



Universiteit Utrecht

“SCIENCE THAT WORKS IN SOCIETY”

STRATEGIC AGENDA SOCIETAL IMPACT (2019-2024)

Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance (LEG),
Utrecht University

November 2019

THE STRATEGIC AGENDA

Societal impact

Generating *societal impact* has become a third key process within universities. This is certainly the case within Utrecht University. It firmly anchors the university's traditional key processes of *teaching and research* in society, with societal issues, practices and partners. Besides creating societal added value, this also enables us to make science more interesting, relevant, accessible and legitimate. We define societal impact as follows:

We connect our academic teaching and research directly to societal issues, partners and practices, thus ensuring that teaching and research have societal meaning, continued effect and added value.

The Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance (REBO) wants to play a leading role in this, in close connection with developments outside the faculty, within Utrecht University, the Netherlands and beyond. Such developments include the Utrecht University strategic theme hubs, the university's emphasis on Lifelong Learning, Community Service Learning (CSL) and contract funding, as well as the broader focus on Open Science, including recognition and reward, the Dutch Research Agenda, the KNAW emphasis on impact, including the importance of impact pathways, and the LERU emphasis on productive interactions.

This short strategic agenda outlines the importance of generating societal impact, what this entails – the types of key activities – and the associated actions. These include actions which have direct impact as well as more indirect actions for steering, organising and supporting impact. The Strategic Agenda is described more fully in a separate *Appendix*. More concrete programming of some of our impact activities is provided in a separate *Implementation Agenda*.

The importance of impact

Generating impact has become increasingly inescapable. In the light of such serious societal issues as sustainability, health, security and justice, society demands scientific teaching and research that has societal relevance and continued effect. Researchers want to carry out meaningful research on worthwhile issues. Students want to be socially relevant. There is much to be gained from impact via external activities such as advice and executive teaching and via consortia: it generates knowledge, networks, input, research data and partnerships, as well as capacity and financial means.

All of these things are in line with the broader movements intended to strengthen the *relevance* of science: the university 'opens up', shows societal responsibility and responds to societal issues and expectations.

Key activities

Impact is not a specific kind of activity and it goes beyond *public engagement* and *outreach* such as public lectures or public communication. This memorandum makes a distinction between four types of *key activities* that bring about interaction between scientific teaching and research and society at large (see Figure 1 for a summary):

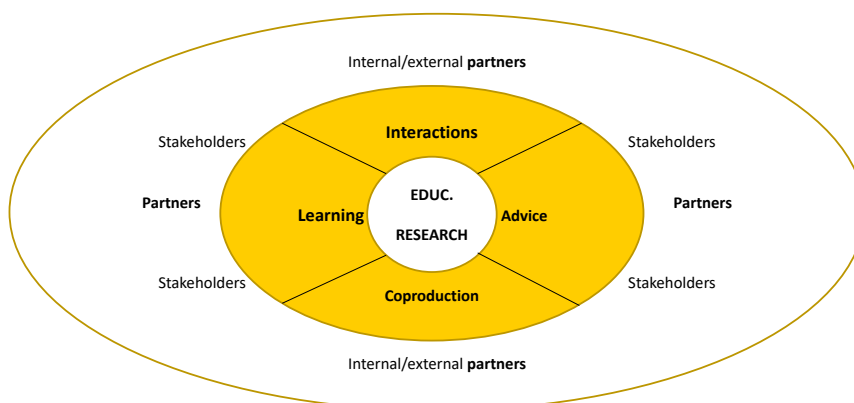
1. *Societal learning*: forming students as socially engaged professionals, career and employment prospects in Ba/Ma, connecting teaching to topical issues, links between teaching and societal issues/practice and Lifelong Learning (including flexibility).
2. *Societal advice*: supporting organisations in tackling societal issues, including governance, legal and economic aspects, ranging from short-term advice to more lengthy, commissioned research.
3. *Societal interaction*: directing knowledge towards society, via expert roles, lectures, social media, media communications and public events, as well as public engagement and outreach activities.
4. *Societal co-production*: research in co-production with social partners (including businesses) and business development including planning, elaborating and effect of projects, via (among other things) stakeholder networks and multi-year agreements.

Carrying out these key activities does not happen all by itself. To start with, it presents some tricky dilemmas, such as how far should scientists or academics go in entering into partnerships? Academic *independence* is important and needs to be protected. Secondly, partners have their own motives, wishes and methods which sometimes clash with the way the university works with regard to academic integrity. From a university perspective, the motives of partners may be 'suspect'. Thirdly, the extent to which impact can be realised varies between the different disciplines and sub-disciplines: one may have closer links with partners and practices than another. And finally, the university is not simply organised for the realisation of impact activities, nor is this something that everybody can or should be doing.

This means that the further implementation of impact activities should be carried out in a *dosed, differentiated and careful* manner. Not all at once, not everything for everyone.

Moreover, the faculty is not doing all this itself. On the contrary. It stimulates and facilitates with regard to the various departments and disciplines, to teaching and research, to multidisciplinary cooperation and to the relationships that researchers and lecturers have with the world at large. Generating impact requires a subtle interplay between departments and disciplines, faculty circuits, hubs and focus areas, and university priorities, accents and actions.

Figure 1. Societal impact core activities (in context)



Actions

Against this background we can explain the actions that are relevant within our faculty per key activity:

1. *Societal teaching:*
 - a. Strengthening societal engagement in and around teaching
 - b. Linking teaching to societal issues, for example via CSL (Community Service Learning), traineeships and projects, including advisory projects
 - c. Strengthening the career and employment market perspectives within Ba/Ma programmes, in part via the student societies/associations
 - d. Strengthening alumni relationships and networks
 - e. Further development of Lifelong Learning
2. *Societal advice:*
 - a. Further development of 'LEG Consultancy'
 - b. Further strengthening of commissioned research on societal themes
 - c. Making research relevant to policy and organisation
 - d. Professionalising academic advice (incl. competences/qualifications)
 - e. Measuring impact, with an emphasis on *impact pathways*
3. *Societal interaction:*
 - a. Realisation of *landmarks*, such as the Skyscraper
 - b. Continuing/expanding *Impact nights, Impact cafés, Impact connect*
 - c. Organising public lectures (for example in co-production with TivoliVredenburg)
 - d. Responding to current affairs via pop-up lectures
 - e. Showcasing research
4. *Societal co-producing:*
 - a. Extending institutional partnerships and networks
 - b. Expanding 'hybrid' PhDs and postdocs (research time partly funded via partners)
 - c. Exploring the possibility of creating impact-related career pathways (particularly for professors and associate professors)
 - d. Creation and expansion of Learning Platforms, in relation to businesses, government bodies and social organisations
 - e. Further extension of partnerships and consortia, in part via business developers
 - f. Supporting social and/or field experiments
 - g. Developing Citizen Science, in which citizens are involved in research

Preconditions

First and foremost, partners and societal themes are important vehicles for creating and connecting the key activities. Next, all kinds of administrative, policy-related and organisational preconditions are needed:

Administrative:

- Further emphasis on and development of societal *themes*, such as sustainability, health, security and justice
- Setting up a *Board of Impact* [achieved in February 2019]

- Formalisation of LEG *Impact Cooperation Team* (FSO) [achieved in April 2019]
- Continuation of *Societal Impact Award jury*, including students
- Establishment of LEG *Societal Advisory Council* (*Maatschappelijke Adviesraad*, MAR), with strategic partners
- Maintaining faculty *Annual Calendar*, including a yearly programme
- *Impact day* (with and for faculty and university-wide colleagues, student societies/associations as well as partners and external parties)

Policy-related:

- Strengthening/tightening partnership policy
- HR policy: widening incentives, task allocations, assessment, career routes
 - Professionalisation of cost recoupment (at team and group level)
 - Recognition and reward, including *MERIT* (also at team level)
 - Review of task allocation (time not taken up by teaching and research, in line with *MERIT*)
 - Impact career accents (for above-average performance via high impact research and/or teaching), for professors and assistant/associate professors

Organisational:

- Impact climate, including facilitating discussion of dilemmas
- Strengthening of back office support LLL and advice
- Look and feel of societal activities
- Communication and visibility
- Business development (extension of partnerships and networks, including the business community)

Finally

Direct impact activities and indirect preconditional activities can be used to build stronger connections between *inside* (academia) and *outside* (society). In this way, impact is not just a peripheral issue or an afterthought, but something that strengthens teaching and research. Teaching and research are academically and internationally strong as well as being embedded in society, valuable and practical. In short, science that works in society.