

University Council Election plan 2023-2024



Dear student,

We are pleased to hereby present you our election plan for the year 2023/2024!

While we are continuing to tackle issues that have existed for a long time, we are also facing the challenges of a new age. The University must keep up with national and international developments while ensuring that its actions align with the needs of its students. We should see this as an opportunity to shed old habits and open up to an exemplary style of organisation, serving the best interest of all students.

We want a university which is a healthy environment for students to develop both professionally and personally. One which encourages us to make use of the many opportunities of the city, and enables us to shape our own education and time as a student. A university of which we can truly say it understands the present needs of a working culture, technological tools, and green organisation. Only such an organisation can credibly prepare us for the futures of our own.

Our plan rests on three pillars: The Active Student, Career and Education, and Sustainability. Among these pillars, we include the aim to ensure that the organisations which form the backbone of our characteristic student life will get the resources they need. We aim to improve students' well-being through a more mindful mode of education and extra flexibility in our studies. Flexibility includes longer availability of study spaces, but also less stringent attendance rates and more curricular opportunities. Furthermore, we are engaged in the struggle to become more energy efficient by providing green policies which do not harm the quality of education and could serve the mutual benefit of students and the University.

As we recognize that being a student is more than just studying, in the University Council, we stay committed to working in the interest of all students, by making sure you have access to the most joyful opportunities.

Yours sincerely,

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What We Stand For

The Active Student

Of all the parties in the University Council, SOG is THE party that stands up for the active student. We believe that your student life consists of more than just studying. Every student should have the opportunity to explore the rich association life, which makes Groningen the flourishing city it is and the best student city in the Netherlands. In the upcoming year, we promise to do everything possible to enhance active student life and represent it in the University Council in the best way possible. We will try to achieve this, among other things, by creating a more inclusive active student life, making more resources available to student organisations and getting more recognition for student boards.

Career & Education

Education is the reason we are all here, united at the University of Groningen. During this time in our lives, we are laying the foundation for our future careers. Thus, we believe that it is of great importance that the University should have the quality of education as its highest priority. Knowledge exchange is not possible if there is not an open and safe atmosphere at the University. In the coming year, we will try to do everything to ensure that students feel comfortable and safe at the University and know where to get help if this is not the case. Additionally, we believe you should have the opportunity to prepare for your future in the best way possible. Therefore, we will fight for more opportunities to shape your own education, longer availability and better facilities of study spaces, and digital modernisation of the University.

Sustainability

Many students are concerned about the environment and believe that our University should take action to preserve our planet for future generations. We agree and believe that we should work together towards a sustainable future, especially now that we are in an energy crisis. In the next year, we will be advocating for more energy efficiency and transparency and more greenery around the University.

Harmony Model

We are convinced that pragmatism is a prerequisite if we want to implement our ideas and bring about actual change. Thus, we strive to have healthy and constructive relations.

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1 THE ACTIVE STUDENT

Being a student is a once-in-a-lifetime experience which is why we want to ensure that you, as a student, can take advantage of every opportunity so that you can excel in your future, but also be able to look back on the amazing experiences. For this reason, we prioritise the pillar 'The Active Student' because being a student is more than just studying. We want to ensure that you can develop yourself, your knowledge, values, connections, friendships and skills, which you will have for the rest of your life.

The 'Active Student' stands for the community outside of the classroom, whether this be a study, student, sport or any other organisation. You can, through this unique student experience, discover different fields of governance which allows you to have a better idea of which path you might want to take after completing your studies. For a more fulfilling experience in the student community we believe every student that is involved in the community outside of their normal curriculum should be recognized and valued by the University, that is why we propose the implementations you can read below.

1.1 Be Active Starter Pack

1.1.1 Information packets for incoming students

We want new students to receive a clear information package about active student life before they come to Groningen. This information package will come from the University itself, so that they already know where they can get active. This way, new students have clear information from the University itself before participating in one of the introduction weeks or starting their studies.

This information package will contain a concise overview of the different associations that are available in Groningen, namely student, study and sports associations, and where you can find information about these associations. This way, students will be aware of all the organisations they can get involved with and will be able to find the student organisation that really fits their interests and their personality, thereby making an informed choice. We hope that this will benefit all associations, big and small.

We know that, especially for international students, the general information students receive from the university is already very excessive. We think that by keeping the active student starter pack very simple and well-organised, it will not create an overload of information. Adding to that, most students are interested in the range of student organisations and student life, so this information will not be redundant. This will be like accompanying students through the wide range of organisations one can find in the city. Furthermore, making such a summary of information available directly in one

document will save students time with researching what is available in Groningen next to their studies.

1.1.2 Extension and expansion of the student mentorship programmes

In order to better prepare incoming students for student life in Groningen, we want to look at the possibility of getting an informative phone call by existing students (if wanted) in between the enrolment period and summer break. This can be an immediately visible starting point for students' time here, valuable for a number of reasons. First of all, it can draw attention to the introductory period of the city's student life. While several student organisations do their own advertisement, many students unfamiliar with the city get to know about this period too late and may thereby lose the opportunity to get familiar with association life in time to get enrolled. This way, we want to foster a shared understanding that being a student in Groningen is more than just studying, and make the city's association life more inclusive. This facility also has potential to create awareness on the housing situation on time.

Not every programme has a student mentorship programme in place, and while this programme has other educational benefits, for the benefits mentioned above it would suffice to implement a limited student mentorship programme for only these calls. Both the limited mentorship programme and expanded programme should be compensated for according to workload.

1.2 Visibility of study associations through the University

1.2.1 Physical Advertising

Allow as much advertising space as possible in and around the university buildings. Put the advertisement about the different study associations at the relevant faculty buildings and University Library, and involve the associations in the different information markets organised by the University at the start of the year. The University must keep itself informed on all the associations that involve its students, and give all associations equal opportunity in making themselves known to the students.

1.2.2 Digital Advertising

Some sections on Brightspace provide a better understanding of what associations are doing at particular times of the year. However, the information that the University provides on the activities of associations is lacking.

To attain this we want a section on the Brightspace page that is specifically titled "Student Life" to collect the monthly calendar of the different associations that are willing to be on this information

section of Brightspace. This section will group information from the (study) associations based on which faculty they apply to and then will show up on the Brightspace pages of the relevant students of those faculties. If multiple associations are under one faculty, there should be a drop-down menu for the student to see on their Brightspace page to pick which association they want to see the information of. Like the UG schedule, this could also entail a central calendar system with the possibility to export activities into your iCal calendar.

This will allow for a more centralised source of information, on the one platform that all students use no matter what because it is the main platform of the University for all the student information. Furthermore, it will allow students who do not use social media to also be informed of the events held by the associations they are interested in.

1.3 Board year recognition

The student boards are the backbone of the student life of Groningen. They are of vital importance to all the different organisations and without them, these organisations would not be able to exist. Additionally, a board year is one of the best learning opportunities that active student life has to offer. We can say from experience that doing a board year provides you with extra professional and personal development that you will not get from your study. Although it is a great learning experience, more and more boards find it hard to find successors. Reasons such as the loan system, increased living costs, and now the maximum on years of student grant, discourage students from taking a board year. We think it is important, especially in these times, to encourage students to do a board year. These student boards consist of students who may face a study delay and devote a great deal of their own time to their organisation. Thus, in the upcoming year, we will advocate for the following changes to achieve more board recognition, which we believe they well deserve.

1.3.1 Indexing board grants to the tuition fees

In the upcoming year, we want to continue advocating for the raising of board grants. A board year is a very costly affair for students, as they cannot fully study alongside it and are expected to participate in and pay for all activities. The current faction has worked very hard this year to make the first steps to an increase. Although this is a great progress already, we think it is still not enough and our work is far from done. We think that the board grants should move along with the inflation, and one way to do this is by indexing the board grant to the tuition fees. This means that if the tuition fee rises by 5%, the board grants will also rise by 5%. This way, the cost of board members is more in line with the current financial situation and this will hopefully lower the threshold to do board year.

1.3.2 Board Minor

Another way to gain more recognition for boards is by getting credits for doing a board year. We believe that doing a board year diversifies students' extracurricular activities and provides them with more unique learning and professional development opportunities, which will undeniably equip them with skills that will be useful for the duration of their studies as well as for their professional careers. Doing a board year should be encouraged by the University. After all, you gain so much unique knowledge during this period, whereas now you are strongly discouraged because you will be delayed in your studies and this will cost you more tuition fees. This year, SOG played a big role in submitting a memo for the implementation of a Board minor. This will provide Board members with the opportunity to pursue this minor, whereby they can earn 30 ECTS. In the coming year, we will continue with this project, by being part of the working group and ensuring that boards remain involved in the design of the Board minor. This way the University acknowledges the importance of doing a board year and together with raising the board grants, this will ensure that board members of student organisations receive adequate compensation for their efforts.

1.4 Confidential Persons in Organisations

We believe that students thrive best in a safe environment, both inside and outside the lecture halls. So we think it is very important that students feel safe within active student life and the confidential person can be a key element in this. Thus, we want to provide sufficient training to confidential persons in student organisations, strengthen the communication between student and study associations' confidential persons and the University's confidential person as well as market the University's confidential person position and role more expansively. The objective is to make every student aware of the ways in which to report socially unsafe behaviour and to make sure that the support system is strong and able to accommodate all complaints in a timely and responsible manner. These trainings have been provided to a limited number of study associations. We strongly believe that all student organisations and their respective members will benefit from such training and should be made available for all associations.

1.5 Housing of Student Organisations

Student Organisations in Groningen involve students from the University. Without those students, the associations would not be up and running. It is therefore our belief that it is the University's duty to provide housing to these organisations who provide so much for the University. While the

University is pushing towards more flex-spaces, we believe that every association needs a space of its own. The work that students do when they are part of an association or an organisation takes time and to do this work it is necessary to be in the right mindset and have adequate facilities for it. Therefore, having an office is one of the criteria we deem essential for a functional board year.

Organisations that have a full-time board should have access to their own office, and organisations that have a part-time board should have at least one office that they share with maximum one another organisation that also has a part-time board.

Offices are used to do meetings, hold interviews and store documents and material relevant to the organisation therefore it is crucial that the University is able to provide housing for the organisations. What we have learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic is that some things are better in person than behind a screen. Moreover, it is important that students are able to find the board members when they are needed, something may have happened at an event, personal circumstances or trouble with registration, where it is necessary to physically be able to find a board member to help. This also contributes to the social cohesion in the association and the social wellbeing of members.

1.6 University-provided facilities for study associations

Student organisations often organise activities that require space and resources. However, this can prove difficult when there is not enough space for events. Oftentimes external venues are booked months in advance and fill up quickly. Considering that the University has much space throughout the city it should take initiative to provide more opportunities for associations to utilise the spaces on campus. On the rare occasion that an association does utilise the space available then they must utilise the catering of the UG, which has a rather high price tag.

We want the University to facilitate the use of the space available at the University, to host “on-campus” events, whilst also being more flexible with the catering policy. This would ensure more visibility of events by students, for students, which would result in higher attendance, whilst also ensuring the financial survival of associations.

2 CAREER & EDUCATION

Education is the core reason for every student's presence at the University. This same education should prepare students for their future careers. Thus, the University must improve the quality of education. For students to make the most of their education, the study environment must be safe and open to all students and staff. Ensuring this safe and open environment is one of our main objectives next year. Similarly, next year we will be striving to bridge the gap between the University and the job market. Students should be taught relevant professional skills, such as digital (literacy) skills, as part of their programs.

2.1 Well-being and social safety

Students can only receive high-quality education if they feel safe and supported at our University . Such well-being cannot be achieved by simply increasing the number of student psychologists; it requires an environment devoid of harmful behaviour and bullying and where students have a healthy work-life balance. Mental health policy is not only about treatment but also about prevention. The University needs to help students find the external resources and facilities available to help them should they face problems with their mental health. Furthermore, the University can complement these resources by cooperating with the student population itself, for example by upscaling training sessions for confidential persons at associations and by improving the buddy systems.

2.1.1 Flattening the hierarchy

Like any academic organisation, our University is strictly hierarchical. Students are often dependent on a single supervisor and seminar teachers for grades and assessments and, consequently, their entire academic career depends on those same people. When students do not feel comfortable with their supervisors, this hierarchy might prevent them from speaking up and can thus create unsafe situations. This dependency can hence directly or indirectly contribute to issues of social safety and undesirable behaviour. To prevent this, the University should make it easier to switch supervisors if students do not feel comfortable with the person they are assigned to.

2.1.2 Cultural Awareness Training

The University should provide additional cultural awareness training for students and especially staff with the aim to educate both Dutch and international people in accepting and accommodating those coming from various cultural backgrounds in regard to their needs and values. The objective of this

training is to create a more accepting and safe environment in which all students feel accepted and supported in and outside the classroom, facilitating a more inclusive community between Dutch and international students.

Making these types of training available to students and staff can have a positive impact on the well-being and social safety of students and staff. Next to this, the University can take steps to make these tools that are already available, such as the Active Bystander Training, more visible, to ensure that every student is aware of these possibilities.

2.1.3 Work-life balance

It is important for students to have a good rhythm and a healthy work-life balance. While students should be free to study at night (see 2.2.3: 24/7 study spaces), students and staff may want to dedicate their evenings to their personal lives, and should have the opportunity to do that, hence no formal obligations should be scheduled in the evenings. However, due to a lack of exam facilities during the day, some students and staff are obligated to attend exams in the evenings and sometimes even on the weekends. This disruption to your normal rhythm also risks you performing worse on your exams. The University should strongly work on organising exams only on weekdays, just as classes do not take place on weekends. Furthermore, it should also work to condense exams within the typical working hours.

This can be achieved by making sure that the University has enough available exam spaces, because the lack of usable spaces should not have a negative impact on your performance on an exam.

2.1.4 Visibility of resources

During your time at the University, you are inevitably faced with a lot of questions that you do not necessarily know how to answer despite the available resources. Due to this, it will most probably take you longer to find the information you need or you might drop the research altogether.

The University has a duty in making sure that you know who to talk to or which platform to turn to for the resources you need. As such, it is necessary to ensure that resources are visible to all the students that look for them. By making this information clearly available you will know about the resources that are necessary for living and being a student in Groningen. Such valuable resources may include health care and other health-related facilities, housing, confidential persons and other resources regarding living in Groningen (i.e. understanding the tax system, waste management, transportation etc.). This is especially important because these programs and resources may be less known to international students who may not be accustomed to living in the Netherlands.

We urge the University to promote and advertise these resources actively and more efficiently, for you to be able to know where to get the help or support you may be looking for.

2.1.5 Mental health support and the buddy programme

Mental health is important and should be highly valued by the university as it largely affects the work ethic of students. Unfortunately, it is an ongoing problem that the University-provided psychology services are overloaded and this has led to increasing waiting times for consultation as well as the redirection of student patients to a professional (external to the University) psychologist.

The waiting times are long and when redirection to private psychologists is necessary, it can add up to several months of waiting. The road to professional help should be streamlined.

We suggest investing more into the buddy system, as provided by the Behavioural and Social Sciences, to account for some of the current shortcomings. We want to urge the University to look at the possibility of expanding this buddy system into the waiting period.

The goal is for the buddies to be there to provide you with a helping-hand during the waiting process, not to be responsible for helping you solve your mental health problems. Buddies will be trained to understand the issues that go with navigating mental health institutions and screening is done for both parties, to make sure the program is appropriate for both students involved.

2.2 University Library

2.2.1 Availability of the UB

The University must ensure that there is at least one study space, preferably the University Library, that stays open until midnight on weekdays throughout the entire year.

The University Library currently closes at 22:00 on weekdays in non-exam periods, partially because of sustainability reasons. However, if you cannot use the University Library facilities you will most likely study in your room, which might not be the most suitable for proper focus and efficient studying.

The opening times of the UB have been limited for the past four months due to the high costs of energy from the on-going energy crisis. However, responding to inflation, tuition fees have increased over the past years therefore it is unacceptable to limit the facilities available, especially regarding access to a building like the University Library, which is a staple for most students.

Having a quiet place to study is essential for all students and the University Library, with its central location and large capacity, is the perfect place for this. Students have different patterns of studying and the University should make it a priority to keep the Library open until midnight at least every weekday. The University should do its best to not let the prices of the energy crisis have a

consequence on the facilities available to students, and alternatively it should consider closing other University buildings earlier (i.e. any building that is not being used for required teaching or work-related activities) in order to keep the UB open longer since it is not linked to any faculty and is suitable for *all* students.

2.2.2 Coffee and water in the UB

While the availability of coffee in the UB has improved, there are still frequent shortages during the exam periods and on Sundays. We want to increase the availability of coffee within the said periods to fulfil your caffeine and water needs. To do so, we believe that communication with Maas and Douwe Egberts (the coffee companies) should be improved and that the University has to better anticipate periods of high coffee demand. Broken water taps should also be fixed in due time so that you can stay hydrated during long days in the UB.

Through improved communication between the different actors, it can be prevented that you are left without coffee or water during exam periods and on Sundays.

2.2.3 24/7 study spaces

Every student has a different way of studying, so the University should accommodate the variety by allowing flexibility in offering study facilities. A number of prominent universities worldwide (Oxford,¹ Harvard,² MIT³) offer 24/7 study spaces, with some studies reporting overall usage rates of 20% by students and a highly positive reception of the service by students (90%).⁴

We suggest that the University offers a small test space that would function as a 24/7 mini-UB to help accommodate you in the event that you cannot make it during the UB's conventional hours. This way, if you have a busy work schedule or a shifted sleeping rhythm, you can enjoy the University's studying facilities to the fullest.

Piloting such an experiment is necessary in order to evaluate whether there is a practical demand for, and further potential in, such a project. Ultimately, this pilot could also help the centralisation of energy into one University provided space rather than multiple dispersed other ones (see the "Lights Off " campaign under section 3.2.1).

¹ Pembroke College Oxford, "The McGowin Library", accessed 29 April 2023 from <https://www.pmb.ox.ac.uk/mcgowin-library>.

² Harvard Library, "Lamont Library", accessed 29 April 2023 from <https://library.harvard.edu/libraries/lamont>.

³ MIT. (n.d.). 24/7 Study Spaces. Retrieved 9 April 2023 from <https://libraries.mit.edu/study/24x7/>.

⁴ Hayman. (2014). Students and Libraries May Benefit from Late Night Hours: A Review of: Scarletto, E. A., Burhanna, K. J., & Richardson, E. (2013). Wide awake at 4 AM: A study of late night user behaviour, perceptions and performance at an academic library. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 39(5), 371-377. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2013.02.006>.

2.3 Flexible studying

2.3.1 Visibility of extracurricular options

Many students are unaware of the wide variety of extracurricular activities offered by the University. Therefore, the University should actively promote these possibilities. We propose to restructure how the announcements are presented on Brightspace. We suggest an additional page of Brightspace dedicated to extracurricular activities. Right now, the Career page on Brightspace has a strong focus on showing you different jobs available and the services provided by the Career Services department. While this is useful, it would be beneficial for you to have an overview of the events and workshops provided by student organisations. Certain events, for example conferences organised by study associations, are open to all students and provide a great opportunity for you to expand your knowledge on topics that are not part of your studies. Since the reforming of such a page takes time, the University can promote its extracurricular options through a quarterly email or announcements on Brightspace. In this way, University can facilitate all students in broadening their academic horizons.

2.3.2 Visibility of curricular options

In addition to extracurricular options, the University also offers a variety of curricular possibilities. The University should promote facilities like Career Services. It is important that you also be made aware of the opportunity to follow courses that fall outside of your standard degree program or at different faculties. We aim for promotion of extra courses, to allow you to further develop your academic interests. For example, in some programmes, a minor can be done by picking courses from different faculties and programs rather than picking solely from programmes within your faculty. Study advisors should not hesitate to promote such inter-faculty studying, even if it causes a study delay.

2.3.3 Recorded lectures

Recorded lectures can greatly help students with different and/or busy schedules. Students who have engagements outside of University may not be able to attend lectures but it is still just as important for them to not miss out on any of the course material, access to a recorded lecture will be appreciated and helpful. Additionally, recorded lectures will also be useful for students who wish to rewatch them before the exam to refresh their memory of the topics discussed during lectures at the start of the block/course. Therefore, we propose making lecture recordings available at least two weeks in advance, in contrast with the current one week notice as it is important to start studying as far in advance as possible.

2.4 Additional credits for internships

The University is primarily focused on preparing you for your professional career after graduation, whether it be within academia or outside. Internships, specifically, are a way for you to have the opportunity to broaden your professional development and skills. Adding to this, you may get a better feel of life after graduation, which may help you to make a more conscious decision for your future studies or career.

Right now the rules for internships are different per faculty, with some providing the opportunity for you to incorporate it into your program while others not. We think that this is unfair because doing an internship can be an important learning experience for you and a valuable addition to your studies and professional development. Right now you can get a maximum of 30 ECTS for an internship, but the definite amount you receive is determined by the examination board. This examination board differs per faculty and has different requirements and benchmarks for internships. In the coming year, we want to make sure that you have the opportunity to be able to do an internship within your studies. In addition, we want these internships to be assessed uniformly by developing a central assessment method for internships. In this way, we hope to achieve that every student gets the equal opportunity to do an internship during their studies.

2.5 Digitalisation

2.5.1 Acquiring digital skills

In all labour market sectors, digital skills are required and therefore you should gain these as part of your education. In a similar way to the Dutch courses for non-Dutch speaking students, the University should offer classes on digital skills that students can take besides your regular program. The University should actively promote these classes and provide you a certificate of course completion that you can show your future employees.

These classes should focus on acquiring in-demand skills, such as working with Excel, photoshop, and knowing how to utilise datasets. Offering these courses through the University makes them more directly accessible and of better quality due to in-person learning. Furthermore, we understand that for some studies digital skills are already a part of the programme thus we believe the University should seek to offer cumulative courses that increase in difficulty which will greatly benefit students and the University.

2.5.2 Workshops for professors and other members of staff

The University must ensure that all teaching staff is able to use the technological systems and tools efficiently. To make sure that all staff are up to this task, we propose that the University offers workshops and additional help to members of staff who have difficulty with technology. These could be organised by the faculty IT departments. At the start of the academic year, the University should hold a briefing for all staff members to either introduce or remind them of all the technological tools available to them.

It is important that teaching staff know how to adapt to digitalisation so they can increase the use of technological tools in their classes which will help promote engagement with technology and can help you acquire new digital skills as a part of your learning.

2.5.3 How to deal with AI

Digitalisation has changed the University in a profound manner in the last decades and it will continue to do so. The newest development in this respect is the rise of AI. We believe that AI will play an important role in the future and consequently, many students will encounter some form of AI in their future careers. Therefore the University should take initiative to introduce you to AI programmes, how to navigate and utilise AI in an ethical and responsible way during your time at the University so you can be prepared for the future. However it is important to note that while the University should provide guidelines concerning AI tools and their effects on education and examination the final decision should be largely left to the faculties which can more specifically tailor the use of AI to the programmes which they offer.

3 SUSTAINABILITY

As students, we stand at the threshold of the rest of our lives, and the importance of the sustainable treatment of our planet has become more pressing than ever. Taking care of our environment and resources will be one of the biggest challenges of the generations to come and we as SOG advocate for a more sustainable University, in order to ensure a safe and circular development as the world is ever changing. Not only can the University set an example for the implementation of sustainable practices, but it can also provide the student population with a strong foundation of scientifically accurate information on your impact on the environment and the prospect of a world with more scarce resources and a changed climate. Additionally, students can offer a new and creative perspective on addressing such issues. Therefore, the University should facilitate students in providing ideas and solutions to questions regarding sustainability, circularity and climate adaptation. Collectively the University and its students can make a significant impact through a wide variety of changes, big or small, to ensure a durable community in which scientific development can thrive.

3.1 Energy efficiency

3.1.1 “Lights Off” Campaign

It has come to our, and many other students’, attention that at night some University buildings remain brightly illuminated even when completely vacant. We do not believe this is sustainable or progressive towards the University’s goal to become more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. SOG proposes a campaign to draw attention towards the illumination practices of the University and how they should change. Taking inspiration from an ongoing French campaign to turn off storefront lights left on at night, the objective of this campaign would be to sufficiently reduce the number of lights left on in all University buildings that are unnecessary to be on at night. The University can achieve this by simply placing poster reminders in offices, rooms and other spaces to turn lights and shut windows before leaving. The University can add several other measures, such as installing motion detectors in educational areas and offices, or ensuring that sensors that are already installed are working effectively.

3.1.2 Transparency of energy use

We urge the University to be more transparent about the distribution of energy being used over the entire campus, together with the open evaluation of the distribution efficiency of energy and its related costs. Being transparent about this can help the investigation towards effective energy use within the University. We urge the University to publicly publish their energy usage.

3.1.3 Radiation and reevaluation of buildings

We encourage the University to be critical not only of its light use but also of its heating practices. Secondary glazing, crack sealing, and radiator foil are examples of simple but effective remedies to inefficient energy use.⁵ Using thermographic inspection, the University should inspect its many, at times monumental (i.e. old), buildings to tackle leakages where needed.

However, some buildings may turn out to be too inefficient or too ineffectively occupied. In the case of study places (2.2.3) mentioned above, we already stipulated how the centralisation of study spaces could enable other buildings to have more sustainable opening times.

Producing energy for the University more sustainably is not only an issue for the newer buildings, like on the Zernike Campus. The University should look into possibilities of doing so in older buildings as well. For example, adding solar panels to more University buildings should be considered.

The University should reevaluate the energy distribution among buildings and assess the facilities these buildings offer. In this manner we optimise the energy use of our buildings.

3.1.4 Data cleaning

Becoming a technologically advanced University means we should become more aware of the waste that comes with the consumption of digital services and adapt to more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. About 1.4% of global electricity consumption results from data transmission networks.⁶ The Google storage of the University adds up to 800 terabytes of data, and the total cloud traffic amounts to 11 million kWh or the equivalent of 4500 households.⁷ The University should take a more active role in reducing its cloud traffic and promote a structural change among staff and students more visibly.

3.2 Energy collaboration

The University can do a lot to make its energy management less wasteful, such as working together with other organisations. One possibility is the energy provision at Zernike. In collaboration with other institutions, such as Hanze University of Applied Sciences, it is possible to envision more ambitious projects. This could take the form of private energy production from renewable sources or green infrastructures such as the expansion of charging stations to encourage the usage of electric

⁵ SOG Faction 2022/2023, "Sustainability Recommendations for the University of Groningen," (2023) p. 9.

⁶ International Energy Agency, "Data Centres and Data Transmission Networks," accessed April 28, 2023, <https://www.iea.org/reports/data-centres-and-data-transmission-networks>.

⁷ SOG Faction 2022/2023, "Sustainability Recommendations for the University of Groningen," (2023) p. 18.

vehicles.⁸ Another way the University can make an impact is through partnerships with more sustainable corporations.⁹ Consequently, we urge the University to look into possible collaborations to ensure that we have the energy we need for an acceptable price. Besides new collaborations, the University should encourage their current partners towards sustainable and less wasteful energy management. Collaborating with energy partners to redirect the energy generated by the University, such as from solar panels, to the University buildings would lead to a reduction in energy wastage.

3.3 Green workplace

Adding more green to the University's grounds should be one of the real estate goals for the upcoming years. Plants are known to have a positive influence on the stress levels of students and their productivity. Students tend to feel more comfortable and stimulated in social interaction and spend more time on campus when natural elements are implemented in the University's interior. The University can add greenery in and outside University buildings. For instance, planting trees can improve the air quality around university buildings, while adding plants inside buildings can create a calmer atmosphere. Besides trees, planting a variety of plants and wildflowers can increase the biodiversity on campus. The University could look at the initiative of *Maai Mei Niet*, which has promoted biodiversity in municipalities across the country, attracting bees and other insects.¹⁰

3.4 Bring your own mug

Coffee is one of the most crucial aspects of a student's life, but it is evident that the single-use cups currently offered around campus are far from sustainable. It is a widespread practice amongst coffee/beverage sellers to offer discounts to customers who bring a reusable mug. Programmes such as this incentivise sustainable practices and reward positive behaviour with a financial benefit, which we believe every student will appreciate. The University can achieve a similar system by merely reprogramming the self-service coffee machines around campus.

⁸ SOG Faction 2022/2023, "Sustainability Recommendations for the University of Groningen," (2023) p. 8.

⁹ SOG Faction 2022/2023, "Sustainability Recommendations for the University of Groningen," (2023) p. 7.

¹⁰ Maai Mei Niet, "Wat is Maai Mei Niet?," accessed 1 May 2023 from <https://www.maaimenietnederland.nl/maaimeniet-voor-particulieren/>.

4 NATIONAL INITIATIVES

Student interests go beyond University level. We at SOG strive to represent you to the highest level possible and therefore continue to maintain and progress our already well-established relations with national institutions. These institutions are the Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg (ISO - Intercity Student Consultation) and the Landelijke Kamer van Verenigingen (LKVV - National Chamber of Associations), both of whom have direct ties with the Ministry of Education. We want to utilise our network to promote your interests at a national level, along with our sister parties at other Dutch Universities.

4.1 Binding Study Advice (BSA)

We think the BSA is beneficial to you and all of your peers as it helps to ensure that you know whether your degree program is the right one for you, and if you can handle the study load. In addition, the SOG also sees the BSA as a motivating factor to start studies on good terms, as it ensures that first-year students can get off to a good start.

It is a suitable guiding factor to ensure you are enrolled in the program that is most aligned with your interests and what you prepare yourself to focus on as a base for your career.

We strongly stand with the fact that the BSA also helps first-year students develop proper study habits which will benefit them for the rest of their time in University and will also allow for the development of their professional work habits.

4.2 Language and accessibility bill

Internationalisation in academic institutions is very important because it enhances the quality of science and education. It also contributes to the position of Dutch universities in international rankings.

The focus should not be the number of international students at a University, but whether a program is offered in the language that is best suited for the career that could follow from it. We stand against a cap on the number of international students because the attention must be focused on offering a program depending on the language that is most useful for it.

The Minister of Education, Research and Culture has recently released his long awaited letter, and has proposed writing a new bill. We will stay in contact with national institutions and urge them to prioritise the interest of all stakeholders. We are closely following national developments on this topic and aim to keep you well informed of any new information.

4.3 Restructuring the academic year

The current academic year is divided into two semesters and four blocks, without breaks between the examinations and the commencement of the next block. The only break is the two-week Christmas holiday, when you usually have to study due to the exams straight after the holiday. Students have no possibility of recharging as they jump from block to block, cramming all information in a short time to pass their exams. This process is on repeat without any breaks, causing stress among students. In addition, international students are faced with the challenge of going home for the Christmas holidays due to the lack of flights, causing a substantial increase in prices. We want the University to look into the possibility of restructuring the system from the block system to a more semester-oriented system. An example is the three term system of the UK, which includes reading weeks, in which students can prepare and catch up on their course readings. Consequently, this system would have two exam periods instead of four, expanding the examination period. This provides a higher probability of ensuring regular exam schedules. Furthermore, it would remove the need for staff and students to cram knowledge into the seven-week block and allow a break between examinations and the start of the new semester. This structure reduces stress, creates more flexibility for activities outside your studies, and allows international students to go home to their families.

4.4 Adequate compensation for students

The current generation of students will graduate with substantial debt and therefore have a more challenging start to their adult life, such as competing in the housing market. The reintroduction of a basic amount of study grant for eligible students (that have a right to DUO) has also sparked conversation about fair compensation for students who missed out on this. We disagree with the current amount for compensation and want to work with our national partners to ensure that actual adequate compensation is realised.. We propose that compensation for students is similar to the missed amount of 'basisbeurs' (study grants). We believe that our generation should not suffer from a failed government policy and that this level of compensation is the only way to avoid a "guinea pig" generation. We want to give all students equal chances in the start of their adult life.

4.5 OV-chipkaart

One way students can find housing before the start of the academic year is by looking outside of Groningen city. Many Dutch students stay with their family and friends in their hometowns while looking for permanent student housing in Groningen. However, staying outside of the city is unavailable to many international students because it comes with additional expenses and costs for

commuting. Thus, many international students do not consider this a viable option simply because they cannot afford it. Hence, we advocate for fair and equal access to public transport for all Dutch and International students through the OV-chipkaart-for-all initiative. We want to continue the work of the previous faction(s) in providing all students with fair means of transportation, because we believe it would help in finding housing for all students.

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