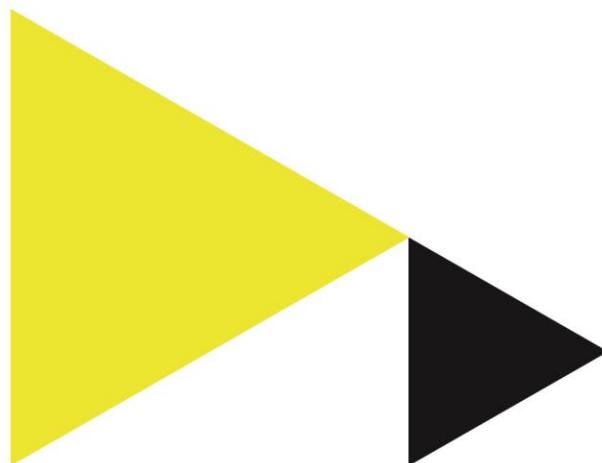


Room to learn

For the official opening of the 2020-2021 academic year



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AUAS Executive Board

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Room to learn

This academic year is set to get off to an unusual start. We miss the bustling resurgence of campus life, the big reunion after summer holidays, and we miss it a lot. One thing's for sure: Not only will the start of the new year be different, the whole of 2020-2021 will be dominated by an uncertain future that is yet to take shape.

While we won't be organising a Student experience at Wibauthof or a jam-packed opening ceremony with festive drinks, we are starting the year with a sense of confidence and pride. Although the opening ceremony may have been downscaled, decentralised and organised in a blended format, we will – as always – reflect on the past year, look ahead to the coming one and focus on each other as we do it.

We will be welcoming our first-year students during the programme introduction, organising a second edition of Tune In (our programme for students who are the first in their family to pursue academic studies) and will be offering information, virtual networking opportunities and a summer school through our Start Off Strong programme. Staff are interacting again at our various campuses, within social distancing guidelines.

Students are welcome in our buildings once again and will be celebrating the start of the new year with our staff. Make no mistake, the restrictions imposed in connection with the coronavirus are both serious and far-reaching. In fact, they have turned our world upside down from both staff and students' perspectives. Still, today also marks a collective sigh of relief as we partially reopen the AUAS. After months of lockdown, we can now resume on-campus research and education in line with our institution's identity. Student numbers have also started to increase again cautiously, growing by a few percentage points. We are and remain a large, robust and stable institution.

Creating space during the coronavirus pandemic

We have all faced a series of individual challenges since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March of this year and we were forced to close our buildings. In some cases, those challenges proved to be very tough indeed. In addition to the disease's impact on students and colleagues, the lockdown also affected everyone differently. Parents were suddenly forced to combine work with childcare and organise home schooling for their children. Lecturers teaching online regularly faced a wall of black screens as students left their cameras off. It also became difficult to accurately gauge the educational impact of their lessons. Students and staff for whom actual interactions within our institution are crucial in avoiding loneliness, lost touch with each other. Students also faced uncertainty about graduating and continuing their studies, coupled with the pressure of mounting student debt. However, education continued in spite of everything and most students were able to complete their year as planned. We can all take pride in that achievement

and we would like to take this opportunity to thank you all – students and staff – for your continued dedication and effort. That goes for the students and their parents who kept us informed about their ups and downs and suggested useful improvements; the programme managers and lecturers who prepared the curriculum; the lecturers who pioneered online didactics and supported and inspired others; the schedulers facing an especially complex puzzle this year; the representative advisory bodies who did everything in their power to facilitate rapid decision-making. Finally, let's not forget the support staff who worked all summer to prepare the campus and ICT facilities for our partial reopening. We couldn't be more proud of their efforts.

Although there's no way to do everyone justice here, we would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude and respect for every member of the AUAS community. Together, we have created space – in the most literal sense – for education and research. No one needs that space more than our students. After all, you don't get a second chance to study.

Change in the midst of immense pressure

Our long-term programme remains clear and will not change due to current circumstances. We will continue to be driven by the four pillars of our institutional vision: We are a knowledge institution that is focused on students and guided by the principle of cooperation – within and in support of – the Amsterdam region. The previously outlined societal challenges have only intensified as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. These major social developments directly impact the labour market and consequently affect the content and structure of our degree programmes, research and business operations.

Our knowledge institution is committed to the resolution of three major social challenges, internally referred to as the 'three Ds': Sustainability (*Duurzaamheid*), Diversity & Inclusion and Digitalisation. We develop all research and education on the basis of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a part of these efforts, we established a new position, Professor of Practice, this past year. British economist Kate Raworth was the first to be appointed to the new post. Raworth is currently working intensively to elaborate and promote her vision on sustainable development (based on the so-called doughnut model) within our institution and the city of Amsterdam as a whole. A huge success. We will appoint a second Professor of Practice in the field of responsible technology during this academic year. We are delighted to announce that Marleen Stikker has agreed to fill this position. Marleen Stikker is an internet pioneer, founder and director of De Waag and a widely respected advocate of open, honest and inclusive technology. Her acclaimed work, *'Het internet is stuk, maar we kunnen het repareren'* (*The internet is broken, but we can fix it*) was published in 2009. The book analyses the current state of the internet and outlines a path towards a humane digital future, based on the sovereignty and agency of all citizens. Like Kate Raworth, Marleen Stikker will be working to challenge and inspire our education and research. This will be crucial as major societal developments continually force us to re-evaluate our curricula and research in order to meet the needs of future professionals. In addition to educational content, this also concerns didactics and the atmosphere at our degree programmes.

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Our education is becoming more personalised as we offer greater flexibility in terms of timing and content. This development is both a result of the aforementioned transitions and an autonomous trend. We are making these changes in response to both the needs and expectations of our students and labour market developments. A digital learning platform is a logical part of this development, and will allow students to study at any time and location while enabling more intensive personal supervision. The call for a more robust range of Lifelong Development programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level also reflects this shift in the labour market.

Accessibility and a rich learning environment

Student years are an invaluable period of 'dedicated' time. At its linguistic root, the word *school* refers to the period when children and young adults are still exempted from work so they can receive an education. By this definition, schools are a *haven of personal development*. The need to keep schools open and accessible is all the more pressing in light of the current shortages and demands from specific professions (education, healthcare and technology) and looming economic recession. In addition to children and young adults, this also concerns those interested in lifelong development and anyone who wants or needs to change careers. After all, our current knowledge-intensive society depends on broadly developed, sustainable learning capacity. In fact, innovation would actually be impossible without it. Above all, our society is desperate for people and organisations with versatile professionalism. Short-term solutions such as the appointment of incompetent staff or transfer of public duties to the private sector will simply not suffice. The same applies to a one-sided focus on practical skills. However, co-creation between education and the professional field can yield a genuinely sustainable approach. A good case in point would be Amsterdam's approach to the current teacher shortage in the form of the Teachers' Agenda.

By their nature, schools must also be a 'place', a *space for human interaction*. In addition to the physical space on campus, the virtual realm also offers such a place. In May of last year, we published the '[Strong in turbulent times](#)' memo, encouraging programme teams to consider a new balance between physical and virtual learning and working in line with our institution's unique identity. The current transformation challenges us to consider what we will need to do to in order to be a fully-fledged 'school' once the coronavirus pandemic has ended. What will the rich higher education learning environment of the future look like? In addition to the current campus environment and research-related urban learning environment, this will also include lab-based collaborations between regional partners and local knowledge institutions. However, this new form of education also requires the design of new types of *student engagement* or even student governance formats and will inevitably involve the development of hybrid teaching methods – our new DNA.

Digitalisation as a challenge

This leads us to reflect on the actual process of digitalisation. First and foremost, the responsible digitalisation of our education will require solid privacy and reliable systems and working methods. However, this is just the beginning. We are facing a complex practical, intellectual and ethical challenge.

The successful digitalisation of our education must be underpinned by coherent didactic principles and supported by development programmes for our staff. Finally, we must work to maintain or – better yet – improve accessibility for our students. Our education should prepare students for digital citizenship, on the basis of a balanced investment agenda. The same applies to our research activities: Who owns the data, for whom are the results intended and who sets the research priorities?

Digitalisation offers vast potential opportunities while challenging us to develop a new equilibrium. Ivo van der Werk took up his new position as our Digital Transformation Officer in April of this year. He will be spearheading our digital agenda with Rector Geleyn Meijer and several other colleagues. Our new Professor of Practice, Marleen Stikker, will undoubtedly contribute to the development of this agenda, offering a constructive critical perspective.

2021-2026 Strategic Plan

The draft version of our Strategic Plan for the 2021-2026 period is now ready. This involved numerous consultations throughout all layers of the institution. The key themes will undoubtedly seem familiar. We will ensure continuity in terms our education, research and organisational policies, and our vision will remain unchanged. However, the nature of this Strategic Plan has changed in comparison with previous years. We now regard the Plan as a working document for our professional organisation rather than a blueprint for the coming years. The concept of ownership will be key in the coming planning period, as will manoeuvrability. The world is changing both rapidly and constantly. As a knowledge institution, we are both evolving with the times and helping to shape this change.

The current transformation of the education sector is taking concrete shape. The experience we were forced to gain this spring enabled us to make enormous strides in educational development. While face-to-face education will inevitably continue, we will also keep offering more flexible and time-independent content as we reach cross-programme agreements on curricula and logistics. The Well-organised Education programme will be a key pillar of this transformation. We will consolidate and strengthen our portfolio of Master's and Associate degrees. We will further align Bachelor's education and research through our Communities of Practice and Communities of Learners. We will periodically evaluate our degree programmes, and assess their topicality. The five Centres of Expertise will serve as drivers of research and creativity, both within and outside our institution. Our Lifelong Learning programmes will be explicitly linked to levels five through eight of the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The AUAS will increasingly focus on Lifelong Learning, applying the flexible learning pathways used in regular degree programmes as a basis for our activities.

The SDGs are key to our value system. We will thus remain committed to providing sustainable and accessible education and research within a diverse and inclusive institution. Every talent counts. We must acknowledge our differences. Not in order to divide, but to connect and build a new collective identity.

Conclusion

The new year is set to begin. We have returned to campus and finally have the space we need to interact and learn together. We are and remain a large, robust and stable institution. In addition to new students, this year also marks the arrival of many new colleagues at our programme teams, departments and services. Staff changes at the faculties of Health, Sports and Nutrition, and Technology also resulted in the appointment of new Deans.

The AUAS community faces its first key challenge in September: the panel responsible for assessing our quality agreements will visit us in preparation for the NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) ruling. We look forward to their visit with a sense of confidence.

Room to learn. As an institution with a clearly defined identity and value system, we offer our students and researchers the space they need. We also make sure to give ourselves that same space, as we move towards a new equilibrium between physical and virtual interaction. Together, these measures will allow the AUAS to remain true to its core mission: *Creating Tomorrow Together*.