

VISION 10.0

In early board meetings in August 2020, the newly appointed board took the decision to rebrand NovUM in the hope of emerging stronger than ever at the next election. Four new pillars were decided on around which to base our actions and policies for the coming year. These pillars are:

Housing

Education

Sustainability

Internationalism

This proposal was reviewed by members at the August General Assembly and approved unanimously. These pillars reflect the goals and attributes we would like to see Maastricht University focus on. For more concrete details of how we propose to improve our University, please examine the party manifesto as well as the current candidate manifestos.

Maastricht, November 2020

Board of NovUM

I: Housing

A survey conducted by NovUM found that many students found it 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to find a room in Maastricht. Reasons cited for this struggle included a shortage of affordable housing, the high number of scam housing advertisements, discriminatory listings geared towards 'Dutch only' or 'girls only'.

According to testimony from UM students, the shortage of housing has left many in temporary or unsatisfactory living situations, for example having to sub-rent while they continue searching for a long-term housing solution, living in hostels or commuting from across the Belgian border, which removes them from the epicentre of student life and makes socialisation, student associations and UM facilities less accessible due to the long commute, especially in the cold winter months when it gets dark early, and especially for female students for whom a long cycle home after dark is a potential personal safety risk. Making time for such a long commute to classes and other activities also adds another level of time management challenge to an already demanding university experience.

The shortage of student rooms will only worsen as the university continues to grow. UM must increase its student body by 1-3% per annum to conserve government subsidies. This means that every year there will be an additional ~180 students looking for a room—that's over 1000 in the next 6 years, so it is imperative that the housing supply also continues to grow. NovUM stands behind UM's efforts to date in investment in expanding the UM Guesthouse and supports continued innovation to prevent housing from being a barrier to students making the most of their time at UM.

1: UM Guesthouses

NovUM stands for ensuring the accessibility of UM to students around the world regardless of their income. Therefore we support continued investment in developing and maintaining UM Guesthouses at a variety of price points, especially those like the Annadal complex where many students live together and share facilities, as this encourages socialisation outside university-related activities and thus can help new students and exchange students to feel at home in Maastricht.

2: Accessibility and navigability of the private rental market

Aside from the availability of housing, the inaccessibility of the Maastricht housing market can create further obstacles to students finding a satisfactory living situation. Obstacles include high prices and discriminatory letting criteria based on gender and nationality. Students' lack of awareness of how the housing market works often leads to them being exploited by scammers making money from false room listings, and landlords and letting agencies including unjust contractual terms and avoiding returning deposits. Therefore, NovUM advocates cooperation between UM and the municipality to promote appropriate regulation of the student housing market to crack down on scammers and exploitative practices. NovUM also supports the University providing legal and general housing advice facilities for students through the maintenance of quality services such as the Huurteam Zuid-Limburg.

II: Education

As a student representative party, NovUM is naturally invested in the maintenance of a high quality of education at UM, not only in terms of standards of teaching and the quality of learning resources, but also the breadth of the curriculum; the accessibility of university facilities; academic, professional and personal support systems available to students; and the opportunities available for students to expand their learning. This year there is a need for especially rigorous continued evaluation of education at UM, due to the present exceptional circumstances of hybrid education, which remains somewhat experimental and is a continuing learning curve for both faculty and students.

1: Excellence in teaching

Whilst enthusiastically endorsing the value of PBL as a learning method, NovUM encourages recognition of the fact that it may sometimes require some adaptations in order to get the most out of certain courses- for example, feedback suggests that some challenging scientific courses benefit from the tutor taking on a more active instructional role than is conventional in PBL, or incorporating exercises in addition to, or instead of, readings. Therefore, NovUM endorses encouraging tutors and course coordinators to use their discretion to adapt the broad format according to the specific needs of the class.

It is also imperative to ensure that all tutors and support staff have a high level of qualification in English/Dutch language (dependent on the language of instruction of the study programme they teach), and that tutors are sufficiently trained in the PBL method and are highly motivated.

NovUM supports the continued existence of course evaluation forms and the encouragement of high rates of student participation in these evaluations. In the interest of making students feel heard and ensuring the continued improvement of courses to meet the needs and expectations of students, NovUM also endorses regular feedback summarising the output of these evaluations for each course, and what will be done in future to address any recurring issues. This is especially important now that the structure, format and content of some courses has been altered to make them better suited to the current pandemic situation, meaning there is more trial and error involved than ever before.

Especially whilst circumstances continue to change with regards to university education in the pandemic, NovUM highlights the importance of ensuring excellent communication between university administration, faculties, tutors and students. Furthermore, we support the continued existence of regular faculty newsletters in certain faculties and encourage their introduction in the remainder of faculties.

2: Hybrid education

Whilst NovUM, like many, looks forward to returning to relative normality once it is safe to do so, we recognise that the hybrid format of education in 2020 has a few benefits which could be taken forward into the post-pandemic future, as well as the many inconveniences we are all aware of. Chief among these positives is pre-recorded video lectures which students can watch at their convenience, as this adds more flexibility into the sometimes-demanding timetable of a UM student and enables students to revisit the lecture whilst completing assignments and studying for exams. It is also helpful for many to be able to pause and

rewind lectures to ensure thorough notetaking, as many otherwise struggle to simultaneously listen attentively and take detailed notes in live lectures. However, live in-person lectures have obvious benefits as well, such as the ability to ask questions and receive instant feedback, and the social aspect of in-person university providing a further incentive to attend the lecture in the first place. For these reasons, NovUM proposes that, after the pandemic, in-person lectures at faculties are restored, but are also recorded and uploaded to the student portal along with the slides, so as to reap the benefits of both traditional in-person and video lectures.

3: Opportunities to expand the learning experience

One of the outstanding characteristics of Maastricht University is the emphasis on independent learning and 'going the extra mile'. For this reason, NovUM strongly endorses the maintenance and expansion of opportunities available to students to expand their learning experience, apply what they have learned and push themselves further.

These opportunities include excellence/ honours programmes to encourage highly motivated students to deepen their knowledge and be rewarded for it, as well as the ability to take internships as part of a study programme and earn credits for it. NovUM supports making these opportunities available across all faculties where they are not already offered, and also advocates for the introduction of skills courses focussing on career skills to give more support to students in their process of becoming not only knowledgeable but employable and feeling prepared to navigate the job market after graduation.

Cross-faculty minors are another opportunity for students to expand their learning, and one which NovUM feels is too often overlooked as a means of adding breadth to the curriculum. Therefore, we support the dissemination of more information about cross-faculty minors, and increased efforts to make the scheduling of minor classes run smoothly so that every student who wants to take part in a minor is able to do so, regardless of other commitments.

Furthermore, NovUM enthusiastically supports UM offering a wide range of extracurricular activities, allowing these activities to use university facilities and keeping them affordable so that they are accessible to all students.

NovUM also supports a campaign to inform all students about the opportunities for student representation at faculty and university level as well as the impact student representatives can have, to encourage more students to both run as representatives and vote in the UM elections to increase the democratic mandate of the councils.

NovUM believes students' privacy is important and should not be compromised in pursuit of pandemic-safe assessment solutions. We are therefore openly sceptical of proctoring software and encourage UM to investigate alternative assessment solutions until it is once again safe to administer on-site exams.

4: University learning facilities

NovUM recognises the importance of purpose-built study spaces to many students' productivity. We value the fact that UM libraries adapt their opening hours in line with students' needs, for example, longer hours during exam weeks, and reiterate the importance of providing sufficient study places, both for silent work and group work. NovUM would also support the ability to book rooms in faculty buildings for group study during corona when

students are not free to spend time together in faculty buildings outside of educational activities.

It is also important, especially while education remains wholly or partly online, to be vigilant for arising IT issues and ensure as far as possible that university hardware and software functions to an adequate standard at all times.

NovUM firmly believes in the importance of ensuring higher education at UM is accessible to all students, regardless of financial situation and physical and mental health and disabilities. This encompasses maximising the accessibility of UM buildings to students with reduced mobility and ensuring the ready availability of university psychological services.

III: Sustainability

The environment is an issue of high priority to a large number of UM students. We are alarmed by the IPCC's report on the importance of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and understand the magnitude of the amount of change needed to achieve this. Whilst every individual in the UM community can and should do their part to be ecological, we believe that it is big businesses which can make the most difference, and universities are no exception. Therefore, we urge UM to improve sustainability as a matter of priority.

1: Transparency and accountability

NovUM encourages UM to continue the progress towards carbon neutrality. We also believe it would be beneficial to give interested students more insight into how the university's 2030 sustainability goals are progressing and the work of the Green Office, such as regular progress reports and seminars and presentations to inspire the student community.

NovUM also expresses disapproval of the fact that UM has made commitments to sustainability but continues to use ABP pension fund to manage UM employees' pensions, given that ABP still funds fossil fuel companies. NovUM therefore urges UM, as a large client of ABP, to put greater pressure on ABP to divest from fossil fuels, and, if they continue to resist such pressure, to consider switching to an alternative pension fund which is more sustainable.

2: Sustainable resourcing

NovUM applauds existing efforts to reduce paper consumption at UM and encourages the maintenance and expansion of access to e-books, virtual copies of course materials, second-hand books and paper-free transmission.

NovUM also endorses collaboration with local businesses for the supply of materials and food where possible, to support these businesses and build relations with the local community.

3: Sustainability on the curriculum

NovUM also supports the proposal to introduce a sustainability-related minor in all faculties, adapted to be maximally relevant to each study programme, whilst retaining a focus on sustainability. More broadly, NovUM endorses collaboration with local climate activism groups to raise students' awareness of sustainability and promote engagement with the issue, for example by running workshop at INKOM and informational lectures.

IV: Internationalism

NovUM is traditionally the party of international students, and we are proud of this image, and of the diverse international community at our university, which we believe can broaden our horizons as much as our formal education. Therefore we believe in promoting this diversity, and making the most of it by encouraging as much integration and cultural exchange as possible. We also recognise that being an international student can come with its own unique set of challenges, so we pledge to stand by our traditional base of international students by working with the university on solutions to these challenges to make sure everyone feels at home in Maastricht and can make the most of the opportunity to learn from each other.

1: Integration

NovUM believes in working to encourage the integration of Dutch and non-Dutch students, and the integration of international students into Maastricht life and Dutch culture in general, to make the most of the experience of studying abroad. To this end, we support the university-wide availability of high-quality of language courses, especially in Dutch and English, and extensive promotion of these courses to encourage as many students as possible to take them.

Additionally, we would like to advance a proposal for an entirely English-speaking studentenvereniging, as these greatly enhance the social lives of Dutch-speaking students, and NovUM believes it would be beneficial to extend the same opportunity to international students, since ESN is marketed more towards exchange students than full-time international students and Kaleido remains small.

2: Support

Moving to a new country can be confusing and difficult, both on an emotional level and in terms of the sheer amount on organisation and paperwork you have to deal with. NovUM therefore supports the continued existence of university services designed to support international students with such things, such as the International Student Helpdesk, and urges the university to disseminate more widely information about these services and how to access them and to ensure a high quality of help for every individual. This includes university psychological services, since being far from home can be challenging for some student's mental health, especially with the added challenges of the pandemic and the inevitable stress of academia. We would support the establishment of a separate additional counselling service specifically for international students suffering from homesickness or culture shock or struggling to settle in. More broadly, we support ensuring that students have access to advise and information on practicalities of moving to Maastricht, for example, finding housing and registration and the municipality.