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Concerning **Mental Health**

Dear Executive Board, Dear Geert,

After a long period of discussion among several faculty student councils, specifically the CSR, FEB, FdR, FMG, FGw, AMC and FNWI, we would like to collectively encourage the Executive Board and the Faculty boards to consider resolving current issues related to mental health at the UvA. We define mental health problems as issues that are study- or student-related and affect students' psychological well-being, which corresponds to the official UvA STS definition. We consider the solution of these mental health related problems to be of huge importance, due to the negative effects poor mental health can have on study success. A good state of mental health can directly boost students' talent development, motivation, engagement and involvement. These are all goals of the Study Success Report (Recommendation 1, Recommendation 3). But foremost and perhaps even more importantly, the quality of life of the students themselves is greatly improved with an improvement of mental health.

The main problems related to mental health at the UvA can be divided into three categories: the lack of accessibility of the services, the lack of visibility of mental health services and the awareness around mental health. These topics will be discussed in this order in the five paragraphs below.

Firstly, the lack of accessibility. The student-psychologists do not cost any money, parents do not have to be informed and the waiting period is relatively short. This is experienced as a large positive factor by students. However, research also shows that the student-psychologists themselves are disappointed about the time and effort they can invest into treatment (ISO, 2016). They experience a lot of time-pressure and cannot offer optimal help. Student feedback mirrors this conclusion. Research from ASVA (2010) concludes that the short duration of the treatment, consisting of five individual conversations, is the primary object of criticism by students. We recommend addressing this issue by appointing more student psychologists for the purpose of giving them more time per student.

Secondly, also concerning the lack of accessibility, there is currently a pilot to facilitate an easily accessible walk-in hour of the student psychologists at the FNWI. The study adviser can forward students with mental health related issues to the visiting student psychologist to help to tackle these issues. Not only is it evaluated very positively, it also facilitates early intervention. Student psychologists also say that they only need a couple of minutes to assess the problem and send students in the right direction. We would therefore recommend creating similar walk-in hours on all campuses with a frequency of one session per week and following this to implement this walk-in hour permanently at the FNWI. Individual faculty student councils can evaluate the frequency and success of the walk-in hours after a reasonable period of time.

We think that this way of involving study advisers is a step in a good direction. Following this we recommend to make mental health a more integral part of the first years' mentor program at all faculties to help students before serious problems can develop. How to best integrate our proposals at the individual faculties should be discussed in cooperation with the respective student councils.

Thirdly, concerning the lack of visibility. Several student psychologists at the UvA, point out that many students are unable to find the psychologists via the regular UvA channels, such as the UvA website. Research shows that students are made aware of the student psychologist via friends, study advisers or teachers. The facilities are available, but as mentioned above, students in need are struggling to find them. Both connecting it more to the mentor program and creating walk-in hour might help creating more visibility, but we think more can be done. We recommend an active promotion strategy of the student psychologist to make them more visible.

Fourthly, concerning the lack of awareness. we recommend making mental health a primary objective of one of the CvB-members is a way to ensure that mental health is made a long-term goal of the entire UvA. Responsibilities should include evaluation of the state of mental health at UvA in general, as well as monitoring how each faculty is implementing changes that go towards solving mental health related issues. The CSR can be consulted about how this can be implemented in way that can be beneficial for the university.

Fifthly and finally, also concerning the lack of awareness. In our opinion the general student population should be made more aware of mental health through an awareness week. This may also be a good way to promote facilities such as the Student Services and ensure that people who need support are able to find it. The CSR can collaborate in this mental health week set up and we want to emphasize the fact that role of the different faculty student councils and student associations should discussed, when organising such a week.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Concluding, we observe a few problems surrounding mental health at the

University of Amsterdam. In our opinion, the University plays an important role in taking care of their students coping with problems. The central problems we see in the lack of information and accessibility do not offer reasonable solutions to struggling students.

Keeping the aforementioned analysis in mind, we recommend the following:

- Appointment of more student-psychologists.
- Introduction of low barrier walk-in hours on faculty level every week.
- Integration of mental health into the first years' mentor programme at all faculties.
- More promotion of the students psychologists of the UvA to make them more visible.
- Establishment of mental health as a primary objective of one of the members of the CvB.
- Creation of a week dedicated to mental health and the Student Services.

Hoping you acknowledge our central concerns and the overarching agreement across the faculty student councils of the CSR, FEB, FdR, FMG, FGw, AMC and FNWI, we sign this letter and await your reaction.

Sincerely,

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