

University Council
Consultation Meeting
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Date and Time: 23-09-2025, 14:00-16:00

Location: Polak 3.18

Present in the meeting: Annelien Bredenoord (EB Chair), Jantine Schuit (EB, Rector Magnificus), Ellen van Schoten (EB, Vice-Chair), Ann O'Brien (EB, secretary) Luca Hellings (Chair), Roxanne Austin (Clerk), Floortje Dekker (Minutes), Dogukan Demirboken, Albert Wagelmans, John Hays, Borja Ranzinger, Jaap Cornelese, Rik Alleleijn, Linda Dekker, Clara Eggers, Bilal El Allouchi, Federica Violi, Max Wagenaar, Sebastiaan Kamp, Mohamed Khalil, Iwona Gusc, Caressa Bol, Lourdes Wansink Mangiano, Manuela Bartolovic, Bodi Winkler, Simon Maas, Deniz Alican, Hans van Oosterhout,

Absent: Rosita Boedhai, Joseph Ayinla, Adina Popovici

01 Opening

01.01 Setting of the agenda

There were no remarks on the agenda, therefore the agenda was set.

01.02 Setting of the previous minutes

There were no remarks on the minutes, therefore the minutes were set.

01.03 Announcements

Way of Working

Since this is the first consultation meeting of the year, the Chair elaborated on the way of working during the meeting. He remarked that one UC member will ask the questions for each topic.

02 Agenda items plenary meeting UC

02.01 Quarterly update report Labor Inspection

A UC member asked the EB about how they are planning to make the recommendations of the Labour Authority and of the policy group consistent with the budget cuts. The EB answered that this is a challenge and that the action plan is in principle to address the concerns of the Labour Authority. However, the Labour Authority is very demanding, expecting the university to do more with fewer people and less budget. The EB said they are trying to see what is realistically possible.

The UC member asked the EB about the challenges mentioned in an earlier meeting of balancing the Labour Authority's requirements with ongoing budget cuts, and how the EB plans to communicate the impact of these budget cuts on structural workload issues to the relevant political bodies. The EB responded that they are working on structural communication, for example through town halls that are being organized, with work pressure as a recurring theme. This gives staff the opportunity to ask questions, and this is part of building community. The EB added that the impacts of the budget cuts are not yet fully clear. They also stressed the need to be realistic, as there is no money available to hire new staff to reduce workload. Instead, they are looking into measures such as using AI to help reduce work pressure, though this will take time.

Furthermore, the UC member asked the EB about the balance between work, people, and money, and whether a potential conclusion could be that the university is understaffed but that there are no more funds available and how conclusions will be drawn from there. The EB answered that this is a speculative, open question and therefore difficult to answer. They acknowledged it is hard to hire new people given the limited budget, but they are looking at possibilities. They mentioned working together with other institutions in the longer term and explained this is also part of the new strategy, which emphasizes collaboration and diversification of income streams. The EB also noted that EU and lifelong learning budgets are increasing, which could create opportunities.

The UC member also asked the EB about how budget cuts may negatively impact the work stress of junior staff in particular, including a more diverse and fragmented portfolio and larger classrooms, and how the EB plans to monitor this situation and avoid creating and reinforcing inequalities between career stages. The EB recognized that junior staff are in a more vulnerable position and that the lack of long-term prospects makes it less attractive for them to stay. However, they emphasized the importance of retaining talented staff in their 20s and 30s. The EB said that all deans are required to make plans to prevent people with fixed-term contracts from losing their jobs.

The EB was then questioned about the governance of job contracts and how choices are made, specifically regarding the criteria leading to the extension of temporary contracts, noting that the departure of temporary staff can also create work stress issues. The EB answered that this is part of strategic personnel planning, which is reviewed twice a year. They noted that the CAO agreement states there should be a maximum of 30.5% temporary contracts, and that the university currently has 11.9%, which they consider to be within the acceptable range. The EB also emphasized that maintaining a flexible layer of temporary staff is necessary to keep the organization dynamic.

The UC member asked the EB about action item C (E&W, Recognition & Rewards or Recognition & Appreciation), and pointed out that in practice there are challenges related to the capacity within a team to choose a focus profile, the overall financial situation, the educational load, and other team-relevant issues. They asked how realistic the application of an R&R scheme is, also beyond academic staff. The EB responded that they strongly believe in the R&R scheme. They ask deans to identify what is needed in the coming years and try to distribute tasks within departments so staff can make choices, though this is not always possible. In the beginning, R&R included multiple rigid career paths, but this has since shifted to a more mixed and flexible model that allows adjustments. Employees are expected to discuss their roles with their supervisors, and deans use this input when making their plans. The EB emphasized that education and research must remain at the foundation of academic careers.

The UC member asked the EB about the insights from the evaluation surveys shared with the staff, which challenges have been identified, and which plans are being made to overcome them. The EB answered that many people do not see what is happening behind

the scenes, including what the EB is doing to promote recognition and rewards. They are trying to improve communication so that these efforts are more visible. The UC member asked the EB about whether, given the anticipated budget cuts, there will be a need to adjust the proposed timetable. The EB answered that moving forward with the strategic plan requires clarity about possibilities and agreements between staff and their team leaders. They stressed that budget cuts are not a reason to slow down and that investments are not strictly necessary for recognition and rewards, as the scheme is about structuring career paths.

The UC member remarked that the financial situation does influence the feasibility of career diversification, since educational duties always need to be covered. The EB replied that this tension is not specifically related to R&R, as the work must always be completed collectively by teams. They also remarked that income streams include more than direct funding, such as engagement activities. A UC member remarked that while they value the R&R program, they have noticed that people dislike being typecast. They asked the EB whether the system allows flexibility for people to change their focus over five years. The EB acknowledged that the original framework was too strict and confirmed that the scheme is now more flexible, allowing movement between paths. Deans have been asked to experiment within the framework and reflect later.

The EB was then asked whether the university is moving in the direction of using AI to support certain tasks. The EB answered that there are currently too many assessments and noted that RSM is experimenting with AI, while other schools are not yet doing so. They want to see how these experiments evolve before making broader decisions. Lastly, a UC member asked the EB about the heavy workload of applying for external funds, and whether they are considering making an impact assessment to identify which funds are easier to obtain, which allow the hiring of staff, and how much time they take. This would help faculties create a clearer map of which funds best fit their needs. The EB answered that ERS can brainstorm with teams about funding opportunities and support employees in the process. They added that all faculties are conducting such reviews and that responsibility lies with the deans, who need to create overviews at the school level.

03 Incoming documents

04 Any other business

04.01 Opening of the academic year

A UC member asked the EB to reflect on what happened during the Opening of the Academic Year, when a student in a wheelchair was unable to access the stage at the end of the ceremony, and how this relates to the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion. The EB remarked that the auditorium is equipped with a lift, but the student did not want to use it to go up the stage. They explained that there was discussion with her afterwards and she indicated she was satisfied with the procedure.

Another UC member remarked that they had also spoken with the student, and she explained that she did not want to use the lift because it would draw too much attention, but

that a ramp would have been fine. They added that the student was also unable to go up the podium with the prize winners at the end of the ceremony. One UC member stressed that the issue should not depend on whether the student complained, as the university should ensure that everyone feels included. The EB repeated that they had the impression that the student was satisfied. They also noted that there is an accessibility plan in place for 2030, though this will take time to implement. Another UC member clarified that the awarding part of the ceremony had not been the problem, but that during the closing moment when all prize winners went up the stage, the student was left without an option to join. They suggested that alternative solutions could have been improvised, such as letting people stand in front of the stage. They emphasized that while planned accessibility was in place, it is also important to act inclusively in impromptu situations. The EB responded that they will take this into account.

04.02 Follow up committee of sensitive collaborations

A UC member asked the EB whether they could provide an update on the implementation of the most recent advice from the Advisory Committee on Sensitive Collaborations. The EB answered that the institutional relationship with Israel is currently frozen. The committee is at this moment evaluating some other collaborations, and advice on these is expected shortly. The EB repeated that ties with Israel will remain frozen until the university no longer has any concerns. The UC member asked whether the EB could reflect on the other collaborations under review. The EB explained that the institution is currently looking at one Israeli institution and one Palestinian institution. They added that the committee is a temporary body, but it might continue its work depending on developments.

Furthermore, the UC member asked the EB whether, considering the recent developments mentioned, their stance has shifted toward taking further measures. They also asked whether the decision to evaluate other collaborations was made by the EB or by the committee itself. The EB explained that the committee will review all institutional collaborations in the Middle East, which is why a Palestinian university is also being evaluated. The decision to do so was probably made in collaboration between the EB and the committee. The EB answered that they do not currently see the need to revisit the collaborations as all collaborations are frozen. The UC clarified that the question was not about the stance itself but about taking further measures given the new developments.

The EB further explained that in two weeks there will be a discussion with UNL about the advice from KNAW. They stressed that the university has been trying to avoid taking political positions such as boycotting an entire country. Therefore, these matters will be discussed together with UNL and the Ministry of Education. The EB remarked that if EUR were to act more proactively on its own, it could be heavily criticized, and therefore it is better to take such steps collectively with other universities.

The UC member asked whether the EB would consider suggestions such as giving scholarships to people from Gaza. The EB replied that the university already participates in the "Scholars at Risk" program and that staff have been looking into this. The UC member asked whether the EB could reach out to the program to see what is being done in this regard. The EB responded that they are open to suggestions. They added that they are also in conversation with the EU committee. Another UC member remarked that the EB could also voice their opinion to the ministry, and that simply freezing ties is not enough. The EB

answered that navigating this situation is difficult, noting that the university has also been criticized for freezing ties with all Israeli institutions.

A UC member asked the EB what measures they consider taking to ensure that EUR is not complicit through collaborations with third parties, such as institutions or companies. The EB answered that the committee evaluates these risks and looks at the probability of the university being indirectly complicit. If there are any concerns, the committee will inform the EB. A UC member asked whether this would also include looking into collaborations with other Dutch universities such as TU Delft, given recent accusations against them. The EB remarked that they were not aware of these accusations and suggested that the UC member forward this information to the committee.

04.03 Fire safety provisions EUR buildings

A UC member asked the EB about the fire safety deficiencies identified during last year's government inspections across multiple university buildings. They requested clarification on the main causes of these deficiencies and what measures have been taken to address them. The EB answered that they have started renovating the Tinbergen building, which was long overdue, and explained that this is the case for several other buildings as well, including the Mandeville building. They noted that a dashboard has been created with all identified issues, and measures are being taken in consultation with the municipality to ensure compliance with regulations. The EB emphasized that some maintenance is extensive and requires complicated processes. In the meantime, fire wardens have been deployed as a mitigating measure. While progress is being made, fire wardens are still necessary in the Mandeville building.

A UC member asked whether other solutions had been considered as the fire wardens are quite expensive and remarked that the fire wardens were supposed to be a temporary measure of six months but have now been in place for a year. The EB replied that while the measure is indeed costly, they now finally know what the problem is and how to fix it. However, there have been delays, due to the need to follow European tender law procedures. They indicated that the issue is planned to be fixed this year. A UC member asked whether the university buildings are safe. The EB reassured the Council that they are and reiterated that the issue could be resolved by the end of this year.

04.04 Impact and engagement

A UC member asked the EB about the ambition to position impact and engagement as a third pillar alongside research and education, noting that this is not yet reflected in the current governance structure. The EB answered that it is indeed their ambition to establish engagement as the third pillar, and they are in the process of incorporating it into the governance structure. They have appointed a dean of engagement whose task is to embed engagement in the governance structure. The EB remarked that it will take time to build a proper governance structure, as this is a relatively new pillar. They are developing a vision on engagement and have initiated a *gemeenschappelijke raad van advies*, which brings together people from different backgrounds to provide advice on establishing the new governance structure. The EB expects the structure to be fully in place by 2030. They also

noted that engagement is inherently connected to research and education, so they are still considering what the best governance model would be.

The UC member emphasized that it can be counterproductive to consider structure last. They gave examples, such as vice deans who see their main responsibilities as research and education may not take engagement seriously because it could be perceived as infringing on their primary duties. They added that giving boards explicit responsibilities for engagement is a more effective way to get things done. The EB responded that some faculties already have vice deans for engagement and reiterated that structure should follow strategy. They are still carefully considering how best to implement it.

Another UC member remarked that engagement should not be treated as a separate activity from education and research. They noted that at RSM the dominant opinion is that activities should only count as engagement if they have a clear connection to research and education. RSM has a dean of engagement, and a review is planned to clarify the dean's responsibilities. The UC member recommended that the EB delegate responsibility for executing the engagement strategy to the faculties. They observed that many prior attempts at engagement had failed, so empowering faculties is key to making societal engagement successful. The EB agreed with this perspective.

Lastly, a UC member remarked that they hope the EB does not backtrack on positioning engagement as a third pillar, since this represents a significant cultural shift. They also noted that staff tend to cling to old ways of working, partly due to budget constraints. The UC member asked how the EB reflects on discussions with faculties regarding the deans of engagement. The EB responded that all schools will develop strategies and they are open to suggestions from schools, for instance about combining portfolios. The EB emphasized that they want strong ambassadors for engagement within faculties, with clear responsibilities in their portfolios.

04.05 Reflection on situation around professor

A UC member asked the EB about the recent media coverage and public protests regarding the situation around a professor and requested an update on the measures taken as well as reflections on how such situations are addressed. The EB answered that they spend many hours per week on cases like this. They noted that these issues are openly discussed in the media, on campus, and by outside groups. The EB stressed that they try to avoid bias and, for example, brought the Association of Muslim Rights Watch into contact with a team within the university. They added that the information from different parties is often one-sided, which is why the EB does not comment publicly and feels a responsibility to remain neutral.

The EB was then asked about the guidelines on how to engage with such cases. The EB explained that there is a code of conduct, but it is general and does not provide specific guidance for navigating polarized debates. They emphasized the importance of freedom of speech and noted that there are no specific rules about what individuals can or cannot say. A UC member remarked that this is tricky, as more polarized debates are likely to arise in the future, and suggested it would be important to reflect on how the university equips employees to handle such discussions. The EB responded that some training has already been offered because of difficult classroom discussions and reiterated that people should be aware of their responsibilities.

A UC member asked the EB where they would draw the line on social media, since the EB had said that people can almost say everything there. The EB replied that they plan to create a social media code and will start on this. They acknowledged that there is a thin line between freedom of expression and academic freedom and added that it is not possible to monitor all employees on social media, especially as they also have private lives. A UC member asked whether the UC could be updated on the development of such a code and remarked that it is strange the university does not already have one. The EB answered that they do not find this strange, since sharp debates should take place within the university.

Lastly, the UC member asked whether there are any additional rules for people holding special positions about what they can or cannot say. The EB answered that members of the board have less room to state political opinions because they represent Erasmus University and therefore must be very cautious. They emphasized that this is not about rules but about responsibilities: the board and deans carry institutional responsibility, while individual staff members carry personal responsibility. A UC member asked the EB what actions are taken when racist or discriminatory incidents occur, and who decides on these cases. The EB responded that independent committees review such incidents. Informally, supervisors may address them, while formally they can be referred to a legal committee or to external legal bodies.

Action point:

- The EB will update the UC on the development of a social media code of conduct.