

Root text

We are 0.7, a union for academic staff on temporary contracts at Dutch universities. The document you have in front of you is the explanatory placard for a root text or program that has yet to be drawn up. What we already know is that the manifesto will revolve around improving working conditions and inclusiveness at Dutch universities. There is a need for radical improvement. Therefore, this statement will call for an immediate abolition of systemic overtime work in our academy, for reforming systems of liability and responsibility, and for promoting better career perspective. In the first phase we will try to accomplish this by forming a collective of academic workers on temporary contracts within all Dutch universities, and by entering into dialogue with all institutes and interest groups. But in addition to the conversation, we will also be taking action. This will include: protesting, striking, and refusing to publish any work under the banner of a university as long as it does not pay for it. The union label 0.7 will then serve as a quality mark for the publication of scientific research that we refuse to publish under the name of a university.

It has become a cliché, but the corona crisis has exposed structural abuses that can no longer be ignored. This is true of the abuses within the Dutch universities as it is true for the abuses in Dutch society. Employees at Dutch universities are left unprotected against the years of austerity and assimilation to neoliberal bureaucracy and market thinking within the organizations themselves. We must conclude that the current situation is one of exploitation of academic staff. Despite the fact that there are many in our immediate vicinity who are trying to protect us from the institution of academia, the structures of the academy are evidently exploitative. Unpaid overtime that is nevertheless relied on, predicted and calculated into the budget. Contracts without any job perspective. Policy without participation. An enormous degree of responsibility and independence for the employee who does this work for a remuneration that fits for a "training" trajectory. Lack of institutional oversight on the quality of supervision of junior employees. All this is taking a huge blow to the health, quality of work, career prospects and living conditions of researchers and teachers at universities.

This situation must end. We are not romantic artists who are willing to cut off our ears for the greater interest of academia or for society. Especially since the current situation will certainly not benefit academia and society. Only a fraction of our time goes into research, pioneering research is often not funded, talented people drop out or never enter the walls of the university and there is hardly any attention for the quality of education. We want a better university, for ourselves, for the student, and for society. We begin by re-relating ourselves to the university as what we deliver: labor. We demand a fair employment relationship. Justice (or "social justice") is a term that we as academics like to talk about, but if we look at our own praxis, we must conclude that we are always falling short. We fall short in ensuring diversity, in protecting against discrimination, sexual harassment or worse, and we fall short in our employment relationships. We will start with that last point, but these other points will also be our core objectives.

The complaint is simple. Labor rights do not seem to apply to us in practice. We don't get paid for much of our labor. We are forced to work unpaid overtime. Moreover, we are not the proprietor of our intellectual labor, both our research and our education work are owned by the university. We don't have the job perspective that would suit our functions, and the structures to discuss and change these perspectives are missing. The university, and with it academia, relies on its ignoring the labor rights of academics at the start of their career, and of employees on temporary contracts. This is systemic. No coincidence. Not an incident. But structural and conscious. Moreover, for the people who do the work, the teaching and research staff (and we do not exclude that other groups such as facility staff also have to deal with these problems), it is impossible to raise these problems with the people who are responsible. Because of the typically neoliberal spread of liability over a number of bureaucratic processes, procedures, organizations and managers, it is practically impossible to address those who make the decisions.

Our supervisors, managers, promoters, senior researchers and so on, are not the ones who knowingly allocate too little DCU per course, who draw up our salaries and contracts, or who have designed the extensive feedback or expense claims systems. They are trying to keep us out of the wind. But we believe that this is not enough. They fail, as we ourselves fail, by maintaining a system that eats us up. With that we are all partly responsible for all people who fall outside of this system, because they could not sustain it and fell ill, or because they did not have the resources or privileges that the survivors have. What is the point of another diversity committee if the position of scientist is reserved exclusively for people with the privilege of cultivating a career on their own resources and time?

There are already many trade unions, many interest groups, many participation mechanisms, and one of our main goals is to look for partnerships with these. Ideally we will have to conclude that we are not needed and that we can join within an already existing organization. However, so far all these organizations have not been able to prevent or remedy this situation. The hierarchical structure of our universities does not allow for internal participation and influence. There is hardly any possibility of democratic participation, and there is too little independent supervision. Careers can only be made by building a good network and this is what makes it risky to adopt a critical attitude. Also during the corona crisis, participation appeared an impossibility. When making decisions about, for example: keeping offices open, contributing to solutions, extending contracts, preventing mental illness, the online training of new employees and the hours spent on putting education online was not discussed with the employees. We get stuck in procedures, emails from support staff that have no responsibility, claims of money shortage (we call it priorities) and mindfulness courses. Sometimes there was help, sometimes there were resources or there was attention, but always from an involved person, or one hub / collective / department that tried to "make the best of it". Structurally as organization, as universities, and as academia, it fell wildly short, as it has done for so long, and will continue to do. It's bad now and it won't get better by itself. In any case, not by doing only what has already been done. The undemocratic and hierarchical structures also cause an enormous lack of diversity and inclusivity. That is why we see room for a new organization. One that works as

a collective and stands behind individuals who want to criticize, and can exert external pressure so that it creates room for change within the university. We hope that our organization will quickly make itself obsolete.

We want more action and more activism! Less consensus. Less fear of failure as academics, or fear of suspicious eyes within an organization because we break with the status quo. This does not mean that we want conflict with our research schools, with our managers, with our rectors, tutors and professors. We see them as our supporters. In the spirit of WOinactie and with an extra salute to Ingrid Robeyns, who without her knowing is a great source of inspiration for us, we will try to expose these problems. We want to seriously think about (white) strikes, seriously think about dismantling the VSNU, seriously discuss a restoration of our labor rights. We will refuse to be passive recipients to policy, but demand a seat at the table. After all, we do the work and have insight in what is currently keeping us from doing our job to the best of our ability.

We choose the name 0.7 because it symbolizes what is wrong. For a temporary teacher, 0.7 is the maximum for a contract, because it is clear to everyone that with a contract of 0.7 more hours are already being worked than a full-time contract requires. This shows that it is clear to everyone that systematic overtime is the norm. With the choice of this name we want to make the absurdity of this norm explicit. There is only one conclusion that you can draw: change must be made.

The union 0.7 proposes the following concrete steps:

1. As a trade union, we enter into dialogue with existing groups and organizations academia. We form a broad network that offers us knowledge, insight and with which we can have an impact. In the short term, we will focus on employees of temporary contracts, but are open to academics in general. We will be active at multiple universities so that we have experiences to be able to compare and take "best practices" as an example. If in Nijmegen something goes well, and not in Utrecht, then we want to hold Utrecht University accountable. Since we recognize that across the faculties, the problems differ, we initially focus on humanities faculties, but we are prepared to open up to other faculties, if it turns out there are similar problems.
2. When we do work on our own time, we will no longer publish it under the name of the university. We will publish this scientific work under the union name and hope to be able to provide a quality guarantee as a union. We are a collective that publishes scientific research, and will uphold that intellectual property and commercial property either belong to the collective, or is given to academia as a whole. We hope that it may serve as a means of leverage, and may be exemplary of the many hours of free work that academics give to the university. That people praise our free work afterwards, while we ourselves have already burned out and left academics, is no longer acceptable. Again, we decline to be tormented geniuses while we are simply employees on a payroll. We wouldn't ask factory workers to identify so much with their work that they work the night shift for free. Our research will no longer be owned by the university if the university does not pay us for it.