

Guide for Programme Committees

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Date

20 April 2017

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Introduction

Every degree programme at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is headed by a Director of Studies. The Director of Studies is responsible for the quality of education offered by the programme and receives advice on this matter from a Programme Committee.

VU Amsterdam places a high priority on the quality of education. At programme level, the Programme Committee is the designated body for quality assurance. A programme benefits from the advice of those best placed to assess its quality: its students and lecturers. After all, they are the ones with first-hand, day-to-day experience of the standard of education. They know which aspects are running smoothly and which are in need of improvement. Participation by staff and students contribute to the quality of education and the efficiency of how the faculty is run.

Programme Committees play a valuable role because they enable students and lecturers to consult one another in a relatively informal setting about the areas in which degree programmes excel or fall short, and because they are a valuable source of new ideas.

The student members of Programme Committees receive information from their fellow students about the positive and negative aspects of how a programme is run. Lecturers are fully aware of the primary process because they are the ones providing the education. They observe at first hand which aspects of the educational process are operating as they should and which aspects are in need of improvement.

Within the Programme Committee, students and lecturers can discuss these aspects, put forward issues of their own and propose amendments affecting individual courses or entire years of the programme to the Director of Studies and/or the Faculty Board, depending on the matter in question.

The duties and powers of the Programme Committee are described in a number of different documents, most notably in the relevant legislation and in the university's regulations. This guide aims to bridge the gap between these legal and administrative provisions and their practical application. It provides an overview and shows by means of recommendations and practical examples (text boxes) just how valuable a Programme Committee can be in maintaining and improving the quality of education within a programme.

This guide was developed by the working group for Programme Committees, set up by the committee of teaching portfolio holders. This working group consisted of members and former members of Programme Committees, a portfolio holder for teaching, a member of the University Student Council and a policy officer for student and educational affairs. The guide is managed by the Student and Educational Affairs Department and is revised prior to the start of each academic year if necessary. This revision process also enables the guide to be updated with good examples that have been observed during the course of that year.

On 14 June 2016, the Dutch Senate adopted the Enhanced Governance Powers (Higher Education) Act. The proposals contained in this Act concerning higher education will become part of the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). Articles relating to Programme Committees will come into force on 1 September 2017. The introduction of the Enhanced

Governance Powers (Higher Education) Act will result in certain changes to Programme Committees. The guide is based on the situation as of 1 September 2017.

Abbreviations used

WHW: Higher Education and Research Act

WVB: Enhanced Governance Powers (Higher Education) Act

OLC: Programme Committee

OER: Academic and Examination Regulations

USR: University Student Council

FSC: Faculty Student Council

GV: Joint Assembly

OR: Staff Council

NSE: National Student Survey

NAE: National Alumni Survey

The ideal Programme Committee¹

You have just become a member of the Programme Committee. In response to the Faculty Board's appeal for new members at the start of the academic year and after reading the background information you were sent, you decided to join the committee. You believe it is important to be a part of the discussion about the quality of your degree programme and you are keen to make an active contribution. There is always room for improvement, after all. Besides, taking part will give you valuable insights into the organizational workings behind the programme. After submitting your application, you took part in the elections and were fortunate enough to be elected. Your membership began on 30 September (see [Establishment](#)).

The Programme Committee has its first meeting in early October. You are not the only new member to be welcomed; this year there are a couple of new members from the teaching staff and a fresh influx of new student members. The combination of students and lecturers is a good cross-section of the programme as a whole: all of the departments, years of the programme and specializations are represented. This is very useful because it facilitates contact with students and staff in the various sections of the programme. The Programme Committee is fortunate to have very active members who invested a lot of time and energy in recruitment before the summer holidays. There were so many applications that elections had to be held to select the new student members. The faculty organized these elections to coincide with the Faculty Student Council elections (see [Recruitment, appointment, termination](#)). Now the Programme Committee is back to its full strength: six members, of whom three are lecturers and three are students (see [Composition](#)).

At the first meeting, the Programme Committee discusses its duties and how it plans to fulfil them in the year ahead. The annual work plan is also discussed. This work plan has been prepared by the chairperson with the support of the administrative secretariat, based on the dates when relevant documents become available for discussion. This list of dates has been drawn up by the Director of Studies at the start of the academic year. The annual work plan is linked to a meeting schedule, which stipulates that the Programme Committee will meet ten times during the academic year and states the topics to be discussed at these meetings. After the meeting, this schedule is sent to the Faculty Board and published on the faculty website to give interested parties the opportunity to attend the public meetings (see [Order of Meetings](#)).

Training for members of the Programme Committees is also discussed at the first meeting. The new members decide to take part in the training and sign up for the sessions (see [Development of expertise](#)). In addition, the meeting discusses what the Programme Committee's focus and priorities for the coming year should be. This is done with reference to the preceding annual report for the programme and the Programme Committee. What points will be carried forward into the coming year and require follow-up? A number of new priorities are also defined. An important aim will be to widen the Programme Committee's scope beyond the discussion of teaching evaluations. A few years ago, these evaluations were the committee's primary focus but it has now adopted a wider interpretation of its duties (see [Duties of the Programme Committee](#)). However, this transition has been a gradual one and this year it would be an improvement to take a broader perspective on the quality of the programme. The members consider what action needs to be taken to achieve this.

¹ This chapter describes a fictitious, fully functioning Programme Committee with a view to providing an inspiring example.

The first meeting concludes with a discussion of the number of new students enrolling in the programme. Enrolment is down slightly and it is worth considering whether adequate measures are in place to reverse this trend. The Director of Studies has been invited to comment on this agenda item; he explains that he shares the Programme Committee's concerns and is working on a recruitment plan to attract new students. The Programme Committee is happy with this and asks the Director of Studies to share his plan with the committee, so that it can play an advisory role. The plan is added to the agenda for the next meeting and the Faculty Board will be invited to join the discussion. The Director of Studies agrees to deliver the plan two weeks before the next meeting. The Programme Committee undertakes to issue a written recommendation two weeks or less after the next meeting (see [Advisory Structure](#)).

In the course of the year, the Programme Committee issues various recommendations on subjects including the imminent programme of study review, the implementation of assessment policy, optimizing the matching activity and use of IT resources, as well as a number of recommendations in response to course evaluations, programme of study evaluations and the National Student Survey. The Programme Committee also advised on and approved the Academic and Examination Regulations. At the April meeting, the draft of these regulations was extensively discussed, after which a written recommendation and approval was sent to the Director of Studies (see [Duties of the Programme Committee](#)).

It is early July. The end of the academic year is at hand and the Programme Committee holds its final meeting before the summer holidays. Fortunately most of the members are staying on and meet the criteria for reappointment. The recruitment drive to replace the student members who have graduated is already in full swing. However, the chairperson has reached the end of his term of office and will not be returning next year, which means the meeting has to elect a replacement. There is good news: a well-qualified successor is willing to take up the position and receives unanimous backing from the committee's members (see [Order of Meetings](#) and [Voting](#)).

The last item on the agenda is the preparation of the annual report. The chairperson and the administrative secretariat have come up with a solid first draft and further details are discussed at the meeting. Everyone's input is incorporated, with special attention paid to the Programme Committee's performance this year. The conclusion of this discussion is that while things have gone well, there are still improvements to be made in the year ahead. In some cases, documents from the programme board were only made available shortly before the meeting and on a few occasions there was a considerable delay before the Programme Committee's written recommendations were issued. It is agreed that these points should be incorporated in the annual report as a measure to be taken by the Director of Studies on one hand and the Programme Committee on the other. As such, they can then be discussed at the autumn meeting on the annual report with the Director of Studies and the portfolio holder for teaching. The secretariat incorporates the amendments into the annual report and sends the final version to the Director of Studies and the portfolio holder for teaching in July (see [Annual Report](#)).

1. Laws and regulations governing Programme Committees

The duties of the Programme Committee are described in the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW, see [Appendix 1](#)). VU Amsterdam has set out the duties of the Programme Committee in the VU Management Model, the faculty regulations and the Education Quality Manual, in connection with the contribution that Programme Committees make to the quality of education. Furthermore, in September 2011 the university adopted a set of model regulations for Programme Committees, which define issues such as establishment, composition, duties, frequency of meetings, advice, voting and performance. With these regulations, the university aims to guarantee a basic level of quality for the Programme Committees. Finally, instructions for the Programme Committees have been enshrined in the Student Charter. These various strands of information have been brought together and explained in this guide. Provisions which constitute a legal requirement are identified as such in the text. Other instructions are a matter of university policy.

Table 1: Documents that feature the Programme Committee and the aspects they discuss.

Laws and regulations	Principles for the Programme Committee
Higher Education and Research Act (Articles 9.18 and 9.48 of WHW)	Duties Appointment and composition Facilities and training
VU Management Model	Advisory structure for education Duties Planning and accountability
Faculty Regulations	Establishing Programme Committees at the faculty Duties Duties of the Director of Studies
Student Charter	Establishment Duties Nature of advice, specifically with regard to Academic and Examination Regulations
Manual for Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning	Ch.1 Role within educational organization (= Management Model) Ch.3 Role in teaching evaluation cycle Ch.4 Role in quality assurance of teaching programmes Ch.5 Reporting in the context of quality assurance, role in risk management of education Ch.8 Role of Programme Committee in the context of Teaching Performance Framework Ch.9 Discussion of National Student Survey results as duty Ch.10 Disability within Academic and Examination Regulations and faculty policy Ch.11 Evaluation of Academic and Examination Regulations as regards assessment, identifying assessment issues, advice on drafting assessment policy/plan
Model Regulations for Programme Committees	Foundation Composition Duties

	Method: Order of Meetings, Advisory Role, Voting, Performance
Participation Regulations ²	From 1 September 2017

2. Position within the organization³

The Faculty Board

Faculties have a portfolio holder for teaching. As a member of the Faculty Board, the portfolio holder for teaching holds primary responsibility for the faculty's educational activities and is tasked with ensuring that the faculty puts both faculty and university education policy into practice.

The portfolio holder for teaching is mandated by the Faculty Board in the area of education and therefore holds responsibility for the quality of the programmes and the coordination between the programmes. The portfolio holder for teaching implements quality assurance and takes initiatives geared towards improving education and setting standards of good practice. He is head of the faculty's educational organization and therefore acts as line manager to the directors of studies and the head of the education office.

The Faculty Board may appoint a faculty Director of Studies to take on some of the portfolio holder for teaching's duties while acting under his authority.

The Director of Studies

The law gives a central position to the programme (Article 7.3 of WHW). A programme is a coherent set of educational units, focusing on well-defined final attainment levels and culminating in a final degree assessment (*examen*). Every educational unit concludes with its own final assessment. Programmes are established within faculties.

Each programme or group of programmes is managed by a Director of Studies, appointed by the board of the relevant faculty. The Director of Studies ensures that the education promised is actually provided and meets the quality standards; he draws up an annual teaching schedule for this purpose. The Director of Studies is responsible for developing educational policy for the programme under his authority and for implementing faculty and university-wide educational frameworks. He also ensures sufficient educational quality and takes care of the organization of education and representational aspects of the programme.

The purpose and content of the programme are laid down in the Academic and Examination Regulations, which are approved by the Faculty Board. The authority to determine that a student has achieved the objectives set out in these regulations, lies with the Examination Board⁴.

The Programme Committee

In accordance with faculty regulations, the Faculty Board sets up a Programme Committee or, if needed, more than one. In any case, one Programme Committee must be authorized for each of the faculty's programmes. The committee's duty is to advise on promoting and safeguarding the

² From 1 September 2017, the Programme Committee will be a consultation body.

³ This chapter is largely based on the VU Management Model.

⁴ Article 7.12 of WHW and Article 22 of VU Management Regulations.

quality of the degree programme.⁵

With effect from 1 September 2017, Programme Committees must have put in place 'procedural regulations'. VU Amsterdam had already established model regulations for the Programme Committees at the university. These regulations have been adapted to the new legislative situation and now also serve as the [procedural regulations](#).

In carrying out its tasks, the Programme Committee ensures that it is adequately informed by those it represents (lecturers and students of the programme) and has effective working procedures for achieving this purpose (see [Procedure](#)). The portfolio holder for teaching or the Director of Studies regularly consults the Programme Committee.

A Director of Studies, programme coordinator, portfolio holder for teaching or Director of Education is not permitted to be a member of a Programme Committee.

Each year, the Programme Committee reports on the fulfilment of its duties in an [annual report](#).

The Examination Board

The Examination Board supervises the quality of assessment and the value of the qualification. It safeguards the quality of the programme's examinations and final degree assessments by drawing up rules and guidelines for the procedures and orderly administration of examinations. Where necessary with a view to implementing the Academic and Examination Regulations, the Examination Board sets additional rules on the execution of its duties and responsibilities, grants exemptions and designates examiners who are authorized to administer an examination. The Examination Board is set up and its members are appointed by the Faculty Board, to which it also reports. For the establishment and operation of the Examination Boards, VU Amsterdam has a [Model for Examination Board Rules and Guidelines](#).

Each year, the Examination Board reports on its duties in an [annual report](#).

A lecturer who is a member of a Programme Committee is not allowed to be a member of the Examination Board in order to ensure a clear separation of responsibilities.

Participation

VU Amsterdam has a system of shared participation in decision-making. At university level this is exercised by the Staff Council (OR) and the University Student Council (USR), as well as the Joint Assembly (GV), which consists of the members of both councils. These bodies derive their powers from the Works Councils Act and from VU Amsterdam's own regulations concerning employee and student participation, which are based on the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW).

Employee participation at faculty level is exercised in the subcommittee and the Faculty Student Council, as well as in the Joint Assembly of the two bodies. From 1 September 2017, the status of the Programme Committee will change and it will formally become a consultation body. Every service department has a Subcommittee. The Staff Council lays down the powers to be exercised by the Subcommittees in its decisions. In the context of the exercise of employee participation at faculty level, the Faculty Board is normally represented at meetings by at least the dean and the

⁵ Article 9.18 of WHW and Article 21 of VU Management Regulations.

relevant portfolio holder.

It is important for the Programme Committee to have a healthy working relationship with the Faculty Student Council (FSC), especially where the council has right of approval on the Academic and Examination Regulations in relation to the rights of the Joint Assembly. The FSC represents all students in the faculty and it is important for the Programme Committee to share its knowledge of the programme with the FSC. On legal grounds, the advice issued by the Programme Committee must be forwarded to the FSC for the purposes of information.

Advisory structure

The portfolio holder for teaching and the Director of Studies receive advice from various quarters regarding the design, implementation and evaluation of their work. The Programme Committee is asked to make its recommendations and approvals known well in advance of a decision being taken. For this purpose, the Programme Committee needs to be given accurate information as a basis for making a sound decision. Responsibility for the timely delivery of this information lies with the Faculty Board and can be delegated to the Director of Studies. The Programme Committee is given the opportunity to consult the Faculty Board or its representative (usually the Director of Studies) before it issues a recommendation or approval. The Programme Committee always issues its recommendations in writing.

These recommendations may be either solicited and unsolicited (see Duties of the Programme Committee). A solicited recommendation is issued in response to a specific request made by the Faculty Board or the Director of Studies (e.g. regarding the Academic and Examination Regulations). Such a request usually includes a response deadline (usually a few weeks⁶). If progress on a dossier is of the essence, the requesting party can include a condition that the recommendation be issued within a certain period so that it can be incorporated in the decision-making process. In the interests of feasibility, it is important that a request for advice is announced in good time; ideally, a general timetable should be made available at the start of the year.

In addition, the Programme Committee may offer unsolicited advice on all kinds of matters concerning education. The person to whom the advice is addressed is required to respond within a few weeks⁶.

If the committee makes a solicited or unsolicited recommendation or proposal to the Faculty Board or its representative, the latter will respond within three weeks⁷ of receiving the recommendation/proposal. If the advice is rejected or only partially adopted, then this decision must be fully substantiated. If the advice is rejected, or if the Faculty Board fails to reach a decision within the prescribed period, then the Programme Committee may initiate a dispute in accordance with the legally prescribed procedure.

The Programme Committee may convene subcommittees charged with a specific task. Both lecturers and students are represented in subcommittees.

The Programme Committee will give due account of the advice it issues and responses it receives in its annual report. The relevant section can even be updated throughout the year, so it is clear what advice has been issued and whether there has been a response in every case.

⁶ This period is set at faculty level with reference to the Model Regulations for Programme Committees.

⁷ The statutory deadline is two months; however, VU Amsterdam recommends a deadline of three weeks.

3. Duties of the Programme Committee

Article 9.18 of the Higher Education and Research Act (see [Appendix 1](#)) stipulates that a Programme Committee must be established for every degree programme. The committee's duty is to advise on promoting and safeguarding the quality of the degree programme. The Programme Committee is also:

- a. entitled to approve the Academic and Examination Regulations, as referred to in Article 7.13, with the exception of those areas mentioned in the second paragraph under a, f, h-u and x, and with the exception of the requirements referred to in the Articles 7.28, fourth and fifth paragraphs, and 7.30b, second paragraph;
- b. responsible for conducting an annual evaluation of the way in which the Academic and Examination Regulations are implemented;
- c. entitled to present advice in respect of the Academic and Examination Regulations referred to in Article 7.13, with the exception of those areas in relation to which the committee is entitled to grant approval on the basis of (a); and
- d. responsible for making recommendations or proposals to the Director of Studies and the Faculty Board, either on its own initiative or on request, on all matters relating to teaching in the degree programme in question. This advice will in any case be related to quality improvements within the programme.

Items (a) and (c). Approving and issuing advice on the programme's Academic and Examination Regulations

The programme's Academic and Examination Regulations set the terms and conditions that apply to programme. Article 7.13 of the Higher Education and Research Act (see [Appendix 1](#)) sets out the elements that should be included in the Academic and Examination Regulations. In general terms, these elements are as follows:

- the structure of the degree programmes including language of tuition and the programme of study as a whole;
- requirements for admission to the programme, but also to specific programme components (e.g. the Bachelor's project);
- regulations relating to exams, including the approval of subject combinations and arrangements for the honours programme;
- regulations on study advice and quality assurance.

The Academic and Examination Regulations apply only to the academic year for which they are adopted. If the programme of study changes over time, the appropriate transitional arrangements are set out in the regulations.

The regulations must be adopted by the Faculty Board on an annual basis. The portfolio holder for teaching or the Director of Studies asks the Programme Committee to approve certain sections of the Academic and Examination Regulations and to advise on other sections of the Academic and Examination Regulations (see [Appendix 4](#) for the relevant sections). The Programme Committee can ask the portfolio holder for teaching or the Director of Studies to provide additional information on amendments to the regulations. Even in the case of an interim amendment, the portfolio holder for teaching or Director of Studies has to seek the Programme Committee's approval or advice.

What can the approval or advice relate to? It can relate to the content of the specializations, the design of practical exercises, the level and the feasibility of the programme (e.g. distribution or sequence of courses; alternation of teaching methods and modes of assessment; location and scope of internships and electives; cohesion of components; timetabling, the programme's evaluation plan, etc.). It is advisable for the Programme Committee to incorporate the experiences and results from previous years' educational activities in its findings. The requirements of the Academic and Examination Regulations are defined in Article 7.13 of WHW, paragraph 2, and can be found in the appendix to this guide. This Article is a useful reference point when you are asked to decide on the Academic and Examination Regulations⁸.

The Programme Committee grants its formal approval and advice to the Faculty Board and sends a copy of its recommendations to the Director of Studies and the Director of Education (where applicable) and to the Faculty Student Council (FSC). The FSC has right of approval on other parts of the Academic and Examination Regulations (see Appendix 4). The parts on which the Programme Committee has right of approval but the FSC does not generally relate to the content of the programme. Following the Programme Committee's and the FSC's recommendations and approval, the Academic and Examination Regulations are adopted by the Faculty Board. The Faculty Board states what has been done with the Programme Committee's recommendations.

The Programme Committee does not express an opinion on the (programme) rules established by the Executive Board. These have previously been submitted to the various consultative bodies, in accordance with VU Amsterdam's management model, taking account of the competences of the consultative bodies.

Best practice: The Faculty of Social Sciences holds a consultation round on the draft versions of Academic and Examination Regulations. These drafts are then submitted to the Programme Committees for advice. They then have six weeks to prepare their response. After about four weeks, all Programme Committees are invited to a discussion on the draft Regulations with the portfolio holder for teaching, the Director of Education, the head of the education office and the education policy officer. The Programme Committees are asked to submit their questions and proposed approval/advice in advance so that a verbal response can be prepared. During the discussion, the Programme Committees' questions are addressed and explanations given as to why specific recommendations can or cannot be adopted. The committees then have two weeks to prepare their final approval/recommendations, incorporating the input from the discussion. They receive an official response to these recommendations from the Faculty Board.

TIP: Be proactive when it comes to the Academic and Examination Regulations. As a Programme Committee, make sure you have the opportunity to contribute ideas and proposals at an early stage so that you can make a genuine contribution. Otherwise you run the risk of the Faculty Board's request for advice coming too late and necessitating a short-term response. See also the [best practice](#) at Fontys University of Applied Sciences.

⁸ Within VU Amsterdam there is a Bachelor's and Master's Guideline; its components are not within the scope of the right to prior consultation and/or right of approval of the Faculty Student Council or Programme Committee.

Item B: Evaluating how Academic and Examination Regulations are implemented

The Programme Committee not only advises on the new Academic and Examination Regulations but also consults the Director of Studies regarding their implementation.

The

Director of Studies ensures that the programme or parts thereof are evaluated on a regular basis.

The Programme Committee makes agreements with the Director of Studies on how teaching evaluations are incorporated into the assessment of programme implementation.

Advice on the implementation of the Academic and Education Regulations can roughly be divided into three clusters:

- Educational implementation, especially those aspects relevant to course evaluations, such as quality of the lecturer, study materials, information about the course and the exam.
- The teaching programme – the relationship between courses, academic skills, the distribution of the study load across semesters and years, the structure and provision in the programme of study for gifted students or those who have fallen behind (i.e. issues addressed in programme of study evaluation, the National Student Survey, the National Alumni Survey or the alumni monitor).
- Other aspects of the Academic and Examination Regulations, such as publication of examination results, provision of information to students about their programme of study, programme-specific elements of study advice, etc.

Item D: Issuing solicited and unsolicited advice on educational matters

Programme committees do not have to wait until they are asked to advise on educational matters; they can also issue unsolicited recommendations.

The topics within their remit include:

- how students are informed about the teaching programme, for example in the study guide;
- the programme's annual report and annual plan;
- educational reforms;
- reviews of the programme of study;
- timetables;
- the number of examination opportunities;
- use of IT and other learning resources;
- negative recommendation on continuation of studies (BSA);
- advice on critical self-reflection and on a recovery plan for the programme where appropriate.

Programme committees only give advice on issues related to education and not on matters of finance, administration or staffing, unless these are demonstrably related to quality of education in the programme. Programme committees ensure that they consult those they represent in order to formulate their advice. Lecturers on the committee consult the teaching staff and students members consult students affected by the topic to which the advice relates.

Examples of topics on which the committee can advise: vision of the programme, educational programming, the study guide, correlation between final attainment levels, learning objectives and forms of assessment, review of programme of study, assessment policy, assessment plan, the programme's annual report and annual plan, the Examination Board's annual report and plan, faculty annual plan and long-range plan, course evaluations, programme of study evaluations, alumni monitor, National Student Survey, National Alumni Survey, critical self-reflection, recovery plan, professional development for teaching staff, educational reform, timetabling, information, examination opportunities, academic counselling and study advice, management information (recruitment, yield, dropouts, market share), international rankings, report by the Professional Practice Advisory Council, lecturer consultation, IT in education.

4. Programme committees in practice

This chapter contains general regulations, options and recommendations regarding the appointment, composition and working methods of Programme Committees at VU Amsterdam, mostly derived from the Model Regulations for Programme Committees. Opportunities, advice and examples are presented in the boxes. Please remember that there are many possible variations on the opportunities and advice presented, as well as many good examples within the university.

TIP: Go to www.opleidingscommissies.nl for several good examples of Programme Committees. The Inspectorate of Education is conducting research into Programme Committees in 2016 and is the driver of this web platform, working in cooperation with ISO and LSVb.

Foundation

The Faculty Board establishes a Programme Committee for the programme or a group of programmes.

Programme committee members should ideally be appointed before the start of the academic year, but by 30 September at the latest.

Recruitment, appointment, termination

Recruitment can take place through current members of the Programme Committee and the Director of Studies, who can also make resources and opportunities available for this purpose.

TIP: To ensure that a full Programme Committee is in place by 30 September, it is advisable to begin recruiting early. Different target groups can be recruited at different times. For example, second or third-year students may be recruited in June to shorten the start-up period of the Programme Committees. But after the summer further recruitment will be required for international students and new students.

Lecturers and students may apply to the Faculty Board or Director of Studies to be appointed to the Programme Committee. The Faculty Board or Director of Studies advertises this opportunity to all students and lecturers through internal communication channels. Faculty boards must consult the faculty Joint Assembly regarding the nomination procedure. The Executive Board has informed the Faculty Boards of this and indicated that they should address this in their faculty regulations.⁹ The new legislation allows for elections as part of the nomination procedure.

⁹ A new version of the model faculty regulations is being drafted by Legal Affairs. This aspect will be incorporated into these model regulations.

However, another method of appointing the assembly may also be chosen. The assumption is that the methods previously used to appoint a Programme Committee will be continued. This will be included in the model faculty regulations.

What options are available? Elections or cooptions are possible. Selection based on criteria published in advance may also be considered. The Enhanced Governance Powers (Higher Education) Act (WVB), which comes into force on 1 September 2017, assumes that an election will be held in which individuals or 'parties' can put themselves forward as candidates for the Programme Committee. However, alternative arrangements can be made annually in a consultation between the Director of Studies or the Faculty Board and the faculty Joint Assembly. In that case, the faculty regulations will state the procedure for composing the Programme Committee (see also Enhanced Governance Powers (Higher Education) Act). In some faculties, the Faculty Student Council also plays a role in recruitment in composition. While healthy collaboration in the area of recruitment is a good thing, the Faculty Student Council cannot be allowed to play a role in appointing members to the Programme Committee. It is important that the input given is distinct from the participation bodies. Independence remains a requirement in cases where the composition of the Programme Committee is arranged other than by election.

A student member can serve on the committee for a period of one year. This term may be extended twice. The term of office for a lecturer is not fixed, but is determined in the Model Regulations for Programme Committees. However, limiting terms is recommended in order to encourage a healthy rotation of members who can contribute fresh insights and ideas.

Membership of a Programme Committee is terminated in the following circumstances:

- At the end of a term of appointment, when no re-election follows;
- If a lecturer is no longer working in the relevant programme;
- If a student is no longer enrolled in the programme in question;
- At the member's own request;
- If a member repeatedly fails to attend the meetings without due notification. In this case, the chairperson or secretary / minutes secretary of the Programme Committee will always contact the member first. The Programme Committee can ask the Faculty Board to terminate the membership of a particular member.

Composition

A Programme Committee consists of at least four members. No maximum has been set but it can be specified by the Faculty Board in the Model Regulations for Programme Committees.

TIP: For small-scale programmes, it is sometimes difficult to achieve the minimum of four members. However, a committee consisting of fewer members is not recommended. A committee made up of one lecturer and one student is particularly vulnerable, especially from the student perspective. In that case you should convene one (or multiple) large Programme Committees for all (or a substantial number) of the small-scale programmes offered by the faculty. The committee can be composed such that each programme is represented by at least one lecturer and one student. For the record, it is worth noting that the Bachelor's and Master's are regarded as two distinct programmes. A separate Programme Committee may therefore be established for each one. A single committee for both is conceivable and to be recommended.

The Programme Committee is based on equal representation: half of the members are students registered in the relevant programme(s), the other half comes from the lecturers of the relevant programme(s). If the Programme Committee covers several programmes, it is important that its members should represent all of the programmes involved.

TIP: It is advisable to seek the widest possible distribution of members according to programme, specialization etc. so that those involved in the programme are well represented. That does not mean that each specialization must appoint a representative to the Programme Committee.

Members of the Faculty Board, the Director of Studies and the Examination Board are also not permitted to be concurrent members of the Programme Committee. Lecturers may be members of several Programme Committees, as long as they teach in the relevant programmes.

Development of expertise

The chairperson of the Programme Committee is responsible for the performance of committee members

and must ensure that new committee members are properly equipped for their duties.

Members of the Programme Committee are entitled to training for the proper execution of their duties; this is a legal requirement (Article 9.48 of WHW).

Best practice: For a period to be determined jointly by the Faculty Board and the Programme Committee, the Faculty Board shall give the members of the Programme Committee the opportunity to receive the training they need to carry out their duties. The lecturers on the committee are given the opportunity to receive such training during working hours and with full pay.

The Programme Committee may submit a reasonable request to the Faculty Board for additional facilities and training they regard as necessary. The Programme Committee will make clear in its request how the additional training or resources contribute to the quality of education.

VU Amsterdam has developed a training course for the members of Programme Committees. This training course is open to lecturer and student members and is taught in the autumn (usually November) in both Dutch and English. At the current time (April 2017), opportunities are being explored for expanding the available training (more differentiation in the training available, different workshops for different target groups at different times of the year).

There are a number of opportunities for further professionalizing the Programme Committees and promoting the exchange of good practice. In order to achieve this, a periodic meeting for Programme Committees organized on a particular theme may be possible, or a meeting for all Programme Committees from the same faculty. The good practices that result from this could then be included in the guide.

Support

The Improved Governance Act specifically mentions that the Programme Committee is entitled to administrative, financial and legal support.

Administrative support

For larger Programme Committees¹⁰, an official administrative secretariat is available as standard at faculty level. The administrative secretariat is responsible for providing information to the Programme Committee, arranging meetings, sending out the agenda and relevant documents on time, taking minutes at meetings, keeping contact information up to date, and providing support in relation to the drafting of the annual report. Smaller Programme Committees will choose a member to act as secretary and divide the tasks among them.

There will be a dedicated point of contact for each Programme Committee within the Education Office (possibly through the administrative secretariat), and a good handover between Programme Committees from one year to the next must be ensured. The policy recommendations issued by Programme Committees and the follow-up action should also be safeguarded at the faculty level. Responsibility for verifying these matters lies with the Faculty Board or may be delegated to the Director of Studies.

Financial

The Faculty Board has determined that lecturers are to be adequately compensated for their efforts, both now and in the future. How a lecturer is compensated is determined by the remuneration structure of each faculty. The financial compensation for lecturers usually forms part of their management tasks (in FTEs). The reimbursement varies depending on the position within the Programme Committee, the size of the programme and the level of support offered.

The chair of each Programme Committee will inform the student members of the opportunity to apply for compensation from the Student Financial Support Fund. A student member is eligible for the grant if he or she studies full-time within the official duration of the programme (plus one year), has not yet completed the programme's final degree assessment, is registered at the university and has paid all tuition fees owing. See the [Student Financial Support Fund](#) for more information.

In order to ensure that each student is compensated in accordance with the effort made, it is recommended that the application to the Student Financial Support Fund first be submitted to the chair of the Programme Committee, who can assess whether the amount of compensation paid is appropriate. Attendance can be used to gauge the commitment of members (guideline: 80%), as well as input for meetings and the activities of the Programme Committee. Responsibility for this check resides with the chair of the relevant Programme Committee.

Legal

Programme Committees may appeal to the VU Amsterdam Office of Legal Affairs (or their own faculty legal advisor, where applicable).

Procedure

Order of meetings

At the start of its term of office, the Programme Committee elects from among its members a chairperson and a secretary and an alternate for the chair and secretary.

These offices may be taken up by a lecturer or a student. The chair represents the Programme

¹⁰ To be agreed with the Faculty Board where this is necessary for the execution of duties

Committee, both inside and outside the faculty.

If an administrative secretariat has been allocated, then the committee shall not elect a secretary.

The Faculty Board's portfolio holder for teaching shall consult with the Programme Committee.

The Director of Studies may consult with the Programme Committee on behalf of the portfolio holder for teaching.

Regular consultations between the Director of Studies and the Programme Committee are recommended. Under the new law, the Programme Committee is in any case entitled to this; the Act states the following: *The Programme Committee is authorized to invite the designated Faculty Board member or his/her representative at least twice a year to discuss the proposed policy on the basis of the agenda it has drawn up.* It is advised that this occur more often than twice a year, as prescribed. In addition, regular informal contact with the Director of Studies is recommended.

The Programme Committee shall establish a meeting schedule during its first meeting of the academic year. This shall be submitted to the Faculty Board, the Director of Studies and the Joint Assembly. The meeting schedule shall also be posted on the faculty website. If possible, an indication will also be given of the topics to be discussed in the various meetings, and in which meeting the consultation with the Faculty Board or its representative will take place. For this purpose, the Director of Studies will, at the start of the academic year, provide the Programme Committee with a list of the dates it can expect to receive various relevant documents. The meeting schedule shall include at least two meetings (one to discuss its advice on the Academic and Examination Regulations, the other to discuss the implementation of these regulations), but it is advisable to meet more often. If possible, an indication will also be given of the topics to be discussed at the various meetings, and in which meeting the consultation with the portfolio holder for teaching or the Director of Studies will take place.

Appendix 2 contains an example of a work plan for the academic year.

To ensure the independence of the Programme Committee, it is not advisable that every meeting should be attended (in its entirety) by the portfolio holder for teaching or the Director of Studies. It is recommended to invite the portfolio holder for teaching or Director of Studies only to attend the discussion of specific agenda items at meetings.

The Programme Committee shall convene any time two or more members submit a request for a meeting to the chairperson. It is advisable to meet once every month / six weeks. The meetings of the Programme Committee are public, unless the subject under discussion is a person. The reports and recommendations of the Programme Committee are also public. The Programme Committee will ensure that the documents are accessible and made available as needed. It will maintain confidentiality with regard to all information relating to a closed meeting. The Programme Committee may invite experts to speak at a meeting.

The portfolio holder for teaching or the Director of Studies shall provide the Programme Committee with the information it needs in a timely manner, either at its request or on their own initiative, so that it may carry out its duties.

The secretary will forward the agenda and underlying documents to the committee members at

least one week before the meeting.

Complex or highly sensitive information should ideally be sent two weeks prior to the meeting.

The Programme Committee members are entitled to the use of a meeting room.

Voting

Recommendations and approvals may only be formulated if a majority of members are present at the meeting. If a majority is not present, then the subject shall be discussed in a subsequent meeting. At that meeting, no majority is required in order to issue a recommendation or approval.

If so requested, the Programme Committee members shall vote on a recommendation or approval. These shall then be determined by majority vote. In the event of a tie, no recommendation will be formulated and no approval will be issued, and this will be reported to the portfolio holder for teaching or the Director of Studies as soon as possible.

Annual report

Before 1 October, the Programme Committee will make an annual report for the previous academic year. A [university-wide format](#) has been drawn up for annual reports. This annual report is appended to the programme's annual report. The Programme Committee's annual report examines the composition and performance of the committee and details the recommendations issued and the responses from the relevant officials. The annual report shall address the duties of the Programme Committee; specifically: a. Advising on the Academic and Examination Regulations; b. Assessing the implementation of the Academic and Examination Regulations; c. Solicited and unsolicited recommendations.

During the final meeting of the academic year, the Programme Committee shall assess its performance and activities of the past year and draw up a list of points for consideration for the following academic year.

This assessment is also recorded in the Programme Committee's annual report.

TIP: Discuss the annual report each year with the portfolio holder for teaching and/or the Director of Studies. At this meeting, points for improvements for next year and any action on both sides can also be discussed. It is also a good time to reflect on how the Programme Committee has performed and its communication with the Director of Studies / the Faculty Board.

Appendix 1 Higher Education and Research Act

Effective from 1 September 2017

Article 9.18. Programme Committees

1. A Programme Committee is convened for each degree programme or group of programmes. The committee's duty is to advise on promoting and safeguarding the quality of the degree programme. The Programme Committee is also:
 - a. entitled to approve the Academic and Examination Regulations, as referred to in Article 7.13, with the exception of those areas mentioned in the second paragraph under a, f, h-u and x, and with the exception of the requirements referred to in the Articles 7.28, fourth and fifth paragraphs, and 7.30b, second paragraph;
 - b. responsible for conducting an annual evaluation of the way in which the Academic and Examination Regulations are implemented;
 - c. entitled to present advice in respect of the Academic and Examination Regulations referred to in Article 7.13, with the exception of those areas in relation to which the committee is entitled to grant approval on the basis of (a); and
 - d. responsible for making recommendations to the programme management, as referred to Article 9.17, first paragraph, and to the dean, either on its own initiative or on request, on all matters relating to teaching in the degree programme in question. The committee forwards the advice and proposals referred to under d to the Faculty Council for information purposes.
2. Article 9.35, preamble and sections b, c and d, shall apply to the advice referred to in the first paragraph *mutatis mutandis*.
3. If the committee makes a proposal as referred to in paragraph 1, subsection d, to the programme management or the dean, the management or the dean shall respond within two months of receiving the proposal.
4. Article 9.31, paragraphs 3 to 8, shall apply to the Programme Committee *mutatis mutandis*. After consultations between the programme management or the dean and the Faculty Council, a method for determining the composition of the Programme Committee that is other than election may be set out in the faculty regulations. Each year, it shall be decided whether it is desirable to adopt a different form of appointment.
5. The Programme Committee is authorized to invite the programme management or the dean at least twice a year to discuss the proposed policy on the basis of the agenda it has drawn up.
6. If a faculty includes only one programme, the faculty regulations may provide that the powers and duties of the Programme Committee are exercised by the Faculty Council, referred to in Article 9.37.

Article 9.48. Facilities and training

1. The Executive Board grants the University Council use of those facilities which may be made available to it, and which are reasonably necessary for the council to carry out its duties, and in all cases including administrative, financial and legal support and training.
2. The Executive Board shall make a training budget available to the members of the University Council, to be determined collectively by the Executive Board and council. University staff are given the opportunity to receive such training during working hours and with full pay.
3. This Article shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to the Faculty Boards and Programme Committees on the understanding that the Dean takes the place of the Executive Board.

Article 7.13. Academic and Examination Regulations

1. For each programme or group of programmes provided by the institution, the board of the institution will set out its own Academic and Examination Regulations. The Academic and Examination Regulations contains adequate and clear information about the programme or group of programmes.
2. The Academic and Examination Regulations, notwithstanding the other specifications in this Act, document for each programme or group of programmes the applicable procedures and rights and

obligations related to teaching and examinations. These include at least the following:

- a. the content of the programme and associated examinations,
 - a1. the manner in which teaching and education in the relevant programme are to be evaluated,
- b. the content of the specializations offered as part of the programme,
- c. the programme's final attainment levels with regard to knowledge, understanding and skills,
- d. where applicable, the structure of practical exercises,
- e. the study load of the programme and of each of the constituent educational units,
- f. the detailed rules referred to in Article 7.8b, sixth paragraph, and Article 7.9, fifth paragraph,
- g. the Master's programmes to which Article 7.4a, eighth paragraph, applies,
- h. the number and sequence of examinations and the times at which these can be taken,
- i. full-time, part-time or work-study (*duaal*) organization of the programme,
- j. where necessary, the order, and the periods in which and the number of times per academic year that the opportunity to sit examinations and final degree assessments is given,
- k. the rules specified in Article 7.10, fourth paragraph,
- l. whether examinations are administered in oral, written or another form, notwithstanding the authority of the Examination Board to decide otherwise,
- m. the way in which students with a disability or chronic disease are given a reasonable opportunity to take the examinations;
- n. the public nature of oral examinations, subject to the right of the Examination Board to determine otherwise in special cases;
- o. the period within which the results of an examination must be announced, together with details of whether this period can be altered and if so in what way;
- p. the way in which and the period within which students who have taken an examination are given the opportunity to inspect their marked work;
- q. the way in which and the period within which information can be provided about the questions asked and exercises given in the framework of a written examination and about the standards used for assessment;
- r. the grounds on which the Examination Board could grant exemption from the taking of one or more examinations to students who have previously passed examinations in higher education or have acquired knowledge or skills outside higher education;
- s. where necessary, the stipulation that students must pass certain examinations as a condition for admission to other examinations;
- t. where necessary, the obligation to take part in certain practical exercises with a view to admission to the examination in question, subject to the authority of the Examination Board to grant exemption from this obligation, with or without the imposition of alternative requirements;
- u. the monitoring of academic progress and individual student support and guidance;
- v. where applicable, the manner in which students are selected for a special track within a programme as referred to in Article 7.9b; and
- x. the actual design of the education provided.

Appendix 2 General annual timetable for Programme Committees

Period of the academic year	Duties of the Programme Committee
1 September to 30 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training, reading up on relevant topics • Determining focus and priorities • Discussing programme's annual report • Discussing new student numbers • Discussing teaching evaluations • Discussing programme of study evaluations
1 December to 31 January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing teaching evaluations • Proposing amendments to Academic and Examination Regulations
1 February to 30 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing teaching evaluations • Discussion of draft Academic and Examination Regulations • Producing draft of advisory report / amendment proposals • National Alumni Survey (every second year) to discuss results and follow-up • Results of the Alumni Monitor and follow-up discussion • Discussion of management information
1 May to 31 August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing teaching evaluations • Submission of advisory memorandum with proposed amendments to Academic and Examination Regulations • Discuss results of National Student Survey and follow-up • If applicable, recruit new members and prepare handover • Produce annual report

Appendix 3 Source references

- The Netherlands' Higher Education and Research Act (Articles 9.18 and 9.48 of WHW);
- VU Management Model
- Faculty Regulations
- Student Charter
- Educational Quality Handbook
- Model Regulations for Programme Committees
- Participation Regulations¹¹
- University of Amsterdam's Brochure on Programme Committees
- Delft University of Technology's 2015 Guide for Programme Committees

¹¹ From 1 September 2017, the Programme Committee will be a consultation body.

Appendix 4 Overview of advisory and approval rights of Programme Committees and faculty Joint Assembly

Academic and Examination Regulations, Article 7.13 paragraph 2 of the Higher Education and Research Act	FGV		OLC	
	I	A	I	A
a. content of the programme and associated examinations				
a1. the manner in which teaching and education in the relevant programme are evaluated				
b. the content of the specializations offered as part of the programme				
c. the programme's final attainment levels with regard to the knowledge, understanding and skills that must have been acquired				
d. where applicable, the design of practical exercises				
e. the study load of the programme and of each of its constituent educational units				
f. the detailed rules referred to in Article 7.8b, sixth paragraph, and Article 7.9, fifth paragraph (recommendation on continuation of studies)				
g. the Master's programmes to which Article 7.4a, eighth paragraph, applies (elevated study load)				
h. the number and sequence of examinations and the times at which these can be taken				
i. the full-time, part-time or work-study structure of the programme				
j. where necessary, the order, and the periods in which and the number of times per academic year that the opportunity to sit examinations and final degree assessments is given				
k. where necessary, the period of validity for pass grades awarded for examinations, notwithstanding the authority of the Examination Board to extend this period of validity				
l. whether examinations are administered in oral, written or another form, notwithstanding the authority of the Examination Board to decide otherwise				
m. the way in which students with a disability or chronic health condition are given a reasonable opportunity to take the examinations				
n. the public nature of oral examinations, subject to the right of the Examination Board to determine otherwise in special cases				
o. the period within which the results of an examination must be announced, together with details of whether this period can be altered and if so in what way				
p. the way in which and the period within which students who have taken an examination are given the opportunity to inspect their marked work				
q. the way in which and the period within which information can be provided about the questions asked and exercises given in the framework of a written examination and about the standards used for assessment				
r. the grounds on which the Examination Board could grant exemption from the taking of one or more examinations to students who have previously passed examinations in higher education or have acquired knowledge or skills outside higher education				
s. where necessary, the stipulation that students must pass certain examinations as a condition for admission to other examinations				

t. where necessary, the obligation to take part in certain practical exercises with a view to admission to the examination in question, subject to the authority of the Examination Board to grant exemption from this obligation, with or without the imposition of alternative requirements				
u. the monitoring of academic progress and individual student support and guidance;				
v. where applicable, the manner in which students are selected for a special track within a programme as referred to in Article 7.9b (excellence track within a programme)				
x. the actual design of the education provided.				
<i>All other matters that are regulated in the Academic and Examination Regulations but which are not mentioned as such in Art. 7.13 of the Higher Education and Research Act under points a to x.</i>				

The letters corresponds to the letter of Article 7.13, paragraph 2 of the Higher Education and Research Act

Abbreviations used:

- FGV: faculty Joint Assembly
- OLC: Programme Committee
- I: right of approval
- A: right of advice