

Strategic plan 2017-2021

Short version

1. Preamble

The University of Humanistic Studies is a denominational university, inspired by humanist traditions. It was founded in 1989 to offer a professional education programme for humanistic chaplains¹. It has now evolved into an academic knowledge centre with wider-ranging ambitions.

In 2017, the university offers three accredited education programmes: the Bachelor's programme of Humanistic Studies, the Master's programme of Humanistic Studies (a three-year programme for humanistic chaplains), and a one-year Master's programme in Care Ethics & Policy. Additionally, the university has its own graduate school for PhD students. Since personal development and social development are important goals (the humanist ideal of 'Bildung'), the university's research, education and mission emphatically converge here:

The University of Humanistic Studies pursues high-quality scientific research and education on the basis of core humanist values, thereby contributing to a humane society in which all people can live meaningful lives.

It is not difficult to see Paul Ricoeur's 'ethical aim' reflected in the mission of the university: to achieve self-esteem by living a good life, with and for others, within the context of just institutions.

A denominational university in the 21st century

In its mission, the university rests on the three pillars of contemporary humanism as formulated by the Dutch Humanist League (Humanistisch Verbond):

- Humanism is a *worldview* that postulates the dignity and autonomy of every individual and that is inspired by ideals of humanity.
- Humanism is a *political-ethical* commitment with a strong societal component.
- Humanism encompasses the pursuit of *a good and meaningful life*.

In these pillars we can in turn recognise the three elementary philosophical inquiries that must continually be pursued within the framework of one's own time and culture, namely the inquiry into truth, into goodness, and into beauty. The three pillars are translated into a single research programme that also incorporates the core of humanistic chaplaincy: *the optimisation of people's potential and possibilities to lead a dignified and meaningful life*. In education and research, humanism's philosophical and political-ethical aspirations deliberately have equivalent roles. It follows that both research and education at the University of Humanistic Studies are socially engaged and critical in a constructive manner. The main scientific, worldview and political-ethical values that underpin and inspire the university's education and research are as follows:

Scientific values

The university fully underwrites the academic values that underpin proper scientific practice, as set out in the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Academic Practice (*Nederlandse Gedragscode Wetenschapsbeoefening*). The university aims to ensure that its research and education fulfil the

¹ Humanistic chaplaincy is the professional counselling of and care for people with spiritual questions or needs, and the provision of professional advice regarding ethical and/or worldview aspects in health care and policy making. Humanistic chaplaincy aims to strengthen people's spiritual resilience – that is, to activate people's ability, in their specific context, to realise a dignified autonomy in mind and action, for themselves and for others, in situations of hardship, vulnerability or adversity.

requirements of scrupulousness, reliability, verifiability, impartiality, independence and responsibility. This is important, because the university is committed to political-ethical goals in addition to scientific goals. This morally and socially engaged message is heard more clearly when backed up by solid research. The university is also committed to transforming the currently multi-disciplinary character of its research into inter-disciplinary research. The societal challenges relevant to the mission of the university are so complex that inter-disciplinary collaboration is imperative. Finally, the university takes a positive view of the *Science in Transition* movement to improve the balance between the pressure to perform, a scrupulous scientific practice, and the personal well-being of the researchers. In the coming five years, efforts will be devoted to the quality of scientific output, to promoting proper scientific practice in research and education, and to safeguard the well-being of lecturers, researchers and support staff.

Denominational values

The university is keenly aware of its humanist roots. Humanism is an open worldview, characterised by critical (self-)reflection and a continuous dialogue with others. Humanism stands for values such as freedom (understood as resilient autonomy), responsibility (understood as the task to care for oneself, others and the world and to be accountable for that care), justice (understood as a commitment to a society with institutions that protect against exploitation and humiliation), solidarity (understood as spiritual and material care for one another), and pluralism/inclusiveness (understood as the right of individuals and groups to their own identity). These values serve as guideline when making choices in research and education, and are themselves an object of study.

Political-ethical values

Humanism, as a social-political practice, seeks to engage societal and political movements in debate. The core questions relate to humanisation: what dynamics hamper or promote a humane society? What social and political practices help people to flourish? What does a dignified human life require of our societal organisations and institutions? How can humiliation, exploitation, discrimination and disrespect be avoided? What does this require of organisations and institutions and of the professionals and managers that work there, and of the general public? The values that ground and inspire our action in research and education, and the concepts we examine, are the values of respect, human rights, citizenship, democracy and emancipation.

External influences

Society today is changing rapidly, and these changes are affecting many people. Consequently, a widely felt societal need for a shared framework of meaning is emerging. The many changes in the world and the growing segregation along social, economic and ethnic lines, the changes to the welfare state, global migration flows and terrorism inspired by radical Islamic ideologies demonstrate the scientific and societal relevance of the university's research programme. The university examines what people perceive as a 'meaningful life' and a 'humane society'. Through its specific humanistic approach, researchers are able to observe these trends in detail and to formulate propositions that promote a sense of meaning and a humane society.

The discipline of humanistic chaplaincy is also developing rapidly. Fundamental research into the future relevance of humanistic chaplaincy in the context of a multicultural society is becoming increasingly important. As the academic vocational programme for humanistic chaplains on behalf of the Dutch Humanist League', the university permanently seeks to address the needs of the various professional practices. Through research and education it furthermore seeks to develop and make accessible to its graduates new professional practices in education, care, ethics and policy.

Convinced of the added value of its particular research niche, the university actively collaborates with fellow scholars in larger programmes to study the major questions of today's society. Also in the years ahead, the university aims to connect to the major European challenge as formulated in policy

by the EU: *Europe in a changing world: Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies* (Horizon 2020). As regards the Dutch National Research Agenda, the university is engaging with the so-called routes 'Resilient and meaningful societies', 'Between conflict and cooperation', and 'Youth and education'.

2. Research and valorisation

Research at the university addresses the major questions of our time and thereby connects to the research programmes mentioned above. Within these programmes, the university has developed its own research niche by correlating humanisation and meanings of life, and by merging humanism as a worldview and as a political-ethical endeavour. The added value of the university's research will be consolidated further in the years ahead by:

- strengthening the research focus;
- improving the balance between the societal and scientific relevance of the research;
- increasing the research budget.

Strengthening the research focus

A more deliberate focus in the research will contribute to creating a more recognisable and clearer image of the university's research for the outside world. It will also contribute to strengthening the scientific basis of humanistic chaplaincy in the 21st century. Finally, such focus will necessarily foster a stronger internal collaboration between research groups, as well as long-term collaborative ventures with domestic and international societal and academic partners.

The university will continue to develop a single research programme devoted to humanisation and meanings of life, in which the core of humanistic chaplaincy will become apparent. This research will emphatically merge the worldview and political-ethical aspirations of humanism. Substantively, the research programme's central theme is *the optimisation of people's potential and possibilities to lead a dignified and meaningful life*.

The programme will devote extra attention to the strengthening of cross-disciplinary research into humanistic chaplaincy in the 21st century. In addition to further developing a solid scientific basis, the coming years will see a greater research effort into the practices of humanistic chaplaincy and into suitable means of accounting for the results of such practices. In 2021, the university will again be a leading institution, both domestically and internationally, in the field of research and education on the significance of humanistic chaplaincy in the 21st century and the associated professional practices.

Improving the balance between scientific and societal relevance

Ever since its foundation, the university has sought to fulfil its mission by interconnecting fundamental science and societal practices. In this effort it has anticipated today's social, societal and political developments. Now that the Dutch standard evaluation protocol (SEP) explicitly addresses both scientific and societal impact, the university aims to consolidate and retain its head-start in this regard.

A demonstrable increase in the acknowledgement of and appreciation for the added value and quality of the university's research by the science and societal sectors will enhance our eligibility for research grants. Greater societal recognition and appreciation is obtained through long-term collaborative efforts with relevant societal partners. Scientifically, the university is aiming for a good assessment by the research visitation of 2020, with 'good' defined as enjoying international recognition for our research, as being relevant to society, and as being well equipped for the future as an academic institute.

Also an improved balance between the scientific and societal relevance of the research will contribute to a better research climate and hence to the quality of the scholars' work and well-being.

Increasing the research budget

The university has devoted much effort to increasing its income through indirect government funding ('2e geldstroom') and contract funding ('3e geldstroom') in the past years, and it will continue to do so in the years ahead.

Research grants through indirect government funding offer opportunities to strengthen international collaboration with academic partners and demonstrate appreciation for the quality of the research. The demand by NWO (Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research) to work together in consortiums, wider academic appreciation for multi-disciplinary research and the merging of the NWO domains of Social and Behavioural Sciences and Humanities in a single domain ('SSH') offer opportunities to strengthen the university's research through 'second flow' funding. In 2021, the university will regularly submit successful proposals at NWO and in international competition.

Thanks to its particular research niche in relation to its mission, the university is popular with young researchers. In the coming years, the university will therefore strive to recruit external resources with which to fund the appointment of PhD and post-graduate students in order to strengthen a flexible body of young researchers and hence to strengthen its research.

The substantial increase in investments by societal partners in the university's research is a token of its substantive value and of the appreciation that societal parties have for the unique character of the university's research programme. By consolidating existing relations with organisations and actively forging new relations, the university will reinforce its contribution to tackling the major issues of our time and hence to the humanisation of society.

The university aims to see its university fund grow through gifts and bequests to at least €100,000 with which to finance its risk-sensitive innovations in education and research. One example is the development of new empirical research methods and designs that strengthen and facilitate truly interdisciplinary ('SSH') research.

Evaluation of the success of programme research and valorisation

The extent to which the university manages to achieve the three aforementioned strategic goals (focus, balance, research grants) will be evaluated in 2020 during the research visitation. The university aims to be recognised as 'good' in all domains:

- *Scientific quality* of the research, demonstrated for instance through the quality of scholarly output (peer-reviewed articles, monographies and multi-author publications at leading scientific publishers, and study books) and long-term domestic and international academic collaborations.
- *Scientific impact* of the research, demonstrated for instance by the number of citations, the number of reviews, invitations to conferences (presentations, chair sessions, keynote speakers), the use of (study) books at other institutions of higher education.
- *Scientific recognition* through awards, through 'second flow' grants and invitations for honorary doctorates, fellowships, memberships of national and international scientific committees and editing boards.
- *Societal impact and recognition* through 'third flow' research funding, collaboration with non-academics, increased name recognition, public lectures, interviews, reports for policy bodies, symposiums, memberships, and political spin-off.

3. Education

The University of Humanistic Studies offers high-quality education and has been doing so for many years. This is borne out by the above-average scores awarded to the university by students² and the results of the education visitations. An important aspect of good education is that the programmes are relevant to the job market. The university offers education programmes that connect to societal developments and give graduates a favourable position on the job market. Following graduation, students are well equipped to work in a steadily more complex, globalising world. This applies for the Bachelor programme, and for the two Master programmes (Humanistic Studies and Care Ethics & Policy), and for the graduate school programme. The university's education programmes are explicitly tied to the professional practices and to the research that the university performs.

An education visitation is scheduled for 2019. The university is committed to obtaining good results, drawing on the results of a mid-term review. Additionally, three strategic goals have been formulated to which it will devote extra effort:

- improvements in the inflow and in the study results;
- expanding the occupation profile of Master degree graduates;
- improving students' competencies to study, work and live in an international environment.

Improvements in the inflow and the returns of the education programmes

A student inflow that is sufficiently large and consists of the right target group, limited attrition and strong returns remain important strategic goals. The university wants as many (paying) students as possible to follow the programmes without incurring any delay. Targets have been formulated for the inflow, the through-flow and the study results to be realized. The ambition for the coming years is, in outline, to achieve a return of 75% after n+1 year, in all education programmes. The desired inflow and through-flow figures vary per programme.

In the graduate school, the university wants 60% of the participants to have concluded their programme within five years.

² See the National Students Survey (*Nationale Studenten Enquête*, NSE).

The permanent improvement of the quality policy will contribute to increasing the graduation percentages of the programmes. To this end, the quality of the assessments and the accomplished levels will need to be monitored closely. The university furthermore finds it important that students gain more than just academic knowledge and skills. Personal development and social development ('*Bildung*') are considered to be an integral part of the curriculum.

Expanding the occupation profile of Master graduates

The university finds it very important that the education programmes connect to the job market. The revised curriculums for the Bachelor and Master programmes in Humanistic Studies were already geared to improving graduates' job market perspectives. Now that these curriculums have been implemented, it is time for a thorough evaluation and fine-tuning where this is necessary.

Developments in the job market also require permanent attention and adaptation of the curriculums. This means that permanent efforts are required to optimise the job market qualifications of Bachelor students and the occupational qualifications of Master students. This demands a contemporary and coherent vision of education, which in turn implies a clear vision on current occupational requirements.

The University of Humanistic Studies offers a full academic preparation for professional humanistic chaplaincy. The revised Master programme of Humanistic Studies additionally prepares for various occupational prospects that are related to a denominational profession or occupation, such as in education, organisational studies and research. Recent developments, including changes within the traditional professional practices and the dynamic nature of the job market, call for the investigation of new occupational perspectives for graduates, and where necessary to specifically prepare for these in the Master programme.

The inflow to the Care Ethics & Policy Master's programme currently consists of a large number of students already occupationally active. The anticipated inflow of academic level students also requires extra attention for the job perspectives for these graduates.

The university seeks to consolidate the job market position of graduates from the Master programmes of Humanistic Studies and Care Ethics & Policy by compiling clear job profiles in view of contemporary questions in relevant professional practices. These profiles need to be in line with the university's identity. They will be translated into the content and methods of the Bachelor of Humanistic Studies, the (pre-) Master programme of Humanistic Studies, and the (pre-) Master programme of Care Ethics & Policy, and where necessary into exit qualifications.

These changes will be coordinated carefully with the graduate school and with activities by the university's centre for knowledge transfer (*Praktijkcentrum Zingeving & Professie*) and other (extra-) curricular activities by the university.

Regarding graduates' job market perspectives, the possibilities of creating an academic teacher's training programme and a third Master programme that connects to developments on the job market will be investigated.

Improving students' competencies to study, work and live in an international environment

In today's society, the local and the global are becoming increasingly intertwined. To perform well in this environment requires specific knowledge and competencies. It is the university's task to prepare students for this changing society and to offer them an international orientation as part of their professional development. The university wants students to acquire enough skills and knowledge through the education programmes in order to study, work and live successfully in an international environment. Considering the complex nature of internationalisation and the limited possibilities of a small university, a clear vision on internationalisation is required to serve as a basis for well-considered choices for activities that have added value for the university's students.

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The emphasis is on internationalisation-at-home, meaning that the university aims to become a more pluralistic academic community that contributes to increasing the international and intercultural competencies of both students and academic staff. This goal is reflected in a curriculum that familiarises students with studying and working in a globalising world, in which they are likely to encounter different international influences and cultural traditions.

To create an 'international classroom' for students, international exchanges are stimulated by strengthening collaborative ventures in the context of Erasmus+ programmes and by exploring possibilities of exchange with universities outside Europe. Both the Bachelor and Master programmes have an English-language minor that is also attended by domestic students. To encourage the participation of foreign students, another minor with English-language courses on Humanistic Studies is currently under development. This minor can consist partly of study components from the already existing English-language minors at Bachelor and Master levels. The feasibility of an English-language Master's programme is also being investigated.

The university understands internationalisation as a development process for staff and students, in which English-language education and international exchanges are a matter of course and where the strengthening of students' international and intercultural competencies are an integral component of the professional competence. The university ensures that international students and lecturers are properly supported and assisted and are made to feel at home at the university. This also requires an infrastructure that supports internationalisation.

4. Organisation

The University of Humanistic Studies aims to remain an independent, publicly funded institution. This requires having a flexible and effectively managed organisation that reinforces the relations with external, domestic and international partners and that promotes the permanent education of its staff. The core policy objectives regarding the organisation are:

- the long-term employability of employees,
- a solid financial and staffing policy, and
- an infrastructure equipped to meet today's requirements.

Long-term employability of employees

The university invests in the long-term employability of its employees and enables them to pursue their own further development. This is supported significantly by the performance cycle, introduced in 2015. This cycle aims to achieve the greatest possible synergy between the development goals of the university and those of its individual employees. The university is committed to the permanent education of its staff, where possible using courses and training programmes offered by other universities. Attending conferences and internships abroad are part of this effort.

The university aims to have structural tasks fulfilled as much as possible by employees on a permanent employment contract. It also wishes to offer opportunities to young talented graduates. However, the small scale of the university limits internal career possibilities. To progress to a next phase in their career, employees will often be dependent on external opportunities. Talent development programmes are designed with this in mind.

Financial and staffing policy

The university's prime asset is its staff. Not surprisingly, therefore, staffing costs are by far the largest cost item in the university's budget, and controlling these costs is an important goal in the 2017-2021 financial policy.

Staffing policy is based on the currently existing financial parameters and the long-term expectations. The policy is based on the principle that structural education is provided by the permanent staff, complemented by junior lecturers and PhD candidates. To fund this through the 'first flow' (direct government funding), each of the six permanent chairs has a minimum staff size of 4 FTE for academic staff, consisting in principle of 1 professor, 1 assistant professor, 2 university lecturers. For the long-term funding of this staffing, it is necessary to achieve a minimum inflow of students and minimum outflow of graduates at all three levels of education programmes provided by the university: the Bachelor and Master programmes, and the graduate school. This requires attaining the returns described in the previous paragraph. The university's student recruitment policy and marketing efforts are aimed at minimally achieving this stability, and to furthermore grow by 5% a year. Additionally, sufficient funding must be procured through the second and third funding flows and every chair must annually accomplish (as a multi-year average) at least two doctorate conferrals.

Infrastructure

Staff members and students are entitled to proper facilities and an infrastructure able to meet today's requirements. This not only pertains to being able to work and study effectively within the university, but also to having facilities that enable the perusal of scientific sources elsewhere, for instance at home. The university makes sufficient resources available to keep the building, the (IT) infrastructure and the access to digital sources up-to-date. This effort is paired with a commitment to environmental sustainability, including efforts to reduce the use of non-renewable energy sources.