

**SOG Notitie**

**Sustainability subsidy**

**2017/18**

## Introduction

“The University of Groningen as a socially responsible institution has set itself the goal of promoting sustainable development in all aspects of the university”. This is the first sentence of the Environmental Policy Declaration of the RUG<sup>1</sup>. Since a couple of years the concept ‘sustainability’ gets a lot of attention at the RUG, this can be seen in policy (People, Planet, Performance) and practice. We achieved some great results in this departments such as the foundation and operations of the Green Office- and University, a BREEM score of ‘Outstanding’ at the Energy Academy and a 11th spot on the Green Metric System<sup>2 3</sup>.

Many aspects of the university’s operations are addressed under the term sustainability and in the policy area People, Planet & Performance. In materializing the current results it has been of major importance that all parties involved have shown a willingness to address matters regarding sustainability. However, with this memo the SOG would like to turn the attention towards a group that is very much involved with the university but isn't really taken into account in the current sustainability policy of the university , namely the study associations.

Even though the RUG does a lot for its students concerning sustainability the SOG believe there is still a lot more to be done when we look at sustainability in relation to study associations. The RUG could contribute to this by:

- a) Creating greater awareness within the student community and within the own organisation about the importance of sustainability,
- b) Organising activities with the sustainability thema as a main focus and,
- c) Spreading several measures (with a low threshold) how students can contribute to the RUG vision regarding sustainability.

Hence, the eventual goal of this memo is that sustainability and sustainability policy will also be made aware to study associations in order to make sure that the sustainability thema will be picked up by this group as well. To achieve this goal we would like to propose a sustainable activities subsidy<sup>4</sup> for study associations which would be monitored by the Green Office.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.rug.nl/about-us/who-are-we/sustainability/general/environmental-policy-statement>

<sup>2</sup>

<http://www.rug.nl/about-us/who-are-we/sustainability/sustainable-construction/projects/energy-academy-europe>

<sup>3</sup> <http://greenmetric.ui.ac.id/overall-ranking-2017/>

<sup>4</sup> The sustainable activities subsidy is meant to stimulate sustainability within study associations. This subsidy can be claimed when an association can show that a certain activity can contribute positively on the sustainability of the association or its members. The applications will go through the Green Office, which would receive support from CUOS, and would also be given out by them.

## Analysis

At the RUG there are several frameworks put in place to enhance the general sustainability within the institution. An example of this would, among other things, be the Strategic Plan 2015-20 in which is stated that the RUG: “strive[s] for an environment that is carbon-neutral and promotes sustainable behaviour of both staff and students in their work, study and life”<sup>5</sup>. It also refers to the Roadmap Green University 2015-2020 in which is said that the university wants to actively involve and facilitate students in/with sustainable initiatives. The SOG is of the opinion that in regard to actively involving and facilitating students, or in general the student community, there is still a lot of room for improvement. It’s true that the Green Office has started several activities through which they try to communicate the importance of sustainability to the student community (Mythbusters Course, the health week, GreenMind Award etc.), but this output is still generated by the university itself while you would ideally want to support student initiatives. Study associations are a group that could directly contribute to this goal.

However, before this could be materialized there are several problems that need to be resolved. Firstly, there are a lot of study associations that are very interested in organising sustainable- or sustainability related activities but in the current CUOS allocation model these efforts are valued in a very minimal manner<sup>6</sup>. The opportunity cost for organizing- and integrating an activity relating to sustainability are simply too high, which in practice means that it is very rare. While other overarching topics such as internationalisation are being stimulated within these study associations, this year for example with the introduction of the CUOS International Grant, sustainability not being promoted at all. Nevertheless the university does assume that the student community plays its part in the sustainability projects the RUG has initiated on several fronts.

The solution for the above mentioned problems would be an activity subsidy geared towards improving sustainability as presented earlier. This would however cause two other problems. Subsidies such as this one for study associations are the responsibility of CUOS. However, the workload for CUOS is already very high and it cannot be expected of them to manage an entire new subsidy. In addition, stimulating sustainability is not the primary task

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<http://www.rug.nl/about-us/who-are-we/strategic-plan/documents/strategic-plan-2015-2020-nl-web.pdf>  
- RUG Strategic Plan 2015-2020. p. 14, 5.3.1: Sustainable Operations

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<https://www.rug.nl/about-us/organization/rules-and-regulations/onderwijs/profileringsfondsregeling-1112.pdf>  
f - CUOS Profileringsfonds

of CUOS. For the Green Office on the other hand this would be a primary task and hence they could take over a lot of work from CUOS. Besides that is the Green Office in possession of a lot of knowledge in the field which would make assessing the applications form the subsidy much easier.

## Implementation

As has been mentioned, the Green Office has a lot of knowledge in the field of sustainability and has the capacity to handle all applications. CUOS would have an advisory role on the formalities concerning giving out subsidies. In this field CUOS has a lot of experience and can support the Green Office which needs support with these tasks. CUOS will also make their list of CUOS recognized associations available to the Green Office so that the subsidy is only apply to these recognized associations. This method has been agreed upon by the Green Office and CUOS after extensive consultation. The end goal for both organizations would be to stimulate sustainability among study associations and generate even broader support for the RUG goals in the field of sustainability within the academic community.

The assessment of the applications will be done by the Green Office but in order to give all parties some insight into how this is done a sustainability checklist will be drawn up. This list is composed by the Green Office and can give study associations an idea what aspects they should consider when applying. The Green Office will use this checklist to make a ranking in which study associations can earn gold, silver or bronze medailles in the field of sustainability. This way sustainable associations are being rewarded and given an incentive to become even better. Whether or not to participate in this ranking is a voluntary choice of every association.

The Green Office has a lot of means to assess the subsidy applications. However, in order to ensure the continuation of all current projects of the Green Office and the successful implementation of this project it is necessary to hire one more student assistent. Besides that additional budget should be made available to give out the subsidies. For the total implementation of the sustainable activity subsidy 10.000 euros should be made available<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> This sum will be all-encompassing. This means that the student assistant, additional start up costs and the eventual subsidy will be financed from this sum.

## **Advise**

On the bases of the analyses the SOG would like to advise the Board of the university that:

- The Green Office should be allowed to integrate the sustainable activity subsidy in its student services.
- The Green Office should be allowed to assess the applications of the subsidy.
- The Green Office should be allowed to manage the finances connected to the subsidy.
- The Green Office should get extra fte by means of a student assistant in order to manage the extra workload generated by the sustainability checklist and the subsidy.
- Funds should be made available as high as 10.000 for the purpose of implementing this subsidy.

Faction Studenten Organisatie Groningen 2017-18

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