



## **Party program 2021-2023**

### **Utrecht PhD Party**

As UPP we stand for the interests and opportunities of early career academics on temporary contracts like 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 and representation, we focus in our programme on the issues of workload, sustainability, inclusivity and diversity for the university as a whole.

## **1. Rights & Representation**

UPP stands for the rights of early academic career staff. There is a lot of confusion around the rights and duties of this group of staff. UPP aims to clear up this confusion by facilitating clear communication about these rights and duties. We pay special attention to, amongst others, the right to a sustainable work-life balance and the right to keep learning and grow as an academic besides the day to day job.

### **Transparency and information**

There is a lot of confusion around the rights and duties of early academic career staff. We believe that the university has the duty to inform all early academic career staff about their position, in a clear and concise way. The majority of scholarships have English as the main language, but the majority of university policy is currently presented in Dutch. In the last term, we worked on and published a Dutch/English [PhD handbook](#). This is a first step in providing (new) PhDs with the right information. As the international and diverse community that we are, we strive towards making the information regarding policies accessible for internationals by using English as the main language of communication. A step in the right direction during the last term was that all documents have an English translation, or can be translated upon request. We want to go further down this path with the following action points:

- Meetings and minutes of those meetings of participation councils are to be made accessible in English by default;

- The UU should communicate more proactively about the expectations about staff, particularly early academic career staff, it should not only depend on supervisors to provide this information. An introductory course for new staff and the PhD handbook are initiatives that we want to expand upon in the coming term.
- Focus on reaching out to international and bursary PhDs in particular as they are most vulnerable to missing out on information on their rights and duties.

## **Investments and contracts**

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 [here](#)). We specifically want to focus on the following points:

- Ensure that all temporary research staff that are in need and eligible for an extension as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic get their extension.
- Reduce the percentage of temporary teacher contracts.
- Improve the terms and conditions of contracts, especially for those with temporary contracts to prevent the scenarios in which employees are paid for a part-time position (0.7 fte), but in reality spend full-time hours on the job.
- Expand on the possibilities that are offered in the terms and conditions model (i.e. ‘arbeidsvoorraarde keuzemodel’) to accommodate researchers to spend their earned holiday hours in a beneficial way.

## **Supervision**

Early academic career staff 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 early academic career staff with conflict-resolution mechanisms, without unnecessary increases of the bureaucratic load. In the last term, we made progress in terms of the possibility of having an extra person present during the yearly assessment meetings and requiring training for new promotores to increase the quality of supervision. This term we want to focus on supporting new initiatives that further focus on the procedures when the supervisory structure is not working as intended:

- We want to improve upon the accountability structures that are in place, specifically, we want to focus on the confidants. We see three areas of improvement: (1) ensuring their independence, (2) improving their visibility, and (3) ensuring the quality of their services through (mandatory) training.
- The procedure and possibilities of filing complaints for misbehavior must also be improved upon. The main challenge here is to ensure that these complaints are handled independently. Next to a role for the confidant, we see an important role for the ombudsman. Not only on a university wide scale, but on faculty or departmental levels as well.

## **PhD project**

Most PhDs have to obtain a certain number of hours of formation before they can defend their thesis. Next to that, personal development of PhDs and their skillset are of vital importance for a sustainable future career.

- We ask the University to open or create a course center for all PhDs in Utrecht University. All graduate school courses should be freely accessible for all PhD candidates across disciplines, including bursary PhDs.
- Each PhD candidate should get a budget financed by the university to pay for the end of their project activities. At the end of a PhD trajectory a PhD is required (or expected) to finance a number of printed theses, a dinner with supervisors and a reception after the defense.
- Options for a more sustainable way of providing the thesis at the end should be promoted by the university, especially creating e-books.

## **Representation**

It is important to have early academic career staff represented in the management and representational levels of the university. Early academic career staff make up a large part of the employees at the university but are not represented at all levels of management. The presence of early academic career staff representatives from UPP at the university council since 2 years is a good start, but it is not enough. Therefore, we continue to work on one main action point:

- Outside of the UU council, we would like to see more early academic career staff 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 starting academics. If early academic career staff have a say in every decision that affects them, it is more likely that we will help build a university that fits and respects more of our wishes and needs.
- We also strive for fair compensation in hours spent for all people who dedicate time and effort into representing early academic career interests. In particular, we want the UU to recognise and compensate the members of Prout for their efforts in community building for and interest representation of early academic career staff.

## **2. Workload**

UPP is devoted to reducing workload. COVID-19 has hit our PhD's and other academic staff on temporary contracts very hard. It laid bare what has been a problem for years; academia functions because of systemic unpaid overwork. Combined with the precarity of temporary contracts, such a workload results in talented and valuable staff leaving academia in disillusion, or worse due to burnout. It also effectively excludes people without a privileged social-economic situation, thus being counterproductive to the University's goal of a diverse workforce. UPP wants to look into ways to reduce the workload as quickly and effectively as possible. In the spirit of WOinactie, we modestly demand that employees get paid for the hours they work. Presently, the responsibility for work-life balance and mental health begins and ends with the employee, as exemplified by the availability of workshops in mindfulness, workers efficiency and/or self-care that are made available by Utrecht University. Not only are workshops insufficient when dealing with structural problems, they also seem to allocate the ownership of these problems to the employee instead of the employer. The university is responsible for ensuring that employees are only required to work the hours they get paid for and should formulate an active policy to make sure that this is the case.

### **Unpaid overwork**

Research into working hours in academia - and in the UU specifically - show that unpaid overwork is rampant. Part-time contracts are actually full-time contracts for part-time pay, and vacation hours are not used for taking leave. UPP formulates the following action points and suggestions.

- We wish to improve and centralise the DCU model so that every teacher gets realistic hours for their teaching.
- If 0.7 contracts are actually full-time contracts, Utrecht University should correct this immediately. Anything less is exploitation of the workforce. The UPP wants insight into the decision of Utrecht University to limit teaching contracts to a 0.7 appointment.

## **Accountability**

In general, the call for a reduced workload is closely related to workers' rights as well as to accountability. If we work several hours a week for free, our rights are not met. And if our rights are not met, who then is responsible? The UPP will address the current lack of accountability within the UU. This means that on every level, department, faculty and university, management should be held accountable for burnouts and unpaid overwork within their respective structures.

- It is the responsibility of the University to monitor whether PhD's - and staff on temporary contracts - work too much, therefore the B&O forms should include working hours, and a protocol should be present for when the overwork is too high.
- We want to investigate and formulate protocols to hold the university, the departments and the CVB accountable when mistreatment is present.

## **Contracts**

In addition to these suggestions to diminish workload we also subscribe to the current policy to reduce the percentage of temporary teacher contracts and improve the contracts of staff that necessarily have to work temporary (of 0.7ft 4yr), while also acknowledging that these ambitions have been met in underwhelming fashion. During our term we will monitor these ambitions, while also demanding accountability if the goals aren't achieved.

- Improve the terms and conditions of contracts, especially for those with temporary contracts, including realistic teaching hours and research time.
- Finally, all PhD's should receive extensions, if necessary, due to the immense efforts and the delay they've suffered during the past year (and counting) due to the covid pandemic. The University hasn't provided the conditions for doing research. Offices haven't been available to the level that they should've been, academic exchanges with colleagues and supervisors have been severely diminished, field work and conferences have been postponed or cancelled. It left PhD's locked in their houses, often without the necessary support the projects demanded. A global pandemic does not warrant business as usual, and a just University does not defer its effects to its employees.

## **3. Sustainable Environment**

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 must commit to reducing our negative impact on the environment. The urgency of taking action against climate change is recognized by the international scientific community, including the UU. Unfortunately, the university has let go of its ambition to be climate neutral by 2030, we want this goal back on the table. We believe the university should be clearer in their ambitions and should not only operate in the margins, but aim for more consistency in applying sustainable initiatives to the organisation as a whole. As a research institute, we should make use of our resources to do internal research to map out which measures should be taken to reach sustainability goals more effectively. Furthermore, we want to emphasise that pollution of the environment and climate change are not merely consumer problems and cannot be solved alone by making 'green' consumer choices. We want

green policies to count university-wide and apply these to all employees, in all levels. We also see that UU can be more proactive in certain areas when it comes to [reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions](#).

## Sustainable Travel

26% of the UU's CO<sub>2</sub> emission is caused by mobility.<sup>1</sup> Plans are in place to reduce travel by car and plane. However, UPP wants reduction of air travel to be more firmly on the agenda. The first steps towards this goal have been set in the shape of the UU's new train policy. This policy enables travel by train as a feasible alternative to air travel by compensating the price difference when a train ticket is more expensive. The new [Train Zone Map](#) helps employees determine which destinations are accessible by train. We think the UU should take this one step further and actively discourage travel by air to destinations that are close enough to reach by train. Furthermore, if climate goals are to be achieved, mere compensation of emissions is [not enough](#), and more rigorous measures need to be taken.

- The UU should take a more proactive stance in promoting alternative and sustainable forms of travel. And work on better communicating the existence of initiatives such as the new train policy to employees.
- Unnecessary air travel to destinations easily accessible by train should be actively discouraged.
- If traveling by train is not feasible, air travel should be compensated by destruction of emission rights and not by 'planting-trees' programs.

## Reduction of Travel

If there is anything that the academic world has learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that we can do significantly more work remotely than we previously did. While UPP recognizes the importance of face-to-face contact and on-location work, we also want to decrease disproportionate and superfluous instances of travel. The scientific community at the UU should continue to support conferences where people come together digitally instead of physically, even after the corona-crisis. 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). In addition, efforts to reduce emissions made by early career academics should always be matched by their seniors. Therefore, we would like to see a reduction in travel (over significant distances) typically undertaken by senior academics and higher management.

- Better support and resources must be given to academics who want to organise online conferences, courses, and lectures.
- Travel (especially by plane) to conferences and events where only short appearances are made (such as short lectures, brief meetings or 1-day conferences) needs to be reduced. Instead, such lectures and meetings can easily be done remotely.
- Encourage non-local committee members to participate at PhD defences through online video calls, to avoid unnecessary travel.

## Sustainable Procurement and Purchasing of Energy

UPP would like to see further efforts being made towards green energy usage. We think that it is important for the UU to invest into green energy suppliers, and for the university to transition to sustainable energy production.

- Currently the UU is generating part of its required energy with solar panels. UPP would like to work on further expanding sustainable energy generation on location.

## 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. Yet plant-based options in UU restaurants are extremely limited and also not clearly labeled. Many of the plant-based options that are offered still include a high number of dairy products. 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>12</sup> Moreover, we want to stress the importance of applying these measures equally to all layers in the university. The responsibility to transition to more sustainable diets should not lie solely with students and junior employees, but also with senior academics and higher management.

- The UU should match their own ambition to move towards consumption of sustainable food with facilitating this for their employees. UU restaurants should increase sustainable plant-based meals and should offer more non-dairy options.
- Coffee machines need to offer a non-dairy, plant-based milk option.
- Sustainable food options should be encouraged and eventually become the norm at networking dinners as well as UU facilities that are often visited by senior employees.
- We want to encourage Eurest to order from local suppliers.

## Waste Footprint

In an organisation as large as the UU significant amounts of waste are produced daily. The university has made significant progress in waste separation and recycling. We think the waste footprint can be reduced even more by reducing the waste we produce in the first place. We see room for improvement in the use of disposables as well as the UUs printing footprint.

- PhD's should be allowed to hand in their thesis digitally only or as an e-book version.
- Use of e-books by students and academic staff over printed material should be encouraged. Digital readers could be provided to facilitate the use of e-books.
- Eurest should ban the use of disposable cutlery and dishes at UU canteens.

## 4. Inclusivity

UPP stands for inclusivity. The past years, Utrecht University has taken some important steps toward becoming a more diverse and inclusive organization. One of the outcomes has been the establishment of a university-wide Equality, Diversity and Inclusion office (EDI). UPP appreciates these efforts but would like to see more structural changes, more funding for diversity policy, more inclusion of (inhouse) experts from various backgrounds, and more awareness in all levels of the organisation. Inclusivity is not a choice: It is a necessity. 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. We therefore are committed to increase awareness of diversity and improve the accessibility of our university, with

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<sup>1</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>2</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>

particular attention to people of color, non-binary and transgender people, and people with mental or physical impairments.

## Awareness

Diversity and inclusion should be integrated in all parts of the university and should not become the burden of either grassroots groups or the EDI office, UPP aims for a structural and university wide awareness and accountability from the UU leadership. The communication's offices should pay more attention to ensure information is accessible for everyone, regardless of language or audio/visual impairments, and the unconscious bias training should be compulsory for all those in leadership positions. Furthermore, inclusivity can only be achieved when there is a clear and accessible complaints structure. Confidants should be accessible, visible, knowledgeable and committed to the wellbeing of the staff, rather than serving those in higher levels of the university. Concretely, we propose:

- The unconscious bias trainings should be expanded, making this obligatory for (at least) all PhD supervisors and professors.
- The communication's offices should pay attention to inclusivity in the information provided by the university: Making sure that everything is accessible for people with audio/visual impairments, all information is simultaneously offered in Dutch and English, and all unconscious bias adequately addressed.
- An anti-discrimination office should be established where people can offer complaints. This includes complaints about accessibility of buildings and structural problems that cannot easily be traced to one individual or event. This office has a signalling function and can forward people to the official complaints procedures or ombudsperson if needed. As such, the office also works to build knowledge on discrimination at UU.

## Anti-racism

Racism is scarcely addressed in the EDI policy and we want to make sure that promises made in the [statement regarding](#) after the Black Lives Matters protest in June 2020 are fulfilled. Diversity should furthermore not be equated with internationalization, the UU should be proactive in ensuring inclusion of Dutch people of color. This should be considered the responsibility of the UU leadership and not just for marginalized groups themselves.

- The UU needs a stronger and funded anti-racism policy that goes beyond lectures and debates, and that addresses institutional racism. This can only be done if a bottom-up approach is pro-actively facilitated and with the help of (outside) experts on combatting racism.
- 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.

## Gender

On the terrain of gender, the man/woman imbalance has been addressed, but there is currently no policy whatsoever for particular needs of transgender and nonbinary people and discrimination of LGB people is not pro-actively addressed. This is why we will focus on:

- Gender marks need to be removed where possible, including in dress codes and registration forms. There should be an option to indicate preferred pronouns on the employee pages.
- UPP is devoted to ensuring all parents or caregivers are treated equally. Childcare should not be an obstacle for the career of junior scholars, nor vice versa. We managed to ensure contract extension for PhD candidates when they take parental

leave. PhDs who take the lawful six week leave when their partner gives birth (also called ‘paternity leave’), should similarly be offered an extension.

- To work towards gender equality, the university should start a pilot for the use of a gender quota.
- We will continue and expand the pilot with gender inclusive bathrooms which UPP [started in May 2018](#).

## Mental health

In the past, mental health has been on our agenda. [Research has shown](#) that PhD candidates are among those most at risk of encountering mental health issues during their employment. Our ten recommendations on how to improve PhD well-being are 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.

- Our university appointed a PhD psychologist, after the petition we promoted together with Prout. This has now become a permanent position. We will continue to work with the psychologist to see how this service can be improved and demand that it is expanded if needed
- The UU needs to arrange long-term support for employees experiencing mental health issues related to Covid-19.
- The availability of quiet rooms needs to be expanded with rooms where there are facilities to rest and lay down.

## 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](#) (see also [here](#)). 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](#). In striving towards meaningful accessibility, we specifically focus on:

- Meaningful accessibility of buildings, offices, lecture halls and social areas (especially in the city center). One concrete task is to make a wheelchair accessible lecture stand for PhD defences and other formal occasions.
- UU should formalize the responsibilities with regard to accessibility issues in the organization (e.g. cutting across inter-departmental red tape). Accessibility needs to be integrated in the BKO trajectory.
- The university should adopt a more pro-active stance: 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;
- The *Platform Onbeperkt Studeren* continues to be funded and extended to include ‘graded accessibility’ in assessing buildings. In addition, UU needs to support and fund the formation of a similar platform for employees.