



**School of Education**

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May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

Dear Rector,  
Dear Vice-Rector,  
Dear Ghent University management,

We heard about the difficult position in which Ghent University is finding itself as a result of governmental underfunding and understand that this situation requires drastic austerity measures and therefore difficult decisions. It has also come to our understanding that one of those difficult decisions concerns a proposed budget cut on the university's [Green Office](#) as a place where staff and students collaborate to initiate, support and facilitate sustainability projects in a highly coordinated and professional manner.

As researchers in the field of Environmental and Sustainability Education, many of us have come to know the Green Office through international collaborations, networks, studies and seminars and been deeply impressed by the way in which a multitude of crucial functions and activities are combined within one central body, jointly driven by passionate students and experienced, highly skilled staff. The Green Office serves as a central sustainability hub, connects sustainability initiatives between the university and the city, drives educational innovation and transdisciplinary research and supports students in finding solutions for real-world sustainability problems. These kinds of activities do not only integrate more sustainability into the university itself, but also radiate locally, nationally and internationally. This has greatly contributed to Ghent University's excellent international reputation as a frontrunner for sustainability in higher education.

Within our field of research, it is widely established that merely learning about the underlying problems of the climate crisis and the resulting consequences does not automatically enable students to apply this knowledge. On the contrary, it can have negative psychological effects on students such as anxiety or paralysis. For universities, it is thus essential to not only study and teach about sustainability issues, but to adopt more transformative types of education and enable current and future generations to actively work towards concrete solutions. Professional coordination and support in dealing with real-world sustainability challenges such as that provided by the Green Office staff are powerful tools to provide students with invaluable practice experience and help them develop the self-efficacy required to turn their knowledge into practice.

Accordingly, universities worldwide are recognizing their important role in equipping students with not only knowledge about sustainability problems, but also with the skills to develop solutions to the great variety of challenges that the climate crisis imposes on them, leading to an extensive rise in new initiatives integrating sustainability into all areas of academic life and all fields of education. Internationally recognized examples such as Transition UGent and the Green Office are thus much needed. Unsurprisingly, Ghent University is regularly referred to as an inspiring role model for other higher education institutions in Europe and beyond.

We would therefore like to stress the far-reaching impact of your decision on maintaining the Green Office in its current form. Depriving the Green Office of its coordination capabilities and turning it into a student-led initiative would not only negatively affect Ghent University, its students and the local society, but also be a huge backlash for the current wave of new sustainability practices at other universities worldwide who turn to Ghent University for inspiration and best practices.

Out of deep concern, we urge you to recognize the wide impact Ghent University currently has as a sustainability frontrunner and trust that you will decide to strengthen this role and continue to inspire other higher education institutions with remarkable initiatives such as the Green Office Ghent.

Sincerely,

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