



# Centrale Studentenraad

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Bijlage(n)	-		
Betreft	<b>Education &amp; Selection</b>		

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*Dit betreft een Engelstalig advies*

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Dear Executive Board,

With this advice, the Central student council (CSR) would like to deliver on the action point concerning education and accessibility from the OV d.d. 27-11-2018. The CSR's official vision on education that was presented to you serves as the foundation for the following advice. Since the start of our term, the CSR has given much attention to and carefully deliberated the topic of education and accessibility. A number of key priority areas have been outlined and deserve attention. These are sustainable selection procedures, discontinuing the growth of English track programs, increasing the numbers of motivated students with academic potential, and working to improve the state of diversity across the UvA. In this advice, we briefly return to our reasoning for the latter choice of priorities, and thereafter introduce you to our final choice of selection methods that we would like you to endorse, when and if necessary.

Over the course of recent years, the university has embarked on a policy of growth, admitting an ever more increasing number of students. Unfortunately, this has led to an evident shortage of academic facilities such as space in lecture halls, classrooms and in private study space areas. The workload of teachers and academic staff has increased, raising concerns for their working conditions. Larger class sizes mean that less individual attention is given to our students. The CSR is greatly concerned that these developments are undermining the quality of education at the UvA. We stand to ensure that students are adequately accommodated in their study and receive the high quality of education that they were promised. Therefore, we advise that the CvB abstains from further growth of the University and adopts a more cautious admissions policy regarding international students and programmes with existing *numerus fixus*. In OV181127 the CvB stated that it is not the ambition of the UvA to grow. The CSR would like to see more concrete steps and actions to counter the growth, as it is clearly still the case at multiple faculties. This is necessary until the university increases its capacity to accommodate a larger number of students. We address our vision of appropriate admissions policy later in the advice.

The most prevalent areas of growth have been the English track programs. The conversion of Dutch programs to English has led to a rapidly increasing inflow of international students. The number of international students (EEA included) has grown by 4 percentage points between the academic years of 2015/16 and 2016/17, and by further 3 percentage points in the academic year 2017/2018. Whilst internationalisation can enhance the quality of education, it must be done with caution and with utmost certainty that transition to English will increase the quality of the study, not the intake quantity. The CSR is most concerned by the rapid increase in international admissions and believes that this has been a significant contributory factor to uncontrollable growth of the university. As a result, it has become increasingly more difficult to accommodate large numbers of students, not only in their studies but also in finding a place of residence as the pressure on the housing market continues to grow. For this reason, the council advises the CvB to actively consider the implementation of *numeri fixi* on English tracks, once made possible by the Dutch Government.<sup>1</sup> This action is absolutely necessary to allow for more stable and predictable intake numbers.

The CSR believes that stopping growth and focusing on efficient use of current resources is only one of the strategy components. The next crucial step lies in developing the existing systems of selection at the university. The CSR believes that the criteria used in the process must extensively encompass students' 1) academic merit and potential; 2) motivation to follow the academic program; and 3) background, with particular attention to factors that may have limited their academic performance in previous education.

It is in our view that the latter criteria are most relevant for cultivating a strong and rigorous academic culture, as well as maintaining quality and reputation of academic programs, that students will ultimately benefit from. Moreover, it is crucial that a selection system identifies and accounts for the difficulties some applicants from less privileged backgrounds are often faced with. Their academic achievements ought to be rewarded in the light of their circumstances. A working selection must not only take an in-depth look at contextual factors of applicants but must incentivise students from all ranges of backgrounds to apply. It must be absolutely clear that students of any background deserve a place at a program, provided they demonstrate strong academic potential and motivation.

In our opinion, many of the selective programs at the university do not fulfil the expectations outlined above. By far the most commonly employed methods of selection are the GPA (grade-point average) and motivation letters. We believe that these methods alone are insufficient for warranting a thorough and objective evaluation of applicants' suitability to programs. Accordingly, the CSR advises the CvB to advocate for broadening of the selection methods in programs that are currently selective. To assist you in this task we bring to your attention some of the methods the council has deliberated and gives an endorsement to.

### **I. Entrance tests & Assignments**

Entrance test and/or assignments present us with a means to estimate if an applicant will be able to handle a program's requirements and how well the student will perform. These should test skills relevant to the requirements of a program. It is a better measure than assessing through GPA and a motivation letter alone. Candidates who reach higher scores should naturally receive preference in admissions. However, we stress that this should play the role of an auxiliary component, alongside the GPA, motivation

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<sup>1</sup> I.K. van Engelshoven, Toegankelijkheid en kansengelijkheid in het hoger onderwijs [kamerbrief], Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2018–2019, 31 288, nr. 664 p. 9

letter and any other means. Entrance tests alone cannot and should not determine applicants' enrolment into a program. *In addition, such assignments could serve to the benefit of the applicants as estimates of how demanding a program is. As such, the applicants will be able to draw more reliable expectations of a particular program.*

## **II. Selection days (currently used in bachelor psychology program)**

These are one or two days when applicants will be expected to attend two university lectures, after which they are given time to study before partaking in two tests on another day. The candidates are given a choice to register for one of the selection rounds to account for any inconvenient circumstances. The tests scores should have a limited role in the selection process, but are used to compile a ranking of applicants, where they can fall into one of three categories: "will certainly be offered a place", "may be offered a place" and "most probably will not be offered a place". It is important that such selection days ought to be a component (round) of admissions procedure, not make it up entirely. Candidates should never be excluded based on the results of these selection days alone.

## **III. Interviews**

An applicant would be invited to an interview after having sufficiently qualified the previous rounds. Although the CSR opposes binding interviews, it recognises that an alternative such as an interview with a solely advisory role could provide additional insight for candidates into whether they should pursue a program. Because of the known risk of biases, interviews should never weigh in the determination of whether a candidate is accepted or not.

## **IV. Self-assessments report**

This measure should be coupled with a motivation letter, where applicants are asked to talk about their strengths and weaknesses. They are encouraged to bring anything that could have limited their prior education. Once again, this measure provides a deeper, beyond-GPA analysis of candidates. Such a measure should better equip programs to find academic potential in students. If an applicant has underperformed in previous education or in earlier admissions stages, the university will identify a reason for it, thus allowing for certain exceptions. The applicants' admission will not solely be tied to GPA and tests, but more to their potential to do well at a university.

## **V. A point system (currently used in ACTA)**

Applicants would receive a particular number of points for passing different rounds of admissions. They receive additional points for extra academic achievements next to their studies. The points are aggregated to make up rankings of candidates from which admissions decisions will be made. The objectivity of this process is very important, and precautions must take place to avoid biases. One of the important purposes of this system is to potentially award points to able applicants from less advantaged backgrounds, thus increasing their chances of receiving a place at the university. Using an example from ACTA, candidates of refugee background who have achieved fluency in Dutch over a certain period after arriving in the Netherlands, are awarded extra points.

## **VI. A draft financial plan for first year at a program**

These minor admissions requirements are there to help applicants make up more realistic expectations of living costs in Amsterdam. This could help applicants make more informed decisions when considering whether to apply for a program. It is important that although a financial plan will constitute a mandatory requirement within the selection process, the content of the draft should not determine the admission of a candidate.

To conclude, two important conditions must be fulfilled along with the advice set out above. First, the methods of selection should be continuously evaluated with a distinct attention to objectivity and efficacy. Secondly, any implementation of the given advice ought to involve input from the faculty level medezeggenschap bodies.

We hope to have informed you sufficiently and offered plentiful detail to our recommendations. The CSR requests that the CvB constructs a plan of action to implement the points established in the given advice. We look forward to further discuss this topic in the coming OV and would be most happy to continue to work closely with the CvB on implementing our vision on education and accessibility.

With kind regards,



Roeland Voorbergen  
Voorzitter CSR 18|19

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