



5. Responsibility: we put our public values into practice

The UvA educates people who can tackle societal problems and develops the knowledge that enables them to do so. In so doing, we actively help shape the world of tomorrow. Not for nothing do we call this our raison d'être. And that means putting the public values which we hold dear into practice ourselves.

Our position within academia and our metropolitan location mean that whatever the UvA does is visible to all. We want to translate insights from our research and values that we uphold into our own behaviour. This ensures that we play our part in creating a liveable, safe, just and sustainable environment – both close to home and further away. And that we practise what we 'preach' to our students. We refer to the following values (in no particular order).

The first is the independence of science from (among others) the interests of public authorities and industries. In our data-driven society, this value is under pressure. Digitalisation brings opportunities but it also brings threats. We are exploring this issue and, together with partners, we are leading the debate within society. Topics include the over-dependence of universities on commercial ICT providers, for example, or the impact of digital technologies on privacy (see also Section 2.4).

A second value that we put into practice is sustainability. As a vanguard player, the UvA has a vital role to play in the transition to a sustainable society. This is reflected in our research and education, and also in our efforts to make our own ecological footprint sustainable.

The third value that we uphold is inclusion. We actively participate in the dialogue around inequality of opportunities, social injustice and exclusion. We help combat these phenomena, by exposing the mechanisms behind them. Within our own organisation, this means giving students equal opportunities, whatever their background, and making sure we are inclusive in everything we do (see Chapter 3). As far as staff are concerned, a more diverse mix of backgrounds is important, both when recruiting new employees and in the composition of teams (see Chapter 6). This improves the quality of our work. These ambitions will be pursued in close co-operation with the Works and Students Councils.

Last but not least, we are responsible for providing a healthy, safe and stimulating working and study environment. Key factors here include reducing workload and ensuring social safety.

In short, for the next few years, this means:

1. building guarantees for the independence of science
2. increasing our understanding of sustainability and putting it into practice
3. championing inclusion and equal opportunities
4. providing a healthy, safe and stimulating working environment



5.1 Building guarantees for the independence of science

Independence is one of the core values of science. Today it is under pressure as a result of the rapid digitalisation that is taking place in international higher education and research.

For example, we are seeing in education the emergence of digital learning environments, plagiarism detection tools, online bibliographical databases, intensive use of tablets and laptops, social networks for academics and digital learning platforms. The majority of these are commercial services, which jeopardise the public values on which higher education is based. In addition, if large, wealthy players enter the degrees market, our virtual monopoly on the awarding of degrees may be undermined. The UvA sees it as its responsibility to lead the political and social debate around these issues, identify risks and outline potential solutions.

If digitalisation in education is to be ‘responsible’, educators must retain ownership of their work when they collaborate with platform and data storage companies. Their independence must always be central. In addition, we will consider carefully how we can avoid malicious lock-in situations. Because situations like this are a precursor to large-scale dependence on the commercial partner that supplies the services or the equipment. If we are to guarantee the independence of our education whilst, at the same time, working with the digital systems of dominant private players, we need agreements and regulations.

The same applies to our research. Even with extensive digitalisation, our independence must be key. In our role as a public university, we participate in shaping open science and open educational resources. This is based on the conviction that the research that we conduct and the education that we provide are paid for from public funds and that the results should therefore not be monopolised. We believe that open science provides both opportunities for science to strengthen its self-cleansing capacity and threats to its independence. We will implement the principles of open science in a way which benefits scientific progress. Here too, attention must be paid to the relationship with large, data-processing companies and the legal framework around ‘data’. In close collaboration with other research-intensive universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and in Europe (LERU), we are working on drawing up conditions governing the purchase of information services, the development of alternative publication platforms and an infrastructure which guarantees the independence of research data and metadata.

Things to do

- Put the public values of academic education and research on the agenda and safeguard them when procuring platform services and collaborating with third parties, including publishers and data technology companies.
- Make research data as FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) as possible and work towards making academic publications 100 per cent open access.



5.2 Increasing our understanding of sustainability and putting it into practice

We are making the theme of sustainability a permanent feature of our education and research. Among other things, every student can choose from the courses offered by the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies (which include sustainability). Sustainability is also an integral part of the portfolio analysis of the degree programmes (see Section 2.3). In research, sustainability will be boosted through the four Themes (see Section 2.2).

The UvA has a responsibility to accelerate sustainable change in society. We are therefore endeavouring to reduce our ecological footprint, too. Essentially, based on the World Footprint Network's findings for the Netherlands, the current impact of our footprint must be reduced by two thirds. This will take us longer than the next six years. We will adapt our business processes and our daily behaviour by making the desirable choices attractive. In the case of processes, this includes reduced consumption of non-recycled resources, such as paper, packaging materials or disposables, and extending the useful life of IT equipment. In the case of behaviour, it includes, for example, making conscious choices in areas such as catering or travel. A White Paper on Sustainability (which also includes education and research) sets out measures for reducing our footprint over the next few years. We have set an ambitious but feasible pace for each environmental factor.

According to the Paris climate targets, by 2050 (at the latest) our energy consumption must be a maximum of 70 kWh/m² annually (compared with almost 200 kWh/m² currently). We are looking into the possibility of achieving this target by 2040. We will be 'Paris-proof' if the actual energy consumption – of all the equipment in our buildings – meets the target. This means that all users can and must help us achieve this. Financial incentives must make energy-saving worthwhile. We will accept a slight increase in our cost of space per square metre in view of the investments required to improve sustainability (an increase of 2 per cent, based on the UvA's Built Environment Sustainability Plan (Plan verduurzaming gebouwde omgeving UvA), which was drawn up in 2020).

Things to do

- Implement measures from the White Paper (for operations, research and education).
- Reduce energy consumption in kWh/m² by 20 per cent over the planning period.
- Make our efforts to create a sustainable UvA visible on all campuses, among others through the construction of the Sustainalab and strengthening of the UvA Green Office.



5.3 Championing inclusion and equal opportunities

There is a strong movement under way within society to (finally) tackle the mechanisms behind exclusion, social injustice and inequality of opportunities – both globally and in our own university community. We educate people who can do this, conduct research into these mechanisms and put our core values into practice within our university.

Our interdisciplinary capability allows us to have input into every aspect of the dialogue within society around inclusion and equal opportunities, in that we understand the legal, industrial, colonial, social and psychological factors involved. Inequality and barriers in society are increasing. Groups of people differ from each other, not only in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds, but also in terms of their religion, the language that they speak or their attitude towards family, authority and government, for example. It is our job as a university not only to prepare our students for this reality but also to contribute to less inequality, fewer barriers and – at minimum – equal opportunities for all.

Within our own university community, we engage in a dialogue around inclusion and equality in a manner which is fitting for an academic institution. In other words, based on well-informed arguments, self-reflection, consideration for (the perspectives of) others, equality and the desire to find solutions that work. We realise that the UvA has its own blind spots in this regard and that incidences of exclusion, discrimination and prejudice occur at our university; sometimes they are deliberate, but often they are subtle, unintentional, or even unwitting.

Including different perspectives and embracing differences between people enhances the academic quality and objectivity of our work. It requires a stable, safe working and learning environment in which everyone within the UvA can and must be allowed to voice their opinion unabatedly, whilst respecting and showing consideration for others. Universities are the ideal place to be confronted with facts and opinions which one might find challenging and potentially even offensive. Consequently, the debate around inequality and injustice is closely linked to the policy on maintaining and increasing social safety and resilience (see Section 5.4).

Things to do

- Promote and broaden the dialogue around equality/inequality and justice/injustice within the University.
- Include a broad spectrum of perspectives in education and research, among others in minors and in the curriculum of degree programmes where this is relevant.
- Raise awareness of bias through professional development programmes such as the University Teaching Qualification (BKO) and through leadership training.



5.4 Providing a healthy, safe and stimulating work environment

The health of our staff and students is always important to us, and even more so during the corona crisis. The measures to bring the virus under control are restricting the group-based, face-to-face teaching that is so important for students' academic development more significantly and for a longer period than we had hoped. It is not clear how education, research and academic life will pan out over the coming period and what this will mean for the interior design of our buildings.

Irrespective of the corona crisis, work-related stress among employees is an ongoing area of concern. The workload at the UvA (and in the education sector as a whole) has been increasing for years. Reasons for this include:

- the gradual decrease in the average funding per course
- the greater differences in the background, prior knowledge and skills of students
- the growth in course-related and administrative obligations required by the law and by the NVAO
- the work involved in and the low chance of success of applications for external research grants
- our own procedures, which at times have grown disproportionate, our consultation culture and the pressure to be available at all times

Under the Managing your Workload (Grip op Werkdruk) programme, extensive analyses were performed. These indicate that workload is a complex issue and requires a combination of measures; more money for higher education is essential but this is not always a solution. The reasons vary by faculty or department and also within faculties and departments. Work-related stress derives in part from choices that are made internally. Valuing research output more than teaching, for example, can be a source of stress for lecturers who spend most of their time on teaching. Some factors, however, are not of our own choice. The nature of a degree programme (arts or science) can, for example, play a role. In the case of support staff, work-related stress is caused, among other things, by an increase in external regulations and accountability requirements.

The health of students and their stress and burnout problems will continue to be a major focus for us. We will continue existing initiatives such as UvAcare and the Health Week. The small-scale learning discussed in Section 3.1 is intended in part to minimise isolation and stress in education and to take greater account of differences between students.

Workload is not the only determinant of the health of the working and study environment. Within the naturally competitive environment of academia, everyone must feel physically and emotionally safe. If they do not, they must feel able to discuss the situation without fear of consequences for their studies or career. We take any report of an unsafe situation seriously and investigate it thoroughly, and we put our code of conduct into practice, addressing, not ignoring any inappropriate behaviour. If situations or the behaviour of staff or students fail to live up to the UvA's values and code of conduct and, as a result, someone feels unsafe, appropriate action must be taken. Where there is a structural lack of safety, structural change is essential. Finally, it is important that everyone can access and understand the values and code of conduct, as well as the system of procedures and confidential advisers.

Things to do

- Include specific, direct measures to reduce workload in the faculty strategic plans (including measures to counter the negative impact of online working).
- When adopting new policies, put more trust in the implementers, thereby reducing internal regulations.
- Establish a 'house of social safety' ('huis van de sociale veiligheid') (code of conduct, complaints regulations, network of confidential advisers, training on addressing unsafe situations), based on the recommendations of the Social Safety task force.