

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL MEASURES TO REDUCE THE WORKLOAD DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

VU Working Group on Reducing the Workload: Prioritizing education, research and business operations

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Introduction: Even before the coronavirus pandemic, staff from VU Amsterdam already experienced a heavy workload. This only further increased since March 2020. The last two Coronavirus Monitors show that there is a need for additional measures to the existing policy on workload and work-life balance. Providing online education and working from home will most likely continue until the summer of 2021. The Faculty Board considers it necessary to take additional measures for this period and to adopt an opinion by 15 February at the latest. The working group's objective is to provide both managers and staff with tools that help reduce the workload during the coronavirus crisis within the applicable financial frameworks, as well as to formulate recommendations on continuing or temporizing activities or organizing activities differently or in a more intelligent manner in the areas of education, research and business operations. Some of these measures are expressly of a temporary nature, meaning applicable during the coronavirus crisis. Meanwhile, we also continue to work on more structural solutions to reduce the workload.

The working group is aware that reducing the workload is difficult at a time when so much is done remotely and differently, while at the same time everyone is doing their utmost to keep everything going as usual. This requires adaptation, creativity, customization, solidarity, prioritizing, as well as a focus on what gives energy. These recommendations therefore do not serve as a standard set of recommendations that applies to each and everyone. Many employees suffer from a heavier workload right now, while there also those who have more time and space available. What some persons consider to be an eye opener, is old news to others. One and the same regulation can simultaneously offer support to one staff member and hinder another. The same is true for departments or degree programmes. Where an event would be better cancelled or postponed at one place, there may be room for new initiatives somewhere else. Therefore, in addition to general recommendations and support, and in the context of temporary additional workload relief, we would like to encourage managers and staff, both individually and in mutual consultation, to carefully consider what can and cannot be feasible under the current circumstances. It is also important for everyone to weigh up the quality and quantity of the work, so that the means of regulation do not come at the expense of results.

Tools for managers:

- At crucial times of changes in coronavirus measures communicating with employees about:
 - Understanding each other's circumstances, expressing confidence in commitment.
 - Implications of measures at department level or at the level of the degree programmes (+ links to information/support).
 - Clarity about the manager's expectations in these exceptional circumstances.
- Redivision of tasks among staff or in teams:

- Creating insight into which employees can perform more work or less work.
- Who can take on what and what additional help is needed externally.
- Providing additional support to employees who indicate that they need it or in cases the manager feels this to be needed.
- Engaging into conversations with employees on an individual level about:
 - Work-life balance.
 - Needs and possibilities in terms of performance and prioritization of tasks (what is really necessary - what is not, what gives you energy - what does not, what can be done more efficiently).
 - Needs and possibilities in terms of support from VU Amsterdam, such as arrangements and reimbursements for working from home, IT, commuting and possible help from colleagues or other permanent or temporary staff. See Appendix 1.
- Organizing options for informal team sessions, staff meetings or meetings for degree programmes.
- Use of flexibility in education.
- Use of student assistants in education and support, in so far as possible through the government's temporary coronavirus job scheme. This is especially important at the start of the new academic year to answer questions from new students. It is yet to be determined how the student assistants can best be deployed in an optimal and efficient manner.
- Organizing bilateral meetings and meetings that can take place one-on-one, if possible during a walk.
- Providing temporary supportive measures:
 - Use of student assistants, in so far as possible through the government's temporary coronavirus job scheme.
 - Temporary extension of contracts that are about to expire, especially for groups that require extra attention, such as PhD candidates. The working group on reducing the workload for tenure track employees and PhD candidates is currently pursuing this matter.
 - Deferment or temporary reduction of requirements with regard to publications. The working group on reducing the workload for tenure track employees and PhD candidates is currently pursuing this matter.
 - Making use of existing leave schemes, such as holiday leave, parental leave, care leave and emergency leave, as well as the special leave scheme.
 - Raising the possibility of reimbursement for babysitting at home at VU-level.
- Taking possible higher progression into account to avoid peak load.
- Making use of the tips from the workload matrix and making them known among staff.

Tools for employees:

- Communicating with the manager if there is an imbalance in workload.
- Efficiency and prioritization in the execution of tasks depending on the position and person, i.e. prioritizing tasks, creating workplaces, paying attention to relaxation and breaks, distributing between that which gives a person energy and that which costs energy, defining mailings and consultations, setting boundaries.

- Question time, whether or not on a weekly basis, for students to relieve the employee from inbox overload without being unavailable, both for lecturers, secretariats, Examination Boards as well as coaches.
- If possible, meeting up with colleagues offline: e.g. by going for a walk together.
- Planning 45-minute meetings as opposed to one-hour meetings.
- If needed, there is an option of consulting decentralized confidential counsellors. See Appendix 2.

Examples of specific measures:

General:

- Adjusting meeting habits: not all team members, if a delegation suffices; adjusting the maximum duration of online meetings, consider 45 minutes as opposed to one hour; avoiding consecutive planning of appointments, placing buffers in the calendar in between appointments.
- Holding back on emails: short, concise and limited in number; deliberate use of "cc" and "reply to all"; employees in cc do not have to respond; in the event of an email chain, brief summary and/or repeat question; if addressing different departments, ask question to the appropriate department; sometimes it is more efficient to make a phone call.
- Activities: suspending or cancelling planned events and postponing new initiatives, workshops, projects, programmes, courses or minor programmes.
- Annual reports: shorter and more compact than usual; the same applies for the faculty annual plan.
- FAQs on the faculty website (and VUnet) have been updated and are easy to find.
- Contact with colleagues: Monday morning check-in and/or weekly one-on-one buddy sessions. Creating ways of increasing informal contact, e.g. Monday morning check-ins, weekly one-on-one buddy sessions, and exercise, e.g. bilateral meetings during a walk or making phone calls while taking a walk.
- Making use of programmes such as Slack or Teams (a chat platform for teams)
- Attention for specific target groups (PhD candidates, tenure trackers).

Strategy:

- Autonomization of Econometrics and Data Science - already put on hold, planned start in September 2022
- Autonomization of Financial Management – is to be cancelled
- Humane Economics - start date September 2023; recruitment as of September 2022
- Collaboration with the University of Twente has been put on hold on account of developments at the University of Twente
- International MBA Accounting & Control postponed on account of collaboration with international partners
- Expansion of specialization in quantitative subjects in Business Administration (BK)/International Business Administration (IBA) year 3 > 1 year deferment. Development and

implementation take time and alignment with other follow-up programmes needs to be better developed. Deferment will not become permanent.

- New specialization MSc BA in collaboration with the Public Administration of the Faculty of Social Sciences – ongoing meetings
- No new minor programmes
- Publishing the 2020 SBE Social Annual Report as an abbreviated version with a focus on the coronavirus crisis period.

Teaching:

- Improving working from home with IT systems and the communication about this from the IT Helpdesk.
- Speeding up the decision-making process and the communications about this to avoid redundant emails.
This is partly dependent on central decisions, Exchange / "flexibility" / graduation / recommendation on continuation of studies (BSA).
- Teaching staff exchange of tips-tools regarding online education and good communication about this so as to learn from one another and to avoid having to reinvent the wheel.
- Combining online working groups and working in breakout rooms.
- Attention to specific needs of major degree programmes with respect to online education (BK/IBA).
- Using student ambassadors for the university's open days and information provision at schools.

Research:

- Postponing annual grant meetings of Heads of Department until the appointment of a grant adviser so that they can make a significant contribution and get to know the Heads of Department.
- Limiting the number of zoom meetings to a set maximum.
- Clear communication about the valorization requirements, meaning that valorization does not imply a heavier task burden, but that research and valorization reinforce each other and are closely interrelated.

HRM:

- Limiting KPIs; University Teaching Qualification, annual consultations, leave entitlement.
- A clearer and more efficient process with respect to the Appointment Advisory Committee (BAC) and the appointment of Full Professors. Assigning part of the compiling of dossiers (references, factsheets, etc.) to the Secretariat of the Faculty Board or Christel. Avoiding duplicate information in appointment dossiers, such as CVs, factsheets, reports and advice from the Appointment Advisory Committee, especially for Full Professors by special appointment.
- Reducing the frequency of annual reports with an HR chapter.
- Wherever possible, addressing questions, whether or not of an administrative nature, to the appropriate department. This will most often be the HRM service desk.

Finance:

- Not having PGOs draw up comprehensive financial statements for the 2020 calendar year. A concise annual report with brief explanatory notes on the financial results suffices.

Executive Education Support:

- Postponing archiving activities and the maintenance on records and files

- Postponing or cancelling graduation ceremonies, i.e. by picking up the degree certificates individually at the VU

Career services:

- Continuing any scheduled workshops, appointments and network events with alumni and employers. Creating additional capacity where necessary.
- Introducing CareerSet, which is a system for online CV reviews
- Making use of student assistants for twelve workshops on 'getting in to contact/collaborating'.
- Rescheduling February's young alumni career event to a later date this spring.
- Deferring the new alumni welcome pack - Foleon magazine - to the summer or autumn of 2021.
- Deferring the SSO procedure of the Faculty of Humanities and the extra Faculty of Humanities PhD Ceremony on Career Services until March.
- Putting both the survey for Alumni three years after graduation on hold as well as the organization of the SBE advisory board.
- Deferring the submission of the annual report.

MC&S:

- Keeping track of interested parties, intakes and registrations, whether or not with retrospective effect, is not a priority at present. It is sufficient that degree programmes do this themselves every month until marketing activities are automated.

The Faculty Board will set an example and be prudent and cautious in launching new initiatives that may create additional workload for staff. If new activities prove to be necessary, the first step will be to see if they can replace other tasks by cancelling or postponing these or organizing these differently. It is expressly not the intention to create additional work, but to relieve the workload.

Appendix 1. Regulations and special facilities for the workplace at home

- Home delivery of VU Amsterdam's office chairs, whether of not adjusted, and free-on-loan, via the Corporate Real Estate and Facilities' Service Desk.
- Claiming the reimbursement for an ergonomically-adjustable office desk for a maximum amount of EUR 160 + delivery costs and/or a desk lamp for a maximum amount of EUR 15 afterwards.
- Requesting managed laptop with software/IT support via askit.vu.nl, to be collected.
- Working-from-home set, including standard monitor, keyboard, mouse, on free-on-loan basis via askit.vu.nl, home delivery.
- Reimbursement for the purchase of a keyboard and/or mouse for a maximum amount of EUR 75, to be claimed afterwards.
- Calls and meetings via Skype for Business, Zoom, Teams, Google Meet or mobile subscriptions and devices upon approval of the manager.
- Email via webmail and outlook.
- An Internet allowance scheme of EUR 25 for all employees from 1 January 2021 to 1 September 2021, subject to changes under the effect of the coronavirus measures.
- Reimbursement of commuting expenses on the basis of statement of journeys made via VUnet for the amount of €7.5 ct./km, additionally a tax exchange of €12.5 ct./km is possible. Valid from 1 January 2021 up to at least 31 March 2021.
- Discount in VU Amsterdam's car park for employees of VU Amsterdam having a vital profession status.

Appendix 2. List of decentralized confidential councillors

At SBE, we believe it is important that employees can function in a safe working environment. If situations arise where you feel this is not the case, then, depending on the circumstances, first discuss this with the person in question and/or with your manager. If you are unable to find a solution together, you can turn to:

The SBE personnel consultant

The SBE personnel consultants act as the HR point of contact for all SBE staff. They also advise employees on matters relating to the interpretation and application of the Collective Labour Agreement, statutory regulations and Human Resources policy, such as matters relating to training, promotion policy, remuneration, etc. Furthermore, the SBE personnel consultants may contribute to solutions for bottlenecks in the workplace.

The SBE personnel consultants are:

Karin Wiegman, k.m.wiegman-eilander@vu.nl

Manon de Haan, m.e.n.de.haan@vu.nl

Saskia Schut, s.schut-kuiters@vu.nl

SBE staff confidential counsellor

The SBE staff confidential counsellor supports and advises those persons suffering from inappropriate conduct and helps to find ways to end this conduct. The SBE staff confidential counsellor may also advise the manager in taking measures to end the inappropriate conduct, and may advise on and supervise a complaint to the Faculty Board and/or refer to experts within or outside VU Amsterdam.

The SBE staff confidential counsellor treats all that you tell her as confidential: she does not act without the consent and knowledge of the employee. In the event of inappropriate conduct, the person making

the report remains in charge. In other words, you can go to the SBE staff confidential counsellor, but you may also turn to a confidential counsellor from another service department or faculty.

The confidential counsellor for SBE staff is:
Prof. Hester van Herk, h.van.herk@vu.nl

Ombudsman for VU Amsterdam staff

A staff ombudsman is an independent and neutral party with whom you can discuss your problem or complaint on a confidential and informal basis. The staff ombudsman helps staff members to analyse and resolve problems or complaints in situations where dialogue within the organization itself has become difficult. In these cases, the staff ombudsman can also mediate and facilitate productive discussions between the parties involved or refer them to the appropriate authorities.

More information about the staff ombudsman can be found on VUNET

Staff Ombudsman is:
Drs. E.J. Lies Poesiat, ombudsmanpersoneel@vu.nl

SBE confidential counsellor for academic integrity

If you want to seek advice on the correct way to apply the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity to particular situations or dilemmas, please consult the SBE confidential counsellor for academic integrity. Consider, for example, if there are differences of opinion on the order of authors for a publication or if you have the impression that a reference to your work is missing.

SBE confidential counsellor for academic integrity:
Prof. Harmen Verbruggen, h.verbruggen@vu.nl

Confidential counsellor for PhD candidates:

SBE PhD candidates may turn to the confidential counsellor for any problems ensuing from their PhD programme. Depending on the issue, the confidential counsellor may refer the PhD candidate to another person, such as the confidential counsellor for academic integrity or the SBE staff confidential counsellor.

Confidential counsellor for PhD candidates:
Ina Putter, i.putter@vu.nl

SBE Subcommittee

The SBE Subcommittee (ODC) represents the interests of the employees. They have decentralized participation in the decision-making process on topics specific to SBE. The rights and authority of the SBE Subcommittee is governed by the Works Councils Act, the Employee Participation Framework and the decision establishing the subcommittee. The Subcommittee forms formal part of the Staff Council. The contact persons of the Staff Council and the Subcommittee keep each other informed of all sorts of relevant matters. Moreover, the faculty subcommittees (ODCs) and the faculty student councils form the so-called Joint Assemblies.

Chairperson of the SBE Subcommittee:
Drs. F.E.J.M. Frank Derksen, frank.derksen@vu.nl