

# STRATEGY 2020 - 2023

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## INTRODUCTION

Since our establishment in 1999, the Student Union has grown considerably. We have not only grown in organisation size, but also in the responsibilities we have been mandated by the University of Twente (UT). To strengthen the substantial role we have at the UT and to increase the value of the Student Union for UT students, we present our new strategy for the coming four years.

This strategy, the Strategic Plan, is made every four years and gives directions for the future. It is a multi-year policy plan that forms the basis for our annual plans and with that for all the activities of the Student Union. Based on societal trends, input from many stakeholders and our own experiences as Student Union we have created this new edition, which sets the goals for 2020-2023.

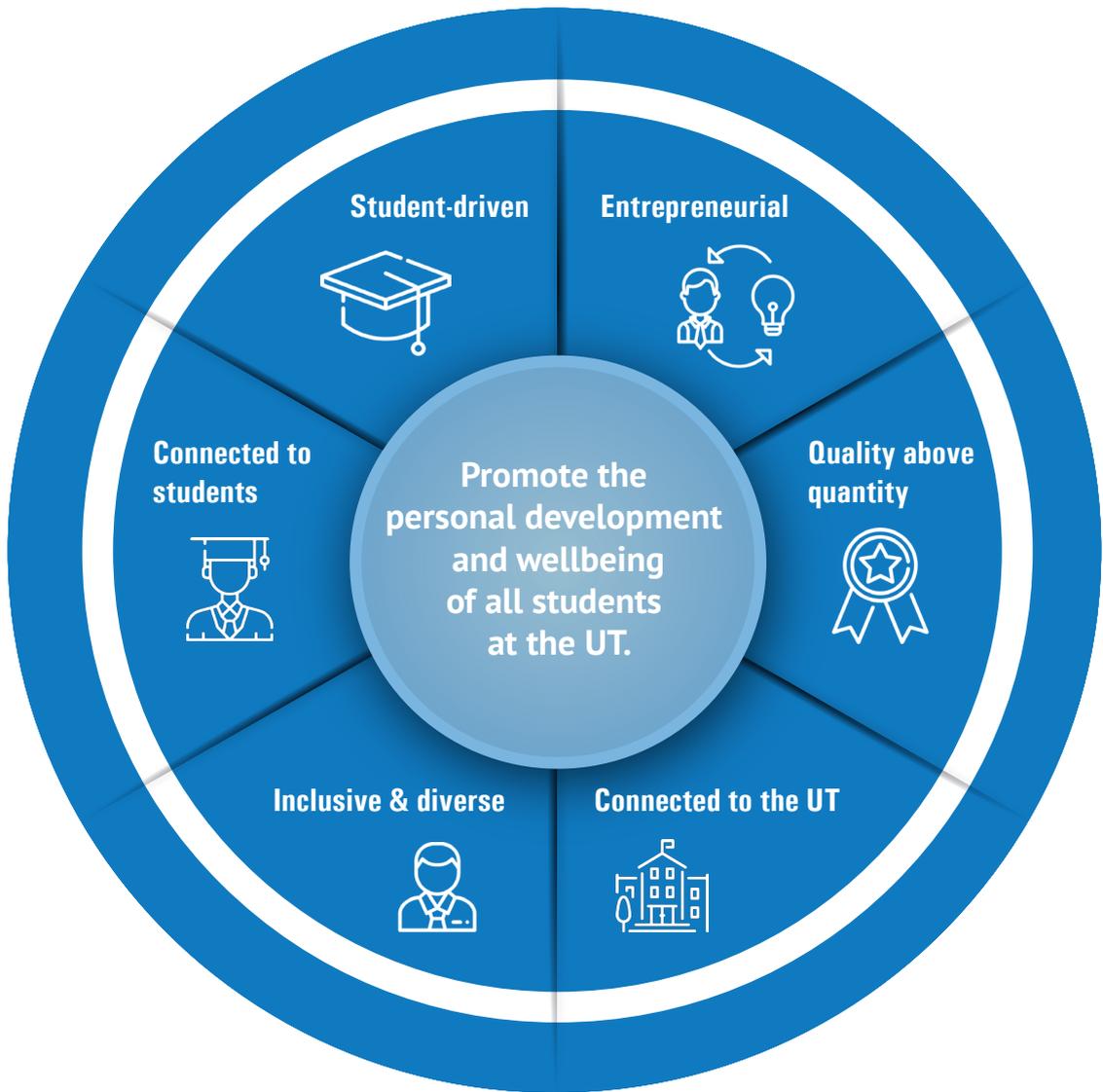
We start this strategy with a brief introduction to our organisation, followed by the trends in the student population that we observe in research, conversations with our many stakeholders and our own experiences. Having introduced our organisation and the societal context, we briefly elaborate on the structure of this strategy. This is followed by our five main aims for the coming years, each with its own goals and indicators that set the direction for the coming years. Last, *appendix A* provides context on our current organisational structure.

## OUR MISSION AND CORE VALUES

As Student Union we have the mission to **promote the personal development and wellbeing of all students at the UT**. This mission forms the basis of everything we do as Student Union and is surrounded by our core values:

- **Student-driven:** Students fuel our organisation and are the main part of our organisation;
- **Entrepreneurial:** We are constantly looking for new opportunities and set up or stimulate new initiatives that support our mission;
- **Quality above quantity:** We aim to deliver high quality products and services;
- **Connected to students:** We involve students and student organisations in our mission and are easy to approach;
- **Inclusive & diverse:** We stand for a diverse organisation and student life in which everyone can participate, regardless of their conditions;
- **Connected to the UT:** We cooperate with the UT whenever we can to fulfil our mission and reach our goals.

We build up our strategic plan from our mission and core values. Our main themes and focus points are derived from this.



# CONTEXT

In order to understand the context of this strategy, we use this section to explain four important observations and trends that impact students and student organisations.

## The influx of students is larger and more international than ever before

The size of the student population at the UT has increased significantly in the past years. Between 2016 and 2018 alone, the amount of students at the UT increased with over 12,0%, which is significantly faster than the Dutch average of 7.3%.

This student population is not only larger, it is also significantly more international. Since many bachelor programs switched to English in 2016, international students roughly make up a stable one third of all incoming bachelor students. Altogether, three out of ten students at the UT are now international.

## The financial pressure on students has increased

The introduction of student loans for Dutch students and also the increase in Dutch VAT from 6% to 9% has its impact on the financial position of students. As a result, 68% of all Dutch students have a job besides their study to make ends meet and 52% avoids social or extracurricular activities due to their personal finances. Additionally, the amount of students that live in student housing has decreased with over 30%.

## The labour market demands more from graduates

Although the financial pressure has made it harder for students to find time to be involved in extracurricular activities, the demands of the labour market has increased as well. Next to acquiring knowledge, employers require their employees to have more than a degree and employers may already expect a well-filled CV of graduates.

Integrating these extracurricular activities into the existing education programmes may be the only way to meet this demand without increasing the pressure on students even further. This way, Bildung and competence acquisition can form a more central part of education without weakening the transfer of knowledge.

## Students' mental wellbeing is under pressure

Students face an increased pressure to perform. The financial pressure, the increased demands of the labour market and increased self-expectations are only several reasons that cause this. As a result, students have an increased risk of a burn-out and over two third of all students indicates they often experience the pressure to perform. The need for professional help also grows, leading to increased queues at university psychologists.

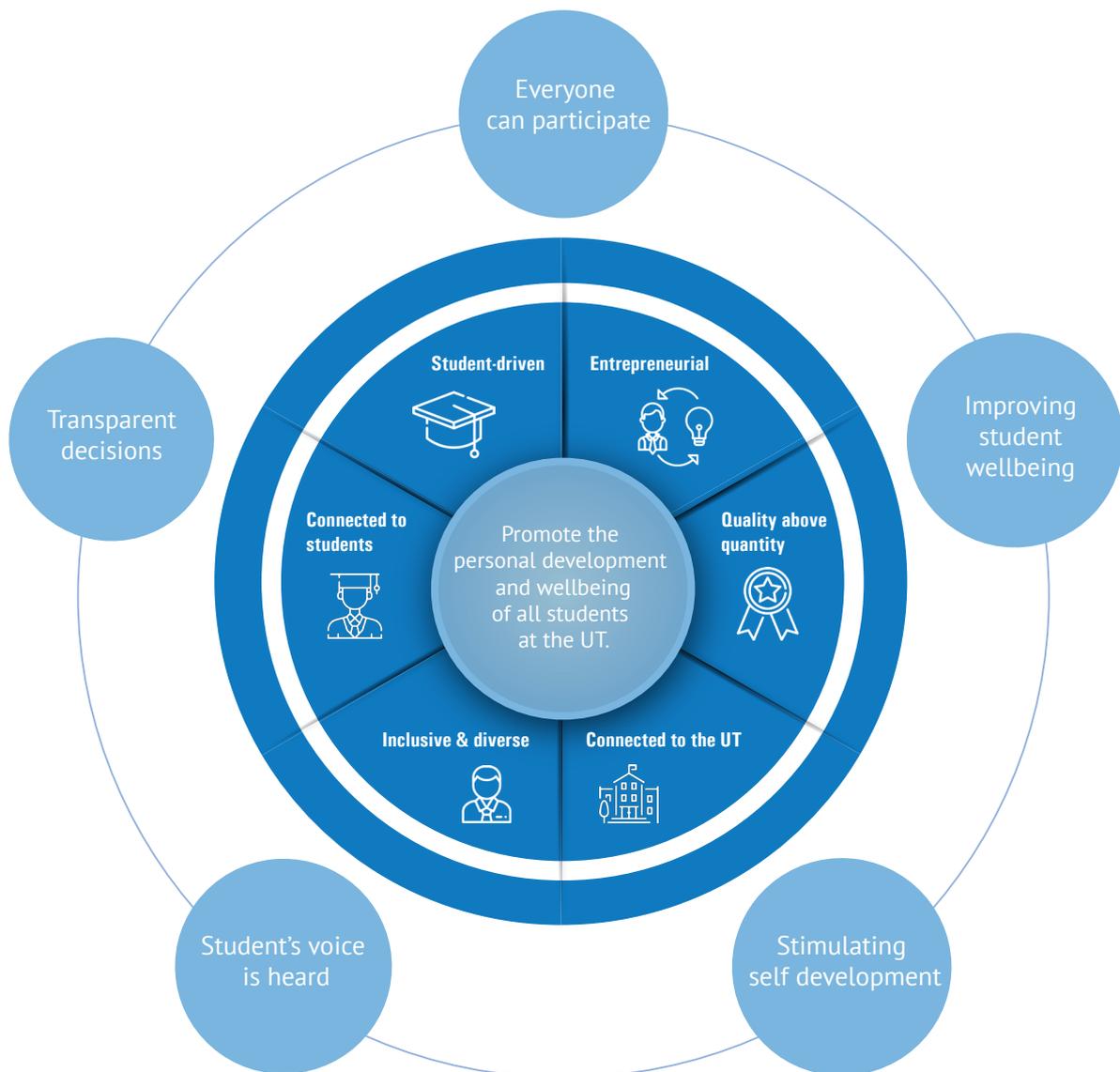
The Dutch Council for Public Health and Society (RVS) concluded in her essay "Over Bezorgd" that students not only put pressure on themselves, but that educational policy also impacts the pressure on students. The 0 or 15 ECTS regulations within the Twente Educational Model (TEM) or the Binding Study Advice (BSA) can be considered to be an example of such policy.

According to a report of the Committee for Personal Circumstances (CPO) at the UT, international students are even more vulnerable to mental health issues as they have more difficulties integrating into their new environment. In addition, internationals can face cultural differences with professional help.

# STRUCTURE & OVERVIEW

Following our mission and core values, we defined five key aims that will have our focus for the coming years:

- Everyone can participate in student life;
- We aid in improving student wellbeing;
- Students are stimulated to develop themselves;
- The voice of students is heard;
- We make substantiated and transparent decisions.



For each key aim we formulate multiple focus points, that give a concrete direction for what we want to achieve in the coming for years. At the same time, these focus points leave sufficient freedom for their implementation.

Each focus point is provided with a clear goal and one or more measurable indicators. The goal sets a clear point on the horizon, while the indicator give insight in future progress. Altogether, this structure creates a clear guide for future plans and reports.

## 1. EVERYONE CAN PARTICIPATE IN STUDENT LIFE

### We help students and student organisations to find each other

Whether it is due to developments in national politics and society or due to developments at an institutional level, student life and the needs of students are changing. Amongst others, students want to study faster, are more career-focused and a significant proportion of the new students no longer has a Dutch background. These changed needs might call for changes among student organisations, but can also make it difficult for new students to find organisations that fit their needs.

We see it as our responsibility to help both students and student organizations to find each other. On the one hand by showing students what they can do in the diverse network of student organisations and on the other by helping our affiliated organizations to adapt to the changed needs of students. In the coming years we will therefore aim to bring the needs of students and student organisations together.

#### Goal

Help student organisations to adapt to the changing needs of students and help students to find the organisations that fits their needs.

#### Indicators

- Annually, we publish a document on the trends within the student life and student population to our affiliated organisations;
- We reach more students with information about how and which student organisations could fit their needs each year.

### Everyone gets introduced to their living environment

The changing student population with changing needs also brings challenges for the introduction of students to their living environments. For most international students for example, a week is not long enough to properly let them get used to their new living environment. Furthermore, the diverse needs of students calls for a more diverse introduction week that is both inclusive as accessible.

As Student Union, we will focus the coming year on adapting the introduction program to fit all of our students. We realize that nine days is not enough and will therefore focus on creating one integrated introduction programme that spans multiple months or even the entire first year. In this introduction programme, we will include the Kick-In and other programmes to make sure all of our students can get introduced, regardless of their conditions. Next to this, we will focus on making the introduction programme more inclusive and accessible by intensively evaluating each year.

#### Goal

Create a longer and integrated introduction programme where all students are integrated in their living environment, regardless of their conditions.

#### Indicators

- In 2023, we have included the Kick-In, Buddy, Member for a day and other relevant initiatives into one integrated introduction programme;
- We annually evaluate and improve the entire introduction programme on a practical, tactical and strategic level, with a special focus on inclusiveness and accessibility.

## 2. WE AID IN IMPROVING STUDENT WELLBEING

### We aid in improving mental wellbeing

The pressure on students has increased considerably in recent years, as research shows: Students have more complaints about stress and have an increased risk of a burnout. International students face a pressure that is potentially extra high, considering that they often also have more difficulty to getting used in their new living environment. An additional challenge for internationals is the cultural differences in social life, which can also hamper professional counselling.

As Student Union we will therefore make serious work of aiding in the improvement of mental wellbeing of all students, with a special focus on international students. We will intensively collaborate with the UT to make sure accessible professional help is available and is being found. In addition, we will build a network of assistance together with our affiliated organisations that can offer help in an early stage. To streamline this we will also work closely together with national student organisations like ISO and LSVb.

### Goal

Aid in improving the mental wellbeing of students at the UT, with a special focus on our international students.

### Indicators

- In 2023, we will have one or more people that are trained to help students at a basic level with mental problems and refer to the right (professional) help at 80% of our affiliated associations;
- We annually consult with the involved UT service departments on how we can (further) improve the mental wellbeing of students and to make sure that the facilities and services are fully accessible for internationals;
- We annually consult with national student organisations to obtain advice and information on the mental wellbeing of students.

### Students participate in sports & culture

Sports and culture are crucial items in the personal development of students. We believe that all students that want to should be able practice sports and culture with pleasure during their entire time as a student, both for the mental as physical wellbeing of our students. As Student Union we consider it therefore highly important that there is sufficient opportunity for every student to participate in sports and culture. Although the UT currently has good facilities, the number of participants has grown faster in recent years than the capacity of accommodations and the available budget. In addition, the accessibility and inclusiveness of the sector could be improved.

We wrote a new vision on sports and the coming years we will focus on ensuring that sports and culture are (financially) stable sectors. This includes that we also strive for an expansion of the current facilities and budget, to safeguard the accessibility of sports & culture. In addition, we want to further promote the visibility of the culture sector, to let students discover this relatively small sector.

### Goal

Every student can participate with pleasure and satisfaction in inclusive and accessible sports and culture.

### Indicators

- We will ensure a (financially) stable sports and culture sector;
- We will promote the sector culture, so that the fraction of students that participates in culture increases.

### 3. STUDENTS ARE STIMULATED TO DEVELOP THEMSELVES

#### Students discover entrepreneurship and develop an entrepreneurial mindset

The University of Twente is not only known as most entrepreneurial university of the Netherlands, we also have a particularly entrepreneurial student culture. As Student Union, we consider it important that people come into contact with entrepreneurship during their student days. Starting a business not only provides students with potential spin-offs, but also many with skills that cannot easily be learned in regular education.

In the coming years, we therefore want to increase the fraction of students who come into contact with entrepreneurship. We will achieve this through our strategic cooperation with Novel-T, including a new start-up hub on the second floor of the Bastille.

#### Goal

Increase the fraction of students that get into contact with entrepreneurship to further increase the personal and professional development of students.

#### Indicator

- The number of students who come into contact with entrepreneurship via our cooperation with Novel-T will increase every year.

#### Students receive appreciation and recognition for their activities

We believe students deserve appreciation and recognition for their activities outside of the curriculum. Where appreciation makes being active more appealing and pleasurable, a (formal) recognition can also prove the value of extracurricular activities to future employers. In particular in an international working environment, formal recognition of student activities can provide huge benefits. Employers are also looking for students with more than a degree!

The coming years, we will put an extra focus on the appreciation and (formal) recognition of extracurricular student activities. We will focus to further promote the existing recognition for full-time boards and to make this process as easy as possible. Additionally, we will conceive a formal form of recognition for part-time student activities, if possible in collaboration with the UT. Last, we will launch initiatives to increase the appreciation for active students, to help make to promote and be an ambassador of student activities.

#### Goal

Make all significantly sized student activities eligible for a formal recognition and increase the appreciation for active students.

#### Indicators

- In 2023, over 50% of the eligible students will obtain an official recognition for their full-time board activities (2018: 16%);
- In 2023, all student activities of over 8 hours per week can be formally recognized, if possible in cooperation with the UT;

## 4. THE VOICE OF STUDENTS IS HEARD

### We hear the voice of our organisations

We regularly make decisions that (can) have a major impact on student life and our student organisations. In order for us as Student Union to make well-considered decisions, we consider it highly important to take the interests of impacted students and organisations into account. To strengthen this for the future, we want to involve our diverse network of student organisations more in our decision-making process.

The coming years, we will involve our student organisations - and indirectly a wide variety of students - more in our decision making process. We will experiment extending the formal advisory rights of our (umbrella) organisations, searching for the just balance between participation and decisiveness. Following the experiments, it is our intention to formalize the rights that were considered to be well-functioning.

### Goal

Increase participation of our affiliated organisations in our decision-making process.

### Indicators

- Annually, we temporarily extend and evaluate the rights of the umbrella meeting and/or the participants council meeting;
- We permanently grant rights that are well-functioning.

### Students are heard at the UT

As Student Union, we are the UT's all-overarching student organisation for student activities and facilities with over 130 affiliated student organisations. Students regularly contact us with questions, complaints and requests regarding all kinds of student matters and facilities. Unfortunately, the capacity to handle these is very limited in the current organisation.

Students and student organisations however often expect us to safeguard their interests towards the UT. In addition, we have the position, network and powers within the UT to safeguard the interests of students regarding student facilities and activities properly. Additionally, we are also aware of the existing parties that safeguard student interests and for which matters they can help. In the coming years, we therefore want to increase our capacity to safeguard student interests and bring existing parties together to safeguard student interests as good as possible.

### Goal

Increase our capacity to safeguard student interests on student facilities and activities and closely work together with existing parties to better safeguard student interests in general.

### Indicator

- We will no later than 2020 allocate a (new) part of our organisation that is solely dedicated on safeguarding student interests that:
- Closely works together with existing organisations;
- Grows each year in the number of requests, questions and complaints it handles.

## 5. WE MAKE SUBSTANTIATED AND TRANSPARENT DECISIONS

### We make substantiated decisions

As Student Union, we are a public organisation with a large potential impact on student life at the UT. Although participation is important to make well-considered decisions, we are also accountable for the decisions we make and the impact they have. Clear substantiation of our decisions is therefore essential: on one side to estimate potential impact and justify difficult decisions, on the other side to measure the result of our policies.

The coming years we will give special attention to the substantiation of our decisions, especially when considered to be high-impact. This is on one side done by substantiating our decisions and policies with research and data of the student population. On the other hand we will give our goals clear indicators to measure our progress. To support substantiation of our decisions and measurements of results, we will annually gather data on the student population.

#### Goal

Clearly substantiate our impactful decisions and use measurable indicators for goals in our plans and reports.

#### Indicators

- In 2023, we substantiate most of our policies and impactful decisions with research and obtained data about the student population;
- In 2023, we provide most of our goals in our policy plans with measurable indicators that are also used in the corresponding reports;
- We annually gather data on the student population.

### We are transparent in our decisions

As mentioned before, the Student is a public organisation. This does not only require us to have sufficient levels of participation and accountability, but also obliges us to be transparent in our decisions and in how we work. This means that we not only have to clearly communicate our plans and decisions to the UT community, but that we also have to be transparent in our decision-making process and (financial) organisation structure.

In the coming years, transparency will get a special focus within our organisation. As Student Union, we will work to be as transparent as possible about our organisation, finances, decisions and processes.

#### Goal

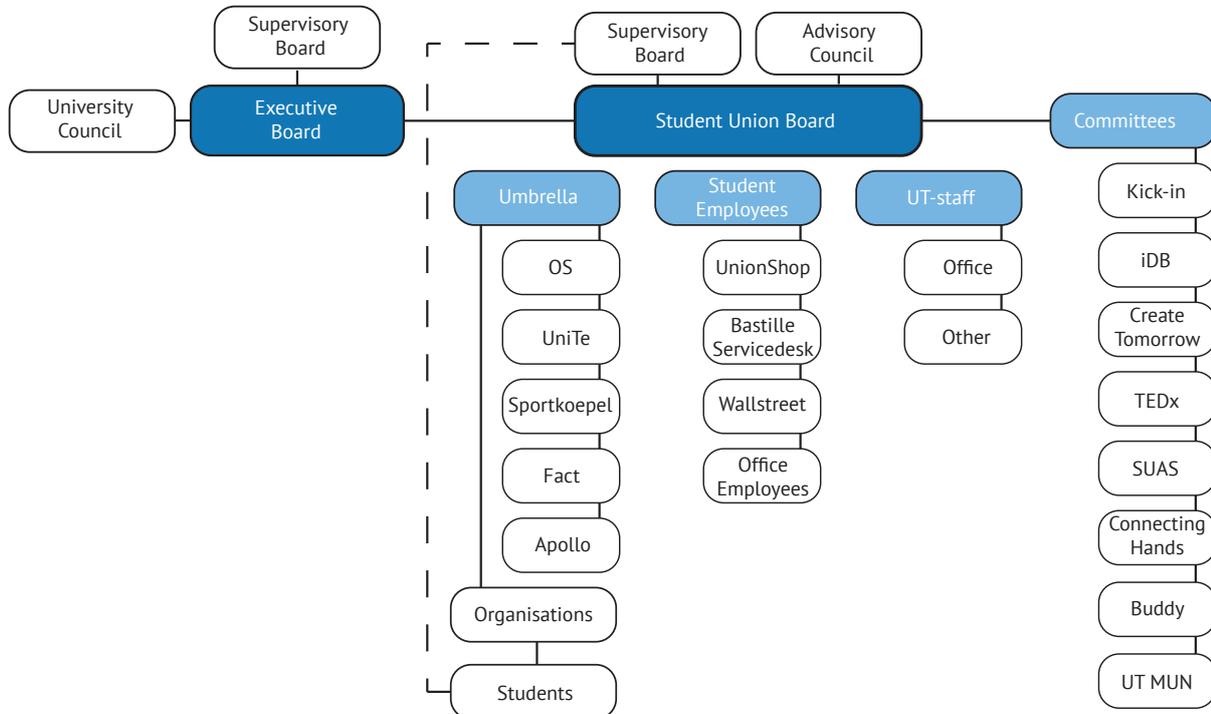
Be transparent about our organisation, finances, decisions and processes.

#### Indicators

- In 2023, we publish all of our non-confidential decisions;
- In 2023, all high-impact decisions will be supplied with a substantiation that will be published with non-confidential decisions;
- In 2023, 75% or more of the participants council meeting considers us to be a transparent organisation (2019: 35% agreed, 15% disagreed);
- In 2023, 75% or more of the participants council meeting is aware of our decision making process (2019: 29% agreed, 41% disagreed).

# APPENDIX A - OUR ORGANISATION

The Student Union has grown considerably since its establishment in 1999, both in size as in responsibilities. We currently have over 130 affiliated student organisations and over 120 people working for our organisation as an employee or in one of our committees.



The figure above shows our organisational structure and the relation to the UT's executive board. The Student Union is governed by the executive board, which is supported by student employees, supporting staff from UT service departments and several committees in their daily work.

Furthermore, our organisation consists out of several bodies that are involved in the decision-making and participation process. The supervisory board, consisting both of students and non-students, has to approve the most impactful plans and decisions of the executive board. In addition to the supervisory board, we know an advisory board that advises the board on all kinds of matters.

Next to that, we have over 130 affiliated student organisations, the so-called participants. These organisations are united in the Participants Council that appoints, suspends and discharges the members of the supervisory board. These organisations are also divided into six sectors, for which five of them have their own overarching organisation, the so-called umbrellas. These umbrellas, which are shown in the previous figure, meet frequently with the executive board to discuss and advise various topics. The figure below helps to understand the decision-making structure.

**Supervisory Board**

*Meets each 4-6 weeks*  
 Approves impactful decisions of executive board  
 Appoints, suspends and discharges executive board members

**Executive Board**

*Full-time*  
 Decision-making on behalf of the Student Union  
 Leads Organisation

**Umbrella Meeting**

*Meets each 4-8 weeks*  
 No formal rights  
 Discussion and feedback on plans of executive board

**Participants Council Meeting**

*Meets 2-4 times per year*  
 Appoints, suspends and discharges supervisory board  
 Gets informed on large plans and decisions

