



# **Student Wellbeing 2025 Report**

*Drafted by the Leiden University Student platform.*

## **Introduction**

This report was written by the Leiden University Student Platform (LUS) and is intended to provide advice and notice to the Leiden University Executive Board and other staff, students or interested parties.

The report begins with the motivation for the LUS to write this report. Below that is a summary of the recommended policies. In addition, the LUS has distinguished between four themes. For each of these themes, a summary of perceived obstacles has been made, followed by the recommended measures. Recommendations are made for each obstacle, but the report also includes recommendations not directly linked to a problem. Such advice comes from feedback from students who indicated that certain things were missing from the advice. We hope that the report creates new insights and that it can make a positive contribution to the wellbeing of students at Leiden University.

On behalf of the Leiden University Student Platform,

Jelle de Boer

*President Leiden University Student Platform 2024-2025*

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## Motivation

- The most recent Mental Health and Substance Use Student Monitor found that 44% of all students struggle with depressive and/or anxiety symptoms. A staggering 59% of all students indicate emotional exhaustion.
- Leiden University has expanded its student wellbeing initiatives in recent years. It is not sufficiently clear which initiatives fit well with student needs and which do not.
- The LUS is in the perfect position to gather and summarize student opinions on wellbeing policy.

## Summary recommendations

### *General*

- Leiden University should actively engage with students in addition to the evaluation methods formulated in the Joint Plan of Action for Student Wellbeing.
- Wellbeing initiatives can benefit from a familiar face. Sports-, study- and student associations can play an important role in providing this familiar face. It is advisable to organize activities in cooperation with these organizations.
  - Preparations should then take place far ahead of time due to the busy schedules of these organizations.
- The university and its faculties should actively inform students about the impact of financial problems within the university and involve them in conversations about the future of the organization.
- The university and its faculties should continue and expand the creation of "rest rooms" or "third places" for students. This allows students to get the relaxation they need during their day of study and facilitates social interaction with fellow students.

### *Communication:*

- University communication should be improved through better use of current channels.
- Coordination is needed between central departments and faculties when there is promotion on similar topics. This prevents an oversaturation of information and prevents different initiatives from keeping each other down.

### *Wellbeing Week*

- Specifically, the Wellbeing week can benefit from collaborations, especially with student associations. This concerns both the organization of activities and promotion.
- The format of Wellbeing Week should be evaluated. Students experience the week as too full and it is recommended that the week be transformed into a month.
- Activities organized during the week should take place more often in the evening. During the day, students have (mandatory) lectures.

### *Study*

- Within study programs, more attention should be paid to student wellbeing when creating study programs. Deadlines should be spread out and deadlines should be extended sooner due to personal circumstances. It is recommended that central guidelines, with a possibility for customization, be designed for this purpose.

- Rest is essential for students, and students should have a holiday at least twice a year for an extended period. Suitable times are around Christmas and New Year's and in the summer.
- The student mentorship can be given a greater role in providing information to first-year students. In this they should be actively assisted by student advisors.

## General Affairs

### 1. Findings

The survey shows that one-third (31%) of students are neutral or do not notice that the university pays attention to (their) wellbeing. Almost all students (92%) say that the issue of stress affects them or those around them. Moreover, students do not know enough about where to go for help within the university. Finally, members of student associations often indicate little need for support from the university. Associations often organize their own wellbeing weeks/activities and have confidants or psychologists.

Key positives according to students:

- A large majority of students do notice that the university pays attention to student wellbeing.
- Students indicate that study and student associations are (increasingly) paying attention to student wellbeing.
- Students are very positive about the work of the student psychologists.

### 2. Obstacles

The most common obstacles students encounter:

- Students report experiencing stress due to the budget cuts and financial difficulties experienced by the university. This problem is twofold:
  - For some students, the future of their education is uncertain and;
  - Many students notice the great stress and workload of their teachers.
- Many students are not sufficiently aware of where to turn support or advice.
- For many students, they often lack a place where they can unwind during their study day.

### 3. Recommendations

To improve the effectiveness of the broad policy at Leiden University, the following is recommended:

1. Financial problems
  - This report cannot provide solutions to the university's financial problems. However, in the context of students' mental wellbeing, the university is advised to actively involve and inform students about the (financial) future of the university. This can eliminate uncertainty and stress and increase students' confidence in the university.
2. The method of evaluation
  - For future evaluation of student wellbeing and wellbeing policy, students would like to see (national) surveys (such as the NSE or the Trimbos mental health monitor) used for this purpose.
  - Another option is for the university to engage students on a large scale. This can be done through mentoring and/or through sample interviews with a diverse group of students on a large scale.

- The LUS thinks that student advisors or student psychologists could also be well for this purpose. These can be used before or after an interview with a
    - ask students if they would like to briefly answer some questions about experiences with wellbeing policy. In this way, a large group of students can be reached without requiring many resources.
  - The university must also continue to evaluate with employee participation, such as the University Council and representative bodies, such as the PKvV and the StOP.
- 3. Services
  - 49% of students indicated a need for student psychologists. Therefore, it is recommended that the supply of student psychologists be kept the same or further expanded.
    - No research was conducted through the survey on the maximum of five appointments with student psychologists. In interviews with students did emerge that this system is perceived as logical. Students realize that the university does not have the resources to facilitate long pathways.
  - Online resources that students can work with themselves are less popular than workshops, student psychologists or other types of activities. Nevertheless, one in eight students does indicate interest in this. So for a large portion of the student population, this may offer a good option to work on their wellbeing.
- 4. Space for the student
  - Faculties should continue to provide spaces for students to unwind. Initiatives such as "living rooms" in several faculties (FGW, FdR, Plexus) are seen as very positive.
    - A note here is that these should have clear rules, so that students do not hijack these for meetings of project groups, committees, etc. Moreover, they should be easy to find for all students.
    - It is recommended that the creation of spaces for students be included as an option when repurposing spaces, such as offices or classrooms.
    - Students not only benefit from rest rooms, but also places where social interaction is possible. Hepatho and the Fusion within LUMC and FWN respectively are good examples of "third places" where students can meet.
  - Students, from all faculties, should have enough rest periods during the year. This means that every student is entitled to vacation even if he or she has to take resit exams.
- 5. Communications
  - Students are not sufficiently aware of where to turn for help. This is part of a broader communication problem. This is explained further under the *communication* section.

By implementing these (policy) measures, the university can better align its overall policies with the needs of students and contribute to a structural improvement in their wellbeing.

# Communication

## 1. Findings

A large majority of students are not sufficiently aware of wellbeing initiatives. To illustrate: only 48% of students were aware that Wellbeing Week was taking place during the week of November 11-15, 2024. In addition, students indicate they do not know enough about where to go for help and support.

In terms of communication, there weren't many positive points put forward by the students.

## 2. Obstacles

The main obstacles students face in communication:

- The university often fails to reach students adequately. This problem is not exclusive to the topic of wellbeing, but is especially damaging with this topic.
- A common problem here is that students do not know where to turn for advice or support.
  - Students can largely be divided into two groups based on their knowledge of where to turn. One group indicates that they know (very) well where to go for support or advice. This concerns about a third of the students. Another group has insufficient or (almost) no information about where to go for support or advice. This concerns about two thirds of the student population.
  - An additional problem is that while students know of the existence of a particular body or person, they do not know enough about what help is offered by which person or agency. This sometimes leads to long searches or a delayed request for help.
- Students also indicate that sometimes student advisors, but especially student and teacher mentors, are not sufficiently aware of what the university offers. This causes them to be unable to properly direct students to the right destination.

## 3. Recommendations

To improve communication regarding student wellbeing towards students, the following is recommended:

1. Students report that the following communication methods work well. The university uses these methods already, but this could often be more effective. For each option, attention should be paid to the frequency of information sharing. The following options are listed in order of popularity based on what students indicated in the survey.
  - 1) *Lectures*: A majority of students say the best way to be informed about student wellness (initiatives) is through lectures.
  - 2) *Associations*: 49% of students indicated that promotion through their study association (also) would be an effective method if reaching them and other students. Fewer students indicated that their student association would be a good way to reach them.
  - 3) *Social media*: Students also overwhelmingly expressed a desire to be reached through social media. The reach one can have through social media is

probably still significantly larger than what students indicated in the survey. So it is advisable to continue promoting social media accounts, but to make choices in what to promote. An over-saturation of similar content should be avoided. It is advisable to involve students or young staff in making promotion, at the program, faculty and central levels.

- 4) *Student email/Brightspace*: 40% of students indicated that promotion through their student email can reach them well and this is evidenced by the fact that 20% of students had been informed of Wellbeing Week through their student email. Brightspace was mentioned by many students in conversation as an appropriate means of communication.
- 5) *Physical promotion*: Students indicate that physical promotion, such as on screens or coffee machines can work effectively as a promotional tool.

## 2. Information

- Students are inundated with information, so it is very important to present information as concretely as possible. The *student wellbeing roadmap* is a good example of an effective tool, but the roadmap itself could benefit from better promotion through the above channels.
- In the context of the large amount of information, it is important to avoid oversaturation among students. Cooperation between faculty and central departments on wellbeing is needed for this purpose. This prevents promotion or activities from crowding or crowding each other out.

## 3. Communication from first points of contact

- Student advisors are an important first point of contact for students who need help or support. It is essential that they have the right information. The same applies to student and teacher mentors. More attention will be paid to this in the Study section.

# Wellbeing Week

## 1. Findings

Wellbeing Week elicited a variety of responses from students. The survey shows that a majority of students are familiar with the concept (76 students), while a significant number (33 students) were not aware of it. Moreover, students indicated that the Wellbeing Week does not help them pay more attention to their own wellbeing.

Key positive points according to students:

- There is a focus on student wellness, which helps reduce stigma.
- The activities are accessible and diverse.
- Meditation and sports activities are especially appreciated.

## 2. Obstacles

The main obstacles students experience around Wellbeing Week are:

- Lack of spread: Students perceive the week as too full, leading to low participation.
- Insufficient promotion: Students indicated that physical promotion on campus, such as posters and booths, would be more effective. Whereas 70% of students had heard of Wellbeing Week, only 48% of students were aware that the week took place Nov. 11-15.
- Insufficient integration in education: Students report that wellbeing is not sufficiently discussed within their study programs.
- Mismatch with needs: Some activities are considered less relevant to wellbeing.

## 3. Recommendations

To the effectiveness of Wellbeing Week, the following is recommended:

1. Better distribution of activities
  - Spread the activities out over a longer period of time or organize multiple Wellbeing Moments throughout the year. This avoids students being unable to combine Wellbeing Week with their normal weekly schedule.
  - Consider a Wellbeing Month instead of a week. In addition, more activities in the evening, when there are no required lectures or study groups, could increase participation rates.
2. Targeted promotion and visibility
  - More physical promotion in strategic places on campus, such as in restrooms and on the coffee machines.
  - Intensified collaboration with programs to strengthen promotion through mentor groups. As a result, new students are aware of Wellbeing Week from their first year.
  - Many students indicated that promotion through lectures would be effective. A lecturer would then take a moment to reflect on the Wellbeing Week topic and convey information in an effective and cost-free way.
3. Expanding supply and accessibility
  - Activities should also be offered in the evenings. Activities in the evening, when there are no required lectures or working groups, can provide a higher enrollment rate.

- Students indicate that the current range of activities does not match what they benefit from.
  - 51% of students indicate a need for social activities where they can meet fellow students. In addition, there are also students who need activities where they can talk to fellow students about (shared) problems.
  - Activities where students can talk to fellow students about their problems should focus on mental health and on "learning to study.
  - Sports- or rest-related activities also score very high (44% | 44%) and it is advisable to organize such low-threshold activities.
  - Students basically indicate little need for lectures, but the demand for workshops is much higher. The focus here could then be on workshops related to dealing with stress or "learning to study.
- 4. Collaboration with study associations
  - This is a good way to improve the promotion of Wellbeing Week.
  - Collaborating with student associations can increase the enrollment rate.
  - Student associations have considerable experience in organizing activities, increasingly wellbeing-related activities. This enables them to organize activities independently and could (partially) relieve the workload on university staff.

By implementing these (policy) measures, the university can better tailor Wellbeing Week to students' needs and help structurally improve their wellbeing.

# Study

## 1. Findings

Students largely indicate that they would like to see attention to their wellbeing reflected in their education. This emerged from the survey and in conversations with students. They perceive that instructors are reluctant to honor leaving deadlines due to personal circumstances, often see their deadlines fall at the same time, and have no or few vacations. 92% of students indicated that stress is in their environment or with them, study pressure is obviously partly responsible for this.

Students experience a lot of stress and pressure as a result of their education, and it is essential that programs consider the pressures they place on students. If the wellbeing of students is not considered when creating study programs, then the university's wellbeing policy is mostly concerned with treating symptoms. A preventive approach that pays more attention to student wellbeing at an earlier stage can hopefully prevent more serious problems.

Key positives according to students:

- Student advisors are often compassionate and thoughtful.
- Teachers do agree to leave deadlines in cases of serious personal circumstances, such as death or prolonged illness.

## 2. Obstacles

The main obstacles students experience within or related to their education are:

- Students notice little understanding or commitment to their mental wellbeing in their studies. On the other hand, many students do report that in conversations with student advisors they feel very clearly heard.
  - It is possible that a large group of students do not speak to their student advisor enough or cannot sufficiently "find" them. This ties in with findings from our survey that many students do not know enough about where to turn for help. These students then feel less heard.
  - Unfortunately, some students do indicate that student advisors often do not have all the knowledge needed to direct them to the right person within the university or to help them.
- Students find that teachers offer little respite from deadlines. Also, in the case of impeding personal circumstances, such as illness, stress, problems at home or in relationships.
  - As a side note, many students understand the reluctance to leave deadlines. Moreover, there are also students who indicate that their teachers do agree to extend deadlines.
  - It often bothers students that they notice many differences by teacher or by course.
- Some of the students report that they are unable to experience vacations during their study time. This is either because "vacations" must be used for studying

for exams right after the "vacations," or because "vacation periods" are plagued by exams, often retakes.

### 3. Recommendations

To improve wellbeing and wellbeing policies during the study programs, the following are recommended:

1. Attention during lectures
  - Students indicate that they feel wellbeing is little or even not discussed during instruction. Lecturers should provide space for students to talk about this. The recommendation under the heading "communication" to include promotion of wellbeing initiatives during lectures fits well with this.
  - Teachers can easily switch from promoting such an initiative to a question toward the group or a general statement about their commitment to student wellbeing.
  - It is important that instructors can customize this for each group, program or faculty, but it is essential that core elements be the same across the university. It is advisable to make use of a handbook for instructors with guidelines and tips that describe how to make student wellbeing negotiable.
2. Education
  - That the willingness to extend deadlines varies by instructor often bothers students. Guidelines drawn up at the program or faculty level for extending deadlines, with room for customization where necessary, could be a good way out.
3. Student Advisors
  - Study advisors score high (11%; after family and friends) as the first point of contact for students with mental health problems. It is therefore also essential that every study advisor is aware of the appropriate help and support options for students. A handbook for teachers recommended above may also be appropriate for student advisors.
  - In addition, it is important to continue to emphasize the role of student advisors.
    - It is recommended that student advisors periodically visit colleges to lower the threshold to ask for help.
    - Study advisors can reach out more to students, such as by sending emails to senior students who are low on grades. These emails could include an invitation to a meeting, as well as a referral to support options outside the student advisor.
4. Informing teacher and student mentors
  - It is strongly recommended that student mentorship be used to promote information sharing with first-year students. They are in an excellent position to share classroom information.
    - To use student mentors successfully, however, it is important that their knowledge, pay and workload be comparable across all programs. It is logical that faculties or programs can continue to have their own interpretation of this as well, but central elements in the tasking and information provision role should be streamlined.
    - This gives students as many equal opportunities as possible to seek decent help or support.

- To maintain the knowledge of student mentors, it is advisable to organize check-in moments. During these meetings, the year can be evaluated and the knowledge of student mentors can be refreshed.
5. Vacations
- Students should be able to experience the necessary rest during their study time. For this, vacation periods are essential. The exhaustion that failure to take vacations generates in students is very unhealthy.
  - The university could require its programs to stick to at least two vacation periods per year. During Christmas and New Year and in the summer period, especially around the El Cid.

By implementing these (policy) measures, the university can better align the focus on student wellbeing within programs with the needs of students and contribute to a structural improvement in their wellbeing.

## Conclusion

The student wellbeing policy at Leiden University is the result of a university that works hard for its students. There is an incredible amount offered that can support students in their wellbeing, study, future or personal life. Nevertheless, there are things that are missing or could be improved in the eyes of students. Important messaging or (new) initiatives often do not reach them and students sometimes feel excluded from important decisions about the future of the university. Moreover, initiatives do not always connect well with the needs of the student population. It is essential that the university continues to actively engage with students about exactly what they want and expect from the university.

The university is a collaboration of its staff, faculty, researchers and students. It is our hope that this collaboration will continue successfully as it has for 450 years. A healthy student population is essential to the university, and we hope this report makes a positive contribution to that.

On behalf of the Leiden University Student Platform,

Jelle de Boer

*Chair Leiden University Student Platform 2024-2025*

### **Note: Gathering of information.**

- The findings of this report are based on interviews with university students and staff, a survey administered to students and the experiences and expertise of the LUS.
- The survey in question was completed by 112 students, a small portion of the student population. The LUS does believe that the group surveyed is a good reflection of the opinions of students at Leiden University.
- The survey was completed by a diverse student population that reflects the overall population well. There is a wide variety of programs and faculties. Among the respondents, there is a 60-40 split of Dutch and international students and a slight overrepresentation of undergraduate students (77% BA versus 23% MA).
- A larger *sample size* is desirable, however, to increase the statistical significance of the survey. Given the size of previous surveys of the LUS and the response rate of most student surveys, this can be seen as a success though.

### **Other findings**

- Student psychologists score very low under the heading "first point of contact," but many students do indicate a need for more student psychologists. So students do not approach a student psychologist as their first point of contact, but much more quickly their friends or family. However, after this contact with friends or family, there is a great need for professional help.
- There is also a substantial proportion of students who indicated that they do not need support from the university regarding mental wellbeing. This was 16% of respondents.
- The proportion of students who want to be informed about student wellbeing initiatives through their student association is significantly lower than for student associations. Interviews with students revealed that this is often because associations have their own initiatives. Thus, they often have less need for initiatives or information from the university.