



# Election Programme 2022-2023



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# Foreword

Dear Student,

Hereby I proudly present the Election Programme of the Eighth Faction of Letteren Vooruit. This programme is the product of seven years of effective Faculty Council representation by Letteren Vooruit and the innovative ideas of the Eighth Faction. It is shaped by continuous experience in decision-making at the Faculty level from previous factions, and by our unyielding dedication to making students' voices heard. This programme was carefully put together to indicate our persistent devotion to making the Faculty of Arts a better place.

It is an honour to be the lead candidate among a group of ambitious, dedicated and strong-minded students. We all have different strengths and passions, but what unites us is our enthusiasm for representing students in order to leave this Faculty in a better shape than how we found it when we started studying. That enthusiasm we share is why I have no doubt that our candidate faction will continue to bring progressive and noticeable change at our Faculty. During our year, we will focus our efforts on student wellbeing, communication and transparency, quality of education and further internationalisation.

After the previous faction made considerable strides in reconnecting students and the Faculty, we hope to follow in their footsteps. We will proudly continue the work of previous Letteren Vooruit factions in mental wellbeing among students without compromise. We will pay special attention to the lasting effects of the pandemic on mental wellbeing. While continuing to improve and advertise existing mental wellbeing resources at the Faculty, we also will provide innovative ideas to mental wellbeing challenges.

In the last period, Letteren Vooruit focused on transparency and accessibility, transparent communication within the Faculty, student wellbeing, and quality of education. All of this work will be continued by the Eighth Faction.

Now that the Faculty has fully moved to physical education again, we, alongside many students, hope that the lessons learned while studying from home will not be abandoned. It was difficult for all of us to stay on track while we were not able to go to classes in person, to be sure. Therefore, Letteren Vooruit is delighted to be back and is inspired to make changes that will lead to tangible, long term improvements at the Faculty.

With the unique position afforded to us, we will navigate the challenges posed in the coming academic year, setting progressive, inclusive, student-oriented precedents. With your vote and confidence in Letteren Vooruit, we can make a difference. Our voice, our Faculty.

Bart van Donselaar

Lead Candidate Letteren Vooruit 2022-2023

## In Short

### Student Wellbeing

With increasing care, Letteren Vooruit has dedicated itself to addressing wellbeing and mental health at the Faculty of Arts. Through a broad range of surveys, in-depth analysis, and a determined voice in the Faculty Council, Letteren Vooruit plans to improve and advertise support structures for students' wellbeing. We firmly believe that students should be able to obtain the support they may need – without the burden of finding this support alone. Furthermore, we can address the causes as well as the symptoms: by tackling the more common and severe stressors in academic life, we can give support to students before they need it.

### Education and Research

When it comes to education, Letteren Vooruit will fight for the right balance between innovation, progress, and student wellbeing. Having finally returned to in-person education, the Faculty needs to ensure that students who have hitherto experienced mostly online-education are integrated well into on-campus life. We want students to have continued access to lecture recordings, and will monitor that Brightspace will be an accessible study portal for all. We also strive for increased diversity of the study material to ensure that the Faculty can continue to play an essential role in an increasingly diverse society. Lastly, we will focus on practicalities that will enhance the study experience. This includes monitoring that course guides are published on time and more transparency when lecturers exceed the review period for papers or exams.

### Transparency and Participation

The governance structures of our Faculty and its participatory bodies such as Programme Committees, Clusters or the Faculty Council often seem far removed from students. Additionally, information about the Faculty is often not easily available and accessible. In the coming year, Letteren Vooruit wants to improve transparency regarding what is happening within our Faculty through clear and accessible communication, so that students are well aware where to turn to if they have questions, comments or suggestions. This will not only increase the accountability of the Faculty, but will also encourage students to take an active role in Faculty matters, something we highly encourage.

## Unity and Cooperation

Our Faculty, a diverse community drawing from various cultural and educational backgrounds, should find strength in its differences. The Faculty of Arts would best be a space where everyone feels welcome. In order to work towards this, Letteren Vooruit will make sure that the opportunities for international and native students are of equal value. Firstly, it is critical to address the language of instruction. While nearly all courses at the Faculty of Arts are available in English, students' and (personnel's) skills aren't always at a fully academic level. Letteren Vooruit seeks the implementation of additional classes for students and instructors to hone their English communication skills, and be certain that they can express themselves academically. Furthermore, we seek to reduce tokenism while establishing the importance of diverse voices and literature in education.

## Organisation

Next to the lack of accessibility and visibility, our Faculty struggles with some structural issues. Cluster Advisory Committees that are supposed to monitor the functioning of Clusters and the actions of Cluster Boards are not yet up and running properly. The Faculty still faces a shortage of staff and study advisors and the voices of Master's and PhD students are often underrepresented in co-governance structures. Letteren Vooruit strives to address these issues with the help of relevant actors at the Faculty and thereby contribute to a better accessible Faculty.

## Financial Future

At the moment, the financial situation of the Faculty is rather stable. However, it is not yet clear how future developments, such as the abolition of the student loan system or the increasing influx of students, will affect the Faculty's finances in the long-run. Therefore, Letteren Vooruit will continue to critically evaluate the financial situation, and point out critical issues where needed.





# Student Wellbeing

# Student Wellbeing

## Mental Health & Awareness

From our very beginning, Letteren Vooruit has been attempting to bring real change when it comes to the mental health of the students of the Faculty of Arts.

In 2022, LV conducted a survey among Faculty of Arts Students asking about their mental wellbeing. Results show that students are incredibly stressed and lonely, even with COVID-19 measures being dropped. Less than 1/3 believed that they could go to the Faculty for support when they experienced issues. The distressed state of student wellbeing and what we as a Faculty can do about it is one of the most critical issues within the faculty that we want to improve. While students are now starting to go back to a more normal way of life, we must acknowledge how the pandemic has greatly affected their mental health and their ability to manage stress. This situation, while peculiar, highlights the distress of students and we believe they should not be treated as something else or something that can be treated temporarily. Rather than hoping that things will get better over time, the Faculty needs to bring real changes and real support.

### ***Social Safety***

One of our focal points will be the harassment response structures from the faculty and the implementation of policies encouraging the prevention of such terrible acts and help-seeking behaviours. These policies would not only focus on issues related to mental health affected by class and schoolwork-related stress, but also on the mental toll of offences such as sexual harassment, which remains a significant issue that personally affects many students in the Faculty. The process to reach out to (and most importantly the existence) of the confidential advisor appointed by the Faculty should be advertised a lot more over the campus, while the formation for peer to peer confidentiality advisors should be implemented. To expand on this, to increase help-seeking behaviours in students, we noticed most are more likely to speak with a peer than a trained professional. However, what would prevent them from speaking out is the fact of being judged or the spread of rumours. Thus, a group of peers, with a reasonable amount of training in the matter, under an oath of confidentiality, would most likely increase the chance of more students coming forward, while not blocking the few trained professionals provided by the Faculty. Hence, the implementation of



such groups would be a way to encourage students to come forward rather than alienate them.

As a Faction we would like to implement the possibility for Associations specialising in the matter to promote their work. This was taken into consideration by the Faculty, and a policy was newly implemented for study associations to be able to receive money if they organise events related to mental health. In order to pursue all the issues that are important to students, this policy should be extended to all events and initiatives regarding social safety in a more global way. In continuity of this, another aspect of Social Safety would be the possibility to implement policies for the Faculty to provide free menstrual products.

### ***Monitoring and Access to Support Resources***

The trend started by the 6th Faction of LV of doing a survey to analyse the student's mental wellbeing, should be reiterated and implemented as an annual (or per semester) item. Moreover, while the 6th Faction focused more on how COVID-19 impacted the mental health of students during the crisis, we, like the 7th Faction, will direct our attention on the aftermath of the Covid crisis and the long-lasting effects that the pandemic has had on the student's mental health and the Faculty's efficacy of teaching methods. But we also will do our best to include issues that are not related to the pandemic in order to get a better grasp of what issues are the most important to improve students' mental health.

Therefore, we believe that the promotion of events dedicated to tackling the issues regarding students' mental wellbeing would encourage the willingness to seek help. Furthermore, if the aforementioned promotion is advised to be done by part of the Faculty Council, and the Faculty itself, the possibility of those events gaining exposure will surely be much higher and impactful.

In order to address students' mental health, it is important that students at the Faculty of Arts are aware of the resources and pathways to find support. At times, these resources can feel indirect or inaccessible. While help for mental health problems includes student psychologists, deans, and mentors, Letteren Vooruit understands this may, at times, feel like a big step and wants to offer gentler measures for students first seeking help. For example, the Faculty could institute information events on mental health throughout the year, similar to the execution of career events. Letteren Vooruit aims to bring more awareness of mental health within the Faculty; this topic should be

routinely examined within the Faculty Council. Students should feel comfortable looking for the support they may need.

### *Information from the Faculty*

The Faculty implemented an online study guide, available on Nestor under Study Info, and everyone has access to the mental health resources that have been stored and listed within it. However, most students in the Faculty of Arts do not seem to be aware of their existence. Hence, we would promote a better advertisement of it as part of the resources to improve students' mental wellbeing. An example of this could be the advertisement of their importance via flyers put up in all Faculty's buildings.

Moreover, while some information is available from the Faculty about mental health problems and the possibility of going to a student psychologist, this information should be made more obvious to all students. Currently, students often do not know what options they have and experience stressful situations that could have easily been prevented. Letteren Vooruit strives for better and clearer information concerning mental health, which is the responsibility of the Faculty. Examples of how this could be improved are posters within the Harmony Building about student psychologists, clearer information on the Faculty website, as well as reminders about the possibility of taking stress management training.<sup>2</sup> The Faculty could also utilise study associations' capability for outreach to spread awareness of resources.

### *The Benefits of Support*

It should also be made more clear that it is not only beneficial for students' mental health to talk to someone about issues they are facing. There can also be practical agreements about BSA or study delay in special circumstances. This might relieve some of the stress that contributes to mental health problems. Besides this, more discussion about this topic might create a more safe space amongst students themselves, where they would feel listened to and understood when talking about their mental health problems with peers.

## Student Stress Management

Letteren Vooruit aims to bring awareness to the different solutions to student mental health issues, and to take preventive steps in order to avoid burn-out and other stress-related problems. A good opportunity for both the Faculty of Arts and the University would be to increase awareness of the student stress management training courses, via emails or posters in order to reach the greatest number of students. This would be very useful in terms of coping with and mitigating stress in healthy ways. Not only do these training sessions provide helpful tips, they will also set up a platform for peers so

students might feel less alone with their problems and can find someone who might be experiencing similar issues.

### *Tackling the Cause*

Another point Letteren Vooruit wants to address is the causes of stress, and primarily the heavy workload students might experience in certain courses. The workload can get quite excessive, which can make studying feel like a burden. This not only results in more stress, but also less time for essential pursuits such as sports or social activities. Sports and social activities help relieve stress, whereas a lack of either only increases it. We at Letteren Vooruit want a proper balance between energy-taking and energy-giving activities. That is why Letteren Vooruit strives to go into discussion about the possibilities of balancing some of the heavy workloads. And, to do so, we will be in contact with Program Committees as well as Study Advisors to identify where those heavy workloads stem from and then develop strategies to address the issues.



A photograph of a classroom scene. In the background, there are rows of empty wooden bleachers. In the foreground, several students are gathered around a table. A young woman with long red hair and glasses is leaning over the table, looking at something. A young woman with long brown hair and glasses is also looking down. A young man with short brown hair is looking down. A young woman with long blonde hair is looking down. A young man with a red and white striped shirt is looking down. On the table, there is a green apple, a blue bag, and a blue water bottle. The text "Education & Research" is overlaid on the image in a green box.

# Education & Research

## Education and Research

The next academic year will most likely be organised as it has been in pre-pandemic times as the University has slowly moved back to in-person teaching. At the Faculty of Arts, Letteren Vooruit will fight for this process to go as smoothly as possible and put the interests of students first. We will pay attention that the high quality of education and research will be upheld in times of uncertainty and change, work for the connections between students and staff to be improved, and strive for the right balance between the need for innovation, progress and the wellbeing of students.

### Integration of Students Into Campus Life

Online education has mostly been abolished at the Faculty of Arts and most students have returned to on-site teaching. After a long period of online teaching, it is crucial to make the transition and process of integration as smooth as possible. This way students can integrate and make the new students familiar with the (new) academic life by creating opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experience within the Faculty throughout the term as well as providing opportunities for and encouraging students to connect with and support each other. Letteren Vooruit wants to implement the best possible hybrid form that allows a mix of in-person education and live classes to create the best possible flexible learning environment for both teachers and students. The online parts need to be maintained and improved where possible so that students can take maximum advantage of their study situation. This means that Letteren Vooruit is in favour of recording lectures so that students have the opportunity to rewatch lectures if they would like to.

#### *Curricula*

During the transition to an online teaching environment as well as returning to in-person education, many course contents and teaching methods had to be adapted to the digital sphere. However, this process has not been successful everywhere and led to a higher workload or more difficulties for students and staff in some cases. Letteren Vooruit calls upon the Faculty to critically evaluate the past years and listen to students' opinions on which methods worked well and which did not. Closely examining course evaluations and consulting with the different Programme Committees are two steps to achieve this. If necessary, the contents should be adjusted in order to guarantee a fair learning experience for the student cohorts to come.

#### *Study Locations*

Studying from home can be very exhausting for students. As most COVID-19 related regulations have been lifted, students can again reserve a study place at the Harmony Complex. However, the reservation creates an inflexibility among students that is very

inconvenient and no longer appropriate in the current pandemic-related situation. In order to ensure more flexibility and an open Faculty, we as Letteren Vooruit call on the Faculty to extend the opening of study places at the Faculty of Arts. With this we would lift the restrictions on open shared places, while keeping the reservation policy especially during exam periods. This way more students have the opportunity to plan their study routine more easily and with the highest flexibility possible.

## ‘Blended learning’ and In-person Education

Digitalisation has brought improvements to the quality of education at our Faculty and lessons should be learned from online education. Letteren Vooruit wishes for the Faculty to take advantage of these changes, and keep those that benefit the students.

### *ICT and the Student Portal - Brightspace*

ICT is the principal information resource for students and, accordingly, poses a crucial priority for Letteren Vooruit. As of now, there is still much to be achieved at the Faculty regarding ICT, with the COVID-19 pandemic exposing the importance of transparent and reliable communication. In recent years, the study portal has already improved communication. Letteren Vooruit will continue to be involved in the development of the student portal.

In the upcoming academic year, the whole University will move over to Brightspace and leave Nestor behind. We aim to protect the best interest of students by actively monitoring this change. We hope Brightspace increases the quality of education and the appreciation of students and staff who will have to use the platform extensively.

### *Seminar Attendance*

During online education, seminar attendance has been handled flexibly in most study programs at the Faculty of Arts; students were not punished for missing more than the maximum amount of seminars stated in the course guide. However, with in-person education, seminar attendance will apply once again. We will advocate for keeping the seminar attendance flexible, meaning that the faculty should communicate the clarifications of exceptions better and be more transparent on assignment possibilities to make up missed classes. Besides that the faculty should clearly communicate how many classes students can miss per course. Not only does this reduce stress for students occupied with work or extracurricular activities next to their studies, but it would also allow for a more flexible approach to dealing with the impact of the post-pandemic time.

### *Making recordings available*

Another positive carry-over from having lectures online has been the availability of lecture recordings. Most lecturers have made use of the recording functions and students were able to watch them back at their convenience to study for exams. This



was not only beneficial for students who had to miss lectures because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, but also enhanced the studying experience as a whole. As Letteren Vooruit, we will strive to have lecturers keep recording their lectures during the next academic year, whether they are given online or on campus.

When or if these recordings are made available to the students is up to the discretion of each lecturer. Nevertheless, Letteren Vooruit would argue that, if they are made available, this should happen at least two weeks before the exam. This way, students who had to miss lectures can still be adequately prepared. Furthermore, we support the possibility for vulnerable students to access recordings early after contacting the study advisor. This year, Letteren Vooruit will advocate to extend the possibility of accessing these recordings to students with work or board obligations besides their studies. The role of the study advisors in assessing this and providing the recordings to eligible students remains crucial.

The Faculty of Law maintains a system, where certain students request access to recordings online. Letteren Vooruit advocates for a similar improvement of the accessibility of lecture recordings, by submitting an online application or via the study adviser. Letteren Vooruit recognises the student as an individual and strives for an inclusive Faculty. With this in mind, Letteren Vooruit believes that the Faculty of Arts can improve the accessibility of lecture recordings for a certain group of students in the short term, e.g. chronically ill students and students with a board position, as well as caregivers and students with children.

#### *Paying special attention to vulnerable students*

After switching back to on-campus classes, too little attention has been paid to students that, due to a prior health condition or other factors, were especially at risk. Letteren Vooruit believes it is important that the needs of vulnerable students are taken into account, for example by giving physically vulnerable students prioritised access to recordings of on-campus classes or the opportunity to follow a seminar online. On the other hand, vulnerable students who are more at risk from isolation, should be offered more attention.

## International Classroom

#### *Inclusivity of the Study Material*

The diversity of the student body in terms of perspectives as well as social and cultural backgrounds should be represented in the study materials. In this manner, problems can be viewed from multiple perspectives, e.g. liberal, feminist, or ecologist. Many articles and journals provided as readings in courses are still dominated by Western scholarly perspectives, even though non-western scholars are publishing almost the same amount of information regarding those topics in their articles. It is important for the course coordinators to bring those articles to the forefront. We, as a faction, would

like to encourage teachers to introduce their students to such perspectives and make their studies more inclusive.

### *Diversity of the Staff Body*

Teaching inclusivity is more effective when the teaching body is composed of people from different perspectives and backgrounds. Recently, the University has made an effort to increase the number of female professors, which is something Letteren Vooruit supports. However, diversity does not stop at the gender mark. Therefore, we call on the Faculty to encourage clusters and programmes to explicitly take diversity into account when hiring new staff members.

## Maintaining the Quality of Teaching and Teachers

### *Course Evaluations*

Course evaluations are a useful tool to improve the courses within a study and to guarantee the quality of the education. However, few students fill in these evaluations because they think that nothing is done with their feedback. Therefore, Letteren Vooruit calls for more transparency regarding the consequences of course evaluations. If a critical review gets passed through the course evaluations, course coordinators should make a plan and announce the resulting changes to the students before the end of the following block. In the evaluation of the last block, students will receive online feedback at the end of June. Students will notice that their course evaluations have an impact, and they will, therefore, participate more often, making this tool more effective. In the long term, this feedback is valuable for the students as well as the teacher, as it contributes to providing quality education at the University.

Last year's pilot project introduced by the Faculty of Arts of having panel discussions at the end of each block, moderated by the programme committees, is something Letteren Vooruit supports. We however have seen that these events are scarcely visited and the outcome therefore insignificant. We are convinced that the current format fails due to the very low participation and the therefore very low informative value of the evaluation. In contrast to the current format of these panel discussions, Letteren Vooruit suggests holding these evaluations in the very last lecture of each block, guaranteeing that people actively participate and share their opinions in order to have a profound evaluation of a course. Implementing these panel discussions right after the last lecture in the absence of the teacher will allow students to mention concrete points they liked or would like to see improved, which would allow for much more nuanced feedback than possible through the course evaluations.

### *Review Periods*

The maximum review period for teachers to assess exams or other assignments ranges from 10 to 15 working days. Some teachers repeatedly exceed this maximum period without notifying their students. Letteren Vooruit wants to increase transparency by

calling on teachers to notify their students if they are not able to make the deadline. This allows for more predictability and less uncertainty and frustration among the students. Furthermore, we point to the role of Programme Committees in the review process, and encourage them to take action if they notice that certain lecturers within their programme struggle with providing the assessments on time.

### *Course Guides*

Course guides give students an insight into the planning of a course, how the exam will be assessed and what the weekly assignments will be. These study guides are announced at the beginning of every new period, but far too often only shortly before the new course starts. It is expected that students come prepared for the lectures and seminars, which is not an easy task if the course guide gets published days before the start of the first lecture. Letteren Vooruit wants study guides published on Nestor two weeks before the start of a new period to avoid this. If this is not possible, the necessary information for the first lecture week should be communicated at least five working days before the course commences. The role of Programme Committees in monitoring this is crucial.

### *Student Workload*

Within the ECTS system, every course has a specific number of working hours allocated to it. A 5 ECTS course, for example, translates to roughly 140 hours of work. Despite this standardised system, we often see that different courses within a study programme vary significantly in terms of their workload, even though they have the same amount of ECTS allocated to them. Letteren Vooruit thinks that this should be addressed and teachers whose courses have been evaluated as exceeding the workload prescribed should be held accountable and required to reduce the workload for the next time the course is being taught.

### *Internships*

The number of students attending universities across the country has been rising over the past years. Students no longer decide for a university degree only if they wish to pursue an academic career, but increasingly to expand their knowledge or fulfil a necessary requirement for the type of job they would like to work in in the future. Nevertheless, our university, and especially the Faculty of Arts, struggles with employability, meaning that students do not often find a job right after graduating. To provide students with the opportunity to develop themselves further within their bachelor degree, the University has a minor programme, during which students can choose to do an internship in the first semester of the second year. However, no matter its duration, an internship only counts for 15 ECTS. This means that, to gain the other 15 ECTS, students who choose to do an internship for an entire semester, have to do courses next to their often full-time internship, which drastically increases their workload and stress. In this manner, it is not convenient to follow an internship. Letteren Vooruit wants more credits to be awarded for these internships. A way of



modelling this is by awarding credits based on hours.

In addition, it is only possible to follow an internship in your minor period. Letteren Vooruit thinks this should change, so students are more encouraged to pursue an internship and to get work experience. To realise this, we think that the guidance towards an internship needs to be improved, e.g. through closer cooperation with the Career Service. Besides this, what we believe could also have a stimulating effect would be to visit more companies, for example, in collaboration with study associations at the Faculty. Lastly, Letteren Vooruit would like to make the requirements for doing an internship less strict, this way more students would get the opportunity to get work experience.

## Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity is the combination of multiple scientific areas to view a certain problem from more perspectives. To gain interdisciplinarity, students tend to follow courses at different faculties. This means that students must be capable of making their own choices in their study programme.

To stimulate interdisciplinarity, Letteren Vooruit thinks it is important to educate students sooner about the possibility of following two studies or following a course at a different faculty and make this information easily accessible, for example by providing it through mentor groups or by email through the study advisors.

## PhD Students at the Faculty of Arts

In the past, there have been problems regarding the allocation of teaching hours to PhD students. Letteren Vooruit will work together with the personnel faction to ensure a good balance of research and teaching hours for PhD students which allows them to finish their projects on time, but also get some valuable teaching experience. Furthermore, we will critically monitor the Faculty's plan to increase the number of graduating PhD students, in order to make sure this will not be detrimental to their workload.

Related to this are the health effects on the mental health of PhD students, which have been exacerbated by both the workload and the pandemic. We expect the Faculty to take this issue more seriously and to make lasting and tangible changes for PhD students. We believe that a lighter workload and the resulting reduction in pressure will have a positive and lasting effect on the general academic work of PhD students and, in the long term, a positive side effect for the University and the Faculty.



# Transparency & Participation



## Transparency and Participation

The Faculty of Arts strives to offer high-quality education as well as an inclusive environment for students to develop both on their academic and personal levels. One of the key elements to successful education is represented by a real connection between the staff members and students. We believe that the Faculty needs to listen to the students' opinions. This means that the Faculty Council needs to be representative, transparent, and communicative. Letteren Vooruit wants to include the opinion and ideas of every student in the Faculty. We want to increase communication between the students and the Faculty and decrease the distance between board members, teachers, and students.

Letteren Vooruit has consistently advocated for an open Faculty. Ease of information and student awareness are necessary for an open Faculty to exist and function. Therefore, Letteren Vooruit will focus its attention on improving the transparency of the Faculty along with its professional relation with students.

## Visibility and Passive Participation

We believe that the Faculty Council should be more visible and approachable to students, and we will keep striving for that next year. After two years of online education and the resulting physical absence and communication between staff members and students, improving visibility is more important than ever and more attention needs to be paid to the process of increasing visibility.

The Faculty of Arts has not always been transparent to its students in comparison to the other faculties. For example, Faculty Council minutes can so far only be accessed after a thorough search through Nestor. The Faculty of Spatial Sciences, on the other hand, has a webpage for its Faculty Council meeting minutes on which one can access the minutes of the Faculty Council meetings reaching back to 2008-2009. Letteren Vooruit wishes to implement an analogue of this in our own Faculty, and improve the visibility of meetings as well. The meetings could, for example, be announced sooner and be highlighted more on the many platforms of the Faculty. At the same time, main points of discussion should be available for all to see.

Letteren Vooruit wishes to expand upon the experiences gathered by our Faction members during Council meetings. We want to advertise the opportunities for the public to watch these meetings live better, and also for these meetings to be recorded and accessible for those interested. This method of student participation mainly touches upon a passive type of student participation. That is being informed of what happens at the Faculty itself.

## Active Participation

However, Letteren Vooruit also wishes to expand upon active participation: the role of students in the decision making process at the Faculty. Both active and passive reinforce one another and are invaluable for proper student participation. Key to both according to Letteren Vooruit is the flow of information and how it is communicated towards the students.

Student participation is essential in bridging the gap between student and Faculty. The Faculty of Arts contains several decision-making bodies in which the voices of students can be heard. However, students are often unaware of their options to participate, which Letteren Vooruit will strive to correct in the coming year.

This also feeds into how the Faculty Board will operate for the coming year. Letteren Vooruit wants to see to it that information is properly communicated to all students and believes this will lead to more participation. The Board's experience with new digital methods should help them in communicating what is decided by the Board more effectively. This will help the Board become more visible among students and will in turn help students become more aware of the situation of the Faculty. Our belief at Letteren Vooruit is that informing students of what happens at the Faculty, will activate them and help them to better understand and engage with the Faculty itself.



The image features a vibrant green background. At the top, a row of white puzzle pieces is partially assembled. In the lower-left corner, a person's hand is shown placing a single white puzzle piece into a larger, more complete grid of white puzzle pieces that occupies the bottom half of the frame. A semi-transparent green horizontal bar is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the text 'Unity & Cooperation' in white.

# Unity & Cooperation

# Unity and Cooperation

## Who is the Faculty?

The students and staff of the Faculty of Arts form a diverse community drawn from a range of cultural and educational backgrounds. The Faculty of Arts strives to provide students with a challenging learning environment designed to fulfil their talents and ambitions and to equip them with the knowledge, skills and sensitivity to intercultural diversity needed for further participation in the global labour market of the twenty-first century.

## Internationalisation and Integration

The Faculty of Arts has internationalised rapidly since the introduction of English tracks, and the rate of international students joining our Faculty is increasing. Hence, the staff of the Faculty of Arts works together with its students to improve the concept of “international classroom” and to find the best ways possible for students to benefit from the multicultural diversity. The “international classroom” not only entails a programme taught in English, but also a programme that uses study materials which reflect various perspectives, without limiting itself to the Western one. A truly international classroom prepares the students for the globalised world by training them to consider issues from multiple perspectives. Students are challenged to reflect on and work in international groups in which intercultural dialogue and competence are assessed correspondingly.

Since the pandemic situation has improved and students are enabled to travel to Groningen again, the number of international students is rising at the Faculty of Arts. Students from abroad are a significant proportion of today’s Faculty Body. The achievements of internationalisation within our Faculty has been recognised but more needs to be done. Although internationalisation offers numerous benefits to all parties involved, the University as well as the Faculty that is welcoming international students are experiencing challenges with promoting internationalisation and integrating international students adequately. The Faculty is often confronted with a gap between Dutch and international students as well as with members of the staff. In order to fill this gap and create one student body, the Faculty is engaged in finding ways to improve the relationship between the groups involved.

Advice for the Faculty in particular can be formulated in terms of internationalisation and the integration of international students. Here, amongst other aspects, the Faculty is advised to formulate a clear vision and realistic goals in terms of internationalisation, to promote intercultural exchange strategically under Dutch students and academic staff members, to invest in platforms for intercultural interaction between international and local students inside and outside the “international classroom” and to carefully monitor internationalisation and react adequately to changes. Eventually, every device can be supplemented with practical instructions on how to achieve the improvements and we as Letteren Vooruit want to put our main focus on that.

### *Lingua Franca & Academic Expression*

Letteren Vooruit stresses the importance of internationalisation - a process that has brought many positive changes and improvements to the quality of education, but it also comes with weaknesses. The most pertinent part of the international classroom is the language of instruction, which may harm the quality of education if the level of proficiency in English is insufficient. Courses may become hard to follow if the knowledge of English of the teacher or the student is not satisfactory. As a consequence, the Faculty of Arts should pay great attention to the implementation of English tracks. The Faculty should make sure that there are enough adequate teaching resources as well as staff members from different backgrounds and with a high proficiency level in English.

### *Solving the Language Barrier*

Mastering the language of instruction is an essential step in the process of learning. Insufficient English proficiency is a challenge both for students and staff. When it comes to staff, there is sufficient funding for staff to boost their studies, but, when it comes to students, there is still room for improvement. A part of the funding offered by the University will be spent on English and Dutch classes for students, however we suspect that this may not necessarily result in increased language proficiency. Most students have difficulties in their studies with the use of academic English in coursework, the main reason for this being the lack of previous knowledge and instruction in this sense. As a result, Letteren Vooruit stresses the importance of introducing additional classes that would instruct students and help them gain a better understanding of academic expression. Letteren Vooruit takes this topic seriously, and we will investigate how problems resulting from a lack of English proficiency are handled at the Faculty level and what improvements can be made in the coming year. We plan to do this by encouraging research programs to include academic writing skills courses in the first year, as well as exploring the possibility of adding more courses to the curriculum.

### *Unity and Inclusion*

An important part of internationalisation is the process of integration. Inclusion is key to creating a sense of belonging among students, thus it is our aim to implement initiatives to support our fellow incoming students and to provide them with a great start. Letteren Vooruit stresses the increased involvement of study associations and the development of strategies to incorporate intercultural awareness into the study kick-off event and also during the first year. Switching back to physical education, or the blended one in the beginning, will require additional activities aimed to help students to become familiar with the Harmony Building, as well as, with other important spots in the city, such as the University Library. In order to ensure that, we will collaborate with study associations to create a welcoming environment.

### *Harmony renovations and Prayer and Quiet rooms*

The plans for the Harmony Building renovations will start to materialise this year. These renovations have been delayed for a long time and though the current plan has the end of 2024 as the end date for renovations, they might suffer even further delays. The plans for the renovations have been finalised, though Letteren Vooruit will monitor their progress in the upcoming academic year.

That said, we will continue to argue for improvements and additions that make the Harmony Building a more inclusive and student friendly space. What we want to accomplish in this regard is, for example, the reservation of space for a prayer room and a quiet room. Many public places have a room reserved for prayer and religious practices, and providing such a space at the Harmony Building accommodates the needs of many of our religious students. Simultaneously, and for similar purposes, a quiet room is an important facility. There are plenty of spaces in the Harmony Building that are quiet, but these places are reserved for studying. To facilitate students who benefit from quiet practices such as meditation, we argue that such a room in the Harmony Building could be reserved, in addition to the low-stimulus spaces Letteren Vooruit has argued for in the past.

### *Increased Connections with Mentors*

Another important aspect of the integration process is that international students take more time to get used to the new academic environment, curricula and mode of instruction. Hence, for Letteren Vooruit, efficient communication between the staff and students is imperative. More time should be allocated to students and regular meetings should be set by the study advisors, mentors or student mentors in order to facilitate the process of learning, as well as, to ensure that students are truly part of an inclusive community.

## Sustainability

The renovated Harmony Building will have more possibilities for sustainable solutions, though there is still much to gain in this department. For instance, Letteren Vooruit still wants to encourage the use of your own mug as much as possible by reducing the amount of coffee cups at the machines, so that bringing your own mug is normalised.

Integrating sustainability into education is central to University policy. Letteren Vooruit would like to see this reflected even more in the Faculty. We want to encourage all employees and students of the Faculty to tackle the problems and dilemmas associated with this topic by participating in the discourse and pursuing sustainability in everyday practices such as printing as little as possible and not wasting supplies. Letteren Vooruit strives to work more closely with the Green Office in order to raise awareness of sustainable projects, events and lectures among the staff and students of the Faculty. Lecturers should be encouraged to integrate sustainable perspectives such as Green Theory into their curriculum. Furthermore, sustainability should play a key part in events organised by the Faculty of Arts, for example by making sure that goodie bags or food handed out at the Arts Festival are as eco-friendly as possible.



## Multilingualism in the Council

International students are becoming more involved in the University's policies, hence Letteren Vooruit emphasises the value of bilingualism in the Council. Therefore, we will ensure that the Faculty Council's agenda and notes, as well as the rest of the materials covered, are published in both English and Dutch, so that they are accessible to any student interested in the Faculty Council meetings. Also, we will provide handy access to all the documents that should be of interest and we will give clear guidelines on where they can be found.

### *Language of Communication*

At the moment, the Faculty Council meetings are held mainly in Dutch, but with the help of a translator from the Language Centre the discussions are made available in English as well. The meetings are translated via a Google Doc, which takes quite a long time, and details are often lost in the summary. As a consequence, international students and teachers who do not speak Dutch proficiently are unable to actively participate in the meetings. In the coming year, Letteren Vooruit will work on changing the language of the meetings. We will strive to use English during the meetings and moreover, we will engage in making the documents for the Faculty Council also available in English. Also, for improved inclusion and understanding, Letteren Vooruit wants to make sure that the answer to a question or memo is given in the language of the question or memo.



# Organisation & Participation



# Organisation

## Clusters and Cluster Advisory Committees

Clusters are organisational bodies combining programmes that closely align with one another. At the Faculty of Arts there are currently five clusters, each overseen by a Cluster Board and the Faculty Council. Clusters allow for Faculty-wide policy to be implemented tailor-made to the respective programmes and allow the different programmes to stand together stronger when needed. Within each cluster, topics concerning education (e.g. the coordination of courses across different programmes or the quality of education), but also organisational issues like hiring of new staff are discussed. Each Cluster also has a corresponding Cluster Advisory Committee (CAC), which is given the task of overseeing the individual Cluster Board.

Issues with the Clusters and CACs have persisted for multiple years now, so Letteren Vooruit will try to ensure that significant improvements to their implementation will be made in the upcoming year.

## ***Decentralisation of Responsibilities***

Letteren Vooruit believes that the decentralisation of responsibilities to smaller clusters has provided a tangible improvement in the Faculty, particularly regarding finances and the organisation of programmes. However, there was a delay in the implementation of the Clusters, and, most notably, the Cluster Advisory Committees. The Faculty Council expected the CACs to be fully implemented by the end of the Academic year 2019-2020, but this was postponed until the end of the Academic year 2020-2021. Due to the delay, issues have arisen in the evaluation of the Cluster system. As the programme is still largely in the trial stage and not all CACs have been formed, a full evaluation is not possible, and guidelines for the CACs have not been established.

## ***Strategic Personnel Plan***

Letteren Vooruit wishes to ensure that the strategic personnel plan is being regularly followed up on by the Faculty. Letteren Vooruit is going to follow the implementation plans and cooperate with the Council to come to the best possible solutions towards a sustainable and future-oriented faculty.

## Communication

The past years have proven tough for the University of Groningen and the Faculty of Arts. We had to invent creative solutions to make up for the lack of face-to-face communication. In doing so we have had to stretch both lecturers and students in their capacity. Proper communication has always been central to a well-functioning

organisation. During the pandemic, we have been left with emails, Google Meet codes, Blackboard Collaborate, Discord servers (some fuller than others) and WhatsApp groups, but still communication has not always been clear. To improve on this, the Faculty should continue to reach out to staff and students. Letteren Vooruit wishes to explore methods of communication that “destress” instead of “stress” and which are inviting to use, instead of forced. For example, taking walks with a study advisor is a great way to get in contact with the Faculty and also puts you in a different environment.

### Voices of Master’s and PhD Students

Master’s students tend to be both newcomers and veterans of the Faculty. Letteren Vooruit wishes to provide proper introductions to Master’s students, as it is possible for them to not yet grasp the intricacies of studying at the RUG in particular. Letteren Vooruit will survey Master’s Students themselves, as we believe their views on the University and its institutions can provide us a more complete idea of how the Faculty works and what its errors are.

As for the inquiries themselves, we want to know from Master’s Students more about how they view the Faculty from their perspective. Do the schedules at the University fit personal schedules? Should the Faculty be a bit more engaging with you during your studies, or would you like some more time and space for yourself? We at Letteren Vooruit think Master’s students should be better accommodated during their studies at the Faculty and wish to provide for them.

The same is true for PhD students. While having a separate body, the perspectives of PhD students, especially those not on staff-contracts, in the Faculty Council are often under-represented. Letteren Vooruit therefore will engage in dialogue with PhD students in order to identify their particular areas of concern.

For instance, it has come to our attention that Master’s Students at the Faculty of Arts cannot resit an exam they received a passing grade on. Bachelor’s Students do get this opportunity, and this allows them to try and attain a higher grade. This is an example of Master’s Students not receiving the same treatment, and Letteren Vooruit feels that the Faculty can be more forthcoming in this case and in others.

### Role of Study Advisors

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a lot of students with issues concerning their minors and year abroad. These issues fall on the shoulders of the study advisors. As such, the workload of the study advisors has increased to such a level that it is difficult for them



to execute their tasks properly. Letteren Vooruit wishes to review the workload of the study advisors to ensure that their workload does not exceed an unreasonable amount.

These issues persist despite the Faculty's hiring of more advisors with the larger budget allocated for that purpose. Letteren Vooruit will therefore continue to monitor the performance and issues of and with study advisors.

#### Overarching Study Advisor

About two years ago, an overarching study advisor was appointed by the University. All study advisors go to them to signal pressing issues. In case of a very pressing issue they then inform the Faculty Councils of these issues. This would help mitigate the workload of study advisors, because some cases would be combined and together be brought under attention. This position should be evaluated, to ensure that this position does what it set out to do.

#### Handling the Workload Increases

Letteren Vooruit wants the Faculty of Arts to take potential future workload for advisors into account. Since the return to physical learning at the Faculty, the workload for study advisors seems to have increased. The Faculty of Arts should continue to think about a response towards this increase.

#### Preparing for Substitution

Another pressing issue concerning the study advisor is the lack of substitutes in case of a temporary leave. If a study advisor were to become absent, students would suddenly find themselves without access to a study advisor for advice. We have already received signals of fellow students who experienced this. Letteren Vooruit wants to examine the process for substitution of the study advisor in case of a temporary leave.



# Financial Policy

# Financial Future

## Financial Prospects

Letteren Vooruit, over the past years, has put work into improving the financial situation. However, the future of the Faculty remains uncertain, and while it is quite steady as of now, it's always good to keep monitoring, especially now that the student loans are being replaced again, as it is still unsure how this will affect the finances. Including this year, the level of the Faculty's financial status is due to the clustering within the Faculty and the use of the Studievoorschotmiddelen (i.e. the financial aid that the University and Faculty receive from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science.) This money has been available since the proceeds of the introduction of the loan system and must - as laid down in the Sector Agreement for Scientific Education - be spent on new, innovative activities for the benefit of education. The Faculty also budgeted fairly across the upcoming years and used the financial reserves adequately in order to limit financial losses. However, the Faculty did not account for the unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 nor the budget cuts by the Van Rijn Committee.

Letteren Vooruit believes it is necessary for the existence of our Faculty to be looking ahead and planning for what will happen with the Faculty when these two large expenses are incorporated into the current financial plan. Therefore, Letteren Vooruit will endeavour to get clear and specific data from the Faculty Board about the financial prospects of the Faculty in the upcoming years.

## Van Rijn Committee and Action

In May of 2019, Dutch MP Martin van Rijn released the results of an investigation committee he led on behalf of the then-Minister of Education, Ingrid van Engelshoven. The Van Rijn Committee investigated how to tackle financial problems in Dutch higher education. The minister implemented many of the recommendations the Van Rijn Committee came up with.

As a consequence, money within universities has been reallocated between faculties. In short, this has several positive effects for bèta studies at technical universities, but negative effects for alfa studies, under which our Faculty of Arts falls. As it seems now, this would mean that the Arts Faculty would have to cut 909,000 euros from its yearly budget in the upcoming years. The total amount of money that will be economised at our Faculty can be found in the Multi-Annual Budget. As the financial future of the Arts Faculty was already challenging, this only complicates the situation more. On top of that, as all students in the Netherlands now get a loan to study instead of a grant, we were promised more investments in education directly. Some of that money will be invested as Studievoorschotmiddelen, money that had become available when the student grants were abolished. So, they could invest the money back into education.

What currently happens is that money is added on one side with Studievoorschotmiddelen, yet money is cut on the other side due to the advice taken by the Minister from the Van Rijn Committee at Arts Faculties.

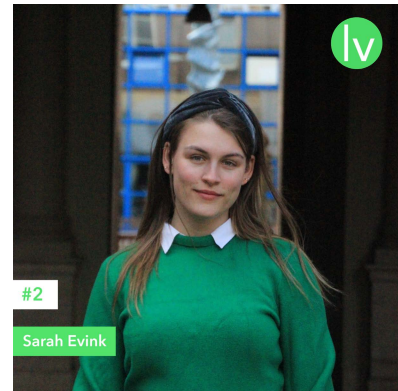
This policy is made at the ministry and not within the University. It is also clear that this policy will have many consequences for Arts-students in the whole of the Netherlands, Groningen not excluded, of course. That is why Letteren Vooruit has started working outside the Faculty in 2020-2021 and worked against budget cuts at Arts Faculties. There are several organisations with which Letteren Vooruit has collaborated since last year. Among those are parties within the University Council, the LSVb (the Dutch National Student Union), and the GSb (The Groninger Student Union). The 6th faction has expanded its horizon by also collaborating with other Arts and Humanities faculties all over the Netherlands. We stand much stronger together with the other Arts faculties. Therefore the 8th Faction of Letteren Vooruit wants to continue having strong contacts with these other Arts faculties nationwide. Our main aim in working together with these organisations, is that Letteren Vooruit hopes to be able to communicate a clear message to the Minister so that they might reconsider the de facto budget-cuts at Arts Faculties in the Netherlands.



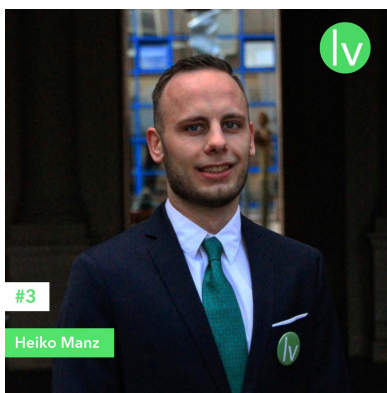
## Candidates



Bart van Donselaar  
Minorities and Multilingualism



Sarah Evink  
European Languages and  
Cultures



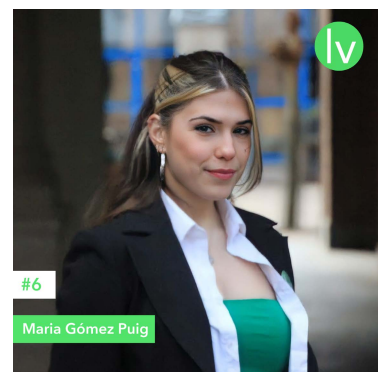
Heiko Manz  
International Relations and  
International Organisation



Tiara Ruidavet  
European Languages and  
Cultures



Nick Arndt  
History



Maria Gómez Puig  
Art History



Roxane Amou Mohammadi  
Ghomi-Loumagne  
International Security



Audrey Maharani  
English Language and  
Culture



Jean-Paul Janssen  
European Languages and  
Cultures