



# University Council Election Programme 2020-2021

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Dear student,

I am sure that you are well-aware of the strange and unique situation that we are currently in. The effects are being felt everywhere. A closed university, global quarantines, and the inability to meet your friends and loved ones make this a challenging time for all of us.

As the SOG, we are not only doing everything we can to help guide the university and its students through this difficult period, but also thinking about how to rebuild and improve in the future.

In the past, the SOG has always fought for the wants and needs of students, especially in active student life, internationalization and sustainability. This year is no different, and with the current circumstances, it is more important than ever for the voices of students to be heard.

We are striving to ensure that active student life stays as strong as ever, despite the circumstances. Flexibility, communication and transparency are paramount in making sure that this comes true.

On your screen is the election programme of the candidate faction for the SOG '20- '21. We are looking forward to representing you and all other students at the University Council this coming year!

Your Candidate Faction for '20-'21,

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## What is our role in the University Council?

The University Council advises the Board of the University about their decisions and plans that influence students, staff and the university as a whole. This council is the most influential democratically elected student organ of the university, and functions on a central level within it. The University Council consists of twelve employees and twelve students, with these twelve students representing all students in different parties that hold diverse views. The SOG is one of these parties and campaigns for active student life, internationalisation and a sustainable university. As a significant part of the council, the SOG represents students and makes sure that the university is reminded of your wants and needs when making its plans.

Aside from advising and discussing the plans of the Board of the University, the council also has the right to vote in some areas and represent students in an even more meaningful way. Finally, all University Council members, including those from the SOG, have the right to submit proposals to make worthwhile changes that benefit you as a student. To best represent students and their desires, it is important that as many students vote as possible. The more votes we obtain, the more power we have to make an impactful difference for you and all your fellow students! With the COVID-19 pandemic on the foreground of the lives of all students, your voice should be heard. Help us help you. The SOG will, as it always has, be fighting to represent students in the University Council. Making it better. Together.

## COVID-19 and Crisis Plan

The second half of the academic year 2019-2020 has been dominated by the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The after-effects of this sudden pandemic will ripple throughout the coming academic year and that is why we find it very important to lay out the possible consequences and our stances on the topic. Additionally, to prevent such a situation from catching the university off-guard in the future, this section will also tackle measures for future crises. The main concerns for future crises are proper and unified communication, as well as protecting students from unfortunate side-effects such as study delay and financial issues.

### Capacity Shortages in Academic Year 2020/2021

SOG agrees with the decision of the RUG to remove the BSA regulation of the first-year students of the UG in 2019/2020. However, this decision does come paired with serious complications for 2020/2021. We can foresee that the deviation of the BSA regulation will cause many more students to follow first-year courses than usual, especially in semester II, as students were disrupted in their studies. This will cause lecture halls and other educational tools to become overcrowded. Therefore, the SOG advocates for the continuation of lecture recordings and increased digitization of education that is already currently happening to support the proposed hybrid education system of the university.. Additionally, special attention will be paid to ensure that the educational quality is maintained during the course of the coming academic year.

### Phased Re-opening of the UB

In the current situation, every student is forced to study at home. This is hard for some students due to the lack of space in the room, not working internet connection or other jammers. Before the Corona outbreak, these students would find residence in the various study locations of the RUG. As a result of the closing of the locations these students' study performance takes a hit. Measures for the libraries have been reduced and study locations can re-open in a phased way. We strongly suggest to the RUG to research the possibilities of opening up the locations for the students in need of better study conditions. First at a small scale for students in dire need, assuring a safe environment for the health of the students and staff. Due to the fact that the UB can not run on full capacity at the beginning of the re-opening, we urge the UG to seek salvation at other buildings such as Harmony Building and Aletta Jacobs.

### Lecture on Demand

Currently, the university facilitates online lectures for every course. However, many courses do not provide lecture recordings to watch on demand. The SOG recognizes this as a problem, as some students need more flexibility during the unique pandemic situation. Poor connection, hardware issues and international students now living in different time zones all demand for lectures on demand for all courses.

## Supporting Active Student Life in 2020/2021

The new academic year will not start with the introduction period and KEI week in their usual forms. This means that study- and student organisations will not have the chance to connect with first-year students as they have in previous years. The SOG is looking to become active in a think-tank committee with various student facilities and organisations with the goal of aiding and providing a solution for not only the organisations, but also the first-year students that deserve an amazing introduction to student life. The key to achieve this is increasing visibility and accessibility for these associations and organisations outside the regular, physical means.

## Improving Support Infrastructure for First-year Students and Education

The new first-year students are enrolling at the UG during a unique time. Therefore, solely relying on existing information and support facilities is not enough to guarantee the same level of information provision that new first-years normally receive. To avoid this situation, the SOG is advocating for increased proactivity from the UG by way of preemptive FAQ emails and online information provision, as well as the introduction of a buddy system where new students are optionally paired up with older students that are more knowledgeable about student life in Groningen. Combining these measures will allow the new first-year students to access all the information they need to make a solid start.

Finally, we believe that the university should be proactive in monitoring and maintaining the quality of (online) education during Corona times. Many courses are still not given optimally, and the university can and should be evaluating both degree programmes and students through the use of surveys, questionnaires and similar means.

## Future Crises: Communication

Extending the Corona problematique to potential future crises, clarity for students must be central. Students should have a voice in times of crisis, with precautions being taken so that complaints and questions are taken seriously. Moreover, the university must provide an emergency communication plan that serves to avoid the spread of conflicting information. To achieve this, the university must set strict, central guidelines to faculties and degree programmes about the measures and the consequences that students may experience.

As this approach may be distant from the student, every faculty must establish an accessible organ to assist students with questions. This will help bridge the gap between students and the university in crises. Additionally, the university must periodically provide surveys to discover (potential) problems amongst staff and students. Important information that may apply for students such as procedures for study delay and financial compensation must also be communicated swiftly and decisively.

Finally, the university must be able to adapt more quickly in future crises, especially with regards to the switch to digital education and recorded lectures. This also includes determining alternative time frames for exams, introducing live question sessions to courses and setting up a help-desk are all essential to more smoothly deal with similar situations in the future.

## Active Student

The SOG believes that a well-rounded education and student life includes being an active member of the university community. Developing yourself through experience with committees, boards, sports, politics, jobs and other extracurricular activities should be actively encouraged and pursued. This experience leads to development socially and professionally that is very hard to come by without these opportunities. Students and the university both benefit from capable and well-rounded students. To make this development possible for all students, we campaign for an increase in the flexibility of academic schedules to allow students to partake in extracurricular activities next to their studies. This should also come coupled with additional support for more demanding extracurriculars such as entrepreneurship, cross studying and board years. Finally, the university should not just support these endeavours, but have a platform where these kinds of opportunities are advertised and made visible to all students. This platform is currently in creation by the SOG and will provide a central location that increases visibility and accessibility for all interested parties.

## Increasing Board Grant Budget

SOG considers a board year as a great 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 has succeeded in the initiative of tuition-free board years. This year it will once again be an important discussion point.

Today's students are struggling with the loan system, in which they do not get the full opportunity as their predecessors to further develop their qualities without being stressed about their debts. Therefore, we see it very important to compensate students on every ground possible. Ever since the new loan system, boards are struggling to find new candidates. According to the SOG, it is necessary that a large extent of boards in Groningen should be subsidized by the University of Groningen. Furthermore, the SOG is committed to increase the board grant budget of the Profileringsfonds part C, together with CUOS, to better support the active student population in Groningen so that students get the chance to develop themselves aside from their studies.

## Improving Board Year Certificates

The SOG finds it necessary that all boards are recognized by the University of Groningen for their efforts. The value of doing a board year needs to be re-acknowledged by providing a valuable certificate after finishing a board-year. Currently, part-time boards or boards including international students are in dire need for better certificates. For part-time boards it works for acknowledgment and attracting candidate board members. When applying for a job abroad, companies could ask for official documentation proving participation in a board year. The board year certificates available right now are not sufficient for their request.

## Cross Studying

More and more students are interested in enrolling in more than one bachelor programme or taking an additional course outside their degree programme. Additional educational support for these ambitious students should be available to let their academic freedom fully flourish. Therefore, the SOG encourages more communication between faculties to ensure a well-managed combination of taking two bachelors. Students taking two bachelors face the problem of deadlines or fixed dates right after one another. Courses offer little to no room for students to deviate from set deadlines and schedules. A centralised policy stressing communication between faculties could help alleviate this issue. Furthermore, we believe there is a lack of promotion. A lot of students are unaware of the possibilities of cross studying. Promoting useful and diverse courses that enrich a standalone bachelor should be a priority.

Additionally, master students are currently often unable to follow bachelor courses that would interest them and enrich their studies. Therefore, we are aiming to make this an option for all master students. Bachelor students would still have priority in courses with limited spaces, and bachelor courses would have to be either clearly connected to the master programme or provide otherwise clear added value.

## Visibility of Opportunities

Currently, it is difficult for students to get an overview of what is possible in active student life, especially when they are inexperienced. Several associations do not require previous experience or membership in the association for students to become active parts of committees and boards. At this moment, faculties do provide promotion for their own study related associations. More general associations, for instance cultural, political or universitywide, miss out on this promotion. That is why the SOG is currently working on creating a platform where all associations can announce their vacant positions.

## Stimulating Entrepreneurship

As part of SOG's belief, every student should be able to fill in their own student life. A part of that could be starting a business for yourself during your study. Right now, the RUG offers an entrepreneurship minor and various faculties provide it as well. Nevertheless, aside from increasing academic flexibility, we believe that the RUG could stimulate ambitious students more on being an entrepreneur. The current VentureLab offers help for existing companies to expand their activities and reach their utmost potential. The SOG strives for similar opportunities also becoming accessible for students with a business model, seeking assistance in starting-up. Furthermore, the RUG can stimulate students by creating a competition, in which each student presents their business model to a jury. We believe that with the right advice and guidance, a student can start a promising company. During the creation of the competition, in collaboration with various associations and the RUG, the SOG would gladly take the lead.

## Stimulating Flexibility with Online Lectures and Recordings

The SOG strongly believes that recording of lectures allows for more flexibility for active students. Recording lectures increases the ability for students to do boards and leave room for extracurricular activities. Besides this, a portion of students has indicated that they learn better with the ability to pause the lecture to write down notes and understand the lecturer better. Recordings should be open for the students to watch two weeks or a week prior to the exam. This way the student can re-watch lectures with a hard subject. By opening the lectures for a limited time only, students actively participating in lectures get the chance to refresh the matter. Students not able to participate will get the possibility to fully prepare for the exam. Some courses offer in-depth videos about different subjects. We as the Candidate faction strongly encourages the use of these helpful elaborating videos. Right now, due to the pandemic, courses are forced to implement online lectures. After the corona crisis, the use of online recordings should be reviewed and implemented more widely in various courses.

## Education

It is very important to the SOG that the education provided by the university equips students with the knowledge and means to develop yourself and make full use of opportunities in your life. In keeping with this, we are striving for academic freedom, meaning that its students are capable and should be given the freedom to shape their academic planning to their educational and developmental needs. Finally, the University of Groningen is a prestigious university and the SOG wishes to maintain its high standards and raise the bar wherever possible.

### Tuition-free Period for Internships

Many student internships require applicants to be actively enrolled at a university. This is why the SOG proposes the idea of a tuition-free period for students who would like to do internships whilst being enrolled at the university without following courses. This would allow students to increase their skills during their degree programme whilst not also carrying an additional financial burden.

### Increasing the Number of Study Advisors

The purpose of the study advisors within the university is to assist students with any problems which may occur throughout their study time. A study advisor also offers educational information and guidance, which is of great importance for the educational journey of a student. However, the lack of assistance remains a problem in numerous faculties. It has become increasingly difficult to get support due to the small number of advisors available and high demand for their assistance. Therefore, the SOG stresses the importance of increasing the number of study advisors in faculties. This would allow more support and guidance for struggling as well as active students.

### More (Non-mandatory) Midterms

The SOG sees great value in midterms. They offer students an additional testing opportunity for a course, while also being an excellent way to stimulate engagement during the period and measure how far along their study progress is. Therefore, we are aiming to implement midterms in more degree programmes and courses around the university.

However, having mandatory midterms with grades that count towards your final adds much stress each period and limits academic flexibility, especially if midterms become more widespread. Therefore, we are campaigning for more non-mandatory midterms. This system is already successfully in place in some courses, and is received well by students. If students decide to make the midterm and the grade is higher than the final, the eventual grade for the course is decided by a weighted average of the two grades. Otherwise, only the grade for the final exam is used for the eventual grade.

## Leniency in Mandatory Attendance

As part of the SOG's belief in increasing educational flexibility for students, we also strongly believe that attendance policies should become more lenient for many courses. By increased leniency, the SOG advocates the removal of failing a student on the basis of not attending a class. Policies of 100% attendance remain present in various courses. We strive for lowering the 100% attendance policy to at least 80%.

This would still allow the university to ensure enough attendance, while removing the unfairness of students failing a course because of them not being available once due to other factors or responsibilities. Board years, internships, jobs and many other student opportunities would greatly benefit from this. Of course the SOG recognizes the exceptions such as laboratories and other time-sensitive parts of courses being logically mandatory.

## Improving and Expanding on Online Language Courses

There is a great influx of both Dutch and international students and staff every year. The importance of integration by means of providing language courses is essential. The SOG recognizes the university's increased efforts and the costs of providing language courses. Nevertheless, to continue the increasing expansion of the university, the SOG urges for an increase of the number of language courses offered by the university. Alongside this we would like to see the better use of online tools, which would include expanding online classes as well as providing more revision exercises via online platforms.

## Centralized Online Examination Database

Currently, obtaining previous examinations and sample questions is not easily available for students across faculties. Providing previous examinations allows students to learn more quickly as well as accurately grasp what they should be revising. Some courses currently already provide old examinations and sample assignments. In order to give all students the opportunity to have these learning tools, the SOG advocates for a centralized online examination.

## Digitizing Exam Reviews

Although evaluation and feedback is an integral part of the learning experience, many students miss feedback on their exams. An online Nestor environment for exam reviews already exists, and the SOG aims to further spread the usage of this platform for exams. This way, students have easier access to their mistakes and feedback. This adds flexibility and transparency to the educational process.

## Internationalisation

The University and the world as a whole are becoming more and more internationally oriented. We as the SOG strongly believe in the importance of Conscious Internationalisation being implemented at the UG. The term Conscious Internationalisation refers to the increasing integration between international and Dutch students. Currently, the university has put a large focus on recruiting large numbers of students from all over the world. However, we believe there should be less focus on the number of international students at the university, and a greater focus on improving the level of integration and their comfort. To this end, we are striving to strengthen our bonds with internationally oriented student associations, providing them with more support wherever possible and actively working together to make this goal a reality.

## Housing

The University has a responsibility of welcoming Dutch & International students to an adequate work environment. Housing has been a serious issue in previous years, due to lack of availability. The University increasingly encourages students to live outside Groningen, in the neighboring towns. Nevertheless, this isn't always feasible for international students. The SOG acknowledges the initiative of the University to support influxing students. Nevertheless, as more students enrol each year the University should ensure the continuous improvement of the housing situation by:

- **Providing Financial Support**

Housing outside the city in neighbouring towns has become an alternative to help combat the limited housing facilities. While Dutch students are supported financially by way of an OV-Chipcard, international students are not offered this service. This makes living outside the city with a daily commute back and forth very impractical and costly. Therefore, the University should offer financial support by providing train or bus tickets to International Students.

- **Supporting Emergency Housing**

The SOG believes that student safety should be a top priority of the university. In previous years, the University has resorted to providing emergency housing for international students for this reason. In the short term, The SOG campaigns for further supporting and funding emergency housing, with additional measures and care being taken to make sure that facilities are up to standard, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

## Tutors Board / International Counselor

The SOG believes that integration of international students into Groningen should be a larger priority, which is why we propose an extension of the Student Services Center by adding an 'International Counselor'. This person will be responsible for assisting international students in issues involved specifically to do with orientation into (student) life in the Netherlands. This includes practical issues such as where to go when in need of mental health support, creating awareness of the exciting aspects of Dutch student life and informing students of the various facilities that may be very helpful that may otherwise go unknown to them.

## Centralized Information Platform About Student Life

The SOG values and cares for the wellbeing and welcoming of new students. Incoming international and dutch students, which did not partake in the KEI or ESN introduction week, struggle to find important information about the opportunities of joining associations, sport clubs and other aspects of the University. Therefore, the SOG stresses the importance of spreading information through the means of a central platform. This can be in the form of a new website and/or an additional page on the current RUG website, as well as handing out brochures or sending these in the acceptance letters/package which students receive. This central platform would inform not Dutch students yet primarily international students on important news such as: sign-ups, deadlines, bureaucracy information (BSN number etc) and other readily available information.

## Official University Documents Offered in both Dutch & English

The SOG believes in the importance of the availability of all faculty council and university council documents in both Dutch and English. This is due to the fact that only offering the information in Dutch creates a barrier in accessibility of information for international students. In making all these documents all available in English we hope to provide all students equal opportunities in understanding the work being done within the university and how that would benefit or affect them.

## Sustainability

Sustainability is playing an increasingly large role in the university. Students are becoming more and more aware of the necessity and impact of sustainability and this is visible throughout student life. The SOG aims to improve sustainability in not only the short term, but also the long term in all areas of the university. This includes sustainable internationalisation, education, student life and environment.

### Green Educational Development

Whilst striving for innovativity, the university must directly include sustainability in education. On the one hand by way of establishing new multidisciplinary bachelors, on the other by actively including the topic of sustainability in different programs (e.g. environmental law, sustainable business, etc.). Additionally, the university can explore the idea of establishing a multi-disciplinary research program in sustainable innovation. By way of cooperation between different programs, faculties, etc., the university can achieve proportional sustainable options for every organizational entity.

### Active Student Initiative

Currently, information about sustainability is only being provided centrally and from central university lectures. The university can make use of study- and student associations to spread the message and stimulate student involvement. Besides financial compensation (i.e. sustainability grant) for inclusion of green initiatives in study associations that the SOG has initiated anteriorly, the university must involve the respective associations more actively. Thus, the university should, on a set basis, organise activities that stress the importance of sustainability and the changes that people can make in their daily lives to become more active and proactive. Cooperation between existing associations can cast a wider network with established communities.

### Prevention of Waste and Emission

The SOG finds it important to reduce general waste output. Taking an active stance in this, the university must prevent waste of printing paper, packing paper and coffee cups. In keeping with this, we also strive for the further digitising of the handing in of papers and reports. Students should not have to hand in papers on paper anymore. Additionally, the current flying pattern of staff amounts to a large part, namely 16 percent according to the 2018 data, of the university's CO2 footprint. We encourage the university to decrease the number of flights by way of accessing direct necessity as well as finding more sustainable alternatives, for example in the form of travelling by train or online conference calls.

## Local and Seasonal Food

To ensure that sustainability within the university keeps improving, constructive components of the university framework as well as the consequences this produces must conduct green alternatives. According to data from 2018, 18% of the university's CO2 emissions come from food. To combat this, the university can and should take measures. Providing more vegan and vegetarian products in canteens, as well as offering local and season-bound products will aid in reducing these emissions. However, the SOG does realise that prices for students must be kept low and reasonable.

## Creating a Greener Environment

Besides the sustainable use of products within the university, the study environment must also reflect the green atmosphere the university wants to be. Whilst enhancing productivity and concentration of students and staff, the SOG aspires a spatial and natural setup of the university buildings. This means that new buildings must be designed in this way (according to BREEAM guidelines), and where possible, old buildings can adapt to this. For example, the making of a plant wall as well as the planting of trees would contribute to a greener environment. Furthermore, at this point in time the green energy supply is restricted to the Academy Building. We want the University to replace this system with more sustainable electricity sources. In extension, the SOG wants more information about the efficiency in the use of energy.

## Transparency About Sustainability Policies

After having formulated objectives on institutionalizing sustainability, the university must be more transparent about the progress in realising mentioned goals. The SOG wants openness and reportation about the effectiveness of sustainable policy in order to review plans for the future. Furthermore, besides the formulation of general clauses, the university must be more specific in how this subsequently will be achieved. This includes adequately defining the available financial means for the topic of sustainability. A fixed budget serves as concretisation of working methods in the process of adjusting the university to be increasingly sustainable.

## Facilities

To provide an optimal educational experience to students, the university needs a strong supporting infrastructure. Therefore, the SOG is focused on not only improving education, but also on maintaining and improving the facilities surrounding education. The ultimate goal is to give students the opportunity to perform to the best of their abilities and make the most of the chances that the university offers them.

## Study Spots

The SOG aims for a university with accessible and streamlined facilities. Currently the UB, Harmony building and Zernike become overcrowded during exam periods. There is an increase in students not finding a space to study in the UB and/or Harmony building.

A partial solution to this issue is to introduce a 'Share your Chair' principle that is already present at other universities in the country. This way, students can officially indicate that they will not be using that seat for a while and that others may use it, but it will still be available when they return.

Seeing the fact that a queue of students is already waiting before the UB opens, the current dynamics of the in- and outflow of students and lack of free spaces demands immediate attention. By lengthening the opening times in Zernike and Harmony building, the stress during exam periods is spread by not only having the UB in the city centre open at certain hours, but also the other locations with study spots. On a similar note, the UB in the city centre is by far the most crowded study spot, regardless of the time of day. To help alleviate this issue, the SOG aims to increase awareness of the different study spots and their buildings by way of central university promotion.

## Reducing Exam Slots

The SOG strives for an environment where students can perform at their best. Currently, the RUG offers four time slots each day for exams. Therefore, students are forced to concentrate in the early morning or past dinner time when their concentration is not optimal. In addition, due to the current system, time between exams is short. This results in crowded hallways of the exam locations and a disturbed flow of students. Students with additional time are sometimes met with students entering the exam hall for the new exam or teachers preparing the hall for the next exam. The SOG is striving to bring the number of exam slots back to three to solve these issues. Currently the four exam slots will remain until the academic year of 2021/2022 and afterwards, the SOG will strongly advocate for a return to the three-slot system.

## Making Full Use of Digitalization

Besides our stance on the further digitalization of education and making sure that lecture recordings stay relevant and present even after the current COVID-19 situation, there are also other factors related to digitalization to consider.

The RUG can also still progress in their digital communication with the students. Currently, there is a 'Library Groningen University' app available in the app stores. It features a map of the facilities and floors to help the students to find different books. It also facilitates a window where the occupation of workstations is shown, like the Nestor website does. The SOG thinks that more options could be implemented in the app or found in a new app. This includes but is not limited to: the ability to reserve study studios in the UB and the visibility of the occupation in the UB. As a student card is already required to enter the building, the data of the number of students currently in the building is already available to the university. By making this information accessible for students, they can decide whether a visit to the UB is useful to find a spot. This also (partially) tackles the problem of the crowdedness in the studyhalls.

## Facilities for Students with Learning/Physical Disabilities

Students that want additional time due to ADHD or dyslexia have to jump through hoops to gain these privileges. Some faculties only offer additional time after a review with a test or obligate a recent doctors statement. The SOG is of opinion that too much is demanded from students to qualify for additional time. This way the students that could qualify opt out because of the high demands. The current policy differs for each faculty and lacks a centralised plan. The SOG believes that the RUG should implement a centralised policy for students with learning/physical disabilities when requesting additional time.

## Student Health and Well-being

It has become increasingly apparent in recent times that many students cope with stress and struggle with mental health in general. Although the university has made many steps to deal with the issue already, the SOG believes that it is paramount to stay vigilant and to keep evaluating and improving current measures. We campaign for easier and quicker access to professional help, making mental health issues more discussable and working together with the university to search for the causes of these problems. To push for these changes, the current facilities and budget will be evaluated and changed where necessary.

### *SOG Cares*

In times of the corona crisis, it has become harder for students to find their healthy distraction in between study breaks. Sitting at home the whole day has many difficult and unusual challenges. How to stay motivated? How not to get bored? How to cope with developing negative feelings now you don't have your friends and peers around you? And who is there for the student population now there is a crisis and students can't physically talk to psychologists anymore? We see this as a serious and extremely relevant matter. The well-being of the students in Groningen needs to be taken seriously. Therefore, SOG wants to provide online tools, like the SOG Blog, to help students in every way possible. We care when you have questions that concern your health and well-being, or when you have problems relatable to your studies. We care when you cannot find your way around anymore, or when you simply need some ideas to keep up your motivation. SOG wants to help our academic students in times like these, to stay healthy, happy and relaxed. As well, We strive to promote all the facilities that are needed for the overall health and well-being of the academic students in Groningen.

**Making it better. Together.**