

2026 – 2027

ANNUAL PLAN UNIVERS

*Who are we, what do we stand for, and
what does the future hold?*



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What is Univers?

Univers is the network for and by neurodivergent employees at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). Univers provides a space for staff members who are seeking support, have questions, or wish to connect with colleagues who share similar experiences.

Since its establishment in 2024, Univers has actively contributed to an inclusive working environment where neurodivergent employees feel heard, valued, and supported. Through peer support, knowledge sharing, and open discussions about workplace-related challenges, Univers strengthens both employee well-being and sustainable employability.

Our Team

The Univers management team consists of five dedicated and active members, each bringing their own background, expertise, and role within Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. This diversity of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives is the team's greatest strength. Through their combined efforts, they work to support the continued growth, development, and strengthening of the Univers network.

The team consists of:

- Gaby den Held – **Chair**
- Rain Bleie – **Concept creator**
- Jefri Tangkau – **Secretary**
- Marina Friedrich – **Lecturer and PhD Student Contact Lead**
- Tessa Poll-van Nieuwenhuijsen – **Strategic Advisor**



Mission & Vision

MISSION

Univers is helping to build a Vrije Universiteit where neurodivergent employees feel seen, heard, and supported.

We provide an accessible, judgment-free community where neurodivergent employees can connect, share knowledge and experiences, and support one another. We give neurodivergent employees a voice and help make neurodiversity visible within the VU.

In doing so, we contribute to greater understanding, acceptance, and meaningful change.

VISION

We envision a Vrije Universiteit where neurodiversity is a natural and integral part of diversity and inclusion.

A VU where different ways of thinking, working, communicating, and experiencing the world are recognized and valued.

A university where neurodivergent employees are given the space to contribute in their own way, develop their talents, and thrive.

Objectives

1. Enhancing Inclusive Leadership

Neurodiversity becomes a recognized and visible part of the conversation on inclusive leadership within VU.

Expected Outcomes 2026-2027

- In collaboration with HR, explore how neurodiversity can be incorporated into existing training programs for employees and managers.
- Organize at least one knowledge-sharing or inspirational session for managers on neurodiversity in the workplace.

2. Strengthening Collaboration with HR and Univers's Position within VU

Univers becomes a regular discussion partner for HR, the Diversity Office and other relevant VU departments on matters related to neurodivergent inclusion.

Expected Outcomes 2026-2027

- Establish a structured consultation process between Univers and HR (~ three meetings per year).
- Develop a proposal for structural financial support for Univers from 2028 onwards.
- In collaboration with HR, complete two Inclusion Ambassador training programs and generate interest in future ambassador training initiatives.

3. Creating a More Inclusive Physical and Social Environment

The needs of neurodivergent employees become more visible and better accommodated within the campus environment.

Expected Outcomes 2026-2027

- Identify and map existing low-stimulation facilities and spaces.
- Gather input on desired improvements to the physical work environment.
- Develop recommendations for Facilities Services on low-stimulation workspaces and quiet/rest areas.

Objectives

4. Strengthening the Community

Univers continues to grow into a recognizable and accessible community for neurodivergent employees and their supporters.

Expected Outcomes 2026-2027

- Organize at least five social gatherings and align them with themes from the annual calendar.
- Launch a pilot for peer support and/or intervention groups.
- Increase the number of active supporters compared to 2025-2026.

5. Increasing the Visibility of Univers

Univers becomes better known within VU as the network for neurodivergent employees and as a discussion partner on neuro-inclusion.

Expected Outcomes 2026-2027

- Participate in at least one VU-wide event related to diversity, inclusion, or well-being.
- Establish connections with external neurodiversity networks at universities and universities of applied sciences, and actively exchange knowledge and experiences.
- Build a sustainable partnership with the Diversity Office for knowledge exchange and event collaboration.
- With the support of the Dutch Autism Register (NAR), robust, scientifically substantiated proposals and projects can be initiated.

Success Indicators by the End of 2027

- Univers has a stable core group of active volunteers and supporters.
- A structured consultation process with HR is in place.
- Neurodiversity has been incorporated into at least one existing training programme.
- Peer support and/or intervention activities are underway.
- There are at least two Inclusion Ambassadors within Univers and/or Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Annual Calendar

August 2026		September 2026	October 2026
		Start Academisch jaar borrel 29 September 2026	Dyslexia Awareness Week 1 - 8 October 2026
November 2026		December 2026	January 2027
Work Stress Awareness Week 9 - 13 November 2026		End of year drinks Date Pending	
February 2027		March 2027	April 2027
		Neurodiversity Celebration Week March 15 - 19 2027	World Autism Awareness Day 2 April 2027
May 2027		June 2027	July 2027
		Neurodiversity Pride Day Date Pending	ADHD Awareness Day Date Pending

Budget

For the 2026–2027 academic year, Univers's budget has not yet been finalized. Therefore, this budget projection is based on expenditures from previous years and the anticipated investments for the coming period.

Budget 2026–2027	
Expenditures – Cost Type	Amount – EUR (incl. VAT)
Networking Event – September 2026 (Start of the Academic Year)	~ €50,-
Networking Event – November 2026 (Work Stress Awareness Week)	~ €50,-
Networking Event – December 2026 (Christmas & New Year Celebration)	~ €100,-
Networking Event – March 2027 (Neurodiversity Celebration Week)	~ €60,-
Networking Event – June 2027 (Neurodiversity Pride Day)	~ €60,-
Ambassador training (2x)	€5.989,-
Miscellaneous Expenses	~ €500,-
Total	~ €6.809,-

Vision for 2031

Over the next five years, Univers will grow from a newly established network into an integral part of VU culture: visible, widely supported, and structurally embedded within the organization.

By 2031, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam will be a workplace where neurodivergent employees feel seen, heard, and valued. Managers will understand what neurodivergence means in practice and, where possible, actively adapt the working environment to meet diverse needs. Univers will be a respected and well-supported partner in this effort, with a strong ambassador network, a vibrant community, and a permanent place in the university's annual calendar.

Where Will We Be in 2031?

1. Inclusive Leadership as the Norm

- Awareness initiatives and training programs delivered by Unvers in collaboration with HR will have ensured that managers understand a wide range of neurodivergent experiences and actively contribute to creating supportive and effective working environments for neurodivergent employees. These awareness and training activities will no longer be one-time interventions but will be embedded as a regular component of leadership development across the university.

2. Structural collabotation with HR and the Diversity Office

- Unvers will receive an annual budget from departments such as HR and the Diversity Office to support ambassadors, training programs, workshops, and informal community events.
- The partnership between Unvers, HR and the Diversity Office will be so well established that the retention, well-being, and professional development of neurodivergent employees will be recognized as a shared objective and shared responsibility.

3. A Physical and Social Work Environment That Works

- The university will offer an adequate number of low-stimulation quiet spaces across campus. These spaces will be comfortable, welcoming, and thoughtfully designed, rather than feeling bare, isolated, or punitive.
- Unvers will have established an ambassador network of at least ten employees, with the long-term aspiration of having at least one ambassador in every faculty and service department. Achieving this goal will, of course, depend on the interest and willingness of employees to take on ambassador roles.

Where Will We Be in 2031?

4. A Self-Sustaining Community

- Peer support programmes operate independently, organized by and for neurodivergent employees, with minimal guidance required from the core Univers team.
- A buddy programme is in place to support new and existing neurodivergent colleagues whenever needed.
- Univers continues to grow through word of mouth and hosts a regular, well-attended social gathering where members, managers, and interested colleagues can connect, share experiences, and build relationships.

5. Visibility Within and Beyond VU

- Univers has a permanent place in VU's annual calendar and is actively involved in relevant university-wide initiatives and events.
- The network aligns its activities with the national neurodiversity calendar, collaborates with other networks both within VU and beyond (including NAR and other Dutch neurodiversity networks), and organizes or participates in an annual national gathering of neurodiversity networks.
- An annual award and accompanying networking event recognizing the most neurodiversity-friendly workplace help keep inclusion in the spotlight and celebrate good practices across the university.
- The VUfonds and the VUvereniging are engaged as philanthropic partners, helping to support the continued growth and development of the Univers network.
- The network works in close partnership with the Diversity Office on knowledge sharing, policy development, and joint events focused on inclusion and neurodiversity.

Acknowledgements

At the end of this annual plan, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to everyone who contributes to Univers. We extend our heartfelt thanks to our members, ambassadors, supporters, and all colleagues who are committed to fostering greater understanding, visibility, and inclusion of neurodiversity across VU.

Your engagement, experiences, and ideas are the foundation of our network's strength and make our shared ambitions possible. We look forward to the future with confidence and to the steps we will take together to make VU an environment where every employee can thrive and reach their full potential.

Together, we will continue building a more inclusive and neurodiverse VU.

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