Meaning of highlighting:
Action decisions
Other decisions

Interim USR Report of the

OVERLEGVERGADERING (OV) USR & COLLEGE VAN BESTUUR (CvB)

[Note: the below are not the established minutes of the OV USR-CvB, agreed by both parties. As the official minutes are not yet established at the moment, this document is merely an interim report prepared by the Official Secretary of the USR. Neither of the parties can be held accountable for statements and agreements in this provisional interim report].

Date:	19 October
Time:	13.30 – 14:58 h
Location:	MF D132 - Salutem 1
Present:	Jeroen Geurts (CvB), Veerle Roeyen (BS CvB) Jusry Eshun (Chair USR), Stephanie Hennekens (Vicechair USR), Esraa Aboelkasem, Josephine Hart, Lauren Buyn, Mirta Vucetic, Omar Elhabiby, Diederik Prakke (AS-ai USR)
Online:	Francisco Reis Garcia Gomes, Oumnia Nounouh, Necati Özel
Absent:	Anouar Aghaddar
Guests:	None

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1. Opening and check in 13.30 h

2. Announcements

2.1. CvB

1. The CvB shares that it received the SRVU appeal to SOZ about the SRVU's claim to retain a (fixed) office at StudentD0k.

   It is noted that the week before the OV, the GV proposed to make this a GVO issue. On the GVO agenda, the topic was added (even though that agenda had been finalised. As the GV did not wish to postpone the item, the Board Secretary (CvB) indicated that a document would be helpful to enable a proper discussion. In response, the GV submitted a draft letter on GV concerns and views - see: Draft letter GV on SRVU.

   The CvB explains that the appeal process relates to the derecognition of the SRVU as an association at the VU, and that this is procedurally separate from the SRVU's office issue. The USR, however, commented that the two issues are connected because SOZ agreed to delay discussion of revoking the SRVU's office until after the recognition appeal was ruled on.

The CvB shares that the membership issue is resolved (the SOZ recognizes that the SRVU has enough members to match the set norm). The USR concludes that the appeal is thus only on the question of whether SRVU's name/statutes are OK (specifically whether SRVU is 'political'), and whether its statutes are followed by the SRVU itself. The CvB mentions that the appeal timeline is unknown but will be six weeks or less.

2.2. USR

1. Interal Regulations USR - agreed on 12 October 2026
2. USR general and training budget 2026-2027: just submitted on the 14th of October
3. USR met Ad Valvas this (19th) morning. It was a first informal meeting, getting to know each other
4. USR DB will meet visiting RvT members 21st October morning
5. USR to be briefed on 'Bijsturing' on 26th October
6. CTL training opportunities are appreciated. Several courses (e.g. on negotiating skills) have not/hardly been attended, as the USR focussed on them too late. The financial training last week was well attended, also by the USR, and very well appreciated.
7. USR is preparing for further tailormade training, among others with TAQT and CTL, on deep democracy, the navigator working method, and team coaching/evaluation.

3. Approval 260921 Minutes USR - CvB **and checking** Action list CvB-USR 2026-2027

The CvB has still one point of feedback. The Board Secretary (CvB) and the Administrative Secretary (USR) will look at a formulation about StudentD0k. That will finalise these draft minutes into mutually agreed minutes.

Reviewing the action list, the issue of the USR being more visible to the students of the VU was discussed, with the hope that more visibility may change the low voting turnout (10-20% the last few years) and thus make the USR (and the other student representative bodies) more connected, representative, informed and thus wise. The Board Secretary (CvB) and Administrative Secretary (USR) will look into the possibilities of getting information to a wide range of students. The outstanding question (in the action list) was about mailing all students (e.g. about the USR policy plan), but the CvB informs that even they look for options in this regard, as the AVG regulations make that only faculties can mail all students at private email addresses, while mailings to official student-emails are not well read. Thus, the CvB sometimes goes through the faculties, to reach all students through their faculties.

4. Establishment of the agenda

Endorsed without comments.

5. Consultation/information matters

5.1. **Summary of** USR Policy Plan 2026-2027 Draft (Jusry) **and USR training plan** (Stephanie)

USR (draft) Policy Plan

VU UNIVERSITAIRE STUDENTENRAAD

1. Social safety, freedom of expression and complaints handling (p. 6-7)
2. Transparent and ethical assessment international collaborations (p. 13-14)
3. University-wide AI policy and secure AI tools (p. 6)
4. Mental-health support, disability accomodation and physical health (p. 9-10)
5. Sustainable support/facilitation for student associations (p. 11-12)
6. Accessible campus facilities and exam locations (p. 12)
7. More accessible internships and inclusive Honours Programme (p. 8-9)
8. Better course evaluations and education quality (p. 5)
9. Stronger student participation and transparent decision-making (p. 15-16)
10. More effective digital services and clearer student communications (p. 14-18)

Discussion:

1. Asked by the CvB, the USR puts forward that particularly the **international students feel less safe**, less able to find their way to support services, and less trusting that these services (often starting with filling out a form) will merely support them, and that contacting these services will never be held against them.

   The CvB states that it will be of great help to them, if the USR has insights who faces what. They realise that the situations and needs are diverse, which is the reason the 'story boards' campaign was started, acknowledging (and showing the VU understands) some of that diversity.

2. In GV-context the USR has written an ‘oplegger’ with a summary of facts and some questions about the **collaborations** the university has and which ones have been (re-)assessed since the framework was implemented. The CvB has received questions but CvB and USR were not sure whether these are only questions from the OR, or (also) from the GV/USR. The USR will submit their ‘oplegger’ directly to the Board Secretary (CvB), and the CvB will respond in writing (to the GV, as the USR questions were for submission through that forum).

3. Both parties very much want clear, appropriate **AI-use rules**, but the effort is in establishing what they should be.

4. Similar to social safety (point 1), asking special care (‘accommodations’) can be a rather burdensome bureaucratic procedure, which in itself is an obstacle to the most **challenged students**.

5. Besides the SRVU (already discussed), the USR hears that **several FSR’s** are not well facilitated.

6. Regarding **access to exam location**, the USR mentions that in some cases crowdedness at exam locations is rather overwhelming, while better locations seem to be available.

7. The USR observes a great diversity in how well students are facilitated in finding **internships** (and, ultimately, jobs). Compared to others, Beta seems to provide less career services, and the USR would like to see a VU-wide policy and practice.

8. The CvB acknowledges the USR's concern regarding **course evaluations** and recognises the challenges involved. The USR shares that participation in evaluation is so low, (statistically insufficient), so that no analysis is made in such cases, and thus courses are not evaluated, sometimes three years in a row. A thought is to work with incentives. The CvB shares an experience of an institution that provides a cake to the department with the highest percentages of evaluated courses, which reportedly works well. In this case, it is the motivation behind the gesture, rather than the cake itself, that is appreciated and makes the reward work.

9. Regarding **visibility and transparency** of the USR itself (see also under point 3, review of action list), the USR considers amongst others making (some of its) meetings open to public.

10. The challenge with **digital services**, such as website, insta and canvas, seems (nowadays) less about whether information is available, but how easy it is to find it. The USR itself intends to start working with canvas, as the FSR's do successfully. This could (in part) bypass the email problem (noted under point 3). SOZ leads canvas, so the USR may contact them when working further on its canvas idea.

The Board Secretary CvB proposes to link the above USR Policy Plan to the medezeggenschapskalender, perhaps already in the CvB presentation at the GVO coming Wednesday. This idea is well appreciated. The Administrative Secretary (USR) adds that he knows of cases where the strategic agenda of the organisation and key priorities of a participation council are put on two sides of a page, with in the middle the common agenda, where *zeggenschap* and *medezeggenschap* find matches. This does not always lead to all matters ending in the common agenda, but does at least yield clarity where the *medezeggenschap* may have limited interest in the management agenda, and where *medezeggenschaps* concerns are not fully embraced by management, thus requiring further attention and follow-up.

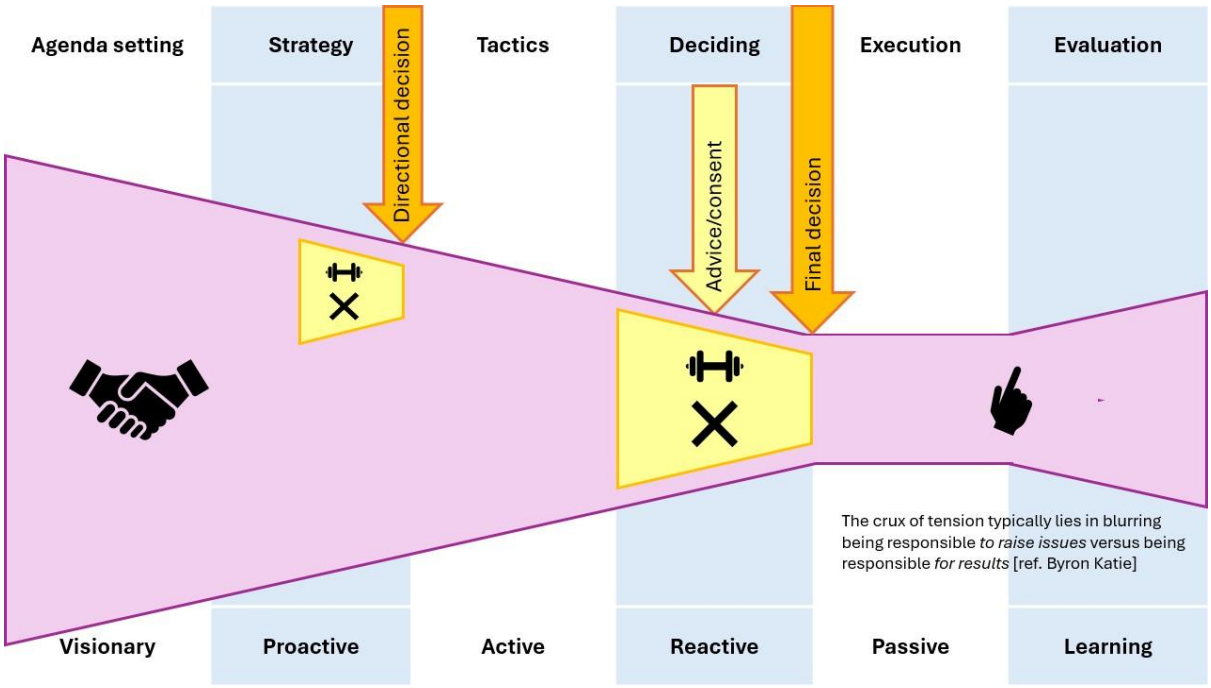
The CvB expresses great appreciation of the USR Policy Plan, also noting that it is ambitious.

USR training plan
As stated under USR-announcements (point 7), the USR is planning to undergo training soon, to strengthen its effectiveness (navigator, deep democracy, team coaching).

5.2. Vision: Codetermination from intent, not rules (Diederik)

This topic concerns an elaboration of working methods Diederik is in the process of sharing with the USR, notably through above mentioned trainings. The CvB therefore did not respond to all of

the content or specific wording (thus, it should be noted, that some of the below statements may not fully reflect the CvB's own understanding of its relationship with the USR). Also note that the below observations relate to common relationship patterns between participation councils and management in general, rather than to the USR and CvB of the VU in particular.



With the intention to clarify and build more common ground on the purpose, does, and don'ts of *medezeggenschap* (co-determination), the above image is presented.

- The orange arrows show that decisions are made in two steps:
    - setting the strategic parameters for the plan that is to be made (directional decision) and
    - the final decision (when the plan is ready)

  The formal right of advice and consent of codetermination ('medezeggenschaps') bodies is relatively short before the final decision (yellow arrow), at which point substantial changes are unlikely, and management is ready (and usually eager) to proceed swiftly
- The 'special powers' (as they are called in the WOR/WCA) of the rights of advice and consent are symbolised above in a yellow field with a weight and a cross respectively. For these issues management is bound, as long as the codetermination body demands it, to respectively *seriously consider the advice* and *obtain the consent* of the 'medezeggenschap'. In other words: only on these particular issues the 'medezeggenschap' has some power to *enforce* that management does as the 'medezeggenschap' wants, even if management is not convinced that this is beneficial. Put differently: on these issues, the lawmaker gave councils some additional support to ensure their voices are heard and considered, though management remains the sole 'captain on the ship'.
- The lila area symbolises the 'normal power' of the 'medezeggenschap' (overlegrecht): that it can express views and make proposals on any issue (concerning the university). The handshake symbolises that in this case management is free to decide as it wishes, and is therefore likely to only adopt proposals that the CvB genuinely regards to be beneficial

- The intent and potential benefit of early engagement (before the ‘special powers’ apply) is that:
    - The potential influence of the medezeggenschap is bigger at this stage
    - At this stage the discussion *can* be a dialogue (open exchange of views, in which all actors mention and are open to pros and cons of different views and options) rather than a debate (in which parties stick to ‘speaking with one mouth' and silence rather than encourage divergent views). [Note: unfortunately, in some actual situations, perhaps including the VU, conversations continue to be polarised debates rather than open dialogues].
- Tensions in collaboration often occur and accumulate because one or both parties are predominantly (rather than just occasionally) in debate rather than dialogue mode. Or the parties may not fully grasp and accept the independence of management: that in the lila area (stages and topics of decision making) management is responsible and takes decisions for the organisation, and the medezeggenschap does not. A particular example of that is the 'wagging finger’: the USR has a duty to *raise certain topics* and to ***promote*** *certain outcomes* (zorgtaken – under the WHW particularly concerning transparency), but it is up to the management whether to adopt views and suggestions the council may make.
- Particular to the WHW is that a number of dossiers with advice and consent are strategic directions (budget guidelines, M-OER) - symbolised by the yellow box at the strategy phase.

The USR also presents the premises of what is called the Navigator working methode:

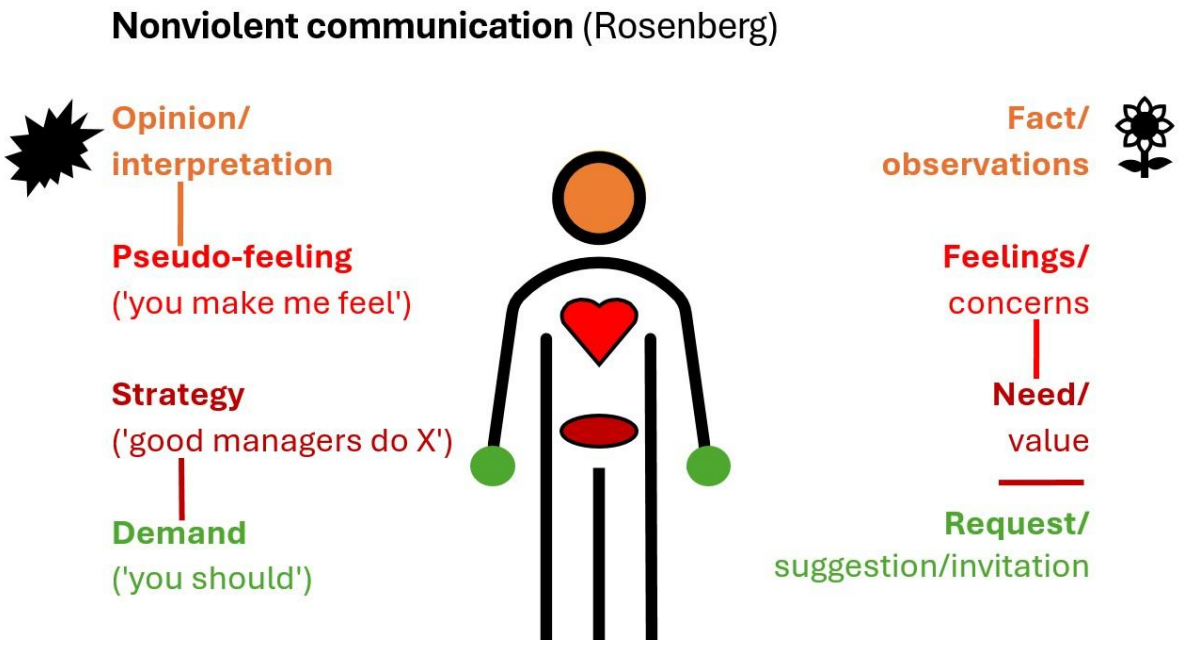
- Stop asking questions, state values (in which the medezeggenschap does not share endless questions, but primarily the concerns and needs that prompt such questions)
- Stop waiting, act now (in other words: engage as soon as there is a concern, rather than wait until the moment of consent and advice according the WHW. This also aligns with the principle ‘do not surprise each other’ (by holding back information)
- Not rights and rules (systems), but intent and input (first share your concerns, rather than first claim the right to information, advice or consent)

Discussion:

- The CvB shares that these approaches align well with the idea of embracing discomfort and proactiveness that will be discussed at the upcoming Dies Natalis
- Regarding responsiveness, the USR shares that a certain mail to FCO has not been responded to for several weeks, despite reminders. The CvB will look into it if the USR forwards the mail.
- The CvB notes that early involvement can (and did) lead to surprises and disappointments, e.g. when a council advised negatively after having been involved early on, seeming to be onboard. Thus, the CvB calls for the council to also ‘speak with one voice’ during early involvement.
- The USR submits that the crux may be to be clear what is expressed at which stage:
    - Councils give formal advice and consent *only once and* should discuss it well enough to express a common agreement, but in early involvement the very purpose of discussions is to learn and adapt rather than to agree.

  - Of course, surprises should be prevented as much as possible. If serious doubts arise during the development of a plan, it is best to discuss them directly rather than surprise the CvB with negative advice or non-consent.
  - Early involvement does not take away advice and consent. And, provided they explain their view, the CvB can deviate from council advice, though the CvB expresses that they do not prefer (and will not lightly) do so.
- Asked whether the CvB would appreciate being informed of the exact votes behind a USR advice or consent, the CvB expresses that this is not needed.

The below slide is shown, to acknowledge that wording matters. If something is phrased (or comes across) as a demand ('you should', 'you have to') that naturally raises more defensiveness than if the same idea is phrased as a request. The two parties acknowledge that, in view of last years' experience, these distinctions can be important. Both parties will try to neither attack nor defend (express and hear concerns, needs/values and requests rather than interpretations, judgments, etc), but will also err at times.



5.3. Reaching agreement on timely approval USR-CvB OV minutes

Background: In the previous OV the USR had expressed a wish to automatically approve and then publish minutes a week after draft minutes were shared with USR and CvB, unless either of them had major comments. The CvB did not agree to this proposal, not only because the one-week is rather short, but also as approval of minutes in the next OV (which is then minuted in the minutes of that meeting), is a common (and current) way to formally establish minutes. At that OV it was agreed that the two Secretaries (CvB and USR) would sit together to find a workable solution. Since then the Secretaries indeed met and discussed various issues finding more common ground. However, they did not discuss this particular issue and therefore have no proposed solution yet.

5.4. Briefing on possible developments DIE Office (Diversity, Inclusion and Equality – CvB)

The CvB informs that the dossier is broader than just the diversity office but also concerns the chiefs. Information will be submitted by mail, while the USR will talk with Evelien Moors and Pauline Hagenbeek on 'Bijsturing' at its next IV, as the DIE-dossiers is also an organizational reform (though not part of the 'Bijsturing').

Diversity was a team of little over 5 fte, under the guidance of a Dean. When this Dean left the VU, the dossier came to CvB (Jeroen Geurts), who wanted the DIE support under a Service, rather than a Faculty, to ensure the service continues regardless of Faculty wishes. The idea now is to support DIE from SOZ for students, and from HR for employees. This besides a DIE committee.

The CvB shared that current efforts are about being prepared should DIE no longer be strongly politically supported or even undermined (as happened in the US). The CvB makes a note that the Ad Valvas article on this topic is not factually correct. Notably, the idea and objective is not a budget cut, but an enforcement. The dossier comes on the OR table (must), but if so wished also the USR will be kept informed and welcome to express its view.

5.5. How to organise demonstrations in a safe way (student safety and freedom of expression, USR)

1. The USR's wish is to establish a dialogue in a way that helps both parties and the VU forward. Now students do not feel safe and free to express their views. Also to normal demonstrations (so a gathering without occupation or encampment) there are obstacle by security. Last month a student was called a terrorist and physically touched. In earlier cases someone's picture was taken and shared with the cafetaria. This is the context in which the USR wishes to know security staff instruction, as the only guideline students know is that they should 'follow instructions'.
   The CvB shares that tomorrow (Tuesday 20th) an addition to the VU house rules will be shared (as requested/discussed last year with USR). This will not include internal documents how situations are internally discussed and decided when they escalate, as had been asked for by the previous USR.
2. The UNL guidelines are more constraining on encampment and occupations than Dutch law and tradition, so the USR would not like the VU to refer to these
3. At the VU, FCO has provided so many roadblocks that a planned Cuba event was ultimately cancelled. Experiences like this push people towards not organising events (including film screenings etc, etc) or doing it off campus.

A discussion follows whether outsiders have been involved in (organising and/or attending) protest events. The USR puts forward that the same students who organise movie screenings, lectures, are the ones that than plan sit ins, encampments. And that they are frustrated with what they call the 'securitisation'. It has not have developed for no reason at all but is left as disproportionate and unnecessarily restrictive.

After October 7th there is a lot more security than before. The CvB puts forward that in the cases that the police was called in, this was because things were getting out of hand (not just for a sit-in or march). The USR contradicts this: in the first months after October 7th they were called in

immediately. The CvB states police visits can also be spontaneous visits initiated by the police itself, rather than after having been contacted by the VU.

The issue will be put on the OV agenda again, to discuss how do you discuss under pressure.

6. **Matters for formal advice**
   No dossiers.

7. **Matters for consent**
   No dossiers (other than under 5.3).

8. **Any other business/questions**

The USR has a concern about VU support to **student housing** for new student. The concerned USR member will contact the Secretary CvB on this issue.

The USR also shares a concern about the possible **merger of two studies in biosciences**, as discussed with FSR, where the FSR recommendations were not adopted by management. Issues are

- the possible merging (which to the USR does not seem fitting, as the studies have few common courses), and
- the fact that more than 700 are in the Bachelors, which is too massive.

Transfer from **AUC to UvA**. USR questions:

- What is the timeline
- Will the FSR be involved
- How can USR/CvB guarantee FSR involvement

CvB (Jeroen Geurts) will talk to the Dean about the concerns of the USR and later brief the USR on that discussion.

CvB (Jeroen Geurts) will also look into the contents of the plans, around the "merger". He affirms that even if the AUC indeed transfers to the UvA, the concerned students will remain welcome at the VU.

9. Round of tips/tops about this meeting

10. Closure