



University Council

Datum

01-04-2021

Onderwerp

Response to Work plan tackling work Pressure

Ons kenmerk

CvB/EB/LvS/275.682

Uw kenmerk

UR/MH/38421

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Dear members of the UC,

Thank you for the unsolicited advice regarding the work pressure approach in your letter of February 15, 2021. We perceive your advice as indicative of great commitment to the EUR community and its well-being; a commitment we definitely share. We would like to continue the constructive dialogue we are having with each other on this subject. We respond to your four suggestions (displayed in *italics*) point by point and we would like to discuss these responses further with you.

1. *The work-pressure emergency at universities is part of a larger issue. It relates to the financial allocation models for higher education on the national level. The workplan focuses on internal issues only. In order to make more fundamental improvements, however, universities would also need to take more radical steps to balance the student/staff ratio. Any references to such actions are lacking.*

We agree that work pressure at universities is part of a larger, systemic issue. That is why the Approach Work pressure also proposes a process wherein issues and potential solutions are analyzed at different levels, i.e.: individual, team, department, faculty/service, and EUR, as described in step 0 (p. 13 and 14) and step 4 (page 15). This is a bottom-up process, wherein employees get the opportunity to participate in cocreating solutions. The Approach Work pressure dates from June last year and we've understood that HR and the UC taskforce had several constructive meetings on the topic since. In these conversations the UC successfully stressed the importance of the external issues, such as the financial allocation model for higher education. In the practice of implementing the Approach Work pressure this has already resulted in adding the national level to the analyses of issues and solutions that are being conducted in teams, which brings us a step closer

to a systemic analysis and systemic action. In a to be developed implementation plan for the Approach Work pressure (as explained after point two) the national level will be added as a level that needs to be taken into account in the analysis of issues and solutions.

Additionally, we would like to stress that not all can be solved with this Approach Work Pressure. Several simultaneous actions are already undertaken regarding the external issues that contribute to work pressure. One example is the participation of EUR (CPC and several representatives from the faculties) in a national work group that studies the financial allocation model for higher education. Another example is the continuing dialogue and the maintenance of the relationship with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

- 2. The workplan focuses mainly on the content, but not so much on the process. It does not elaborate the preconditions. The UC urges the central management to take charge to ensure that the workplan will be carried out. Faculties that currently do not see the urgency of tackling work pressure more fundamentally, need to be stimulated. Frontrunners need to be rewarded. Success criteria need to be defined and progress needs to be monitored. Faculty management needs to be called to account in their bilateral as concerns workload issues in an open dialogue. This means that the problems faculties are facing also need to be taken seriously and where possible, alleviated. We like to see this better developed in the workplan.*

The general preconditions for the Approach Work pressure are elaborated in the paragraph 'principles of an effective approach' (page 11-12). However, to further stimulate uptake of the Approach Work pressure in faculties and services, a central implementation plan will be developed by HR. This implementation plan shall include a timetable; key indicators that need to be addressed in the approach at faculty/service-level; success criteria and a monitoring process.

The central implementation plan will be monitored by HR, but the responsibility for executing the approach lies and remains in the faculties and services. Several services have indicated they cannot execute the Approach Work pressure fully by themselves because of time constraints, and that they would benefit from an (external) central project lead that helps them plan appointments, monitor progress, communicate about the project, etc. We are considering to ask HR to temporarily hire an external project lead for the remainder of 2021 and in this way to facilitate these teams. The costs for this are estimated at 100k, which will come at

the expense of the Health & Safe Working environment (G&VW) budget. This would change the purpose of the planned costs on work pressure (i.e. the budget was reserved for support faculties and services in taking measures), but it fits within the overall budget. Before we ask HR to pursue this route, we would like to discuss with the UC if this would fit their analysis of what is needed now.

Lastly, work pressure has been a subject in the bilaterals last year and will again be a subject in the spring bilateral and the autumn bilateral. More specifically, this year will be asked how far the faculties and services are in executing the Approach Work pressure, or similar approaches that incorporate the same active ingredients (e.g. open dialogue, tackling issues at the source, participation of employees).

- 3. Even though the workplan is built on a model that recognizes the causes of high work pressure on different levels, the UC notices that initiatives aimed at the individual and so-called "low-hanging fruits" (R&O format, HR-menu card, improving self-service, worklife balance coaching, sharper policy for ombudsperson and confidentiality counsellors), are readily adopted, but that the EUR shies away from larger, systemic changes. After many years of changes aimed at increasing the university's efficiency, few lowhanging fruits are left when it comes to lowering work pressure. We emphasize that initiatives aimed at making more fundamental changes, collective efforts and primary preventive measures need to be developed and prioritised and we like to see that written down in the workplan.*

We agree that systemic changes are needed and that collective measures are to be preferred because they are generally more sustainable. That these measures are to be preferred is already written down in the Approach Work pressure in the chapter 'order of measures' (p. 10), that highlights the 'occupational hygiene strategy'. We believe that the Approach Work pressure can fuel systemic changes, but to reach this we all need to work together.

We would also like to draw your attention to other efforts we are taking and the integral policies we are building, which could be perceived as systemic change at the EUR-level. For example, the development of a risk analysis cycle (in Dutch: "RI&E") which ensures that occupational risks such as work pressure and social safety are addressed periodically in the faculties and services, supported by central HR. But also the development of a health and safety policy ("arbobeleid"), which will include a declaration of intent on working conditions. This declaration is to be perceived as a promise to our employees and describes

what working conditions we stand for. And thirdly, the efforts we undertake to work together with different services on the same issue of health and safety, as exemplified by the collaboration in the Platform on Integral Safety (PIV).

4. *The UC questions the Timetable. A lot of time is allocated to investigating and only little time is allocated to actual implementation and evaluation of measures. It is also unclear how information from previous investigations is being followed up on, which we believe would make it possible to start acting sooner.*

In the to be developed implementation plan a timetable will be created. Nevertheless, we must do justice to the ongoing processes in the faculties and departments and we will need to accept that they need the time to fit the Approach Work pressure in their schedules. We will also need to accept that faculties and services will to some extent follow their own pace. It is quite possible that departments pay attention to reducing work pressure with great regularity in their daily activities. However, tackling the fundamental causes of work pressure requires changes in sometimes long-standing patterns and behaviour. The effect of activities to reduce work pressure may therefore take longer than desired. We will however continue to stress the importance of progress in executing the Approach Work pressure in our encounters with deans and directors.

Secondly, the previous investigations will be taken into account in the analysis of EUR-level and national level issues. We will make sure this is stated in the implementation plan of the Approach Work pressure.

To sum up:

- We will ask HR to develop an implementation plan that:
 - Takes into account the national level in the analysis of issues and solutions to work pressure;
 - Encompasses a timetable; key indicators that need to be addressed in the approach at faculty/service-level; success criteria and a monitoring process.
 - Takes into account the previous investigations on work pressure;
- We will discuss the progress on the Approach Work pressure in our spring and autumn bilaterals with faculties and services;
- We will continue to stress the importance of progress in executing the Approach Work pressure in our encounters with deans and directors.

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- We will discuss with the UC whether hiring an external project lead (100k) fits their analysis of what is needed now to spark the implementation of the Approach Work pressure.

With kind regards,

On behalf of the Executive Board,



Prof. dr. H. Brinksma

Chair of the Executive Board