

Vrije Universiteit Brussel


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## Institutional Reform at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel

*Based on the principles of good governance*

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### 1. WHY THIS REFORM ?

#### External reasons (Flemish Community)

- **2011:** "Guidelines for good governance" issued by GUBERNA on behalf of the Flemish Government, containing a set of recommendations for good governance in HEI
- **2012:**
  - Decree: introduction of a mandatory INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW
    - as a tool for the financing by the government to periodically assess if the Flemish HEI are "in control" of their core academic business
    - public report
    - scope: all organisational levels; policy process; main focus on education and quality control, but also governance structure
    - 1st site visit : april–may 2016 (institution as a whole + audit trails in depth)
- **2013:**
  - GOOD GOVERNANCE CHARTER for the Universities of the Flemish Community
  - Gender Policy Plan

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#### Internal grounds

- **2008:**
  - Policy Plan newly elected Rector
  - introduction of a long-range Institutional Strategic Plan (4 academic years), adopted by the Board of Directors
- **2009:**
  - installing Audit Committees / Units for both University & University Hospital
  - creation of a new department for Strategic Planning and Policy
- **2011:**
  - risk Analysis
  - institutional Strategic Plan yearly monitoring, calling for a modernisation of the institution's governance structure
- **2012:**
  - GOVERNANCE AUDIT
    - conducted by the independent internal Audit Unit
    - resulting in over 70 recommendations for reform

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### 2. SCOPE OF THE REFORM

- the institution as a whole (nb: VUB = private institution by law but with public funding given its social mission)
- covering all its components, *id est* :
  - University, incl. its 8 faculties and the Institute for European Studies
  - University Hospital (and its interaction with university and medical faculty)
- focus on policy processes
- including all organs, committees and structures, both central and decentral, with special focus on their composition and powers

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### 3. PROCESS

- Governance Committee, installed by the Board of Directors, with representatives of all the stakeholders and including experts
- appointment of a fulltime senior staff member for governance issues
- with support of EUBELIUS (legal firm)
- *resulting in* :
  - University Good Governance Charter
  - Code of Conduct for Directors (deontology)
  - a new INSTITUTIONAL CHARTER (= by-laws, "Organiek Statuut")

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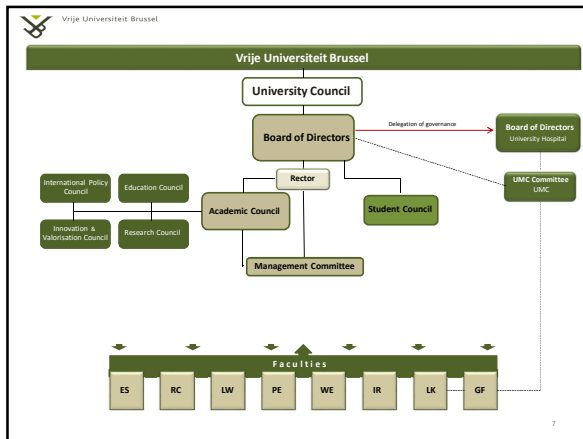
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### 4. a new Institutional Charter for the VUB

- adopted by the Board of Directors in September 2014, based on the recommendations of its Governance Committee and with the approval of the University Community
- implemented from the academic year 2015-2016 onwards
- **CENTRAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**
  - ❑ a **University Council** (48) as the representative body of the VUB as a whole
  - ❑ a reformed and professionalised **Board of Directors** (10) and **Board of Directors for the University Hospital** (delegation of governance, required by federal law)
  - ❑ a new **Academic Council** (20), operating both as an *advisory body* to the Board of Directors (budget, regulations) as well as a *decision-making body* for all academic affairs (including appointment and evaluation of faculty staff), chaired by the Rector
  - ❑ a **Management Committee** (14) (executive body, chaired by Rector and including General Manager, Senior Management, 1 faculty representative)

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**Other key elements embedded in the Institutional Charter**

- democratic participation** in the decision-making process for all members of the University Community, *id est* a key statutory governance principle of the VUB
- gender diversity**
- a **new Vice-Rector for Innovation and Valorisation**, in addition to the already existing Vice-Rectors for Educational (and Student) Policy, Research Policy, and Internationalisation
- general elections for the Rector**, open to the whole university community
- a **uniformized governance structure for all the faculties** with enhanced powers for the faculties, making the faculty internal governance process and their governance relation with the central structure more transparent, harmonized and efficient (Faculty Council – Fac. Board – Fac. Bureau - Department Councils & Course Councils)
- adding **professionally selected and periodically evaluated members** to the Board of Directors

**Other key elements embedded in the Institutional Charter**

- the introduction of an advisory **Ethics Committee** to the Board of Directors, in addition to the already existing **Audit Committee**, **Governance Committee** and **Remuneration (and Nomination) Committee**
- embedding the governance structure of the **University Hospital** and an **UMC Committee** in the VUB's by-laws
- embedding both the existing **Student Council** and **Student Facilities Council** in the VUB's by-laws, as well as embedding the important principle of student **co-governance** (thus ensuring student participation and representation in all governance bodies)
- a **more professionalised election / selection** of Rector & Vice-Rectors, Deans, Directors for the Boards, based on a **profile** adopted by the Board
- offering specialised **governance training** to all members and representatives in the institution's governance bodies

**Pitfalls**

- balance between "participation" and "external"
- gender
- remuneration
- elections versus appointments
- ....