



Vision on Student Well-Being



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

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REFERENCES:

The following publications provided inspiration for this document:

Leiden University, [Shared transferable skills](#)

Leiden University, *Towards an integrated approach to student well-being at Leiden University*.
Advice from the Student Well-being Taskforce to the Executive Board, September 2019

Leiden University, [Innovating and Connecting](#), Leiden University Strategic Plan 2022-2027, February 2022

Universities of the Netherlands, [Vision on Student Well-being](#), March 2022



Introduction

In recent years, there has quite rightly been increasing awareness of the importance of student well-being. Students, university staff and researchers have sounded the alarm several times, both nationally and at our university, about the decline in student well-being. Much has happened since and important steps have been taken to support our students' well-being.

It is with pride and a strong sense of urgency that we present this Vision on Student Well-Being, which derives from our shared ambition to continue building a healthy, engaged and learning community (the University Strategic Plan 'Innovating and Connecting' 2022-2027). The vision was developed with input from students and staff from all the faculties, as we can only support and improve our students' well-being as a community. The vision is in line with the Administrative Agreement on Higher Education and Science 2022, which explicitly mentions student well-being.

This vision document comprises the definition of student well-being that we use at Leiden University, followed by the vision itself. This provides a framework within which faculties and central departments can shape their student well-being policies and projects. It is followed by an explanation of the role of student support staff and the objectives arising from the vision. The duty of care framework is also attached.

The vision was approved by the Executive Board on 14 March 2023 and therefore enters into force.

To move from vision to implementation, we will translate this vision into an implementation plan 2024-2027 for the whole University.

DEFINITION OF STUDENT WELL-BEING

Student well-being means that students are able to develop their abilities to the full, cope with the challenges of the study and student period, work on their personal and professional development, and maintain a balance between positive and negative aspects of the study period. Student well-being is characterised by resilience, contentment, establishing relationships and gaining experiences during the study period. Student well-being is expressly broader than simply mental health, and also encompasses a degree of physical and social well-being.

(Definition based on the Vision on Student Well-being developed by Universities of the Netherlands, March 2022)

1. Vision on student well-being

Studying and the study period are all about gaining new knowledge, skills and experiences in what is for many students a new environment. It is a period when students develop within a challenging, diverse academic environment that has a lot to offer them and at the same time also places high demands on them. A sense of well-being is an important prerequisite for students to complete their study period successfully. If a student's well-being is under pressure, this can have a negative impact on their studies and their personal and professional development. Leiden University therefore attaches great importance to the well-being of our students and, together with the faculties, takes structural measures to promote student well-being.

A study is a challenging undertaking, which as well as its pleasures and successes, can also entail pressures and setbacks, such as deadlines and assessments. In terms of student well-being, the University is strongly committed to a preventive approach. We communicate clearly, for example on the study programme, and make every effort to avoid unnecessary stress. The University encourages interactions between students themselves and between students and lecturers as a means of creating a safe, inclusive learning environment and a strong academic community. Attention is paid in our teaching programmes to the skills of reflection and resilience. These help students monitor and boost their well-being. This is not only important during their studies but also prepares them for taking part in a society that is subject to rapid change and ever-increasing complexity.

Leiden University offers a range of services to help address problems with student well-being at an early stage. Lecturers and student advisers know what is expected of them in terms of the well-being of students. Students know what they can do to foster their own and one another's well-being, and student organisations also take their responsibilities seriously in this regard. Well-being, the possible lack of this and mental health can be discussed freely in an open culture where we look out for one another and where you can make it known when you need help or support.

If a student realises that their health is under pressure, they know what help Leiden University can offer. Students are encouraged to take the initiative themselves if their well-being is compromised, and to make use of the help offered as and when necessary. Support is readily available and information about it is easy to find. Students also know which adviser they can approach with questions.

Student advisers themselves have the knowledge needed to support students, or they know where to go to access the proper support. If a student adviser suspects that the well-being of a student is under threat, they will take the initiative to discuss this with the student. If necessary, student advisers will refer students on to the right sources of help.

This means that together we form a healthy, engaged and learning community that contributes to the well-being of students and in which they are able to develop personally and professionally.

INFORMATION ON THE ROLE OF STUDENT SUPPORT STAFF

A healthy, engaged and learning community that contributes to the well-being of students is an environment we all create together. Even so, different members of staff have different responsibilities; some have a greater role because their relationships with students puts them in a better position to identify (potential) problems and make more targeted referrals. Together, the student advisers form an integrated support chain.

Student support staff include, but are not limited to: student advisers, study choice/career counsellors, student counsellors, student psychologists, study abroad coordinators, staff at the POPcorners and the student mentors and tutors associated with the mentorship system.

In addition, the University empowers its lecturers, PhDs, postdocs, lecturers and senior lecturers to create a safe and inclusive learning and general environment for students. If they become aware that there are concerns about a student's well-being, they will refer the student to the student advisers.

2. Objectives

Based on the vision on student well-being, Leiden University has set for itself the following objectives, based on the five principles of student well-being (prevention and early signalling, support services and psychosocial interventions, the promotion of expertise, fostering a sense of belonging and a safe study environment).¹ These objectives will form the basis on which faculties and SEA will formulate their implementation agendas for 2023-2027.

Principle 1: *Awareness starts in the learning environment*

- The University focuses on student well-being as part of their personal and professional development. The interdisciplinary skills of reflection and resilience are addressed within the curriculum as a means of contributing to student well-being.²

This is an integral part of our preventive approach;

- The University makes clear the possibilities and responsibilities available to students regarding their own well-being and what help can be offered within the University. As a result of this clear expectation management, students know where they stand from the point when they enrol;
- The University motivates students to work on their personal and professional development. Managing the pressures and uncertainty that are at times part of any study is one element of this;
- The University informs students at the start of the study and at key junctures about the available support and guidance within and outside the University.

Principle 2: *Prevention and early detection in a culture in which student well-being can be discussed openly*

- The University makes it possible to openly discuss mental health (and associated problems) and well-being; there is no taboo on uncertainty or asking for help. As well as study success, there is also space to discuss setbacks;
- Our teaching and the services we provide focus as much as possible on prevention and early signalling; offering students help promptly allows them to function better, and keeps study delays to a minimum. If necessary, we help students make a new, more appropriate choice of study programme;
- The services we offer are readily accessible, easy to find and available within a reasonable timeframe;
- Student advisers are able to recognise problems relating to well-being, and discuss them openly. They know how and when to refer students on to other sources of support;
- The University works together with students and external partners to develop new initiatives to promote student well-being.

Principle 3: *The University and its faculties provide an appropriate range of student support services*

- The University provides a range of training courses that are easy to find and are accessible to all students, on topics that positively affect student well-being;
- For students who need extra support there is a safety net that provides short-term counselling;
- It is clear to students what help they can access within the University and when they will be referred to external partners (see box on duty of care);
- The University maintains contacts with the municipalities, general practitioners and mental health services, thus facilitating referrals within the care chain.

Principle 4: *Advancing the expertise of student advisers to achieve an optimal chain of student support*

- Student advisers together form a chain of guidance to support students with their well-being. There is a high level of cooperation within this chain;
- The roles and responsibilities of student advisers, PhD candidates, postdocs and lecturers in the chain are described and communicated clearly;
- Student advisers are given the opportunity to gain knowledge and develop skills that contribute to the well-being of students. The University offers them a range of training courses to facilitate this, including courses specifically aimed at the particular problems of international students;
- The University ensures that student advisers have the time and opportunities to pay attention to the welfare of the students they support.

Principle 5: *Promoting the well-being of students by creating a sense of belonging and a safe study environment*

- The University creates a safe study environment that has a positive influence on the well-being of students;
- We are actively committed to teaching that both connects and activates students, ensures a balanced distribution of the study load and identifies stressors in teaching and in communication;
- We bring students into contact with each other, the programme and the University and encourages the establishment of relationships between them. It actively contributes to creating and maintaining an engaged community, including through the mentorship system and study and student associations. Specific attention is paid to students in The Hague and their opportunities to interact with one another;
- We encourage academic rapport between teachers and students;
- We connect students with various bodies within the organisation, such as student associations and peer support groups.

¹ The five principles are based on the advice of the *Student Well-being Taskforce: Towards an integrated approach to student well-being at Leiden University*.

² [Shared transferable skills](#)

UNIVERSITIES' DUTY OF CARE WITH REGARD TO STUDENT WELL-BEING

From: 'Vision on Student Well-being' compiled by Universities of the Netherlands, March 2022.

“The universities’ duty of care within the broad societal issue of student well-being is to ensure that the teaching environment and the education are structured in such a way as to support the well-being of students. Universities are responsible for creating an open, safe and inclusive environment that enables students to flourish in terms of their academic and personal development. In addition, universities are responsible for offering counselling and support to students who need it in order to successfully start, participate in and complete a study programme in the Dutch higher education system.

Individual students may embark on their studies from different starting positions, or may develop a need for support during their time as a student. For example for students with a disability, students with informal care duties, international students, first-generation students and students who are combining multiple roles in some other way, such as board members or top-tier athletes. The institutions endeavour to remove obstacles to the feasibility of their study programmes wherever possible. This is among the basic facilities provided by a university. In exceptional circumstances, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, an institution may further scale up these facilities. This is how universities can offer their students the possibility of working to improve their well-being; it is the students’ responsibility to take advantage of these opportunities.”

Leiden University addendum to the definition of duty of care

The student psychologists offer short-term guidance for both study-related and personal problems. Student psychologists do not determine a diagnosis, nor do they offer treatment for serious psychological/psychiatric problems. A student requiring specialised or long-term help, will be referred to their general practitioner for a further referral to the mental health services.



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