in their studies.
- Diversity is a key component of the academic core curriculum, of elite ‘honours’ courses and of minors.
- We facilitate and support our students in engaging in intercultural exchanges.
- We help our students in preparing themselves thoroughly for the jobs market.
- We encourage students from ethnic minorities to develop extracurricular activities.

Preparation
- We increase cooperation with secondary schools in order to make contact with prospective students – particularly those from the so-called first generation (with no family history of higher education) – at an earlier stage and in order to increase mutual knowledge about the organization of education.
- We thoroughly prepare students at risk of falling behind due to their social background for an academic career. We do this through matching, through clear communication about expectations and requirements and by introducing them to the academic world as early as possible, through pre-university activities.
HOW DO WE KEEP OURSELVES AND OUR PLANET SAFE?
NEW INSIGHTS INTO SUSTAINABLE INTERACTION BETWEEN MANKIND AND THE ENVIRONMENT
We develop an international culture

In line with our ambitions in respect of diversity, we are also developing an international culture in which students and staff feel at home and seek out interaction. The VU campus is a meeting place for people of many nationalities, from many different backgrounds. Our language policy focuses upon inclusivity for the entire student body and workforce. Eventually, in phases, ours will become a bilingual campus with Dutch and English as its languages of communication, bearing in mind the context in which they are used. Depending upon the course concerned, either Dutch or English will also be the language of instruction. To enhance our appeal to students, tutors and scientists from all over the world, we intend to increase our global visibility. The international profile of degree programmes is to be refined, and their attractiveness exploited to the full. For our “home” market, students from the Amsterdam region, this will mean an international learning environment on their own doorstep. And the local and international employment markets alike will benefit from our teaching and research expertise.
The VU looks further, even across borders

For decades now, the VU has been sharing its knowledge across national boundaries, especially with developing countries. We have long-established relationships with South Africa and Indonesia, which have repeatedly adapted themselves to new circumstances in the tide of history. Over time, both of these countries have emerged as important regional economic actors. The VU maintains institutional relationships with organizations in these countries, in part through research Master’s degrees tailored to our own profile themes. We encourage our researchers to join strategic alliances, and at the university level we enter into these relationships wherever the best partners are to be found. We also encourage the international mobility of students, PhD candidates and other staff, since experience abroad prepares students for a transnational career and the quality of our research benefits immensely from intensive international cooperation.
PROBLEMS THAT TRANSCEND BOUNDARIES REQUIRE RESEARCH THAT TRANSCENDS BOUNDARIES
### Our ambition

We are an international university. Our strongly internationalized character contributes towards the quality of our education, research and contribution to society. Our international environment, culture and exposure encourage our staff and students to look beyond borders.

### Indicators

1. Percentage and quality of intake of students with a non-Dutch educational background to programmes taught in English (educational reports).
2. Percentage of non-Dutch staff (HR reports).
3. Percentage of undergraduates taking part of their degree programme abroad (educational reports).
4. Participation in international research consortia with external funding.
5. Use of English.

### Objectives

1. Create an international environment.
2. Strengthen our international profile.
3. Improve the international mobility of our students and staff.

### Approach

#### Environment

- We develop an appealing international campus with programmes taught in either English or Dutch.
- We create an international classroom.
- We develop a challenging international curriculum, with minors and research Master’s degrees taught in English and focusing upon our four “profile themes”.
- Students with different backgrounds and nationalities are brought into contact with one another through joint open days, events, and programmes.

#### Profile

- We emphasize Amsterdam’s international character, culture and career opportunities.

- We designate foreign universities, institutes and research organizations as preferred partners.
- We join international strategic research consortia and obtain the international HR quality label for researchers.
- We invest in long-term relationships in South Africa and Indonesia.

#### Mobility

- We encourage our students to study abroad.
- We encourage our academic staff to take sabbaticals abroad.
- We optimize information and services for exchange and diploma students, both incoming and outgoing.
- We recruit international students, PhD candidates and academic staff.
FOUR PROFILE THEMES
As they increase in complexity, the issues facing contemporary society are demanding solutions informed by multiple academic disciplines. The academics, scientists and professionals of the future are going to have to look beyond the boundaries of their own field. To encourage this process now, and also to highlight the broad range of teaching and research carried out at the VU, we have adopted four so-called “profile themes”:

1. Governance for Society  
2. Human Health & Life Sciences  
3. Connected World  
4. Science for Sustainability

These themes endow us with a clear profile as a university, for staff, the business community, governments, academic partners and society at large. They have been derived from our identity and core values, our strengths in education and research and our focus upon societal issues. Moreover, they strengthen links between different academic disciplines – not only within the university, but also between it and the VUmc.

**The themes are evolving in line with social developments in the world.**

**Strengthening interdisciplinary research**

The interdisciplinary research institutes at the VU are largely responsible for shaping our four profile themes. As well as encouraging and strengthening cooperation between the institutes, these also bring
faculties and educational programmes closer together. They invite participation rather than excluding it. The themes are never static, but always evolving in line with developments in the wider world. They serve as a guideline when mapping out our future direction as a university. And they are reflected in the research and educational programming, the external positioning and the valorization activities of the academics and scientists concerned, with thematic conferences further encouraging interdisciplinary cooperation between teaching and research staff.

Particularly in our Master’s degrees, there is an evident curricular link with the themes. Our ambition is to create an undergraduate minor for each of them as well.

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<tr>
<th>Our ambition</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<td>The broad range of education and research conducted at the VU reflects contemporary issues in society. To better highlight this fact, we profile ourselves through four recognizable themes derived directly from our main academic strengths.</td>
<td>1 Percentage of the top 10 per cent of scientific publications (Leiden Ranking).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Number of publications by authors from at least two different disciplines.</td>
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<td>3 Participation in large-scale research programmes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 Profile-based Master’s degree programmes (including research Master’s degrees).</td>
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<td>5 Products of valorization.</td>
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<td>6 Postacademic education</td>
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<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
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<td>1 As far as possible, we organize research along thematic lines.</td>
<td>- As far as possible, Master’s degree programmes are linked to thematic research.</td>
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<td>2 Through our thematic approach, we promote the quality, impact and interdisciplinarity of our research.</td>
<td>- At the undergraduate level, we develop university-wide minors for each of the four profile themes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Our profile themes help us to resolve issues in society.</td>
<td>- The themes guide our internal and external research communications.</td>
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<td>- The themes guide our recruitment of academic personnel.</td>
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<td>- We make a concerted effort to join relevant national and international research consortia.</td>
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<th>AMBITIONS</th>
<th>OUR FUTURE</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
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Through its research and educational activities, the VU wants to help build a better world. Governance for Society is about the analysis of societal problems, about how issues of a collective nature are raised and scheduled, about how different actors organize themselves and their interactions in pursuit of possible solutions, about what activities actually result from that and about the outcomes they achieve. In other words, this theme centres on the question of how organizations and civil societies today are, and in the past have been, constituted and governed – or should be – in such a way that they are able to tackle and resolve their overarching issues. As such, the theme both explores our theoretical understanding of governance processes and problems and looks at “what works” in practice. This makes “governance” a profile-determining theme in and of itself.

As a society, we find ourselves more and more often coming up against the natural boundaries of existing forms of governance. Processes of globalization, technological innovation and sociocultural differentiation are loosening the ties binding societies, and also making them more unpredictable and less manageable.
HOW CAN GREATER TRANSPARENCY HELP BUILD A BETTER SOCIETY?
unpredictable and less manageable. At the same time, civil society at all levels faces the greatest ecological challenge in human history, a far-reaching financial and economic crisis, growing social inequality and other major social and cultural challenges. Challenges which demand a deeper understanding of societal problems in order to find appropriate answers and relevant new forms of governance.

The quest for new ways to deal with the pressing issues of our time is drawing in public, community and private organizations alike, not to mention individual citizens. But none of them can take up the challenge alone; they have no option but to forge wide-ranging alliances and networks. The question of what form these should take and how they can be made to work is now firmly on the agenda at many different levels. From the individual wanting to influence his or her own living environment to environmental organizations fighting for a better world, governments wanting to tackle unemployment, the mayor of Amsterdam who wants to make their cities safer and social housing providers wrestling with the boundaries of good governance, right up to international organizations like the EU, the UN and the World Bank and the many NGOs campaigning for a safe and sustainable planet.

Within the context of the VU’s own educational and research agenda, Governance for Society is a logical priority. It encompasses issues ranging from unemployment to public security, from sustainability to diversity and migration, from market forces and entrepreneurship to the distribution of wealth. All of these have overlapping local, national and international dimensions – and also, thanks to their complexity and often paradoxical nature (“wickedness”), no straightforward solutions. These are issues it is impossible for one academic discipline to tackle on its own, or even for a combination to resolve. To arrive at responsible, creative solutions requires the participation of many parties of many different kinds. Our governance theme demands not just an interdisciplinary approach, then – one transcending discipline and faculty boundaries – but a transdisciplinary structure which also connects with the practice of societal, political and corporate governance.
The result is an intriguing agenda for research, education and external cooperation. What typifies the governance of difference sectors? What seems to work, and what lessons does that teach us? Areas of focus and subthemes here include the problems themselves, the consequences – including the unintended ones – of the approaches chosen to tackle them, the institutional structures and legal forms involved, interactions between public, community and private actors, accountability structures and systems, the definition and workings of leadership and inspiration, visible and invisible power practices, regulatory discipline, local perceptions of governance strategies, practices and systems, resistance by the “governed”, the significance of complexity and of emergent phenomena such as culture and, last but by no means least, the question of what constitutes “good governance” – in terms of ethics and integrity – at every level from the local to the global. Naturally, current processes of globalization oblige us to adopt a planetary perspective rather than confining ourselves solely to the Netherlands or Europe.

The governance agenda presents challenges and offers opportunities. It combines different ways of looking at topics (disciplines, foci), different subthemes and different sectors, but above all it connects the VU with wider society. As such, it both dares us to make great strides forward and provides us with the potential to do so. The potential to work together in the search for new insights, to be gleaned from research making a contribution to policy, leadership and social engagement with input from our investigative and educational activities.
How can organizations and societies be run in such a way that they are able to take up social issues and resolve them? What works, what is effective and what helps build a better world? And how does the approach adopted reflect the opinions and efforts of the public or the workforce? In looking for the answers, one underlying question keeps recurring: what constitutes conscientious, high-quality governance? Fundamentally, this is a question of values, of right and wrong. Researchers at the VU are therefore focusing upon “good governance”, upon the values associated with it and upon the tensions between them. But also upon the “dark side” of governance and how to illuminate it. Building a better world begins with better governance.

Participating researcher
Gerda van Dijk
Our ambition

Building upon our free and independent academic position, and with a view to shaping a better world, we seek to make a profoundly fundamental contribution to issues of societal governance. We do this by creating what we call a “free space”, in which we work with social and scientific partners to raise such issues, to bring together the necessary practical and academic knowledge about them, to further develop that knowledge and to make the resulting insights and best practices widely available in a manner that is demonstrably beneficial to the wider world. This entire process begins and ends with society.

Objectives

1. Hone our profile to focus upon current and relevant issues of governance for society, to which we can make a substantive contribution.
2. Be recognized and acknowledged as a leading research and educational institution in the field of societal governance issues, both nationally and internationally.
3. Strengthen our national and international partnerships in order to increase research funding opportunities.
4. Secure European grants in the field of governance.
5. Play our part in the training of future leaders by teaching our students to be more resilient and by equipping them to deal astutely with the complexities inherent in governance relationships.
6. Increase our visibility in the public debate, both nationally and internationally.

Approach

- Governance for Society takes a broad, transdisciplinary approach. We bring together different disciplines and faculties, gather and process relevant input from professional practice and society in general and work step by step to improve acknowledgement of and engagement with this theme amongst both staff and students.
- Our transdisciplinary ambition guides the way in which we combine education and research on this theme.
- In general terms, we identify urgent, overlapping issues related to governance at every level of society, from the local to the global, and then translate these into a number of specific themes for research and education.
- We develop a university-wide minor, an élite “honours track” and a research Master’s degree in Governance.
Healthy living and quality of life are important themes in the modern world. Yet they also represent a huge challenge, not least because of the strong current demographic trend towards an ageing population. Then there are the epidemiological developments we face, with the burden of disease shifting very much towards lifestyle-related conditions. Phenomena of both the soma and the psyche, these are not problems which can be overcome simply by expanding the volume of traditional care.

Societal and technological developments are also playing their part. Thanks to the digital revolution, “ordinary” people are now better informed and often quite capable of monitoring aspects of their own health and disease (the “quantified self”). Advances in medical imaging, biomarkers, genome analysis and 3D printing for clinical purposes are leading to “personalized” medicine. Moreover, the context here is very wide-ranging, from neighbourhood to school, from sports club to workplace and from front-line healthcare to highly complex academic medicine. It is quite clear that these are matters requiring a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, also incorporating ethical, legal and governance aspects. And solutions to the problems related to these issues will require an international approach as well, because they are universal issues.

Under the heading Human Health and Life Sciences (H2LS), the VU is working with the VUmc and the Academic Centre for Dentistry Amsterdam (ACTA) to develop and reinforce educational and research activities in the fields of life, health and care. This is being done across a broad front, centring on the continua connecting fundamental knowledge with its practical application, prevention with cure and care and pure
with applied science. Specific areas of focus include public physical and mental health, neurosciences, oncology, the cardiovascular system, sports and human movement, imaging and diagnostics, in all cases embracing both the soma and the psyche.

Our particular research and education emphasis is understanding the mechanisms of disease in order to facilitate early identification and intervention. On the research side, our work is characterized by the linkage of fundamental insights into life processes with practical applications in preventive and curative healthcare. Improving health and human functioning through lifestyle change, in particular by means of diet, exercise and sport, is an important subtheme. With a focused profile and an integrated scientific approach, we hope to be able to answer the healthcare questions of today and tomorrow by combining education, research and care within one flexible and innovative organization.

Thematic clusters and buildings stimulate collaboration
The health issues of today are complex, covering everything from prevention, diagnostics and treatment to end-of-life care. H2LS seeks to organize education and research activities in the medical, behavioural, health, human movement and life sciences in such a way that we are able to make a significant contribution to societal and technological progress in these fields, in the widest possible context. To achieve this, our work is divided into thematic clusters within interfaculty research institutes. The new O2 building, which houses research groups from both the VU and the VUMc, has added new impetus to their collaborative efforts. The primary emphasis here is the neurosciences, in the broadest sense of the word, and there are direct links to preclinical and clinical research and care. In the longer term we also intend to form a sports cluster, with those involved in education and research in sport and human movement interacting intensively with sports and health practitioners.

The educational chain at the VU and the VUmc runs from Bachelor’s, Master’s and research Master’s degree to PhD training, and at all stages is linked to established interfaculty research priorities. The approach we have adopted is a comprehensive one, “from molecule to man and from
“man to molecule, from prevention and health promotion to treatment and care”, and we strive for excellence throughout. We offer students in the H2LS domain the opportunity to complete their first degree within the allotted duration [usually four years], then choose a Master’s suited to their interests and abilities. Step by step, a number of the BSc programmes within H2LS are being made more flexible. This is for two reasons: so that every undergraduate ends up on the right course for them and so that young talent is discovered, nurtured and encouraged as early as possible.
Hereditary progressive brain diseases in children end young lives almost before they have begun. For more than 25 years now, the VU has been conducting research to help doctors recognize these conditions. The underlying aim is to understand their mechanisms better, so that we can develop effective treatments. Fortunately, that goal is now coming increasingly within our reach.
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<th>Our ambition</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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| Thanks to a focused and ambitious profile on the theme of Human Health and Life Sciences (H2LS), organized in an engaged, innovative manner and incorporating the practice of health promotion, sport and care as well as education and fundamental, translational and applied research, we generate solutions to topical questions around fitness, vitality and health. Looking beyond disciplinary and national boundaries, on this theme we combine expertise from the university itself and from the VUmc, and we work with the University of Amsterdam, the Academic Medical Centre Amsterdam and the best institutes in the Netherlands and abroad. | 1 Formulate a common research strategy with a leading role for translational research that does justice to the collaborative efforts between our fundamental and applied work, placing a strong emphasis upon health promotion and healthy, prevention-driven lifestyles.  
2 Feed a substantial proportion of the training component of our PhD programmes with work generated by the research institutes, placing a particular emphasis upon the practical application of their findings.  
3 Flexibilize undergraduate programmes in subjects related to H2LS, so that they are relatively easy to modify. This will reduce the numbers of students dropping out and improve pass rates. |

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<th>Approach</th>
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<td>Research</td>
<td>Undergraduate education</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
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| • Research in H2LS is conducted within existing research institutes at the university, in all cases striving for excellence and relevance.  
• We facilitate this work through professional project management and control, valorization support and a state-of-the-art research infrastructure. | • We adopt a funding model which enables students to move between faculties and universities.  
• We gradually flexibilize undergraduate programmes to enable students to progress into a variety of Master’s degrees, by means of majors, minors or transitional years. | • Our work is interdisciplinary and has an international orientation.  
• We combine the VU and the VUmc expertise, and also work with the University of Amsterdam, the Academic Medical Centre Amsterdam and leading institutes abroad. |
| Graduate education | | |
| • We develop “honours programmes” aligned with the work of the interdisciplinary research institutes.  
• The faculties involved set up a graduate school to provide H2LS education for PhD candidates. | | |
Connected World

In our globalizing world, people, companies, governments and academic institutions are becoming ever more strongly connected. The recent worldwide information and communications revolution has brought different parts of our planet closer together. History has seen previous periods of intensive technological, socioeconomic, cultural and political influence, and global interaction goes as far back as Antiquity. Identity, cultural heritage, immigration, knowledge creation, politics, the public domain, religion and both verbal and non-verbal communication have all affected patterns of globalization, and vice versa. Even the VU itself has been impacted, evolving from a bastion of Protestantism into an organization characterized by diversity. Periods of globalization, recent and historical alike, present chances and opportunities, but also go hand in hand with problems and conflict. As national borders fade within a greater Europe or a global network, so themes like alienation and loss of identity rear their heads.

How does globalization affect our society? At the VU, the diverse manifestations of the “connected world” are investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively, drawing upon wide-ranging sources, by anthropologists, archaeologists, philosophers, historians, social scientists and theologians working closely with information scientists and linguists.

Within this profile theme, we study issues of globalization as historical, cultural, scientific, philosophical, social and technological phenomena.
with valuable comparative components. In so doing, we focus particularly upon the interaction between emerging global networks and the recently developed information and other technologies partly responsible for the changes they are bringing about. In the way it combines humanities with the exact and social sciences, Connected World is unique both in the Netherlands and internationally. At its heart are three subthemes.

**Digitization**

The digitization of society has created a world of new social relationships, and has changed the nature of existing ones. It has become easier to make contact with other people, to form networks and to discover new forms of collaboration. At the same time, however, technological progress has created fresh risks: it can also result in new forms of control, regulation and conflict. The digitization and globalization of our planet are changing the way we communicate, the way in which economies function and societal issues are tackled, the way we deal with the past (including heritage), our language, our relationships, our philosophical outlook and even the way we view humanity and the world. We have now reached the stage where more data is generated on a daily basis by machines, servers and mobile phones than by people. This so-called “big data” contains a wealth of information, but its very volume and diversity of sources make that hard to exploit. On the other hand, recent and future developments in digital technology are opening up exciting new opportunities in the humanities, the social sciences (data analytics) and the health sciences.

**New patterns of cooperation**

The interaction between technology and social patterns has obvious economic, political, cultural and philosophical effects. The far-reaching integration of information and communication technologies within organizations has prompted the formulation of new theories about sociotechnical systems. An analogue development is taking place at the level of the individual, where the massive digitization of our everyday lives,
our private domains and even sometimes our own bodies raises questions about the possibility – and desirability – of cyber-physical systems. Meanwhile, the creative industry is wrestling with its productivity, with what it knows about the effect of new media, with the development of new technologies and with the notion of creativity as a factor in business innovation.

**New responsibilities**

The humanities and social sciences themselves are increasingly subject to wide-ranging computerization. Thanks to new forms of source mining and management, it is now easier than ever before to access the past. Not only does this allow historical and hermeneutic perspectives to play a more prominent role in the evaluation of societal developments, it also means that new responsibilities have emerged in respect of the management of our cultural heritage. Conversely, this increasing automation entails a growing need to take account of what still constitutes the essence of research in the humanities and a section of the social sciences: interpretation and the inherent cultural, historical, religious and philosophical values expressed through it. Finally, new information opportunities and intensifying interdependencies create new moral and philosophical responsibilities in space and time, as reflected in debates on such issues as global justice, social cohesion and our duty to future generations.

These three subthemes express our mission to combine fundamental knowledge with the implementation of changes in society, whilst not losing sight of the associated standards and values. The high quality of our internationally oriented research institutes is widely acknowledged. Under the auspices of the Amsterdam Academic Alliance (AAA), we are working closely with the University of Amsterdam on a number of fronts, concerning both education and research. In terms of educational provision within the VU, too, we are endeavouring to achieve greater cooperation. For example, we are developing a BA Politics, Philosophy and Economics programme as a partnership between the departments of Philosophy, Political Sciences and Economics.
In themselves, words have no meaning. It is a context which gives them that. Computers can read masses of news and information, but can they learn to understand it all? The VU’s “Newsreader” brings them a step closer to that, by teaching them to recognize context and to incorporate it in their interpretation. The millions of news reports gathered every day by the Newsreader are placed in an historical context, generating a “story line” from which it is possible to tell what people have agreed and disagreed about, and how these differences relate to emotions and world views.

**Participating researcher**

Piek Vossen
Our ambition

In a unique collaboration bringing together the humanities and the exact and social sciences, the Connected World theme focuses upon the interaction between new global networks on the one hand and, on the other, the revolution in information technology and linguistic engineering which has been partly responsible for their emergence. In this domain, our researchers and students investigate the cultural, historical, economic, social, legal and philosophical effects of globalization and digitization. Or they use the resulting technology to study and explain the past and the present in a variety of contexts.

Objectives

1. Ensure focus, mass and teamwork in our research into globalization, digitization and their societal impact, ranging from the use of big data to alienation and loss of identity.

2. Given the huge societal impact of globalization and digitization, strengthen our ties with industry and social partners (public-private partnerships).

3. Develop new educational programmes teaching and exploring the issue of globalization as an historical, cultural, scientific, philosophical, social and technological phenomenon, and emphasising the value of comparing qualitative and quantitative methods as well as the importance of different periods in world history so that students are thoroughly trained for the information and communications society of the 21st century.

Approach

- We continue and strengthen successful research already under way at the university’s Network Institute and Institute for the Cultural Landscape and Urban Environment (CLUE), as well as in other alliances like the Amsterdam Centre for Business Analytics (ACBA) and Amsterdam Data Science (ADS).

- We enter into new alliances with institutes outside the VU.

- We endeavour to forge intensive collaborations with the international business community in the field of digital humanities.

- We allow MA students to participate in embedded research projects.

- We offer university-wide minors in the Connected World domain.

- We offer a new, broad-based interfaculty BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE).
For the long-term well-being of our planet and the people living on it, it is essential that we act responsibly with the natural resources and services the world offers us and that we make our activities climate-neutral. To do this requires fundamental new knowledge about many different aspects of climate change, energy generation and the sustainable exploitation of water and other resources, scarce or otherwise. It is also hugely important that we increase our understanding of the best ways to bring about the changes in human behaviour and society needed to help create a sustainable world.

Science for Sustainability has four central core themes, which combine education and research into the earth science, biological, physical, chemical, socioeconomic, social, political and legal aspects of these issues:

**Climate**

How exactly do climate systems work, and how do they interact with land, water and the atmosphere? By enhancing our knowledge in this area we hope to be able to set out strategies for predicting and countering the negative effects upon ecosystems of climate change and extremes – and also to seize new opportunities presented by the climate of the future. This core theme is an ideal arena for interdisciplinary and interfaculty cooperation. On the one hand we are committed to forecasting climate change as well as its impact upon ecosystems. We do this by, for example, combining atmospheric measurements with experiments to test how global warming and other forms of climate change affect plants, animals and micro-organisms as well as entire ecosystems, and also their ability to adapt, and with climate prediction models linked to
WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL COSTS OF OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENERGY?
dynamic earth-crust, hydrological, carbon and vegetation models.

On the other side of the coin we couple insights gained from that work with societal factors. Our activities in this respect include new studies looking at approaches to climate change in national and international legislation, risk analysis and disaster management, socioeconomic policy, water management, insurance, and vulnerability concerning flooding in low-lying urban areas.

**Natural resources**

How do minerals, nutrients, biodiversity, ecosystems and land (including man-made or reclaimed areas) respond to human exploitation, and how can we find and exploit natural resources more efficiently? What cost-benefit relationships are associated with such exploitation, whether the resources concerned are scarce or plentiful? How do we express those costs and benefits in monetary and non-monetary – natural, cultural, social and suchlike – terms? And how can we balance them in a sustainable fashion? Particularly when it comes to the valorization of ecosystem services management, currently a “hot topic” on the international scientific stage, there are some wonderful opportunities at hand to forge new links between the natural, earth, social and economic sciences. Not only in research, but also in education. For example, this multidisciplinary core theme has recently been given new impetus at the undergraduate level, with BSc Earth Science and Economics at the VU and BSc Future Planet Studies at the University of Amsterdam joining forces to encourage their students to select secondary modules freely from either programme.

**Energy**

“Only the sun rises for nothing.” So what are the costs and benefits to society of our approach to energy? How can we deal sustainably with its finite sources? How can we store it efficiently for later use? And how can we successfully exploit those sources available for millennia to come, such as geothermal and solar energy? Can we make plants photosynthesize more efficiently, to generate power on a large scale? How
REDUCING URBAN VULNERABILITY

SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY
From Jakarta to New York, cities around the world are threatened by rising sea levels and extreme flood events of the kind we have seen all too often on television in recent years. Together with international research partners, the VU is working to improve water management, risk forecasting, disaster management and insurance coverage, so as to reduce vulnerability to inundation in urban areas.
can we emulate photosynthesis through biochemical and technological innovation? The VU already has a fantastic international reputation in those areas, thanks to our pioneering work at the biophysics-biochemistry interface, our development of a “green methodology” for the low-energy chemical synthesis of molecules for use in materials and medicines, and so on. Building upon that solid foundation, over the next few years we intend to take more steps to reduce human dependence upon finite and polluting sources of energy, like nuclear power and fossil fuels.

These three core themes clearly express our commitment to link fundamental knowledge with the implementation of real changes in society. Indeed, that is the strength of our approach to the issues of Science for Sustainability – an approach appropriate to a university situated at the heart of the community. As in our other profile themes, here too we are working closely with relevant partners. These collaborative efforts are reflected not only in our research, but also in the increasing number of joint MSc programmes we are offering. The new degree courses are all about enabling students to benefit from the complementary scientific expertise available at the university and from its partners, and to learn from the best tutors in each and every component of the programme. We are now working to develop joint degrees, too, so that we can continue to offer a broad and varied choice of studies in

IT IS VITAL THAT WE DEAL RESPONSIBLY WITH THE NATURAL RESOURCES AND SERVICES THAT THE WORLD OFFERS US AND THAT WE MAKE OUR ACTIVITIES SUSTAINABLE.

this domain in Amsterdam. Also in the pipeline is a coordinated range of MSc programmes from the science faculties at the VU and University of Amsterdam, in the form of a joint Science for Sustainability graduate school.
## Our ambition

This theme combines fundamental scientific knowledge with a thorough understanding of the way in which changes are actually put into practice in the real world. As such, we focus upon the entire research chain, from pure to applied to implemented.

### Objectives

1. **Objectives**
   - Introduce a set of clearly profiled Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programmes, with international appeal, on the theme of Science for Sustainability.

2. **Objectives**
   - Set up an Amsterdam partnership platform for world-class interdisciplinary research on the theme of Science for Sustainability.

3. **Objectives**
   - Establish an international profile as one of the world’s leading institutions in the field of sustainability.

### Approach

- **Approach**
  - We review the existing undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes at the VU and relevant partners, and where necessary revise their curricula in order to achieve maximum mutual coherence.

- **Approach**
  - In our Master’s degree programmes, we establish clear links with our research work and endeavour to involve our leading researchers in their teaching, not least because of their ability to serve as role models.

- **Approach**
  - In partnership with the University of Amsterdam, we select the best tutors for each module. All must hold the BKO teaching qualification, or obtain it as quickly as possible.

- **Approach**
  - We increase the number of undergraduate programmes taught in English.

- **Approach**
  - Using Amsterdam Academic Alliance (AAA) resources, we attract a number of leading international researchers to serve as key links in a core theme.
AN INTEGRATED VIEW OF SICKNESS AND HEALTH TO DISCOVER DISEASES BEFORE THEY MAKE YOU ILL
EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SUPPORT
For the VU, the quality of our facilities and support processes is decisive to our ability to achieve our ambitions in research and education. There has to be a good connection between management and the primary processes. We organize our support processes as effectively, efficiently and sustainably as possible. Academic and non-academic personnel alike make an important contribution to our success as an institution. In recent years we have laid the foundations for sustainable and efficient management, but we are currently still in the transitional phase. Our priority for the next few years is quality improvement. That will require a sustained collective effort from the entire workforce, both academic and ancillary.

**Sustainability**

We set high standards in respect of sustainability, across a broad spectrum: campus development, procurement policy, catering, water and lighting, computerization and so on. The university as an institution bears responsibility for sustainability policy, and in the coming years this is going to be extended with new initiatives in the fields of green IT and sustainable accommodation to further substantiate our perspective on “people, planet and prosperity”, our emphasis upon saving energy and our commitment to creating sustainable, healthy and futureproof buildings. At the management level, we readily adopt staff and student initiatives that contribute to our sustainability as a university.

**Safety and security**

We regard safety and security as vital preconditions for a good academic climate in which everyone is able to flourish without hindrance. For the VU to function effectively, it is essential that the working, research and study environment we provide is healthy, safe and secure in every respect.
Approach

**Digitization**
- We press ahead with digitization by, for example, developing a bilingual online platform providing all support services and products. Ideally, the “self-reliant” employee or student can arrange these without calling upon third-party assistance.

**Innovation and development**
- We develop an effective guidance mechanism for customers and suppliers, in order to improve services and make them more efficient and sustainable.
- In the ICT domain, in particular, we apply new developments in order to improve educational and research management.
- We respond to customer wishes through continuous monitoring.

**Integrated services**
- We develop integrated products, transcending service boundaries, to create a “one-stop shop”.
- We develop a model for the provision of services that enables educational and research collaboration with other institutions.

**Professionalization**
- We train all support services staff in generic skills, including English-language proficiency.
- All support services managers invest in motivating and inspiring their staff.
- We encourage support services staff to further develop their own professional know-how and skills.
- We implement integrated security.
- We conduct an annual risk scan, and translate the results into action to mitigate the risks identified.

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**Our ambition**

The VU facilitates education and research in a professional – that is, efficient and effective – manner.

**Indicators**

1. Customer satisfaction with support processes (Service Scan).
2. Ratio of academic to non-academic personnel costs.

**Objectives**

1. Increase customer satisfaction in respect of internal services.
2. Improve our customer and service focus.
3. As far as possible, offer services in an integrated manner.
4. Create standardized and harmonized service provision.
5. Develop safe and sustainable services.
6. Reduce process completion times.
7. Conform to the national university norm for the ratio of academic to non-academic personnel.

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7. Conform to the national university norm for the ratio of academic to non-academic personnel.
The VU has identified a number of elements crucial to the achievement of our ambitions with regard to education, research and organization.

1. People
2. Financial resources
3. Communications
4. Information
5. Campus and facilities

These are described on the following pages.
HOW CAN COMPLEX, MODERN ORGANIZATIONS FUNCTION WITHOUT A HIERARCHY?

DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES IN SELF-MANAGING ENTITIES
WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO NEW TECHNOLOGIES OFFER US?

NEW SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE ARE CREATING NEW RESEARCH TECHNIQUES.
Our staff are the people who achieve our ambitions. Our academic personnel are the key to success when it comes to the quality of our education and research. The VU therefore develops policy to assure the health, vitality and long-term employability of our personnel. In doing this, one of our ambitions is to make use of our own research findings. Our new management structure is based upon the principle of professional support. We deal successfully with diversity in our own workforce, with policy in this area intertwined with every aspect of our HR policy. We equip all our staff, but especially our tutors, to encourage the integration of different groups.

Our core values – open, responsible and personally engaged – are reflected in the way we deal with our students, our staff and our alumni. This approach helps us to recruit and retain high-quality personnel, although increasing financial uncertainty combined with an ever more competitive and international employment market are making that more challenging. We apply the principle that structural tasks are carried out by employees on or in line for permanent contracts. We aim to achieve a balanced and futureproof ratio of permanent to flexible personnel, proportionate to our activities. For our workforce, flexibility and career development are important aspects in maintaining their long-term employability. In the case of staff on temporary contracts but with the prospect of a permanent employment relationship with the university, we reach clear agreements about their development. For temporary personnel, time working at the VU should make a meaningful contribution to their professional development, flexibility and future career prospects, ideally in a permanent position, be that with us or elsewhere.
# Our ambition

The VU is an attractive employer, able to attract and retain talented people. An ambitious climate prevails within the university, characterized by integrity, respect, responsibility and team spirit. We challenge all our employees to develop their talents to the best of their ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Assessment of how employees perceive their work (Employee Survey).</td>
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<td>2 How encouraging employees find their annual appraisal interviews (Employee Survey).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 How effectively incentive schemes for academic talent are implemented (HR reports).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 How employees rate opportunities for career development (Employee Survey).</td>
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## Objectives

<table>
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<th>Objective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Strengthen our position as an attractive employer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Encourage and facilitate staff in their professional development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Properly appreciate the value of education and research.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Foster a climate of transparency and integrity.</td>
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</table>

## Approach

### Professionalization

- We invest in the professional development of our employees, and encourage career advancement in research, teaching and non-academic positions alike.
- We develop appropriate training programmes for academic and non-academic personnel.
- We develop outstanding leadership and forge a universal sense of responsibility.

### Facilitation and support

- We assess on an annual basis how our staff experience their work.
- We encourage effective, transparent and performance-led working methods.
- We endeavour to create a pleasant and safe working environment.
- We encourage internal and external mobility, and long-term employability.
- We value, foster and retain talent in education, research, management and support services.
- We encourage and facilitate an open, conscientious climate in which staff engage in open debate and feel free to challenge one another.
Our ambition

To enable us to achieve all our ambitions in other areas, we must ensure our financial healthy. Our investment policy is guided by the needs of research and education, based upon our four profile themes.

<table>
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<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 A (dynamic) surplus of 1.5 per cent of annual turnover.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 The financial rates and ratios required by external funding bodies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. A solvency rate of at least 30 per cent</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. A debt service coverage ratio of at least 1.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. A loan to value rate of no more than 50 per cent</td>
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</table>

Objectives

1 Ensure that our financial policy is guided by our annual targets and plans for research and education.
2 Balance the books on a structural basis, and comply with the financial benchmarks set by internal and external regulators and financiers.
3 Safeguard the necessary funding for future investments.
4 Comply with current and future requirements laid down by the government, society in general and other stakeholders in terms of financial accounting, management, transparency and probity.

Approach

Implementation

- We compile rolling long-term budgets and financial plans, both at university level and for the individual faculties and services, with a planning horizon of six years.
- We establish an independent business control function as a strategic partner in research and education.
- We implement risk management.

Optimization

- We improve the balance between planning and implementation with a new planning and control cycle.
- We improve investment decision-making by using business cases based upon the discounted cash flow method.
- We strengthen the management of and accountability for project implementations.
- We improve project control, accountability and management.
Communications play an essential role in forging solidarity within the university community. In education, good communication between student and tutor is particularly vital and must not be confined simply to conveying knowledge, but should foster the student’s overall development in the broadest sense. The VU is an open organization which sets great store by mutual contacts amongst students and staff as well as interaction between these groups. Even before they first enrol with us, we make every effort to enhance students’ engagement with the university and to build their “campus feeling”.

Our positioning as a university is clear and focused. Both internally and externally, it is obvious what added value we provide. Our students, staff and alumni are all proud to show who we are and why we do the things we do. Communications are also used to enhance our appeal to prospective students and to underline our relevance to wider society.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Our ambition</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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| The VU is a community in which people listen to and understand each other, and in so doing build a strong sense of mutual solidarity. Transparency is a vital part of this, too. Our position in the world is clear and distinctive, and is recognized and supported both internally and externally. | 1. How well-informed students and staff feel (VU Panel).  
2. How closely our scientific communications tie in with our “profile themes”, as evidence of our relevance to society (VU Panel).  
3. Findability of research information and teaching materials at VU.nl (Google Analytics) |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Approach</th>
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| 1. Link our academic communications to our profile themes.  
2. Strengthen our sense of community, both internally and externally, and enhance the sense of self-awareness throughout the university.  
3. Raise our profile and make our contribution to society more visible.  
4. Improve our appeal to prospective students as an attractive and appropriate place to study.  
5. Help our scientists and academics to make their research results more widely accessible. | **Connections**  
- We make use of interactive media, tailored to specific target audiences.  
- We create a podium to interact with students, staff and external stakeholders about what the VU stands for.  
- We develop and optimize an integrated recruitment strategy for undergraduate and postgraduate students, both domestic and international.  
- We maintain an active two-way relationship with our alumni.  

**Positioning**  
- We create an unambiguous image of the VU by making clear communication choices.  
- We highlight our profile themes as evidence of our relevance to society.  
- We encourage our staff to maximize the media visibility of their educational activities, research and results, and facilitate them in doing so.  

**Reputation**  
- We establish and intensify relationships with external stakeholders. |
MIGRATION, GLOBALIZATION AND CONFLICT, PAST AND PRESENT
People forced to flee their homes. Heritage destroyed. But also enterprising migrants making new lives for themselves. Researchers at the VU are documenting and analysing the close relationships between migration, globalization and conflict. Current events have brought together ongoing work on the legal position of migrants in the Schengen nations with studies documenting the religious cultures of Syria. The UNESCO World Heritage status of Amsterdam’s historic “canal belt” invites comparisons with the destroyed city of Aleppo, an endangered World Heritage Site. Battlefield archaeology, the anthropology of migration, Chinese-African relations today and Mediterranean links in Antiquity: our connected world forces us to want to understand the relationships, and to bring the depth of time to them.
For an academic institution, scientific and other information is vitally important, as is the technology needed to make it available where and when necessary. Scientific information and data are essential resources for education and research, regardless of medium: digital or (sometimes) paper. The public internet does not provide sufficient access to this material, so our own information technology ensures that it is always available to researchers, tutors and students, wherever they are. We also use IT on a wide scale as a basic tool and as a research and teaching aid. And since this technology will help us to achieve our ambitions, we seek to provide reliable, innovative and excellent IT support.

Scientific information and data are essential resources for education and research.

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<th>Our ambition</th>
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| Information technology is used effectively and efficiently in support of innovative education and research and robust business processes. Our researchers, ancillary staff, tutors and students have access to all the information and data they need, scientific or otherwise, at all times, wherever they are. | 1  Student and staff satisfaction with IT facilities (Service Scan/VU Panel).  
2  Student and staff satisfaction with the availability of scientific information (Service Scan/VU Panel). |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Approach</th>
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| 1 Improve the digital learning and working environments for our students, tutors, researchers and other staff. | **Support**
- We use IT applications to provide students, tutors and programme management with comprehensive information about learning outcomes, educational evaluations and other results, bearing in mind privacy requirements.
- We implement a virtual research environment and infrastructure for the storage, management and processing of scientific data, bearing in mind privacy, intellectual property, integrity and transparency requirements.
- We encourage the transfer of knowledge to researchers and students.
- We publicize ICT successes in education and research.
- We provide students and staff with a wide range of applications with which to search, read and manage academic publications. |
| 2 Improve the availability of scientific information and data for our researchers, tutors and students, taking into account the specific needs of different disciplines. | **Optimization**
- We improve the reliability of our services and the efficiency of supporting processes.
- On a consortium basis, and led by the information needs of our researchers and tutors, we combine the general licensing agreements reached with academic publishers with bespoke arrangements.
- We enrich the learning and educational assessment environment with IT applications and content.
- We improve audio-visual support in an open-architecture environment. |
| 3 Prepare the university for the smooth implementation of new advances in ICT as and when necessary. | **Flexibilization and cooperation**
- We develop an open architecture which supports cooperation.
- We facilitate off-campus working.
- Tutors and researchers themselves direct the organization of digital teaching and research processes.
- We encourage and facilitate the use of academic information in education and research. |
As an intrinsic part of the Amsterdam region, the VU is an international community that works closely with academic, civil society and business partners. A meeting place for people of different nationalities and from wide-ranging backgrounds, our campus is undergoing constant development to meet the demands and needs of our time. It also plays an important part in tutor-student interactions. We have deliberately chosen to provide an environment which facilitates personal contact, and in the future will continue to work on strengthening this “campus feeling”. With the construction of new student accommodation on site, and the expansion of its sporting and cultural programmes, our campus is becoming a truly metropolitan hub with ever stronger links to the adjacent Zuidas district and the rest of Amsterdam. The opening of facilities for student associations, and the additional influx of students that generates, is also contributing to this development. Collectively, our mission as a university community is to create a welcoming and inspiring environment for excellent academic education and research, a place where students, staff and guests feel at home and an attractive facility for residents of and visitors to Amsterdam. We also see it as our
duty to identify approaching changes to the requirements demanded of the university environment, and to respond with appropriate solutions in terms of accommodation and related services.

Our campus is an important aspect of our identity, as both the VU and VUmc. We therefore seek to offer an open, hospitable and internationally appealing setting, where students, tutors and researchers can excel and where patients receive treatment of the very highest standard. The campus is where people meet, where they are inspired and where they are invited to share knowledge. It combines learning with knowledge, with care and with the business activities of the Zuidas and the Amsterdam Academic Metropolis. Its development is needs-driven, in support of the primary processes of education, research and healthcare. It is used as effectively as possible and is inviting and inspiring, with flexibility, sustainability and cost-awareness as key drivers. We ensure that there is a place on the campus for every section of the university, and also welcome partners wishing to locate there.
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<th>Our ambition</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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| Our campus supports and actively fosters quality in education and research. It is where people come together and where our students, tutors and scientists work alongside each other. Welcoming, safe and sustainable, it is an inspiring and appealing international environment. And it connects the university with the surrounding Zuidas district and with the rest of the Amsterdam academic metropolis. | 1  Student, staff and guest satisfaction with the quality of the campus. (National Student Survey, Customer Satisfaction Survey and Service Scan).  
2  Usage of floor space (SAP Space Registration Model).  
3  Presence of facilities for international guests (accommodation) and for representational purposes (university club).  
4  Activities outside regular teaching hours (Top Desk System). |
### Objectives

1. Strengthen the contribution the campus makes to the quality of our research and education.
2. Make the campus more lively and liveable, with a combination of educational, research, housing, sports and cultural facilities.
3. Strengthen the unique status of our campus within the Amsterdam academic metropolis, and its reputation as international, substantive and welcoming.
4. Raise the profile of our campus as an attractive place for our partners to locate themselves.

### Approach

#### Vision and policymaking

- Campus staff are welcoming and helpful, providing services tailored to the primary processes of education and research.
- We work intensively with students in developing and implementing a “campus image”.

#### Campus development

- We develop the campus gradually and sustainably.
- The campus is a generic facility, with building types and uses standardized as much as possible and with a focus upon value creation, sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency.
- The Campus Plan envisages the addition of public facilities such as restaurants, cafés, shops, cultural and sporting provision, student and general housing, green space, bicycle parking and events.

#### Profile and cooperation

- We actively endeavour to embed the VU within the Amsterdam metropolitan community and to reinforce its profile in respect of our four chosen themes.
- We provide space and facilities for joint initiatives like the Amsterdam Academic Alliance (AAA), the University Medical Centre Alliance (UMCA) and other recognized regional partnerships in higher education and with academic institutions, the business community and other private parties.
- We maintain good relationships with our immediate neighbours and with the wider local community.
HOW ARE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES CHANGING OUR SOCIETY?
GAINING NEW INSIGHTS BY LINKING BEHAVIOUR, KNOWLEDGE AND ETHICS
FINANCIAL OUTLOOK
HOW CAN WE USE POLICY TO BOLSTER SOLIDARITY?
RESEARCH TO HELP THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
The VU is part of the VU-VUmc Foundation [Stichting VU-VUmc]. In our financial operations, as in other activities, the interests of that foundation are taken into account. The next few years will see a number of developments affecting our management and hence also, indirectly, our long-term outlook.

- Research is increasingly reliant upon mixed funding, drawn from a combination of direct (government), indirect (agency) and contract (commercial) sources. However, there are limits on the availability of government resources and on the types of research that can be conducted with agency and commercial funds. The introduction of a comprehensive internal charging system will enhance cost awareness and so, it is expected, help us to optimize the allocation of indirect and contract funding.

- Student numbers at the VU have grown considerably over several decades, with our market share expanding accordingly. Despite a continuing increase in the number of funded enrolments and degrees, however, in the past few years our market share has fallen slightly. We now expect it to stabilize at the current level, with 26,000 enrolled students, and this is the situation assumed in our long-term financial forecasts. Should the actual position deviate from this supposition, we will immediately adjust our forecasts in line with relevant scenario analyses. This approach retains sufficient flexibility – in such areas as accommodation planning as well as financial forecasting – to allow us to respond effectively to unexpected changes in student numbers and market share.
- Europe is an increasingly important source of research funding. The EU’s HORIZON 2020 programme has a bigger budget than its predecessor and so is likely to be a particular rich source of income.

- In the light of the Interdepartmental Policy Research (Interdepartemental Beleidsonderzoek, IBO) report on scientific research, and also other developments, we expect the national funding system to be revised. As well as making additional grants available through the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, NWO) for HORIZON 2020 matching and co-financing, it is also possible that the government will take steps to make its own research budget more performance-dependent, at the expense of the historical component.

- Our current performance agreements with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science expire at the end of 2016. We expect any new agreement again to link the allocation of financial resources to the achievement of performance targets. One side effect of this would be further restriction of our spending freedom by limiting the institutional block grant.

- The university works with a variety of regional partners, including the City of Amsterdam. These partnerships are to be intensified in the coming years.

- During the period covered by this Strategic Plan, there is to be a disentanglement of the university’s links with the VUmc. Any detrimental financial consequences of this exercise will be kept to a minimum. The costs of any remaining shared services will be allocated in accordance with the full-cost model.

- As a result of our recent investments in premises (the O2 building, the main building and NU.VU), our depreciation and financing costs are increasing. Since our external revenues do not rise automatically in line with these costs, and the accommodation grants received from the ministry are structurally insufficient to cover the actual costs incurred in this respect, we are repeatedly forced to take difficult decisions on whether to allocate funds to accommodation or to other processes. In making these choices we are guided by the established framework for the evolution of accommodation costs. In the case of investment decisions, the benchmark is an average of no more than 14 per cent of the university’s turnover.
As a result of the last reorganization, our staffing costs are falling. In 2014 and 2015 these savings are partially offset by incidental reorganization costs.

By introducing a comprehensive internal charging system, we are making the faculties solely responsible for the full cost of their research and educational activities, including support services. Faculties must now negotiate service level agreements and prices with the providers. We expect this arrangement to enhance cost awareness and to encourage economically responsible use of support facilities.

VU University Amsterdam is expected to achieve positive operating balances from 2016, provided that the objectives of the reorganization are met. Postponement or delay – for example, in the implementation of the reorganization – means that the university will face a negative operating result for a more extended period.

Objectives

Income from the institutional block grant and tuition fees is translated into budgets for education and research. Within the current long-term financial planning framework, choices are made which allow sufficient scope for innovation and for fulfilment of the ambitions set out in this Strategic Plan. Where necessary, this could mean that existing activities are not continued in their current form. Any additional direct funding, beyond the established framework, is allocated in such a way that it makes the best possible contribution to achieving the objectives of this plan.

We balance the books on a structural basis, at both the institutional and the individual unit levels, and comply with the financial benchmarks set by internal and external regulators.

- We safeguard the funds necessary for future investments.
- We comply with the current and future requirements laid down by the government and other financial stakeholders in such areas as financial accountability, governance and transparency.
- Internal rules define our management and accommodation budgets. The introduction of a comprehensive internal charging system enhances cost awareness and encourages economically responsible behaviour. Our budgets are compared regularly with those of comparable organizations.
The resourcing framework for education and research consists of faculty funding in accordance with the VU Financial Allocation Model (VU Sturings- en Allocatie Model, VUSAM), supplemented with a limited central strategic policy budget which is dispensed at the discretion of the Executive Board. The faculties themselves bear primary responsibility for necessary innovations in their education and research, and for matching with other sources of income. A limited number of central funds are available to support faculty-led innovations.

The VUSAM for 2015-2019 is to be finalized in the spring of 2015 and comprises two components for each faculty:

- A formula-based (performance x tariff) performance component, divided between research and education. The tariffs used in the respective formulas are adjusted in line with current levels of direct government funding.
- A policy component made up of specific allocations. In principle, these are temporary in nature and will be reviewed as part of the quinquennial VUSAM evaluation.

Together, these two components form a lump-sum allocation for each faculty, which it is free to spend as it pleases in fulfilling its primary responsibility for education and research.

In addition to the VUSAM allocations, there are also central funds available for the following purposes:

- Implementation of the VU Education Agenda.
- Financing of activities related to the Amsterdam Academic Alliance (fund operated jointly with the University of Amsterdam).
- Investments in improved research support.
- Strategic allocation by the Executive Board. Possible objectives include securing major national or international grants and pre-financing new market-led degree programmes. Through this discretionary funding, and guided by the Strategic Plan, the board co-finances important initiatives which are beyond an individual faculty’s normal financial means.
- Talent policy.
- Unforeseen circumstances
Taken together, these funds can be viewed as a central reserve for the financial support of innovations connected with Strategic Plan, to supplement the allocations made by the faculties from their own budgets.

Within the framework just described, long-term agreements are reached with faculties concerning the allocation of financial and other resources in pursuit of the ambitions and objectives set out in this Strategic Plan.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE IS CONNECTED?
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN
This Strategic Plan is intended to serve as an inspiring, encouraging and guiding document for the entire university. Based upon it, each individual faculty and service is required to draw up a covenant for the plan’s entire duration. This sets out how, taking into account its own ambitions and starting position, the faculty or service in question intends to contribute towards the university-wide policy priorities presented here. The covenants are adopted by agreement with the Executive Board. The faculty board or service management team is responsible for implementing the provisions of its covenant, and the annual plans derived from it, thus enhancing its role in achieving objectives whilst at the same time delegating responsibility to a lower layer of the organizational structure. The representative bodies are involved in the process, and are given the support they need to perform this task effectively.

To hold the faculties and services sufficiently accountable within the scope of their own responsibilities, the Strategic Plan contains a limited number of indicators. These are formulated at the level of the university’s ambitions. In this respect, the Strategic Plan provides guidance whilst the covenants and annual plans are more concrete. When they are compiled, monitoring at the institutional level focuses upon the extent to which their specific provisions contribute towards the overall ambitions and whether they require revision in order to do so. The consistency and cohesion of the proposed policy are also considered. Particularly important are the links between the primary processes of the faculties and services. As well as conducting year-on-year monitoring based upon the annual plans, the Executive Board will also carry out a mid-term review half-way through the period of this Strategic Plan.
Risk management and the associated safeguards are high on the VU list of priorities. To successfully achieve the objectives described in this Strategic Plan, a thorough awareness of the risks needing to be managed along the way is essential. In the sections of their covenants and annual plans describing how they intend to fulfil the strategic priorities in conjunction with the Executive Board, the faculties and services must therefore include an audit and list of the potential risks, together with details of the measures to be taken to manage them. Subsequent monitoring of progress towards achieving the defined ambitions, as part of the planning and control cycle, also considers current and new risks and measures to mitigate them. This approach ties in with the development, already under way, of “Risk” sections for inclusion in the 2015 annual plans of the faculties and services, and for the university as a whole in its annual report and annual plan.

The guiding principles here are our core values: personal, open and responsible. The faculties and services themselves are responsible and accountable for achieving the performance targets and for managing the risks which fall within their area of responsibility.
Colophon

Client Executive Board, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Text Eva Vos, Nynke Rodenhuis

Design Total Identity

Photography Peter Valckx (1,18, 76, 112), Marieke Wijntjes (5, 55), NASA/eyevine/HH (6), Markus Scholz/HH (8), Astakhov Dmitry/HH (10), Sabine Joosten/HH (12), ALW(14), Yvonne Compier (18, 63, 80), Wim van Egmond/HH (26), Robert Kneschke/HH (29), Guido van de Werf (34), Riechelle van der Valk (34, 64, 85), Bram Budel/HH (40), Peter Gerritsen (40, 100), Ivan-ALW (46), Peter Hitz/HH(49), Goos van der Veen/HH (54), Phil Nijhuis/HH (58), Corbis/HH (64), Karl-Josef Hildenbrand (70), Monty Rakusen/HH(74), Tineke Dijkstra/HH (76), Mischa Keijser/HH (78), Panos Pictures/HH (86), Philipp Breu/HH (92), Wim Klerkx/HH (102) NamJunePaik (108)

Print Van der Perk BV

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