

HKU Student Union - About

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1. Mission and purpose - what are goals
2. Why do we have a union, origins
3. Who are we? - members vs organization
4. Structure - workgroups - flat structure etc.
5. Communication
6. How do we accomplish, demos etc
7. How do we work, communication, meeting?
8. Transparency - archive
9. Finances
10. Responsibility and accountability

HKU STUDENT UNION – Together we change

The HKU Student Union who encapsulates the struggles of all participants in the functioning of HKU, from students to staff, to cleaners and teachers, it has been set up to due to lack of necessary change and even negative change in our institution.

It started as a movement of students who expressed solidarity with Palestine and saw their opinions and thoughts being masked and censored by official HKU higher ups.

Our solidarity was pushed back from within, and therefore a justification for an official representative student union arose, as the CvB did not decide in favour of the majority.

The demands of the HKU Student Union are as following:

- The democratisation of HKU.
- The improvement of student conditions.
- The cease of collaboration with any Zionist entity and any other future genocide perpetrators/defenders/investors, including exchange.
- The abolishment of institutional racism and any other form of discrimination towards oppressed groups.
- A better integration between HKU departments
- The reversal of the ban of Alumni students from HKU workshops.

Every policy decision about the HKU is made by the CvB, the highest saying body within the HKU, which is unelected. The only prominent form of student representation is that of class representatives, whose advice to the board is non-binding, and whose role is in facilitating isolated communication between individual students and faculty directors.

The CvB has rolled in favour of negative policies for the students and staff of the HKU such as:

- The ban on Alumni students from HKU Workshops, leaving students without the tools to easily continue their practices.
- The pretending ignorance of institutional racism that made two teachers quit their position.
- The change from a self-owned mailing service and move towards Microsoft Outlook, furthering depending HKU on private American technology companies.
- The dissolution of the technical center at HKU Oudenoord, a space created to help students, to create an office for a higher up.

And more.

The HKU student union opposes the undemocratic nature of the HKU and aims to facilitate the coming together of critical students across all HKU schools. It is a (in time) official body of representation, meant to provide the connecting tissue between otherwise isolated students, so we can speak up and influence the policies that affect our community as a unified voice. By providing channels of communication, we can facilitate meetings to organise protests, mass complains or negotiations with the board. Furthermore, we aim to publish zines, statements, posters, etc. communicating our goals and ideas.

Why do we need a union?

The HKU is the final step before students go into the the job market to sell their labour.

The education and conditions of the HKU is what will dictate student performance and learnt skills. Therefore it has an immense impact in the future life of all students.

In the present, each and every student, teacher and employee, has a full life in the HKU, whether its classes, social activities or others, the way the school is ran has a direct impact on their day to day life, of which poor management can cause severe negative consequences to the students such as mental problems and financial stress. For most students, and some teachers, the HKU is a place they go to almost every day, so it is of importance that everyone can feel at home and that their needs are met.

After studying, the HKU continues to have impact, since there are 800¹ new young artists leaving into the world every year. The values and way of thinking that the alumni have been exposed to, continues to live on.

Next to the individual lives, the HKU as an institution has a massive impact. Being one of the biggest art schools in Europe, with a cashflow of 70 million per year, more than 4400 students, and 900 employees, the HKU is not a small, cozy school, that it impersonates.

Considering that the HKU has so much impact, it is of utmost importance, to have a fully independent organisation - that represents the values of the students and teachers - to keep the CvB of the HKU in check.

As opposed to the other limbs of the HKU with students and teachers involved, like the CMR and the OC. The Union can take more direct actions, like negotiation, demonstrations and protests. In these actions, the students and teachers take a much more active role.

¹ ,2,3 <https://www.hku.nl/getmedia/0e020c7f-2557-4c7e-aca0-4cae648cad35/HKUjaarverslag-2023.pdf>

Who can join?

Although we are called the HKU Student Union, teachers, employees and alumni are also welcome to join. The Union is for everyone who wants their voice heard.

Structure of the union

In the Union, everyone is equal. We are a flat organisation without an executive board or leaders. We make decisions by consensus. We have general meetings every Thursday, where everyone can join, and share their vision.

To participate in the Union you can either take on an organisational role or a following role.

In following, your voice can empower us in a protest or a petition, and you become a valuable part of our network. Apart from that, you can also help us by spreading the word about the Union and our activities. Input about things happening at your school or helping us build our network through your contacts is helpful.

In organising, you can organise – pretty straight forward. You can either join already existing workgroups or use our network to set up a new group with a new goal. We strive to realise both smaller and bigger goals. You can do this by signing up and joining a work group / organisation chat (signal).

If you'd like to do anything on behalf of the union, please do present your ideas at a meeting, send us an email or message us in the signal chat. If this way of organising becomes unsustainable or impractical, we may review it and establish a more formal way of organising the union.

Communication

The union uses multiple platforms to communicate to our members. The most important being this website and our newsletter. The newsletter will be sent via email 1-2 times every month, where we will send updates regarding our activities, upcoming activities and more information. Apart from these, we also send updates regularly in our Whatsapp community, where members can also discuss among themselves.

For organisational communication, the Union uses Signal exclusively. This is our platform of choice for private conversations.

The union uses Cryptpad as our online data storage, as well as writing other docs and our meeting notes.

The Union uses Fastmail as our mailing service and internal calendar.

The Union's website is run using a Github repository.

The Union is heavily against Meta, Google, and other Big Tech companies. It strives to use as many open source platforms as possible, which business models are not exploiting their users.

To also reach students/teachers/employees, that are not members yet, we also make use of posters/stickers, and will occasionally spread messages via Whatsapp groups.

How do we accomplish our goal?

The Union strongly believes that united the members can accomplish a whole lot, we call ourselves the ants for a reason.

The first step to accomplish anything is always to inform, so that members can make their own opinions. We do that mainly with posters and articles. We use other platforms to spread those physically and online.

We then try to create a movement, to make sure the people that the message is for, hear us loudly and clearly. We make petitions, make art, or do patching sessions. In the meantime, the Union will usually contact the representatives of the opposing side. And invite them to negotiate. The Union tries to de-escalate wherever possible, but also stands firm and protects our mission.

If the Union sees no other way but to escalate, we can organise demonstrations or strikes. These go by strict rules, and will always be non-violent. We look back with pride to what our comrades already accomplished with peaceful movements, and follow their example.

Transparency

Transparency is important, especially with an organisation that works with, and for the Members of the Union. Members have the right to stay informed with our decisions and the reasons behind them. Therefore we strive to publish our meeting notes, and share as much information as possible.

Everyone is welcome at our meetings, as they are usually in the atrium of the Oudenoord. We do not like working behind closed doors.

Finances

The Union currently does not receive any funding from the HKU, government or any other instance. Although all of our members do any work voluntarily, we still rely on donations for our, tiny, but existing expenses. We pay 5 euro's per month for our email service and 6 euro's per year for our website domain. Apart from our fixed expenses, other expenses include, but are not limited to: material costs, printing costs, food and snacks.

We track all of our finances using Actual Budget, and we will publish our transaction in our newsletter and on our website.

Responsibility and accountability

We are aware that speaking for 4400 students and 900 employees, is quite the responsibility. Any decision made by the Union is made by multiple members, and made carefully. Every article and written document is shared to the organising members, so it is checked before being published. Never do we force any member or student/teacher to stand behind us, every individual makes their own decision on each matter.

After every action, we assess and debrief. We talk about what happened, and what we will do different next time. We also ask for feedback from members as much as possible, and are always open for conversation.