

Response to EFO demands 31 May

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E-mail text 'Response to EFO demands', 31 May 2023

Dear members of End Fossil Occupy Utrecht,

This email is a reaction to your e-mail from Wednesday 10 May, in which you asked us for a detailed response to the list of demands you shared with us.

First and foremost, we would like to emphasize that our organization operates on democratic principles. This is important, as our community is large: it consists of over 39.000 students and over 8.500 employees. Students and staff participate in our policy-making process and advise our various administrative bodies (solicited and unsolicited) in all our organizational layers, for example via our employee and student representation. Although we understand and sympathize with your sense of urgency, it is crucial to Utrecht University that we also respect the democratic framework we have established. We ask you to take the democratic process in consideration.

So while we appreciate your commitment to making a difference in our organization and beyond, we must inform you that we can and will not meet all your demands without question, due to the dynamics of our democratic decision-making process. However, your concerns have been duly noted and will be brought to the attention of the appropriate channels within our organization. For our detailed response to your demands, please read the text in the attachment.

Lastly, we are committed to fostering an environment that encourages dialogue and drives positive change. Therefore, we are happy that the Head of our Sustainability Office has already spoken with you last Friday about your concrete ideas to make Utrecht University more sustainable and how we can continue the dialogue. We look forward to further collaboration with you, while upholding the democratic principles we hold dear.

Best regards,

Anton Pijpers, Henk Kummeling, Margot van der Starre and Anneloes Krul

Attachment to e-mail 'Response to EFO demands', 31 May 2023

1 Cut all Ties with the Fossil Fuel Industry

1.1 Do not accept any funding from the fossil fuel industry.

1.2 Do not start new research projects with the fossil fuel industry.

1.3 Stop all research projects by 2025 that either work with, or help the fossil fuel industry.

Both inside and outside the university, there is more and more discussion on collaborations with fossil companies. As Utrecht University, we have organized two so-called 'deep democracy' sessions to get the perspectives within our

community the table. All students and employees were able to sign up for these sessions. Furthermore we reached out to different stakeholders like the Utrecht Young Academy, scientists who currently have collaborations with the fossil industry, and organizations like Scientists4Future, XR Utrecht, and yourself. The perspectives collected during these sessions will be used to draw up a clear assessment framework for future decision-making on cooperations with the fossil industry. This framework is not limited to research collaborations. It will be applicable to a wider range of activities, like career activities organized by Utrecht University.

We will continue to follow the democratic process that we have set out around these questions. The aim is to have a draft framework ready before 1 August 2023. Subsequently, the Executive Board and the Employee and student representation – who participate in the policy-making process on behalf of all students and employees - will take this framework into account in policy and decision making.

We want to thank those of you who joined the session again for their valuable input.

1.4 Do not promote the fossil fuel industry through career days, excursions, guest lectures/research, or other recruitment activities.

Currently we don't have a policy for the organization of career activities. However, for the last four years, no fossil companies have been part of career days organized by Utrecht University. Student associations also organize career activities (like excursions and guest lectures) and it is possible that they do invite fossil companies. The framework that we are working on will give guidelines for activities organized by UU. We will ask study associations to consider our framework when organizing their own activities.

1.5 Do not employ people that are simultaneously involved, either financially or intellectually, with the fossil fuel industry.

Whilst we have various research collaborations with fossil fuel companies – an overview of which has been published on May 31st on <https://www.uu.nl/en/research/research-at-utrecht-university/transparency-research-collaboration-fossil-industry> - we have no Professorships sponsored by fossil fuel companies at Utrecht University.

1.6 Establish a democratic student/staff commission that creates a moral framework to evaluate all collaborations with industry partners.

This is precisely what we are doing in our efforts described in the answer to demand 1. Students and staff joined the deep democracy sessions to provide input for this framework.

In general, it's very important for us to hear the voices of students and employees. Co-determination (medezeggenschap) is even guaranteed by Dutch law. Therefore they are represented in – amongst others - the elected University Council that meets with the board regularly about all sorts of topics within Utrecht University. They provide solicited and unsolicited advice on our policies. And often, their initiatives are implemented. For example: the new action plan for social safety, the all gender toilets in our buildings and the Utrecht University tree fund. For more information on how our Employee and student representation works, please see <https://www.uu.nl/en/organization/governance-and-organization/employee-and-student-representation>.

2 Be transparent

2.1 Be transparent on all partners and finance flows into the university.

Universities in the Netherlands are given three tasks by the government: education, research and valorization. By 'valorization' we mean bringing science back to society and making sure scientific knowledge is implemented in for example government policy and business operations. Therefore it's crucial to also collaborate with organizations outside the university.

We understand the call for more transparency around collaborations with partners. In regards to collaborations with the fossil industry, we have mapped all research collaborations. This information is now available at <https://www.uu.nl/en/research/research-at-utrecht-university/transparency-research-collaboration-fossil-industry>. Our spokespersons are happy to walk you through the available information in a phone call or meeting in case you have any questions.

2.2 Be transparent on your climate impact and reporting.

Utrecht University sees climate impact in business operations more broadly than only reducing emissions. With goals aimed at reducing direct and indirect emissions, restoring biodiversity on site and steps towards a circular campus, the climate impact is minimized. This is a roadmap plan which will continuously adapt and be sharpened so that we can always identify new opportunities for sustainability. The head of our Sustainability Office who you have already met, can provide more information on this.

Utrecht University has committed itself to reporting in accordance with European legislation for non-financial reporting, the so-called Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive as of 2026. We are gradually working towards this extensive reporting method, with a double materiality analysis as the first step this year. See: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organization/sustainable-uu/operations/co2-footprint>.

2.3 Integrate sustainability and environmental justice in all curricula/faculty programs and establish a mandatory course on the climate crisis that is truly interdisciplinary. By specialized groups in each faculty that develop a faculty-specific plan. Integrating the SDGs is far from enough!

The theme of sustainability is becoming increasingly important in education. Think for example of the interweaving of a sustainability perspective and setting up innovative projects. We approach sustainability from all different disciplines.

However, at Utrecht University we don't have mandatory courses for all students. Most importantly because we want students to have the freedom to choose which skills they want to develop. Another reason is the fact that there are more topics Utrecht University considers as important and might then ask for a mandatory course for all students; for example the topic of consent and inappropriate behavior.

UU-students who are interested in doing more with sustainability in their education, can easily put together a course package with sustainability as its theme by using the course planner : <https://cursusplanner.uu.nl/>. The possibility to easily select courses on sustainability in the course planner is rather new. Before, students were not offered an overview, but had to search for the different courses themselves.

2.4 Declare the climate and ecological emergency with a call for climate justice - Include this in your 'mission and vision'.

Previously, Utrecht University has deliberately chosen not to use the word "climate emergency". However, we see that this has raised questions about the position of Utrecht University on the climate crisis. The fact that we did not use this particular word has unintentionally given the impression that we do not consider climate change to be of great urgency or importance. However, this is a misconception. On the contrary, we endorse that there is urgency and a climate crisis. Our researchers have also been sounding the alarm about this for a long time. That is why our university's anniversary (Dies Natalis) in March was dedicated to the climate crisis. Sustainability and the energy transition are therefore woven into our teaching, research and business operations.

As a result of our conversations with you between May 8-10, we realized that so far, we might have approached the word "climate emergency" too legally. Utrecht University itself is not in a state of emergency. But we see that in response to climate problems, there really is an emergency in some parts of the world. We have therefore chosen to use the term "climate emergency" in our communications from now on, in order to make Utrecht University's position on climate change even more explicit. By doing so, we aim to match the words commonly used in society.

Since the last time we spoke we have updated our page about the climate crisis and added the climate emergency on it. See: <https://www.uu.nl/en/research/climate-crisis>.

2.5 Take responsibility as a public educational institution to hold the governments accountable on their climate commitments.

At Utrecht University we stress the importance of sharing scientific knowledge with a larger audience via public engagement, and we support researchers doing so. We regularly have researchers advising the government on a variety of topics. And we think this is precisely our role in the public debate. Although some researchers on an individual level might be activists. As an institute, we are hesitant to do so, in order to prevent that 'science becomes just another opinion' in the public debate. Also because we already see that science is often already considered just another opinion.

2.6 Clarify and democratize Utrecht University's 'Strategic Plan 2025 subsection sustainability' by being specific, tangible, and time-bound. - Include cutting ties with the fossil industry.

The Strategic Plan 2025 was developed with the help of numerous staff members, students, members of our employee and student representation bodies and various partners. Their input was crucial: after all, we're all responsible for building our university's future together. There were for example opportunities to provide feedback to a draft version of the strategic plan. You can read more about this process here: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organization/strategic-plan-2025/how-was-the-plan-developed>.

We give substance to the strategic plan through policy documents that are always discussed democratically with the University Council. In this way we also retain the necessary leeway to respond to current affairs. So we are not limited by what is in the plan, or not. Therefore there is no need to add something retroactively to the text written in 2020.

Our road map on our sustainability strategy for our business operations, is currently being developed by our Sustainability Office. In that plan actions are specific, tangible and time-bound. Furthermore Utrecht University has committed to comply with the new European legislation on sustainability reporting: [the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive](#). In line with the legislation, UU will be fully in compliance with this legislation in 2026. Part of this is the disclosure of how the interests and views of stakeholders, like yourself, are taken into account by our sustainability strategy and operations. In 2023 we will publish the process in which we will take the interest and views of all our stakeholders in account, and how we will organize engagement. We will be transparent on how we have amended or expect to amend our sustainability strategy and operations, to address the interest and views of our stakeholders by publishing this in our annual report.

2.7 Increase the access and availability of free climate education for the public in forms of lectures, access to university resources, materials, library spaces, etc.

We agree it's important to share our knowledge on sustainability with the general public. Our communications department therefore recently made the page uu.nl/climate-crisis. On this page we highlight research, researchers, events and news articles. It's a great idea to also share links to public lectures like our Massive Open Online Course <https://www.coursera.org/learn/solutions-future-food-problem> or the lectures organized by Studium Generale Studium Generale (our public platform for knowledge & reflection). See for example the thematic content on <https://www.sg.uu.nl/themas/duurzaam-doen> (in Dutch), and for English, see all content on <https://www.sg.uu.nl/en> under the topic 'Sustainability'.

2.8 Educate and integrate a climate justice approach to research and teaching: acknowledge the university's position in the Global North, and commit to a post-extractivist research ethics.

In our answer to demand 2.3, you can see how we integrate the climate crisis in our teaching.

In the process towards the assessment framework for collaborations (see answer to demand 1), we think about ways in which we can reach a future that is no longer built on fossil fuels.

2.9 Decolonize the university: be transparent on its colonial history, decolonize curricula and staff body, commit to more decolonial research. Take inspiration from here.

In 2021, a study into the slavery past of the city of Utrecht was published. The study shows that Utrecht University also has ties to slavery. We want to acknowledge that we have directly and indirectly profited from colonial slavery. We have to establish that we do not know everything about our own role. This part of our history is underexposed. Utrecht University wants to acknowledge this and take responsibility, it wants to account for the past, in line with an advisory report written by a committee of experts in February 2022. All faculties have been asked to follow up on this report. For more information on each faculty's efforts, please see <https://www.uu.nl/en/organization/about-us/tradition-and-history/traces-of-slavery>

Regarding the curricula: it's a priority of Utrecht University to promote diversity and inclusiveness among students in order to create a safe and inspiring learning environment. To realize this ambition, an analysis of the curricula of our bachelor and master programs with respect to diversity and inclusion issues is necessary. A curriculum reflection tool that will prompt teachers and coordinators to reevaluate several aspects of a course has been developed. In turn, to help resolve any issues identified through the curriculum reflection tool, a toolbox containing tips to make curriculum and learning environment more inclusive has been made available. The next step is to develop a plan to support teachers in this process of creating an inclusive curriculum and inform our

community about the plans and results. For more information, please see <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/inclusive-curriculum-and-learning-environment> and <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/inclusive-curriculum-and-learning-environment/newsmedia>.

Attention to inclusion in research is identified as an action item by the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Steering Committee and requires further elaboration and planning.

3 Make the university accessible

3.1 Take the university an inclusive space accessible for everybody. Provide adequate support for neurodivergent students, listen to the struggles of marginalized groups and act on them. We want people to feel safe and at home within the university. Extra support for neurodivergent students – and for students with for example chronic illness or a physical impairment - is important and besides support from study advisors, there is also the possibility at Utrecht University to get in touch with a student buddy via the platform Studying without limitations, who can think along and provide support where necessary.

In addition to the platform Studying without limitations, there are several diversity networks for students and employees aimed at diverse groups at the university. These networks are supported by a network coordinator: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organization/equality-diversity-inclusion/network> There is an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Steering Committee, consisting of students and employees from all faculties and the administrative department, which draws up a strategic plan around these topics, monitors developments and provides solicited and unsolicited advice to the Executive Board. If you have any concrete suggestions on how we can improve our support in this area, this steering committee would be happy to hear them via <https://www.uu.nl/en/organization/equality-diversity-inclusion/contact>.

Properly address complaints by researchers, students and employees, including answering to previous filed complaints, as this is the only way to create a safe work environment where people can grow and learn.

We have procedures in place for students and staff to be able to talk to various confidential advisors and for (support with) filing a complaint. More info can be found here: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organization/talk-in-confidence-report-or-file-a-complaint/selection-guide/talking-to-someone-about-inappropriate-behaviour>

Social safety requires our constant attention. At Utrecht University we are committed to the social safety of our students and staff. Active Bystander training sessions are regularly organized for staff and students to enable them to take action as witnesses. Regulations have also been adapted recently and, for example, the new Committee for Interpersonal Integrity has been set up. In addition to the ombudspersons for staff, an ombudsperson for students is also planned. Last year, for example, a theatre performance called 'Mindlab' was organized to raise awareness of the subject among employees.

Again, if you have any concrete suggestions on how we can improve our support in this area, we would be happy to hear them.

3.2 Involve staff and students in democratic decision-making, through the introduction of a student/staff assembly which holds real decision-making power.

It's important for the board of Utrecht University to know what's going on amongst students and employees, and involve them in decision making. Therefore there are [different employee and student representations](#) at different levels of the organization. We consider this of vital importance to the performance of the university. We have – amongst others – a University Council, a Faculty Council at every faculty and a Labour Representation Board. Utrecht University is also one of the few Dutch universities with a so called student assessor in the Executive Board. This is a UU-student that is part of the Executive Board and advocates for students in meetings. All students and/or employees are electable for these positions, or in the case of the student assessor: can apply for the job. On top of that we often consult students and employees on topics. The Deep Democracy session on the collaboration with the fossil industry is a new way in which we try to involve opinions of our community in decision making.

For more info on how employees and students participate in the policy-making process and advise the various administrative bodies in each organizational layer of Utrecht University, please see <https://students.uu.nl/en/student-life/student-government-and-participation>.

3.3 End precarization of university staff: end zero-hour, non-permanent, and casual contracts.

Being a good employer is important to us. Since several years, we have been working with a new approach, in which we offer lecturers on temporary contracts security for a longer period and space to develop and prepare for their further career. This already resulted in the fact that the amount of non-permanent contracts was reduced to 15,1 percent at UU. Early in 2022, we have dedicated extra money to lower the workload and offer more permanent contracts to our employees. The total amount is 50 million euros, spread over six years. And just before the Summer of 2022, the Ministry has also signed an agreement to allocate extra funds to more permanent contracts.

3.4 Offer affordable and ethical food choices: plant-based by default, localized, seasonal and organic.

We are continuously working on making our catering more sustainable. Wishes and demands for sustainability are included in the contracts for catering. More specific, before Summer 2023, we will start converting a number of coffee machines to oat milk, in response to a petition by the Vegan Student Association Utrecht (VSA). The goal is that in the course of Summer, 25% of the coffee machines will offer oat milk. For more info on the initiatives that have already

been implemented, see <https://www.uu.nl/en/organization/sustainable-uu/operations/catering>.

3.5 Demand an end to student dept from the government.

3.6 Demand free transportation for international students and staff from the government.

The fulfillment of these demands fall under the responsibility of the Dutch government, and are therefore beyond the jurisdiction of our organization.

3.7 Provide support and documentation for international students to access services that are within their right as a resident of the Netherlands.

It is not clear to us which specific services you are referring to in this demand.

In general, Utrecht University students have the right to access to various services, and we support our international students in many ways. See for example <https://students.uu.nl/en/homepage/practical-information/international-students> and <https://students.uu.nl/en/guidance-and-development/who-to-contact>. Unfortunately not everything is within our reach, see for example the answer to demand 3.8.

3.8 Ensure access to affordable housing for all students.

Utrecht is a city with a large housing shortage. This is a problem for many groups in Utrecht, including students. We are aware of the sometimes distressing situations this can create. And we invest a lot of energy into improving the housing options for our students.

Within the student community, the situation is most difficult for internationals who have just arrived in the Netherlands, as they have no home base to fall back on, and do not yet have a local network. We do everything we can for this group: we provide information, practical support in finding a room, and reserve rooms with housing providers. But in general, we will not be able to solve the housing shortage in the short term. Therefore we also focus on providing information about this topic early on in the study-choice process, so that people are not taken by surprise by the situation.