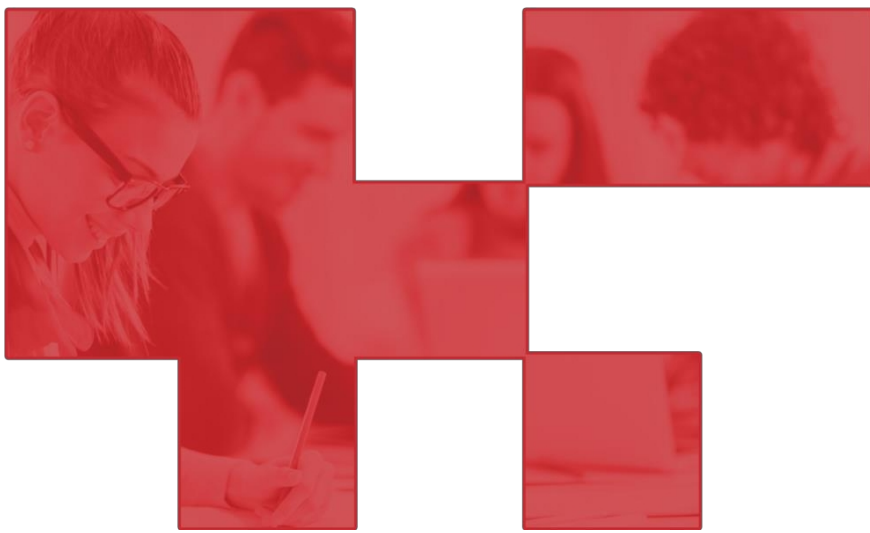
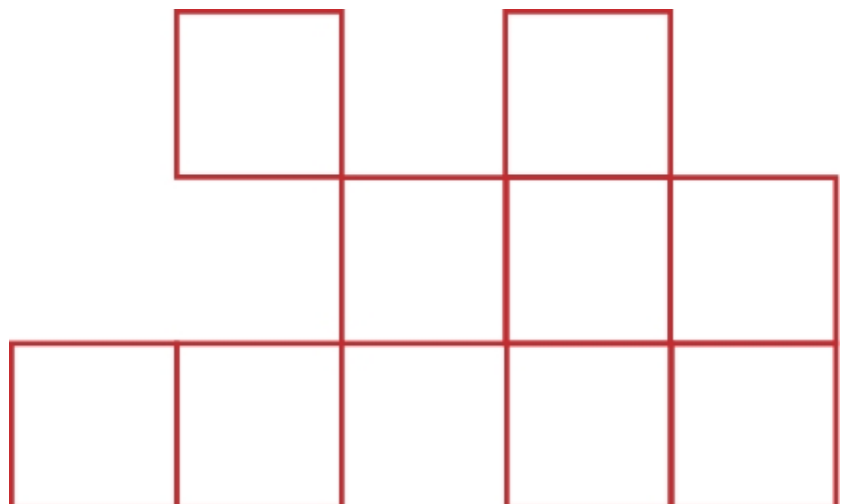




Vision of the National Students' Union

2016–2026



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Introduction

Education is a place for development, both for the individual and for society.

By building on the knowledge of previous generations, students and higher education institutions contribute to a better society.

Dear reader,

The National Students' Union (LSVb), founded in 1983, represents the interests of all students in the Netherlands. But why, exactly? And to what end?

Since 2003, the answer to this question has been set out in the document *Icarus*. *Icarus* described, in an ambitious and idealistic manner, what the LSVb believed the ideal higher education system in the Netherlands should look like.

In 2015, the LSVb's General Members' Meeting (ALV) decided that it was time to revise *Icarus*. To reflect once more on the LSVb's mission, the ALV set up a committee tasked with rewriting *Icarus*, either in full or in part, to bring it back into line with the LSVb's thinking.

The results of the Vision Committee's work can be found in this document. In consultation with the AGM, the committee decided to start with a clean slate and to work together to redefine the LSVb's vision. To this end, during the 2015–2016 academic year, the committee organised various meetings at which the member associations, the board, the governing bodies, the staff and all relevant volunteers jointly formulated contemporary answers to the 'why' and 'what for' questions.

These answers have been incorporated into this document. Following its adoption at the General Meeting of Members (ALV) on 25 June 2016, this document sets out the LSVb's vision for higher education in the Netherlands from that date onwards.

This document is intended for anyone wishing to familiarise themselves with the LSVb's vision, values and guiding principles, which the LSVb uses to formulate its positions, and is therefore publicly available. As such, this document serves as a generally binding set of guidelines for the board and staff, as well as a charter for member associations and volunteers. To this end, this document therefore sets out not only the values that form the core of the vision, but also the conditions that make it possible to turn this vision into reality.

LSVb Vision Committee 2015–2016

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Scope of this document

- This document is binding on the LSVb board and all other persons who directly represent the LSVb. Furthermore, the General Members' Meeting (GMM) as a whole is also bound by this vision document. Among other things, this means that the meeting must, for example, assess whether a policy plan or other important documents are in line with this vision document. In addition, the GMM may not adopt positions that conflict with this vision.
- This vision document may be amended if a two-thirds majority of the GMM is in favour of doing so, rather than an absolute majority as applies to most resolutions. Without amending this vision document itself, the GMM cannot adopt positions that conflict with this vision. However, for strategic reasons, the LSVb may choose to temporarily accept proposals and amendments that bring it closer to its ideal vision but do not fully realise it. This means that the Executive Committee may submit proposals to the General Meeting to deviate from the vision on a temporary basis. The General Meeting may then decide to approve these.
- Individual member associations are urged to bear the vision document in mind when formulating their own policies. However, they are not bound by the new vision document.
- When new organisations wish to join the federation, it must be assessed whether their vision and policies are in line with the ideals of the LSVb and, therefore, with this vision document. This vision document could also be used to reconsider the membership of a member association that no longer aligns with the ideals and principles of the LSVb. The vision of the LSVb's cooperation partners must, in the context of their cooperation with the LSVb, correspond with the LSVb's vision.
- All other vision documents, position papers and policy documents are subordinate to this vision document and may therefore not contradict or deviate from it.
- Trainers and other volunteers are not bound by this vision, provided they do not directly represent the LSVb. Furthermore, trainers are not directly bound by it during training sessions either. However, they must not actively assert the opposite of this vision.

Values

According to the LSVb, the nine values set out below lead to good education. This means that education and student life must be organised or structured in such a way that these values are reflected. In order to uphold these values, certain conditions must be met in education and student life. These conditions are described in the following chapter. The LSVb campaigns for these conditions in order to promote the values of education.

The foundation

At the heart of all these values lies a tension that recurs throughout the entire education system. On the one hand, education is intended to help students develop into individuals who know which direction they wish to take, how they will get there, and what choices they must make to achieve this. On the other hand, students are educated to become members of society. During and after their education, students are not merely active as individuals; they live and work in a particular environment alongside other people. Higher education therefore also has a social role. This role can be practical, such as qualifying individuals to practise certain professions (think, for example, of medical staff), but it can also serve non-practical functions, such as providing a safe space for discussion and for a critical, long-term perspective on humanity, society and the world. Conversely, society as a whole, as a collective, also has a stake in high-quality higher education. Education that focuses on the individual and on the social role it plays forms the very foundation of the LSVb.

Values

According to the LSVb, ideal education meets the following values. These values are described and explained below. The values are listed below in alphabetical order.

- Contribution to society

During their studies, students learn how they can contribute to society.

Education is of value not only to the student, but also to society. The knowledge students acquire during their studies has intrinsic value and continues to benefit society even after they have graduated.

- Creative thinking

Education encourages creative thinking.

The world for which a student is being trained is changing by the day and may already be very different by the time they graduate from what it was when they began their course. Education must therefore challenge students to be inventive. This can be encouraged, amongst other things, by varying the way in which teaching and the assessment of knowledge are organised. A student should not simply follow the beaten track,

but rather be challenged to find a different, new solution. Creativity is essential to enable students to cope with a rapidly changing world.

- Personal responsibility

Education and student life foster an awareness in students of their own actions and the consequences thereof.

Students starting their studies are (almost) adults and must therefore learn to take responsibility for their own actions during their studies. Students must be supported in this, for example when finding suitable accommodation. Furthermore, it is important that students realise that their actions have consequences for themselves and for others. In this way, students learn to feel responsible for their immediate and wider environment, both now and in the future.

- Empowering role

Education is a sphere that promotes social mobility.

By 'emancipation', we mean the improvement of an individual's social position within society. To this end, everyone must have an equal opportunity to access a good education. This means more than simply making everything accessible to every individual. It is important that educational institutions and other stakeholders in the higher education sector recognise that not all young people start their education on an equal footing. Collectively, these institutions have a responsibility to take this diversity into account and to implement active policies ensuring that students from different cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and those with (physical) disabilities, are appropriately supported in accessing and progressing through education. In this way, education also indirectly promotes broader social emancipation. Open and accessible education gives everyone a fair chance in life after their studies.

- Critical

Education fosters critical thinking.

It is important that students are able to think critically about themselves, the world around them and society. Students can learn to do this during their studies by, for example, being encouraged to take a critical view of what they are taught and the way in which education is organised. Education encourages an inquisitive attitude, the acquisition of knowledge and engaging in dialogue.

- Pluralism

Education fosters a pluralistic society.

By pluralism, we mean a diverse group in which every individual can and is allowed to be themselves. Education must nurture and encourage this. Rather than forcing people into a straitjacket, education should encourage students to be different from one another and to develop in their own unique ways, so that each can fulfil their potential in their own way.

- Freedom

During their time at university, students must be able to make their own choices without being hindered in doing so.

It is important that students are able and allowed to make choices during their studies, even if others might view those choices as wrong or ill-advised. One learns a great deal from mistakes, and this should be possible precisely within a safe educational environment. Furthermore, it ensures that students have the freedom to pursue the path they themselves choose and that they can apply these choices in their later lives as well.

- Self-fulfilment and self-development

Education provides a space where people can develop themselves, fulfil their potential and get the most out of themselves. It also helps them to better understand themselves and their world view.

Self-fulfilment and self-development ensure that students can reach the goals they set for themselves. At the same time, good education challenges students to look beyond the obvious and thus realise their full potential. To this end, it offers students the opportunity to make choices and develop themselves both within the standard curriculum and beyond it.

Conditions

This chapter explains the conditions. These conditions are necessary to ultimately achieve the values of education. They can be likened to levers that the LSVb can adjust. This means that, by engaging in dialogue with political actors, the media and other relevant parties, amongst other things, the LSVb can ensure that these conditions are better reflected in education and student life.

Accessibility

The LSVb advocates for accessibility in (higher) education because of the emancipatory role of education. Given the great importance the LSVb attaches to this role, it sets as its most important condition that all (prospective) students who wish to study should be able to do so. There must therefore be no barriers for anyone who is reasonably capable of studying or who can develop that ability. In this regard, the LSVb applies the principle that the best way to determine whether someone is capable of studying is to give them the opportunity to actually study.

According to the LSVb, financial considerations should therefore never be a factor when choosing a course of study. Nor should other (indirect) costs play a role. For example, students must be able to travel to and from their educational institution, and every student must have a realistic opportunity to find accommodation in the student town of their choice.

In addition, educational institutions and the government must remove other barriers as far as possible. This includes, for example, actively providing good study information, sound study choice guidance and adequate facilities for students with disabilities. Students can only enjoy the freedom that education offers and provides if they also have access to it. In this regard, it is important that certain minority groups also see sufficient role models, so that they too are encouraged to pursue higher education.

Accessibility is therefore also essential for students' personal development. Students may well be encouraged to develop themselves, but as long as they are subsequently unable to do what they wish, this serves little purpose. Ultimately, accessibility is the very foundation of being able to become a student in the first place.

In this context, it is also important that students receive proper guidance before choosing a degree programme. This guidance must, moreover, cover all aspects of studying, so that it is clear to the student what they can reasonably expect from their studies and what lies ahead afterwards.

Quality of education

Once access is guaranteed and every student is free to make their own choice, the quality of education becomes the second key requirement. For only education of a sound quality can ensure that all the values and objectives of education described above are properly and fully realised. Good education produces diverse individuals, citizens and ideas, rather than simply a one-size-fits-all approach. It develops students, and the knowledge imparted is up-to-date and relevant. Education must enable students

to find and fulfil their role in society. Good education makes students aware of their own responsibility and ensures that they take it seriously. In this way, it also helps to turn a student into a critical citizen. At the same time, good education ensures that this critical student remains connected to society and is able to devise creative solutions to social problems. Ultimately, good education provides space and freedom for the individual's input and aspirations.

The quality of education ultimately forms the basis of every learning process. It is important that there are good teachers, with sound teaching skills, who are given the professional freedom to practise their profession. Teachers who are not held back by managers with no understanding of education, but who can shape the curriculum together with their fellow teachers. In addition, good and comprehensive personal feedback is crucial. Teachers must be given the time and space to help students progress on a personal level, with support tailored to each individual student's needs.

The LSVb also emphasises the importance of small-scale education, both in terms of class sizes and educational institutions in general. Good education provides scope for meaningful discussions between students and between students and teachers, based on trust. There is also scope for critical self-reflection within an institution.

Different perspectives

As education should lead to self-development, it is essential that students are exposed to different viewpoints. Whether they wish to gain a thorough understanding of a subject or to develop themselves in a more abstract, academic sense, students must be exposed to multiple perspectives and views on theory and everyday practice, so that they can develop themselves as broadly as possible.

The same applies to the development of critical thinking skills. Students must be accustomed to seeing multiple perspectives on a subject and then being able to make a reasoned choice. Only when students are practised in this do they develop critical thinking skills. In doing so, education highlights multiple world views and provides scope to look at the content of their own studies in different ways.

Different perspectives are also important for social emancipation. Education should introduce students to multiple perspectives, cultures and world views. Fostering understanding and awareness of one's own world view and how it influences thought and action is of great value and should form part of every student's education. In addition to their own world view, education also confronts students with other world views and teaches them how to deal with them. All cultures and backgrounds are valued equally, and in this way education can fulfil its emancipatory role.

Self-development

An important value of education is self-development. In practice, therefore, education must provide sufficient scope for this. It goes without saying that the standard

curriculum of a study programme must provide sufficient challenge and support for students' self-development. Furthermore, the LSVb advocates a broader range of opportunities for self-development.

For instance, there must be a range of extracurricular activities on offer, and it must be possible for these activities to be recognised as an integral part of the education being undertaken. The same values and conditions apply to extracurricular educational activities as those that apply to the standard curriculum.

Furthermore, there must be a wide range of cultural activities, both at the educational institution and in the city where that institution is located. There must be sufficient opportunities for students to develop socially as well, so that they become engaged with the world around them.

Students themselves also play an active role in fulfilling this condition. An active student, student council and society life is very important in this regard. Students must be able to play an active role within student organisations and to develop and flourish there as well.

Freedom

Freedom is necessary so that students can develop a sense of personal responsibility. Only when students experience the freedom to take responsibility will they learn to value it.

If education is to lead to emancipation, students must have the freedom to pursue the education they deem necessary. Furthermore, students must be free to choose where they wish to study, and suitable accommodation must be available in their city of study. Furthermore, students must be free to be part of the educational community, free from prejudice, and also to remain true to themselves without being obliged to conform to that community.

Critical thinking can only flourish in an environment of freedom, where one can express oneself without prejudice, without fear of repercussions and without persecution. Education only leads to pluralism if there is the freedom to allow multiple perspectives to emerge. And as mentioned earlier, freedom also enables students to be themselves; this, too, is a prerequisite for pluralism.

It is important that students are free to choose their own degree programme, but also have the scope, during their studies, to choose modules and shape their own curriculum. In this regard, it is essential that students are properly and fully informed about the learning objectives and learning outcomes of the degree programme and the modules.

Only when students have the freedom to choose what suits their needs can there be genuine self-development. It is therefore important that all fields of study, large and small, can remain available as subjects of study at all stages of higher education.

Furthermore, it is important that students have the freedom to be critical of the institution itself and to identify areas where they see room for improvement.

Studying without barriers

The LSVb advocates studying without barriers. This means that students must not be forced in any way to graduate quickly or more quickly. Students must be given the space to make mistakes, to develop new interests and give them a chance, and simply to be able to make the wrong choice. Decisions made by educational institutions and the government must not be based on financial considerations. However, students who wish to study at a faster pace must also be given the opportunity to do so. Ultimately, the choice lies with the student themselves.

Student-centred learning

The student and their needs are central to the design of the curriculum. For this reason, student-centred learning is important. Students learn in a way that suits their needs. Furthermore, the method of assessment is also tailored to the students' needs. Students are guided and supported in finding the most suitable learning methods.

Student-centred learning helps students develop a sense of personal responsibility, as it encourages them to organise and shape their own education. Through this, they learn what personal responsibility entails and what the consequences of this are. This means that, in an ideal educational setting, there are no compulsory study pathways; instead, students are free to design their own educational journey.

Student-centred learning encourages students to think creatively, as there are endless possibilities for structuring the education they undertake. Thinking outside established frameworks and patterns of expectation is encouraged in this form of education, and students are urged not to opt for well-trodden paths from the outset. Within this flexibility, frameworks are viewed merely as guidelines rather than dogmas.

It is evident that student-centred learning is essential for maximum self-development. Only when students can tailor their education entirely to their own needs can they achieve their full potential. After all, students themselves know best which needs and interests they wish to develop.

Flexibility

The practical implementation of student-centred learning involves developing flexible study programmes that meet the needs of the individual student. Study programmes are flexible if there is scope to make choices, to choose one's own direction, but also to take modules or sit examinations at different times. It is important for students to have a flexible timetable so that they can also develop in ways other than just within their own degree programme. It also offers the opportunity to study alongside other commitments, such as work or bringing up children.

Student involvement and participation

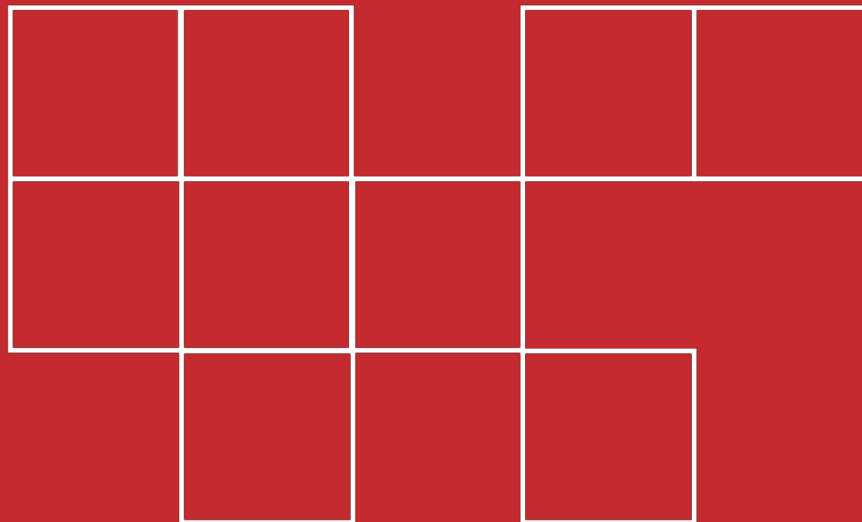
Together with lecturers, students are closest to the education process: they are the experts. Their involvement and say in the design and implementation of educational policy is therefore a key prerequisite for high-quality education. That is why it is important that educational institutions and legal frameworks are structured in such a way that students have a say at all levels: at the level of the organisation of higher education in the Netherlands, at the level of the educational institution itself, and at the level of everything from facilities to the curriculum. Furthermore, student involvement and say help to strengthen the *checks and balances* within an institution.

Engagement and student voice must be as close as possible to the education process and the students themselves. In this way, you ensure that discussions about education take place where people have first-hand knowledge of the subject. The guiding principle is that the focus of engagement and student voice should always lie as close as possible to the teaching and the students, unless it needs to be at a higher level. Participation and student voice contribute to the development of students' critical thinking skills and also enable them to ensure that higher education institutions adhere to the values which, according to the LSVb, are worth striving for.

In conclusion

The LSVb Vision Committee 2015–2016 is, of course, available to answer any questions regarding the drafting of this document.

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