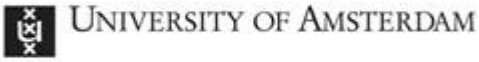
THE VSNU IN 2015

WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE



vsnu
vereniging van universiteiten
association of universities
THE NETHERLANDS

January 9th, 2015

INDEX

Introduction with strategic questions: With a view to the future 4
Association of Universities' Annual Calendar: The VSNU in 2015 6
APPENDIX: Projects per focus area 7
A. Overarching projects 7
1. Strategy for the future 7
2. Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research 7
3. General Performance Agreement 2.0 7
B. Education 7
4. Accreditation system review 7
5. Teaching agenda 8
6. Study Success 2.0 8
7. Flexible higher education for working people 8
8. Alignment with the labour market 8
9. Selection at the gate 8
C. Research and Knowledge Transfer 8
10. Further development of the Science Vision & Science Agenda 8
11. Open access 8
12. Impact of Dutch Universities 9
13. Review of the Code of Conduct on Academic Integrity 9
14. Evaluation of valorisation indicators 9
15. Research data management 9
16. Animal experiments 9
D. Human Resources 9
17. Collective Labour Agreement for the Dutch Universities (CAO Nu) 9
18. Gender diversity 9
19. Researcher employability 9
20. PhD students 9
21. Work and Security Act 10
22. Balance between education and research 10
23. UFO Job Classification System 10
24. Working Conditions Catalogue 10
E. International Affairs 10
25. Branding of Dutch universities 10
26. Vision on global development 10
27. Strengthening the internationalisation of education 10
28. Expansion of legal and regulatory frameworks 10
29. Implementation of the national scholarship programme 10
30. Binding talent 11
31. Development of European pension fund 11
32. Horizon 2020 lobbying activities 11

F. Finances 11
33. Sustainable financing 11
34. Student loans system 11
35. Transparency 11
36. Central government grants in 2015 and 2016 11
G. Governance & Accountability 12
37. Monitoring of the General Agreement and performance agreements 12
38. Review of administrative relationships 12
39. Monitoring of sector-wide codes of conduct 12
40. Interoperability of research systems 12
H. Communication and Public Affairs 12
41. Representation and communicating with the member base 12
42. Communication activities 13
43. Lobbying activities 13
44. Parliament and Science 13

With a view to the future

For the Netherlands' universities, 2014 was an especially memorable year. As in previous years, we welcomed a larger number of first-year students: a seven percent increase as compared to 2013. The enrolment date for new students was rescheduled to the earlier date of 1 May. This was implemented smoothly, and all students will be offered matching interviews. The VSNU and Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences presented their joint International Vision. The first concrete activity ensuing from this document is a new international scholarship programme for incoming and outgoing students.

2014 was also an eventful year in terms of research. Debates on the academic culture and pressure to publish led to the amendment of the Standard Evaluation Protocol for research inspections. As confirmed by the Interdepartmental Policy Study on Science, the Dutch research system delivers excellent performance levels on relatively low budgets. The end of the year saw publication of the government's long-awaited Science Vision, and the successful conclusion of VSNU's initial negotiations on open access.

The year 2015 is shaping up to be another intensive year. The VSNU's annual calendar is included as an appendix to this document and outlines our key themes and projects for the coming year.

These projects and key themes all centre around four major strategic questions. Although these questions have featured prominently on the universities' agenda for some time now, they have become increasingly relevant in the past period:

1) **What will the students and education of the future be like?**

- How will the trend towards shorter study periods impact effective current study success rate policies? Will the proposed abolition of the basic grant and the introduction of a student loans scheme prompt students to further reduce the duration of their studies?
- We are seeing the emergence of new forms of education: tailor-made, personalised, module-based, online, and international education, and part-time variants. Which steps should universities take to cater to this growing diversity?
- The trend towards the digitisation of education and online learning continues to gather pace. How will this affect the aspects of quality assurance, financeability and integrity?

2) **How can we further improve the quality of education and research?**

- How can we further improve the quality of education? How should we apply the resources made available as a part of the proposed student loans scheme (some EUR 650 million in the years ahead?)?
- Scientific culture is the subject of lively debate. The current quantitative approach has been the focus of justifiable scrutiny. We are also seeing a growing emphasis on the impact of research. What is the social and economic value of research?
- Academic careers are also the subject of debate: how can we ensure a better balance between education and research? Is education sufficiently appreciated? How do we prepare young researchers for a career outside the academic world?

3) How can we strengthen our international positioning?

- Reputation matters. With the ongoing trend towards globalisation, the name recognition of universities, scientists and disciplines is crucial. Efforts to establish the Netherlands as a magnet for talent will require effective positioning and the development of a clearly-defined image in collaboration with the business community, universities of applied sciences and individual regions.
- The Netherlands ranks among the EU's best performing countries in the area of research. Retaining this position as other emerging countries continue to develop and competing nations increase their investments represents a considerable challenge. A greater flow of funds from the EU (Horizon 2020) is also increasing the pressure to match government funding.

4) How can we ensure the appropriate balance between trust and accountability?

- The tension between autonomy and regulatory pressure, trust and accountability is growing. There is an ever-greater need to bind universities to performance agreements. This development reflects the continued demand for greater transparency, whereby universities are required to account for the results achieved through public funding. What are the preconditions for an ideal administrative relationship between government and universities?

Universities are among Europe's oldest institutions. The field in which they operate is in a state of flux, prompting constant reassessment of their strategies for future research and education. The VSNU supports the Dutch universities in this process. We look forward to a challenging year, with an unprecedented focus on future developments.

Josephine Scholten, Executive Director
Karl Dittrich, President

Students...
... have a thirst for knowledge.
... want tailor-made education.
... want prospects for future.
... have no boundaries.

Researchers...
... aim to excel in their field.
... contribute to the quality of life.
... advance scientific development.
... seek to share knowledge with a wide audience.

Citizens...
... are worried about the future.
... want to progress.
... want value for the money they pay in taxes.
... are seeking stability in a changing society.

The VSNU in 2015

Association of Universities´ Annual Calendar

This annual calendar describes the Association of Universities' key focus areas for 2015. The calendar was adopted by the presidents of the Executive Boards of the universities. The project portfolio comprises three categories: future-oriented, social and political.

1. Future-oriented and proactive
The universities' future-oriented and proactive projects are jointly conducted on the basis of common interests and the urgent need to respond effectively to future developments. Projects in this category include:

- Strategy for the future
- Open access
- Review of administrative relationships
- Balance between education and research
- Development of a European pension fund

2. Social and performance-oriented
Social and performance-oriented projects and activities are aimed at improving the quality of teaching and research, and ensuring accountability for these aspects. Projects in this category include:

- Teacher quality in primary and secondary education
- Evaluation of valorisation indicators
- Monitoring of General Agreement and performance agreements
- Impact of Dutch Universities

3. Political and reactive
A third category of projects relate to current political and administrative developments. Projects in this category include:

- The Minister's Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research
- Further development of the national Science Vision/science agenda
- Implementation of the proposed student loans scheme
- General Performance Agreement 2.0 with the Minister
- Information Agreement with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

The appendix to this document features the full list of projects to be conducted by the VSNU office in collaboration with university staff and partners from the professional field.

Further information
http://vsnu.nl/focus-areas-en.html: VSNU activities within the various focus areas
http://vsnu.nl/general-board-en.html: composition of General Board
http://vsnu.nl/steering-committees-en.html: steering committee structure
http://vsnu.nl/vsnu-team-eng.html: VSNU team, including contact details

APPENDIX

Projects per focus area

The 2015 annual calendar was adopted by the VSNU's General Board. The General Board consists of Board members from the fourteen Dutch universities. The calendar was prepared by steering groups, comprising a delegation of university presidents, rectors, and vice-presidents. The steering groups are supported by some thirty staff members at the VSNU office. To this end, the office has been divided into specific focus areas. Each focus area supports the associated steering group. Like the steering groups, the focus area teams collaborate closely. The appendix to this document features a list of projects to be conducted by the VSNU office in 2015 in collaboration with university staff and partners from the professional field.

A. Overarching projects

The year 2015 will see the implementation of three overarching projects involving almost all steering groups and focus areas.

1. Strategy for the future: The Association has been actively developing its own calendar and long/term vision since 2013. For example, we jointly develop what we refer to as our 'own vision' that enables us to operate and direct activities in a proactive manner. We will be holding an internal retreat event on 23 and 24 January 2015. The event will be themed around developments in education and their impact on financing issues and governance in anticipation of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science's upcoming Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research.

2. Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research: The Ministry of Education Culture and Science is scheduled to submit its Strategic Agenda for Higher Education and Research to the Dutch Lower House in the summer of 2015. The VSNU will co-read draft versions of the strategic agenda and provide input. Its input will be based on an independent vision developed by the VSNU.

3. General Performance Agreement 2.0: The government's Science Vision will serve as a basis for discussions on a potential new general agreement between the VSNU and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. This agreements sets the national framework for possible new performance based contracts between the government and individual universities. It will incorporate the experience gained from the current performance agreements and cohere with the announced quality agreements as a part of the new student loans scheme.

B. Education

Academic development is key to all university education. The relationship with research activities is vital. Universities work to ensure the quality of the teaching process, the level of diplomas, the integrity of education and its relevance to the labour market.

4. Accreditation system review: The Minister of Education, Culture and Science aims to review the current accreditation system. The VSNU's 'Post-2017 Accreditation' memorandum describes a system based around institutional accreditation and limited programme-based accreditation, under which the institutions would be free to choose the system that best suits them. This memorandum forms the basis for the VSNU's negotiations with the minister.

5. Teaching agenda: In 2014 VSNU presented its own Teaching Agenda aimed at increasing the number and quality of academically trained teachers in the classroom of primary and secondary education. In 2015 we will focus on themes such as the adjustment of relationship charts, the introduction of suitability assessments, increasing tailor-made programmes and greater flexibility, academic Bachelor's programmes for primary education, the quality of teacher-training programmes and recruitment for the Education minor.

6. Study Success 2.0: In recent years the VSNU has organised dozens of meetings at which students, lecturers, executive officers and policy staff shared experiences relating to improving study success rates. These meetings will be continued in 2015. The project aims to support the universities in their efforts to increase study success rates, partly on account of the relevant performance agreements with the minister.

7. Flexible higher education for working people: The introduction of the student loans scheme could prompt students to seek employment immediately after completing their Bachelor's programme and postpone their Master's. Universities may be forced to respond to this development. The universities also offer refresher courses for professionals in fields such as healthcare and law. Which areas offer potential for further inter-institutional collaboration? Which role can online education play in this regard?

8. Alignment with the labour market: In the year ahead the VSNU will collaborate with various policy staff members from the institutions to develop a VSNU memorandum regarding alignment between education and the labour market. Among other aspects, the memorandum will focus on extracurricular activities, guest lectures, research assignments, training courses, career days, practical assignments and final research projects in the business sector.

9. Selection at the gate: Universities have an increasing array of options for selection at the gate. A working group of experts is currently assessing questions, such as which selection criteria contribute to an effective match between students and their study programme? What are the most effective and efficient selection methods? How can we ensure the transparency of the selection procedure?

C. Research and Knowledge Transfer

Dutch universities are responsible for eighty percent of all research conducted in the Netherlands. Their excellent performance on the basis of relatively modest resources is now broadly recognised. The social impact of research is a key theme for all Dutch universities. Crucial questions include: how can science contribute to today´s key social issues, what is the economic impact of research and can it be made measurable, and how can we make scientific knowledge freely available through systems such as open access? The VSNU will strive to influence the national and European debate on research and valorisation, and to improve the preconditions for a high-quality research environment.

10. Further development of the Science Vision & Science Agenda: Among other key initiatives, the government's Science Vision sets out a national science agenda. The universities will contribute to the development of the national agenda on the basis of their profiling plans and priority areas. They will also factor in the regional dimension.

11. Open access: In 2014 and 2015 the VSNU will conduct negotiations on the transition to open access with various major publishers. These publishers include Elsevier, Wiley, Springer (completed), Taylor & Francis, and Kluwer. The VSNU office supervises the universities' efforts in adjusting their research information systems to enable them to count the number of open access publications.

12. Impact of Dutch Universities: In 2015 the VSNU will launch a project to assess whether the economic impact of Dutch research can be made measurable at system level.

13. Review of the Code of Conduct on Academic Integrity: The Dutch Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice forms the core of the Dutch universities' integrity policy. The desirability of a thorough review of this code will be assessed over the course of 2015. The VSNU will conduct this assessment in collaboration with the KNAW and NWO.

14. Evaluation of valorisation indicators: The VSNU oversaw the development of a 'Valorisation indicator framework' in 2013. These indicators are set to be evaluated towards the end of 2015. The VSNU office will supervise the process, organising one or more workshops to share the experience gained.

15. Research data management: The storage and accessibility of research data is becoming an increasingly crucial issue for universities. The NWO and EU are planning to impose research data management requirements in their grant conditions. The universities have a need for coordination and sharing knowledge. The VSNU office will seek to support them in this process.

16. Animal experiments: In response to negative publicity on animal experiments over the past few years, the universities are currently seeking to devote more structural attention to this aspect. For example, they could provide information on their procedures and methods, underline the importance of animal experiments and draw attention to their search for feasible alternatives. The VSNU-endorsed Animal Experiments Openness Code plays a key role in this process.

D. Human Resources

Teaching and research of high quality is inextricably linked to the quality of staff. Among other aspects, the quality of research universities is reflected in their appeal to talented academic staff. The effort to bind and retain talent and increase the universities' appeal is thus key to all projects conducted in the field of Human Resources.

17. Collective Labour Agreement for the Dutch Universities (CAO Nu): The VSNU entered into a new collective labour agreement in late 2014. The following themes will be continued or initiated in 2015: CAO of the future, reorganisations within the CAO (shorter completion time and better alignment with case law) and aspects relating to international staff. A number of agreements arising from the previous CAO are also on the agenda: the tightening of systematic personnel policy, further investments in development, closer 'job-to-job' guidance and strengthening employment practices.

18. Gender diversity: The Dutch scientific community is leaving potential female talent untapped, especially with regard to high-level positions. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has established a gender task force, in which the VSNU participates. The VSNU will help the universities share their best practices in this area.

19. Researcher employability: A large portion of the talented young researchers trained by universities (PhDs, postdocs) do not opt to for a further career in the academic world. How can the universities prepare this group for a career outside the academic world? Are their communications in this area effective enough? How does one go about selecting talent? These are the key questions underlying this project.

20. PhD students: The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has created legal space for experimentation with PhD students. The VSNU is supervising the universities in this

experimental process. The VSNU is also working to ensure the uniformity of registration systems and is responsible for national monitoring.

21. Work and Security Act: Many academic careers start with a series of consecutive temporary contracts. The new Work and Security Act places restrictions on the number of temporary contracts. The VSNU is assessing the current possibilities within the framework of the law. We are also assessing adjustments expected to ensue from this law with regard to dismissals and unemployment benefits.

22. Balance between education and research: This project will assess the potential for a personnel policy based on greater incentives for the provision of excellent education. Experts on education policy and personnel policy are currently developing proposals, exchanging best practices and prioritising the issue within the institutions.

23. UFO Job Classification System: What are the requirements and salary scales for each position? All Dutch universities apply the same job classification system: UFO. The VSNU manages the UFO system and ensures that it remains up-to-date and applicable.

24. Working Conditions Catalogue: The Working Conditions Act offers employers the option of preparing tailor-made occupational health and safety measures in consultation with their employees. The universities have jointly prepared a Working Conditions Catalogue outlining the various possible measures. The VSNU is responsible for maintaining this catalogue.

E. International Affairs

In 2015, International Affairs focus area will focus on the consolidation and implementation of the International Vision submitted to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science by the VSNU and the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences in 2014.

25. Branding of Dutch universities: Among other activities, in 2015 the VSNU will take part in trade missions to Canada and Indonesia and the Chinese visit to the Netherlands. We will also be working in association with Nuffic to develop a communications strategy aimed at positioning the Netherlands' as an appealing country in which to study, conduct research and work.

26. Vision on global development: In early 2015 efforts will be undertaken to prepare a seminar that should yield a supplementary vision on universities and universities of applied sciences' contribution to global development. We will also be working in association with Nuffic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to assess the potential for improving existing training courses and grants/scholarships.

27. Strengthening the internationalisation of education: Dutch universities are offering a growing range of English-language programmes. We will be working in association with Nuffic to improve the accessibility of available expertise.

28. Expansion of legal and regulatory frameworks: We will continue to work with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to create legal space for a greater number of joint programmes. This also applies to transnational education, including forms of blended learning and offshoring.

29. Implementation of the national scholarship programme: The new scholarship programme for international students is set to take effect in the 2015-2016 academic year. We

are working to develop the programme structure and ensure effective implementation in collaboration with the universities and Nuffic.

30. Binding talent: The 'Make it in the Netherlands' programme will lend an important impetus to efforts to help international students find work in the Netherlands. The VSNU must find effective ways of quantifying the programme's impact.

31. Development of European pension fund: The VSNU is involved in the Directorate-General for Research & Innovation's European task force. We are also in regular contact with the ABP, the pension fund for employees in the government, public and education sectors, and Dutch employers.

32. Horizon 2020 lobbying activities: The VSNU aims to ensure the continuation of or to achieve an increase in the relatively high Dutch share of European research grants. Crucially, the Netherlands should not appear to be making excessive demands. In 2015 a seminar will be held aimed at maintaining the Netherlands' profile as an active player. The VSNU is also preparing a concise overview of the Netherlands' successful collaborations with less developed European countries.

F. Finances

The issue of funding is a key aspect of the debate on the universities' strategy for the future. The VSNU aims to offer insight into the required investment burden and the relationship between investments and returns. The growing expectations and tasks placed upon universities in combination with declining funding form a constraint in this regard.

33. Sustainable financing: The aim is to ensure that universities achieve a stronger, sustainable financial position within the context of current and future developments. The VSNU is working to identify threats and opportunities that could directly or indirectly affect the universities' macro budgets.

34. Student loans system: This project centres around the financial consequences of the transition of the basic study grant to a student loans system. Key themes include quality agreements and improving the quality of teaching, the distribution of revenues between research universities and universities of applied sciences, pre-investment in higher education for 2015-2017 period, the right to endorse outline budgets and the funding of pre-Master's programmes.

35. Transparency: The VSNU is working to improve perceptions of the universities' financial position. We are also conducting an exploratory study in order to pro-actively improve transparency on the application of university funds. This will allow us to substantiate future claims or budget cuts more effectively.

36. Central government grants in 2015 and 2016: The VSNU will closely monitor the procedural and substantive aspects of the preparation and implementation of the national budget for 2015 and 2016. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is considering whether to base future calculations of the price per student exclusively on students who complete their programmes within the official time period (no delays). The VSNU advocates carrying out the transition with due care, as the introduction of the student loans system could potentially lead to an unexpected chain of events.

G. Governance & Accountability

In addition to the projects outlined below, the VSNU permanently focuses on: coordination of the WO Monitor (a survey among graduate Master's students), the management and accessibility of information sources, the analysis of rankings, coordination of the Information Agreement between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and VSNU and coordination of VSNU-wide contracts. The aspects of governance and accountability are key to all of these projects and issues.

37. Monitoring of the General Agreement and performance agreements: The performance agreements are set to be evaluated in 2016. The VSNU and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will make arrangements for the final evaluation over the course of 2015. This evaluation will take into account the various preconditions adjusted over the course of the process and the fact that the government failed to implement all the agreed conditions.

38. Review of administrative relationships: Which regulations can the government impose on universities? How much autonomy do the universities have, and why is this important? What is the ideal administrative relationship between government and universities? The VSNU aims to discuss these questions with the Ministry of Education Culture and Science on the basis of the Ministry's new Strategic Agenda. The debate will be held on the basis of a position paper currently under preparation.

39. Monitoring of sector-wide codes of conduct: Codes of conduct are a key instrument that help universities retain their autonomy and provide accountability on their activities. The VSNU monitors member compliance with these codes, which include the Market and Government Code, Guidelines governing the Use of Personal Data, the Good Governance Code, the Animal Experimentation Code and the Scientific integrity Code.

40. Interoperability of research systems: Universities use systems to register their research input: the publications of their researchers. All universities use their own unique systems. The VSNU seeks to ensure that these various systems can communicate with one another and that uniform definitions are applied, working in association with both European and Dutch organisations.

H. Communication and Public Affairs

Acting as a spokesperson, lobbying and broader Association communications with its member base and the outside world are among the VSNU's most important tasks. These duties are the responsibility of the Communication and Public Affairs team, and clearly relate to the VSNU's focus area themes. The team supports the focus area leaders in their communication and lobbying activities. The VSNU is also indirectly involved in communication activities outside the Association. On a limited scale, the VSNU supports initiatives that contribute to the positive perception of the universities and underline the Association's key messages.

41. Representation and communicating with the member base:
Representation activities are conducted on the basis of key messages prepared and maintained in consultation with the universities. In 2015 efforts will be undertaken to improve the press environment on www.vsnu.nl, in order to facilitate site visitors in their search for information. We will also be further professionalising our Twitter account in collaboration with social media experts. Other channels used to communicate the VSNU's activities and positions the weekly PA update for our member base, the monthly VSNU headlines and the video report featuring our annual overview.

42. Communication activities: The following VSNU-wide communication activities have been scheduled for 2015:

- Four VSNU Cafés, at which politicians, academics, administrators, public officials and other key figures will debate current political and academic themes.
- VSNU Spring Drinks event for business relations and the VSNU Executive Board.
- Science & Society evening: a dinner debate for prominent social and political figures in the Ridderzaal (The Hague).
- The coordination of communications on the traditional opening of the academic year in early September.
- Coordination of the U-meets and autumn Science Weekend, during which the universities open their doors to the general public.

Certain aspects of these proven activities are in need of renewal. For example, the VSNU Cafés and annual Spring Drinks event are set to be revamped.

43. Lobbying activities: The VSNU closely monitors political and administrative developments. The Association will provide both solicited and unsolicited advice to public officials at the relevant departments as well as members of the upper and lower houses of Dutch parliament and members of the European parliament. The VSNU promotes its positions through targeted discussions with politicians, updates to the Dutch parliament, fact sheets and the above communication activities. Over the course of 2015, the association will also actively mediate in arranging work visits to the universities by members of parliament. The potential for further strengthening our lobbying activities in Brussels will be assessed in collaboration with the International Affairs focus area.

44. Parliament and Science: This project is set to be continued in 2015, and is based around a collaboration between the NWO, KNAW, VSNU, Young Academy and Dutch Lower House. The Lower House aims to strengthen its knowledge position through the alliance. The scientific organisations aim to contribute to the parliamentary process through the provision of scientific knowledge. This includes breakfast meetings with members of parliament and academics, scientific fact sheets and network surveys.