Fostering student wellbeing in higher education

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Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Fostering student wellbeing in higher education.
Practical tools for teachers, teams, study programmes and institutions based on a systematic review study.

Want to know more?
Full report (in Dutch).

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Didactical approaches

- **Apply activating and connecting didactics.** E.g. group discussion, small group work, collaboration on challenging problems. Implement, evaluate and improve based on student experiences. Have an eye for experiences of less prominent students.
- **Adapt assessment and study schedule.** E.g. lecture-free periods, deadlines within regular working hours, formative assessment, grade-free first semester. Be aware of unwanted side effects, like peak load.

Relational approaches

- **Contact between students.** E.g. peer mentoring (of first year students by senior students), intervision. Support mentors and set clear expectations about tasks and goals.
- **Contact between students and teachers.** E.g. collaboration in projects, space for informal contact. As an institution, emphasize the importance of authentic contact and facilitate teachers with time and resources.
- **Connection with institution and study programme.** E.g. inviting physical spaces, extra-curricular activities, contact with local environment, work field and alumni.

Person-focused approaches

- **Share knowledge about mental wellbeing.** Students learn to recognize signs in themselves and others and know how to take action.
- **Positive psychology.** E.g. reflective assignments, concentration excercises and mindfulness excercises in class.
- **Practical skills.** E.g. time management. Mind: risk of ignoring the source of the problems.

Society

Higher education

Teachers
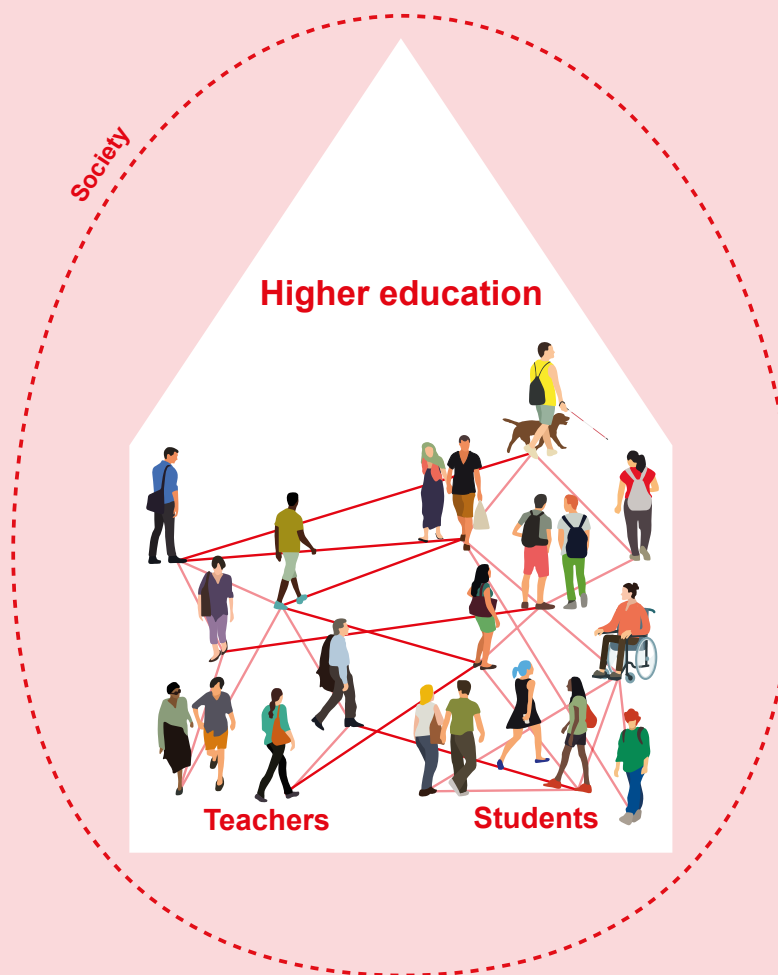
Students

Student wellbeing

Academic integration

- Student connects with the **content of the study programme.**
- Student replies positively to questions like: *Can I keep up? Do I understand why I'm learning this?* and *Am I able to pass my exams?*

Social integration

- Student connects with the **people** of the study programme and the institution.
- Student has positive social interactions, and feels **sense of belonging**.
- Student positively **identifies** as a student and a prospective professional.

The "model student"?

- Have an eye for differences between students. When applying the approaches, take into account the wellbeing of (groups of) students who do not resemble the "model student".

What's next?
Reflective questions for teachers, teams, study programmes and institutions.

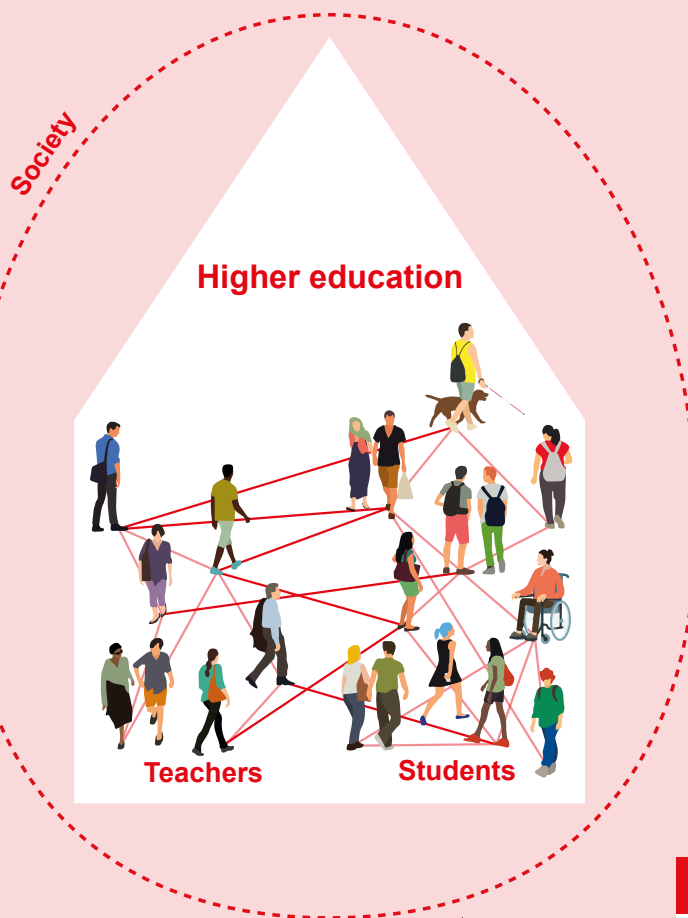## Reflective questions on course level

Didactical

Does our (upcoming) course contain (enough) activating elements? Can we integrate forms of collaboration in the course? Do we expect students to do study related work in the evenings and on weekends?

Relational

How is the atmosphere during meetings? Can we strengthen the contacts between students in the course? Do we need to pay attention to social safety? In which ways can students get in touch with us? How do we feel about more personal contact with students?

Person-focused

To what extent do negative emotions and cognitions interfere with the learning process of our students? To what extent can such worries be discussed? Do we offer enough structure? Would integrating short reflective assignments or mindfulness exercises be suitable for our course?

Society

Higher education

Teachers   **Students**

Reflective questions on study programme and institution level

Didactical

What norms do we express regarding work ethics and performance? How often are deadlines set outside working hours? How are deadlines of different courses planned and does this lead to peak load? How much flexibility does our framework of rules and regulations offer?

Relational

To what extent are our physical spaces welcoming? To what extent are students personally addressed by the study programme and the institution? To what extent do we apply (peer) mentoring and who are the target groups for mentoring?

Person-focused

To what extent is attention to wellbeing integrated in the curriculum? To what extent do we offer students possibilities to develop personal coping skills, like time management, dealing with performance pressure and anxieties?

Students

Talk to students, also to those from underrepresented groups. What are their experiences? Which possibilities and solutions do they see? Apply co-creation when possible. Student organization bodies and year representatives form important links between students and teachers, study programme and institution.

In general

Do we have information about the state of wellbeing of our students? Do students experience barriers to ask for help and can we remove those barriers? Do we know how our teachers pay attention to student wellbeing and how effective they are with their approaches? How do we facilitate teachers and teams by implementing, monitoring and evaluating approaches to increase student wellbeing?