

The University of Tomorrow

Green Paper of Leiden University Green Office (full version)



Universiteit
Leiden



Leiden University
Green Office

Bij ons leer je de wereld kennen

A. Introduction

Universities play an important role in society as they develop knowledge, share it with new generations, and like to see such knowledge put to good use. In this way, the university has a great deal of influence on what society looks like.

At the same time, the society in which the university is working is changing rapidly. We are facing humanity's greatest challenges: the climate crisis, the loss of many animal and plant species, and large-scale landscape destruction. Universities, including Leiden University, have played an important role in discovering these crises. Through their research, we know the urgency of these challenges and what it will take to solve them. It is important that action is taken now.

Leiden University can see this challenge as a great opportunity: the university can develop innovations and knowledge on sustainability, teach its students about sustainability themes and solutions, and ensure that scientific insights in the field of sustainability make a difference outside the University. In addition, the university itself can set a good example by drastically reducing its ecological footprint.

In this Green Paper, Leiden University Green Office (LUGO) describes how sustainable doing, thinking, research and studying will have a place within Leiden University by 2030. In the past, there has been a focus on making the university's business operations more sustainable. Although these are meaningful steps, the university should in the first place make its core tasks more sustainable: education, research, and valorisation (impact). After all, a sustainable university is not synonymous with sustainable business operations.

B. Education

The need for sustainability

Real climate action requires the transformation of our society, including the economy. This challenge requires a major transition in the education sector. After all, the transition to a sustainable world requires highly educated people who understand sustainability issues, can devise solutions, and implement these. We need not only environmental scientists, but also legal experts who can write new environmental law, economists and government experts who can write effective policies and psychologists who can design behavioural interventions that stimulate sustainable behaviour. These are just examples: every discipline has a link to sustainability.

The university educates citizens of the Netherlands and abroad. Many of them are the leaders, businessmen, politicians, and experts of tomorrow. In their lives and work, they will have to be aware of the challenges and urgency of sustainability dilemmas. That is why it is crucial that all students have sustainability included in their curriculum. Students need to gain the knowledge and experience that links their subject of study to the theme of sustainability.

Education with impact

Students will be involved in greening the university and giving advice to external organisations on sustainability themes from their studies, for example in class or for a capstone project. Besides the fact that this can have a positive environmental impact, it is good practice for students. They can build up a network and gain experience with skills that are becoming increasingly important on the labour market. It is a win-win situation as the university or a partner organization receives advice at low cost and students can use their talent to make a difference.

Assisting and recruiting teachers

Academic teachers will not always be familiar with the academic view of sustainability from their own discipline(s). For this reason, teachers will be offered support in the form of a network and by making training available. This goal was already included in the previous

Environmental Policy Plan 2016-2020, but unfortunately it has never been implemented. It will also be possible to recruit new teachers who can combine experience in the field of sustainability with other academic disciplines.

Expanding available education on sustainability

The university can encourage students to choose sustainability-related subjects in their elective space. The range of electives, minors, bachelors and masters with sustainability as a subject in the elective space will also be expanded and promoted to students. Online education will also be used as a means. People from all over the world can be taught online about subjects related to sustainability, similar to what other universities do.

Students are stimulated to do their internship, if applicable, at a sustainable company or organisation.

Sustainable educational materials

The university should be committed to the reuse of educational resources and e-books, in order to prevent the unnecessary purchase of goods. For example, the university can stimulate the passing on of second-hand study materials, in order to reduce paper waste.

Education for sustainability in a bastion of freedom

The best approach to integrate sustainability into the university's curricula differs per faculty, programme, section, and subject. For example, while some studies would benefit from a separate core subject on this topic, for others it would be more appropriate to make it a recurring theme in different subjects. Ambitious studies may even consider both options. Education for sustainability is tailor-made: lecturers, management, and co-participation together determine the best approach for integrating sustainability into the curricula on a decentralised basis. This approach fits the University's motto: Praesidium Libertatis - Bastion of Freedom. These processes are stimulated and assisted at faculty and central level.

C. Research

Scientific research has enabled us to understand the climate crisis and other ecological problems. Developing knowledge about sustainability issues is not only crucial to understand the crises, but also to formulate solutions. In addition to the environmental sciences, it is also important to conduct research into sustainability themes by other scientific fields. The findings can serve as a basis for improving education.

Financing

The university may choose to focus its first flow of funds more on research into sustainability issues. In addition, sustainability research offers an opportunity to secure and/or increase the second and third flow of funds. After all, a large part of this income is project-related grants that depend on the social relevance of the research, such as grants from KNAW, NWO, and Horizon 2020.

D. Impact (valorisation)

The university is a house of knowledge. Knowledge is powerful in tackling the climate crisis, but only if this knowledge is used accordingly. Unfortunately, academic language is often inaccessible to people without an academic background. For example, it may not be written in their native language, the resources are pricey to access, the level of language use is too difficult to understand, or the resources are difficult to find. That is why the university should make a commitment to disseminate sustainability knowledge in an accessible way.

Offering knowledge

The university will actively provide expertise and direction in making society more sustainable. Scientific research will be drawn up in simple language - and in several languages - and presented free of charge to decision-makers in governments, industry, and NGOs. This information can also be viewed free of charge on the university's website. This is preferably done in the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus context.

Public debate

The university plays an active role in the (inter)national public debate on climate - where the conclusions of science are unfortunately sometimes still denied. Members of the university community explain sustainability themes in understandable, clear language, and above all offer perspectives for solutions.

In order to strengthen its message, the university declares a climate crisis. In doing so, the university joins the more than 200 institutions of higher education worldwide that have already done so in a UN context.

Stimulate making an impact

Valorisation of sustainability knowledge is just as full-fledged work as education and research. Employees will therefore be supported, also financially, to disseminate their knowledge and skills about sustainability in society. Making an impact with sustainability research will be institutionalised.

Innovation

The University creates the innovations needed for a sustainable future. For example, the Centre for Innovation is already working on expanding teleconferencing. Such techniques bring educational progress, but also have a big potential in reducing CO2 emissions from transport. The development and testing of such innovations at the university will be stimulated.

E. Operations

A university should act according to scientific insight. The university can show that it takes science seriously by making its business operations considerably more sustainable. This gives the university credibility, and makes it act as a role model in society.

The university can be proud of the great progress that has been made on this theme. By now the entire fleet is electric, there is a Join the Pipe tapping point in almost every building, and almost no beef is sold in the PURE restaurants and cafés. It shows that the university shows decisiveness and can take people with it in its reforms. Leiden University now ranks seventh in the Green Metric: the worldwide ranking of sustainable universities. This is mainly due to its sustainable business operations.

There is a great desire within the university to make business operations more sustainable. LUGO has noticed this through its collaboration with the University Services Department (UFB), the ICT Shared Service Centre, and the Real Estate Directorate (Vastgoed).

However, there are also many opportunities to make the University's business operations more sustainable. In 2030, the university should operate climate-neutral and fully circular.

Transport

Transport is one of the biggest sources of pollution at the University. International destinations that are served by Leiden University and that can be reached by train or bus will not be flown to. Students will be reimbursed for travelling to and back from their exchange if they travel by public transport, just like at Utrecht University.

Air traffic will be reduced. Air travel is only carried out when more sustainable transport options are not an option and where physical presence has a clear added value compared to attending the event digitally. Digital event attendance will be promoted.

The university stimulates students and staff to travel to the university using sustainable means of transport. The university can do this by changing travel reimbursements. Moreover, university car parks can be phased out.

Catering

In 2026 the university will only serve plant-based food in cafes and restaurants. The catering at events is also completely plant-based. Students and staff will drink from their own mug or a borrowed cup. Even now major steps should be taken, for example by starting to sell vegetarian food only from now on.

Energy

All buildings in which the university is located will be preserved as much as possible, including the rental buildings. All light bulbs will be replaced by more sustainable alternatives by the end of 2020. By means of smart technology, lighting, heating and appliances in all buildings will be switched on and off automatically. Wherever possible, roofs will be used optimally to generate heat or electricity.

Ecology

The university will work for local biodiversity with its land and roofs that are not used for energy generation. Here a natural system of plants for insects and edible perennials will be used. The harvest of these plants will be used in catering, cafes, and restaurants, as proof of concept. The lands and roofs of the university form a network of urban nature together with the urban greenery in Leiden and The Hague.

Sustainable investment

The university will ensure that its financial reserves are invested in such a way that they have a positive impact on the environment. The university's house bank should handle its funds ethically.

Procurement and tendering

Sustainability will be central to all of the university's tenders. In this way, the university not only makes itself sustainable, but also encourages potential partners to think about sustainability within their own business operations. For example, the ISSC recently submitted a request to Cisco, a network equipment manufacturer, for a higher energy efficiency of their network equipment. This can also make network equipment outside Leiden University more energy efficient.

Also small-scale purchases of the universities ought to happen sustainably. Sustainability becomes a requirement in the procurement rules for amounts of up to €5000 by office managers. Additionally, the university should stop ordering the production of promotional goods with a high environmental impact, such as cotton bags.

F. Implementation

Ambition

The university aspires to be the most sustainable university in the world in education, research, valorisation, and its operations by 2030. To achieve this, it is important that sustainability in education, research, impact, and operations is included as the highest ambition in the institutional plan, and therefore also its communication strategy.

Communication

Making the university sustainable is an inclusive process. That is why the university should communicate its plans clearly to students, staff, and externals to take them along and enthuse them about the transition. The university also asks them for suggestions and feedback.

Budget

There will be sufficient budget available for making this transition. For this purpose, the university uses part of its reserves, can borrow it, or can claim subsidies.

Organizational units will have their own sustainability coordinator, where relevant. Care is taken to ensure that making the University more sustainable in all its facets does not lead to an increase in the workload of staff.

Collaboration

The university is working with external partners to make this transition as effective as possible. Universities ought not to compete on sustainability, but join forces to make the transition as effective and efficient as possible.

G. Final words

The university knows many people: students, academics, and support staff, who are enthusiastic about this subject and are eager to get down to work to make the university more sustainable. With more than 30,000 students and 7,000 employees, Leiden University's contribution to a sustainable future can be very powerful.

“[S]cience on its own can give no reason for sustaining humankind. It can, with equal rigor, create the knowledge that will cause our demise or that necessary to live at peace with each other and nature.” - David Orr

Colophon

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The Leiden University Green Office (LUGO) is the independent sustainability department of Leiden University. As part of the Administration and Central Services, student-employees are committed to greening the university in the areas of education, research, and business operations. Additionally, LUGO involves students and staff in activities about sustainability.

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