

**MANUAL FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE  
OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

**TEACHING PROGRAMME**

Version 2019

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Every degree programme is based on a vision of what you want to educate students to become and how you want to go about it. In essence, the teaching programme is the means by which you seek to achieve these goals. The content and method of the programme determine what and how students learn.

Maintaining an overview of the coherence and quality of the entire programme is no easy feat, not least because each individual lecturer is usually involved in only one or two courses on the programme. Their main focus is on their own teaching. For effective coordination with the other programme components, they need support from fellow lecturers, staff from the Education Office and faculty teaching coordinators to name but three.

In addition to the importance of high-quality educational content for a programme, its design and coherence also have a major influence on the students' academic progress.<sup>1</sup> Various aspects of the teaching programme have a clear effect on academic progress, most notably the way in which one course relates to another and builds on students' prior knowledge, the planning of study load and assessment (examinations and resits), and the extent to which teaching methods motivate students to study.

Given the significance of a high-quality programme, it should come as no surprise that this is a key component of the accreditation system employed by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). Decisions on the accreditation of a programme are based on its standard of education, but also the way in which it is structured.

The Teaching Quality Steering Committee assesses applications for new programmes at VU Amsterdam, while the Department of Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management (part of Student & Educational Affairs) assists programmes in writing self-evaluation reports and applications for new programmes. On the evidence of their experiences and the general standard of accreditation submissions, many applicants struggle to formulate a clear description of a programme's design in line with the NVAO criteria. The following problem areas have been identified:

- the ambiguity surrounding a number of terms from the NVAO accreditation framework (e.g. final attainment levels, didactic concept, learning objectives);
- difficulty defining the relationships between the various terms in the NVAO accreditation framework (e.g. the relationship between objectives, final attainment levels, and learning objectives);
- lack of clarity on duties and responsibilities in relation to the programme and an intermittent lack of effective monitoring.

The aim of this chapter of the Manual for Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning is to provide faculties with greater certainty by describing how the programme should be structured and defining

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of research on factors that influence the success rate of a programme, see the Higher Education Success Rate Checklist produced by Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching.  
<http://www.studiesuccesho.nl/2011/11/20/checklist-concept/>

everyone's duties and responsibilities in this area. The chapter is closely linked to VU Amsterdam's Educational Vision and to Standard 1 ('objectives') and Standard 2 ('programme') of the NVAO accreditation framework. It takes a practical approach, designed to enable readers to put its content into action.

## 2 OBJECTIVE, PARTICIPANTS AND DUTIES

This chapter provides information on how an effective teaching programme should be set up. It also indicates how the programme should be described in order to ensure compliance with the guidelines of the NVAO accreditation framework.

In addition to the NVAO framework, this chapter also deals with the agreements that apply within VU Amsterdam, as set out in the university's own Bachelor's and Master's Guideline (see [VUnet](#)).

Last but not least, the chapter specifies the employees involved in the programme, their duties and responsibilities, and how they can operationalize quality assurance in relation to the programme (i.e. by monitoring how duties are performed).

### 2.1 PROGRAMME DESIGN

According to the guidelines contained in the NVAO framework ([version 2018](#)), a programme has to meet quality requirements in the following areas.

#### 2.1.1 THE PROGRAMME'S VISION

The NVAO expects a programme to have its own vision (or programme objective), which states clearly and concisely what the programme stands for and what kind of students it wants to deliver. This vision therefore expresses what the programme wants to achieve in educating students to fulfil a specific need within society or to meet a demand for higher-education graduates with specific expertise in particular areas. The development of such a vision is important not only in terms of the quality of education but also for public-relations purposes. Not only is it a starting point for educational development, but it is also a 'programme philosophy' which ensures internal cohesion in relation to two key questions: (1) What do we stand for as teachers? (2) What opportunities will be open to our students once they have completed the programme? In this sense, a vision rooted in consensus forms the programme's very foundation. [Appendix 1](#) contains examples of a programme vision. The [practical application of VU Amsterdam's Educational Vision](#) can also serve as a useful guide when formulating a programme's vision.

#### 2.1.2 COORDINATION BETWEEN VU AMSTERDAM'S EDUCATIONAL VISION AND THE PROGRAMME VISION

VU Amsterdam's Educational Vision elaborates on the priorities set out in the university's Strategic Plan 2015-2020, see:

<http://www.vu.nl/nl/over-de-vu/profiel-en-missie/uitgelicht/onderwijsvisie/publicaties/index.asp>

VU Amsterdam's Educational Vision is in line with its academic culture, as characterized by the three core values of personal commitment, openness and responsibility. VU Amsterdam's core values are

expressed in teaching through the content of the curriculum, the approach to teaching and how teaching staff relate to students and other stakeholders at VU Amsterdam.

**Personal: an academic community in which each member is recognized.**

High-quality and valuable education starts and ends with the **teaching staff**. VU Amsterdam is proud of its inspiring teachers, and has an eye for the personal development of every teacher.

VU Amsterdam cherishes the idea that every student has a **talent**, and is proud of the role it plays in discovering and developing this individual talent. Students are **unique and valuable**, and are given the opportunity to realize their full potential within the university. Each student is heard, seen and recognized. Mentors and tutors play an important role in education at Bachelor's level. Small-scale teaching methods, such as practicals and seminars, provide a personal touch in the supervision of students.

VU Amsterdam is a **community of learners**, in which teachers, researchers and students meet each other in formulating and reflecting on shared questions. Students are actively involved in education through peer review and other forms of feedback. The unique contribution of each student is an underlying principle.

Wherever possible, the **value of the personal background and experience** of students and teachers feeds into the educational process, providing a direct link between education and the issues that concern society. Education is often interactive and promotes an ongoing academic dialogue among students and between students and teachers. The personal research interests and experience of the teaching staff are brought into the educational sphere as much as possible.

By creating a **positive learning culture** within VU Amsterdam, learning becomes an everyday habit. Students are motivated to keep reflecting on their own development, and making mistakes is valued as a step in the development of academics who reflect critically on their own performance and progress. **Critical thinking** is an essential value within the academic core. Students are motivated to think independently, to remain critical and to assess the truthfulness of information.

**Open: we are open to diversity in disciplines, nationalities, religious beliefs, world views and social convictions.**

VU Amsterdam is an **inspiring meeting place** where mutual respect is the foundation for working on connections between disciplines, cultures, religions, social views and societal issues. Confronting differences leads to new insights and innovations, to clarity and sharpness of focus, and furthers academic excellence.

VU Amsterdam promotes lifelong learning. The university's academic community welcomes students and staff from a wide diversity of backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, educational background, phase of career, beliefs systems, political convictions, lifestyles and approaches to learning. We embrace this diversity as an integral element and see it as adding value to the university's educational culture. We are inclusive, and the power and richness of this diversity only shine through when it is not left latent and unspoken, but is fully acknowledged both in education and extra-curricular academic life. A heterogeneous academic community brings many different viewpoints into the lecture theatre, creating a gathering that enriches the academic discourse.

Diversity is more than cultural, social and intellectual variation. Different academic disciplines can have their own view of the same social problem, and their own potential solutions to that problem. Lecturers at VU Amsterdam organize education in such a way that students learn to approach and discuss issues from different angles. Our students become aware that many complex issues cannot be resolved in a single dimension. Issues and problems are tackled using a multidisciplinary approach. In doing so, it is of course essential that our students first acquire an in-depth understanding of their chosen discipline.

VU Amsterdam's focus goes beyond academic excellence alone. The university sees it as its task, challenge and responsibility to lead all its students to academic success.

**Responsible: engaging with people, education, society and the world.**

Alongside teaching staff, our students also play an important part in the **connection between university and society**. The education offered by VU Amsterdam encourages students to engage with each other, their degree programme, society and the world, and to take this level of commitment into their future career. On the one hand, students are encouraged to take up a position in the world and to be open to others and to otherness. On the other hand, VU Amsterdam appeals to the sense of responsibility that already exists within the student community.

Education and research at the university are aimed at making a contribution to **solving society's problems**. The nature of those problems and the people affected by them are open to debate. VU Amsterdam encourages teachers and students to define their own position and responsibility in this regard, while remaining open to other ideas and perspectives.

Wherever possible, education is provided in the form of interactive teaching methods, with problem-based learning or self-directed learning as a possible interpretation. By using real-life cases and dilemmas from society, and by involving stakeholders – such as the public sector, the business community and social organizations – education becomes more **relevant and valuable**. As part of this approach, VU Amsterdam seeks intensive contact with the Amsterdam region, the professional field and alumni.

Complex societal problems form an important aspect of the education we provide. In this regard, it is important that we do not work towards a unique solution, but that the various values that matter to those involved become clear and comprehensible. Our students are encouraged to define their own position, and in doing so become reflective, critical and committed academic professionals, who can find their way in a complex, globalizing and diverse world, which is changing ever more rapidly.

At VU Amsterdam we expect students to take responsibility and not simply attend university in order to consume education as a product. The programme management and the teaching staff are **responsible for designing high-quality degree programmes which set realistic targets**, while the students who take these programmes are then **responsible for their own student life cycle and academic success**. As the student life cycle progresses, the level of guidance from the programme will steadily decrease. Students play an active part in feedback and assessment, and extensive use is made of peer assessment.

In Community Service Learning (CSL) activities, students apply their knowledge and skills for the benefit of society and learn from the experience. The value of CSL for students lies in its status as an active

and effective learning method. CSL also brings students into direct contact with social developments that raise challenging questions. Students experience how their efforts can impact society and how they can take personal responsibility for their actions. CSL also strengthens connections with the job market.

The VU Education Knowledge Network ([KnowVU](#)) has developed the university's Educational Vision in greater detail, spelling it out in terms of concrete action (see [VUnet](#)).

VU Amsterdam's [LEARN! Academy](#) and the Department of Education, Quality Assurance and Process Management provide support in developing scenarios for teaching methods and faculty policy on the educational vision and the programme vision.

### 2.1.3 THE CONTENT OF THE PROGRAMME

#### Final attainment levels / intended learning outcomes

With regard to content, the programme vision is expressed as final attainment levels. This is synonymous with 'intended learning outcomes', while in its latest framework the NVAO uses the term 'learning outcomes'. These constitute a more detailed version of the intended learning outcomes that every graduate of the programme is expected to achieve. The final attainment levels define a student's achievements on completing the programme in the following terms: fields of expertise, degree of expertise, requisite skills, familiarity with methods and techniques and ability to design, conduct and present research at a given level. If elements such as an aptitude for collaboration are of major importance in the programme, these should also be incorporated in the final attainment levels. The final attainment levels are defined at programme level, not per year or course. As a rule of thumb, between 7 and 15 final attainment levels should be defined.

When a programme has to write a self-evaluation report for accreditation purposes or an application for a new programme, NVAO expects them to demonstrate clearly that the curriculum (i.e. the sum of the components that make up the programme) represents an adequate concretization of the final learning outcomes as regards level, orientation and domain-specific requirements. One way to demonstrate this is by drawing up a 'programme matrix' or 'test programme matrix'. This is a table containing the various programme components and showing the final attainment levels to which they make a key contribution to (see Appendix 2 for examples of the matrix).

#### Final attainment levels and Dublin Descriptors

The Dublin Descriptors came about as part of the Bologna-process, the name given to the European Union's efforts to create a single European Higher Education Area (EHEA)<sup>2</sup>. The aim is to achieve a transparent range of higher education programmes that facilitates student mobility and mutual recognition of national degrees and diplomas. The various elements within this process are developed and implemented step by step. The well-known acronym ECTS – which stands for European Credit Transfer System – is an example of an instrument developed in this context: expressing credits in terms of this system make them comparable and therefore transferable between member states.

Different levels of education are distinguished in the European Higher Education Area. The three main levels (or 'cycles') correspond to the highest three levels in the subsequently designed European

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<sup>2</sup>For more information, see <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>

Quality Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF).<sup>3</sup> This framework contains eight levels which describe the learning outcomes of the entire educational spectrum:

from primary school to doctorate level. Levels six, seven and eight cover the range of higher education and describe the results of education at Bachelor's, Master's and doctorate level. Appendix 5 describes Level 6 (Bachelor's) and Level 7 (Master's).

The Dublin Descriptors have also been developed within the context of the European Higher Education Area and describe the generic level of learning outcomes associated with a completed Bachelor's and Master's programme. The Dublin Descriptors express learning outcomes in five dimensions: knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding, making judgements, communication, lifelong learning skills.

*Table 1: relating EQF levels to the higher education framework*

EQF	HIGHER EDUCATION FRAMEWORK
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	Bachelor's – first cycle
7	Master's – second cycle
8	Doctorate – third cycle

The Dublin Descriptors as used in accreditation are included in Appendix 3. In the accreditation framework, NVAO requires programmes to give a plausible account of how their final attainment level corresponds to the generic level described by the Dublin Descriptors.<sup>4</sup> In concrete terms, this can be demonstrated by showing how each of the five dimensions of the Dublin Descriptor correspond to a specific final attainment level(s) or final learning outcome(s). This enables the programme to show that its students are educated to the required level for a Bachelor's or Master's degree.

Appendix 4 contains an example of how final attainment levels can be linked to the Dublin Descriptors.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/eqf08\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/eqf08_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project is working towards developing content-related criteria for applying the Dublin Descriptors to various academic disciplines. For more information, go to <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>.



### Learning objectives

The level at which programme content should be described in the most concrete terms is at the level of learning objectives for the various courses. Several learning objectives are formulated for each course. A distinction can be made between generic learning objectives and specific (subject-related) learning objectives. Generic learning objectives correspond to characteristics of general academic conduct in areas such as communication, cognition and ethics. These learning objectives must also be reflected in the programme. A learning objective is a detailed account of one of the final attainment levels. This does not have to take the form of separate courses (e.g. Academic Skills modules), but can also be achieved through subject-specific education.

The learning objectives of a course may relate to more than one final attainment level. Appendix 2 contains two examples of how final attainment levels are linked to programme components, teaching methods and types of assessment. The second example also includes learning objectives. Appendix 6 explains how to formulate learning objectives correctly.

### Coherence

Within the programme, there is clearly a difference in level between the learning objectives of a first-year course, for example, and the learning objectives of a third-year course. Courses should build on the learning objectives achieved in previous modules. This creates a rising gradient within the programme, one which ensures that all final attainment levels have been achieved by the end.

NVAO requires degree programmes to provide sufficient evidence that they offer students a coherent programme of study; they can do this by demonstrating that the programme has been carefully constructed, has a clear and well-considered structure, takes a coordinated approach to the range of topics and themes it covers, and provides a sound balance between broad-based and in-depth study.

A programme's coherence can be demonstrated through learning pathways. These pathways form a logical structure and a logical sequence of programme components: they state the subjects, concepts and skills that have to be learned, and in what order, in the consecutive years of the programme. They are often characterized by an increasing level of difficulty and a transition from simple to complex skills. Learning pathways provide insight into a step-by-step approach to course material which can help avoid needless repetition or excessive leaps that impede the students' understanding of the material or leave them unable to make connections.

The extent of a programme's coherence can be examined through [curriculum analysis](#). Such an analysis can look at aspects such as programme design, and the connections and overlap between courses. The Department for Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management (part of Student & Educational Affairs) can provide the necessary support.

One example of a curriculum analysis method based on learning pathways is the skills yardstick developed by the Faculty of Arts. This yardstick is presented in Appendix 8. For each of the Dublin Descriptors, it states the various skills that are taught. Each skill is described in terms of three successive levels, which combine to form a learning pathway. For example, written presentation, oral presentation and debate skills form three separate learning pathways within the Communication component of the Dublin Descriptors. Curriculum analysis using this yardstick rates each course within the programme on whether and at what level (1, 2 or 3) a specific skill is featured. This results in an overview of all successive courses: the rates given indicate whether specific skills are regularly taught

by the programme and whether the level of the programme rises as it should (i.e. whether continuous learning pathways exist within the programme).

### Assessment

Assessment is examined according to the principles of constructive alignment: it must reflect the learning objectives that have been formulated and the teaching methods selected. The relative weighting of the learning objectives is also reflected in the assessment. The learning objectives of each course are adequately assessed, so a programme can guarantee that every student actually meets the final attainment levels. It is also important that assessment methods correspond to a programme's teaching methods. This correspondence is set out in a programme's assessment plan and also has to be described in a programme's self-evaluation report for accreditation.

If a programme's didactic concept is to facilitate active student learning with a view to enabling a range of skills (final attainment levels/learning objectives), then multiple-choice exams would not be an appropriate method of assessing student performance. The director of studies is responsible for drawing up the assessment plan. In this plan, duties and responsibilities at the levels of the assessment, programme component and assessment programme are formally allocated and incorporated in the relevant Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle. The assessment plan includes the final attainment levels stated in relation to the Dublin Descriptors, the degree programme's assessment programme, and the accompanying explanation and methods for optimizing assessment quality (for other aspects, see the Assessment Framework chapter).

#### 2.1.4 THE PROGRAMME'S METHOD

Once a programme has stated its ambitions in a vision document (i.e. what the programme wants its students to achieve as a result of the education it provides), it then formulates how it plans to educate its students. This is described in the programme's didactic concept.

The didactic concept encompasses the way in which a programme seeks to approach, structure and organize the education it provides, based on certain didactic principles and methods. Common didactic concepts include student-centred education, teacher-centred education and concepts geared towards active learning, such as problem-based education. However, a programme does not have to adopt a pre-existing concept, nor does its approach have to be bound by a single concept. It can also describe the teaching method within a particular programme and explain why this method is employed. Appendix 7 contains an example of a didactic concept.

The teaching methods employed by a programme should be a clear illustration of how its didactic concept is being put into practice. A common pitfall when describing the didactic concept is to take the teaching methods as the starting point for the description: in fact, the methods only represent the practical interpretation of the didactic concept, not the concept itself. Another regular mistake is selecting or formulating a didactic concept that is not expressed in the programme's teaching methods, for example applying a buzzword such as 'active learning' to a programme that consists mainly of teacher-centred lectures.

### 2.1.5 FEASABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME

Research has shown that the design of a degree programme influences students' study patterns (e.g. Crombag, Van der Drift & Vos, 1985<sup>7</sup>). Scheduling classes and exams at specific moments can change student behaviour for the better. It is therefore advisable to think carefully about how you plan your educational components and exams. A number of key outcomes of this research are discussed below along with some points to bear in mind.

#### Student study patterns

If a lecturer makes regular demands of students throughout the duration of a course (e.g. expecting them to write and submit interim reports), then students will be active during the teaching period. As long as no demands are made during the course, students will assume that nothing needs to be done and they will not start studying until immediately before the exam. A lecturer who schedules a series of classes followed by a number of weeks with no classes in the lead-up to an exam is encouraging students to postpone their learning until just before the exam.

Concentrating classes on one or two days of the week can encourage students not to study on the remaining days. Preferably, there should be an even spread of contact hours over five days.

#### Scheduling examinations

- How examinations are scheduled has a major influence on the academic success of students. This does not refer to obvious effects such as a higher success rate on a less challenging exam, but the effects of scheduling exams and resits, the number of exams, and granting limited compensation on exam results. It is worth bearing the following recommendations in mind when drawing up your exam schedule:
- Give ample consideration to how many exams lecturers are willing to administer in the course of an academic year. Every increase in the number of exams represents a decrease in the programme's success rate, because each exam exposes students to the risk of failing an assessment they are capable of passing. The amplitude of this effect has been calculated for an academic year with eight as opposed to sixteen exams. Assuming a pass rate of 70% for all exams, the success rate will decrease from 35% for eight exams, to 24% for sixteen exams.<sup>5</sup>
- When the number of exams in an academic year is relatively high, consider allowing students to compensate for one narrow fail within a cluster of exams (e.g. granting students an overall pass with one grade of 5 as long as they have achieved a grade of 7 or over for another course).<sup>6</sup>
- It is best to spread exams as widely as possible over the year.
- It is better to schedule resits in blocks.
- Resits should be scheduled as soon as possible after the first exam opportunity.
- Where resits are concerned, a balance can be achieved by scheduling them in a cluster before the start of the next teaching period.

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<sup>5</sup> Crombag, Van der Drift & Vos (1985). De inrichting van curricula en het werkgedrag van studenten, *Universiteit en Hogeschool* – Vol. 31 - 5

<sup>6</sup>Hermans, B.M. J. (1996). Tentamenaantal en studierendement, *Handreiking bij Onderwijs-programmering*, VU Amsterdam Educational Services Office.

If exams are scheduled too close together, students are likely to devote more attention to an earlier exam at the expense of a later exam. More time between exams leads to a more balanced division of study time across courses, a higher total study load and a higher pass rate on one course without a corresponding decline in performance on another course competing concurrently for the student's attention.

### Contact hours

When setting up a teaching programme, it is important to consider the number of contact hours in relation to the time available to students for independent study. A distinction should be made between the gross number of hours on the curriculum (1680 hours, 42 weeks x 40 hours) and the net curriculum (1300 hours, 42 weeks x 30 hours, allowing for travel time, breaks, etc.). This leaves 1300 hours available to students in the form of contact hours and independent study with fellow students.

Research into the effectiveness of contact hours and independent study hours has shown that the contact-independent ratio correlates positively with learning performance. The greater the number of hours available for independent study- on a programme in relation to hours of instruction, the greater the improvement in learning performance. The primary aim of contact hours should therefore be to provoke meaningful independent study. In this context, Vos has proposed that the presentation-elaboration model (i.e. teacher explains, student is expected to study but tends to postpone this) should be replaced by the preparation-feedback model: frequent feedback moments (contact hours, exams) immediately preceded by preparation time for students.<sup>7</sup>

A sparing approach should be taken when planning the number of contact hours with a view to prompting and facilitating independent study. This should be seen within the context of the total number of net hours: 1300 hours. An annual class participation time of between 325 and 400 net hours leaves around 820 hours for independent study.<sup>8</sup> At this tipping point, the ratio of expensive contact hours to inexpensive hours of independent study is more effective than in other combinations. Research at course level puts the tipping point at which an increase in contact hours does not result in extra independent study at 12 hours a week.

In the Bachelor's Guideline, VU Amsterdam's Executive Board has set the minimum number of contact hours in the first Bachelor's year at 14 hours a week, with a 12-hour minimum for years B2 and B3. It is advisable to make students aware of these independent study hours (e.g. using visual aids), which include time to prepare for practicals, lectures, tutorials and to complete assignments. Table 2 can be used to show the distribution of teaching methods (including the balance between contact hours and independent study time).

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<sup>7</sup> Vos, P. (1998). Over de ware aard van uitstellen. *Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs*, 16, 4, 259-274.

<sup>8</sup> Crombag, H.F.M., van der Drift, K.D.J.M. & Vos, P. (1985), De inrichting van curricula en het werkgedrag van studenten, *Universiteit en Hogeschool*, Vol. 31, 234-247.

*Table 2. Distribution of teaching methods*

YEAR	LECTURES	TUTORIALS	PROBLEM-CENTRED	THESIS	INDEPENDENT STUDY	TOTAL
1	200	200	220	0	680	1300
2	170	300	100	0	730	1300
3	100	200	120	0	880	1300

*NB The numbers in Table 2 are purely by way of illustration.*

### Study load analysis

The attainability of a programme can be examined using a study load analysis (also known as a description of prescribed duration).<sup>9</sup> This is a description of the programme based on the workload-required of students according to the official documentation. This enables conclusions to be drawn regarding the attainability of the programme; the distribution of study load over the academic year or part of the academic year; any peak periods; and the opportunities for developing a programme that is more balanced in terms of study load. The Department of Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management can offer support in carrying out a study load analysis.

## 2.2 INVOLVEMENT

Various individuals, bodies and organizations are involved in the programme.

- Faculty Board
- Portfolio holder for teaching
- Director of Education
- Director of Studies
- Programme Committee
- Head of department
- Examination Board
- Lecturers (course coordinators)
- Students
- Alumni / the professional field
- Head of the Education Office
- Department for Educational Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management (part of Student & Educational Affairs)

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<sup>9</sup> W. van Os, *Studeerbaarheid van een curriculum, Onderzoek van Onderwijs*, September 1983

## 2.3 DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THOSE INVOLVED

The faculty regulations set out the duties and responsibilities of the various consultative bodies and committees within the faculty. When it comes to their teaching programmes, faculties may differ in this respect.

The *Faculty Board* is always responsible for approving all changes to the teaching programmes (through the Academic and Examination Regulations). The *portfolio holder for teaching* holds day-to-day responsibility for this mandate (if the faculty has chosen to appoint someone in this position) and is assisted by the Director of Education.

The Faculty Board requires the prior consent of the *Faculty Joint Meeting (Faculty Student Council and the Subcommittee)* for any decision on the faculty regulations, and for approval of or amendment to the Academic and Examination Regulations, with the exception of 'content-related' issues (for further details, see the chapter on Educational Organization).

The *Programme Committee* is composed on the basis of equal representation (i.e. an equal number of students and teaching staff). Every programme is obliged to appoint a Programme Committee, whose main task is to monitor the quality and attainability of a programme and to identify any problem areas. The recommendations made by the Programme Committee are submitted to the programme management or – if it relates directly to teaching staff – to the relevant head of department. The Programme Committee has the right to propose changes of its own and to request additional information on all education-related matters. Changes to the curriculum are submitted to the Programme Committee for advice. The Programme Committee is responsible for the annual evaluation of the Academic and Examination Regulations and for issuing relevant recommendations; since 1 September 2017, the Programme Committee has also had right of consent on specific aspects of the Academic and Examination Regulations (see [VUnet](#) for further details).

The *Director of Studies* ensures that the education proposed is actually provided and meets the quality standards, and draws up an annual teaching schedule for this purpose. In line with the VU Management Model and with a view to planning, Directors of Studies have the authority to recruit staff, in the first instance from the departments of their own faculty. However, if they are unable to recruit staff of the desired calibre and/or expertise within the faculty, they are authorized to recruit staff from other sources. The position of Director of Studies is incompatible with the position of head of department.

The *head of department* is responsible for organizing and coordinating the department's activities. Heads of department discuss the results of course evaluations with lecturers (e.g. in the annual interviews) and monitor compliance with agreements on changes in teaching methods or the educational content of the programme.

The *Examination Board* enforces the Academic and Examination Regulations and organizes and coordinates activities in relation to examinations and final degree assessments. Its duties include appointing examiners and drawing up rules for proper procedure during examinations. In addition, the Examination Board monitors the admission level of students, has the authority to approve or reject the curriculum of individual students, and assesses whether students meet the graduation requirements. Lastly, it is responsible for updating the Rules and Guidelines.

*Lecturers* (and course coordinators) bear responsibility for their own teaching. They have the duty to provide education and they focus on the learning objectives associated with each course they teach and its place in the curriculum. At the same time, they have a duty to ensure that their course teaching methods and examinations reflect the learning objectives. Examinations must therefore be of sufficient quality (see chapter on Assessment and Evaluation). Lecturers are accountable to their head of department on an annual basis. They are also evaluated by students and are partly assessed based on the results of this evaluation (see the chapters on Teaching Evaluation and Staff Policy with regard to teaching).

*Students* are expected to provide a responsible review of the education they have followed by completing course and curriculum evaluations, and by means of participation in the Programme Committee, with a view to safeguarding and improving the quality of education.

*Alumni and representatives of the professional field* are periodically invited to respond to surveys about the teaching programme and its relevance to the job market. Both of these groups can also be involved in the programme by taking part in a Field Advisory Board.

The Department of Education Policy, Quality Assurance and Process Management (part of Student & Educational Affairs) can play a role in improving the quality of education if requested to do so. Faculties can contact the department to obtain support in improving a curriculum, setting up or describing learning pathways, implementing innovations, evaluating problem areas, and so on. The department also supports faculties in developing a new specialization or degree programme and helps reinforce the culture of quality in preparation for an external accreditation. Three [instruments](#) can be deployed for this purpose: the mid-term programme review, an expert group that reads and advises on the self-evaluation report, and a mock inspection organized in preparation for the external review. For details of a protocol for developing a new degree programme or specialization, and the procedure for discontinuing a programme, see Appendix 12.

## 2.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR TEACHING PROGRAMMES

The quality of teaching programmes is monitored by means of internal and external quality assurance (see also the chapter on the Quality Assurance System).

The following elements form the basis of internal quality assurance for teaching programmes:

1. The Programme Committee monitors and advises on educational implementation and the design of the teaching programme. This topic is on the agenda of every meeting-of the Programme Committee and advice on changes to the programme is issued on an annual basis. The Programme Committee records its findings and recommendations in reports which are reviewed on a systematic basis, and reports annually to the Faculty Board (see Appendix 9 for the format of the Programme Committee's annual report).
2. The Examination Board monitors the implementation of the Academic and Examination Regulations and the quality of examinations, and reports annually to the Faculty Board (see Appendix 9 for the format of the Examination Board's annual report).
3. The Faculty Board monitors compliance with faculty policy and faculty agreements, in addition to the performance of the Programme Committee and Examination Board (see Appendix 10 for a format of the faculty's annual teaching report).

4. A [mid-term review](#) is held halfway through the six-year external accreditation cycle for each degree programme as part of the university's quality assurance system.
5. The Executive Board monitors compliance with the university's policy on teaching programmes, covering areas such as academic progress and dropout rates, aggregated results of student evaluations, IT issues, and educational vision. This is discussed in the administrative consultations between the Executive Board and the Faculty Board. The Executive Board makes agreements with the Faculty Board on the results to be achieved in priority areas.

External quality assurance consists of the six-year cycle of programme accreditation carried out by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders ([NVAO](#)).

### 3 QUALITY REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section deals with the quality requirements (mandatory) and recommendations (optional) for the programme. The aim of these requirements and recommendations is to guarantee the quality of the programme and to improve it where necessary. The Executive Board sets out the requirements and recommendations in a number of documents, most notably the Bachelor's and Master's Guidelines. The Faculty Board determines how the faculty puts requirements and recommendations into practice and monitors compliance.

#### 3.1 CONTENT AND METHOD OF THE PROGRAMME

##### Requirements

1. Bachelor's degree programmes are modular and structured as follows:
  - a. An academic core;
  - b. A major worth a minimum of 90 credits and a maximum of 120 credits;
  - c. Electives comprising at least 30 credits.
2. All courses are worth 6 credits and are listed in the University Catalogue, stating content, level, and where applicable, entry requirements. In exceptional cases, a course worth 3 credits or a multiple thereof may be permitted on educational grounds. For each programme, the number of courses with a non-standard credit value may not exceed 10% of the total (i.e. 18 credits).
3. All courses are taught in line with the university's annual calendar.<sup>10</sup>
4. The registration of courses takes place in the periods determined by the Executive Board.
5. The Bachelor's programmes are designed with a view to promoting active participation and the resultant academic success among their students. There are several aspects to achieving this:
  - a. A minimum of 12 contact hours per week (a 14-hour minimum in the first Bachelor's year);
  - b. One credit equates to 28 hours (combined total for contact hours and independent study);
  - c. Courses divided into three levels: introductory (100), in-depth (200) and advanced (300);

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<sup>10</sup> See: <https://vunet.login.vu.nl/services/pages/practicalinformation.aspx?cid=tcm%3a164-368398-16>



- d. Assessment of student performance must be finalized by the end of the course.
6. The Bachelor's programme contains the following components at a minimum: a readily identifiable academic core of at least 24 credits – preferably 30 credits – primarily concentrated in the first two academic years, specifically geared towards the programme domain, and consisting of academic development, research methodology and philosophical training, supplemented where necessary with other relevant subjects (e.g. academic skills, methodology, the philosophy or history of science).
  7. Each programme has a well-formulated educational vision.
  8. The didactic concept is in line with the educational objectives, content and method of the programme.
  9. The final attainment levels can be realistically achieved by following the education provided.
  10. The teaching staff correctly formulate the learning objectives for courses (see Appendix 6), coordinate them with the programme's other courses, and ensure that the types of assessment used reflect the learning objectives. Course learning objectives are stated in the study guide.
  11. The programme promotes educational coherence by organizing a lecturer consultation for each of the three years of the Bachelor's programme and one such consultation for the Master's programme as a whole.

A lecturer consultation can be organized for all of the teaching staff on the programme in a given academic year, but it can also be limited to staff who teach courses that are part of a specific learning pathway. Permanent agenda items for a lecturer consultation can be:

    - the matrix of final attainment levels, learning objectives, teaching methods and assessment: a table in which the various programme components are presented in relation to the programme's final attainment levels (i.e. which components make a major contribution to which attainment levels);
    - the assessment plan and use of assessment matrices and assessment files;
    - ways of increasing rates of academic progress;
    - improving coordination between components;
    - introducing new teaching methods;
    - the need for professional training.
  12. With a view to practising and acquiring relevant skills (e.g. writing papers, giving presentations, IT skills), the programme should describe the required level (or levels in relation to the various years of the programme) and appropriate assessment criteria. These levels apply to all programme components and are made known to the students on the programme. The programme determines the courses in which these skills are practised.
  13. Each programme states how the educational vision of VU Amsterdam is reflected in its own educational vision, and *provides supporting arguments*.
  14. The teaching programme within every degree programme has demonstrable links to scientific research.

*Links between academic research and teaching can be achieved by:*

- *ensuring that teaching staff are involved in scientific research;*
- *ensuring that research skills are incorporated into the educational content of courses;*
- *ensuring that the Master's programmes are inextricably linked to a research setting, either national or international.*

15. Each Bachelor's programme at VU Amsterdam includes a choice of electives worth 30 credits (except for Medicine, Dentistry and Notarial Law, which are subject to specific professional requirements). For all Bachelor's programmes, the electives are scheduled for the first semester of the third year. Students can fulfil the elective requirement in a number of ways. These include taking a minor (a coherent package of elective courses), taking extra options from the programme, doing an internship, or gaining experience abroad (see Appendix 11 for the current minor policy).
16. The programme enables every student to acquire international experience. This might take the form of a stay abroad, a study trip, classes given by teaching staff from abroad or taking courses with a clear international orientation (see also the chapter on Internationalization).
17. Each Bachelor's programme gives students the opportunity to take an honours program (in English). To comply with this requirement, a programme does not need to provide a full honours programme, but it can join in with a faculty or university honours programme. The programme incorporates the honours programme in its Academic and Examination Regulations and makes its own contribution (see also the chapter on the Honours Programme).
18. The programme devotes demonstrable attention to preparing students for the job market.

### Recommendations

1. The programme should ensure that VU Amsterdam's Educational Vision is clearly reflected in the education it provides, in the form of faculty policy plans, learning pathways and individual educational modules.
2. Teaching staff explicitly reflect VU Amsterdam's Educational Vision in their teaching and assessment methods.
3. The programme features a variety of teaching methods and even programmes with large student numbers work in small groups. Teaching methods should encourage students to be actively involved in and to take responsibility for their own learning. The teaching staff facilitates this approach.

## 3.2 FEASIBILITY OF THE PROGRAMME

### Requirements

1. Within the constraints of the academic calendar, the programme ensures that examinations and assignments due for assessment are spread over the year. The academic calendar permitting, examinations should not be planned too close together and should not coincide with submission dates for papers and other assignments in ways that compete for students' study time (see also Section 4.3).
2. The Bachelor's and Master's programmes ensure a good match between the education they provide and the level of incoming students.
3. The Master's programme has adequate and transparent entry requirements.
4. Admission requirements for the Master's programme are formulated in terms of knowledge, insight and skills. These requirements, along with requirements for prior education, are derived from the final attainment levels for the Master's programme and set in such a way that students admitted can reasonably achieve the final attainment levels within the programme's official duration and by complying with the study load. These requirements are detailed in the programme's Academic and Examination Regulations. Additional requirements can be set for each specialization.
5. The programme, with its academic advisor as first point of contact, makes the following assurances to students with dyslexia, a disability or a chronic illness:
  - a. Accurate and comprehensive information will be made available on special provisions, facilities, or arrangements designed to ensure that they will be able to participate in and complete the programme.
  - b. If necessary, they will receive guidance in compiling an adapted programme of studies. These adjustments can consist of an adapted timetable, alternative teaching methods or teaching modules, adapted learning materials and adapted examinations.
  - c. If they fall behind with their studies, they will be referred to the student counsellor who will inform them about their right to financial compensation.
6. In addition, the programme (academic advisor, Director of Studies) ensures that lecturers are well informed about students with a disability participating in the programme and the special provisions, facilities or schemes available to them. For further details, see the chapters on Student Guidance and Studying with a disability.

### 3.3 EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME

(see also the chapter on Teaching Evaluation)

#### Requirements

1. In its meetings, the Programme Committee discusses the results of course-evaluations and, where relevant, curriculum evaluations, and identifies points for improvement. It does this in writing.
2. On an annual basis, the Programme Committee reviews both the Academic and Examination Regulations and the programme, and advises where necessary on the updating of final attainment levels, on adapting courses or course components, on improving the programme's attainability, and on modernizing and updating the programme. This process takes in the results of course evaluations and curriculum evaluations.
3. The programme decides annually which course years will be subject to a curriculum evaluation (i.e. an evaluation that covers all courses that make up a single year of the programme). Each year of the programme is subject to a curriculum evaluation at least once every three years. In addition, the programme regularly carries out an evaluation of the entire Bachelor's programme (using the final Bachelor's questionnaire).
4. The programme carries out systematic alumni surveys (for both the Bachelor's and Master's programmes). As a result of the alumni survey, points for improvement are drawn up by the portfolio holder for teaching, who also ensures that improvement plans are implemented.
5. The programme systematically asks Bachelor's students for their views on aspects of the entire Bachelor's programme. This evaluation should provide the information needed to make improvements to overarching aspects such as provision of information, the teaching programme (curriculum, teaching methods, study load, etc.), and study advice and student counselling. A vital question is whether students actually learn what the programme is aiming to teach them. If the evaluation indicates that this is not the case, improvements must be initiated.

## 4 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Examples of an educational vision (Dutch)

Appendix 2 - Overview final attainment levels, Dublin Descriptors, forms of teaching and assessment

Appendix 3 - Dublin Descriptors at Bachelor's and Master's level

Appendix 4 - Linking final attainment levels to Dublin Descriptors

Appendix 5- Descriptors of the levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (Dutch)

Appendix 6 - Formulating learning objectives (Dutch)

Appendix 7 - Example of a didactic concept (Dutch)

Appendix 8 - Skills yardstick for the Faculty of Humanities (Dutch)

Appendix 9 - Format for annual report of Programme Committee, Examination Board and Programme Committee

Appendix 10 - Format of faculty annual teaching report

Appendix 11 - VU Amsterdam's Minor Policy (approved) (Dutch)

Appendix 12 - Protocol for starting, changing or discontinuing a degree programme or specialization (Dutch)