



University Council

Election Programme

2019 - 2020



**Studenten
Organisatie
Groningen**

Making it better. Together

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Dear student,

As students of the University of Groningen (UG), we are assured that, with the education we receive, we have the opportunities to become the world-wise individuals we want to be. We consider our university the institution that delivers critical thinkers into the roaring world around us. This can only be achieved by reassuring and improving the quality of our research and education as the basis where we consider students as the building blocks of the university. The Student Organisation Groningen (SOG) has continuously stood at the heart of the student community for over 45 years and will continue to make an effort by working for the meaningful representation of students.

In the past couple of years, the SOG has fought for the improvement of the lives of all UG students by providing students with the opportunity to take free Dutch language courses, do tuition-free board years, and initiating a trial for third-try examination. These are only a few examples of previous achievements of the SOG, and it shows how committed the previous factions have been. But this work needs to be continued. There is always room for improvement and solutions in an environment where new challenges will always arise.

In the upcoming year, we want to continue in the line of our predecessors and strive for the three main pillars the SOG stands for; we are there for the active student, the international student, and a sustainable university. Besides this, we attach importance to the quality of education and research, student well-being, digitalisation, and the representation of all students of the UG, in Groningen but also Campus Fryslân. We want to voice your opinion.

We highly value the opportunities students are offered to develop themselves within and outside of the curriculum. We also recognise the importance of sustainable internationalisation for the university, and consequently the city of Groningen.

In front of you is the election programme of the candidate faction for the SOG '19-'20. We can honestly say that we are extremely motivated and passionate to represent you in the university council of the UG in the upcoming academic year!

Your Candidate Faction for '19-'20,

Marieke Klijnstra, Chris Stumphius, Marcella Fratescu, Marc de Groot, Frans Lunshof, Rolf Hoitzing, Katja Hermann, Claudette Kinds & Leon van der Deure



What is our role as the University Council?

The University Council is a council consisting of 12 employees and 12 students, with the purpose of representing these parties in the decisions the university takes. It is the highest democratically elected student organ of the university that works on a central level. Decisions on a central level are taken by the board of the university and the council checks these decisions, asks questions and gives advice. Besides this, in some areas the council has the right to vote, such as with the annual budget. Lastly, university council members have the right of initiative. That is to say that students can propose changes they would like to implement within the university. The SOG will, as it always has, be fighting to represent students in the university council to make things better. together.

Education

The SOG believes that your education should provide you with the right tools to develop yourself and to be able to create opportunities later in life. In this regard, the key terms for us are academic freedom, critical thinking, personalised education, and the upholding of a high standard of education. Our university is amongst the most renowned in the world and we should be proud of it. The SOG strives to uphold these standards of high quality education and research.

Mandatory seminar attendance

The first element we would like to address is the required attendance in seminars and working groups that exists in order to be allowed to participate in the exam. We view this as being a responsibility of the students themselves. We deem being barred from the exam as being too harsh of a punishment for non-attendance, especially in cases where this is caused by students' obligations in regard to extracurricular activities. We strive towards a more reasonable, positive attendance system for students, which encourages everyone to get the best out of their studies while also being able to develop themselves outside of university.

Influx of students and Housing

Over the last couple of years, the UG has experienced an ever-growing influx of students. That being said, the growth-inspired strategy adopted by the university has led to considerable issues in the form of housing shortages, reduced quality of education and lack of availability of facilities. We would like to emphasise that a great university is characterised not only by its total amount of students but by the quality, amenities and guidance it provides to said students. While this issue is complex, both legally and administratively, this does not absolve RUG of responsibility when it comes to providing students with the basic amenities. As a student coming from abroad, having to sleep in a tent at ACLO during your first weeks of studying because of unavailable housing is unacceptable. Having to live with your parents in another town (as is the case for many Dutch students) because of unavailable housing is unacceptable. The solution therefore is to limit the aggressive marketing to incoming students and implement policies for sustainable growth which will not come at a cost of the quality of education. Besides this, the university should finally take her responsibility and inform incoming students properly about the ongoing situation in the city. Those students have the right to know exactly what they will be facing before they arrive.



Short-term stay abroad: summer- and winter schools

Following the line of reasoning regarding mandatory seminar attendance, we would like for the university to provide students with more opportunities to improve their intercultural competences and broaden their curriculum and knowledge spectrum. This could be done by encouraging more short-term mobility between universities and providing more opportunities to attend summer or winter schools or following extra courses within the university itself. With regards to increasing short-term mobility options, we propose a more lenient attendance policy in order to promote more extracurricular activities.

Third-Try Examination

Last year SOG had drafted a proposition in the University Council to implement third-try resits in September the following year for students who passed their BSA in their first year. The UG was to implement a test of third-try at the faculty of arts, however this will no longer happen. We are incredibly disappointed with the cancelling of this test and will fight next year in the University Council to implement this proposition. We think this policy would allow students who proceed to the second year to have a chance to start the new semester without additional stress. We think this practice will stimulate students' progress, motivation and that it will decrease study delays.

Anonymous Examination

We stand for fair and equal chances for every student. This also involves grading of exams. Writing your name down on your exam next to your student number does not add and should not matter for the grade you will receive. In some cases, it could make the examiner recognise you personally, which can be unfair, in positive or negative bias. In other cases, the gender of the student can have the same effects. Therefore, we suggest that exams are only distinguishable by student number, to prevent prejudiced and biased grading. Some faculties already (partially) operate this way, but we want a central policy or rule regarding 'anonymous' examination.

Lecture Recordings

Lecture recordings can be of great help in preparing for an exam. However, it is necessary for all faculties to have the opportunity to record lectures. The UG needs to invest in creating the necessary infrastructure so that lectures can be recorded and presented online. Besides investing in the infrastructure, we reckon the decision of when to publish lecture recordings online can be left to each faculty, since every study or course has different goals regarding their curricula. Digitalization has become evident to our day-to-day life and information flow. Lecture recordings provide the students with more flexibility in their studies and therefore more opportunities to develop oneself besides the curriculum.

Digital Exam Review

Not many students receive feedback on their exams at the moment, even though such evaluation and feedback is an essential part of the learning experience. There already exists an online environment (on Nestor) for reviewing exams. A next step in this process would be to implement a scheme of easy and effective use so that teachers and students can use it. The digital reviewing of exams will



create more transparency in the educational process and more flexibility towards students.

Honours Programme

Every year students from all faculties apply for the honours college, either by their own initiative or by invitation. Although the Honours Programme is a valuable addition for keen students, some students have felt that the programme itself has increasingly lost the initial essence of challenge. Honours college should be an opportunity for students to challenge themselves, to find the limits of their capabilities and proceed to step over those limits. We want to put more focus on the initial goals of the honours college and strive for a more personal approach to education. One instance through which this can be achieved is by implementing a project system (as is done in the University of Utrecht) to allow students to gain practical experience in their field of interest by receiving ECTS for doing research at local companies, joining a journal in their field of study. Moreover, the 100% attendance system is a common reason for students to drop out. Therefore, we also want to implement a system with easier ways of compensating for missed hours, such as creative replacing assignments.

Active Student

The SOG believes that the university should encourage and enable students to be active members of their community. Whether it be in a student, study or sports association, politics or a job on the side: students in Groningen should be supported in the development of their social and professional skills. Therefore, we aim to ensure that the UG adopts a fair, university-wide policy that allows students to partake and enjoy extracurricular activities without any pressure from the UG to finish their studies within the regular time period.

The UG should be creating awareness about the diverse associations present in Groningen. The KEI-week and ESN-weeks are greatly valued by the SOG and are essential in introducing new students to the many opportunities Groningen has to offer. The UG should actively engage new students to participate in these activities; both the students and the university will benefit from well-integrated students. We also encourage faculties to further strengthen their relationships with faculty associations so that education and personal development can converge.

Board Year

We consider a board year as a solid opportunity of gaining experience in running an organisation and working in a team day to day. Therefore, we consider it as something that should be stimulated in every possible way by the university. In the past, the SOG enabled students to do tuition-free board year. We would now like to extend on this notion. We want to investigate whether there is a possibility to allow students that do a board year to still earn full compensation tuition fee and earn a board grant. We think this will stimulate students to progress in their studies while also gaining valuable experience outside academia. We also encourage the research that is now being done to look into earning ECTS for your board year experience.



Internationalisation

So far, many resources have been invested by the university in creating English-taught Bachelor's and Master's degrees, as well as promoting an English work and teaching environment. The UG has made sizable efforts in building relations with partners, domestic and international, to provide students with various academic opportunities. This goal is not to be taken for granted; it continuously shapes the university's recruitment strategies. Almost one third of students in Groningen come from outside the Netherlands. Promoting an international community also has a direct impact on students' academic and personal blooming. As such, the UG should take responsibility for fostering a healthy study environment. These responsibilities should include adequate and affordable housing, further improved language classes and increasing efforts to integrate incoming students into the Groningen student community.

Our faction is committed to ensuring that the UG provides its students with the necessary tools for their personal growth. We believe the university should prioritise quality over quantity, and carefully assess the availability of its facilities and staff when deciding on a *numerus fixus* (for each faculty and programme).

Integration

The SOG is extremely proud of Groningen's vibrant and diverse student scene. The city offers its inhabitants numerous opportunities, culturally and socially, that we strive to maintain for the future. We want to make sure that incoming students are well-informed about the facilities the university offers as well as the extracurriculars that can add great value and fun to students' lives. More so, we actively support the development and extension of inclusion policies to ensure that all new students will be well integrated. In line with this, we believe that an online information platform where all the necessary information can be found is needed. This information centralization is in order for the students to be able to inform themselves properly about the opportunities Groningen has to offer.

Dutch and English Language Courses

A good way of integrating new international students and staff is through giving them the opportunity to learn Dutch. The university has increased its efforts and expenses to provide free Dutch language courses. However, we think it's necessary to continue improving and extending such facilities. One big issue is the availability of the classes. According to a recent self-evaluation report (2015-2018), the UG struggles to meet the capacity demands of the language courses it provides. According to many international students, enrolling in language classes is incredibly difficult, since most of them fill up extremely quickly. The university should ensure that every student can follow these courses.

A language barrier can also be noticed when it comes to using English at an academic and social level. Too often it is assumed that the level of English is sufficient enough. We therefore believe that high-quality Dutch and also English language courses are a motivational step stone worth investing in; they promote the integration of new and current students in the community and encourage them to actively participate in it. Therefore, we strive for free English and more Dutch courses available for everyone at the University of Groningen.



Introduction to Groningen

The introduction week offers new students an adventurous first glance into the Groningen community and student life. Yearly, around 5000 students, most of them Dutch, participate in the largest introduction week in the Netherlands: the KEI week. During this week, students are introduced to various cultural events organised throughout the city and get to meet student and sports associations. Considering the KEI week takes place in the middle of August, not many international students are able to attend. The reasons for it range from lack of available accommodation to more expensive flights in that period. Furthermore, international students are commonly unaware of the huge value such week has. This is in part due to the lack of good communication coming from the university. We therefore believe that the first step of improving this rate is to better inform and communicate incoming students about the value of this introduction.

ESN introduction Week

The Erasmus Students Network (ESN) board organises an introduction week for international students each year in the last week of August. This year, around 1800 students, mostly international, explored Groningen's student life in the company of other UG students as tour guides and buddies. However, one of the goals of the ESN week is to bring Dutch and international students together. The problem is that the week is incredibly popular for new international students, but there are not enough Dutch students participating in the week, nor are there enough Dutch guides to guide incoming students. We aim for more Dutch students to join the ESN week as well as increasing the number of tour guides to help close the gap between international and Dutch students. We believe it is important to support these events by promoting and partaking in it in the goal to introduce incoming students to the university experience and student life in Groningen.

ESN Building

ESN is an association with large impact in the international Groningen community. Yet it lacks the facilities necessary to create a space where students can meet and socialise. We think that the university should allocate financial resources to support ESN's positive impact. One possible solution would be to provide the association with a building (as other associations have) that will aid to their efforts to creating a vibrant and inclusive student community. In this way the ESN could become a connector between the international and the Dutch community.

Other Integration Efforts

The SOG recognises that the ESN plays an important role in the (international) student community. Among the activities that it organises are the 'buddy' initiative and Integration Night. Bringing international students together with Dutch students is important for the international culture and a great way of accomplishing this is by also involving Dutch students in these activities and associations. We have supported such initiatives and their organisers by promoting their efforts, but also by participating and organizing such activities ourselves.



Sustainability

SOG strives for long-term quality education and the maintenance of a sustainable study environment. For the SOG, the definition of sustainability includes environmental, educational and social aspects that the university should aim to integrate harmoniously in the student life.

Environment

The SOG is committed to raising awareness and implementing initiatives among UG students, staff and policy makers on this topic. Students have, over the past couple of years, been the ones to strive for change. We understand that students can have a tough time living a green life, often because of financial issues. This is why we believe that the UG should facilitate an environment that makes sustainability simple and accessible for everyone such as by banning all plastic from the cafeteria spots and offering cheap alternatives vegetarian and vegan options for meat.

Garbage Separations

We are aware of the students' concerns about the steps the UG takes to promote a sustainable environment. The current demand for university bins to be divided into four sections (organic, rest, paper and plastic) needs to be extended to all faculties and university facilities. Additionally, we aim to propose a general decrease in paper usage in UG facilities and for academic practices. For instance, a general regulation that diminishes the mandatory need to print your assignments, as everyone can submit them online.

Sustainability Plans

Measures need to be taken into consideration for a progressive and durable term. We strive for this to be primarily achieved through the reduction of plastic in the food facilities. In order to achieve this hand-by-hand, we aim at the installation of microwaves in more university buildings, such as the UB and Zernike Library, to promote the reduction of plastic, so that students can warm their food during breaks (#heatitup). Besides this, we aim for more plants in university buildings to create a more calm and green work and study environment.

More so, we think it is imminent for the university to implement sustainability plans in temporarily displaced facilities. For instance, some cafeterias that are moved to other locations due to construction work can only offer plastic cutlery - since no dishwashers are available at the new location. Such an approach to sustainability is unacceptable, especially since construction work can take 1,5 to 2 years (e.g., BSS faculty). Therefore, we believe it important for the UG to make adequate arrangements and allocate sufficient funds to temporarily displaced facilities in order to maintain a clean and sustainable environment at the university. This could, for example, be accomplished by finding alternatives, such as biodegradable substitutes to plastic single-use cutlery.

Initiatives

We strive for a stronger information sector that encourages and motivates students to get themselves involved in green activities and attitudes. We believe that this can be achieved through a growing encouragement of critical thinking



about the environmental situation at the university. The Green Office is a great example of this. We want to continue the initiatives the SOG proposed two years ago regarding offering sustainability subsidies for associations that put effort into a transition towards sustainability.

Facilities

Study Spots

In line with our sustainable academic development, we aim to improve the University's facilities. We acknowledge that the UB has improved over time. Nevertheless, the UB, Harmony building and Zernike become overcrowded during exam periods demands a review for potential point of improvement.

During the last exam periods, we have noticed that there has been an increase in the amount of students studying in the UB, who often don't find a spot. The lack of free spaces, the overcrowding of areas and the dynamics of in- and outflow of students during the day demand critical attention. One potential solution could be to extend the opening hours of the UB at Zernike and the harmony building in the city centre. This will alleviate the added stress of finding a study spot during exam periods.

As an important remark, we applaud the Harmonie building for promoting the use of the Journalism Library as a study area. However, we believe that a crucial point of improvement can be achieved by installing more plugs and better equipment for many of the available study spots located in university buildings.

Catering

Additionally, in line with our sustainable environmental programme, we strive for a re-evaluation of the Cafeteria supplier. We have observed that the increase in prices has created general disapproval amongst students and staff. We believe that the quality of food should match its price: a sandwich at the cafeteria should not cost more than one you can buy in the supermarket or a cafe! More so, providing nutritious cooked meals should be a priority of the Beijik catering service, considering their clients are students with a small budget and a hungry stomach.

Return the Discounts!

Last year, the discounts for hot drinks for bringing your own cup was a full success, and it encouraged students to reduce their use of plastic. Nevertheless, as from January 2019 onwards, the discount was no longer available. It is currently only reserved to those who bring the UCup, the reusable coffee cup sold by the university IShop. We believe it to be important and paramount to bring this discount back! This will have a positive impact on both the students' wallets as well as the clean environment this initiative promotes.

Student Health and Wellbeing

In the past couple of years, the problem of student well-being, with the mental health issue in particular, came to light. The Dutch Student Union LSVB published a report about their research on the topic and the result was harrowing. We recognise the problem and go all out to tackle it. We think that there is still a lot to win when it comes to the knowledge and availability of solutions for this topic in our university. We strive for making the problem more discussable, raising awareness of mental health among students, lowering the work pressure in all layers of the university and an increase in evaluation of existing measures and services offered. Besides this, we see that a better information disclosure and evaluation process is needed on the already existing measures the UG takes. We are aiming to do research about what the financial and facility possibilities are in order to offer and provide more tools to tackle the problem.

Stress Management

The skills students acquire by being active outside of the curricula contributes greatly for students to excel and explore future employability opportunities. However, they can come with added stress. Due to the competition amongst students on the job market, many feel pressured to take on more responsibilities than they can handle at the time. At the SOG, we strive for a student life with a healthy balance between enriching your personal life whilst gaining experience and taking on too much work and only thinking of so-called “CV building”. We propose for the university to offer more workshops in how to deal with stress. Next, we want to implement a better mentoring system for both incoming and current students during their full study period. Lastly, we want to create an environment in which this issue is discussable and where everyone can have a safe space in which they can talk about it, a platform or discussion groups can offer a solution. We need to look at the cause and act adequately.

