ADVICE - EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION AT THE VUB

INTRODUCTION

The entire country is currently in the grasp of the COVID-19 virus. We are grateful for the far-reaching measures, because they will undoubtedly save lives. The physical closure of the universities is a necessary measure that we support. We would therefore like to be part of the decision-making process for further measures to minimize the impact on our students. We want to help channel the needs of our students and form a bridge between the policy makers and the voice of our students, especially the more vulnerable ones.

AREAS OF CONCERN

General

- We want to emphasize the importance of student input. We believe that taking into account the opinion of students can provide targeted and clear solutions. We are therefore happy to help with the search for students who are willing to commit to this.
- We would like to emphasize that one of the most difficult things about this situation is the uncertainty. That is why we ask for fast communication and preferably through a fixed channel, so that students do not have to search for it. Students need information about their education, but also whether or not they will be able to do an internship, go on erasmus... Even communicating what's not known at the moment, may make the situation easier for them.

Education

- For the replacement of practicals, lab work, etc., we think it is appropriate to provide general practical guidelines so that no discussion can take place on this matter. These guidelines make it clear to professors and assistants what they can expect from students and for students what's expected of them.
- The question is often asked to give lessons online as much as possible. This not only by providing written course material, but also by a spoken explanation. In this way the workload of the students will be minimalized, which has an additional positive influence on the daily rhythm of students. We know that maintaining a rhythm has some psychological benefits. Also for lessons where problems arise in this area, we would like to plead for the organisation of a reporting point. Numerous reports have already been received from professors who do not perform this properly.
- Our students cannot be expected to achieve exactly the same objectives as in a regular academic year. That is why we appeal to a certain flexibility in the expectations of professors.
- Students of course have other deadlines and we would like to ask to take this into account. Other planned traineeships, applications for scholarships and the start of the work period for graduate students should be affected as little as possible by the Corona crisis. In any case, we want to prevent students from missing out on opportunities here.
- Students writing a bachelor's or master's thesis need fixed moments when they can reach their promoter by phone or Skype. We fear for the loss of guidance of some of these students, since promoters who supervise many students now might be even less reachable.
Financing
- Students who are in financial distress due to the Corona crisis, need help right now. Students should be able to indicate somewhere what the problem is (paying for a room, paying for the study itself,...) and we should be able to look for a solution with them. It is also necessary to offer the means necessary to study remotely (such as laptops and internet connection).

Working students
- A general platform to help students take care of their children seems useful. Students with children probably have the heaviest burden during this period.
- Working students ask to adopt the Flemish system of educational leave, in which educational leave is organised on the basis of credits. In the current system, there are no contact hours anymore and therefore no educational leave will be granted, but they still need these hours for self-study.

International students
- International students also ask to communicate clearly to them. Some students were obliged to return to their home country and if they are unable to return, they are of course unable to take part in offline examinations.

The VUB presents itself as a human university and this seems to us the perfect opportunity to put this conviction into practice. We would like to thank everyone who is committed to our students every day. We would also like to emphasize that some of these points are already well implemented. The purpose of this document is therefore to indicate what students report to us, in order to clearly indicate what they attach the most importance to. We are VUB, more than ever.