

1. DEMOCRATIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION

ANALYSIS

There is a troubling democratic deficit within the University of Groningen. The UG is home to many different administrative bodies that supposedly allow students to make their voice heard. Examples are the faculty participatory boards, the education committees, the university council and the student assessors. Despite this broad variety of councils and meetings, we feel students cannot truly participate in the creation of policy. De facto, the UG only creates a pretense of participation.

Participatory councils don't get a say in policy papers until late in the process, when it is often already too late to propose an alternative. Moreover, the policy documents are marked 'confidential' far more often than necessary, preventing disagreement from becoming public and preventing negative publicity. We feel this state of affairs is harmful: it circumvents true participation and excludes media from monitoring and scrutinizing what should be a public institution.

Education committees formulate their evaluations on the basis of questionnaires that are filled out by students who often have no idea of how important their voice could be. This detached method of quantitative analysis loses sight of the truly important criteria. For example: rather than measuring graduation percentages, one could ask if a course gave a pluralistic overview of the material, or if the course was taught at an adequate academic level.

Student assessors currently have an advisory role in their respective faculty or central board. When they disagree with their board they are always outnumbered by the other board members. This is fair weather participation, and it poses the threat of the assessor becoming a lobbyist working for the board.

The sometimes praised democratic organization of our university must therefore be understood as just show. The real decisions are made by *top-down* management. Student participation is just an annoyance for managers that they try to marginalize. Instead, the student voice and opinion should be embraced wholeheartedly. Managers should treat students as equal participants in the communal knowledge project that is, at its core, what a university should be about.

OUR VISION

DAG supports radical democratization of the UG, to ensure that managers can be held accountable to the academic community at all times. Decentralization is just as important: important decisions should be made by the people who have to deal with the consequences of policy, where possible. An important condition for academic renewal is the breaking up of the current hierarchic and bureaucratic structure of our university. DAG strives for an open university that is managed by a layered democratic system, rather than by appointed managers. This means that central and faculty board members should be elected by staff and students. The most important advantage of this proposal is that managers have to make their ideas, plans and motivations explicit before they are installed. As such, they will have a new responsibility and accountability towards the academic

community.

Another advantage of elections is the openness: policy and its causes will be public knowledge. Currently, students often have no idea of what goes on at the university, or among the staff. Our vision of transparency will improve the engagement of students and will make it much easier to let staff and students participate in the decision-making process. In addition, this democratic system gives managers a lot more legitimacy, because they gained the trust of the community in advance, and explained their vision and ideas beforehand.