



## **Party Programme 2019-2021 Utrecht PhD Party**

As UPP we stand for the rights and opportunities of PhD candidates, which is why we need representatives in the university council (U-raad) to make our voice heard and the status of PhD's and other temporary staff members protected. Next to our focus on PhD rights, we focus in our programme on the issues of accessibility, sustainability and inclusivity for the university as a whole.

### **1. PhD Rights & Representation**

UPP stands for the rights of PhDs and temporary workers. There is a lot of confusion around what the rights and duties of PhDs, post-docs and other temporary employees are. We strive towards safeguarding the rights of employees. Moreover, we wish to facilitate clear communication of those rights and duties to PhDs, post-docs and other temporary workers. We pay special attention to rights such as the right to a sustainable work/life balance and the right to keep learning and grow as a scientist beside the day to day job.

#### **Transparency and information**

There is a lot of confusion around the rights and duties of PhDs and post-docs. We believe that the university has the duty to inform new or struggling PhDs about their position, in a clear and concise way. The majority of scholarship has English as a main language, but the majority of university policy is currently presented in Dutch. As the international and diverse community that we are, we strive towards making the policy documents and the meetings accessible for internationals by conducting those meetings in English. Our action points are:

- Meetings, minutes, and documents of participation councils are to made accessible in English by default;
- The UU should communicate more pro-actively about the expectations about staff, particularly PhD candidates (e.g. handing out 'starter kits' at the beginning of the PhD candidate's employment/bursary student's stay).

#### **Supervision**

PhDs candidate may sometimes feel at the mercy of their supervisors, and regulations are widely different between departments and graduate schools. We want to set a short number of university-wide rules for supervisors with the goal of protecting PhDs and simple enforcement and conflict-resolution mechanisms, without unnecessary increases of the bureaucratic load on ac. We support the initiative to have a third person present in yearly assessment meetings in order to minimize potential biases that might exist between a supervisor and supervised. We also strongly promote trainings for supervisors and will push for ways to assess the quality of supervision.

#### **Education**

Most PhDs have to obtain a certain number of hours of formation before they can defend their thesis. Unfortunately, only PhDs from the Graduate School of Life Sciences have access to free courses with a simple and centralized course center. We ask the University to fund and open the course center to all PhDs in Utrecht University. All graduate school courses should be freely accessible for all PhD candidates across disciplines, and including bursary PhDs. Dutch courses should be made freely accessible for international PhD candidates who cannot finance their education with their bursary.

### **PhDs with a bursary**

PhDs are responsible for a huge portion of the research output of our university and are also essential in the teaching services. However, bursary PhDs are often asked to teach when this is not part of their programme, and have a vulnerable position in the university. We will try to extend to them as many of the rights that employed PhDs currently enjoy and make information more easily available. Additionally, we support efforts to help international and bursary PhD's with the search for housing.

### **Investments**

As the number of students grows, the public investment in higher education keeps shrinking. The pressure of this increased unpaid workload leads to structural unpaid overtime and fast food quality education. We will continue to support the [WOinActie](#) movement, the community of students and employees that “defends the interests of university education and the link with scientific research, which is under great pressure due to substantial long-term cutback and a rapid increase in student numbers.” (see also Robeyns et.al 2018).

### **Representation**

It is important to have PhD candidates represented in the management and representational levels of the university. PhDs make up a large part of the employees at the university but are not represented at all levels of management. The presence of PhDs representatives from UPP at the university council since 2 years is a good start, but it is not enough. Outside of the UU council, we would like to see more PhD representatives at faculty councils, in departments and research groups so that they eventually will have a say in meetings which affect the lives and careers of PhDs. If PhDs have a say in every decision that affects them, it is more likely that we, PhDs, will help build a university that fits and respects more of our wishes and needs.

## **2. Accessibility**

UPP stands for accessibility. Everyone, regardless of characteristics such as their ability, mental health, languages, gender or background, should be able to participate equally in the community of Utrecht University. To this end, we argue for more rigorous accessibility of the university: in particular with regards to mental wellness, persons with disabilities, and the language barriers which currently exist in the university.

### **Mental health and wellbeing**

In the past, mental health has been on our agenda. Our ten recommendations on how to improve PhD well-being are currently being implemented by the board. Nevertheless, mental wellness remains a key point, especially as academia can be a lonely place. We continue to put mental wellness on the agenda. In particular we rally around points such as:

- Diminish the workload. 63% of academics polled by FNV and VAWO report physical or mental complaints due to the high pressure in 2016, in 2019 this has increased to 65% (Totta 2019). We will therefore continue striving for a better work/life balance;
- Continue to safeguard mental health of PhD candidates and temporary workers. Research has shown that PhD candidates are among those most at risk of encountering mental health issues

during their employment (cf. Daas et.al 2017). Our university just appointed a psychologist for PhDs, after the petition we promoted together with Prout. Unfortunately that's just for a trial of six months. Our goal is to make it permanent and extend it also to post-docs and other temporary staff.

### **Accessibility for people with disabilities**

We strive towards being an accessible university, and with this term we mean not just being able to 'access' a building, but to allow for *meaningful access* (cf. Bain 2016; Hamraie 2019; Perry 2015; Tremain 2013). Being able to enter the lecture hall through the emergency exit, and having to stand at the bottom of stairs without either being able to see the lecturer and screen or being able to have a meaningful social interaction with peers is blatantly insufficient (Kenter 2018). In striving towards meaningful accessibility, we specifically focus on points as:

- Meaningful accessibility of buildings, offices, lecture halls and social areas;
- Formalizing responsibilities with regard to accessibility issues in the organization (e.g. cutting across inter-departmental red tape);
- Adopting a more pro-active stance as a university: upon admission/being offered a job ask the student/employee whether they require particular kinds of accessibility levels;
- Strive for not merely meaningful accessibility for physically impaired persons, but include meaningful accessibility measures for neurodiverse persons.

## **3. Sustainability**

UPP stands for sustainability. We have to take action today, to bring about a future in which students, employees and the UU in general can thrive. This requires first and foremost a liveable planet earth, meaning we all have to commit to reducing our negative impact on the environment. For sustainable university growth, it is also important to provide better career perspectives for PhDs and other temporary staff, especially those groups that are currently underrepresented in the upper echelons of the university. At UPP we see inclusivity in all levels of academia as crucial for a sustainable future of UU.

### **Sustainable environment**

The urgency of taking action against climate change is recognized by the international scientific community, including the UU. The university sees sustainability as one of its main focus points, aiming to be climate neutral by 2030. UPP wholeheartedly supports this ambition. We also see that UU can be more pro-active in certain areas when it comes to reducing CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.

- Sustainable travel: 33% of the UU's CO<sup>2</sup> emission is caused by mobility. Plans are in place to reduce car use, but when it comes to flying, the UU's ambition is limited to compensation.<sup>1</sup> UPP wants reduction of air travel to be firmly on the agenda. If climate goals are to be achieved, compensation is not enough (Becken 2017). Train travel should be the standard on short distances. To achieve this, the university should investigate what keeps people from taking the train and implement action to take away these barriers. The UU should actively inform employees that they can travel by train, even when this is more expensive than air travel; higher (financial) costs of traveling by train should not be any objection. If traveling by train is not feasible, air travel should be compensated by destruction of emission rights and not by 'planting tree programs'. In addition, the UU should support initiatives of conferences where people come together digitally instead of physically. These conferences are not only more sustainable, but also more inclusive of people for whom travel is difficult for a variety of reasons (care duties, disabilities, limited financial resources, et cetera).

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<sup>1</sup> Between 2015 and 2016, flying emissions by UU staff actually increased from 6543 to 6822 tons CO<sub>2</sub>.  
<https://www.uu.nl/organisatie/duurzame-uu/bedrijfsvoering/co2-footprint>

- Sustainable food: The university has already taken some steps towards more sustainable food provision. We would like to take this further by increasing sustainable food options. For example, the university recommends plant-based meals as a way for employees to be more sustainable<sup>2</sup>. Yet plant-based options in UU restaurants are extremely limited and also not clearly labeled<sup>3</sup>. In addition, of the over 200 coffee machines, 100% offer animal milk and 0% offer plant milk, a ratio that makes it difficult for staff and students to make the sustainable choices recommended by the university<sup>45</sup>. Sodexo should ban the use of disposable cutlery and dishes at UU canteens and we encourage them to order from local suppliers.
- Printing footprint: Efforts should be made to reduce the UU's printing footprint. PhD's should be allowed to hand in their thesis digitally only or as an e-book version.

### Sustainable careers

An academic career starts with a PhD-position, but getting your PhD is by no means a guarantee for being able to continue in academia. For those who find a postdoc position, only 18% continue with a career in science. Future perspectives for PhD's are thus very insecure and an important source of stress. As the number of PhD's continues to rise faster than the number of university teachers and professors, this situation will only get worse (de Goede et.al 2013).

- UPP urges the university to take action to improve the career perspectives of PhDs and postdocs. For future perspectives, it is important that PhDs can develop their teaching skills and have the opportunity to get a BKO, as many academic positions combine teaching and research and getting a BKO is difficult during a postdoc position. The University has a solution for this: a five years PhD instead of four, and that extra time is spent on teaching, with more responsibilities than a normal PhD. Our goal is to extend this initiative to more PhDs and offer them a clear path to BKO, the qualification that's needed to teach in a Dutch university. There should also be ample training opportunities to develop skills beneficial for a career outside of academia.
- Special attention needs to be paid to the future careers of groups underrepresented in post-PhD career stages. For example, while women make up 50% of PhDs, they only make up 25% of full professors<sup>6</sup> (de Jonge 2018; UU press office 2018). For other underrepresented groups, data are not even available. Changing this is important, not only for equality in career perspectives, but also for safeguarding the future quality of UU research and teaching and the institute's position in society. Being inclusive is not just an opportunity, it is a necessity.

## 4. Inclusivity

UPP stands for inclusivity. The past years, Utrecht University has taken some important steps toward more inclusivity and diversity. One of the outcomes of this programme has been the establishment of the university-wide Diversity Task Force in May 2017<sup>7</sup>. Especially since the occupation of the Maagdenhuis in 2015, diversity has become a prime topic of debate among universities nation-wide (Wekker 2016). Utrecht seems to lack behind compared to other universities and UPP acknowledges

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uu.nl/en/node/6119/green-office/sustainable-uu-sustainable-me>

<sup>3</sup> According to the Coalition for Plant-based catering, there are other organisations that also use Sodexo as a caterer and that have more plant-based options available in restaurants than UU.

<sup>4</sup> At Erasmus University, a coffee machine with plant milk has been added after a petition of students. The Coalition for Plant-based catering has been in contact with coffee machine suppliers and state that these are generally willing to adapt their machines if demand is there.

<sup>5</sup> Adding dairy-free options also caters more to the needs of a multi-ethnic community. While it is common for people of Northern European descent to be lactose-tolerant, the majority of the world population is not. In many East Asian communities, over 90% of adults are lactose intolerant. <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/lactose-intolerance>

<sup>6</sup> At UMC Utrecht, 70 per cent of all employees are women, and 26% of the full professors are women. <https://www.umcutrecht.nl/nl/Over-Ons/Nieuws/2018/Aantal-vrouwelijke-leidinggevenden-gestegen-naar-5>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.uu.nl/en/news/launch-of-the-diversity-task-force>

the recent efforts to change this – though often met with debate in politics and media (Achterberg 2016; RTV Utrecht 2019). UPP considers it to be of great added value that PhDs of the UU have a vast variety of national, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious and class backgrounds. Diversity among researchers brings a variety of perspectives and experiences, which is beneficial for knowledge production and contributes to the internationalization of our university (Ahmed 2012; Bowman 2010; Page 2008).

UPP strongly believes it is crucial that the UU is inclusive for all its employees and students, no matter their background or identity. We believe that there should be an office dedicated to the – mental and legal – confidential support for employees who experienced discrimination. Additionally, we propose (voluntary) training for current employees, teachers and supervisors, related to questions of inclusivity. Three groups have particularly received little attention by the current Diversity measures. With UPP, we dedicate ourselves to improving the rights, work environment and safety of these groups.

- **International PhDs and people of color**

Since 10 per cent of the students have a ‘non-western’ background (Bouma 2016) and a large percentage of the PhD candidates is non-white a/o non-Dutch, UPP argues for more explicit attention to cultural, ethnic and racial diversity. Besides advocating for the inclusion of English in policy documents (see pt. 1), we are concerned with the content of our research and teaching. As teaching shapes a large part of the knowledge created and work in our university, we propose a guideline to ‘decolonize the curriculum’ for both PhDs and other teaching staff (Dechavez 2018). Such guidelines and workshops will be an effort to diversify the options and tools for PhD candidates and others interested in diversity.

- **Transgender and non-gender conforming people**

There is currently no policy whatsoever for particular needs of transgender people. Together with transgender organizations we seek to, for example, make it easier for transgender people to change their name in official registration. We also want to continue and expand the and the pilot with gender inclusive bathrooms which UPP started in May 2018 (van der Ham 2018).

- **LGB/queer people**

Lastly, we would like to pay attention to women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer people. Gender equality has been an important issue of UU and the Diversity Task committee, mainly directed to improving the position of women. There is some attention to sexual diversity via the new ‘UU Rainbow Network’ but this is very limited. This can be strengthened by some additional changes, such as: a clearer policy on (sexual) harassment allegations; addressing potential biases in hiring committees and offering parental leave for all parents. This has been a topic of the UPP already, and we managed to ensure contract extension for PhD candidates when they take paternity leave.

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