

Green Office Utrecht Business Plan 3.0

Bright minds, better future

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Introduction

Green Office Utrecht (GOU) is the largest platform for students and staff to co-create and drive sustainable development at Utrecht University. In the GOU sustainable ideas take shape from vision to execution. Plans for implementation and project launches are coordinated in an effort to make the University a more sustainable place. Achievements and ambitions of the University are communicated through GOU channels to all stakeholders involved. Additionally, GOU has the ability to provide reasonable financial support for students and staff with impact-driven and feasible ideas. Sustainable development is a dynamic process and although many initiatives are currently underway at the University, there is always more that needs to be done. Utrecht University developed and founded the Green Office in September 2013 with the help from partner organization SOON. In 2015, the GOU began a closer collaboration with the Sustainability Program Team. In 2018, the Sustainability Program received confirmed funding until 2021. This document was composed in order to delineate organizational strategy for future development and professionalization.

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1. Context

Our current way of life is deeply unsustainable: Humanity consumes the resources of 1.8 planets. If present trends continue, we will need three planets by 2050. Creating a socially desirable and economically viable human civilization flourishing within planetary boundaries is the primary challenge of our time, the call of action for our generation. The necessary changes will not come easy or through technical fixes alone. On the contrary, they require deep social, behavioural, and economic transformations.

Amendments outlined during the intergovernmental climate summit (COP21) in Paris 2015 and Bonn 2017 need to take place in the lifetime of students currently studying. In order to meet ambitious yet essential targets, such as the maximum increase of no more than 1.5°C globally, students and youth actors must fulfil roles in leading the change. The students of today are the policy makers, scientists, innovators and activists of the future.

It is the responsibility of universities as public institutions to be the engines of local, national and global sustainability transitions: Universities should educate students as sustainability change agents, create and share new knowledge to inform these transitions, and reduce the ecological and social footprints of the organisation itself. Creating more sustainable universities requires dedicated change agents today and in the future.

Students are often marginalised within a university's sustainability efforts. This is a missed opportunity, given the energy and spirit of students, the learning opportunities that sustainability engagement presents and the significance of the student body as the largest stakeholder group on campus. Yet for a large number of students to unleash their full potential as sustainability change agents, the institutional support, resources and legitimacy of universities and governments are required.

As a student-led and staff-supported sustainability hub, the Green Office Model presents an internationally recognized and open-source model to structurally empower students. The Green Office acts as a platform for students and staff running sustainability initiatives, improves the communication around these initiatives, and acts as a catalyst for a buzz around sustainability.

2. The Green Office Model

The Green Office Model is the vision of a student-led and staff-supported sustainability hub that initiates, coordinates, and supports sustainability at further education institutions. The Green Office Model has been a tool and inspiration for an expanding student, staff and organisational movement across the European Union to access the necessary resources, mandates and support for grassroots sustainability initiatives. The Green Office movement is decentralized across the European Union with a variety of local chapters and network partners. The model entails six principles:

- 1) **Students & Staff:** A dynamic team of student employees, volunteers and university staff for the core of a Green Office. They are directly responsible for running the Green Office operations and activities.
- 2) **Mandate:** The Green Office receives an official university mandate to drive sustainability transitions. This mandate drives new impulses, connects, and empowers actors, improves communications, and develops sustainability strategies.
- 3) **Resources:** The university grants the Green Office an operational budget. These resources are crucial to guarantee the continuity and commitment of students and staff, while enabling them to implement high-impact projects and campaigns.
- 4) **Integration:** The Green Office is integrated into the institution's organisational structure, working closely with, and under the supervision of the Sustainability Programme Team. The Green Office team also participates within relevant sustainability committees in advisory and active roles.
- 5) **Collaboration:** All activities of the team are conducted in close collaboration and partnership with internal and external stakeholders. The Green Office becomes a part of the vibrant and diverse network of Green Offices around the European Union.
- 6) **Training:** The Green Office and its volunteers receive formal training from rootAbility. This training is targeted at building core competencies, adapting to sustainability transitions, and inspiring and motivating participants.

The Green Office model was designed by rootAbility and is rapidly proliferating across Europe. It is a source of inspiration and information for those involved to establish and lobby for similar student-led and staff-supported sustainability hubs. The Green Office model is open-source, and freely available to everyone under a Creative Commons License.

3. Green Office Utrecht

Green Office Utrecht opened its doors in October 2013. Since then, the sustainability hub has been responsible for the delivery of a wide variety of activities and campaigns, support of student and staff initiatives, and engagement of the broader UU community with sustainability. Together with rootAbility, the vision and mission of the Green Office was formulated as follows:

Vision

Green Office Utrecht is the central hub where fresh minds and hands come together to support Utrecht University's sustainable development.

Mission

Green Office Utrecht achieves its vision by making the university's sustainability policy tangible to the everyday reality of its students and staff by:

- *Informing them*
- *Involving them*
- *Empowering them*

These mission statements are tackled cooperatively by the Green Office team, with specific team members being responsible for the integral tasks of informing, involving, and empowering. More about task division and operational structure can be found in paragraph 5.

4. Strategy

In 2018, the Green Office Manager, as a part of the Sustainability Program Team, devised a new strategic plan for the GOU. This strategic roadmap comprises of six specific focus themes that, in accordance with university-wide policy, will determine the future direction of the GOU:

1. **Visibility** – This is an overarching element of the additional five themes. The Green Office Utrecht will endeavour to increase awareness, understanding, and involvement in sustainability procedures at Utrecht University. This includes the expansion of the Green Office to incorporate a Green Office “Dependance” location within the city centre faculties. It is anticipated that the pursuit of successful outcomes within the additional four themes will correlate with greater visibility of sustainability across the UU.
2. **Mobility** – Mobility and transport contribute approximately 30% of the carbon emissions footprint of Utrecht University. The GOU is targeting measures to further increase student and staff usage of bikes, including the provision of e-bike hire, promote sustainable transport options through the Green Impact scheme, and offer equitable and effective compensation measures for air travel. The GOU will look to promote and develop the ambitions of the Sustainability Program team to produce concrete sustainable travel policy guidelines for academic and institutional staff and ensure their implementation.

3. Circularity – The GOU is focused on specific elements of this diverse theme. By tackling the “Three R’s” of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, the GOU will drive systematic behavioural change across the offices, study spaces, and green spaces at Utrecht University. In 2018, we launched a large-scale recycling project, tackling single-use plastic bottles across the UU. Circularity will encompass our bi-annual Thrift Shop, the promotion of coffee ground-based coffee cups, and research-led workshops and symposia.
4. Green Campus – This theme aims to broaden the accessibility and diversity of green spaces within the university campuses. The physical and mental wellbeing of students and staff can be improved through easier, more frequent access to green space, be that in the form of adopted plants in offices, or healthy and extensive wild flower gardens at the Uithof. The Green Office will continue to bring academia and action together to deliver initiatives founded upon innovative research on the benefits of “greener” communal and personal spaces. We will manage and maintain the “Tiny Forest” gifted to the GOU on its 5th Anniversary.
5. Food – A transition towards a plant-based diet is likely to be required to reduce the environmental footprint of catering at the UU. Therefore, the Green Office will work towards diversifying the plant-based options in the café’s and canteens across the university, promoting research and projects into the expansion of sustainable food options, and providing opportunities for students and staff to try and taste the broad range of plant-based options provided by the university. As part of the UU catering tender process, the GOU will work together with scientists to propose requirements for a sustainable future catering provider. In accordance with the UU research theme, Future Foods, the GOU will look to share innovative food production solutions and alternatives with the UU community.
6. Energy - This theme has been identified as best approached from an institutional and infrastructural standpoint. Therefore, the GOU will not actively pursue initiatives and projects around Energy but will instead integrate it more passively into existing initiatives such as the Green Impact Challenge and Living Lab research.

The Utrecht University Green Impact Challenge launched in 2018. The first edition involved several offices in the University Administration Building, culminating in the crowning of the inaugural Green Impact challenge winners in October 2018. The challenge stimulates staff, and students, to make tangible sustainability changes to their daily lives, targeting key aspects such as diet and transport choices, personal waste reduction, and participation in broader sustainability initiatives.

The Green Impact Challenge will commence again in early 2019, integrating new departments and individuals within Utrecht University, as well as involving student auditors and coordinators to advise, train and motivate participants. This will include mentoring from rootAbility so that the Green Impact continues to align community action with the UU Pathways to Sustainability guidelines.

The Green Office will continue to work on past strategic goals. The Green Office is now located within the administrative building at Utrecht University, enhancing our reputation of a professional, inspirational, and interactive organisation.

The structure of the Green Office has remained relatively consistent, however improvements to our accountability, effectiveness and cohesiveness are continuously monitored and sought out. Individual and team targets, key performance indicators (KPI's) and inter-personal interaction is driven through regular discussion and review with the Green Office manager. Under this umbrella, the Green Office continues to promote the self-development of its employees, providing professional guidance and opportunities for social and professional development.

In the next chapter, the integration of these strategic themes into the operational structure and daily operations will be accounted for.

5. Operational Structure

The core team with the Green Office consists of one general manager (0.7fte), one assistant manager (0.4fte), one communications advisor (0.7fte), six student team members (0.3fte) and a Green Office host (0.3fte). This team is responsible for the day-to-day operations within the Green Office.

The student team members are allocated specific roles and responsibilities, as detailed in Figure 1, and work in close collaboration with each other and members of the Sustainability Program Team. Two team members are focused on informing our community of sustainability-related developments and opportunities, namely the Digital Communications and Marketing and Outreach coordinators. The involvement of the university community in Green Office activities and initiatives is managed by the Activities and Campaigns coordinators. Lastly, the empowerment component of the Green Office is delivered by the Projects and Volunteer Support and Living Lab coordinators, facilitating the delivery of initiatives and ideas from the wider university community.

In October 2018, the Green Office Dependance opened in the city centre of Utrecht. This pilot requires two City Centre Explorers, tasked with establishing working relationships with the academic faculties of Humanities and REBO, and driving student-led action on sustainability in the centre of Utrecht. They are student employees (0.3fte), who work predominantly in the Dependance, but remain part of the Uithof Green Office team. The Green Office dependence will undergo a review in January 2019, looking at its effectiveness, breadth of influence, and overall perception across students and staff at the UU.

Additionally, the Green Office Host (0.3fte) is responsible for the general maintenance of the Green Office workspace, monitoring financial budgets, and delivering elements of the Green Campus strategic theme.

In 2016, the Green Office Utrecht transitioned to a new shared workspace, collaborating more closely with the Sustainability Program Team, and fostering new relationships with the Utrecht Sustainability Institute and the Urban Futures Studio. This workspace acts as a central hub for sustainability-minded students and staff to meet, work, communicate and present new ideas, many of whom utilise the Green Office staff and expertise to realise their own ambitions for making sustainable change at Utrecht University.

5.1 Communications (Informing)

The Communications team is responsible for creating a clear and cohesive strategy for informing the University community about internal and external sustainability initiatives. The Green Office utilises a variety of communications channels, operated in tandem by the Digital Communications coordinator and the Marketing and Outreach coordinator.

The Digital Communications coordinator manages and develops a digital community across several platforms. The promotion and sharing of information and activities regarding sustainability acts as a tool to motivate and stimulate students and staff. The GOU utilizes social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), monthly newsletters (MailChimp), internal servers (Blackboard and UU Intranet) and our website (WordPress) to disseminate useful information and manage the community.

To align better with the UU Pathways to Sustainability program, the Digital Communications coordinator is responsible for sharing innovative and interesting research and events from various research institutes, faculties and operations around Utrecht University. This will aim to bring the grassroots sustainability community into discussion with scientific and operational experts and create a more cohesive approach to tackling sustainability. This involves working closely with the Communications Advisor of the Sustainability Program Team.

Together with the Green Office Communications Officer, the Green Office has formulated a strategic overview of local, regional, and national sustainability initiatives with which to pair University-initiated research and events, to maximise the stimulation and engagement of our digital communities.

The Marketing & Outreach coordinator is responsible for the external visibility and brand reputation of the GOU. This includes all non-digital outreach channels, and incorporates a holistic, inclusive approach to broadening the Green Office community across a diverse range of stakeholders.

The outreach experience of the GOU, in terms of physical branding, visual and interactive information, and engagement of students and staff, is coordinated in collaboration with the Visibility Committee. This is a group of volunteers, recruited to develop and deliver outreach events and activities, and assist the Marketing & Outreach coordinator with their larger-profile initiatives.

This includes events such as the UIT week, in which the profile and reach of the GOU must be maximised. This committee, whilst managed by the Marketing & Outreach coordinator, is available to the other GOU employees to assist with other events and initiatives. This aligns with a more cohesive, collaborative approach within the GOU core team to improve the delivery of high-quality, inclusive and professional activities.

5.2 Activities and Campaigns (Involving)

As part of a re-structuring in March 2018, the Activities and Campaigns component of the GOU was reformulated. Each GOU student employee, working within the Involving branch, will be responsible for two of our strategic themes.

The Campaigns Coordinator for Food and Green Campus has several key responsibilities. They must drive a transition towards sustainable food and catering at the UU. This involves working closely with the catering company, Sodexo, to provide greater variety and volume of vegetarian and plant-based products. They will also need to coordinate our two food festivals; Flavours of the Future and SusTasty.

Flavours of the Future works specifically to raise the awareness and involvement of Sodexo in the popularity and diversity of plant-based dietary options. It is a week-long festival that transitions the UU canteens towards a fully plant-based composition over the course of the festival. This allows students and staff to try new foods, explore their preferences, and to learn more about the environmental impacts of their food choices. SusTasty is a sustainable food truck festival, taking place in the UU City Center Library, that provides workshops, activities and a variety of food-trucks for the UU community, and the wider Utrecht population. This is a crucial element of the role, and requires collaboration with Gemeente Utrecht, administrative stakeholders, and many GOU members. It highlights the ambitions of the Green Office to continually reach new audiences and bring the sustainability conversation to all members of the UU community.

Green Campus concerns ecology and biodiversity throughout the Utrecht Science Park. This aspect of the role is conceived as being explorative and ambitious, linking research with practical activities and education of the UU community, whilst highlighting the value of nature in broader social and environmental sustainability.

The Campaigns Coordinator for Mobility and Circularity has a more strategic focus. In collaboration with Facility Services and Real Estate& Campus, the GOU will deliver mobility and circularity projects relevant to the whole community at Utrecht Science Park. This role requires the blending of technical knowledge and awareness with interpersonal and management skills. A drive for continued innovation and aspiration is crucial in the Campaigns coordinator role, especially when finding a common strategy and vision across departments at the UU.

Big-picture thinking is invaluable for this role. Mobility and Circularity play significant roles in the UU Pathways to Sustainability, and the GOU must identify opportunities and niches for students and staff to be at the heart of this transition. The Campaigns coordinator should strive to create valuable partnerships between stakeholders at the UU to ensure that our projects deliver impactful results.

5.3 Projects, volunteers and Living Lab (empowering)

One of our aims is to facilitate students and staff members with ideas on how to get the campus more sustainable and to turn these ideas into actual projects. We do this by giving guidance, organizing supportive workshops for GOU project groups and by providing financial support.

The Project & Volunteer Support coordinator is the point of entry to the GOU for students and employees who have ideas about sustainability at the UU. The student employee will support, stimulate and give advice to the project teams. Through a national network of sustainability initiatives led by students, this team member will connect our own projects with similar project teams elsewhere in the country. Therefore, this team member maintains contact with other Green Offices and our partner organisations to maximise knowledge and experience exchange.

This student employee is responsible for managing the Member Pool, linking students and staff to experts and opportunities, and providing training and skill development to the GOU members. This role is a key platform for information sharing, experience building and feedback, allowing the Green Office to be receptive to the needs and ambitions of UU staff and students. The Green Office structure now consists of several committees. The Project and Volunteer support coordinator recruits, trains and oversees the general activities of these committees, ensuring that they meet professional standards, can network and collaborate with UU employees, and follow the UU Sustainability vision.

The Green Office is designed to be a hub for sustainability initiatives within the university. The Project & Volunteer Support coordinator facilitates existing movements and directs student and employee energy towards the university's pressing sustainability issues. In doing so, the Green Office sets out to fully harness the potential of the members of the UU community and empowers them to take action on issues they come across on a day-to-day basis.

The Living Lab Coordinator is responsible for a central pillar of Green Office Utrecht, to utilize sustainability knowledge at Utrecht University to the maximum. And the best way to make use of this knowledge and the capacity of students is to integrate their research projects into actual sustainability issues that the UU is facing.

The Living Lab creates a platform for tackling practical sustainability issues of the UU and provides students with real-life cases to practice their skills on. By connecting students wanting to research sustainability within their project-based courses to university staff facing sustainability issues in their jobs, problems get solved internally. This circular mentality highlights the value of cooperative and innovative problem-solving. Working on real-life cases greatly enlarges student motivation, which is why most teachers are always on the look-out for interesting problems to solve. By providing them with university sustainability issues, students get to research and advice on their own environment and the client – a UU employee – gets an in-depth advice written by people who care about the situation improving.

The Living Lab obliges “problem-owners” to implement successful and valuable research. The Living Lab Officer, a voluntary position within the GOU, coordinates and monitors the implementation of Living Lab results, carrying out real-time evaluation and analysis. This helps to make the impacts of student-led research more tangible within the sustainability transition at the UU. At the end of each academic year, the Living Lab Symposium is organised. Here, the best Living Lab projects are presented and evaluated by judges from across the UU, and a winning

project is crowned. The symposium is organised by the Living Lab Coordinator in close collaboration with the Sustainability Program Team and the GOU manager.

5.4 Sustainability Program Team

In April 2015, the university installed a Sustainability Program team, and in 2018 the Sustainability Program received funding for a further four years. The program team consist of four staff members: a Program Leader, a Policy Adviser, a Communications Adviser and the Green Office manager.

The aim of the sustainability program is to accelerate sustainability within the university's operations and its internal and external communication. The programme has been established with the mission of the university being a role model in sustainability performance and conduct, by integrating sustainability into all its activities and with a community that is visibly and actively involved in this ambition.

The program team has four core themes:

1. **Impact of education and research:** increasing the impact of the UU's activities in the area of sustainability. The transfer of scientific insights to university operations will be promoted, as the UU aims for circular problem solving in the future.
2. **Clean environment:** sustainable operations with the aim of reducing our CO2 footprint. The program will work to push the UU towards carbon neutrality by 2030, with the Uithof and City Center becoming leading sustainability examples in Real Estate and Facility Service Management within Utrecht.
3. **Perception and visibility:** what makes a student, staff member or visitor recognise the UU as a sustainable university? How can we demonstrate our position as a role model in the area of sustainability? The Sustainability Program will better link the Green Office Utrecht to sustainable operations, research and education, to align students and staff better with the sustainability vision of the UU.
4. **Transparent Reporting:** increasing transparency in our reporting and accountability. Green Office Utrecht is especially connected with the third theme: perception and visibility and will therefore work in close collaboration with the Communication Adviser of the Program Team. This will work in tandem with the radiation of optimism and positivity about the role of Utrecht University in making sustainability a reality.

6. Finances

Green Office Utrecht is a university-funded office. The Sustainability Program has secured future funding for the GOU up to 2021. The budget is divided as follows:

1	Marketing & Communication	€8,000.00
2	A&C Food + Green Campus	€13,000.00
3	A&C Mobility + Circularity	€2,000.00
4	Project & Volunteer Support	€2,550.00
5	Living Lab	€4,000.00
6	Team costs (Training, retreat, office supplies, etc)	€2,000.00
7	GOU Dependance City Center	€4,500.00
	Total:	€36,050.00

7. Conclusion

The Green Office Utrecht aspires to catalyse greater sustainability action and ambition at the UU. The alignment of the GOU with the Pathways to Sustainability and continued close cooperation with diverse stakeholders at Utrecht University will help to realize this aspiration. With the opening of the Green Office Dependance, the GOU expands its horizons and pushes the sustainability agenda to a new audience. The two-pronged approach will allow the GOU to target meaningful progress throughout the locations, faculties and communities of the UU, and cement our position as a valuable and essential component of Utrecht University.

The Green Office hopes to position itself as a point of first contact for sustainability problems at the UU, linking students and staff to sustainability professionals and academics to provide truly circular solutions. A unique characteristic of the Green Office is that it is a platform for all of these actors, and our role as facilitators for discussion, cooperation and implementation of sustainability projects will continue to be pivotal to our broader mission.

Global sustainable development, as well as local sustainability, is a pressing contemporary challenge. The GOU recognises that our activities and initiatives must include several vital elements. They must be inclusive and participatory, challenge behaviours and habits, and provide interesting and valuable knowledge and solutions for sustainability problems. Further professionalisation and “up-scaling” of Green Office events will be required to steer the UU community towards a more sustainable future.

The Green Office Utrecht has outlined its aspirations for the coming years and will continue to pursue them with energy and dynamism in order to deliver the 2030 UU vision for carbon neutrality and wider sustainability within Utrecht University.