



Impact Making Guide at level 5

**The place of Impact Making in the learning outcomes
of the associate degree programmes**



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Colophon

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Foreword

Rather than training students for a job that exists 'on paper' only, we guide them towards a role in which they can add value, drive change and contribute to innovation in their field. The challenges we face today, such as climate change, social inequality, health crises and economic uncertainty, require professionals who are solution-oriented, agile and committed. We therefore need a curriculum that encourages personal leadership, entrepreneurial thinking and social engagement.

Making an impact is not an abstract concept, but a concrete way of acting. By embedding impact-making into our Level 5 learning outcomes, we provide students with the tools they need to enter the professional field with confidence and decisiveness. After all, learning doesn't stop once you've obtained a degree. In a dynamic labour market and a rapidly changing society, lifelong development is essential. Impact makers continue to develop, innovate, and adapt to new challenges and opportunities.

By combining impact-making and lifelong development, we strengthen the agility and sustainable employability of our associate degree professionals. This guide is an essential step in further developing associate degree education, positioning associate degree students as socially significant professionals. Together, we are taking a step towards stronger, more valuable associate degree education. We invite students, lecturers, employers and policymakers to contribute and help make impact making an integral part of our associate degree education.

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&

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Introduction

This document is intended as a guide for associate degree programmes – higher education study programmes at Level 5 – which train students to become practice-oriented professionals who can add value at an operational, tactical level, and who can contribute meaningfully, sustainably and in a future-proof way.

In 2018, the national document '*Level 5 Description*' was published, describing the national learning outcomes at associate degree level, to which all associate degree programmes must relate.

In 2021, the '*Guide to an Investigative Attitude at Level 5*' was published, examining the investigative attitude of students as a learning outcome within associate degree programmes. This document emphasises the importance of research in these programmes.

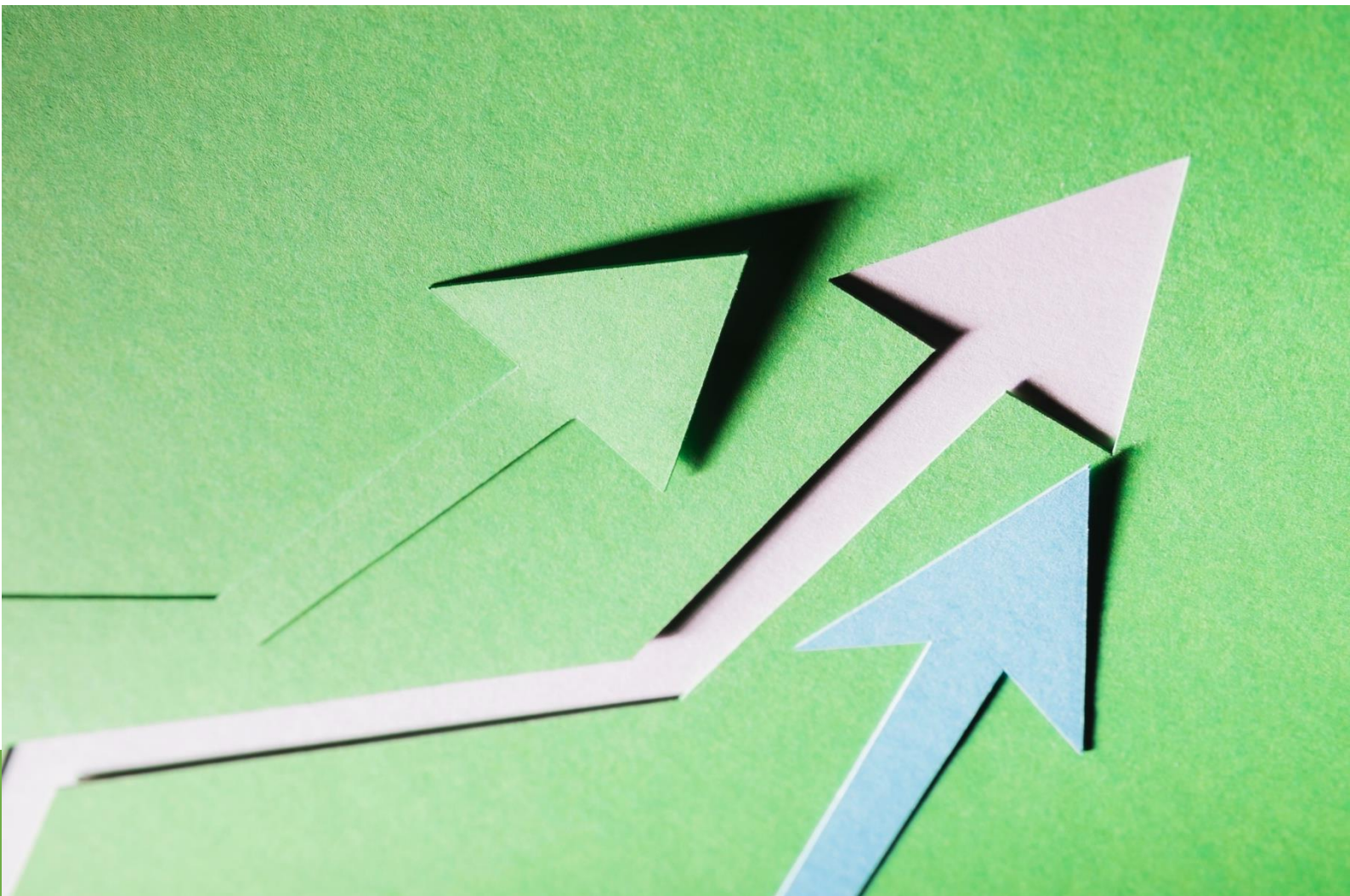
In 2025, the '*Inspirational Guide for Internationalisation and Interculturalisation*' will be published, providing guidance on integrating internationalisation into associate degree education..

The above documents provide clarification and support for the development of forward-looking associate degree programmes. The '*Guide to Impact Making at Level 5*' addresses the following questions:

- What is the role of impact-making in relation to the associate degree students' learning outcomes?
- How can impact-making be made visible in learning outcomes and stimulated in the associate degree curriculum?
- What does a learning environment look like that encourages impact-making?

Chapter 1

Guide to Impact Making



Chapter 1: Guide to Impact Making

1.1 Motivation

The world is facing a range of complex and urgent problems, including climate change, social inequality, health crises and economic uncertainty. There is a growing acknowledgement that traditional approaches are insufficient for addressing these challenges effectively. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) worldwide.

Since 2020, there has been an increasing awareness that a transformation of the human psyche is necessary to achieve the SDGs. The skills required for this inner transformation are set out in the framework of the Inner Development Goals (IDGs). This realisation is also endorsed in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's future outlook for vocational education, 'Today is 2040'. It states that '*New generations of students will have to bear the consequences of climate change and help shape the transitions*', emphasising the need for higher education institutions to train change agents, impact makers and creators who can make a difference. The world is in transition, and the Netherlands needs future generations willing to roll up their sleeves and help build a hopeful future.

Associate degree programmes focusing on impact making prepare students to develop and implement sustainable solutions that contribute to a better, more future-proof world.

We need agile students who can make an impact, both to address societal issues and to meet the rapidly changing demands of the labour market. Students need a relevant, meaningful and impactful education that stimulates their personal and professional development.

1.2 Vision

Associate degree students are able to make a meaningful contribution to the world around them, the labour market and, above all, to themselves, through small or large interventions. It is precisely the can-do mentality that is so characteristic of associate degree students that enables them to make a difference to their immediate environment.

Developing a sense of belonging in the world is crucial to facilitating successful experiences, stimulating talent development and optimising student well-being. If we succeed in giving students the ability to make an impact, this will lead to effective personal leadership and a sense of purpose.

By incorporating impact-making into education, students are not only prepared for their future careers, but also for their role as engaged and responsible global citizens who contribute to a better world. The mindset and perspective of the student play a crucial role in this. By helping students develop this mindset and allowing them to view today's world from different perspectives, associate degree programmes, with their characteristically practical approach, can contribute to the world of tomorrow.

1.3 What is impact making?

Impact making is a sustainable attitude and mindset that aims to create positive value for yourself, others, and the world around you. It is the meaningful use of talents to create interventions that benefit the environment.

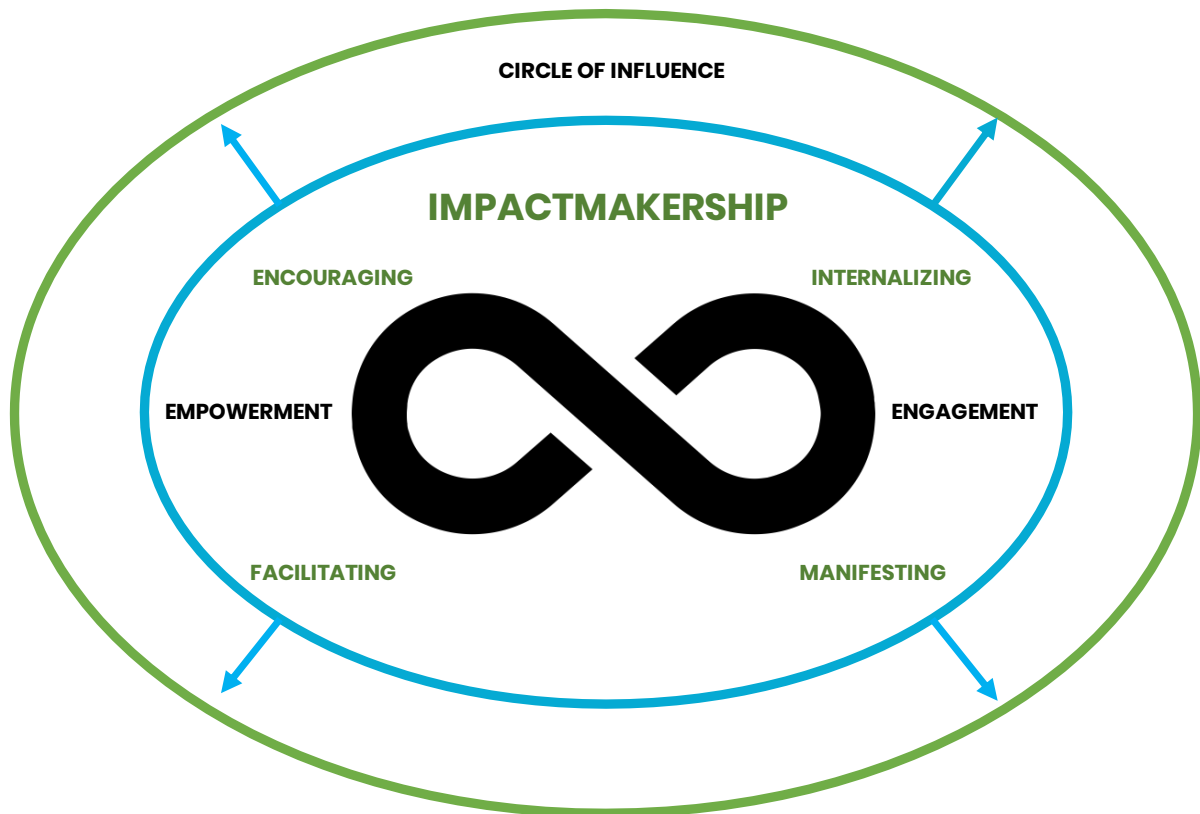
Those who embody this mindset are characterised by self-confidence, integrity, empathy, decisiveness, perseverance, adaptability, a willingness to cooperate, positivity, and a willingness to learn.

Values and ethical considerations are of great importance. Impact making leads to behaviour that benefits the greater good.

Impact making requires skills such as co-creation, systems thinking, creativity, and the ability to work in an interdisciplinary way. Associate degree students learn to integrate different perspectives to arrive at sustainable, or even regenerative, solutions. All skills must be future-proof, even though the future is unpredictable. Therefore, the ability to approach the future with an open mind and a spirit of inquiry is essential, and this is what we refer to as 'uncertainty skills'.

How does associate degree education encourage impact making?

The associate degree programme is motivating and enabling students to develop a sustainable mindset and attitude.



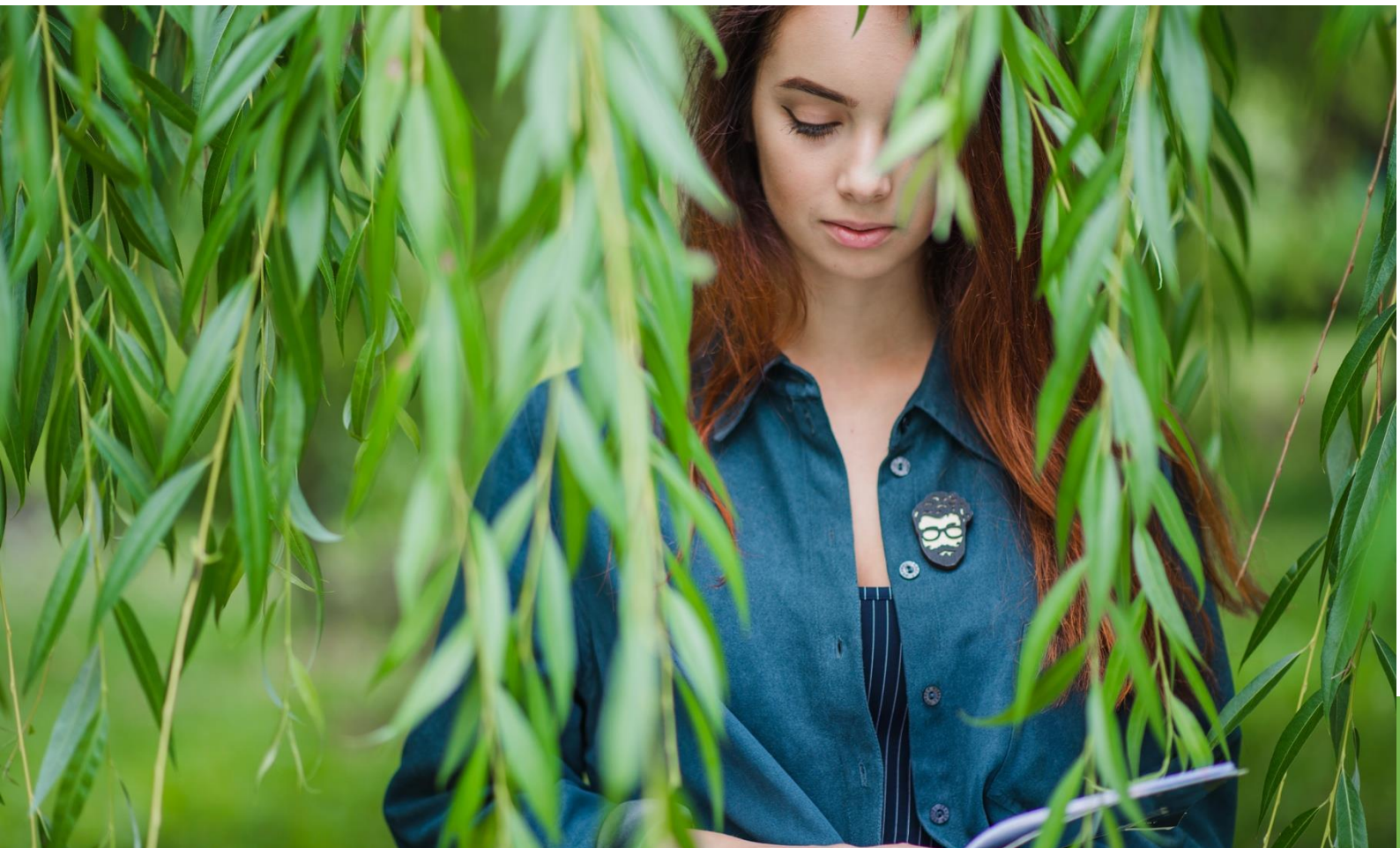
“Be the change you want to see in the world.” – Mahatma Gandhi

Associate degree programmes **encourage** students to contribute to their environment by offering practical perspectives and assignments that promote sustainability. The SDG framework is a useful tool for this purpose.

During the study programme, our associate degree students develop and **internalise** a sustainable attitude. They demonstrate (**manifest**) this personal growth by using their talents and networks to effect social change. In this way, they expand their circle of influence and, as agents of change, **facilitate** the creation of a better, more sustainable world. The IDG framework can be used as a tool to help them achieve this.

Chapter 2:

Learning outcomes level 5



Chapter 2: Learning outcomes level 5

Impact making relates to complex tasks in a chaotic world of change. The increasing complexity within the social and professional context in which our associate degree professionals find themselves requires our students to develop a future-proof skill set.

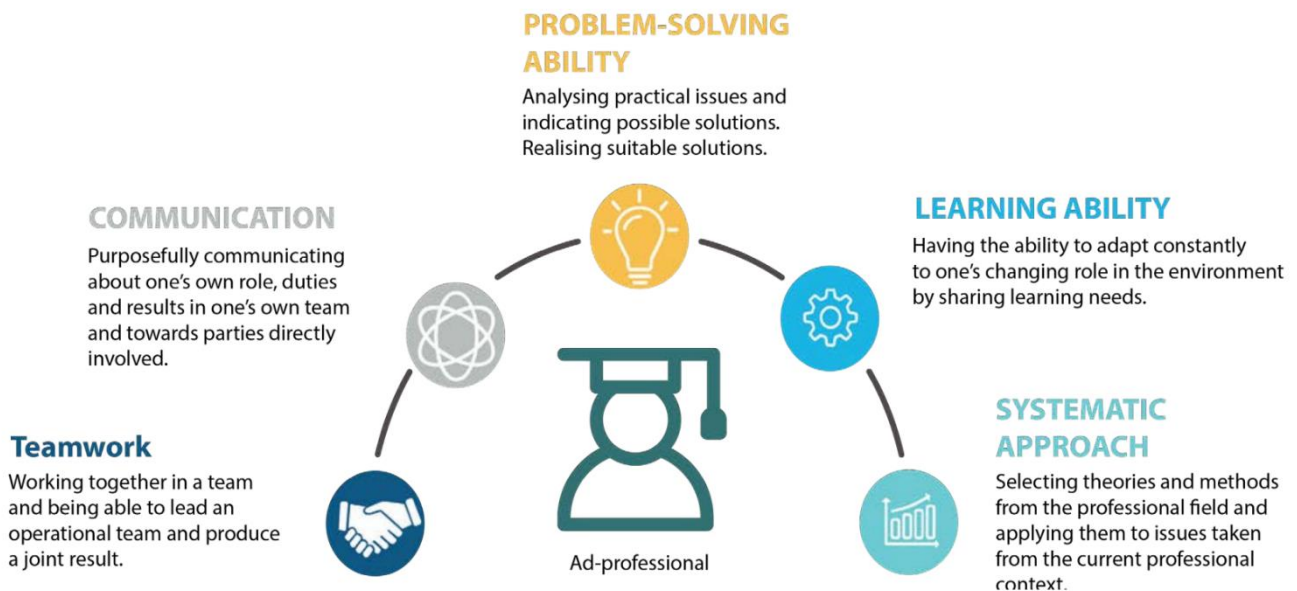
According to the national description of level 5, associate degree professionals have their feet firmly planted in practice, they keep their heads clear, connect people and resources, and thereby link thinking to doing (Associate degree Platform, 2022). The figure below clearly shows the place of the associate degree professional in the senior secondary education-Ad-Bachelor system. It shows that the discerning feature of an associate degree student is that they combine craftsmanship with operations and strategy.

		BACHELOR "IS A CRAFTSMAN IN A WIDER CONTEXT"
	ASSOCIATE DEGREE "LINKS CRAFTMANSHIP TO OPERATIONS AND STRATEGY"	+
SECONDARY VOCATIONAL "KNOWS HIS BUSINESS"	+	+
<i>The starting professional</i>	<i>The starting professional</i>	<i>The starting professional</i>
Who works according to standard procedures and methods and applies them in daily work	Who applies the theories of his discipline to a practical problem	Who works systematically and can translate theories to applications for practical problems
Who works practically independently on standard tasks and collaborates within his own team	Who, while being counselled, works on complex tasks and manages an operational team	Who practically independently works on complex tasks and collaborates in an environment with several parties and interests
Who communicates about his own tasks in the team	Who communicates purposefully about tasks in the team in relation to goals of the organisation	Who communicates with multiple parties and understands the different interests
Who signals problems	Who formulates the (research) question	Who researches the question
Who applies solutions handed to him	Who implements the solution	Who formulates the solution strategy
Who can formulate, while being counselled, his own learning requirements	Who can formulate his learning requirements independently	Who directs his own learning requirements

In order to indicate the level at which the 'Impact Maker' of the associate degree student can be embedded within the EQF framework, we compare it to senior secondary education level 4 and Bachelor's level 6.

Level 6 Strategic Macro	The change agent	Impact on the policies of organisations and society as a whole.	Bachelor's students are able to implement strategic organisational changes that contribute to solving complex and urgent ecological and social problems.
Level 5 Tactical Meso	The impact maker	Impact on personal and professional environment.	Associate degree students can influence stakeholder behaviour and mindset by proactively implementing interventions that positively impact future generations and the environment.
Level 4 Operational Micro	The difference maker	Impact on the individual at work and in private life.	Students at the senior secondary education level can adapt work processes to contribute to organisational sustainability goals and adjust their own behaviour based on ecological and social needs.

In order to embed impact making within associate degree education, it becomes necessary to enrich the learning outcomes of the Dutch description for level 5. Our aim is to encourage associate degree study programmes to translate impact making into their final qualifications. The national description contains five learning outcomes (see figure below).



This chapter uses the current learning outcomes to show how they can be enriched in an impactful way in order to:

- 1 Prepare students for the complex contemporary problems they will encounter in their lives and in the professional field;
- 2 Enable students to grow in a meaningful way as individuals and professionals;
- 3 Enable students to realise impactful interventions that allow them to add positive and sustainable value as professionals.

2.1 Systematic approach

The first learning outcome is the systemic approach. *“Selecting theories and methods from the field and applying them to issues in the current professional context.”*

Current explanation:

Students learn various theories and methods during the programme. The link to current professional practice is what the Ad stands for. That is why the acquired theories and methods are not learned stand-alone but students must be able to apply them to a specific problem. The problem that Ad students tackle, is a practical problem for the Ad-level professions. Ad graduates can link various presented theories and methods in order to solve an issue for which there is no standard solution.

Impactful enrichment:

In the context of systematic action, it is crucial that students can cope with change and uncertainty, and understand the growing complexity of life and work. This requires broader thinking, viewing and acting in order to solve practical problems in a sustainable way. This involves not only focusing on the current situation in the professional practice, but also looking ahead to the future and considering the expected effects on professional practice in interaction with the environment.

The systematic approach is becoming an increasingly iterative process that facilitates flexibility. To make a positive impact, students are encouraged to experiment, reflect, and adapt in this iterative process to effect positive change. Experimenting, gaining experience and reflecting on one's own actions are essential parts of applying theories and methods from the field.

2.2 Teamwork

The second learning outcome is teamwork. *“Working together in a team and being able to lead an operational team and produce a joint result.”*

Current explanation

This describes how associate degree students interact with others in their daily working lives. During the programme, they learn to fulfil different roles and take on various levels of responsibility. As associate degree students act as connectors in their work, collaboration with others is an important aspect. Whether or not graduates will have to manage a team depends on the specific profession. The purpose of collaboration is to achieve a result that individuals would not have been able to achieve alone. Collaboration adds value through the combined experience and expertise of the individuals involved.

Impactful enrichment:

Given the importance of teamwork in learning, it is crucial that associate degree students learn to create value alongside others. They can act as an example of this by collaborating from multiple perspectives, not only economic, but also ecological, social and personal.

Due to the increasing complexity of the world and professional fields, it is also important that associate degree students learn to collaborate in a multidisciplinary manner. To achieve impactful interventions, our students must learn to collaborate not only with shareholders and stakeholders, but also with 'rights holders' — groups or individuals who represent the interests of underrepresented parties, such as other citizens and the biological world around us.

2.3 Communication

The third learning outcome is communication. *“Purposefully communicating about one’s own role, duties and results in one’s own team and towards parties directly involved.”*

Current explanation

Purposeful here means that the Ad graduates use communication to link policy and realisation. Ad graduates are aware of the message, their own role and that of the recipient. Ad graduates are expected to be able to reflect on the effect of the communication on their own role, the role of the team and that of parties directly involved. Ad graduates can then translate the conclusions of their reflection into follow-up actions with regard to the role, task and results towards which they work in conjunction with others.

Impactful enrichment:

As a connector between strategy and implementation, the impactful associate degree student uses targeted communication to inspire others and contribute actively to a more sustainable living and working environment. They reflect on whether their message has been conveyed correctly and had the desired impact. They are able to convey their own vision convincingly and collaborate to create a regenerative movement.

2.4 Problem-solving ability

The fourth learning outcome is the problem-solving ability. *“Analysing practical issues and indicating possible solutions. Realising suitable solutions.”*

Current description

The issue and the solution are pivotal here. Ad graduates analyse the issue, view matters critically and postpone their judgement until all required information has been collected. Ad graduates ask the right questions that are needed to analyse the problem, because they view things from a linking perspective. From this question, Ad graduates can formulate and substantiate suitable possible solutions. Ad graduates realise the final solution that fits within the context, the strategy and the organisation.

Impactful enrichment:

An impactful associate degree student is a participating professional. Guided by their inner compass, they contribute sustainable and potentially regenerative solutions that create value. They are able to innovate with an eye on the changing environment, social welfare and people's well-being, and they have the courage to do so in practice.

Throughout the inquisitive attitude cycle, the associate degree student will assess the impact of the action at each stage, alongside others and from the perspective of rights holders.

2.5 Learning ability

The fifth learning outcome is the learning ability. *“Having the ability to adapt constantly to one’s changing role in the environment by sharing learning needs.”*

Learning does not stop once the diploma has been received. To Ad graduates, learning and working are interwoven. By constantly reflecting on their own actions and their role in the professional context, Ad graduates remain flexible. This happens when the Ad graduates set learning needs and share them with others in the workplace, so as to solve these learning needs together. Learning ability increases the sustainable employability of an Ad graduate. It is a natural part of an Ad graduate’s repertoire.

Impactful enrichment:

Students studying for an associate degree must be able to adapt to changing roles in their environment by developing as individuals within a broader context and by sharing meaningful learning questions that are relevant not only to their professional development, but also to their personal growth.

They grow not only in the work environment, but also as individuals and as part of a larger system, including their own social and professional networks and wider society. Learning, living and working. By actively employing courage, optimism, creativity and their personal talents, associate degree students develop their personal identity. They learn to accept 'not knowing' and proactively ask questions to facilitate learning. This increases their resilience and agility in navigating a chaotic and rapidly changing world. Developing a moral compass helps associate degree students integrate their professional and personal identities.

Chapter 3:

The Learning Environment



Chapter 3: Learning Environment

An effective learning environment for impact makers should encourage students to bring about meaningful change in both their professional and personal lives. This chapter describes what such an environment might look like, focusing on physical, didactic and social aspects. Next, it describes a phased approach to creating such an environment. The chapter concludes with considerations for the long term.

3.1 Physical aspects

Physical aspects of the learning environment refer to aspects that are visible and tangible. Such material aspects include:

- **Nature-inclusive construction:** Use of sustainable materials such as wood and glass, with plenty of natural light and plants in the environment. This supports student well-being and contributes to the regenerative principles that impact makers strive for. Green spaces help reduce stress and promote cognitive functioning among students and lecturers.
- **Flexible spaces:** Open learning landscapes with opportunities for both individual and group workplaces. In addition, modular spaces can be used to easily adapt to different learning scenarios and working methods. Impactful learning and working spaces also offer opportunities for co-creation with the professional field and multidisciplinary learning teams.
- **Technological support:** Access to digital and technological tools and platforms that can unburden stakeholders and facilitate collaboration on interdisciplinary projects. Examples include augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and robotisation to create realistic simulations, practical learning experiences and space/time. In addition, online collaboration platforms such as project management tools and discussion forums can be used to support learning beyond the physical environment.
- **Inspiring environment:** The physical space should stimulate curiosity and creativity through art, interactive installations and spaces for reflection and discussion. Inspiring quotes, storytelling walls and spaces for experimentation help students visualise their own impact and future. This could include, setting up a Green Office, workshops, Learning Labs, etc.
- **The neighbourhood as a 'classroom':** Meaningful learning does not only take place during school hours within the physical boundaries of a school building, but rather in practice and in the regional environment of the educational institution. Impactful learning is encouraged in both the private and professional environments of the associate degree student.

3.2 Didactical aspects

Didactical aspects concern the professional conduct of the lecturer to ensure that the associate degree student is able to learn.

- **Development-oriented coaching:** Lecturers guide students through the learning process by providing targeted feedback and feedforward, and by supporting a growth mindset. They actively use peer feedback and peer-to-peer coaching. This encourages in-depth study and independent learning. Regular reflection ensures an ongoing learning process, enabling students to continuously evaluate and develop their impact and actions. Reflection diaries and impact reports can encourage deeper self-reflection and help students to understand the impact they have had on their environment while obtaining their associate degree.
- **Authentic learning tasks:** Lecturers provide a choice of assignments that are directly related to societal issues and align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Students are encouraged to connect their knowledge to concrete challenges in practice and learn to deal with the associated complexity and uncertainty.
- **Multidisciplinary collaboration:** Lecturers actively seek collaboration with other disciplines so that students from different disciplines work together on complex practical issues. This encourages co-creation and systems thinking.
- **Experimental learning and prototyping:** Lecturers give students the space to experiment with innovative solutions and concepts. This can take place in living labs where learning and working come together in a practical setting. Hackathons and Design Thinking workshops also contribute to innovative learning experiences.

3.3 Social aspects

Social aspects refer to interactions, relationships and socialisation within the educational context.

- **Community of Practice:** Students learn not only from lecturers, but also from each other, alumni and professionals in the field. This stimulates networking, intrinsic motivation and peer learning. In addition, students are encouraged to participate in social initiatives and impactful projects outside the school walls.
- **Sense of belonging:** A sense of belonging increases students' self-confidence and intrinsic motivation to make an impact. Attention to the affective aspects of learning is important. A culture of shared ownership is encouraged by actively involving students and letting them be responsible for shaping their learning environment. Mentorship programmes, buddy systems and Green Offices can play a supporting role in this.
- **Inter-individualism (Mandela, 1994):** Students should be encouraged to see themselves as relational beings operating within a larger system. This is in line with the holistic and regenerative vision of impact making as described in Chapter 1 of this guide. Social responsibility and collective growth are core values within an impactful learning environment.
- **Inclusivity and diversity:** The impactful learning environment must offer a safe and inclusive space where students and lecturers feel free to be themselves. Given the current polarisation in society, different points of view must be taken into account. This can be achieved through inclusive curricula, diverse (lecturer) teams and awareness of different cultural and social perspectives. Intercultural projects and international collaborations strengthen global engagement.

3.4 Phasing towards an impactful learning environment

Creating such an impactful learning environment requires a phased approach. The following process steps can be made by the drivers of impact making:

- **Phase 1: Analysis and vision development:** Take stock of the current learning environment and identify the educational institution's strengths and weaknesses. Formulate a joint vision with all stakeholders, particularly lecturers, students and partners in the professional field.
- **Phase 2: Design and planning:** Establish concrete design principles based on the impactful vision. Physical, didactic and social aspects are clearly distinguished from one another.
- **Phase 3: Pilot and implementation:** Set up small-scale pilots and experiments to test different elements of the learning environment in practice. Collect feedback regularly and incorporate it into the test beds.
- **Phase 4: Scaling up and optimisation:** Following the successful completion of the pilots and experiments, the elements can be implemented more widely within the institution. Continuous monitoring and iterative improvements ensure ongoing innovation and adaptation to changing circumstances.
- **Phase 5: Sustainable embedding and evaluation:** The impactful learning environment should be periodically evaluated and adapted based on new insights and technological developments, with an emphasis on sustainable improvement that will stand the test of time.

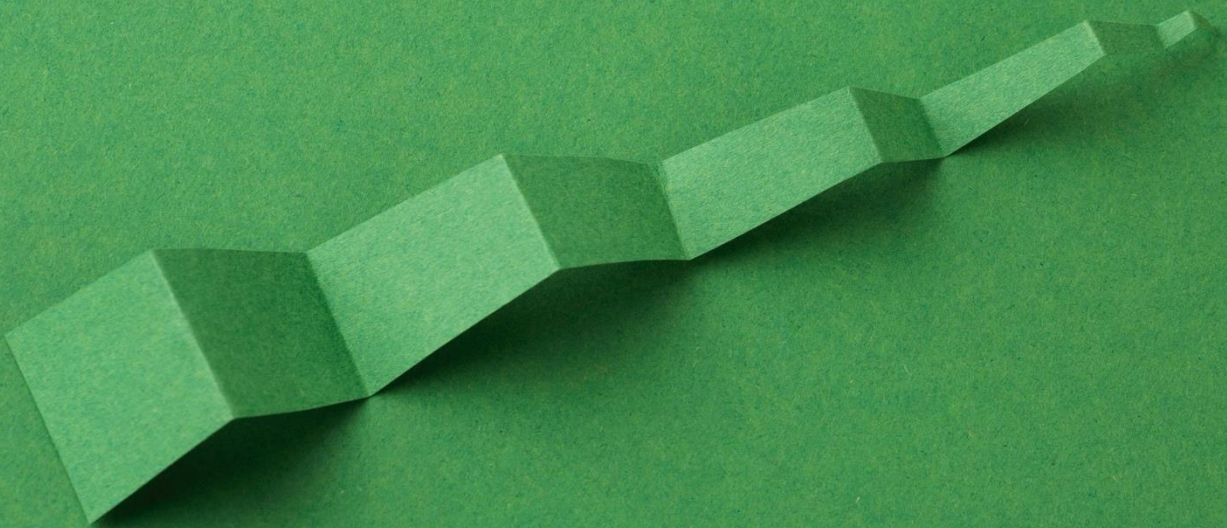
3.5 Long term

Creating an impactful learning environment for students is not enough for an educational institution to drive the transition to a future-proof world. In order for an educational institution to have a sustainable impact on its environment, the following is necessary:

- **Active partnerships with the professional field and the region:** We collaborate with social organisations and companies to enable authentic projects and internships. Company visits and social hackathons strengthen the interaction between education and practice.
- **Promoting lifelong learning:** The creation of impact does not stop after graduation. Alumni can remain connected to the learning environment and continue to participate in networking events and impact programmes organised by the educational institution. More generally, everyone involved in the learning environment continues to learn and develop.
- **Linking to the educational institution's strategic policy:** To achieve a lasting, impactful learning environment, it is important to align with the strategic agendas of educational institutions. If necessary, active lobbying should take place within the institution to ensure that sustainability becomes an integral part of its strategic agenda.
- **Promoting national impact:** This guide is a starting point for us to make associate degree education more impactful together. To achieve this, it is crucial that this guide is implemented, and that all stakeholders in the national associate degree landscape are committed to enhancing and furthering development.

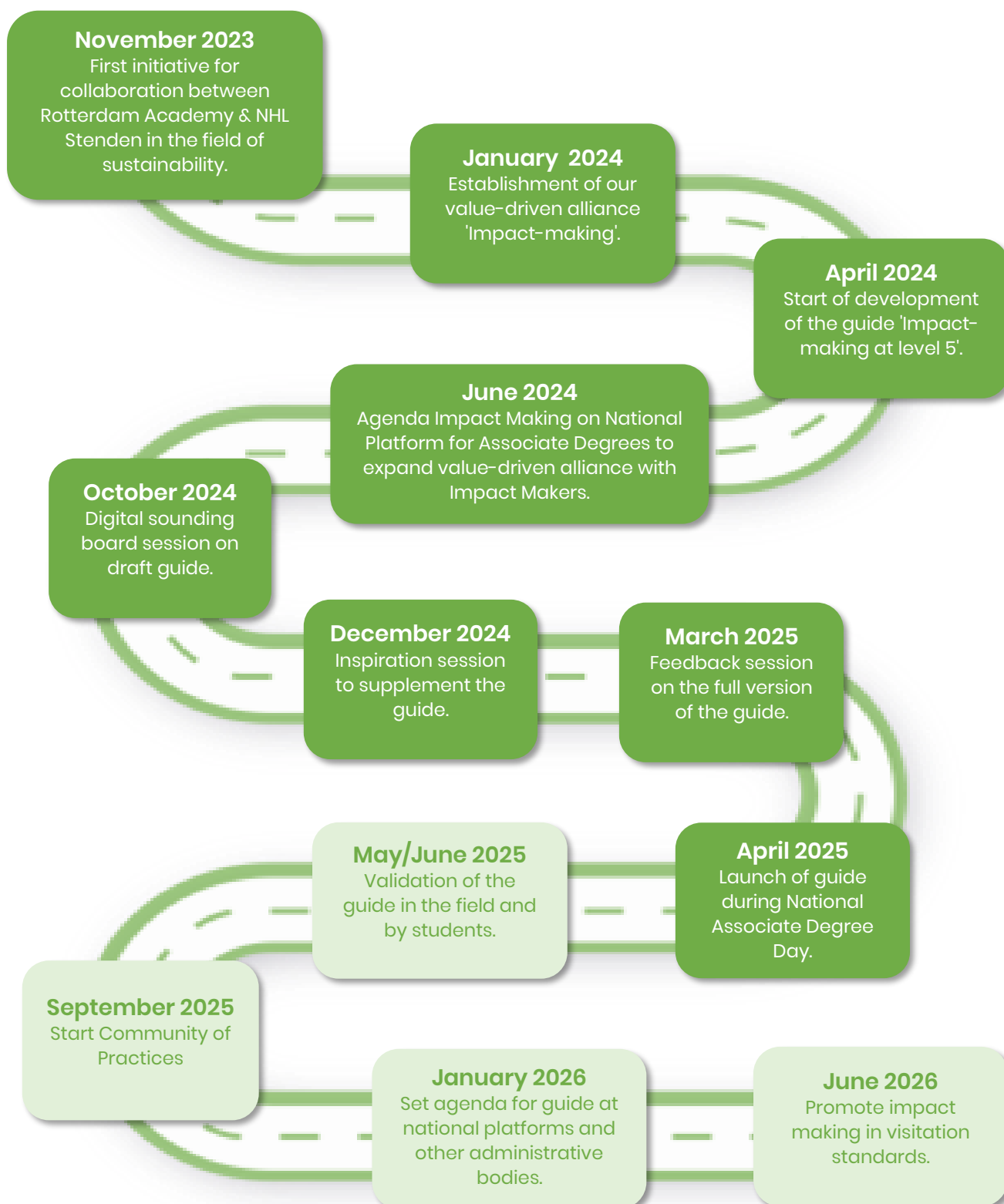
Chapter 4

Timeline



Chapter 4: Timeline

A timeline visualising the activities that have already been undertaken in the development of this guide is provided below, along with an outline of a possible future perspective.



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In addition to using the above sources, AI tools were also used to gather inspiration and make textual improvements. However, the content of this guide is original and has been written in-house.

