

**Strategy 2020 - 2023**

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Table of Contents

[1. Mission and vision 3](#_Toc57795329)

[1.1. Our research programmes 4](#_Toc57795330)

[1.1.1 Child rearing 4](#_Toc57795331)

[1.1.2 Educational neuroscience: brain, learning and development 4](#_Toc57795332)

[1.1.3 Learning Sciences 4](#_Toc57795333)

[1.1.4 Motivation for lifelong learning: developing students for life 5](#_Toc57795334)

[1.1.5 Educational governance, identity and diversity 5](#_Toc57795335)

[2. Our strategy 6](#_Toc57795336)

[2.1 LEARN! community and knowledge exchange 7](#_Toc57795337)

[2.2 Academic culture and research integrity 7](#_Toc57795338)

[2.3 Leading large consortia and improving successful acquisition 8](#_Toc57795339)

[2.4 Mentoring and professional/talent development 8](#_Toc57795340)

[2.5 Quality assurance and external review to improve our work 10](#_Toc57795341)

[2.6 Collaboration with LEARN! Academy 11](#_Toc57795342)

[2.7 External engagement and open science: locally, nationally and internationally 11](#_Toc57795343)

[3. Implementation 15](#_Toc57795344)

[Appendix 1. Budget 2021 and institute’s structure 18](#_Toc57795345)

[Budget 2021 18](#_Toc57795346)

[Institute infrastructure 18](#_Toc57795347)

# 1. Mission and vision

Learning takes place throughout the entire lifespan: at home, in daycare, at school, and at work. Human beings have an enormous capacity to learn and it lies at the heart of who we are and what we do. Not everyone has the opportunity to thrive and acquire the skills to do well in life and function however; sometimes people are faced with unfavorable conditions and contexts or suffer from innate biological barriers for learning. LEARN! aims to better understand and contribute to the relevant systems and institutions which allow children, youth and adults to reach their full potential to contribute to a prosperous, fair and socially cohesive society.

To reach our mission we aim to be the leading research institute and go-to point, both locally (Amsterdam area), nationally (the Netherlands) and internationally, for research on **learning and development and the (institutional and societal) context in which people learn and develop.**

For this purpose we bring together colleagues from the Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences (FGB; host faculty) and the VU medical centre: School of Medical Sciences (see Appendix 1 for participating departments and the structure of the institute). These 141 colleagues work across the behavioural, psychological, social, medical and educational sciences allowing us to use an interdisciplinary approach and generate new insights on learning and development. Our joint work spans the following contexts:

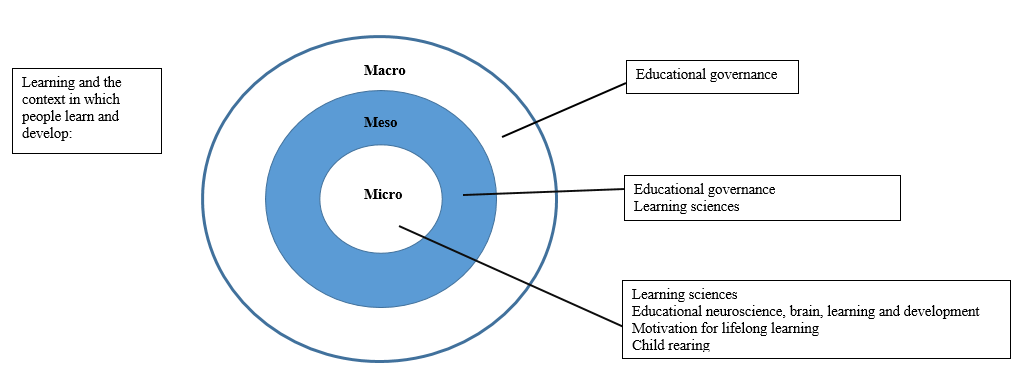
* The Micro context of learning of children and adults (including teachers, principals and parents)
* The Meso context of learning, such as the classroom, school organisation, day-care centres, work-based settings or adult colleges in which people learn and develop
* The Macro context of learning; e.g. the coordination and governance of learning by school boards, local and national governance (e.g. through marketization, network governance, hierarchical coordination), including the cultural and institutional context of learning (norms, values, social blueprint; legal, financial and policy context).

We implement our mission in five programmes of work: child rearing, educational neuroscience, learning sciences, motivation for lifelong learning, educational governance where our key selling point as an institute is how we are able to study the effectiveness of policy all the way through the individual student/child/teacher level.

Across the five programmes we strive for high quality of our work which addresses pressing societal issues related to education and where we actively engage with stakeholders and academic colleagues locally, nationally and internationally in designing and implementing our research. Our advisory board, on 8 December 2020 put forward the following themes which should inform our research across programmes and where we can make a difference in combining the micro, meso and macro context of learning and development: inequality and working with schools/childcare settings serving a disadvantaged population, inclusive education, the role of teachers, schools as learning organisations, knowledge-intense profession, the use of evidence in teaching, the role of different learning environments (home and neighbourhood) and workforce issues (teacher/head teacher recruitment, retention and shortages). Particularly teachers and quality of teachers was seen as a theme that could have more emphasis given the relevance for learning outcomes.

Figure 1 summarizes our mission and vision and these are described in further detail below.

Figure 1. Mission and vision



## 1.1. Our research programmes

Our research is organized in the below five programmes of work.

### 1.1.1 Child rearing

Programme leader: Prof. dr. Carlo Schuengel

How can parents, teachers, and other formal and informal educators help children to find their place within society and become the persons they want to be? Broadly speaking, parents and educators provide control and protection, guidance of children’s learning, entry within peer groups, and create a nurturing family and school climate. This program views socialization, character building, and child rearing through the lens of socioemotional development. One line of work under this theme focuses on parenting, attachment, and self-determination in family settings. Another focuses on teacher-child relationships and peer interactions.

### 1.1.2 Educational neuroscience: brain, learning and development

Programme leader: Prof. dr. Nienke van Atteveldt

How can developmental and biological perspectives help us understand learning and behavior of children and adolescents in educational contexts? Our research focuses on social-emotional, motivational and meta-cognitive factors to understand what is needed for children to do well and feel well in school. In addition to child factors, our program increases insights in how individual development is influenced by the environment, such as the peer context in the classroom, and gene-environment interplay. Throughout our work we use, and further develop, research approaches which are ecologically valid (i.e., situated and implemented in real-life settings, rather than lab environments) to ensure our findings have direct relevance for education.

### 1.1.3 Learning Sciences

Programme leaders: Prof. dr. Martijn Meeter, Prof. dr. Maaike Raijmakers

How can learning processes be optimised in various contexts? The research in Learning Sciences is aimed at facilitating educational improvements with scientific insights in collaboration with practice. Gaining insight into the learning processes at an individual and group level makes it possible to better equip the instructor with teaching methods and skills that promote the learning of the individual. The aim is to ensure that learning processes are optimised for each individual according to his or her characteristics, in line with the context. As such, we are interested in personalised education.

### 1.1.4 Motivation for lifelong learning: developing students for life

Programme leader: dr. Rashmi Kusurkar

How can we motivate students and adults to become lifelong learners, particularly in the health professions? Our group aims to understand how we can develop ‘[students for life](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-h7klf-IZFM)’ who are intrinsically motivated learners, who constantly interact with their environment, integrate learning and practice and want to invest in continuing professional development. We investigate several topics in Health Professions Education (HPE) like learning and academic performance, empathy and burnout, diversity and inclusion, reflection and participation, professional identity and professionalism through the lens of developing students for life.

### 1.1.5 Educational governance, identity and diversity

 Programme leader: Prof. dr. Melanie Ehren

The research on ‘Educational governance, identity and diversity’ spans educational governance of schools and systems in the widest sense, including leadership and management of schools, functioning of school boards and educational networks, their accountability and how performance, innovation and improvement of schools are coordinated through various types of governance (e.g. market-based, hierarchical steering or network governance). We also study and explore questions about which educational practices best facilitate the development of children into adults who are able to live in, and contribute to a society that is culturally and religiously diverse. We combine insights from philosophy of education and public administration to study the functioning of schools and school systems.

# 2. Our strategy

Across the five programmes we strive for high quality of our work which addresses pressing societal issues related to education and where we actively engage with stakeholders and academic colleagues locally, nationally and internationally in designing and implementing our research. We aim to address the most urgent educational and developmental challenges of our time (e.g. high inequality caused by COVID-19 and school closures), exploiting the disciplinary expertise of our team, working to a high level of precision and ethical and moral standards. We recognize the pressure from traditional academic performance indicators (e.g. publication in high impact journals). These should however never take priority over our ambition for innovative and high value research, particularly when such research requires teamwork and is of an interdisciplinary nature. We recognize that quality and integrity requires taking risks, persistence, dedication and patience and learning from failure. Our institute provides a safe environment to explore, test and develop novel ideas where we hold each other to high quality and ethical standards in our scientific work and work with societal stakeholders and academic colleagues.

Our ambitions and *what* we aim to achieve are derived from our mission of

1. Becoming the leading research institute and go-to point, both locally (Amsterdam area), nationally (the Netherlands) and internationally, for research on learning and development and the (institutional and societal) context in which people learn and develop’.

Through

1. High quality and integrity of our work across five programmes, addressing pressing societal issues related to education and where we actively engage with stakeholders and academic colleagues locally, nationally and internationally in designing and implementing our research (quality, integrity and societal relevance).

This is evidenced in:

* High quality of research output (e.g. publications in high impact peer reviewed journals), including of Phd projects which are completed on time
* Successful acquisition of large, high profile national and international research grants
* Structured collaboration with local, national and international stakeholders (see table 1 in section 2.7)
* Local, national and international stakeholders and academic colleagues come to us with questions and for expert advice and we work with them collaboratively in our research across all programmes.
* Local, national and international stakeholders and academic colleagues refer to our work in their communication and activities, such as when citing our work, looking for partners to collaborate with, or for a place that has expertise on (the institutional and societal context of) learning and development
* Colleagues in the field –locally, nationally and internationally- want to study with us (in our undergraduate and graduate programmes and summer/winter schools) and be part of our institute through visiting scholarships, exchange programmes or by taking part in our annual conference.

*How we achieve our ambitions:*

LEARN!’s internal structure is one of a network: relations between researchers are informal and neither programme leaders or the institute’s director have formal line management authority over members. Such line management is organized separately within departments in faculties. The strategies and specific set of activities we will therefore implement to achieve these ambitions are:

1. LEARN! community and informal knowledge exchange
2. Academic culture and research integrity
3. Leading large consortia and improving successful acquisition
4. Mentoring and professional/talent development
5. Quality assurance and external review to improve our work
6. Collaboration with LEARN! Academy
7. External engagement and open science: locally, nationally and internationally

Below we will elaborate each of these strategies.

## 2.1 LEARN! community and knowledge exchange

The breadth of disciplines within our institute is our key selling point and allows us to study complex problems and find answers and solutions that make a difference. Our collegial culture and way in which we work and share our knowledge and networks across the institute allows us to approach contemporary issues in new and novel ways. We are committed to working alongside each other, to cross disciplinary boundaries and to challenge our own thinking in order to better understand and progress the fields in which we work. Our aim to innovate builds on our commitment to progress science and society and we do so from a culture which appreciates a multiplicity of perspectives and identities in the workplace, promoting openness, safety and inclusivity.

The network structure of LEARN! allows us to flexibility respond to opportunities and pressing societal questions that require high quality interdisciplinary research to come up with rigorous and innovative answers and solutions. LEARN! adds value by bringing colleagues from various (interdisciplinary) backgrounds together and combining mutually reinforcing interests. Examples are where colleagues work on a shared interest (e.g. human flourishing, motivation) and bring different perspectives and societal/stakeholder networks to the table to develop a research proposal and/or implement the research.

LEARN! members need to know each other to be able to establish such collaboration, where each and every one is responsive to questions and ideas from colleagues and willing to reciprocate requests for collaboration. We will further strengthen our internal organisation and provide the infrastructure to support such knowledge sharing and bottom-up collaboration between colleagues through:

* PURE: ensuring the database is up to date (colleagues are linked to the appropriate programme and have updated their publications, networks and ongoing projects) and include pictures of people, enabling colleagues to find others with relevant expertise.
* Programme meetings: programme leaders have regular meetings with the researchers in their groups to exchange ideas, work on collaborative proposals and comment on each other’s work
* Annual LEARN! conference to provide a platform for sharing of work between programmes and with external stakeholders.
* Monthly LEARN! research seminars, showcasing ongoing work within each of the programmes
* Monthly newsletter, featuring each of the programmes in a rotating schedule, including an overview of upcoming funding calls and summary of published papers. The contributions to the newsletters (research highlights, interviews and blogs) are edited for quality of the contribution and to ensure these are accessible to read for a wider audience.

## 2.2 Academic culture and research integrity

Having an open, transparent and inclusive culture allows us to be open to new ideas, engage with internal colleagues and external stakeholders who have different perspectives from ours. How we work is informed by the code of conduct of Dutch universities (VSNU) and the faculty’s policy on open science and research integrity where core principles are to be transparent in our research, ‘do no harm’, ‘respect, value and acknowledge other viewpoints and the work of others’.

These values underpin our work and are at the forefront of our culture and how LEARN! members work. We promote these values in our internal communication and ensure they become the underpinning norm of how we work. The LEARN! board and our programme leadersfunction as role models, facilitators and brokers in setting the norms of what we expect from our researchers, in connecting people across disciplines, championing colleagues who are delivering outstanding work, and addressing those colleagues who need further support in meeting our core mission. Where relevant, programme leaders work with departmental heads or line managers to address underperformance in annual meetings, or to discuss how colleagues can best be supported to improve their work. In some cases, roles of programme leader and line manager converge, allowing a more coordinated approach. The institute also supports faculty policy in promoting an open academic culture, such as where the LEARN! director sits on professorial appointment committees and advices the faculty board on promotion and tenure of colleagues.

## 2.3 Leading large consortia and improving successful acquisition

We aim to facilitate LEARN! colleagues in successfully acquiring new research funding, particularly where this allows them to lead large research consortia, funded by EU, NWO/NRO/NWA grants. For this purpose we will closely collaborate with the VU EU liaison officer in scanning funding opportunities (e.g. the successor of Horizon 2020) and the VU grants desk. In our professional development we offer workshops on successful grant writing and where colleagues are planning to lead a bit for funding of large consortia, we will offer support to for example pay for travel and subsistence, support for filling in application forms (particularly when these require extensive work, such as for EU funding), or edit text for English fluency. For the year 2021 we will specifically offer one travel grant of €1.250 for each of the five research programmes to allow colleagues an opportunity to meet with partners and discuss a proposal for international collaborative research.

Where possible we will support the formation of consortia, such as by connecting LEARN! members to relevant stakeholders for new large-scale proposals, explore existing data to answer new and emerging questions as part of new proposals and establish new partnerships. We facilitate cross-disciplinary contact, and mediate connections to NGO’s and private partners that can help implement research outcomes and generate societal and economic impact.

Being part of a research institute allows individual researchers to be more successful in applying for, and leading large research consortia as the available infrastructure and reputation of the institute will add credibility to such proposals. Through our monthly newsletter we signal grant opportunities while we also work closely with IXA, the knowledge transfer office of Amsterdam-based universities to broker collaboration with third parties and manage legal and contractual requirements of large consortia and research grants.

## 2.4 Mentoring and professional/talent development

Not only do we study learning and development, we also value our own learning and development and how continuous learning of both junior and senior staff is needed to stay relevant in a fast changing world and provide the high quality and innovative research we aim for. Recruitment and decisions on professional development and career progression are organized according to departmental structure and fall outside of the institute’s responsibility. However, we offer various opportunities for professional development and build on the programmes and infrastructure offered by the faculty and university, and specifically:

*PhD Policy and Training*

PhD policy and training is organized and quality assured by the doctoral school of the faculty. All PhD students have to register in Hora Finita and meet doctoral regulations of the VU; supervision and required course work is regulated through the Doctoral school and specified for each PhD student in an individual training and supervision plan where agreements are made on mentoring and professional development. There are a number of courses and small grants specifically organized and offered for PhD students to progress their individual careers and support their professional development, such as the talent fund to finance international travel and conference attendance and the workshops organized by Science Transition, for example on research ethics or how to successfully use social media to engage external stakeholders in research.

As a research institute we organize monthly research seminars where PhD students are encouraged to present their work. These meetings are broadcasted and disseminated through the available LEARN! channels (YouTube, newsletter, LinkedIn), allowing them to engage with external stakeholders and showcase their work. We also organize an annual international LEARN! conference where PhD students have an opportunity to present their work to larger audiences, while the newsletter and social media enables them to practice their communication of research findings to a non-expert audience and disseminate their work. During the annual LEARN! conference we organize workshops for PhD students; topics are initiated by students and range from ‘how to write an academic paper’, ‘how to progress your academic career’, to ‘how to secure external funding’.

A specific group of PhD students is working with us on a guest appointment, free of charge. These students are working part-time and not working at the VU on a day to day basis; they have access to supervision and library facilities through a guest account and are offered a hot desk to work at. We acknowledge the value of these PhD students in the work experience they bring and in their international connections and networks that are also relevant for other LEARN! members. At the same time, they are more loosely connected to LEARN! and other colleagues and often only working with their supervisor. The part-time nature of the study often also means that their PhD takes a long time or that they drop-out before completion.

We aim to provide a more supportive environment for this group of PhD students, but also a more regulated approach to supervision to ensure students keep on track. For this purpose we will ask supervisors to schedule annual progress meetings with these students where milestones are discussed as agreed in the training and supervision plan and where appropriate support is discussed. We have also developed a contract with a set fee for supervision, course work and access to other resources (e.g. library and software) which needs to be renewed annually on the basis of sufficient progress to provide an incentive for these students to complete their PhD on time. We will invite these external students to organize their own inter-collegial feedback sessions to share work and their experiences and will grant them with 1 EC towards the minimum number of credit points they need to have to quality for a PhD. These feedback sessions will offer valuable peer support, share expertise in areas of how to structure research and write up findings, as well as develop problem-solving skills. These sessions also allow PhD students to develop a network to discuss practical or methodological issues with other colleagues from the research institute.

Furthermore, we will host an informal get to getter and writer’s workshop with all PhD candidates during the timing of the summer and winter school when most of the external PhD candidates are on campus to complete some of the required course work.

*Talent management of staff*

The VU offers various courses to support the development of both academic professional skills (e.g. writing, methodological skills) and career development. The grants desk advises on relevant grant programmes for further career development, while also offering feedback to improve proposals. As a research institute we aim to support mid-career and senior staff in their research activities and successful grant writing by informing them about upcoming calls in our monthly newsletter; we also encourage staff to work abroad for short period of times through a funded fellowships or scholarships for individual career development. Further talent development is part of the university’s regular human resource management structures and through regular line management outside of the research institute.

## 2.5 Quality assurance and external review to improve our work

Quality assurance of the institute through internal evaluations and external reviews is crucial to ensure we progress towards becoming a nationally and internationally recognized research institute in learning and development and improve our work.

*Internal quality assurance*

Our internal quality assurance is organized to allow colleagues to learn from each other and to instil a quality culture, aimed to continuously improve our work. For this purpose we organize peer review of all proposals above €100.000 as outlined in our review protocol (October 2019). The protocol is included in our monthly newsletters and programme leaders will continue to emphasize the relevance for internal review to colleagues working on new proposals.

In their meetings with their own research group, programme leaders will discuss an overview of funded projects and proposals in progress to allow for knowledge exchange and learning between programmes. Summary overviews are provided by project control.

*Advisory board*

Our advisory board is comprised of external colleagues from academia and practice, representing the various programmes in our institute as well as the micro, meso and macro perspectives of our research. They provide us with valuable guidance on the overall strategy of the research institute, including the viability of existing research programs or the need for new research programs. Their strategic advice and scrutiny of our work provides an important mechanism to improve our work and incorporating relevant external stakeholders in meeting our ambitions. We also aim to have ongoing communication throughout the year for more informal advice and collaboration, where we’ll invite board members for research seminars and our (online) conference. An overview of our members can be found in appendix 1 and on: <https://learn.vu.nl/nl/Images/Advisory-Board_tcm273-950169.pdf>

*External review*

All VU research institutes, including LEARN! are audited once every six years by an external committee, according to the SEP (Strategy Evaluation Protocol) of the Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU). The next audit is scheduled for November 2021 with an internal preparatory self-evaluation to be completed by July 2021. The two standards underpinning the audit (and self-evaluation) are ‘research quality’ and ‘relevance to society’. The University’s Assessment Committee (UTC; Universitaire Toetsingscommissie) will review the audit report and recommend a course of action for the institute to the University’s senior management team.

## 2.6 Collaboration with LEARN! Academy

A natural partner for LEARN! Research Institute is LEARN! Academy. LEARN! Academy is part of the Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences – the host faculty of LEARN! research institute and offers professional development and training of teachers in higher education (BKO, SKO and LOL qualifications), including on various aspects of teaching in, and quality assurance of higher education. LEARN! Academy is a company with a strong position within and outside the VU, which sets the agenda, creates and connects and thus fulfills a bridging function between educational research and practice and thus forms a source of inspiration for education professionals working in higher education in and around Amsterdam.

LEARN! Academy (L! A) employs approximately twenty trainers / advisers. The transition that is visible in higher education, due to social and technological developments, means that this team is once again examining issues such as: What is good education? What is good teaching? This requires an innovative range of professionalism for teachers. An important question in the design of this offer is how the learning of professionals can be optimally stimulated.

Based on the common interest to contribute to learning and development in Higher Education, LEARN! research institute and LEARN! Academy aim to collaborate on 1) the joint development and research of evidence-based principles for learning by professionals, 2) the further development of research capacity within LEARN! Academy and 3) the possibilities for valorisation of research on the theme of learning and development in higher education through the workshops, external networks and activities of LEARN! Academy.

## 2.7 External engagement and open science: locally, nationally and internationally

Engagement with local, national and international stakeholders and the academic community in doing our research (‘Open Science’) is at the heart of who we are. Our commitment lies in generating new knowledge to further our academic discipline and equally to contribute to improving the learning and development of society (local, national and international) and the stakeholders of our research. We will be permeable to, and interactive with, the public and all those that support us by working in partnerships with our stakeholders, as well as through our external engagement both offline ( open access events, research seminars) and online (blogs, newsletters and our website). Through our continuous interaction with our stakeholders we aim to add value to the development of the communities we work with, as well as enrich us with their questions and insights and thereby improving the quality of our work. We work with relevant stakeholders in all of our research projects, while actively communicating the outcomes of our work to them through our newsletters, YouTube channel and LinkedIn site. Our main stakeholders are included in table 1 below.

*Co-creation of research*

External engagement of societal stakeholders requires a reciprocal relation where partners are part of our research process from the start, and not just positioned as outlets for dissemination at the end stage of research. An example of our external engagement with practitioners was our rapid response network of school leaders and policy-makers at the start of the pandemic to collaboratively develop new knowledge on the consequences of school closures, and a subsequent large-scale programme of work to study the effectiveness of catch-up programmes in primary and secondary education for the Dutch research council and the Ministry of Education.

A second example involved the research labs we organized in collaboration with ICSEI (the International Conference for School Effectiveness and Improvement) and Policy Scotland[[1]](#footnote-1). These included researchers and practitioners from a wide range of countries and backgrounds to study and discuss the consequences of COVID-19 on various aspects of learning and development. One of the labs for example included delegates from Inspectorates of Education and academics to discuss the consequences of the pandemic for the purpose, priorities and processes of school inspections[[2]](#footnote-2), while a second lab concentrated on the teaching profession and how teachers across a number of countries responded to school closures and the conditions that supported an agile response. We aim to build on these examples when developing and implementing new research.

To further our strategy of co-creation and stakeholder engagement we will also intensify our collaboration with our colleagues at the Athena Institute ( (Faculty of Science, VU). Their mission is to develop methodologies (principles and heuristics) that can guide inclusive multi-stakeholder innovation processes, as well as strategies that can sustain and upscale such processes, methodologies to monitor and evaluate such innovation processes and develop programmes to train students and professionals in these methodologies. Our collaboration has already resulted in joint publication and use of methodologies to involve stakeholders, such as in the use of the ‘responsible innovation approach’, to deal with moral issues in studying the use of Transcranial Electrical Stimulation to enhance educational performance. The approach was developed to be reflexive and responsive to stakeholders’ needs and values and is an example of how we aim to use state of the art methods for stakeholder engagement.

*Communication to enhance our visibility locally, nationally and internationally*

We aim to enhance our visibility and profile with societal partners indicated in table 1. For this purpose we continue to invest in our online profile (website, twitter, LinkedIn) as well as our offline profile (planned notice board on level 4 near elevators), including consistent branding and high quality accessible writing (Dutch and English) in all external and internal communication. We encourage LEARN! researchers to use our powerpoint template (accessible via internet and a link in the monthly newsletter) in their external and internal communication and we edit all contributions to the website and internal newsletter for fluency and readability.

Our visibility in the academic community is related to our academic publications and presentations at academic conferences. Our mentoring and professional development aims to enhance the quality of these publications and presentations to allow colleagues to publish in high impact journals. We encourage colleagues to present at international conferences although funding needs to come from their own research grants or faculty budgets.

LEARN! was also invited to organize the 2022 annual conference of ICSEI, the International Conference for School Effectiveness and School Improvement. ICSEI brings together policy makers, practitioners and researchers around the world to develop knowledge, policies, and practices focused on improving the quality and equity of education. Organizing the annual conference offers an excellent opportunity to raise our profile in the international community.

Specific strategies and activities we have identified to strengthen our visibility and engagement with local, national and international stakeholders and academics are facilitating and supporting:

* Online research labs: online research labs were developed during the pandemic to enable international collaborative research around pressing issues caused by school closures due to the pandemic. The labs explored questions around teacher agency, educational networks, assessment and school inspections in a series of online meetings, scheduled and advertised through stakeholder networks, such as SICI (the European Association of Inspectorates of Education) and ICSEI (the international conference for school effectiveness and school improvement). We will encourage colleagues to use the methodology developed for these labs to explore further ongoing issues with international partners.
* Investing in networks and consortia for research (including leading large research consortia)
* Active participation in the NRO kennisrotonde, as well as policy/practitioner research programmes of the NRO (‘beleidsgericht onderzoek’)
* Promoting international scholars to visit and study with us through calls for visiting scholarships and exchange programmes in collaboration with CIES and China/Indonesia bursary programmes)
* Offering research opportunities for external (self-funded) PhD candidates to extend international collaboration in, and networks for research
* Promoting and facilitating AWP’s – academische werkplaatsen/research/practice partnerships (e.g. with the Inspectorate of Education)
* Structural collaboration and engagement with national and international partners and stakeholders (e.g. UNESCO, OECD) through participation of LEARN! colleagues on expert committees, advisory boards or project groups.
* Facilitating colleagues who wish to apply for international funding (EU programmes or country-specific schemes open to international researchers).
* Showcasing our engagement work in the monthly LEARN! newsletter through a dedicated item where LEARN! members who sit on advisory boards or external committees talk about their role and work. This also enables other colleagues to learn about their work and to showcase good practice.
* Creating a dedicated space on our website for external colleagues to log and answer questions, enabling citizen science and allowing the LEARN! website to become a platform for knowledge exchange.

*Open Science*

External engagement with the academic community and other stakeholders closely aligns to the principles of ‘open science’, defined as “the practice of science in such a way that others can collaborate and contribute, where research data, lab notes and other research processes are freely available, under terms that enable reuse, redistribution and reproduction of the research and its underlying data and methods” (www.fosteropenscience.eu). Open Science may increase the societal impact of research not only by enhancing its soundness and credibility, but also by promoting reuse of methods and data and reducing research waste. We align our work to the faculty (FGB) Open Science policy and make use of their infrastructure and training programme. Examples are the research data officer and data stewards who support researchers in making data openly accessible, ethical review of data collection and dissemination and publication of findings.

Table 1. Societal stakeholders according to the three contexts of our work

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Local stakeholders | National stakeholders | International stakeholders |
| The Micro context of learning of children and adults (including teachers, principals) | Teachers, students, parents, schools | Ouders en Onderwijs  NKD (Nederlands Kwaliteits Instituut Dyslexie)  Teacher associations, Ed tech companies, Oudervereniging BALANS | International Minds Brain and Education Society,  International research and educational associations (like Association of Medical Education in Europe – AMEE) |
| The Meso context of learning, such as the classroom, school organisation, day-care centers, work-based settings or adult colleges in which people learn and develop | Schools, school boards, Day care centers |  | International research and educational associations (ICSEI) |
| The Macro context of learning; e.g. the coordination and governance of learning by school boards, local and national governance (e.g. through marketization, network governance, hierarchical coordination), including the cultural and institutional context of learning (norms, values, social blueprint; legal, financial and policy context). | City of Amsterdam | Ministry of Education  Inspectorate of Education  PO/VO-raad  Onderwijsraad  VSNU  VGN  BOiNK | OECD  World Bank  UNICEF  UNESCO- MGIEP  UNESCO-IIEP  International research and educational associations (ICSEI) |

Other relevant stakeholders across these contexts and our five research programmes are other international research centers, and particularly those to which we already have strong links (ie through our advisory board or personal networks): the Education Endowment Foundation (work on catch-up programmes and to study effectiveness of interventions), CEPO (Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities at UCL), Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, Department of Psychological Science, Birkbeck, University of London

# 3. Implementation

The seven strategies described in section 2 will be implemented through the list of activities in the table below. These form our agenda for 2021.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Strategy | Activity | Who |
| LEARN! community and informal knowledge exchange | 1. Updating PURE, profile pictures on website 2. Welcome email to new members with link to website and internal documents 3. Regular meetings by programme to exchange ideas, work on collaborative proposals and provide feedback 4. Annual LEARN! conference 5. Monthly research meetings 6. Monthly newsletter, featuring each of the programmes in a rotating schedule, including an overview of upcoming funding calls and summary of published papers. | Ad 1, 2: Suzan, Alissa and Aisha  Ad 3: programme leaders  Ad 4, 5: Melanie, Alissa, Aisha and Femke  Ad 6: programme leaders, Alissa and Melanie |
| Academic culture and research integrity | 1. Role modelling and championing outstanding behaviour and culture 2. Programme leaders discuss research integrity in programme meetings | Programme leaders |
| Leading large consortia and improving successful acquisition | 1. Travel grants for researchers in each programme to work on proposals for large research consortia 2. Broker networks and collaboration with VU EU liaison officer, IXA and VU grants desk for funding opportunities for large research consortia | Programme leaders |
| Mentoring and professional/talent development | 1. Talent fund to finance international travel and conference attendance and the workshops organized by Science Transition 2. Monthly research seminars where PhD students are encouraged to present 3. Workshops for PhD students; topics are initiated by students and range from ‘how to write an academic paper’, ‘how to progress your academic career’, to ‘how to secure external funding 4. External PhDs: structure their work and supervision and payment of fees through contracts (developed by IXA), annual monitoring and organize an informal get together, peer coaching and a writer’s workshop during the summer and winter school period, encouraging all PhDs to stay on campus for one or two weeks. 5. Support mid-career and senior staff in their research activities and successful grant writing by informing them about upcoming calls in our monthly newsletter 6. Encourage staff to work abroad for short period of times through a funded fellowships or scholarships for individual career development | Programme leaders  Science Transition |
| Quality assurance and external review to improve our work | 1. Peer review of all proposals above €100.000 2. Programme leaders funded projects and proposals in progress in regular programme meetings to allow for knowledge exchange and learning between programmes 3. Advisory board: meeting once a year to discuss (implementation of) strategy, ongoing communication throughout the year for more informal advice and collaboration (including through participation in research seminars and online conference). 4. External audit of the institute | Ad 1, 3: Melanie  Ad 2: programme leaders  Ad 4: LEARN! board and board of the faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences |
| Collaboration with LEARN! Academy | 1. Journal club with LEARN! Academy and LEARN! research institute members to discuss state of the art literature on teacher development and learning and write papers in smaller teams on lifelong learning of professionals | Rashmi and Janneke |
| External communication and engagement: locally, nationally and internationally | 1. Encourage LEARN! colleagues to organize online research labs with (national/international) academic colleagues and practitioners 2. Investing in networks and consortia for research (including leading large research consortia) by offering travel grants and inviting colleagues to work on specific calls (in collaboration with VU EU liaison officer and VU grants desk) 3. Hosting and organizing the 2022 annual conference of ICSEI 4. Active participation in the NRO kennisrotonde, as well as policy/practitioner research programmes of the NRO (‘beleidsgericht onderzoek’) 5. Promoting international scholars to visit and study with us through calls for visiting scholarships and exchange programmes in collaboration with VU international office and China/Indonesia bursary programmes) 6. Offering research opportunities for external (self-funded) PhD candidates to extend international collaboration in, and networks for research (call on the website and in newsletter) 7. Promoting and facilitating AWP’s – academische werkplaatsen/research/practice partnerships (e.g. with the Inspectorate of Education) 8. Structural collaboration and engagement with national and international partners and stakeholders (e.g. UNESCO, OECD) through participation of LEARN! colleagues on expert committees, advisory boards or project groups. 9. Facilitating colleagues who wish to apply for international funding (EU programmes or country-specific schemes open to international researchers). 10. Showcasing our engagement work in the monthly LEARN! newsletter through a dedicated item where LEARN! members who sit on advisory boards or external committees talk about their role and work. 11. Creating a dedicated space on our website for external colleagues to log and answer questions, enabling citizen science and allowing the LEARN! website to become a platform for knowledge exchange. 12. Editing written contributions to LEARN! newsletter and website for English fluency | Ad 1, 2: Melanie and programme leaders  Ad 3: Melanie, Alissa and Suzan (in collaboration with VU events)  Ad 4: all programme leaders and LEARN! members  Ad 5, 6 and 9: Melanie, Suzan and Alissa  Ad 7 and 8: programme leaders  Ad 10, 11 and 12: Melanie, Alissa and Suzan |

# Appendix 1. Budget 2021 and institute’s structure

## Budget 2021

The income of LEARN! comes from the faculty of Behavioral and Movement Sciences and is based on the number of researchers (according to fte) working in LEARN!. The budget is set once every six years.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | *2021* |
| **Income** | 114.000 |
| **Expenditures** |  |
| Staff costs:  Director (0,20 fte)  Administrative support (Suzan and Aisha; total 0,4 fte) | 54.816 |
| Memberships (ICO PhDs; Kohnstamm lecture) | 8.000 |
| Annual LEARN! conference | 2.500 |
| Travel and expenses | 1000 |
| Branding, editing, website | 1500 |
| Advisory board | 1000 |
| Other: external audit, preparing self-evaluation report  Travel grants (€1.250 for each programme to support in establishing an international research consortium and proposal writing; €6250 | 45.184 |
| Total | 114.000 |

## Institute infrastructure

The LEARN! board includes the deans of the two contributing faculties (Professor Maurits Tulder, dean of FGB and Professor Christa Boer, dean of the Faculty of Medicine, VUmc, see below) and the director of the institute (Professor Melanie Ehren). The board is responsible for the overarching strategy of the institute, as well as the external audit of the institute.

The strategy is implemented by five programme leaders who are in each in charge of one the five research programmes of the institute and researchers working within each programme. The board and programme leaders are supported by a management assistant (1 day a week; Suzan Besuijen) and a communication officer (1 day a week, Alissa Postpischil). Programme leaders are appointed by the director of the institute.

Overview of LEARN! board and programma leaders

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| LEARN! Board | * Professor Maurits Tulder (dean of FGB) * Professor Christa Boer (dean of the medical school, VUmc) Professor Professor Melanie Ehren (director of the institute) |
| Programme leaders | * Professor Carlo Schuengel * Professor Martijn Meeter * Professor Maartje Raijmakers * Professor Melanie Ehren * Dr. Rashmi Kusurkar * Professor Nienke van Atteveldt |

The faculties and departments contributing to LEARN!, according to programme are listed in the table below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Faculty | Department | LEARN! programme |
| VU: Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences (FGB; host faculty) | Educational and Family Studies (POW) | * Child rearing (Professor Schuengel) * Learning Sciences (professor Martijn Meeter and Professor Maartje Raijmakers) * Educational governance (Professor Melanie Ehren) |
|  | Clinical, Neuro and developmental Psychology (KNOP) | * Educational Neuroscience (Professor Nienke van Atteveldt) |
| VU Faculty of Medicine | Team Research in Education | * Motivation for lifelong learning (Dr. Rashmi Kusurkar) |

Advisory board LEARN!, November 2020 - November 2023

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Dolf van Veen | Special/honorary professor (urban education and children and youth at risk/teacher and school development aan University of Nottingham); lector grootstedelijk onderwijs en jeugdbeleid Inholland, Haarlem (HO) |
| Rien Spies | Directeur Agora, basisscholen Zaanstreek (PO) |
| Becky Francis | CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation UK |
| Rien Rouw | Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and advisor to the OECD |
| Sandy Taut | Deputy head Bavarian State Office for Schools |
| Iroise Dumontheil | Reader in Cognitive Neuroscience at Birkbeck, University of London and Director of Masters courses in Educational Neuroscience (TBC) |

1. <https://www.icsei.net/networks/cren/online-research-labs/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See for example: <https://learn.vu.nl/nl/nieuws-agenda/nieuwsarchief/2020/pr-sep/200918COVID-19-do-we-need-to-redefine-the-priorities.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)