

## **The 2<sup>nd</sup> election round has started – some thoughts from RECTORATE VINCENT**

During the last election debate, on April 1, several questions came up we were unable to answer at the time, and that we, Rectorate Vincent, would like to answer. But first, a brief summary of what we stand for and some thoughts about what distinguishes the two teams. Key characteristics of our team and plans are:

- ✔ Strong, collegial leadership based on broad experience
- ✔ We listen and understand before we decide
- ✔ We are a good team - we complement each other and collaborate seamlessly
- ✔ Academic grounding, always and everywhere - focusing on students and research
- ✔ More participation, trust and transparency – a good management culture
- ✔ Less bureaucracy - a sensible rental model (“leiestedsmodell”)
- ✔ Solid financial management that allows NMBU to contribute to a sustainable future
- ✔ The NMBU brand must be developed - communication and innovation
- ✔ Norway's most satisfied students on a vibrant campus
- ✔ An excellent combination of research and education - Norway's best place to study and work

Our slogan: ONE NMBU – BUILT ON KNOWLEDGE AND TRUST, DRIVEN BY PEOPLE

### **What sets the two teams apart? Here are some things to think about:**

1. We are quite different types of persons. This difference will be reflected in the way we lead and communicate.
2. The two teams have very different backgrounds and experience. Our team has comprehensive and broad experience, from research, education, innovation and administration. We complement each other, and we work as a team. This extensive experience, supplemented by Vincent's membership on the University Board and his role as head of one of NMBU's sustainability arenas, means that we know NMBU very well. Our team has good knowledge of all types of education provided at NMBU, including professional education (“profesjonsutdanning”). Our background also provides us with a deep understanding of the needs of experimental education and research at NMBU in all its breadth; this clearly sets us apart of the other team. For example, we believe that we are better suited to ensure that the implementation of the rental model (“leiestedsmodell”) at NMBU is done in a good and reasonable way.
3. Because we will focus on progress in research and education, and because we have so extensive, operational experience, we will be able to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. We will be able to distinguish between essential and non-essential administrative processes and we will simplify what can and should be simplified. We think that we will be able to achieve very good collaborative interactions with NMBU's administrative forces at all levels, since we are analytical, systematic and efficient, and since we have excellent interactions with administration in the units where we work today.
4. We believe that the teams have slightly different views on some aspects of NMBU's educational activities. Both emphasize high quality, good learning conditions and have focus on digital opportunities and challenges. However, our team is more focused on basic education and ensuring that students acquire core competencies that remain relevant over time and are in demand by future employers. We will of course work with innovation, development of teaching

and learning methods, and entrepreneurship, but probably to a somewhat lesser extent than the other team. We will focus on quality but also on costs. When it comes to education, Ingunn's faculty, Realtek, has much to show for, such as the relatively recent development of high quality educational programs that attract large amounts of students who are popular on the job market, while at the same time creating a strong, partially student-driven, innovation environment.

5. There is a difference between the board experience of the rector candidates. We have, and have had, several board positions at Faculty and University level. The role of chairman of the board will be important for the new rector and here Vincent's considerable board experience will be important and useful.

6. During the election campaign, there has been remarkably little discussion about NMBU's economic situation. We do not know much about what the other team intends to do. We are confident that we have good and realistic plans for how we can improve NMBU's financial situation; more details can be found in other election documents that we have written.

### **Answers to specific questions:**

*Question:* In the current economic situation, part of the agricultural section of NMBU with its expensive infrastructure (rental model) and few students is in a difficult situation. For example, work on certain animal species may be abolished and practical subjects may be cancelled to save money. How does the rector's office stand on livestock subjects in particular and the role of livestock at NMBU? Will you preserve these despite a demanding economic situation?

*Answer:* We believe that we should preserve the traditional subjects that are currently struggling financially and with recruitment. Topics such as food, plants and livestock are more important than ever! This is also pointed out by the OECD. We will work purposefully to ensure that all study places within these subject areas are filled, while we work politically for better financing of national infrastructure. The introduction of the rental model ("leiestedsmodell") at NMBU has not been done in an optimal way and we will address this as soon as we take office. We must be able to afford to use our facilities.

*Question:* Restructuring at NMBU – revised mandate (NMBU Boards, Councils and Committees - Meetings - University Board (06.03.2025) states the following: Additional challenges that are not currently included in the savings requirement are covering previous years' deficits for certain faculties and units, as well as the significant backlog in maintenance and upgrading of buildings and infrastructure, such as machinery, equipment and ICT. Any other cost increases and needs within specific areas are also added. As far as I know, this amounts to many billions of kroner in total (for NMBU's properties alone it amounts to between 4 and 5 billion kroner). How do you intend to deal with these additional challenges?

*Answer:* This is an important point. It is clear that NMBU will never be able to catch up with a backlog of 4 – 5 billion without special allocations of government funds; so we must work for that politically. NMBU should have an ambition to spend more on maintenance of our buildings than we do today. The harsh reality is that our savings/earnings requirement is (significantly) greater than 200 million. In the short term, we are not able to do much more maintenance than we do today, because we have to get through a rather acute economic crisis without losing our independence and because we need to keep up the morale of the employees. However, in the slightly longer term, e.g. at the end of the upcoming board term, the maintenance budgets will have to increase.

*Question:* We heard Solve's view on how important he considers the administration's role at NMBU, can we get Vincent's view on the same?

*Answer:* Solve heavily praised NMBU's administration, which we believe is justified. Our administrative people do an excellent job. However, this does not mean that everything is in perfect order (at NMBU as a whole). There is some over-administration, there is too much silo thinking in parts of the organization, there are too many differences in the way the Faculties operate, and not all lines of command are equally clear.

A competent administration and a skilled technical staff are crucial for NMBU's success. Vincent has extensive experience of good cooperation with the administration at KBM, which is a small, efficient, and supportive unit. Ingunn and Thea interact very well with the administrations at Realtek and VET. NMBU needs local unit administrations, with administrators being close to those who teach, conduct research or maintain large facilities. We believe that we will be able to achieve very good collaborative interactions with NMBU's administrative staff at all levels, both centrally and in the units, since we are analytical, systematic and efficient, and since we have excellent working relationships with administration in the units where we work today.

*Question:* How will you ensure interdisciplinarity and enable the university to solve sustainability challenges in new ways, both in teaching, research and community relations?

*Answer:* Meaningful interdisciplinarity is ensured primarily by ensuring the quality of our disciplines, and interdisciplinarity is not a goal in itself. Interdisciplinarity is needed to solve some of today's biggest challenges, something that, for example, Vincent has gained extensive insight into through leading one of NMBU's sustainability arenas and through a large project funded by the ERC's interdisciplinary research program (ERC-Synergy). However, interdisciplinarity is of limited value if discipline quality is insufficient, and we need to keep in mind that NMBU can also contribute to solving sustainability challenges through approaches that are not necessarily interdisciplinary.

In our policy documents we state: By building on NMBU's unique combination of leading research and education within both the natural sciences and the social sciences, we will educate students who can contribute to solving the complex challenges that the world is facing. Educating students who have the knowledge and tools that are necessary to become societal actors who can solve sustainability challenges is the most important thing we do. When it comes to the great potential that lies in collaboration between NMBU's faculties, we must, as Vincent said in the debate, work to remove cultural and economic obstacles to such collaboration, in both research and education. We are one NMBU.

*Question:* What are the rector candidates' position on the current and future use of tenure track positions ('innstegsvilkår') as a route to hiring academic staff at NMBU?

*Answer:* First of all, as we state in our platform and elsewhere, we want NMBU to have a transparent and fair recruitment policy. Young researchers in various phases of their career should have a clear picture of their options (career paths) and the requirements that come with these options. Competition for fixed positions should be fair and open, using proper recruitment processes. Creating or filling fixed positions through "recruitment by coincidence" (we call it "bakdørsrekruttering" in our Norwegian texts), in non-transparent processes, needs to be abolished. NMBU Faculties should largely apply identical policies.

A fixed position in Norwegian academia is a huge privilege, but to get there, we all need to pay the price of a period of job uncertainty in a time of life (e.g., early thirties) that tends to be busy for many people. The hard fact is that only a small fraction of people doing a PhD end up in fixed academia positions, and it takes a good while and a lot of training to get there. In principle "tenure track" positions could be a useful intermediate between a temporary project-financed researcher position and a fully fixed position, with clear targets to meet and clear criteria for success and failure. However, based on our experiences with this type of positions and our general knowledge of Norwegian culture and law, we doubt whether this a good instrument.

***We hope you will exercise your right to vote! “Riktig godt valg” from Vincent, Ingunn and Thea.***

