

**University Council**  
**Consultation Meeting UC/EB**  
**Erasmus University Rotterdam**

**Date and Time:** 02/07/2024, 14:00 – 16:30h

**Location:** 1.20 Polak

**Present in the Meeting:** Ivonne Cune-Noten (chair), **members of the Executive Board, Ann O'Brien (secretary to the Board)**, Ernst Hulst, Sebastiaan Kamp, Joseph Ayinla, Albert Wagelmans, Nawin Ramcharan, Linqundo van der Klooster, Linda Dekker, Emese von Bone, Wesley Hennep, Katarzyna Lasak, Rosita Boedhai-Jansen, Max Wagenaar, Jaap Cornelese, Aleid Fokkema, Timo Zandvliet, Achraf Taouil, Roxanne Austin (Clerk), Ellie Cercel (Minutes).

**Absent:** Cagla Altin, Tom van Dijken, Emre Ulusoy, Yasin Demir, Aki Negate.

**Waiver:** Anthony van der Linden.

## **01 Opening Consultation Meeting**

### **01.01 Setting of the agenda**

The order of the agenda items was adjusted to the following: 1) 02.02 EUR Strategy, 2) 02.03 Smarter Academic Year and 3) 02.01 Erasmus Perspectives.

### **01.02 Setting of the minutes of the previous meeting/action points**

The minutes were set. The action point “the EB will inform the UC about the meeting with the Vice Deans of Education, as it relates to the topic of recorded lectures” will be resolved with a written answer as soon as possible from the Executive Board.

### **01.03 Announcements**

- This is the last consultation meeting with Ed Brinksma as Chair of the EB. The UC would like to thank Ed for the fruitful conversations and cooperation with the UC.

## **02 Agenda items consultation meeting**

### **02.01 EUR Strategy – Draft recalibrated mission/vision**

Throughout the year, discussions with the Executive Board highlighted the critical need to ensure the continuity of strategic programs while maintaining a human-centered organizational approach, however, several strategic programs are being discontinued. Seeing as the EB has previously indicated that we are in a good financial position in terms of reserves, the UC is critical to the decision to discontinue these projects.

The EB clarified that the strategic projects that will be discontinued, have always temporary projects. As the current strategic period concludes, there is an effort to ensure a smooth transition into the next phase, where the focus will be on positive societal impact, targeted and simplified activities, and a decentralized approach where the faculties will take greater responsibility in aligning with and organizing strategic initiatives. This approach will, according to the EB, promote ownership and localized knowledge.

The UC raised concerns about the uncertainty faced by employees involved in the strategic programs and the potential loss of valuable knowledge and experience, asking the EB to clarify how they are going to avoid these outcomes. The EB acknowledged these concerns, explaining that while

continuity of knowledge is important, it must be managed within the existing financial constraints. As the strategic projects have been originally established on a temporary basis, the EB has anticipated these concerns and will focus its resources on implementing procedures that ensure a good transition, specifically in terms of content. In response, the UC stated that a large loss of on-the-job knowledge will be lost in the process, as it can take years for staff members to deeply understand the context of a large organization such as EUR. The EB remarked that knowledge exists not only within people but also in implementing the right supporting processes and operations. They further outlined the financial strains, explaining that the government's plans of removing funds from the higher education system are expected to lead to serious financial strain in future years, which asks for careful consideration when making additional investments at EUR. With these dire financial considerations in mind, the EB explained their aim is to create and maintain knowledge transfer within limited financial means.

The EB shared that a total of 22 people, amounting to 18 FTEs, had a temporary contract that will expire, and a total of 13 people (in total 11.1 FTE) with a permanent contract will be faced with contract terminations. The EB explained they are aware of their role as employers in relation to the temporary staff engaged in these projects and have taken effective action to inform them timely of the foreseeable contract terminations, thus allowing those involved to react and consider their future employment steps. The ELC has not yet been involved, because these are individual cases and it is not a reorganization, in which case the ELC would indeed be involved. The EB will share a written account with the UC providing more precisely the details of the personnel outcomes.

In response to the potential decentralization of strategic activities, the EB has appointed a Strategic Dean of Impact and Engagement to ensure coordinated efforts across faculties. This role will involve working closely with faculty representatives to develop plans and utilize budgets efficiently, aiming for synergy and maximizing the impact of resources. While the transition does not constitute a formal reorganization, it involves reassigning responsibilities to faculties and services. The UC inquired whether the absorption of knowledge and tasks will involve the same staff members whose workloads we are trying to reduce. The EB replied by once again highlighting the dire financial situation and the potential synergistic outcomes that can result from decentralizing these tasks. Also, the EB explained they foresee the need to outline a team, budget, and specific details regarding the budget of the newly appointed dean.

**Action point:** the EB will provide the UC with a written account detailing the scope of personnel outcomes involved in the process of the ending of strategic programs.

## **02.02 Strategic Implementation Plan Smarter Academic Year**

The UC remarked that the original aims of the design task force were a reduction in workload and study load and an alignment of curricula to reach impact through interdisciplinarity. However, after discussions with the implementation task force, it became apparent that interdisciplinarity was not a primary focus. The UC expressed their disappointment and sought the EB's views, explaining that the current optional plan can allow faculties to overlook the interdisciplinarity goal. The EB acknowledged the challenges, stating that the plan has been condensed significantly. Despite this, it aims to reduce the curriculum to a maximum of 32 weeks for all schools, which is already a challenging task. The intention is to have mandatory weeks without education, befitting both students (who may need to travel to their families) and staff members (who have more space for research and engagement activities). The promise of interdisciplinarity is acknowledged as difficult, but their efforts will continue to integrate it through interdisciplinary minors and a reduction in the number of overall minors.

The UC expressed concerns about the potential impact on students, questioning whether increased demands in less time and with less supervision would truly reduce their workload. They also pointed out that the progress on interdisciplinarity seemed stagnant in the current plans, despite significant investment; for instance, there are missed opportunities for master programs and second-year bachelor programs. The EB responded that, while they understand the frustrations, they are taking steps to create synchronized spaces in BA2 and BA3 where interdisciplinary work can occur. Moreover, they are experimenting with new assessment methods and flipped classroom concepts to reduce the workload on students, as can be seen already at EMC.

In discussions over the past year, it seemed there were high ambitions which now appear limited. The UC was concerned about the disconnect between the design task force's objectives and the current outcomes. They suggested revisiting the design documents and ensuring the design group's advice is fully integrated into faculty guidance, as they worried that faculties traditionally less inclined towards interdisciplinarity might opt out of these initiatives, highlighting the need for a strong central standard and asking if the plans could be revisited to align more closely with these goals. The EB appreciated the encouragement and agreed to discuss with deans to ensure the minimum requirements are met. They acknowledged the suggestions from the design committee and committed to reviewing how these are communicated to faculties to make them less optional. However, they felt it was too early to send the task back to the drawing board, emphasizing that interdisciplinary work would be driven by initiatives like the convergence, Erasmus initiatives, and the strategic dean of impact and engagement.

### **02.03 Erasmus Perspectives**

The UC informed the EB there will be consent on the elements of Erasmus Perspectives for which it has been requested. However, several aspects of the document require additional clarity. Specifically, the UC sought clarity on the consent process for the budget, especially regarding significant cuts to the strategic funds and the requirement for faculties to use their own budgets. The EB explained they are in the process of making the budget part of a broader awareness effort, involving not just financial considerations but also the roles of deans and directors. This process includes regular updates on financial situations and projections, thus ensuring all stakeholders are aligned. The budget for 2025 is still being finalized, with strategic funding expected to decrease by 30% and overall service budgets by 5%. The final budget for 2025 will include these adjustments and will be up for consent in the UC. Moreover, the EB assured the UC that no staff would be fired, but the temporary contracts would not be extended.

The UC questioned the EB about their involvement in budget decisions, particularly in light of the substantial financial challenges ahead. The EB emphasized their commitment to involving the UC throughout the process to avoid surprises and maintain transparency. However, the UC expressed their surprise at recent program discontinuations and sought clarification on the role of the council in such decisions. The EB acknowledged this oversight and committed to better communication in the future.

The discussion also touched on the strategic use of the HeQa funds, with the EB confirming that any changes in distribution would require UC's advice and consent. The transition towards the 2025 budget will maintain the same process for the HeQa funds.

The conversation shifted to the situation at the ISS; the EB indicated that ISS is evaluating its future direction amidst financial challenges, with several possible routes being considered, such as offering consultancy services. They assured the UC that any decisions would be communicated in advance.

The UC shared a difficulty experienced at faculties where the relations between the directors of operations and deans are not optimal, which can create issues within the policy of updating budgets at faculties on a regular basis. The UC emphasized the importance of ensuring the deans and the management teams can have constructive and realistic communication. The EB acknowledged this need and stated they have extensive evaluations in place when deans' contracts are up for renewal.

Finally, the UC raised concerns about the potential impacts of government changes to the incentive and sector grants. They suggested that the CPC develop scenarios to prepare for these changes. The EB agreed, noting that the first step is to address the 25M euro challenge for 2025, followed by planning future scenarios. They also emphasized the collective opposition of Dutch universities to the government's proposed changes and the need to be prepared for any challenges ahead.

### **03 Any other business**

#### **03.01 Open letter rector regarding ties with Israel**

The UC asked the EB about the open letter regarding ties with Israel and the role of the committee led by Ruud Ganzevoort in the process. The EB explained that there had been a misunderstanding regarding the interpretation of the letter, which was issued on behalf of UNL and all universities; the letter emphasized that the core value of any university is academic freedom, which is central to science. In addition, the EB explained that boycotting entire countries is a decision that countries can make, but it is not in the scope of universities. However, for universities that have collaborations with knowledge institutes in conflict zones where human rights might be violated, the universities have the freedom to install committees that will have a serious look at the collaborations and assess whether they challenge their integrity. Based on this principle, EUR has also established a committee. The EB noted that the media translated the message badly through the title of the article, by presenting it in an unnuanced and overly simplified manner.

The UC raised concerns about the committee, as it seems ineffective, as a position was already presented in the letter. The EB explained that the letter did not take a definitive position, but rather described the values and processes involved in their approach, and highlighted the need for better instruments that can handle such complex issues as balancing academic freedom and ethical considerations in international collaborations. As the UC remarked that multiple media outlets had misunderstood the statement, which might be a symptom that the statement could have been improved, the EB reiterated that several outlets resorted to reading the misrepresentative headline instead of the letter, which perpetuated the issue.

Finally, the UC asked for more information about the relationship between EUR's committee and those of other universities. The EB assured the UC that the committee is working completely independently, but there is also ongoing contact among other committees.

#### **03.02 Academic freedom**

Tying into the previous topic, the UC questioned the EB on their stance regarding the potential government decision to cut ties with Israel, and what implications this would have for academic freedom. The EB explained that there are significant differences between the situations. Specifically, the government had placed Russia on a sanction list, and there was an explicit request from the government to freeze collaborations with Russian institutions. Also, there was no significant polarization on campus regarding the situation, while the emotions and tensions regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict are more pronounced. The EB emphasized that they have learned from the

Russian situation, and the establishment of the committee is part of the learning process to handle such sensitive issues more effectively in the future.

### **03.03 Incident at EMC**

A public event was organized at EMC (about the health situation in Gaza), but the organizers were asked to organize elsewhere or change the title of the event. The UC asked the EB how they ensure academic freedom across different faculties. The EB was aware of the incident but discussed it only after the event had been arranged. They explained there is a subtle but important distinction between faculties and the hospital, as the hospital must maintain neutrality for all patients. As a result, academic freedom is weighed differently within the hospital context. The EB suggested that for a more in-depth conversation, the UC should discuss with the Dean of EMC.

### **03.04 Long study fine**

The UC requested an update regarding the minister's aim to introduce a fine for students with study delays. The EB responded that they have no additional information beyond what has been announced in the budget and that they recognize the proposed measure could adversely affect vulnerable students, including first-generation students, students with disabilities, etc., which goes against their principles. They also recognize the negative impact on student boards, study associations, exchange students, etc. The EB, alongside Academic Affairs, is developing scenarios to mitigate the potential impact of this policy. They acknowledged that while they can lobby and content the decision, ultimately, they cannot prevent it if the government decides to proceed. The UC also inquired about any lobbying efforts from UNL. The EB confirmed that they are preparing campaigns with the help of a small campaign office against the proposed study fine and the reduction in sector plans, and during the opening of the academic year, they would like to make a statement. Moreover, there will be collaborations with UNL and other associations.

### **03.05 Demonstrations on campus**

The UC raised several questions regarding the pro-Palestine occupation on campus.

- *Can the EB explain why the announced pro-Palestine occupation was allowed on our campus despite the protestors ignoring security's request to leave?*

The EB explained that the campus open area is public terrain, governed by Dutch law, which protects the right to protest. They outlined three grounds on which such demonstrations can be discontinued: public order, public health, and obstruction of traffic. The EB emphasized that once an event is classified as a demonstration, higher laws take precedence over the House Rules, and they must coordinate with local authorities (the triangle) to manage the situation.

- *If it is an open place, why didn't the security request the protestors to leave?*

The EB explained that, once the event attendees described the event as a demonstration, the higher rules had to apply.

- *What was the reason behind the EB's decision not to enforce the house rules during the occupation?*

The EB reiterated that the House Rules lose their meaning when the activity is under the law of public manifestations, thus they were not in the position to enforce the house rules. They can only enforce the house rules when not overridden by higher laws. The EB also explained that their enforcement capabilities are limited to what is provided through the triangle.

- *The people present were using masks, which is not in line with the national law; can the EB explain how they dealt with this?*

The EB acknowledged that the law is ambiguous, allowing for face coverings unless identification is required. While they do not have the room to enforce this, they could signal it, by requesting to only talk to people who can be identified, thus not wearing face coverings.

- *What is the financial impact on the university caused by the occupation and how will this be dealt with? What are the consequences?*

The EB reported costs of approximately 70,000 euros for a damaged screen and additional expenses for cleaning the graffiti, totaling above 100,000 euros. The EB expressed dissatisfaction with these costs, stressing that while they respect the right to protest, they do not tolerate vandalism. They are exploring ways to address these damages but face challenges due to the lack of a responsible entity to hold accountable.

### **03.06 Building structure concerns**

A few months ago, a building consisting of a similar structure to the Polak building collapsed, recalling past problems with a parking building at Eindhoven airport. The UC inquired if there would be necessary inspections on the Polak building. The EB and RE&F were aware of the incident and there is no cause for concern following up-to-date inspections of the building.