

To all staff of Ghent University

Subject:

- ◆ Rector and Board of Governors continue draconian budget cutback plan
- ◆ Trade unions at Ghent University announce action plan: your participation is needed
- ◆ Join us at the staff meeting on Thursday April 20th 2023 from 1 p.m. until 3 p.m. in Auditorium 2 Franz Cumont, at Blandijnberg

Dear colleague,

On Tuesday March 28th 2023 the Board of Governors has approved the severe budget cutback plan of the rector. During the past couple of weeks there was a lot of media coverage for this plan. The content of the original plan (in Dutch) that was proposed to the Board can be still be found on the news website of Apache. The hyperlink can be found e.g. on the following web page: <https://acodugent.be/node/1176>

Only the decision concerning the list of specific measures (point 4.2.3. of the document) was postponed to the next Board meeting. However we fear that then also there will not be many changes to the antisocial cutbacks that are part of this list, e.g. abolition of the Job Service for students and the Green Office, new budget reductions on daycare and cleaning services, introduction of paid parking spaces, etc.

On top of that management foresees to save another 11 million euro by so called efficiency gains and process analyses in the operations of the central administration, while it is explicitly stated that an intervention in the available workforce is inevitable. In the management text it is made clear what is intended by this: not only the voluntary or forced reorientation of people towards others jobs, but also a recruitment freeze, and involuntary dismissals, also for people having tenure. Apart from this another 5,5 million euro is to be found within the faculties.

What are the consequences?

Such a budget cut is equivalent to the loss of more than 300 jobs, partly in the faculties, but for the largest part within the central administration. This is a social carnage, that moreover will have a huge impact on the services provided to the faculties and students. As trade unions we absolutely cannot accept the involuntary dismissal of people, neither colleagues with employment contract nor colleagues having tenure.

What alternatives are there?

There indeed are alternatives, and the trade unions have proposed these on multiple occasions during the past couple of months: reducing the high marketing expenses of Ghent University, reducing the non-designated funds that for all intent are being controlled by the rector (800.000€/year), avoiding expensive first class flight tickets and reducing the management premiums, increasing the conversion to (less expensive and better protected) tenured positions for current contractual staff, more rational use of buildings, suspension of budgets allocated to cooperation arrangements with the private sector that are being kept out of the annual budget, ... Budget saving equals making choices, but it is clear that the budget saving priorities of the rector are not the same as ours.

We propose a different approach

The three trade unions have published an open letter asking the rector for a different approach to the budget cuts. You can find this letter (in Dutch) on <https://acodugent.be/node/1177>

Instead of one large budget cutback plan of € 33,6 million euro for 2027 we ask for an annual social consultation where each year a thorough discussion on the annual budget is being held, and where is being determined what budget savings are needed. For this we also take into account the result of the annual accounts of the previous year, that each year ends up more positive than foreseen in the annual budget. This way the savings target is reduced, and it can be guaranteed that the savings that would still be needed will happen in a social way, not ending up on the heads of university staff.

Your help is needed

We want to convince the rector and management to choose this social path, rather than opting for an antisocial budget cutback plan. But for this we will need your help. We will need to take action, and those actions will need wide and massive support. Therefore we start an action plan in joint trade union front.

As a first step we call for all staff of Ghent University, regardless of their type of employment or scholarship or other status, to join us in a **general staff meeting (mainly in Dutch) on Thursday April 20th 2023 from 1 p.m. until 3 p.m. in Auditorium 2 Franz Cumont, at Blandijnberg 2 in Ghent. There will also be an online-only staff meeting in English on Friday April 21st from 12 a.m. until 2 p.m. (an MS Teams link will be sent to all who register for this meeting through the online form below). At these meetings, together we will discuss the budget cutback plan, our alternatives, and a proposal of action plan needed to make these alternatives possible.**

This is a formal staff meeting organized by the trade unions. This means that you can leave your workplace to go to the onsite meeting, or participate in the online meeting during working hours. Your superior cannot refuse this, and you are also not required to catch up afterwards for the time lost.

We would like to ask all staff who want to participate in the meetings to please register using the link below, so we can make a fair estimate of the number of onsite participants and e.g. can change the onsite meeting room if needed. Should you not be able to join us at the onsite meeting, you can let us know at registration and you will then receive an online participation hyperlink.

<https://event.ugent.be/registration/personeelsvergadering>



For additional information, please do not hesitate to contact the trade unions using the mail addresses below:
ACOD (acod@ugent.be) – ACV (acv-openbarediensten@ugent.be) – VSOA (filip.lobbestael@ugent.be)

PS: We realize that a paper letter is not a very modern or very ecological way of communicating. Unfortunately, after the trade union actions against the budget cutback plans of last year the mailing lists that were in use by the trade unions have been shut down on the instructions of the rector. Because of this we are forced to spread this message through internal postal mail to make sure all university staff can be reached.

Do you wish to be informed through e-mail also, especially concerning the future actions against the budget cutback plan? You can let us know through the online registration form mentioned above.

Furthermore you can also follow the sharepoint page of the trade unions:

<https://ugentbe.sharepoint.com/sites/EPV>