# Finding Meaning in Academia

Radboud Honours Project: Sense of Purpose and Student Well-being

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# Preface

Hereby, the Honours Academy Project Impact of the Radboud University, in commission of ECIO, presents their policy advice regarding student well-being. The policy advice is part of a larger project about student well-being and the link between student well-being and student sense of purpose. Hence, it is accompanied by a research report and a workbook designed to improve students' personal and professional development, which strengthens their sense of purpose.

The Honours Academy is a multidisciplinary project of Radboud University in Nijmegen, focusing on solutions for societal problems in the commission of an external organisation. The team consists of eight master's students from different academic disciplines, ranging from psychology to political science. The team consisting of master students brings unique first-hand experiences and insights that provide a valuable contribution to the discussion on student well-being.

The project is supervised by theology professor dr. Hans Schilderman and historian and political scientist Casper Kirkels, MA.

Nijmegen, 22 May 2023

# Executive Summary

This report presents the results of an Honours Academy project entitled 'finding meaning in academia'. In this project, students of various Radboud University faculties have studied the problems that students experience regarding their satisfaction with life against the backdrop of their studies at universities. The project has been commissioned by ECIO, the Dutch expert centre on inclusive education, that supports universities, colleges and VET institutes in order to help make education accessible to students with disabilities and special needs, and to contribute to the well-being of students who experience obstacles. The report consists of three coherent parts.

The first part consists of a descriptive research that explores the nature and main characteristics of terms and concepts that are employed in the prevailing literature, such as well-being, meaning, and quality of life. As these terms and concepts usually remain vague, they are ordered into a conceptual model of Quality of Life that distinguishes between well-being and identity development, with its mainly psychological and pathological term use on the one hand, and meaning with its dimensions of Sense of Meaning (SoM), Sense of Purpose (SoP), and Sense of Belonging (SoB) on the other hand. In the according literature corresponding topics were explored empirically among students, study-advisors, psychologists and international experts in the setting of Radboud University, and in the context of Swiss-based NGO's and universities. These topics concerned: to 1) the definition of SoM, SoP, and SoB and how these notions relate to each other, 2) whether students are suffering from a lack of SoM, SoP, or SoB, 3) how it affects them, and 4) how they view the responsibility of the university regarding these topics. It was found that students, study advisors, psychologists and experts agree that although students themselves are responsible for their own well-being, and that universities do have a formal and informal responsibility for aiding the development or maintenance of SoM, SoP, and SoB. This is because SoM, SoP, and SoB – according to them - have positive effects on SWB and QoL. The research underpins a policy advice, which offers guidelines which are elucidated in the next part of this report.

The second part of this report concerns the policy advice of the Honours Impact team to ECIO. Based on this research, the team advises ECIO to raise awareness about the opportunities for the incorporation of SoM, SoP, and SoB in academic education among its partners. The current view of universities regarding their duty of care is twofold: Firstly, exclusive attention is to be given to provide discipline based academic education for students. Secondly, they seek to

facilitate student well-being by referring them to university psychologists, voluntary well-being programs at university, or external partners. This implies that students themselves are ultimately responsible for their own well-being, and hence, this is a very limited formulation of the universities' responsibility. By separating these two tasks, universities miss the chance to proactively support students with their well-being by taking into account the broader conception of life quality that includes SoM, SoP and SoB as well. Instead, it is argued that universities should shift their educational approach, moving from the vocational 'Ausbildung' to the more holistic conception of 'Bildung' that includes the support for formation tasks as integrated in the university curriculum. These approaches differ in their perspectives on what the ultimate objective of education is. While presently the goal is set on attaining knowledge around a certain field of study and getting a degree to increase the chances on the career market ('Ausbildung'), the goal could also be to produce critical intellectuals that are able to reflect on value related questions ('Bildung'). This Bildung-approach makes students more resilient to stressors and immediate well-being challenges, so it is argued and as is also supported by government and inspection regulations that emphasise formation responsibilities. The universities' duty of care is better addressed by integrating student issues of life quality within standard education objectives as compared to a pathologically argued expulsion of student well-being problems out of the university, so it is maintained.

In the third and final part of this report, the honours impact team demonstrates how SoM, SoP, and SoB can be integrated into the academic programme in an exemplary way by sketching the aims and forms of a specific course on student life quality. The course contains three domains: individual development, social development, and professional development. Each of these domains and the themes they include, can be linked to one or multiple of the facets of SoM, SoP, or SoB. For each theme, concrete examples are given as to how the students can develop themselves and relate to SoM, SoP, and SoB. This results in a concept of a workbook universities can offer students in the setting of a course, in which they can complete the assignments. There are two ways to incorporate the course into the curriculum. By making it an independent course with ECs attached to it or to add its learning goals to existing courses spread throughout the programme.

This concludes the executive summary. The Impact team has elaborated the three parts of the report in corresponding interdisciplinary student teams, that now provide the studies in detail.

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# Introduction

The decline in student well-being (SWB) in Dutch universities has received considerable media attention in recent years (NOS, 2021a; NOS 2021b; De Jager, 2020, Kuiper, 2021). According to researchers of the Trimbos institute for drug use and addiction, and the Dutch health service (RIVM), 80% of the students experience loneliness, and 51% of Dutch students are struggling with mental health issues of which 12% experience sever symptoms  (Dopmeijer et al., 2021). The Dutch mental health organisation GGZ has called the situation in Dutch universities a mental health crisis.

In response to the well-being problems, Dutch universities introduced initiatives that improve the well-being of their students. For example, most universities introduced well-being weeks to raise awareness and offer advice on dealing with the mental health problems students may experience. Despite these efforts, universities struggle to tackle the ongoing mental health crisis.

In this context ECIO (the Dutch expertise centre for inclusive education) asked us, students of the Honours Academy Project Impact of the Radboud University, to provide a student's perspective on the well-being crisis and its relation to students' sense of meaning (SoM), sense of purpose (SoP), and sense of belonging (SoB). The assumption is that when students have a meaning in life, have goals, and genuine connection to their academic environment, they grow more resilient to stress and hardships that challenge their mental health.

This project has three parts. Firstly, for the research paper we investigate the definition and relevance of different concepts that relate to student well-being in literature. This is followed by analysis of interviews on if and how students lack meaning and purpose, and how the universities are taking responsibility for the well-being crisis. Secondly, we focus on the policy perspective, in which we identify relevant recipients and implementers for ECIOs policy advice. In this section, we show the different actors' wishes regarding SoM, SoP, and SoB. Subsequently, we offer advice on how universities should approach these topics, and on how ECIO can operate vise-a-vise their partners. Thirdly, we offer the foundation for a course that includes topics such as SoM and SoB.

# PART I
# RESEARCH

# Introduction

An evidence-based definition of student well-being (SWB) has been defined by Noble et al. (2008): "*Student well-being is a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at university.*" Right now, mental health issues occur more often among students than among the general populations, which makes it important to focus on these issues (Dopmeijer et al., 2018, 2020; Gubbels & Kappe, 2019; Kelders et al., 2019). Especially since the report of Gubbels & Kappe (2017) showed that well-being can be reduced by stressors in- or outside the academic community and improved by resources provided by the student itself or the students' studies. Focusing on increasing the well-being and quality of life of students can help alleviate some of those mental health issues.

Quality of life (QoL) is an umbrella term that encompasses material basic needs, well-being, and a sense of meaning (SoM) (Kane et al. 2003; Wong, 2014). Well-being and SoM are considered as contributors to QoL, as well as protective and preventive factors, and the basis for hope in hopeless situations (Wong, 2014). SoM is further broken down into four aspects, one of which is a SoP, which is defined as the belief that one has a reason to exist, a goal or mission to pursue, or a contribution to make to society (Wong, 2010). According to Frank Martela and Michael Steger (2015), a SoP is the presence of core values, aims and a direction of life. Pursuing personal excellence, as Friedrich Nietzsche suggested, can lead to a meaningful life and a sense of fulfilment (Nietzsche, 2008). We believe that the role of SoM and SoP for QoL is often overlooked in policy advice. By cultivating a SoM and SoP, students can develop resilience to overcome challenges and maintain their mental health. Universities can better address and prevent mental health issues among students by using a QoL framework that includes SoM and SoP, rather than solely focusing on SWB. The interrelatedness of QoL, well-being, SoM, and SoP highlights the importance of these concepts in achieving a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Universities may not prioritise nurturing students' SoP because they may not feel responsible for it. The boundaries of university responsibility regarding SWB are unclear, according to ECIO and Radboud University's SWB coordinator Hannah Markusse. Additionally, universities may feel more responsible for students' academic development than their personal growth, as students tend to view their time at university as a means to achieve a degree and career, rather than for self-development according to the University of Amsterdam (2017).

Markusse also noted the importance of soft skills and self-reflection in academic education, and how some students may not prioritise investing in them anymore. This research aims to explore the perspectives of both students and staff on this duty of care of universities.

In addition, the well-being programs offered by universities tend to focus mainly on improving education-related issues of students, which is more related to their 'Ausbildung' than to their 'Bildung'. 'Bildung' refers to the general education and personal development of an individual, while 'Ausbildung' specifically refers to vocational training and education for a specific profession (see *Appendix 1* for current programs offered by Universities in The Netherlands). In recent times, there has been an increase in the prevalence of mental health issues that are directly related to students' university life and have a significant impact on their overall well-being (Hosseini et al., 2011). Unfortunately, these issues are often treated as individual pathologies that require professional help either from university counsellors or external psychologists (Yamaguchi et al., 2013), without considering the systematic recurrence of these issues among students. These studies suggest that universities should become more aware of these problems and start to provide solutions at an institutional level, in order to encompass the majority of students, foster a stronger community, and encourage relevant conversations. This would not only save the resources required to treat each individual but also have a greater impact since the issues are recognized at an institutional level.

This well-being crisis among students is not new, but it seems to be particularly pressing in our current era. A recent publication called the Youth Recovery Plan published by the World economic forum in 2021 presses on the problems the youth is experiencing in a dynamic world (*Youth recovery plan,* 2021). This issue is arising due to various societal and technological changes that have affected the current students differently than the previous ones, making it a generational issue (Spangenberg & Lampert, 2013). For instance, the increased competition in the job market and the high expectations placed on students to succeed academically may lead to more pressure and stress, which could affect their well-being and SoP. Additionally, the growing use of technology and social media may also contribute to feelings of isolation and disconnection from others (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Therefore, it seems crucial for universities to recognize the importance of promoting students' overall well-being and to provide resources that address these issues at an institutional level.

## Research objective

ECIO has asked to research how to improve SWB considering the concepts of SoM and SoP. ECIO stated that there might be a link with SWB that is overlooked. Universities try to improve SWB, but they seem not to focus on SoM and SoP. Furthermore, universities do not seem to regard SoM and SoP as an intrinsic part of professional development in their education objectives. The problem that the Radboud Honours Academy impact team focuses on is: Universities seem to be only focusing on SWB and fail to take into account the SoM and SoP, while SoM and SoP are an important factor for the determination of the QoL.

We will now focus on the student's perspective on their (lack of) SoM and SoP and how this affects their QoL. Furthermore, we will question what the university's role is in aiding students in finding a SoP.

This research aims to support our policy recommendations to ECIO aimed at enhancing university policies, with a specific focus on strengthening SoM and SoP and thereby improving SWB.

## Research questions

The main research question is: How can universities help students develop their SoP to increase student QoL? To answer our research question, we have formulated three sub-questions:
1. What is SoM and how does it relate to SoP, SWB, QoL and sense of belonging (SoB)?
2. Are students suffering from a lack of SoM and SoP and how does this influence SWB and SoB?
3. What is the responsibility of the university regarding the SoM, SoP, SoB, and SWB?

## Research overview

First, there will be a theoretical framework in which the main concepts of the report - such as QoL, well-being, SoM, SoP and SoB - are examined and the relationships between them are explained. Secondly, in order to create an overall view of the student's perspective on SoP, well-being, and responsibility of care, multiple interviews with different sources have been conducted which will be described in the method section. Following there will be an analysis of our interviews with study advisors, students, and (international) experts. Finally, by

integrating all of the above, we will derive conclusions that offer valuable insights into identifying the most crucial information for formulating policy advice or solutions.

# Theoretical Background

As stated before, the concepts examined are often interrelated and overlapping. It is, therefore, important to explain them in detail and to demonstrate their relation to each other. The umbrella term for well-being and SoM and purpose is QoL. The concepts listed below often overlap and lines between the definitions are not always clear. For our framework, these following definitions are maintained for each of these concepts.

## Well-being

Given the crucial role of well-being in an individual's life, the universities currently put a lot of emphasis on improving SWB. Outside of the definition given before by Noble et al., (2008), Klappe & Gubbles (2017) added the characteristics of well-being from a clinical perspective resulting in the following definition of SWB: "*a lasting positive psychological condition, characterised by resilience, self-optimization, satisfaction with yourself and starting of relationships and gaining experiences during the time as a student and characterised by the absence of psychological complaints like stress, anxiety and depression*" (translated from Dutch to English).

Well-being can be influenced by a multiple of factors, however, when looking at well-being as a psychological state, influencing factors can be different for each individual. Something that is critical for one person, can be less important for another. The PERMA-model made by Seligman (2011) representing the core elements of well-being acknowledges universal influences on well-being, including positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments. However, the emphasis of the PERMA model is still based on a happiness-orientation rather than a meaning orientation as differentiated by Wong (2011). When things are going well and experiencing positive affect in the present, positive emotions are probably sufficient to sustain a high level of well-being, however, when people are going through difficult times, meaning rather than positive emotion becomes more important (Frankl, 1985; Wong, 2010, 2011).

## Quality of life

Due to the heavy emphasis on the 'absence of negative and presence of positive moods and emotion' in the definitions of well-being, there is a need for a concept that gives more room to

people's values, goals, and subjective perspectives about their lives: Quality of Life. QoL includes multiple influencing factors next to "happiness" and describes the interaction of the factors, thereby surpassing the term well-being.

QoL is an often-used measure in literature. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1998) defines QoL as *"an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns"*. Although there is an objective measure of QoL as well that includes external factors such as income, housing etc., the person's subjective perception of how well they are doing is most relevant in this study. The subjective QoL is used here as an umbrella term including the interaction between SoM, SoP, SoB and well-being. It is about how a person values their life and if they get satisfaction from it. Therefore, subjective perception of QoL will be mostly focused on in this study when mentioning QoL.

## Sense of meaning and purpose

The definition of meaning in life according to Paul Wong (1998) is: "*Personal meaning as a socially and individually constructed system, which endows life with personal significance; this system includes affective, motivational, cognitive, relational, and personal dimensions*". Wong (2010) describes four steps: Understanding, sense of purpose, responsible action, and evaluation. When people are able to understand their core values (e.g., understand themselves and what they want from life), they are able to set goals (e.g., have purpose) and act, in accordance with those values, and work towards achieving their goals (e.g., responsible action). To continue to act on a SoM, an individual should be able to reflect on their goals, values and behaviour and should adjust them accordingly (e.g., evaluation). The more these aspects of meaning are in line with each other, the greater the feeling that what you are doing is meaningful.

The relationship between well-being and SoM and SoP has also been shown in studies. In literature however, SoM and SoP have been treated as identical concepts in some instances and as distinct concepts in others adding up to the confusion (George & Park, 2013). Therefore, distinguishment between SoM and SoP is difficult in the interpretation of correlational studies. While SoM describes a broader term including a more cognitive aspect and a motivational aspect, a SoP entails the motivational part of meaning and focuses on what an individual's life goals are. A SoP can, therefore, be seen as a 'driver' to shape behaviour of people (Wong,

2010). Despite this confusion of different constructs, studies found that people with a clear SoP reported higher well-being and were more resilient to stress (Hill, Sin, Turiano, Burrow, & Almeida, 2018; McKnight and Kashdan, 2009). Since people know why they are doing what they are doing in life, they experience more positive emotions and are better equipped to handle stress (Bronk et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2007). Thereby, SoP serves as a direct contributing factor to well-being as well as a source of resilience against stress. In fact, during stressful times, meaning rather than positive emotion becomes more important to QoL (Frankl, 1985; Wong, 2010, 2011). According to Paul Wong (2014), meaning in life fuels hope in hopeless situations, where it has the function of transforming negatives into positives as well as make suffering more bearable. Besides the effect of purpose on mental health, a SoP also has a positive effect on physical health and a negative effect on mortality rates (Windsor et al., 2015).

## Purpose development

As stated before, SoM and SoP are overlapping concepts that are not always treated as distinct from one another. Even though having a SoP is associated with a higher QoL, students are still discovering their values and interests. Students rarely had the opportunity to apply their values to concrete life goals, especially younger students. However, searching for a sense of purpose was only associated with an increased life satisfaction during adolescence and emerging adulthood, but not in other age groups (Cotton Bronk et al., 2009). This indicates that during adolescence and emerging adulthood, people may benefit most from being encouraged to search for a sense of purpose as this will help them achieve a sense of life satisfaction with their lives.

Furthermore, purpose development is potentially an inherent aspect for the university student experience for a few reasons: First, purpose development commonly occurs during adolescence and emerging adulthood, which is the developmental stage most university students find themselves in (Pfund & Hill., 2018). Purpose development refers to how people explore and later commit to a purpose in life. The university years provide unique opportunities for both exploration and commitment to a purpose, due to the ongoing process of identity development.

Second is the implications of what university means for many students, namely preparing themselves for their career or more education. Throughout university, students are consistently encouraged to focus on their future by having to form their study programme, exploring internships or job prospects, and engaging in extracurricular activities. Due to this sometimes-

necessary emphasis on "what is next", it becomes valuable for students to have an understanding of their SoM and SoP to make important decisions about their future.

Three primary pathways people form and strengthen their SoP have been proposed (Hill et al., 2014; McKnight & Kadashan, 2009). The first pathway is referred to as the proactive route. This pathway describes the engagement of individuals to find their SoP by active exploration of different options and gaining new experiences. University experience is reflected by this pathway as students take a variety of courses to see which topics are of greatest interest to follow a path towards their academic career. Outside of university students can use this pathway to find and strengthen their SoP by attending events, doing side-jobs, hobbies etc.

The second pathway that has been described is finding and strengthening a SoP by social learning. This pathway describes learning about a purpose through a role model or discovering the value of purposeful engagement from people around them. Within university this can be provided by the academic community, such as professors and even peers can inspire students to recognize the significance of purposeful living and motivate them to pursue their own unique paths of purpose, whatever those may be.

The third pathway described is the reactive pathway to find a SoP. This pathway describes the effect of overcoming a major life event which will direct an individual towards a new life goal or strengthen old ones. Major life events can lead to a salience towards values that are meaningful or a salience to avoid certain life aspects. The reactive pathway is a pathway inevitable to many adolescents and is perhaps one of the most difficult ones to intervene upon in university, however, assistance along this path through self-reflective activities and flexibility could be a role of university.

## Identity development

The early university years are a period of life marked by growing independence and identity development, in which social and emotional processes play a crucial role (Crone & Dahl, 2012). We can distinguish three distinct developmental tasks that the student must fulfill during this period.

Firstly, students must adjust to their new academic environment and peers in order to develop their new SoB. The students find themselves in a new community and setting. When students feel like they belong among their peers and academic community, they will be more likely to

accept their role as students from that community. Such an identity inspires the student to adopt the values and goals they associate with that identity.

Secondly, they will commit to their new identity and derive a SoM from it. During their adolescence the students had a more diverse interest in potential career paths. As they grow older and develop their role-identity, they start to select more personally meaningful goals.

Lastly they orient themselves professionally and follow their new SoP. These articulated goals may later form their sense of purpose in life (Crone & Dahl, 2012; Pfund & Hill, 2020). Hill and Burrow (2012) found that students that were more committed to their identity also were more committed to their purpose. Identity development is therefore of great importance for developing and maintaining the student's SoM and SoP. This insight in the student's own priorities helps them make informed decisions about their future career.

The link between identity development and SoP and SoM has been made before by Thoits (2012), who stated that the more one's identity is seen as important and time is invested in fulfilling one's role, the more a sense of meaning and purpose in life is felt. This sense of meaning and purpose is associated with better mental and physical health and has a major impact on their well-being (Thoits, 2011).

Mental health issues occur more frequently among students than among the general population (Dopmeijer et al., 2018, 2020; Gubbels & Kappe, 2019; Kelders et al., 2019). It is therefore of increased importance for students to develop a salient identity. This can be hard on students since they might be searching for meaning in their life, or not actively thinking about their SoP yet. Many students do not know what they want to do after their studies, but helping a student realise who they want to be can be a fruitful approach for helping them find a purpose.

## Sense of belonging

A sense of belonging is an important psychological construct that relates to an individual's perception of being accepted, valued, and included within a particular social group or community. When talking about students, SoB can be defined as "*a generalised sense of membership that stems from students' perception of their involvement in a variety of settings and the support they experience from those around them*" (Tinto, 2012). Several studies have highlighted the importance of SoB for a student's motivation, self-confidence, engagement and academic achievement (Freeman et al., 2007). Moreover, student retention is higher in

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universities where students feel a stronger SoB (Pedler et al., 2022). The study of Ahn & Davis (2020) mentions that students with a SoB tend to expand the meaning of university as physical buildings or a place to obtain information and consider university as home.

Having a strong sense of belonging is closely linked to other related constructs, such as a SoM and SoP (Kudrna et al., 2016). These concepts are related, as a sense of belonging can contribute to a person's sense of meaning and purpose by providing them with a social context and support system that aligns with their values and goals. Additionally, a sense of belonging plays an important role in all routes of purpose development. For the proactive route, an individual's peers provide new opportunities to gain experiences and provide safety to do so. For purpose development, a stronger SoB results in more actors to learn from for social learning.

SoM and SoP also greatly affect students' academic life. Tinto (1993) shows that students who possess clear goals, strong commitment, and a SoP are more likely to take an active role in their academic life, participating in extracurricular activities and interacting with their peer group. This active stance improves their social integration within the academic community as well as with their personal educational contacts. According to Sharma & Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018), a SoP significantly predicts a student's commitment to their degree. Students with a strong SoP see their university experience as a valuable and rewarding step to their long-term goals and for advancing their career. Ultimately, this caused students to be less likely to drop out (Hill et al., 2014; Nora & Cabrera, 1993). Chikering (1994) argues that SoP not only influences students during their academic years, but also beyond them. When students have a greater SoP throughout their academic life, it leads to more commitment to keep learning new things which positively affects future career successes and personal development.

Moreover, studies have found significant correlations between a SoB and various indicators of well-being and QoL. For example, research by Jetten, Haslam, and Haslam (2012) demonstrated that a SoB positively predicts mental health, life satisfaction, and happiness. Similarly, a study by Lambert et al., (2013) revealed that a strong SoB was associated with higher levels of SWB and overall life satisfaction among university students. Students who feel a strong SoB in their studies are on average more engaged, motivated, and connected to their learning environment. This results in better academic outcomes (Goodenow, 1993; Wentzel, 2003).

# Visualisation

The next visualisation offers an explorative overview of the relationship between the concepts that we have indicated so far.
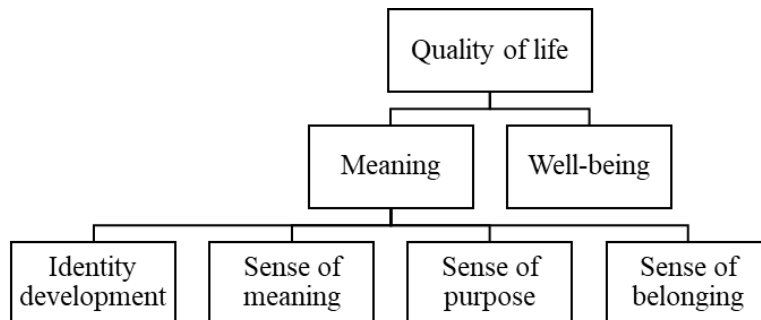


**Figure 1. Visualisation of the concepts**

The connective lines in this visualisation illustrate that quality of life is considered to be an umbrella term with concepts of meaning and well-being featuring as competing frames of thought. Meaning has the connection to identity development and the three dimensions: a) a passive side reflected in sense of meaning (SoM); b) an active side in sense of purpose (SoP); and c) an interactive side in sense of belonging (SoB). In this overview the lines refer to the main argument, i.e. that according to literature, meaning constitutes a (positive) influence on well-being. Mind however that these are not causal or explaining relationships that we test; they simply visualise the argument.

# Methods

Given the exploratory nature of this research, we wanted to gain a diverse set of thoughts and opinions. That is why we chose qualitative research, specifically using interviews with three groups of individuals. The first group that has been interviewed were the university staff members, specifically study advisors. This group was chosen for the interviews because of their connection between both the university and the faculties, as well as the students. Therefore, they could give us information on both viewpoints. The second part of the data collection was by conducting interviews with students. This group has been chosen because the students' thoughts and opinions on the concepts of SoM, SoP, SoB and duty of care is what is currently missing. The last part of the data collection was conducting interviews with international experts. This group has been chosen to be interviewed because of their expert knowledge on the topics of SoM, SoP, and SoB. In addition, we wanted to gain insights into whether the problems that are present in the Netherlands are present in other countries as well, possibly making this an international or generational problem instead of a national. Because of the exploratory nature, all interviews were conducted in a semi-structured approach. This is because a semi-structured interview provides the freedom to explore new areas of themes, but it enables us to compare information as well. A detailed description of the method that was followed for each of the groups is provided below.

## Study 1: Interviews with study advisors

### Participants

For each of the seven faculties, a study advisor was picked at random. They were asked to participate in this study. The study advisors of the faculties of Law, Medical Sciences, Science, and Arts and the Nijmegen School of Management responded that they wanted to participate in the study. The study advisors of the faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies and of the faculty of Social Sciences either did not respond or stated that they would not like to participate. There was a mix between study advisors for Master's students and for Bachelor's students in order to have a diverse set of students represented via their study advisors. Furthermore, we have tried to balance the amount of study advisors for bigger studies and smaller studies as well. As multiple respondents have stated that they do not want to be named

by their specific study, we will refer to all study advisors only with their faculty. The choice was made to only interview one study study advisor per faculty, because of time constraints.

### Procedure

The interviews were conducted by two interviewers, one who was responsible for asking the questions, while the other interviewer made notes. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. The interview was semi-structured. The choice was made to conduct semi-structured interviews, because of the number of concepts that needed to be discussed. In addition, the concepts are vague, especially for people who have little previous knowledge on the subject. Therefore, it is important to be able to ask follow-up questions or to follow a new line of inquiry introduced by the interviewee. The concepts that have been used to formulate the interview questions are student SoP, academic community (SoB), and duty of care. These topics were chosen because we are of the opinion that the study advisors could answer these topics best because of their relation to the students and because of their link to the university or faculty and their perspectives. Next to the questions on these themes, questions were asked regarding possible solutions. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 2. Most of the interviews were conducted in Dutch, except for the interview with the study advisor from the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The choice was made to conduct the interviews, when possible, in Dutch because it was expected that the interviewees could voice their thoughts and opinions better in their native language.

### Analysis

Three types of codes were used to analyse the transcriptions. First, open coding was used to create themes. These were partly based on the themes on which the questions were based. After the open coding, axial coding was used to compare the open codes with each other and to combine corresponding open codes to create overarching codes. An example of this was the open codes of *pressure from parents* and *pressure from social media* to the axial code of *external pressures*. After the axial coding, selective coding was used to combine all relevant axial codes into one theory. The theory that came forward was that of the student journey, which is elaborated on in the next part, Data Interpretation, on p.26. The choice was made to analyse the interviews in this way because of the choice for semi-structured interviews, and the diverse information that came because of it. This analysis was done by three people in order to

increase objectivity. All quotes that are used from Dutch interviews were translated to English. In the analysis, these quotes are marked with an asterisk (*).

## Study 2: Interviews with students

### Participants

24 students from the faculties of Law, Social Sciences, Medical Sciences, Science, Arts, and Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies and the Nijmegen School of Management were interviewed. This included eleven males and thirteen females, ten master's and fourteen bachelor's students. In addition, of the 24 students, five were international students, the remaining nineteen were Dutch. Because of the limited amount of time to interview students, and thus the small number of participants, we have tried to get a diverse mix of students, with regard to faculty, study phase, and internationality, to have a diverse set of thoughts and opinions on the concepts asked in the interviews. This means that the participants were found using non-probability sampling.

### Procedure

Qualitative one on one interviews were conducted with students. The interview, which was semi-structured, lasted approximately 15-20 minutes each. The student interviews were shorter than others due to time constraints and larger sample size. The interview touched upon themes of possible greater goals in life, academic community, duty of care, and student needs in developing a SoP (See Appendix 2 for interview guide). When the students apply themselves in the workforce, they will be able to pursue a purpose that is based on the meaning they constructed and discovered during their studies. Furthermore, they were asked about SoB and their perspective of duty to gain a better understanding of their current issues and ideas to solve them. Students can talk about first hand experiences about the academic community and the impact of current programs which is valuable in designing policies. Given that the students are the target of our policies, their view of issues and solutions are an important aspect of the research.

Most of the interviews were conducted in Dutch, as both interviewer and interviewee were Dutch. When either one was an international, the interview was held in English. The choice was made to conduct the interviews, when possible, in Dutch because it was expected that the interviewees could voice their thoughts and opinions better in their native language.

Student interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. This means that the transcriptions were coded with a few themes that were common across different interviews and possible patterns were examined. We worked in groups of three to analyse each interview, to reduce biases in interpretations. The themes were: SoP, formulation of SoP, maintaining SoP, SoB and duty of care. These themes were derived from the main research questions and the literature discussed in the theoretical approach. There was comparable content in all the interviews for these themes, which were then summarised and interpreted. All quotes that are used from Dutch interviews were translated to English. In the analysis, these quotes are marked with an asterisk (*).

# Study 3: Interviews with international experts

During a study trip to Geneva, multiple experts were interviewed. This is our list of interviewees:

- Spokespersons of four universities in Switzerland, i.e. Geneva, Lausanne, Bern, and Fribourg. They offer examples of the variety in programmes of university and government (Kanton) student and youth support.
- Dorine van der Wal, expert on Youth Engagement and Health and Multilateral Partnerships at World Health Organization in Geneva. The WHO is well-known for its preventive programme on youth well-being.
- Three experts connected to initiatives of the World Economic Forum; Chris Underhill MBE, Peter Varnum (both renowned internationally working entrepreneurs in mental health initiatives) and Katherine Milligan (representative of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, the sister organisation of the World Economic Forum). These persons were interviewed because of their roles in the WEF that executes global-scale projects, including the development of a Global Youth Mental Health Framework by Orygen Global, Australia's Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health
- Anamaria Meshkurti and Alexandra Bustos, coordinators of the WEF supported Global Shapers initiative in Geneva. These were selected because of the social outreach models

that they employ to increase a sense of belonging and their contribution to the Youth recovery Plan made by the WEF.

- A representative of the Kanton of Bern and a few Swiss students on their experiences in university.

These people have been chosen because they are experts with regard to specific topics within SWB. Furthermore, we wanted to gain knowledge on the SWB situation in Switzerland to find out whether other countries are in a similar situation as the Netherlands. This would mean that the problem could be an international or generational problem, instead of it only being a national problem.

### Procedure

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. For each expert, a different interview guide was made specifically focused on the expert's knowledge and expertise. These can be found in Appendix 2. To give an example, one of the interviews was more regarding policy making, while the interviews with Swiss students were more regarding their personal thoughts and experiences on the topic of SWB and SoP. The semi-structured interview was chosen because we did not have a clear view on what some of the topics exactly entailed, resulting in broad and open-ended questions. Because of the diverse selection of experts with their own interview guidelines, the interview lengths were varied, some lasting 30 minutes and other 2.5 hours. The interviews were conducted with multiple interviewers present, at least one person who was taking notes and one person taking the lead in asking questions. When more than two interviewers were present, more people would take notes and others would ask follow-up questions. All of the interviews were conducted in English, except for the interview with Dorine van der Wal, the representative of the WHO.

### Analysis

Similar to the previous two studies, the interviews with the international experts were thematically analysed. The themes coded were: Stigma, Awareness, SoP, SoB, Problems and Solutions. Content from each expert was divided into these themes and summarised. Given the themes of previous interviews, these were selected to ease integration of content. This also makes it easier to interpret the interviews in relation to others and discuss the findings.

# Data Interpretation

Since we did not technically employ qualitative data analysis we decided to present the data as a running text, turning the results into a comprehensive narrative of each of the groups that we interviewed, illustrated by relevant quotes.

## Study Advisors

A study advisor is responsible for guiding students in achieving their academic goals and resolving issues during their studies. Study advisors are often the first point of contact for students and educators, giving them a unique perspective and overview of the university, students, and staff. Due to their direct communication with students as well as higher-ups in the university hierarchy, they have a crucial role within the academic community. Therefore, we aimed to interview the study advisors of all the Radboud University faculties. Fortunately, study advisors of five faculties were willing to speak to us, namely the study advisors of the faculties of Law, Medical Sciences, Science, and Arts and the Nijmegen School of Management. Study advisors of the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies and of the Faculty of Social Sciences proved to be not available. However, since the study advisors were arguing similarly, we expect that the views of the study advisors we interviewed are roughly in line with the other study advisors of Radboud University.

The analysis traces the journey of students throughout their academic trajectory. The first phase encompasses somewhere from the beginning of the final year of Dutch high school to the end of the first year of university. During this phase, high school pupils must choose a university study that aligns with their desired future, requiring them to have some idea of their long-term goals. After committing to a study trajectory, the student is part of the academic community and is developing themself as a person. In this phase, the main challenge for the student is to form a SoB with the academic community around them and to develop their identity further. In the choosing phase of the academic trajectory, the student is figuring out what to do when they have finished their studies. The analysis delves into these phases in greater detail and the importance of a SoP for students during these different phases.

The analysis concludes by presenting the study advisor's proposed solutions and the problems they believe are linked to those solutions. Furthermore, the study advisors' viewpoint regarding the responsibilities of both the university and the student are covered.

## Phase one: Introductory phase

At the end of Dutch high school at the VWO level, it is required that pupils make the decision if and what they are going to study. Ideally, students make a considered judgement about what they are going to study and why, based on their interests and long-term goals. However, for some students, the reality is different. The interviewed study advisors of the faculties of law, medicine and management argue for instance that students are not necessarily intrinsically motivated to study business or law. They are more interested in generally getting a degree rather than in the substance of the degree: "*Many students want the paper [diploma] as their goal. They have little intrinsic motivation for the profession itself.*"\* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Law). In a similar fashion, the study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management states that business students do not necessarily study what is in line with their passion. Additionally, these study advisors argue that the moment of choosing is too early to make a considered judgement based on intrinsic motivation: "*you're actually too young to know by then*"\*. Even when they are strongly motivated to become, for instance, a doctor, this does not have to lead to maintaining this intrinsic motivation. The study advisor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences sees some students enter the academic community with high expectations and a strong will to become a doctor only to find that the reality doesn't align with their initial aspirations: "*They dream about being a doctor since childhood and it's nothing like they thought it would be when they finally get here, which messes with their SoP.*"

Some students are not intrinsically motivated and choose a study based on external pressure from parents or the status of a professional occupation: "*Sometimes also due to parents or the prestige of the study as a guideline, but that the content interests them less. Running into that happens over time*"\* and "*The aim of some students is simply to get a diploma so they can become a lawyer.*"\* (both: Study advisor of the Faculty of Law). Even if students are not motivated intrinsically, or do not know if the chosen study is the correct study for them, the study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management explicitly states that this is not abnormal. Figuring out what you want as a student is normal for the phase of life the students are in and will become clearer during their academic career: "*I think it's still a matter of getting older, thinking, becoming aware that the study ends at some point.*"\*.

In conclusion, the decision-making process for Dutch high school students regarding their choice of study is a complex one. While ideally students would make informed decisions based on their intrinsic motivation and passion for a particular field, external pressures also influence

their choices. However, the study advisors acknowledge that this uncertainty and exploration are part of the normal developmental phase for students, and as they progress in their academic careers, they will gain a better understanding of their interests and goals. Following these findings, the (study-related) SoP is coming in the second phase of their study.

## Phase two: Belonging phase

After a few months into the academic career of students the second phase begins. Students are having multiple problems that are related to the student life and development as an individual. The study advisors stress the importance of feeling a sense of belonging to the academic community for a student's QoL. According to the study advisor of the Faculty of Arts, a lack of SoB is the biggest source of pain for some students. Feeling part of the academic community starts with feeling safe to be who you are: "*A lack of SoB is the greatest source of suffering among students. They often place themselves outside the group because they think they are different from what they think the group is.*''*. This has a great impact on the engagement with university: "*As a result, students no longer attend the university.*"*. Another study advisor, who is from the Faculty of Law, links a SoB directly to the ability to reach goals and mental well-being: "*We feel that this sense of 'belonging' is also important for a SoP and mental well-being.*"

However, external actors have made it harder to feel part of the academic community. Most of the study advisors name the impact of the COVID-19 crisis as an important change in student life. Contact between students has declined: "*The corona crisis did reduce real contact between people. The fact that there were no physical lectures in university has had a big impact. Students get a lot of energy (even subconsciously) from fellow students. That completely fell apart during corona.*''* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Arts). Additionally, the students have become less involved with their education, which has influenced the way students are perceiving their academic career: "*Students were highly involved with education before it [COVID-19 pandemic], and we notice a lot of students don't really get involved in education anymore and hence don't really see where the education is going.*" (Study advisor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences).

The material conditions for students greatly impact their SoB at the university as well. Getting a room and living on your own has declined, since the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, people are staying shorter on campus: "*Many students do not live on their own now, they just*

*come here for lectures and then go back home. It would get better if more students live here and that they feel like staying here.*''* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Law). While at the same time living on your own in the city where the student studies can grow cohesion between academic staff and students, and the cohesion between students: "*The advantage is also that students who live on their own will hopefully participate more actively in student life, which helps the cohesion and developing a SoP.*"* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Law). The study advisor at the Faculty of Medical Sciences emphasises the challenging financial circumstances in which many students find themselves. A poor financial situation makes students live with their parents for longer: "*Financial support would help a lot. Get them all to the university and work together, conduct more classes. The first step would be to be present at university and make connections. Being able to live near the university could help here. One of the reasons is that students don't feel connected and hence don't know what they are doing.*''

Another COVID-19 related problem is the attitude of students towards the university. During the pandemic, the university was solely an institution which provided lectures; all Bildung-related activities had to stop. More and more, the university was seen as a school, instead of a university. This focus on Ausbildung at the university hinders students to think beyond grades: "*University is increasingly seen as a school: how to pass your exams. Students are held much more in check, which can also cause students to see it as an obligation.*"* (Study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management). Therefore, even after the pandemic, students attended the Bildung-related activities organised by the university even less than before.

At the same time study advisors identify problems with students not prioritising their studies and instead viewing them as one of many activities, with two main explanations. First, only doing a study is perceived as not enough for the job market. This is simulated by external pressure by for example social media: "*You see others doing all kinds of things, so you feel that obligation [to do more]. Apart from that study, everyone is happy and successful (on social media), and you're constantly confronted with that now.*''* (Study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management) and "*Urgency among students to do a lot alongside studies because 'otherwise they won't get there', but this can also cause delays and such.*''* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Law). Second, students fill all the (free) time they have with fun activities. The study is only one small part of their student life, and sometimes not even a priority: "*There are lots of other side issues, study is not the priority for everyone, so that's why you're busy with that, and then you don't go to additional activities.*''* (Study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management). In addition, if students are not doing anything, the growth of social media has

made students always busy: "*Social media has not been a good influence, and it [the use of social media] is very hard to reduce. I had two students who did a project where I had them turn in their phones for a day: they were very happy to have it back and didn't think they would find it so difficult beforehand.*"\* (Study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management). The consequence of the problem stated above is that students are no longer bored, and no longer take the time to reflect on their life and their SoP: "*In current times we don't take as much time to reflect.*" (Study advisor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences).

In the second phase of their studies, students develop personally and gain a clearer sense of their post-bachelor goals: "*When they come here, they are not engaged with their SoP. They are just new here, freshmen, this much broader term is not on their mind. During their studies it may change, or they may gain more insight. Do they want to do something with law or just something else?*'"\* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Law) and "*I think people start thinking more about their passion when they realise that the bachelor is ending.*'"\* (Study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management). However, sometimes these developing ideas do not overlap with the study the student is currently following. One of the challenges students face is the belief that they are bound to their initial choice of study and cannot change it: "*Students may think that things are too 'fixed' after your studies; that you only have one direction you can go after university.*'"\* (Study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management). It is important for students to recognize that it is okay to take a different path: "*Eventually you did an education on university level, so you might end up on a different path at some point. It's not set in stone. Your studies are actually kind of a place for sniffing around.*'"\* (Study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management).

Another problem that students face, according to the study advisors, is that they have too many options. Historically, people would complete their studies and would start working in their chosen field. In the present day, people have many more options on what they want to do after their bachelor's: continue studying by doing a master's, start working, do a traineeship, etc. The study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management states: "*Earlier, it was more taken for granted. It wasn't really talked about; you finished your studies, and you went to work. Now you know you have more choices, so you can start to doubt and think about it more.*"\*. This study advisor also mentioned that students might already want too much too fast. One of the reasons they gave for this statement is that the labour market is currently really good, so students have the luxury to think more about what they want.

In conclusion, the second phase of students' academic careers brings forth numerous challenges and issues related to student life and personal development. Study advisors highlight the significance of students feeling a SoB within the academic community. Lack of this SoB is identified as a major source of distress, often leading to students isolating themselves, impacting their attendance and engagement with university life. The COVID-19 crisis has further increased these challenges, with reduced physical contact between students and decreased involvement in education. Material conditions, such as housing and financial constraints, also play a role in students' SoB. Furthermore, external pressures, including societal expectations and the influence of social media, lead to students prioritising various activities over their studies. Students' evolving self-discovery during this phase may not always align with their initial choice of study, contributing to feelings of being stuck. Lastly, the increasing number of options after your bachelors adds complexity and decision-making pressure for students.

## Phase three: Choosing phase

Since our questions for the study advisors focused on students and their SoP, the third phase exclusively pertains to those who are pursuing a master's degree and continuing their studies.

Three out of four study advisors state that (most) students do not know what their SoP is at the beginning of their academic career. During their studies, this can change, and students can find out what their SoP is. According to the study advisor from the Nijmegen School of Management, there is a significant variation among students, which can be attributed to the size of the study: "*Bachelor students probably have no passion yet because it [the study program] is too broad, but master students have more passion.*"\*. This study advisor believes it is also important to note that it does not matter that students do not know what their SoP or their passion is, as this is a difficult topic. The study advisors of the Faculty of Law agree: "*During their studies, it may change, or they may gain more insight. Do they want something with law or just something else?*'"\*. The study advisor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences has a different perspective on the matter and focuses more on reflection instead of SoP: "*[SoP] is something that just comes in life, it's along the lines of reflecting, which is also something that people don't actively decide to do.*"

In conclusion, the majority of the study advisors agree that most students lack a clear SoP at the beginning of their academic journey, but this can evolve and become clearer throughout

their studies. In addition, reflection could be crucial in shaping one's path during the academic journey.

## Solutions and new problems

The study advisors suggested various solutions to address the students' (lack of) SoP. These solutions included mandatory attendance, implementing a learning pathway, and improving the material conditions for students. Some of the most comprehensive and attainable solutions are elaborated on below.

1. Make it mandatory

The first solution regards the attendance of students. As has been explained previously, the study advisors state that students do not come to university as frequently as before the COVID-19 crisis. All study advisors who have said something about this topic have reiterated that students need to be physically present to get the best out of their studies: "*Not having physical lectures at the university has had a great impact. Students get a lot of energy (even subconsciously) from fellow students. That completely fell apart during corona.*''* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Arts). Nevertheless, the study advisors are mainly against mandatory attendance: "*If you ask me, they can completely abolish mandatory attendance.*''* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Arts). To increase the SoB of students, some of the university's action is advised to be made mandatory, because otherwise students are not willing to attend: "*They care mostly about getting good grades efficiently and passing the courses. Now they act more like highschool pupils.*" (Study advisor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences).

However, by making more things mandatory for students, the characteristics of a university are changed to that of a school. The study advisors generally oppose the exclusive emphasis on Ausbildung: "*University is increasingly seen as a school: how to pass your exams. Students are held much more in check, which can also cause students to see it as an obligation.*''* (Study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management).

Nevertheless, there are some benefits of making certain things mandatory. At both the Faculty of Law as the Faculty of Medical Sciences, there is a mandatory group students need to be a part of. In the case of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, coaches (often professors) are assigned during the bachelor and sometimes the master. At the Faculty of Law, first-year students are assigned to a tutor group led by a student who has progressed further in their studies. One of

the benefits of this tutor group is that students feel heard and seen: "*That way students feel heard and seen. I do think it is a requirement to feel included for a higher SoP.*"* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Law). The Nijmegen School of Management has plans to have more guidance in the second year of the bachelor as well, but they do not want to make it mandatory.

From the interviews with the study advisors, it can be concluded that students do not take sufficient responsibility for their own well-being and SoP, highlighting a key issue with the current solutions that they primarily rely on student initiative rather than a proactive facilitation by the university. The study advisors from the Faculty of Law state that students often want a better well-being, but without changing their behaviour: "*Students often want to keep doing the same thing and better well-being, but that is difficult.*"*. Another conclusion that can be drawn is that a lot of students do not use the activities that are currently in place to help them with their well-being and SoP. There are multiple reasons why students do not go to these activities. The study advisor of the Nijmegen School of Management states: "*Not many people come to these well-being weeks. I imagine that is too public. It is not something you really want to show off when there is really something going on.*'"*, while the study advisor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences reveals a specific problem in their faculty, namely an awareness problem. Students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences do not even know of the activities or facilities, as they feel more part of the RadboudUMC instead of the Radboud University: "*Students don't make use of all the utilities since for the most part they don't know that psychologists exist, particularly in the Faculty of Medical Sciences. They feel more blue [RadboudUMC, the university medical centre] than red [Radboud University] and therefore don't know they can also use the support.*". It is important to incorporate the students' perspective on these activities in order to help students with their well-being and SoP. They need to be asked whether these activities are helpful or what they need instead of people higher up making such decisions for them: "*SWB is a hot issue, but what does it mean for students? We fill in a lot for students, but students are not always involved.*"* (Study advisor of the Faculty of Law). In addition to considering the students' perspective on what can assist them, there is a wide range of activities and facilities already available for students; however, many students are unaware of their existence. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance the visibility of these services, aligning with the suggestion made by the study advisor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

In sum, the study advisors noted that students do not take enough responsibility for their well-being and SoP. The current solutions rely on student initiative rather than proactive facilitation by the university. However, students do not take sufficient responsibility for their own well-

being and SoP, and many do not use the existing activities and facilities due to various reasons, such as lack of awareness or discomfort. Therefore, it is crucial to involve students in decision-making and enhance the visibility of services to better support their well-being and SoP.

## 2. Material conditions

In one of the interviews, bettering the material conditions for students was offered as a solution. The study advisor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences believes that financial support would help to increase the SoP of students: "*Financial support would help a lot. Get them all to the university and work together, conduct more classes. The first step would be to be present at university and make connections. Being able to live near the university could help here. One of the reasons is that students don't feel connected and hence don't know what they are doing.*''. As has been previously explained, this would help students to feel like they are part of the (academic) community and thus increase the SoB, which is an important factor influencing the SoP of students.

In sum, financial support to improve material conditions for students increases their SoB by helping them feel more connected and part of the academic community.

## 3. Implement a learning pathway

The implementation of a learning pathway is proposed by the study advisor of the Faculty of Arts, who holds the opinion that a one-time workshop regarding well-being or SoP does not help. Implementing a lifelong learning pathway for well-being, self-awareness, and self-management from primary school to university level could benefit individuals. This study advisor pleads it is essential to introduce topics like well-being and SoP to students well before they enter university, ideally during high school or even primary school. More time and attention should be devoted to personal growth and self-discovery: "*As I described earlier, implement an established learning pathway. Don't start only in university, but as early as elementary school. You need to start this early. This can be done through training, creating portfolios, writing reports, taking courses, etc. I am not a fan of one-time workshops on well-being or SoP. This doesn't make a difference.*"\* and "*So my advice would be to implement a direct learning pathway as early as the end of elementary school. Start much earlier than just in university. Pay attention to personal growth, let people get to know themselves.*''\*. This may correspond to what other study advisors have said regarding the lack of reflecting students are currently experiencing. As has previously been explained, reflection is an important tool to

help students find out what they want to do with their lives, which is important for them to find their SoP.

In sum, implementing a learning pathway that starts early provides ample time for personal growth and self-discovery, which is crucial for finding one's SoP.

## Conclusion of interviews with study advisors

In conclusion, the interviews with the study advisors illustrate that the academic career of a student can be distinguished in three different phases: an introductory phase, a belonging phase, and a choosing phase. All these different phases bring different problems for students. In the first phase, students might not be intrinsically motivated towards the university. Additionally, they face practical problems, such as finding housing, making friends, and understanding the educational system. In the second phase of their academic careers, students face challenges related to personal development and feeling a SoB within the academic community, exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis and external pressures, such as financial constraints and societal expectations, leading to students prioritising various activities over their studies and contributing to decision-making pressure. In the last phase, the student has to choose a life after university. The problems that students encounter in this phase are related to a SoP. They do not know what they want in life, and what masters (or no masters) are needed for this life phase. This phase is thus characterised by student doubt. Study advisors contributed several solutions to these student problems, regarding mandatory attendance, material conditions and the implementation of a learning pathway.

# Students

The second part of the research discusses results and conclusions from the student interviews. While designing policy advice, it is imperative to analyse the issues and needs of the target audience, or here, students. Hence, we decided to interview students in order to assess their understanding of SoP and SoM. The interview also touched upon topics of SoB and duty of care wherein students were asked if universities were responsible for their well-being. Similar to study advisors, students of different faculties were interviewed to get a general sense of the problem and also to see if there were any differences between faculties.

The analysis mainly touches upon four concepts: SoP, SoM, SoB and duty of care. SoP looks at concrete long-term goals of students and their means to achieve it. It provides a brief overview of the different kinds of plans that students have for their lives. SoM on the other hand looks at the values and principles underlying these long-term goals. It is more to do with a person's outlook on life in general rather than specific future plans. Coming to SoB, the concept provides an understanding of the student's feeling of community at the university and their life as a student. SOB looks at ways in which students are integrated into the academic community and the issues that arise with it.

In addition, we also talk about the different ways students formulate their SoP: proactive, reactive, and social learning. The three types delineate the path that students take to find both their SoP as well as their SoM.

The analysis is concluded by providing a summary of the general ideas presented. We will further interpret the student perspective by integrating the various concepts mentioned before.

## Formulation of SoP

Three routes to the formation of a SoP were identified in the student interviews and are consistent with existing research: proactive, reactive, and social learning.

1. Proactive

The proactive route is characterised by individuals seeking out experiences necessary to formulate their SoP. These include their academic development within their studies, but also their experiences outside of university, such as clubs, side-jobs, activism or hobbies they pursued: "*I'm member of the student socialist party back home and I go on strikes, demonstrations, keeping up with social media and surround myself with like-minded people.*". Experiences are necessary to test different tasks, skills and environments for someone to find their SOP. Some individuals who do not have a SoP attribute their lack thereof to not having enough time to think about it outside of their academic and extracurricular obligations, emphasising the significance of having leisure time: "*Well, to be honest, I'm not really into that. Be busy. It is often just getting through the day and studying a lot to be able to pass my studies and have a social life on top of that*.". Having leisure activities and taking time to reflect are essential and require time outside of academic duties.

## 2. Social Learning

Students identified social learning as another way of forming a SoP, where the SoP is learned from the surrounding environment and people. This can be seen in the importance of upbringing and having a connection with family and peers or through mentorship: "*Good people around me. Not just education (studying is not only at university but also from the people around you) but learning from each other. Family and friends who tell it like it is and what makes me feel good.*". One student expressed his SoP in building a family of his own, as he valued his own family and upbringing and desired the same for himself: "*Growing up, and still do, I had a lot of fun at home. I would also like to form and be such a family. I want to have a positive impact on my fellow human beings.*". Maintaining connections with people is considered especially important in relation to a person's SoP, even if their SoP is not directly related to social connections. Some students have reported that discussing their SoP with others can help them develop their own.

## 3. Reactive

The third type is the reactive route wherein students find their SoP after a stressful event. Stressful events can be both short or longer. One person indicated that after struggling with her mental health in the past, she found her SoP in being happy and healthy since it's something she found is important to her: "*Where did I find my larger goals in life? As I mentioned before; My mental well-being is the main reason I started focusing on my own happiness.*". Another individual stated that she found her SoP in finding a place that feels like home due to their experience of living independently at different locations and realising the importance of feeling at home: "*I would say that my goal is to feel at home somewhere and just to be in a place where I feel like this is right. (...) So then [since she lived in Nijmegen] I did become more aware that this is something that I value a lot and I would really like to have later in life.*". It seems that a stressful event can motivate a person into reflection on their own values. It can also lead to a SoP in the removal of stressors (such as money), as struggle can cause a stressor to become more salient.

However, chronic stress or stress in the form of failure can interfere in developing a SoP. One student said he had no SoP because he is too busy trying to get good grades: "*I don't feel like I often think about whether or not I have a goal. I do feel like I am busy every day and have to do things, so I don't think about bigger goals.*". Many students also mention having smaller

goals or feel like the development of a SoP comes secondary after obtaining their diploma: "*I can always say I want to be happy later, but I don't feel like I can do very much about that at the moment. I have to go get my studies first and so on*.". This can lead to having too much pressure on academic performance and therefore leading to little resilience. Additionally, students have mentioned that seeing results and achievement is necessary for maintaining their SoP: "*I think I get that motivation especially when I just see progress in something, because otherwise you're working on something, but you never really get further or you have the idea that you're not moving forward or that it's getting better.*". One explanation for this could be that a person needs to have confidence in their own being and actions for developing a SOP. A SoP should be something that feels obtainable for it to develop. Many students indicate that in order to maintain their SOP, flexibility and time is necessary in their educational program. Many students inevitably come across stressful life events and therefore flexibility in educational programs is necessary to recover, reflect and reduce stress.

4. Other

The development of a SoP for most students falls within one of the three categories explained above. However, we encountered some students whose story did not fit into any of the categories. Some students who have a SoP have indicated that their search for a SoP has been aided by getting older: "*But I do notice that, as I get older now, that sometimes I also find things very fun to do and like to do that, and I am thinking more and more about myself and not trying to please other people. And that makes life a lot more fun.*'"*. Generally, when you get older, you have more experiences, opportunities for social learning and moments of crises. Some things get better when you get older, but some things can stay the same. For example, some students feel pressured by their parents or the expectations of society, such as being in a prestigious program like medical or law school, which can hinder their ability to actively search for new experiences, engage in social learning, and reflect on their personal goals: "*Having conversations about it with family, that can certainly help too, but sometimes not, because there are some expectations on someone studying medicine, including from family.*'"*.

Some students indicated that their SoP came after a moment of reflection in all three types of SoP development, so proactive, social learning and reactive. While actively doing meaningful tasks might facilitate the formulation of a SoP, individuals also need to reflect upon their experiences to strengthen this SoP. This can also be seen in the reactive pathway wherein individuals need to reflect on their stressful event in order to develop a SoP. One student stated

that they needed to use drugs to emotionally experience their SoP, rather than just cognitively understanding it: "*That realisation came from a trip (drugs) and that has stayed with me. Realisation always comes back in several moments. Motivation was always there, but the drugs brought revelation. I needed an idea to follow and feel this emotionally. I noticed that I wasn't experiencing much and that's why my goal has become to experience as much as possible. The initial incentive for me to look for a SoP is introspection during a trough. Do you stand still more often when things go bad*".

## Sense of meaning

One concept that was not talked about much is the values and principles underlying the long-term goals that were stated above. Although a few students were aware of the reason their goals came to be, others did not think of SoP as an intangible ideology that could manifest in a variety of ways. For instance, one student said that they would like to open a restaurant in order to help people find happiness: "*Yes, helping people enjoy life in a way that is not detrimental to other people (relatively of course)*". Another student said that their purpose in life is to have meaningful experiences that they could cherish: "*I think my goal in life is to have a job later on that will make me truly happy. I also want to be happy in other aspects of my life, like family, friends, yes things like that.*''. Even the students who rejected the idea of SOP have an underlying fear of failure in doing so: "*Then if it's just your SoP, then you really need to prepare your life for a life full of failure.*". There were a few students who recognised that their goals were significantly influenced by their upbringing and the values associated with it. For instance, one student wants to be more involved with his family because of the happy childhood he had and would like to do the same with his children. A lot of the goals that are mentioned previously have their own values attached to them and more often than not students failed to recognise it. Although this can partially be attributed to the way the interview questions were framed, it is also a sign of a lack of self-reflection. Students are more involved in the chores of day-to-day life and have no time to introspect: "*I do not specifically have a bigger goal in my life I think. I would like to graduate and get a job where I do something good. But I don't know if I really have a bigger goal. I have small tasks to do every day. These are actually goals. But these goals are small goals, so no bigger goal no not really.*". As was seen in the interviews with study advisors, giving oneself enough time to introspect and reflect is key in finding and reasoning out a SoP.

## Sense of purpose

A common theme in the student interviews is the similarity between SoP and long-term goals. Although a few students spoke about vague goals in the future such as 'to be happy', there were quite a few students who spoke of materialistic goals. Students spoke about their plans that they hope to achieve later in life or the lack thereof: "*I do think I have goals in life, but I don't know if I really have a bigger goal. I usually just want to achieve things in the short term and then I'm working on that and then I'm going to execute it right away*". These were ideas that could be achieved in the far future through either self-development or acquiring resources. For instance, one student said that their SoP was becoming rich and successful while another stated that he wanted to open a restaurant of his own: "*I want to open a restaurant someday that people come and enjoy with closed ones. I want to provide a good working environment to the employees so that they are happy*". For a few other students SoP was closely tied to their academics and advancement in their respective fields was the main goal. A few others also spoke about an abstract SoP or a search for happiness: "*Yes, to be happy and reasonably financially secure. Happiness is satisfaction*". Some students had a realistic plan to achieve it in life while for others it was a vague goal.

Another unique idea that often came up in the interviews was the questioning of the concept of SoP in itself. For a few students this meant setting short term goals and living day-to-day life as it comes: "*I don't specifically have a bigger goal in my life, I think. I would like to graduate and get a job where I do something good. But I don't know if I really have a bigger goal. I have small tasks to do every day. These are actually goals. But these goals are small goals, so no bigger goal no not really*". While a few students said that they were still in the process of finding one: "*No, I don't have one. I am still working on it.*". Others entirely rejected the need for a SoP: "*No, I don't miss it. What do you need a purpose for in life? You are just born and you're just going to do your thing ... every day you get up and you have little goals I think*". This is closely related to having a negative association between SoP and motivation: "*No, I actually don't think so. I feel that is not something I need to feel good or to work towards something. I also find it annoying, I think, to have something (a goal) over a very long time because then it becomes so unattainable. It is then something in the very long term where you do not see the results quickly. I don't miss that in my life, I don't think I'll ever need it either*". People who reject the idea of having a SoP indicate not missing having one either and feel little importance towards having one: "*I also find it strange to assume that there must be a purpose*

*in life. what do I do when I have achieved my goal, is it ready?*". One person said the focus on having a SoP is rather annoying and refuses to think about it, stating it as if you do not have a goal, you have less to lose: "*I also find it annoying, I think, to have something (a goal) over a very long time because then it becomes so unattainable.*". A reoccurring trait in such individuals is the fear of failure with respect to larger life goals. They do not formulate long term goals in fear of not being able to reach them: "*Then if it's just your SoP, then you really need to prepare your life for a life full of failure*". However, these ideas too were closely related to having a concrete goal that is achievable in the future.

## Sense of belonging

Some students identified a SoB as either broad, such as "*I am a student, so I have a SoB in the student community*", or specific in the quality of their connections. Some people interpreted the question of feeling part of the academic community as being an academic person. People who feel part of the academic community give reasons such as having drinks and events with peers of their study programme or finding SoB with other students at other campus facilities such as the sports centre, the restaurant and sometimes campus events: "*Sometimes I also go to the activities of the Radboud, for example Radboud Rocks I found funny, and I certainly enjoyed myself there*". Many students have mentioned that they found their SoB mainly in group work, rather than lectures: "*I do think that a lot of group work contributes to this feeling, because you are doing academic work together.*". This emphasises the importance of working in groups. However, some people have mentioned finding their SoB outside of their studies.

Especially students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences feel a strong SoB among their peers due to the many contact hours in their program, but they miss the connection with students from other faculties. People who have no SoB also mentioned not having it due to their study programme being too big to make connections, competitiveness among students and having little opportunity to socialise due to commuting or being too busy: "*With law definitely not. It is very competitive; the people are very aware of what they are doing and why and as someone who is a little lost that does not make me feel connected to most of them*". Especially master students feel less SoB due to having less interest in socialising at the end of their programme, having their friends graduating already and having less contact hours: "*It is really something for the first year, where you have lectures together with your entire year group. But not for master's students. Then you are very much on your own*". Some students have mentioned their SoB being present due to having close connections with teachers. One student mentioned not

having a SoB, since living far away makes it difficult for her to socialise with peers, but a caring teacher increased her SoB. Someone also mentioned that she has a mentor group and that this helped her in her SoB: "*I have two student mentors and a lecturer mentor, and we had weekly contact with them during the first period and now you can just go there.*". A teacher or mentor can, therefore, have a role in forming a SoB.

Furthermore, there was an association with SoB and a student's SoP. A few students mentioned that they are more driven to achieve their goals when their peer group aligns with these goals. They also said that a SoB in the community helps them be in a better mental space in order to strive towards their future.

## Duty of Care

One of the themes from the student interviews was the perceived responsibility of universities towards SWB. Specifically, we asked the students about their views on how, and if, the university should approach fostering a SoP and promoting SWB. It was found that a majority of students felt that the university has a lot of programs and workshops already and that it was a person's own responsibility to reach out to those programs and workshops: "*I don't think the university has a job in helping me find SoP. This would lead to too much direction and too little control.*". Some students perceived SoP as a personal development journey to be found outside of university: "*The highest sense of responsibility lies with the student to find their own goal since they are adults too.*". Additionally, many students thought that the university can only facilitate the development of a SoP by providing an environment that contributes to good mental health. The university can provide academic guidance for students to choose from the options available to them, but the final decision and the responsibility for the consequences of these decisions lies on the students themselves: "*So yes it is university responsibility to give the resources to start and maintain clubs in university, but not in a direct manner. Students can find their SOP themselves.*".

When it comes to building an academic community, most students felt a higher duty of care from the university. A variety of issues came up while discussing the programs conducted by the university. One issue that a majority of the students seem to face is the lack of awareness regarding the various programs offered by the university: "*I do think that the university could do better advertising about everything they offer. I had to find this myself, and other girls, for example, did not know that this existed.*". This issue was seen in two levels. Firstly, most

students are not aware of the different programs that are happening across the campus because it is simply too much information to take in at once. Moreover, there is confusion about the kind of event that is well suited for the needs of each student and hence they do not know where to go. Secondly, the academic workload along with other necessary activities that the students engage in make it nearly impossible for them to take the time to learn about these events and attend them: "*Career week or Radboud Reflects are good programs but I have absolutely no time to do it because of all the work I need to finish.*". Subsequently, there is no information available about the quality of impact of these events and hence no room for modifications or improvements.

Furthermore, the students also suggested different solutions to these issues. A few students focused on the need for more working groups and student associations in order to get to know each other more. In addition, one student suggested smaller working groups so as to feel more belonged to the community. One student also recommended informal social networking events with staff members: "*For instance, have lunch with teachers once every two weeks in a very informal way.*". In order to combat the issue of time management when it comes to attending existing programs, one student suggested setting aside time for students to participate in these events: "*I think most practically, setting aside a week or two with no exams or classes to do activities together.*".

In conclusion, while students are in agreement that SoP is the responsibility of the self, creating a SoB is part of the university's duty for its students and employees alike.

## Conclusions of interviews with students

Although delineating the different concepts helps us get a better understanding of the student perspective, these concepts are highly interrelated with each other. For instance, SoP and SoM are closely tied together. A long-term goal or plan is more often than not associated with an underlying value that was both the reason for its formation and what drives the person to achieve it. This can be seen in the different ways students formulate their SoP, particularly the proactive path. Moreover, while SoP is here treated as future plans that the individual has, a broader understanding of the SoP also incorporates SoM. The two concepts are undeniably interconnected, and one cannot be talked about without the other.

SoB too is closely related to SoP. A student who has difficulty finding a SoP that is directly or indirectly related to the university might also have difficulties integrating into the community.

In addition, the responsibility that a student puts on the university and themselves depends on their perception of the community and the values they associate with it. A general theme that was seen throughout the interviews is the greater responsibility that students put on themselves when it comes to self-development and developing a SoP rather than outsourcing it to the university. There was a sense of agreement within the student community that external organisations cannot do much for it, or at most only facilitate their growth. This can be attributed to the fact that students do not realise the kind of help that they need or the help that the university can provide. This also stems from their confusion about their own identity and growth which can be clearly seen in the interviews.

However, the opinion significantly differed when it came to SoB. Students put more responsibility on the university to create a community that included everyone and made students feel welcome.

# Experts

During our research we conducted multiple interviews with experts outside of Radboud University. They ranged from (foreign) study associations to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Economic Forum (WEF). In this document we share our findings from these interviews, characterised in recurring themes from the interviews. Note that these answers played a role in our project but should not be taken as our own opinion. We summarise them here as well informed points of attention. Most of the professionals lived and worked in Switzerland, so when statements are made in the analysis below, this may be typical for a specific national context. Nonetheless, most of the findings are relevant to the Dutch situation, as the well-being crisis is an international issue.

## Stigma

One of the challenges in addressing mental health is the stigma in the Netherlands. Other generations may think you exaggerate when opening up. While not as severe as in Switzerland and China, it still forms an obstacle to opening up about mental health issues. Awareness campaigns and initiatives may lessen the stigma and open opportunities for helping struggling students. We should not make mental health issues a big statement, it is okay to just say it. That is why currently campaigns for mental health are mainly focused on raising awareness. However, a university also needs to be able to deal with problems which persist after an

increase in awareness. Which is where the outcomes of our project will play a role. According to Dorine van der Wal, responsible for youth engagement, health and multilateral partnerships at the World Health Organization, prevention has not received the primordial attention it deserves.

## Awareness

Generating awareness of the mental health crisis and means to address it is the first step towards solving it. Most of the issues that are currently faced by students already existed pre-pandemic but the isolation that came with it made it much worse, or at least more evident. Subsequently, mental health and related topics are talked about more often than before. According to the career centre of the university of Fribourg, mental health is talked about a lot more often after the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before. Although the situation post-pandemic is not better, it is more stable, and people are more aware of mental health issues.

The university of Fribourg released their first annual mental health survey in 2020 wherein, students who scored low on the survey were provided with available support services to choose from. They believed that students who knew about these services would make use of them if they deemed necessary. When asked about the role of universities in helping students, the members did not see universities providing much help with the mental health issues except by referring students to external psychotherapists. This created a lack of awareness among students on where to go when facing problems.

Awareness campaigns and initiatives may lessen the stigma and open opportunities for helping struggling students. Therefore, current campaigns for mental health are mainly focused on raising awareness, as is the case at the Radboud University. However, the university also needs to be able to deal with the problems which persist after the increase in awareness.

So, we see the importance of clear communication. Universities can help spread information about mental health issues and available resources. They can also refer students to the right resource for help.

## Duty of Care

An issue we focus on in this project is the duty of care. Who shares in the responsibility for addressing the ongoing mental health crisis among students? Answering this question is important for developing an effective response to the SWB crisis.

When asked about the role of universities in helping students, the members did not see universities providing much help with the mental health issues except to refer students to external psychotherapists. This created a lack of awareness among students on where to go when facing problems. As the EPFL (technical university in Lausanne) has clearly shown us, there are three layers of support: professional – institutional – referral. People in the referral layer (e.g., study associations and tutors) have frequent contact with students. They can give the (struggling) student information about his/her issue and the possible (professional or institutional) services. The student can decide what to do with this information, giving him/her the responsibility to act on it.

A problem that came to light is that the students often do not trust the existing services enough. Students are often referred to multiple people for their problem and all the 'advisors' can give contradictory advice about the same issue. This is very confusing for students, and it does not increase the trust in the system. It is important to have a good system to refer students to the resources they need. Seeking help is a difficult step and disorientation can prevent students from doing it before their problems impact their studies. The right training (for the referral parties) will help solve this problem.

The university is not the only responsible party. Students also must be motivated to improve their mental health and solve their problems. However, you cannot force someone to work on their well-being, only hand them the tools they need to do so. Engaging in self-improvement is crucial not only for personal development but also for the benefit of those around us. Failing to strive for self-improvement can have adverse effects on our social interactions, making it our responsibility. When you work on improving yourself, you can be vulnerable and open up to others. This can help them self-reflect and do the same.

Therefore, everyone in the university is responsible and has the duty of care regarding the mental health of students. Yet, most existing programs directed at mental health give responsibility and autonomy to the students. Teachers don't get any training regarding the mental health of students, but they do benefit from mentally healthy students. This is

behavioural economics. When students and teachers have a better SoP, the academic community will be strengthened. Make it so that a teacher really wants to (and is able to) help their students. A good program should impress the need for support and care on all parties involved. When there is a culture of wanting to help others around you, it benefits the well-being of all.

## Sense of purpose

Another aspect of our project is the student SoP. We found varying perspectives and opinions on the concept. According to Dorine van der Wal, the development of a SoP is a journey and begins in highschool where they develop patterns and ideas that they observe around them. They transition from highschool to university where they become mainly focused on academics. This is corroborated by Katherine Milligan (director at the Collective Change Lab and former executive director of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship) who said that the current universities are more focused on obtaining a diploma rather than meeting students' needs.

Chris Underhill has made comparable great initiatives on well-being in a community setting. In the personal conversation with Mr. Underhill, he mentioned making an 'association' of motivated students to initiate peer-on-peer contact between students as a possible new initiative. This way the conversation about meaning and well-being can be started. This is from his research in communities where peer-on-peer mentoring helped to increase people's well-being significantly (Cohen et al., 2012; Raja et al., 2008). Underhill also thinks that this will turn out to be the case by participating in a community mentor program based around SoP, because it ties in greatly with well-being.

A common theme that emerged in the interviews is the need for reflection to develop a SoP among students. When students do not orient themselves to their goals, it becomes difficult to develop a SoP. Reflection is important to know our strengths and weaknesses, but in the fast-paced world of today students do not have the time to think and reflect upon their actions and thoughts. According to Peter Varnum (director for High Lantern Group, on the Board of The Stability Network and former associate director for Orygen Global), reflection is authentic time with oneself and can be a powerful antidote to social loneliness. Similar to this, Katherine Milligan bases her classes on SoP on a self-inquiry model where students explore and reflect upon their fears and sense of joy. She defines self-inquiry as a process of self-examination and

reflection undertaken with an explicit goal of increasing self-awareness, reconnecting with purpose and joy, healing from past trauma, and shifting toward healthier patterns of behaviour, especially regarding interpersonal interactions.

The universities in Switzerland have several programs to help students develop a SoP. The University of Fribourg offers courses to different faculties where students think about their future and SoP. The faculties are then given the freedom to choose to implement it or not. Moreover, they designed an online platform where students encounter the work field to give them a better understanding of the possibilities after university. In addition, they also have a mentorship program where current students are guided by alumni to help with the choices during their studies regarding their future. The EPFL university integrates problem solving of societal problems into their curriculum to guide students develop a SoP.

## Sense of belonging

The concept of SoB is an essential element in enhancing the QoL of students. Connecting with peers and the academic community, while embracing the role of a student, helps to foster resilience and better manage hardships. To be more resilient and maintain good mental health, students require a SoB and shared culture, which can be established by small structural victories through group efforts. However, COVID-19 measures have had an underestimated impact on the mental health and culture of youth, because a lot of group efforts were not possible anymore. Organisations seeking to assist students often overlook this issue.

The networking among different universities and faculties within Switzerland is limited, possibly due to language barriers, leading to a sense of isolation between students at different faculties and universities. Students need a community, a shared space to be open and honest about their well-being, and a campus that helps to facilitate a SoB by offering collaboration spaces for groups to form and meet. However, Swiss universities have a limited number of collaboration spaces, making it harder for students to share their struggles. Professors can also create a safe space for students to be vulnerable, but students are often left alone during their most critical developmental phase. Friends, especially those who challenge you, are essential in developing one's SoP and SoB. Therefore, it is important that students don't simply keep living in their bubble but form connections with students from different communities.

Before students can think about their SoP, their basic needs should be fulfilled, like feeling part of a community and having a SoB. The employees of the University of Fribourg were of the

opinion that students who had a side job next to their studies had a better SoB due to the larger set of communities that they are integrated with. They could be friends with their colleagues and provide a better structure to their lives by giving them the feeling that they could do something. People require a realistic image of their future to think about their role and purpose and to talk about these things among their peers. Unfortunately, current study programs often neglect the human need for SoB and focus solely on obtaining a diploma. Social media creates an unrealistic image of perfection, which can lead to harm and hinder the development of SoB. Individuals may feel as though they do not belong to a group of peers because they perceive themselves as not fitting in with what is portrayed on social media.

SoB is not the same as SoP; you belong somewhere because you have a purpose there. The current student-generation has an imposed SoP because societal expectations, peer pressure, or other external factors influence a student's decisions about their education and career, rather than allowing them to pursue what truly matters to them. This could be changed to when someone shows these students how to get a SoP; a SoB, community and culture is vital for improving SWB. Therefore, it should always be a central theme in the solution to the mental health crisis.

## Problems

Katherine Milligan identifies that the hindrance to effective intervention is not the willingness, resources or money, but rather the ego, fear, and insecurity that prevent productive collaboration. Toxic masculinity, or in other words the competitive ego, which hinders empathetic listening, and the lack of recognition of soft skills are limiting factors. Furthermore, toxic masculinity is pervasive in today's culture, where vulnerability is perceived as a weakness and not allowed. Therefore, the solution lies in changing the culture to foster psychological safety, not just among peers but organisation-wide. This change can be initiated from the top-down by the leadership, creating non-judgmental and safe spaces to encourage empathetic listening and promote connections among individuals with similar issues, leading to a strengthened SoB.

In addition to the aforementioned issue, there is a lack of student participation in university well-being initiatives. Despite the abundance of such initiatives, they often prove to be ineffective, either because students are unaware of their existence or do not wish to attend. There is also a lack of trust in the university's ability to provide effective well-being support,

and not all students believe that it is the university's responsibility to do so. The mistrust stems from the fact that most of the issues students face are caused directly or indirectly by the university and hence they believe that the university cannot be relied upon to provide assistance.

Furthermore, while the university organises community-building activities, they are often expensive and inconvenient for students who live outside the city. The university's limited funding also makes it difficult to conduct such activities regularly, resulting in reduced engagement and thus less impact. For these initiatives to be effective, it is essential for students to trust that the university can help and actively participate in the initiatives.

## Solutions

Some possible solutions to the crisis came up during the interviews. Interviewees used their own experience to advise us on how to construct a policy for better mental health among students.

1. Psychological safety

Psychological safety refers to the capacity to express vulnerability, disagreement, and openness without fear of repercussions. This attribute should be a fundamental aspect of university culture. A diverse team is more effective as members can express differing opinions without jeopardising their status. This is the key to establishing a safe environment. It is essential to create a safe space in small groups to foster interaction without compromising status.

Making courses on mental health, SoP, and career mandatory for students can have a positive impact, even if some students may not initially welcome it. This requirement will encourage students to reflect on their well-being, which they may not do otherwise. Challenging individuals is crucial for personal growth, as long as they are not coerced to share personal information if they don't feel comfortable to do so. The courses should not be superficial but also not too intrusive, and they should serve as a starting point for students to begin their own reflection process. Not everyone knows their preferred method of reflection, so students could be assigned to explore different approaches. In policy-making, it is important to use storytelling and humanization to make a meaningful impact. However, it can be difficult to translate individual experiences into broad policies.

Because mental health has such a stigma around it, giving courses about it might scare students away. One solution suggested by Katherine Milligan is to organise "leadership" courses that focus on discussing leadership and the personal aspects that come with it. However, it may be better to avoid using the term "leader" as not everyone aspires to be one and the concept can have various interpretations. For example, someone from the Global Shapers hub in Geneva defined a leader as someone who has an impact. Rather than wrapping mental health into leadership, it would be more beneficial to first eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health. Additionally, young people today are generally already more aware and accepting of mental health issues, so it may not be necessary to conceal or downplay these issues.

## 2. Mentorship

Another solution proposed is to establish a mentorship program in which new students or get a mentor who can help them with general decision making regarding their future. The World Health Organization (WHO) is currently developing a plan to use retired employees as mentors for individuals who are entering the workforce, which provides retirees with a new sense of purpose and new employees with additional support in making important life decisions. This concept of mentorship can be applied to new policy ideas by implementing mentorship programs in all faculties or departments. Mentors can assist students with questions about topics they have already experienced, and they are able to offer advice or guidance to university students. Retirees possess a wealth of experience and may be motivated to assist. Additionally, alumni can provide guidance after a student completes their Master's program to ease their entry into the workforce. Personal guidance, emotional openness, and social safety are key elements in providing an effective response to the SWB crisis.

## 3. Outreach models

The WEF initiated global shapers program offers a suitable model for meaning oriented support that connects SoM, SoP and SoB. Globals shapers hubs are locally based non-profit organisations that are supported by the WEF. It is a youth-led association that partners with local bodies to bring concrete change in the community. Global shapers are located at numerous international spots. Global Shapers AnaMaria Meshkurti and Alexandra Bustos elaborated on their standard model of recruiting highly talented young potentials aged between 17 and 27 that

have a keen eye for specific concerns that require local initiative or social support that they subsequently organise or facilitate. Remarkable is that global shapers have not systematically been in contact with university support. As their membership age cohort does match that of university students it is remarkable that universities have not been adopting this model.

# Discussion & Conclusion

The interviews were conducted by students due to which the analysis and interpretation of data could be biased towards students' point of view. However, it helped us gain better rapport since the interviewees were more comfortable sharing personal information to peers. Including two or more analysts for every interview reduced personal biases that might've been present. We strived to be as objective as was feasible.

The expert interviews made it clear that in recent times students have been facing a decline in quality of life, particularly at universities. There is an ostensible acceleration of mental health issues before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as was mentioned by several experts and study advisors. Mental health issues became more prominent during and after the pandemic. Due to the decreased face-to-face social interactions, students missed out on the community feeling, which led to a deterioration of their well-being. In the interviews, we focused on SoP, SoM and SoB aspects of their well-being.

As Chris Underhill mentioned in one of the interviews, the phrase "sense of purpose" can be misleading since youngsters would interpret it to mean long term goals, which was indeed seen during the student interviews. Students spoke about their long-term goals when asked about SoP. This can be interpreted in several different ways. First, students are not aware of their own thought processes in planning long-term goals. This means that they do not realise that these goals are part of their values and principles, which here comes under SoM. Second, in today's world of overstimulation, students do not have the time to reflect on their thoughts and feelings and, hence, work with superficial ideas that are more tangible. This could be day-to-day tasks that they need to complete or even goals such as becoming a doctor or making money. Third, as was mentioned in one of the interviews, students do not think deeply about their goals due to fear of failure or inability to achieve them. They lack a fundamental understanding of their

own self to set achievable goals that are in line with their values and principles, which brings us to the concept of identity development.

University life is a period when students begin to delve deeper into self-development whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Through exposure to the outside world, they begin to understand their own place in it and develop their sense of self. It is during this time that students orient themselves in a particular direction, thus, developing a SoP. Due to the complex nature of this process, several factors could hinder such development. A major issue that students face during this period is external stressors such as financial problems, difficulty in finding accommodation and other factors that directly or indirectly affect their identity development. One other factor, the use of social media, as previously discussed, can overstimulate students, leaving them with little opportunity for introspection. They fill their lives with mundane daily tasks and don't reflect deeply on their actions and future prospects.

Another theme that came up quite often in the study advisor and expert interviews is reflection. Many interviewees were of the opinion that the prime cause of a lack of SoP or SoM in students is that they do not have enough time for self-reflection. Reflection is an important aspect of self-development, whether in the formation of purpose or identity. During this time, individuals think about their own thoughts and feelings and formulate a deeper sense of understanding of themselves and the world around them. This allows them to develop their SoP and SoM. Subsequently, they become more resilient towards obstacles in life since they know their own strengths and weaknesses and have a purpose that they are working towards. Reflection is more than just time spent alone, it requires conscious effort in disentangling day-to-day habits, so that the individual has a stronger sense of self. It entails quality time spent in introspection.

A concept closely related to student well-being is SoB. SoB vastly varies between students, both individually and within faculties. For instance, students of the Faculty of Law have a lesser SoB due to the extreme competitiveness of the courses as well as the hierarchical nature of the faculty. Students need to be included in day-to-day activities both by peers and staff, such as professors, in order to be fully integrated into the community. They tend to feel a better SoB when they can mingle with both their peers as well as their professors without any formal boundaries. This SoB is enhanced when the students' opinions are valued and taken into consideration when executing important decisions. They feel a better SoB and integrated into the community when they see their viewpoints being taken seriously.

As mentioned before, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on the SoB of students. Due to the lack of real life social interactions, many students missed out on the campus aspect of university, focusing solely on academics. According to study advisors, spending time on campus is extremely important for SWB. This helps them better connect with each other, as well as their course of study. Students feel more included in the academic community when they get to spend time with like minded people, who are going through the same journey as them. Online courses, along with the universities focus on Ausbildung, created an atmosphere of stress and anxiety which students experienced as inescapable. They lacked the means to relax and recuperate with their peers which further harmed their mental health. Interviews with students highlighted that they experienced a more profound SoB while working in groups with others rather than work alone. Thus real-life interaction not only builds community, it provides students with a way to better understand their own field of study. They become able to discuss it with others and subsequently plan their future better. It comes as no surprise that students who have a better relationship with their peers or professors had a better outlook on their chosen field of study and the future career path.

Another way to improve SoB in students is activities outside of the university. For instance, students who worked part time have a better SoB than others since they have an extended social circle to rely on. They connect with their environment more which in turn makes them feel integrated into the society. Similarly, students who found accommodation near the university felt more a part of the community than students who lived far away. This can be attributed to the time spent in mingling with their peers and other people who become a part of their student life. They are more integrated into the society and hence can feel more a part of it than others.

SoB has an influence on a student's SoP. Individuals who are more integrated into the academic community have goals that are aligned to their chosen course. They have concrete goals that can be achieved through the university. Moreover, these students find motivation and guidance by other people who are a part of the community such as mentors and professors.

SWB is at least partially the responsibility of the university both from a moral and utilitarian perspective. The university has a responsibility to take care of its students' well-being as long as they are a part of it. Moreover, healthy students are more likely to be motivated to achieve their academic goals, which is again in the university's interests.

For ease of understanding, duty of care is divided into two parts: SoP and SoB. There were conflicting views when it came to students' SoP. Study advisors were of the opinion that

students do not take enough responsibility for their own SoP while a majority of the students said that development of SoP is their own responsibility. Students hold themselves accountable for the process of finding a purpose or setting goals and cannot see how external organisations can contribute to this process. This point of view can be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, students are not completely sure of their own needs and cannot think of ways in which anyone can help with their development. This, as mentioned above, is a problem of lack of reflection and introspection. They do not have the time nor see the need to think about their wants and needs and articulate them in a way where programs can be designed to facilitate them. Secondly, there is an underlying issue wherein students do not trust universities to have a positive impact on their self-development journey. They see the university as a place of stress and anxiety and hence cannot think of any way that this space can also help them towards better mental health. Third, although programs that have the potential to help students in finding their SoP exist, universities do not do a good enough job of designing them in a way that it meets the students' needs. There is a noticeable gap between these programs and what the students need. Lastly, as a few students mentioned, they do not see the need to develop a SoP. This can be due to the fact that they see it as long term goals that are unattainable and hence unnecessary to think about. They feel an intense fear of failure when setting goals that are not immediately achievable. Moreover, students fail to think deeper when setting a goal so as to align them with their values. They make superficial plans for their future which ostensibly changes with the passage of time.

Alternatively, SoB is an aspect that the university can influence a lot. While study advisors see that the students do not utilise existing programs, students have a problem with awareness of these programs. While some students see the variety of events the university hosts for them they also mention that these are not well communicated to the general student population. Students either do not know when an event that can potentially help them happens, or have the time to attend it. In addition, the programs designed by the university mainly focus on Ausbildung. They primarily address educational and academic issues of students such as stress related to exams or difficulty choosing and maintaining courses. Although these are issues that students do face on a regular basis, the university should incorporate Bilding guidance as well in order to effectively combat these issues. Currently, problems regarding Bildung are usually referred to external experts rather than being addressed at the university. There are several issues that the current generation of students face that are treated as individual pathologies and referred to external organisations. This not only makes the students feel ostracised, the

problems remain, since there are not enough resources to individually care for all of them. There is a need for institutionalised solutions to these problems that reach a majority of students.

At the start of our research we formulated three sub questions in order to properly substantiate the answering of our main research question. For the overall conclusion it is, therefore, important to first answer these sub questions.

### 1. What is SoM and how does it relate to SoP, SWB, QoL and SoB?

From our research, we conclude that SoM is a difficult concept and its relation to SoP, SWB, QoL, and SOB are not agreed upon in current literature or in analysis of our interviews. Nevertheless, it is clear that these concepts all relate to one another, whether that be direct or indirect, see Figure 1 on page 19. SoM is of personal significance to people and includes affective, motivational, cognitive, relational, and personal dimensions. We propose it consists of a more cognitive part and a more motivational part, of which the motivational part can be defined as a SoP. The cognitive part is more passive and described by the experience of values and identity.

A SoM contributes to QoL independently as well as it contributes to well-being. It fuels hope in hopeless situations and acts as a protective and preventive factor during emotionally negative situations. This was also seen in student interviews, whereas some students have mentioned developing a SoP after a bad period in their lives. However, not all bad periods in people's lives lead to this development, since students who described being too busy and being chronically stressed tend to have no SoP. This was explained due to the lack of self-reflection and identity development possibilities in chronically stressful periods. In our theory and data-analysis, we see the need for time to self-reflect and introspect being necessary for developing a SoM and take responsible action.

Study advisors and experts have argued that students lack the time or motivation to think about their values and principles and to reflect on their actions due to overstimulation and busy day to day schedules. This was also mentioned in the study advisor analysis and mentioned in student analysis by some students. Spending time to reflect is imperative in developing a SoM and a SoP. However, it was common and expected that while studying at university, students are still in the process of finding their identity and SoP.

Secondly, SoM interacts with SoB, as a SoM takes into account your current whereabouts and connections to others. A SoM encourages engagement and strengthens a SoB by helping connect with others through similar values and selecting the kind of people you want to surround yourself with. In return, a SoB interacts with a SoM through identity development and through the theory of purpose development by strengthening the engagement in activities and through social learning. In our data analysis, students who felt a SoM could also connect this to the activities and the people that they engage with. Many also mentioned that a SoB helped them maintain their SoM. Study advisors also argued that a lack of SoB resulted in less engagement of students in academia.

2. Are students suffering from a lack of SoM and SoP and how does this influence SWB and SoB?

Based on research and exploratory interviews, we cannot conclude whether or not students are suffering from a lack of SoM and SoP. Considering the deeply personal nature of these concepts, reaching a consensus regarding possible effects of the absence of SoM and SoP on students proves challenging. Although possessing a SoM and SoP can have positive outcomes for one's mental health and personal growth, the negative effects of their absence remain uncertain. In interviews with students, some reject the need for SoP and SoM altogether. These students believe that the absence of SoP and SoM does not affect them or can be beneficial. They believe that having a SoP also implies having goals in which one can fail. That prospect of possible failure is experienced as stressful. A student will most likely suffer from a lack of SoM and SoP, when the failure to develop a SoP is believed to be a personal failure, since it can interfere with a person's sense of identity and capabilities of achieving goals. A lack of SoM and SoP can also impact a students' SoB, since having a SoM can help students connect with peers and develop meaningful relationships. The SoB from academic community, peers and relationships in turn offer support in hardship and increase a student's QoL. Study advisor interviews mentioned that a lack of SoB is the biggest source of pain for some students.

In sum, a student's social and educational contacts strongly influence their personal beliefs and identity. These personal beliefs and identity provide the fundament for a steadfast perspective on the students own situation and future. Therefore, a student's SoM and SoP help a student maintain their QoL during adverse situations.

### 3. What is the responsibility of the university regarding the SoM, SoP, SoB, and SWB?

Our research supports the opinion that universities have a formal and informal responsibility to aid and facilitate initiatives regarding SoM, SoP, SoB, and SWB. From the study advisor analysis, there was support for the idea that universities have a responsibility to help students with matters regarding SWB and SoB. However, there was some uncertainty about how the university can aid in increasing student's SoM and SoP. This might be because SoB and SWB are already under consideration and are easily visualised on a campus or university. A campus with sports facilities, a theatre, or cafe helps improve a SoB. These facilities are visible and carefully considered as something that helps increase SoB.

The experts we interviewed see the importance of the role of universities, since it is a central place where guidelines and interventions can truly have an impact on students. Nevertheless, the final responsibility of increasing and developing SoM, SoP, SoB, and SWB rests on the student themselves. Most of the study advisors, experts, and students that have been interviewed agree with this sentiment. Personal responsibility might be a contributor to the lack of facilities of universities regarding SoM and SoP. However, we can conclude that universities have a formal and informal responsibility to aid and facilitate initiatives to increase or help develop SoM, SoP, SoB, and SWB, also regardless of the personal responsibility of students. Formal responsibilities touch upon the advice, guidelines and legal matters surrounding the care for students, which mostly encompasses Ausbildung. Whereas informal responsibility touches upon Bildung and includes how to support the development of students to become well-rounded critical researchers.

The main research question is: how can universities help students develop their SoP to increase QoL? In this research, we have provided information on how the concepts of SoM, SoP and QoL relate, what the positive effects are on students who have a SoM and SoP, and to what extent the university has an informal and formal responsibility to help students develop their SoM and SoP to increase QoL. The 'how' part is hard to address since the perspectives on possible solutions and the need for them differ greatly. In our policy paper we will give advice on how to raise awareness on these topics, which can be a good place to start for initiating facilities, activities, and further research.

# Limitations

Although we conducted an extensive study on the selected topics, it has a few limitations. Firstly, the concept of SoM was not explored completely since the concept and our understanding of it came to be during the course of our study. This had two reasons namely, students' ignorance on the topic and lack of follow-up questions from the interviewers. Students did not think deeply on their values and principles and due to the short time that was available, interviewers did not dig deeper into the topic. Due to this, there is not much information available on the topic from the interviews to analyse students' point of view regarding SoM. Future studies can gain a better understanding of the current students' needs and find a way to address them. Secondly, the sample size was quite small, since there was too little time available for the student interviews and their analyses. Additionally, the sample was limited to one university and hence comparison with different universities is not possible. Moreover, Radboud University has a higher level of SWB than others in the Netherlands (*Times Higher Education* rankings, 2020) and hence, the information gained from the current study could be a potential outlier. Lastly, although the COVID-19 pandemic increased conversations around mental health, it also created a lot more external stressors such as increased cost of living, due to which students are focused more on navigating these obstacles rather than self-development.

Future studies can focus more on the concept of SoM; how and why students form goals in their lives or the lack thereof. More extensive studies are required to completely understand their ideologies and what motivates them. Furthermore, studies can extend their sample to other universities in the Netherlands to compare student life and analyse any patterns that might arise. They can also analyse the differences between the universities and figure out reasons for it. This can help devise strategies to design events that are more in line with the students at each university rather than one size fits all planning.

# Appendices

## 1.   Programs currently in use that deal with student well-being

All things considered, universities in the Netherlands spend time and effort helping students to not only think about their well-being, but to also act upon it (Radboud Universiteit, 2023). Increasing the well-being of people helps decrease anxiety and depression-related symptoms in people (CDC, 2018; Klappe & Gubbels, 2017; World Health Organisation, 2012). Hence it is logical for universities to focus on well-being to improve students' overall performance. In return, there are a lot of initiatives to help increase a student's ability to raise the quality of their own well-being. They can reach out to university staff when they need help figuring out problems, such as student psychologists, student advisors, deans, teachers, mentors, etc. Additionally, they can find help with self-help programs, such as Gezondeboel, or workshops their universities offer, like a Well-Being Week (Radboud University, z.d.; Gezondeboel, 2023).

- Radboud University, Nijmegen: The student council organises working groups that focus on improving SWB. Additionally, the university also offers help through study advisors, self-help courses and activities of the student chaplaincy. (Radboud University, n.d.)
- University of Utrecht: The university organises yearly well-being week, study groups, workshops, and activities for students such as Meditation Lab and Mindful Mornings to improve SWB. (Universiteit Utrecht, n.d.)
- Erasmus University Rotterdam: The EUR created a comprehensive action plan for improving several aspects of SWB such as physical, emotional, and social through different projects. They included student support functions and lecturers, student living room to bring students together, E-Platform and helpline and E-mental health app. (Erasmus University Rotterdam, n.d.)
- British School in the Netherlands: They build a network of staff on campuses across The Netherlands to connect with and help students. (British School of Netherlands, n.d.)
- University of Maastricht: The university offers several different initiatives, both offline and online, such as UM community to bring students together, mind health check, lectures, workshops, and training courses. Additionally, the Well-being Movement

provides tools to promote students' physical and mental health. (Maastricht University, n.d.)

- Wageningen University: The university provides several workshops and training courses on anxiety, stress, and mindfulness. The "Surf your Stress" initiative in particular focuses on providing more information and practical tools for students to tackle stress. (Wageningen University and Research, n.d.)

- Step-Up: The initiative organises interactive incursions for students that is based on research in psychology, education, and pedagogy to develop an understanding of growth, neuroplasticity and healthy relationships to improve SWB (Unleashing Personal Potential, n.d.).

- Universiteiten van Nederland: The network created a vision on SWB for universities in the Netherlands, which details the different aspects universities are responsible for supporting the students in bettering their own well-being. This includes guidelines on what the university should offer in regard to guidance and support. In addition, they give advice on how to communicate about SWB. (Universiteiten van Nederland, 2022).

## 2. Interview guides

### 2.1. Interview guide for study advisors

1. Can you briefly explain what you think of when you hear the term sense of meaning?
2. What could be the consequences of a lack of sense of purpose?
   a. Do you think that lack of sense of purpose is common among students?
   b. Have you observed a decline in sense of purpose among students in recent years?
   c. Are there also consequences for the students' mental well-being in your opinion?
   d. If so, how do you think we can help the students with this?
3. If students come and the lack of purpose becomes clear, what do study advisors do with this?
   a. Utilities, do you know if students use them a lot?
      i. If not, why do you think students do not do this?
      ii. Can we do anything to improve this?
4. What about the relationship between students and teachers?
   a. Can the teachers help the students with this?
5. What do you think is the relationship between the concepts of sense of purpose, well-being, and a sense of belonging?
6. Universities are already busy promoting this sense of belonging, but is there something you think is missing in this?
7. Do you think that a lack of purposefulness is indeed also something that the student themselves must be in control of?
8. Do you think the university is currently doing enough to correct a lack of purpose for students, including all the issues we mentioned?
   a. What changes would you like to see in this?
9. Do you think that university employees, academic advisors, teachers, psychologists, etc., could do more to correct a lack of purpose in students?
   a. Do they have that responsibility?
10. Are there any themes or other important things you think we're missing from the picture of student sense of purpose?

## 2.2.    Interview guides for students

1. Do you have a greater goal in life?
    a. And if so, what is it?
    b. How did you find it?
    c. If not, do you miss having one?
2. What would you need to maintain or help create a greater goal in life?
3. To which extent is the university responsible for aiding and helping students for finding their greater goal in life?
4. Do you feel part of the academic community?
    a. And if not, why?
5. What can the university do to help improve the connectedness of the academic community?

## 2.3.    Interview guides for international experts

**Interview questions #MyMindMyPriority**

1. What type of campaigns and other methods are you implementing at the university involving mental health?
2. Do you work together with other organizations and the academic community for the campaigns that were held?
3. Doen jullie iets met SOP? (SOB met campus life misschien betrekken?) Do you look at SoP as an aspect of mental health?
4. If so, how do you implement that in policy/campaigns?
5. Have you noticed differences throughout time in the mental health of students before and after the campaign or mostly in the awareness of mental health programs?
6. Do you think COVID-19 had an influence on students' well-being/SOP? What did that look like at this university?
7. How do you reach the 'unreachable student'?
8. What is your view on the duty of care? How do you look at the duty of care of universities when it comes to the mental health and pOP of students?
    a. Students
    b. Professors/teachers
    c. Study advisors
    d. Others

**Interview questions Peter Varnum**

1. Did you incorporate SoP in the Australian Model? If so, how?
2. Is there something special or specific with regard to the mental health of students compared to the mental health of youth in general? And is there a difference between countries?
3. In your opinion, is there a difference between the current generation of students and the students of the past? If so, what is this difference, and what might be the cause of this difference?
4. What are the obstacles that you have come across regarding researching student mental health and the problems associated with that?
5. What is your view on the duty of care? How do you look at the duty of care of universities when it comes to the mental health and SoP of students?
   a. Students
   b. Professors/teachers
   c. Study advisors
   d. Others
6. To what extent do universities need to reach students who are 'unreachable'?
7. What is the best way to reach vulnerable students?

**Interview questions Global Shapers Hub**

1. What is your role within the World Economic Forum?
2. What kind of policies work and what do you do regarding student mental health?
3. What is your opinion on student SoP with regard to mental health?
   a. Do you incorporate SoP?
4. What is your view on the duty of care?
   a. Students
   b. Professors/teachers
   c. Study advisors
   d. Others
5. How can universities best include students in their policies and the making of these policies?
6. How do you reach the unreachable students? What do you do with the information that you get from such students?

**Interview questions EPFL**

1. How would you define the topics of student well-being and SoP?
2. How do you address these topics (also with regard to policy)?
3. The role of the university in helping students with their sense of purpose and well-being
    a. Students themselves
    b. Professors
    c. Study advisors
4. If students easily seek help and if the programs for well-being are publicly known.
5. How do you attract students (also the unreachable student) to make use of the facilities?

**Interview questions University of Fribourg**

1. Explain what we are doing
2. Explain the struggles we are facing:
    a. The university organises well-being weeks but not the right students go there;
    b. Problems grow, but students are not going to university authorities;
    c. Since COVID-19, the academic community is not as strong anymore;
    d. The focus is primarily on solving instead of preventing
3. Have you encountered these problems and how is the university acting on these issues?
4. What does prevention look like at the University of Fribourg?
5. What are the main struggles of the University of Fribourg in light of student well-being and mental health problems?
6. Are you focusing on SoP or SoB?

**Interview questions Katherine Milligan**

1. What is your view on the current mental health and well-being of students?
    a. What kind of impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have?
2. What is your view on SoP regarding student mental health?
3. Is there something special or specific with regard to the mental health of students compared to the mental health of youth in general? And is there a difference between countries?
4. What is your specific role within the Schwab Foundation with regard to student mental health and SoP?
5. What are current initiatives regarding mental health and SoP?

6. How can we help students suffering from a lack of SoP and dealing with mental health problems?

7. How can universities best include students in their policies and the making of these policies?

8. What is your view on the duty of care?

   a. Students

   b. Professors/teachers

   c. Study advisors

   d. Others

**Interview questions Kanton Bern**

1. How do you define the topics of student well-being and sense of purpose, and how do you address these?

2. What is the role of the university in helping students with their sense of purpose and well-being?

3. Why is there a supporting role from the canton of Bern in there?

4. Is canton Bern the only canton that has this policy/structure or do other cantons as well?

5. Do you see a difference in the mental well-being of the students at the three different universities?

6. What do you think can improve your services?

   a. How long are your average waiting periods for when a student can get help?

7. Do students easily seek help or are the programs for well-being known by a lot of them?

8. How do you attract students to make use of these facilities?

**Interview questions Dorine van der Wal**

Youth:
1. What trends do you see in youth today with respect to SoP?

2. Do you think SoP is decreasing? If so, what do you think is causing it?

3. What do you think motivates young people in recent times?

4. How do you perceive the well-being and quality of life of youth today and can you see a difference from a decade ago?

Policy making:
1. What are the key points to keep in mind while designing policies?

2. How specific do you suggest our advice should be for it to be practically useful?

3. What are some practical aspects of policy-making that we need to keep in mind?

4. What kind of policies have the most impact?

5. What problems might we encounter while devising policies?

Data analysis:

1. We are doing a thematic analysis of our interviews. Do you have any suggestions that we can keep in mind to make it more accurate and valid?

2. Do you have any recommendations about what else can be done for analysing our data?

**Interview questions for students at the different universities in Switzerland:**

1. Do you have a greater goal in life?

2. Do you think your university is supporting you in creating or maintaining this goal?

3. Do you feel closely connected to the academic community, so with other students, or on campus in general?

4. Do you think the services your universities provide are adequate?

5. What do you think could be improved?

6. What do you think should be a mandatory thing for all universities regarding the psychological support of students?

# PART II
# POLICY

# Introduction

In the context of the rising student well-being (SWB) problem, ECIO commissioned the Honours Project Impact of the Radboud University with the following policy puzzle: while universities are starting and advancing their policy regarding mental health problems, these problems are not decreasing (Dopmeijer, Nuijen, Busch & Tak, 2021). Some of these problems are inherent to the life period in which students live. The first steps into adulthood lead to questions regarding identity, their future, and hence their meaning. However, this does not account for the dramatic increase in problems for people in the students' age category: more youngsters feel lonely, use illegal substances, have depressive or even suicidal thoughts, or struggle with study and non-study-related stress (Dopmeijer, Nuijen, Busch & Tak, 2021).

Some parts of the well-being programmes of the universities are already in place for a long time. For study-related problems, a student could contact a study advisor, while for psychological problems there were study psychologists. At the same time, universities have initiated well-being and mental health weeks to assist students facing mental health problems.

At the governmental level, the well-being problems triggered a response as well. After Members of Parliament (Wassenberg et al., 2021) successfully filed a motion to force the government to act on the SWB crisis. What followed was an agreement between the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW) and the umbrella organisation for universities (UNL) about an integral approach to SWB. The result is that the development of the universities' policies should be finished in 2023 and the first evaluations are planned for 2025 (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2022).

Despite all these initiatives, there is still an increase in mental health problems among Dutch students. We propose that one important factor in this increase is the division instead of the integration of the responsibilities that universities have. Right now, the framework of responsibility out of which the universities act consists of two different paths: 1) the university is responsible for the education of students, and 2) the university is facilitating students who suffer from mental health and well-being problems. This implies a sole responsibility for students to themselves fix their mental health and well-being related problems.

The way university facilitates the well-being problems of students characterises itself by an individual and pathological treatment of the students[1]. Students with well-being problems are referred to student psychologists, or are encouraged to join events that promote well-being, such as for instance the well-being weeks. The individual approach to well-being is problematic because the problem seems not to be individualistic, but a collective problem. After all, a very big part of the student population is suffering from the same problems. Moreover, solving individual problems does not prevent new students from encountering problems during their student career, or directly afterwards.

It seems that these problems regarding SWB are not confined to only the Netherlands. As can be seen in interviews with experts in Switzerland, students are struggling with their mental health as well (Research report, p.43). Furthermore, in the United States, there has been a consistent decrease in the mental health of college students (Lipson, et al., 2022). This finding has been supported by the WHO (Personal communication, 20th of March 2023). Next to the similar mental health problems that students face, there is also a similar approach to tackling such problems. During the interviews with the experts in Switzerland, we found that they have an individual and pathological approach to the treatment of the students, focussing only on treating instead of preventing (Research report, p.45). Therefore, we can state that the problem is not an individual one, but that it is a collective and international problem.

Another problem with the individualistic approach and the policy divide between education and well-being by universities is that only a small number of students are participating in the well-being activities offered by the universities. Our interviews with students show that students do not think of these initiatives as helpful, or it costs too much effort to participate. Furthermore, most students are of the opinion that universities are there to get them their diplomas, and not to help them find their sense of purpose (SoP). Even though students might not see it, education has an important role in forming students into intellectuals, and by embracing this role as orienteers and shapers, universities can help lower the number of students suffering from poor mental health.

Therefore, we argue in favour of a framework for education that helps students in their well-being. This framework consists of the development of a sense of meaning (SoM), which entails

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[1] With a pathological treatment we mean that students are referred to university psychologists, or external partners to treat students with mental health problems such as for instance depression, or burn-out related problems.

the individual idea of what makes life valuable. As the research report shows (p.14-17), the development of a SoM is a way of creating resilience to everyday problems that students encounter. To do that, first, we zoom in to the difference between Bildung and Ausbildung. This differentiation shows two different ways of thinking about education, as a means for student formation (Bildung) or to gain knowledge about a certain field of study. Thereafter, we analyse the policy network, to identify different challenges the actors in the policy network are facing and their positions on SoM integration in their framework. Subsequently, we propose different solutions that ECIO can recommend decreasing the struggles the different actors in the policy network are facing.

# Bildung and Ausbildung

The two responsibilities of the university, and especially the separation between them in the current system, is not a new problem. In the late eighteenth century, von Humboldt created the terms Bildung and Ausbildung. The principle underlying von Humboldt's ideas is that "*the objectives of an education programme are the provision of general education, all-round and harmonious personality development (...) and the formation of multidimensional individuals*" (Günther, 1988). Von Humboldt states that the role of higher education establishments "*is to handle knowledge in the deepest and widest sense of the term and transmit it as (...) the stuff of intellectual and moral development, and to combine objective knowledge with subjective development*", such as personality development (Günther, 1988). In addition, schools play an important role in creating a basis consisting of "*knowledge that is of a general nature and a certain cultivation of the mind and character*", which makes acquiring vocational skills, later on, easier (Günther, 1988). Hence, Bildung lets students think about their values, and their role in society. It forces students to think about what makes life meaningful and what they want in life. Therefore, this approach of education focuses not on mere vocational training, but to the creation of a SoM for the individual students.

In contrast to the broad approach to education that is Bildung, there is Ausbildung. Ausbildung refers to the formal way of obtaining a degree in a specific profession. Contrary to the concept of Bildung by von Humboldt, there is no focus on subjective development, only on the objective knowledge that needs to be obtained before acquiring a degree. The contemporary Dutch approach to education is in line with Ausbildung. Moreover, as the interviews with both students and study advisors show (Research report, p.25-42) is the academic becoming

increasingly more shaped as Ausbildung. Students are more focused on getting their degree, instead of getting involved in student life, and students see academic career as an obligatory sequel to their middle school.

The shift that we propose consists of the transformation of the academic system from Ausbildung, to Bildung. Since Bildung will help students with questions related to meaning, it is a preventive measure for a decline in students' well-being. Additionally, it helps students in the creation of a SoB, and a SoP.

# A complex policy network

ECIO is located in a complex policy network. They work together with the governmental Department for Education, Culture, and Science (OCW), the umbrella organisations for Dutch universities (UNL), and national student organisations the LSVb, and ISO to come up with national educational policy advice for the individual universities. The cooperation between ECIO and its partners is characterised as consensus-seeking and deliberation focused. In Figure 1, this is represented by the block that surrounds these actors. The output from this five-partite consultation is mediated to the universities via the UNL. Additionally, ECIO offers the universities direct advice regarding well-being and inclusivity when they are being asked to by these universities.

In Figure 1, there is another block. In this block, the university structure is pictured. The Executive Board (in Dutch: College van Bestuur; CvB) advises the faculties on their policies. In addition, the CvB shapes policy regarding psychologists, student associations, and study associations. The faculties form the policies towards their study advisors, teachers, and educators. As can be seen in Figure 1, these actors all have an influence on the student. The student is represented in the LSVb and the ISO, which explains the arrows from and to students and LSVb+ISO.

For students, the universities are the most important actors in the policy network when it comes to SWB. The policy that universities implement is directly affecting the students' lives. In time, the students are influencing the deliberation between ECIO and its partners via their interest groups, ISO and the LSVb. There is thus a constant feedback-loop between the input of the universities (the output of the deliberation), and the output of universities.

Additionally, another policy actor with direct impact on the life of students is the Dutch government. Educational laws and regulations, and other rules that are implemented by the government are affecting students' lives directly, such as the rules regarding the student loan system, or indirectly via the universities that execute the government's guidelines. ECIO can influence the government on policy not directly focused on education, but on the broad spectre of problems that students encounter. This however is, out of the scope of this policy advice, and research.

**Figure 1. Policy network of ECIO**
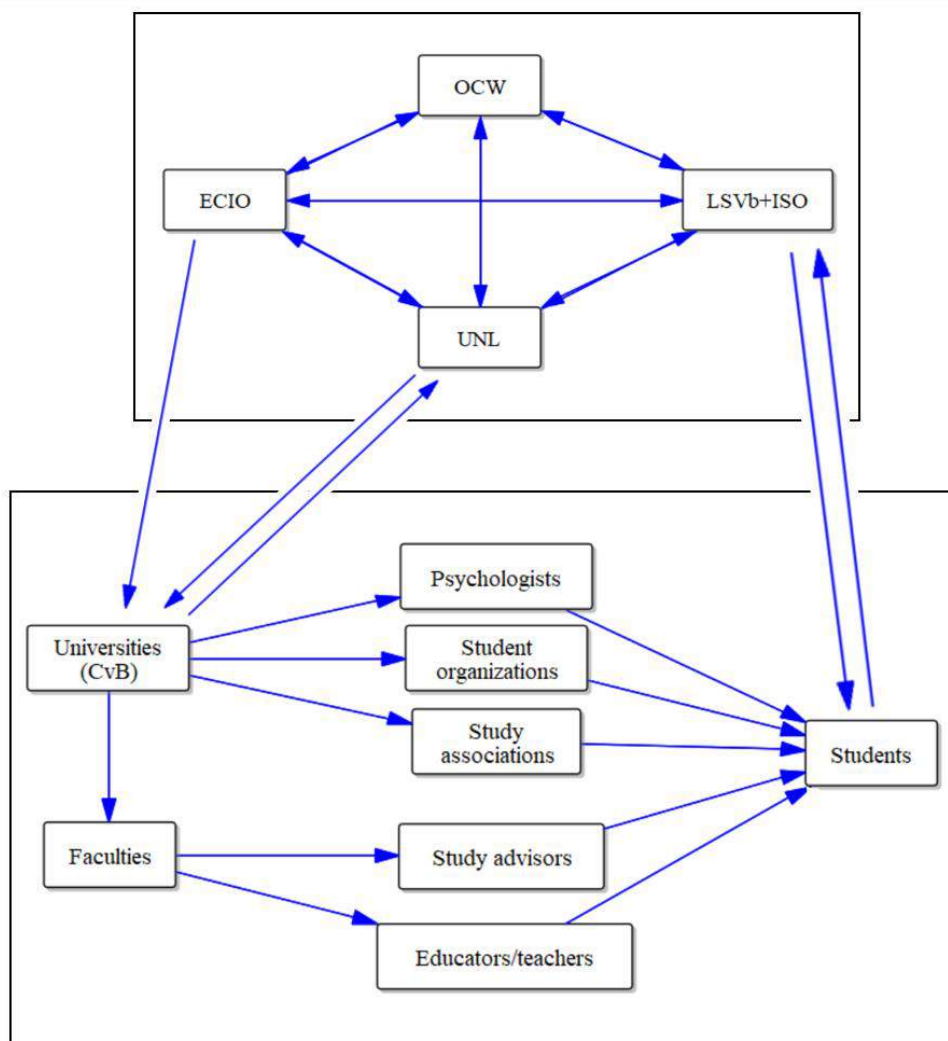
# Defining the problem

The main problem that we address in this project is based on the student level. After all, the well-being of students is foremost a problem experienced by the individual student. However, in the broader policy network, the problems that students encounter lead to challenges for the institutions which deal with students' well-being. We indicate the following main problems for the actors in the policy network, which are not students, when it comes to resolving the SWB crisis and the lack of student SoM.

## The government

Article 22 of the Dutch Constitution provides the Dutch Government with the duty to care for their citizens' health. However, this responsibility is codified in the law for Higher Education and Scientific Research (WHW). In the WHW, the responsibility and goals for universities are stated. According to this law, the universities' goal is to provide scientific education, and scientific research. This focus on attaining a university degree, is an example of Ausbildung:

> Universities are focused on providing scientific education and conducting scientific research. In any case, they provide initial courses in university education, conduct scientific research, provide training to become a scientific researcher or technological designer and transfer knowledge for the benefit of society. (Art. 1.3 paragraph 1 WHW)

Additionally, the legislator has anchored in the WHW the responsibility for universities to educate their students not only in their field of study, but also to educate them as citizens with a sense of societal responsibility. However, this societal responsibility only entails the duty to withholding from discrimination of others and thus it is a very narrow societal responsibility, that does not meet the definition of Bildung:

The higher education institutions also pay attention to the personal development of their students and the promotion of their sense of social responsibility. The promotion of a sense of social responsibility means at least that the institutions, including those who formally or informally represent them, refrain from discriminatory behaviour and statements. In the context of their activities in the field of education, the institutions also focus on promoting expressive skills in Dutch with regard to Dutch-speaking students. (Art. 1.3 paragraph 5 WHW).

When students are challenged by a disability, the university has an additional duty to this group of students (art. 5.7 lid 1e, WHW). However, this duty of care is only there for educational means. University personnel should aid disabled students to help them acquire/obtain their degree:

The programme-specific facilities as well as the institution-wide facilities that influence the quality of the programme, including adequate study supervision and facilities that promote accessibility and feasibility for students with a disability. (Art. 5.7 paragraph 1e WHW).

This leaves the government with only little coercive power to move the universities to act on the well-being of the students. The lack of sufficient coercive power could be a problem for the government since they are not able to force universities to act on policy. However, On July 14, 2022, the Minister of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW), Robbert Dijkgraaf, presented an agreement with governmental partners in civil society, considering the challenges/ bottlenecks that universities face, including a decline in SWB. In this agreement, the governmental partners in civil society agreed with the government that they would create an integrative approach to SWB. This approach is finished in 2023 and the first evaluation of the execution of this approach is planned in 2025. The Dutch government is investing 15 million euros yearly, structurally. In addition, OCW invests 4 million euros until 2031, for research, monitoring, interventions, the sharing of knowledge, awareness, and a change of culture to increase social safety in universities. Furthermore, the minister and the civil society partners agreed that the solution should neither lead to more regulatory pressure for universities, nor to educational system change.

In sum, the government's lawful base to move universities to do more on social well-being is small. Consequently, the government is dependent on changing the law, the goodwill of universities, or other non-law-based coercive means, such as for instance agreements with civil

society partners. The agreement of the minister and the societal partners in 2022, is an example of the latter. However, in this agreement, the first possibility for change is closed, being extra regulatory pressure for universities. This leaves the government in a position of dependency when it comes to SWB.

# UNL

In the Universiteiten van Nederland (UNL), the fourteen universities of the Netherlands work together to create a strong university sector. Together, they formulate their ambitions regarding scientific education and research. Therefore, each universities vision should be derived from and be similar to the vision of the UNL. The UNL has created a document, "Visie op Studentenwelzijn", with the aim to formulate a common denominator for policy around SWB. In this document, the need to focus on Bildung instead of Ausbildung can be derived. In this part, we argue that even though the UNL wants to focus on Bildung, there are some challenges with the integration on a university level.

## UNL's view on Bildung and Ausbildung

The UNL states in the document "Visie op Studentenwelzijn" that studying at a university is more than just gaining knowledge and academic skills (Universiteiten van Nederland, 2022). For most students, it is the first time they will have to take care of themselves without much help because they are living alone for the first time; they need to develop their own autonomy and identity. It is during this time of being a student and going to university that students can learn and develop their talents and skills, and making mistakes is part of the process. It is the university's responsibility to guide students during this process to contribute to the development of resilient individuals, as per the UNL. Furthermore, in their definition of SWB, the UNL includes aspects such as being able to work productively on their (a student's) own development and being able to contribute to both the academic community as well as society. With these examples, the UNL shows that they do not only find Ausbildung important but that they want to focus on Bildung as well.

## In practice

The UNL gives broad advice and guidelines to all the universities in the Netherlands, but the universities want to make these guidelines their own and fill in the details in such a way that it

fits their university. This can result in challenges with the interpretation of some parts of the advice. To give an example, the UNL states that it is the duty of universities to incorporate intellectual and personal development, but the definition of what exactly intellectual and personal development entails is not clear. For the UNL, this could be a way to incorporate the Bildung into the current educational system, but universities might interpret it with even more emphasis on practical skills development, which is Ausbildung.

In the interviews with the study advisors, it became clear that the implementation of Bildung is not integrated well into the academic system. Currently, university is seen more as a school. Students as well as professors are more focused on how students pass their exams and focus more on the requirements of academic writing than for example on reflection. This shows that the university's or faculties' interpretation of professional or personal development is more focused on the Ausbildung instead of the Bildung. Nevertheless, the study advisors see the importance of Bildung as well. They state that attention needs to be given to personal growth and that people need to learn more about themselves. In addition, students need to reflect more. Therefore, both the UNL and the study advisors may want to integrate more Bildung aspects into the current academic system, but the universities are currently not doing so.

## Problem

The biggest challenge that we have identified regarding the UNL and its role in the complex policy network is thus that they give broad advice. It is understandable that they would do this, as universities aim to tailor the details to align with their own institution. Nevertheless, this broadness of the advice results in a bigger chance of different interpretations of certain aspects. As a result of these differences in interpretations, there might be a lower focus on Bildung than Ausbildung.

# Universities

University boards appear willing to act on SWB. Based on informal interviews with study advisors, and on the fact that the university boards are represented in UNL, there is strong evidence that the university boards even want to incorporate the move from Ausbildung to Bildung. However, the problem lies in the fact that universities are a decentralised entity, with a complex policy field inside the university itself. An important policy agent in these decentralised policy fields are the faculties. Each with its own board, and its own policy. In

turn, the faculties themselves are a complex policy field, with different policies, personnel, study advisors, and student politics. The decentralised structure of universities makes the coercive power of the university board a mere theoretical instrument. Sudden changes likely create resistance in the lower levels of the hierarchy. Since the actors lower in the hierarchy are the actors with a direct impact on students' lives, resistance is an unwanted response to new policies.

Another important policy agent is the services offered by the universities. In the case of the Radboud University, these services are for example the support and training organisation for teachers, and the well-being services. A simplified version of this policy network is displayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Simplified policy network regarding universities**
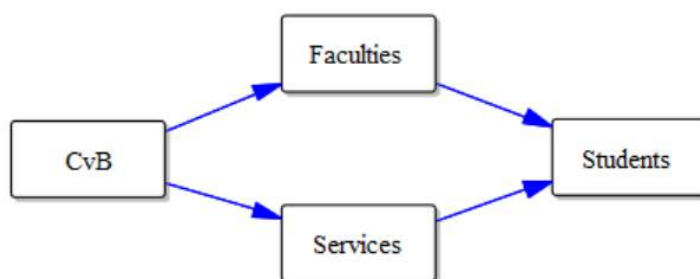


## Faculties

The different faculties are an important policy actor, with great influence on the direct university careers of students. Moreover, the faculties are the actors that have to make policy and execute and facilitate the policy when it comes to SWB. According to study advisors, the translation regarding the transformation from Ausbildung to Bildung ends here. We were not able to track down why the faculties are not keen on transforming their approach to education from Ausbildung to Bildung. However, we have the expectation that this could be due to vested interests in the faculties. This means that there are actors with either veto, or policy shaping power that are unwilling to change the faculties' educational approach. This could be because the actor does not feel responsible, or because the actor does not see a problem with SWB. In conclusion, we indicate that there is a bottleneck and a policy challenge to further engaging in the transformation from Ausbildung to Bildung.

# Students

During the student interviews, it came forward that another bottleneck is present in the system, namely with the students. The student population is diverse, and students have different opinions regarding the duty of the university on well-being, and the positive attributes of having a SoP or SoM. Some students feel the university has no responsibility for creating or helping to create a SoP and SoM, as it is their own responsibility. On the other hand, some students argue that the university should help them in creating their SoM and SoP. The last group of students have the opinion that finding a SoP or SoM is their own responsibility, but this group, however, sees a facilitating role for the university; a role the university is already fulfilling enough (Research report, p.35-43).

These views are linked to Ausbildung and Bildung. The students who believe that it is their own responsibility to find a SoP and that the university has no responsibility whatsoever for helping them, see the university only as a place to prepare them for a future career. Getting a diploma is the only utility of the university. This fits with the premises of Ausbildung, where the university's only task is to give the students the objective knowledge that needs to be obtained in order for them to get a degree. The students who see the facilitating responsibility of the university are more in favour of a Bildung approach to education.

These differences in opinion can possibly be linked to the student journey. That student journey, which is the academic career of a student, consists of three different phases: the introductory phase, the belonging phase, and the choosing phase. What can be seen by the phases of the student journey, which are explained in more detail in the research report on p26-31, is that only in the last phase, students are having trouble with their SoP. In the earlier phases, it is more the SoM and SoB that they struggle with. For every phase, students have different needs, which means that in the eyes of the students, the university has other responsibilities regarding these needs. In the first two phases, students feel like the university can't help them; it is their own responsibility. In the last phase, the university can help them, because a SoP is more related to the career goals students have. This shows that the last phase, in which the university does have a responsibility, is more related to Ausbildung, whereas the first two phases, in which the university does not have a responsibility, are more related to Bildung. It is important that each phase gets attention because there are different problems that students struggle with in each phase.

# Conclusion and recommendations

As shown in the previous section, only some institutions do not want to incorporate a Bildung approach to academic education. The institution that has the most power, the faculties, is seemingly not willing to facilitate this change. Additionally, the students themselves are not unanimous in their demands for a more SoM-related education. Therefore, the problem lies in the translation from wishes in the upper end of the hierarchy (government, UNL, university boards) to the lower levels of the hierarchy (the faculties and the students). The problems that occur for students and faculties are manifold and ambiguous. However, we see that these problems are partly in place due to a lack of awareness at the student and faculty level, and a vested interest in academia. Hence, we conclude the following:

## Create awareness at the student level and the university level

As has been explained in the previous section, most of the actors in the complex policy network ECIO finds themselves in are willing to incorporate the Bildung approach to academic education. Nevertheless, there are still actors who are not willing to incorporate this approach. In addition, some of the actors that we identified as having a willing stance to the incorporation of Bildung might not be aware of their stance or that it is called Bildung.

It is important that all actors in this policy network are facing the same direction with regard to what they want in order to create a policy that satisfies every actor in the policy network. Therefore, awareness needs to be created for all actors that they want and that students need a Bildung approach in their academic education. We suggest keeping the pressure on these policy agents, both from a bottom-up approach, as well as a top-down approach. By keeping pressure and mentioning the topic of SoM, SoP, SoB, and Bildung as much as possible, the actors will ultimately know that these concepts exist and need attention. Nevertheless, this process of creating awareness will take time, but it is crucial for a well-thought-out incorporation of Bildung in the academic education.

## Specify what Bildung is, by use of the Five W's framework

Both the government and UNL are willing to engage in Bildung over Ausbildung. In other words, they want students to not only get a degree but to be a critical citizen who is able to reflect on contemporary societal and personal questions. However, the policy suggestions of

the UNL and the government are vague, since the universities and their faculties want policy freedom to shape and adopt the policy they want. The consequence is that the faculties fill in top-down imposed decisions in a framework of professional development, instead of personal development. We suggest that ECIO push the UNL, to incorporate the Five W's framework in the advice they give to the universities. The Five W's framework is displayed in Table 1, and it touches on the three different themes we suggest are necessary for student resilience: SOM, SoP, and SoB.

**Table 1**

*Five W's Framework*

| W | Question | Answer | Theme |
|---|----------|--------|-------|
| Who | Who am I? | Identity, values | Meaning |
| What | What am I doing? | Study, work | Purpose |
| Why | Why am I doing it? | Values, long-term goal | Meaning and purpose |
| Where | Where do I do it? | University, organisations, companies | Belonging |
| Where to | Where am I going? | Goals | Purpose |

## Advice to incorporate this framework in the study programme

We indicated that students have different needs regarding the creation of their SoM, SoP, and SoB. These needs are partly related to the point of where the student is in their academic career (Research report p.26-31). At the beginning of the study, students have problems regarding their SoB, while at later stages the problems are more purpose related. Additionally, we indicated that students have different viewpoints regarding the universities' duty regarding the creation of a purpose, meaning, and belonging (Research report, p.28-31). These problems can be related to each other. In some phases of their academic career, the students might feel they

do not need the university to facilitate either of these three themes. The problem in this viewpoint is twofold. First, previous research (Research report, p.14-19) has shown the importance of SoM, SoP, and SoB for the students' resilience. Second, if the creation of SoM, SoP, and SoB is left to chance, the student might not create it and will suffer the consequences in a later stage.

We thus argue that the transformation of Ausbildung to Bildung, via the Five W's framework, is integrated into the study programme, mandatory for every student, and rewarded with ECs. The incorporation can be done in two different ways. The faculty can choose to create a separate course that includes the workbook, which deals with the Five W's. See the workbook (p.110-139) for an example. The different study programmes can also choose to develop learning goals and incorporate these learning goals into the existing programme.

## Use the policy partners to force the faculties to change

The direct policy partners of ECIO are the student organisations (LSVb and ISO), OCW, and UNL. Among these organisations, OCW and UNL support the Bildung approach. However, it appears that these organisations lack the authority to compel the faculties to take actions on these recommendations. We, therefore, suggest further research on the power relations in the faculty to develop a better understanding of where the bottleneck is created directly.

Additionally, we suggest ECIO to 1) put the Five W's framework on the policy agenda when talking to other actors in the policy network, and 2) lobby the student organisations to mobilise the students in the university. Ideally, this creates both bottom-up as well as top-down pressure on the faculties. For bottom-up mobilisation, the ISO is the most powerful possible policy ally. As representatives of the student councils, they have the possibility to lobby the student councils of the different universities. The underlying premise is that student politics further influences the academic affairs in the programme.

Lastly, we encountered other problems that students face during their academic career, and the needs that they have. However, given the focus of this policy paper, we did not further investigate these problems and needs. Still, since we see the importance of these problems and needs, we want to briefly highlight them. Further elaboration on these problems and needs can be found in the research report. The problems are: the increasing amount of social media-use of students, that overstimulates the student brain, and decreases the time for students to reflect

on questions related to meaning and purpose; the long waiting lists for student psychologists, and housing problems that targets both the student life, and the SOB of the individual student. Additionally, the need for (peer-to-peer) mentorship, to ask practical questions and improve the SoB of students.

# PART III

# WORKBOOK

# Introduction

Courses about personal growth and development have become increasingly popular in universities worldwide due to the many benefits they offer students (*The Rise of Importance of Personal Development Education in Higher Education*, z.d.; Uță, 2022). It is important to recognize the value of 'Bildung' - a German term that encompasses the development of one's character, intellect and social skills through self-reflection, goal setting, and skill-building. This product will explore why and how Dutch universities can implement Bildung-courses for their students, and how students can learn about their self-development, social development, and professional development with a workbook.

Focussing more on Bildung will give students the freedom and time to introspect and reflect. During interviews with students, there was a strong emphasis on the need for freedom and time. The world is changing at an unprecedented pace, and students need to develop skills that will enable them to learn and adapt throughout their lives. Students expressed a desire to reflect on their personal growth and how they interact with the world, but the high workload at university often makes this difficult. Study advisors and experts have agreed with this statement (Research Report, p.25-43). This course will allow the students to take the time they need, and it can aid in finding a sense of purpose (SoP) or developing and maintaining long-term goals. It is important to give students a sense of freedom as well since their Bildung can be diverse and study unrelated. The idea is not to create consensus, but to have each student develop themselves as they see fit.

By teaching self-reflection, goal-setting, and other personal development skills, students can better understand themselves, their values, and their goals (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). This can lead to increased confidence, self-awareness, and overall well-being (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022; London & Smither, 1999; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Self-development will help create lifelong learning skills as it allows you to continuously reflect on yourself and better yourself. This course will give students tools to support life-long learning, for which it can be greatly beneficial to have a growth-mindset: which means having the mindset that allows you to view talents and capabilities as something that can be achieved when working for it. Having a fixed mindset, on the other hand, will limit the belief that one can achieve anything since one will attribute achievements to things they have no control over, such as coming from a good family or being naturally gifted. Having a growth-mindset goes hand in hand with self-development since a

person with this mindset is open to learning about oneself and how one can improve (Carlson & Tannyhill, 2020). A growth-mindset allows people to learn throughout their lives since it gives them the idea that they can achieve most things if they work for it. However, this does not mean that people with a growth-mindset want to do it all, but instead that if they have a goal, they believe they can get there. People with a growth-mindset are less likely to develop an addiction, report better mental health, and have higher academic achievement than people with a fixed mindset (Carlson & Tannyhill, 2020; Schleider & Weisz, 2016; Wang et al., 2019). Self-development courses can teach students how to set goals, identify areas for improvement, and develop strategies to achieve their objectives. These skills will be invaluable in a world where lifelong learning is increasingly necessary, due to the fact that employees who take responsibility for their own personal and professional development are more likely to be successful and satisfied in their careers (London & Smither, 1999).

In particular, the time when people are studying is a crucial period for personal development. In the adolescent years, the frontal lobe is in the latest development phase which allows for better decision-making, less risk-taking, and stabilising one's personality (Gerber et al., 2017; Hochberg & Konner, 2020; Jones & Stewart, 2016; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1997). On top of that, adolescents find themselves learning how to balance household tasks, academic responsibilities, social life, hobbies, and more, which helps them learn and grow towards being well-adjusted young adults. These years can be hard to navigate when there is little feedback from the world around you. People are social creatures and require social feedback to establish a good picture of themselves. Although the students will be in a workgroup (~ 20 people) we advise making small groups so that students can get peer-to-peer feedback. Students who are less knowledgeable but motivated to learn about their self-development are more likely to improve their learning and have higher learning outcomes (Mumford, 1983; Neugebauer et al., 2016).

Therefore, universities are appropriate institutions to create a Bildung-development environment, which allows students to develop themselves in educational and social contexts. For example, students have the opportunity to explore different subjects, develop new skills and engage in new experiences. However, this requires not only access to educational resources but also freedom and flexibility to pursue personal interests and goals.

# The three domains

The course is set up in three domains: individual development, social development, and professional development. These domains connect well to the Five W's which are discussed in the policy paper. The Five W's are: who, what, where, why am I and where am I going? The first domain of individual development will help answer the who (values), what (identity) and why (self-explanation) questions. The domain of social development will mostly answer the where-am-I question since it takes into account the people you surround yourself with and your place within the university. The same thing can be said for the last domain of professional development, where the where-am-I question also gets answered and so does the where-am-I-going question. Students will reflect on their role in university and extracurricular activities but also take that into account when looking into the future. The where-am-I-going question is the biggest part of the third domain as it helps them get an image of possible future goals.

These three domains will follow each other, starting with individual development. The domain of individual development was chosen based on the amount of psychological research there is on this topic (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; Carlson & Tannyhill, 2020; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022; London & Smither, 1999; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2019; Zimmerman et al., 1997). From the interviews we conducted in our research, we concluded that developing a SoP usually comes from some type of introspection which is a huge part of self-development. Focusing on self-development is not a new phenomenon, as many studies already have a bit of it in there, such as writing a personal evaluation on the course. We start with self-development because it is important to understand ourselves properly before trying to understand how we interact with the world around us. Introspection leads to new insights and can influence behaviour.

This behaviour in response to others will be examined in the next domain: social development. In this domain, the focus will be on communicating, social relations and working relations with other people. It is important for students to learn about themselves in their social environment as it can make for good working relationships, understanding of others and broadening one's perspective on life. This will be the steppingstone to the third and last domain: professional development. The last domain is focused on the step beyond university as it connects the first two domains to practice. The gained insights and knowledge will allow students to think about their professional careers better than before. This domain will bring these two together by

scavenging for job positions, prepping for job opportunities and understanding your motivations.

## General course layout

There are a few technical aspects we advise for this course. The first ones are about the course load and directive. We highly encourage doing the three themes one after the other instead of combining them. This course can be spread over multiple years as faculty staff see fit. From the student's perspective, we advise the minimum length of a year to ensure the time investment is low and this longer time allows for better reflection. Preferably it comes back every year of the bachelor, to reflect on the development over the year. They then can start to reflect on themselves and their interactions with others in the first year. Nearing the third bachelor year or at the beginning of this year the theme 'orientation of the world' will be most beneficial as it helps make decisions for after the third bachelor year (like choosing a master's, another bachelor's, or to start working).

There are two ways to incorporate the course into the curriculum. An option would be to make it an individual course with ECTS attached, the other option is to add the learning goals to existing smaller courses. We strongly advise against a heavy workload for this course and would like to see students working in the meetings instead of at home. Therefore, we advise making it a pass/fail course, where you take participation, effort and attendance to grade the students. A written exam would not be ideal, because the course is very personal, and it will give the students unnecessary stress. See for example the Honours Academy of Radboud University. It is also important to be aware of the time the courses are given. To avoid low attendance, we advise to keep in mind that students can lack motivation or understanding for this course. While scheduling the course, Mondays and Fridays should be avoided and it should be in the middle of the day instead of at the beginning or the end. If the course is scheduled inconveniently, students may experience the course as a burden. These meetings can be once a week for an hour long and equate to around 2 EC (= 56 hours) in total.

This course is meant to be flexible for students as for teachers. Due to the personal focus of the course, the students will create a different SoM or different ways of finding it. Therefore, we advise universities to allow students the freedom and flexibility of choosing which assignments to make. This way the course will be of added value for every student, regardless of their personal study phase. We also advise giving teachers the flexibility to add or remove

assignments as they see fit with the student's major in mind. Psychology students, for example, could do a more in-depth personality test in the beginning since they have already learned about this topic, whereas other students might like a personality test with broader categories to get started. Additionally, we recommend that the teachers giving this course understand the importance of it, can appropriately communicate about personal development and can create a safe environment for students.

In short, the course will look like this per domain:

**Table 2**

*Course overview per domain*

| 1. Individual development | 2. Social development | 3. Professional development |
|---|---|---|
| a. Personality tests<br>b. Values<br>c. Reflection | a. Giving/receiving feedback<br>b. Communicating needs/boundaries<br>c. Understanding others/empathy | a. Intrinsic motivation: reflection on you as a professional<br>b. Career options<br>c. Presenting oneself: combine career options |
| Who am I?<br>What do I do?<br>Why do I do it? | Where am I now? | Where am I going? |

# Domain 1: Individual Development

In the first part of the course, we advise teaching students to properly develop themselves. Students should learn about their personal development to improve themselves in professional and personal contexts. Individual development can lead to greater self-awareness by understanding your own values, strengths, and weaknesses. It can help students make more informed decisions, set goals, and help them communicate more effectively with others. Thereby, individual development can lead to resilience and adaptability, students can reflect and learn about their stress management and problem-solving, which can help students to cope with stress and overcome setbacks.

The three main themes we will address in part 1 of the course will be personality tests, values and reflection.

## Personality tests

Why?

Taking a personality test can provide valuable insights into your own personality and behaviour, helping you to develop greater self-awareness and become a more well-rounded individual. This can lead to personal growth, improved relationships, and greater success in both personal and professional settings. It can help students gain a deeper understanding of their own personality traits, including their strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge can be useful for setting personal goals, identifying areas for improvement, and developing strategies to overcome challenges. Other tests, such as finding out your attachment style, main coping mechanisms, and intelligence tests can be beneficial to you as well. We advise the teacher to at least incorporate personality tests, but incorporate other tests as you see fit. Perhaps based on the student's demands.

In addition, personality tests can provide insight into your communication style and preferences, which can help you better understand how to interact with others. For example, if you tend to be introverted, you may find that you prefer written communication over face-to-face interactions. As you will see at a later stage in this course, understanding this preference can help you communicate more effectively in a variety of settings. Personality tests can help you identify potential career paths that align with your personality and interests. By

understanding your personality traits, you can gain insight into the types of work environments and tasks that are best suited to your strengths and preferences. This can help you make more informed decisions about your career path and increase your chances of job satisfaction.

### How?

There are many different personality tests available, ranging from short quizzes to more in-depth assessments. It is important to choose a reputable test that is well-established and has been validated by research. Some popular options include the Big Five Personality Traits, The Discovery Insights Colours (Insights Model and Colours) and the Management Drives Test. It is important to take time to complete the test thoroughly and honestly.

### Other things to keep in mind

- When taking a personality test it is important to keep the limitations of the test in mind. Personality tests can provide valuable insights, but they are not perfect. Students should keep in mind that the results are just one aspect of the personality and that it is a snapshot. Their personality may be different in different situations and with different people. Students should consider the context of the question and how they answer should depend on the situation. The test should be viewed in conjunction with other information about themselves.

- It is important that students answer the questions on the personality test as honestly as possible. Trying to answer in the 'right' way, can lead to inaccurate results. This can hinder the personal growth of the student.

- Students should use the results as a guide to their personal development. It can help students improve themselves and set specific goals.

### Possible assignment

After taking the personality test, there are some questions you can ask the student to let them reflect on the results. Some examples of these questions are listed below.

- What are my strengths and weaknesses? Identify the traits and characteristics that you scored highly on and those that you scored lower on.
- Are you surprised about the outcomes of the test? Why or why not?
- Do you think your family will agree with the test outcomes? What will they confirm?

- How can I use this knowledge to improve myself? Consider how you can use the insights gained from the personality test to make this course as personal as possible. Set specific goals and create a plan to work on improving yourself in areas that need development.

# Values

Developing and discovering personal values is an essential aspect of personal growth and development for students. It helps them to understand themselves better, set goals, make decisions, grow personally, and find a SoP.

Discovering your values can help students with their self-awareness. Knowing and understanding your values is a critical aspect of self-awareness. It helps students identify what is most important to them and what drives their decision-making. By aligning their actions and behaviours with their values, they can make progress toward their personal and professional goals. It will help students to set goals that are in alignment with what they want to achieve in life. Understanding their values helps students make choices that are in line with their long-term goals and aspirations. Values can provide a framework for making difficult decisions. Discovering personal values can also help students find meaning and purpose in their lives. When students understand what is most important to them, they can focus their energy and efforts on things that matter most, leading to a greater sense of fulfilment.

How?

To help students discover their values, it is important to let students know what a value is and what kind of values exist. Developing and discovering personal values is a process that involves self-reflection, exploration, seeking feedback, and trying new experiences.

Students can explore lists of values online or in self-help books to get an idea of what values resonate with them. Some examples of values include honesty, kindness, creativity, loyalty, and independence. Students can choose values aligned with their personal beliefs and goals.

Learning about your values requires self-reflection, honesty, and an open-minded approach. By keeping these things in mind, you can identify the values that are most important to you and use them as a guide for personal growth and decision-making.

- Students should keep in mind that values are personal and that they can differ from the values of other people. Values can also have different meanings for different people.
- It is also possible for values to conflict with each other. It is important for students to recognize these conflicts and find a way to navigate them in a way that aligns with their overall values.
- Students should also keep in mind that it is normal for values to change over time as you gain new experiences and perspectives. Students should be open to re-evaluating and adjusting their values.
- Discovering and developing your values is a process that takes time and a lot of reflection. It is important to be patient as you navigate this process, and you should allow yourself some space to explore and grow.

Possible assignments

#1

The teacher can show a group of students different values and place them on a table. After stalling the values on the table, students can choose their three main values. Students should pick their values rather quickly because it will be the ones they instantly gravitate towards and therefore are most important. After picking the three values, students should explain to each other why they chose these specific values.

#2

Students can ask trusted family members, friends, or mentors for feedback on their values. Sometimes others may see strengths or values in a person that they may not see themselves.

#3

Students can identify role models who embody the values they admire. They can observe the actions and behaviours of these individuals and consider how they align with their own personal values. These role models can be family members, friends or famous people.

Question to ask:

- What are some qualities or characteristics that you admire in others? Why?

Students can reflect on ethical dilemmas. These dilemmas can be from the news or from their own experience. By considering how they would respond in these situations, they can identify the values that are most important to them.

Questions to ask:

- What are some ethical dilemmas you have faced or may face in the future? What values are important to you in those situations?
- What are some things you are willing to stand up for or fight for? Why are they important to you?
- What are some things that you would never compromise on, no matter what?

# Reflecting

### Why?

Reflection is a valuable tool for self-development for students. By reflecting on their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, students can gain self-awareness, develop critical thinking skills, enhance their learning, promote personal growth, and develop emotional intelligence.

Reflection can help students identify their values, goals, and aspirations. By reflecting on their experiences and considering what is most important to them, students can develop a SoP and direction, which can motivate them to work towards their goals and achieve personal growth. Reflection also helps students develop a better understanding of themselves, their thoughts, and their feelings. By reflecting on their experiences, students can gain insights into their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, which can help them make better decisions and improve their overall well-being.

Reflection encourages students to think critically and analyse their experiences from different perspectives. By asking themselves questions and considering alternative viewpoints, students can develop stronger problem-solving skills and become more open-minded. Reflection can help students develop emotional intelligence, which involves understanding and managing

their own emotions. By reflecting on their emotions and the emotions of others, students can develop empathy, communication skills, and social awareness.

It is important to create a safe space for students where they can reflect on themselves. Teachers can create a supportive and non-judgmental environment where students feel comfortable reflecting. It is important that students know that there is no judgement and that there are no right or wrong answers. Students have to be in control over what they want to share or what they want to keep for themselves. Teachers can model reflection by sharing their own experiences and reflections with students. This can help students see the value of reflection, give them ideas for how to approach it and it can make students feel safe to share their stories.

For self-development, teachers can provide resources on reflection and self-development, such as books, articles, or videos, to help students learn more about the topic and develop their skills. Teachers can assign reflective writing assignments or prompts, such as journal entries or personal essays, to help students practise reflection and gain insights into their behaviour and experiences. They can provide questions and assignments that guide students through the reflection process. These assignments can be related to specific topics, such as a recent project or assignment, or can be more general.

Teachers can also encourage and expect peer feedback and group discussions to help students gain different perspectives on their behaviour and experiences. This part of the reflection will be discussed in part 2: Social development.

Things to keep in mind

While reflecting on yourself you should keep in mind that:

- Reflection is not about judging yourself or Someone else. It is about gaining insights and identifying areas for improvement. It is important that the reflections are focused on the present moment and improving the future, rather than dwelling on the past.
- Reflection is a skill that takes practice. Make sure that students can set aside time to reflect. Keep in mind that students identify specific steps they can take to improve the areas they have identified.

- It's important that students are honest with themselves. They must be honest about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This can help them to gain a better understanding of themselves and their behaviour.

Possible assignments

#1

Ask students to reflect on their personal values and how they align with their goals and behaviours. Have them identify areas where they could improve their alignment with their values.

Have students assess their strengths and weaknesses in different areas, such as academics, social skills, and personal characteristics. Have them identify ways to leverage their strengths and work on their weaknesses.

#2

Have students create a personal growth plan that includes specific goals, action steps, and timelines. Have them reflect on their progress regularly and adjust their plan as needed.

Have students set personal goals that align with their values and strengths. Have them reflect on their progress towards these goals and identify ways to stay motivated and accountable.

# Domain 2: Social development

In the second part of the course, we advise teaching students how to communicate with others properly and effectively. Now that the students have more knowledge about themselves, they can start using this knowledge to understand how they currently communicate with others and how they can possibly improve. Three main themes will be touched upon in this part of the course, namely: feedback, personal boundaries/needs, and understanding others.

## Giving and receiving feedback

### Why?

In the university, there are many teachers/courses who use the peer-to-peer feedback structure for increasing the quality of the student's work. In workplaces, giving feedback and receiving feedback is a normal way of interacting with colleagues and fellow students. As someone who produces products/work, it is important to properly learn how to deal with comments on that. For the benefit of others, it is also helpful if you learn how to give constructive feedback. Outside of people's work, giving and receiving feedback can also be very personal. In this case, comments on your behaviour are considered feedback as well. In order to become a well-rounded individual, it is therefore important to learn how to receive and use feedback as well as to give it. Especially because people should be able to give their own opinions at work and those insights should be listened to.

### How?

As there are two parts of giving and receiving feedback, it is best to learn about them both purposefully. This means that there must be explanations given for the need of receiving feedback well and how one can do it and on giving feedback well and how one can do it. Both should be explicitly mentioned so students know the use of them. It is useful not to fall into the basics of giving feedback but extend beyond that to properly make students think about the constructiveness of the feedback given. For example, to not only give feedback on spelling- or grammar mistakes, but on structure of texts, and whether or not the goal of the text is clear. Better yet would be to discuss what parts the student wishes the feedback to be given.

- If you have an idea on how to *fix it* or if you think of an *alternative* give this along with your feedback. Do not simply state 'this sentence doesn't flow naturally here' when you feel like it would be better to put it at the end of the paragraph instead. 'This sentence doesn't flow naturally here. Maybe you can put it at the end instead?' Is much more helpful and constructive.
- The feedback you give does not have to be *factual*, *right*, or be *taken at face value*. People often refrain from giving feedback because they do not have a solution or alternative option. This does not mean your feedback cannot be valuable. As long as both the recipient and sender understand that the feedback is a helpful tool, a comment can simply be a comment. The recipient can disagree and disregard the feedback. As both sender and recipients understand this, giving simple comments is much easier and disagreeing with said comments becomes easier as well.

Possible assignments

#1

Work with feedback forms for one of the other classes. Discuss the procedure, feedback, and reflection in this course.

#2

Take an assignment of theme 1, explain your work, and ask for specific feedback. Have a recipient, feedback giver and observer to optimise the feedback given. The teacher joins afterwards to discuss the procedure, the feedback, and reflection.

# Personal boundaries and needs

Why?

People, including students, have different behavioural patterns and needs. As stated in the policy document, there is diversity in needs in a student population. There are people with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, high sensitivity, but also top athletes, and people with a business. While working together all those different needs and boundaries are combined. The diversity of personal problems people can be dealing with and the unlimited number of needs and

personal boundaries can be difficult to navigate and understand. Therefore, it can be helpful to communicate when working together. It is important for people to learn that they can ask for adjustments according to their needs, but also to know how to communicate when they do not feel comfortable adjusting for Someone else. It prevents going beyond your personal boundaries and makes sure you are better understood. This will lead to a worker being more comfortable at work, and healthy working relationships which in turn decreases the chance of job-hopping, work dissatisfaction and chances of getting a burn-out. It also helps in communicating with one's social environment and getting the support you need.

### How?

There are many ways students can be taught how to ask for their needs or how to properly communicate their own boundaries. Not communicating your wants or needs happens often in everyday life so going over earlier situations and understanding how one can approach it can make communicating your wants or needs more feasible. People tend to think we need to stick to social rules and simply follow them without wondering if things can be different. For starters, one could question if they can take a seat because they have a need to sit down, the other can, based on their personal boundary reply with a yes or a no. This example shows how pivotal it is to teach both parts of the interaction. If one does not respect their own boundaries they will say yes, even though they do not want to, which can trouble the relationship between them. If one does not ask for their needs to be met, they might have trouble working efficiently which can bring its own lead to their own set of troubles if left unsaid for too long, such as people talking around someone sensitive to noise for long.

### Things to keep in mind

- The Situational Awareness Model (SAM) helps students understand when their bodies and minds are in a red or green zone. Being in a behavioural green zone students have the idea that they are safe, can be curious, and excited or can express positive anger. The red zone is characterised by feelings of shame, guilt, blame, anxiety and more. After understanding this, they can translate it into relationships feeling red/green. Learning that this can just *be* is also an important part of this course. Agreeing to disagree can be respectful and functional.
- When you put great emphasis on asking for your needs to be met or communicating personal boundaries the students should be reminded it might feel like they are asking

for a lot or that they are being ego-centric but try and translate it to real-life situations and timelines. If you are sick once per two/four months, is communicating that you have a headache truly the same as being ego-centric?

- Asking for your needs to be met is one thing. Accepting that they cannot be is another thing. Talking about not getting your needs met is truly harmful to you as an individual. Is that when it happens once or when you see it happen repeatedly? Is that timeframe different for different needs you have? Why? Asking these types of questions helps in keeping expectations realistic**.**

Possible assignments

#1

Teacher leads a meditation exercise to direct the student's attention inwards. Students will discuss things they need/want. The teacher adjusts those things and asks if it is okay with the others. After the assignment students need to have two minutes to personally reflect on the assignment.

#2

Make little groups. Make them discuss instances in which they wish they said something (sooner). How would the other respond to that need? Is it a realistic thing to ask? Also, discuss instances in which you have asked for your needs/given personal boundaries. How did people react? After finishing the task, students should individually reflect on this.

# Understanding others

Why?

As stated above, people have different behavioural patterns. This means people behave differently by default. Behaviours that differ should not be grounds for a troubling relationship once you understand that you might not be very compatible. Instead, gaining insight into different behaviours, reactions, and perceptions can greatly benefit your own self-development. Students will most likely have to work together, which sometimes does not go well due to differences in behavioural patterns and opinions. Understanding this and learning how to communicate about this can be very powerful for teamwork. In domain one they have learned

about their own personality type/colour, but in this part, the goal is to understand how to learn to communicate with people who have a different personality type/colour.

In domain one, students will have learned about their own values, weaknesses and strengths, but how about envisioning working with someone who has the complete opposite? Understanding others is mostly about understanding how you *respond* to others. At this time, it is most beneficial to learn that you cannot change anyone's behaviour except your own. This can be quite a task and can be hard to accept. If students learn about types of people in a teamwork session and possible frustrations or gratification that comes from interacting with them, they learn which people are compatible to work and communicate with. Including casual social interactions. This can be done by open discussion, simply because hearing what other people have to say is already part of understanding others. Some openness is helpful at this stage, which the teacher should take note of. Are the students able to be open towards each other in the group or would little groups be more beneficial when discussing these things? Observations of previous situations tend to be helpful, especially if it is between two (or more) parties that can show new insights into their own behaviour. By reflecting, students can learn to say things like, 'I was becoming frustrated with my own inability to be clear.' or 'I thought you were angry at me.'

### Things to keep in mind

- Teach students how to quickly make assumptions and teach them to observe but not assume. As one learns their biases, it is much easier for them to notice them later on and try not to be affected by them. This can help change the judgement of others and foster a good working relationship.
- Teach students to listen actively. This means listening to one's story with empathy. Recall that all people want to be heard and seen and place yourselves in their shoes. Learning how to empathise with another person can help diminish frustrations and keep the teamwork pleasant.
- Teach students that it is alright not to be compatible with another person but teach them how to interact when they notice their frustration, biases, or other things are negatively influencing the teamwork. This conversation can also be about bullying and treating others respectfully, if needed.

#1

For yourself, write down whether the relationship with each of the other people in the workgroup is considered a red, orange, or green (SAM model) and how you notice that.

Do you see changes in your own behaviour towards others based on these colours? For example, I tend to have more eye contact with the people I have a green relationship with.

Can you think of possible explanations for why these people give you red, orange, or green feelings? How does this influence your perception of them?

Do you think others have written you down under red or orange? If so, why would they perceive you like that?

#2

Make small groups of three and have one person discuss something they are struggling with within or without the course (could be what to eat for dinner, or double planned agenda). The other two must try and actively listen, try and ask good questions and see if they can help the other think of a solution. It is okay if there is not one.

Discuss what you thought whilst the talk was happening. Was the person open to suggestions? Could they have stated that they want Someone to listen instead? Did they respond well to tips or questions?

# Domain 3: Professional development

In the third part of the course, students will learn about their (possible) place in the world. Now that the students have acquired more knowledge about themselves and the way they can communicate with others, it is time for them to orient themselves to the world and get a better view of their future prospects. It is important to have some idea of what your future could look like to be able to make a good choice for what you want to do after obtaining your bachelor's degree. Three main themes will be touched upon in this part of the course, namely: 1) what am I looking for?, 2) what is the offer?, and 3) how can I combine a career with the things I have learned about myself?

## What am I looking for?

### Why?

Finding out what motivates you can help you figure out what you want to do with your life. Understanding your intrinsic motivation is important because it can help you identify your passions and interests. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity or pursuing a goal for the inherent satisfaction, pleasure, or personal fulfilment that the activity itself brings. It is a form of motivation that arises from within an individual, driven by their internal desires, values, and interests, rather than external rewards or pressures. Finding intrinsic motivation is important for students because it helps them develop a SoP in their studies. When students are intrinsically motivated, they are more likely to be engaged in their learning, persist in the face of challenges, and feel a sense of autonomy and control over their academic pursuits. Intrinsic motivation also helps students develop emotional resilience and a growth mindset, where they focus on learning and improving rather than the pursuit of external rewards (like passing exams, getting a degree and working at a job just to earn money). This leads to greater academic achievement and satisfaction with their learning experiences. In general, learning about your intrinsic motivation is important because it can help you identify your passions, enhance your engagement, and increase your overall well-being.

### How?

Students, at this point, can take what they have learned about themselves and their relations with others and apply them to possible career options. The first step is to find out what their

intrinsic motivation is by reflecting on themselves. By reflecting on which tasks and responsibilities match their preferences and competencies, they can eventually formulate their (professional) identity and skills. When students have to present themselves to others, they can refer to aspects of their (past or future) life that are important to them and try to focus on what activities they are intrinsically motivated for. This way students can find out what they have to offer in their work environment (to future employers or within volunteer work), as well as their personal environment (to friends and family).

Things to keep in mind

- It is not primarily the goal that students find their intrinsic motivation. Knowing the importance and possible influence or impact of having one is already really helpful in your developmental stages.

- Finding out what your intrinsic motivation is might not be as easy as it sounds. It is a process that will continue throughout your entire life and will adapt to the frame of mind you have at a certain time in life. It is not possible (or at least advisable) to set in stone what you think you are intrinsically motivated for at a point in time, because it can be influenced by new experiences during your life. However, understanding your intrinsic motivation can help you make better decisions about your education, career, and personal life. Therefore, it is useful to think about it during the time that you are a student, because a lot of important life-decisions will be made in this time frame.

- Sharing one's passions and interests can be quite dreadful if the person is not certain that what they found out is what suits them best. Acknowledging what your intrinsic motivation is is the most important thing, it is not necessary to share this with others. However, it can be helpful for other people to hear about one's discoveries because it can help them determine their own intrinsic motivation.

Possible assignments

#1

Answer the following questions:

- Manager or colleague: What kind of management do you need in a workplace? Type and intensity of guidance? In which way are you best guided?

- Work capacity: How many hours are you willing and able to work per week? Also indicate if it is important to divide these hours over the week in a certain way. You can also indicate here how much travel time you want and can.
- What kind of tasks do you like to perform at a workplace?
- What gives you energy in a workplace? What conditions are desirable in a work setting to allow your talents and interests to flourish?
- If you don't have to take into account money, other people's perception, own abilities or talents. What is the thing you would do now or later in life?

#2

Fill in the Schein career anchors questionnaire. This questionnaire helps understand which 'anchors' you deem most important when making decisions for your career. These can be anything from independence (getting to dictate your own working hours) to idealism (working according to your values and norms).

#3

Do the Belbin team roles test. This test helps you understand what role(s) you take on when working with others. In a team, people take on, often naturally, one of nine team roles, all of which have an essential function within a smoothly running team. You can roughly divide the roles people take on in a team into the groups of action-oriented roles, people-oriented roles, and cerebral roles.

#4

Write an essay about what intrinsically motivates you at the moment. You will be encouraged to think about it more concretely and this might give you more insight into these motivating factors.

# What is the offer?

## Why?

It is important to know what career opportunities are available to help you make informed decisions about your studies, career goals, and future. Understanding the different career

options can help you focus your studies and gain relevant skills and experience. Knowing what career opportunities are available can also help you set realistic expectations for your future.

### How?

There are several ways to explore career opportunities. Conduct research on different employers, job roles, and organisations that align with your studies, interests and skills. Look for job postings, company websites, professional organisations, and industry reports to learn more about the skills and qualifications needed for various career paths. You can also expand your network, by connecting with people who work in the fields you are interested in to gain insights into what the job is like, how to break into the industry, and what skills and qualifications are needed. You can use LinkedIn for example to build your network, but you can also look if there are any people you already know that work in an interesting field. Volunteering and internships can give you hands-on experience in a particular industry or job role. It can also help you build connections and gain insights into what it takes to succeed in a particular field. If you need a little bit more information before you feel like you can choose the right internship, it might be good to arrange a shadowing day (in Dutch: meeloopdag) with someone or at some company to get more insight at an even lower threshold. At last, talking about the career options you found can help you identify your strengths, and develop a plan to achieve your career goals. Discussing these topics with your peers or study advisor for example can help you come to new insights. Chances are that they come up with Some alternatives that you yourself have not thought about yet.

### Things to keep in mind

Knowing what career opportunities are available can also help you set realistic expectations for your future. For example, if you are interested in pursuing a career in a competitive field, such as law or medicine, you may need to plan ahead and take specific steps to increase your chances of success, such as obtaining relevant internships or networking with professionals in the industry.

#1

Research job openings. In this way, you can outline the requirements for specific job roles and find out whether there are many or few employment opportunities.

#2

Gain more insight into the daily work of someone. For example, you can achieve this by (informally) interviewing someone or arranging a shadowing day.

# Presenting oneself

### Why?

Matching your own wishes and capabilities with possible career options is important because it can help you find a career that is fulfilling and sustainable in the long term. If you pursue a career that does not align with your interests, values, and strengths, you may find it difficult to stay motivated and engaged. This can lead to frustration, disappointment, dissatisfaction and even to burnout or career changes later on. If you match your wishes and capabilities with possible career options, you are more likely to find a career that aligns with your passions and skills. This can lead to a greater SoP, satisfaction, and success in your work. In a career context, presenting oneself effectively can help to create new opportunities, build professional relationships, and demonstrate your value to potential employers, clients, and colleagues, which can help you to stand out from others and achieve your career goals.

### How?

There are multiple steps to take to match your own wishes and capabilities with a possible career option. First, you need to get a clear view of your strengths, interests, passions, and what types of tasks and activities you enjoy and excel at, as focusing on the first part of this domain (What am I looking for?). Subsequently, you should try to combine this with the researched career options. When evaluating job opportunities, consider whether they align with your strengths, interests, and values. Look for job descriptions and company cultures that align with your personal goals and priorities. Ways to acquire more information about the careers that would suit you is for example by gaining practical experience in internships or volunteer

opportunities or seeking feedback from mentors, professors, or professionals in your field of interest. By taking these steps, you can increase the likelihood of finding a career that is fulfilling and aligned with your personal goals and values.

Things to keep in mind

- Remember that career paths can be fluid, so it is important to remain open to new opportunities and be willing to adapt to changes.
- A lot of newcomers to the job market suffer from imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome refers to a psychological phenomenon where individuals doubt their abilities and have a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud, despite evidence of their accomplishments and competence. Overcoming imposter syndrome can be challenging, but is it possible? But remember, overcoming imposter syndrome is a gradual process. Be patient with yourself and celebrate your progress. With time and practice, you can develop a more confident and positive self-perception. Don't let it stop you from trying. Some strategies that might help overcome imposter syndrome are recognizing and acknowledging your feelings, challenging negative self-talk, seeking support, focusing on strengths and accomplishments, embracing learning and growth, setting realistic goals, and practising self-care.

Possible assignments

#1

Make a LinkedIn profile and make at least 15 connections. Focus on your own profile. What decisions did you make? Did you do it all in English, did you use a professional picture, and what relevant work experience did you list? Discuss this with a peer.

#2

Reflect on previous career tasks you completed, which decisions did you make? and are content with it? Write something about the task and your experience with it. What would you have done the same and what would you do differently?

#3

Create a professional resume and write a letter of motivation/application. Get feedback from two peers and give feedback to two peers. Which feedback did you incorporate?

Carry out a job interview. Either in real life with an employer, you are interested in actually working for or with peers who act as your future employer. Discuss with your fellow students what you think the most important thing is during a job interview. Write down the do's and don'ts.

What steps are you going to take in the near future to orient yourself on possible masters, job positions and/or organisations that seem interesting to you? Try to indicate this as concretely as possible, based on SMART goal setting.

# WORKBOOK

Individual, social, and professional development workbook for students

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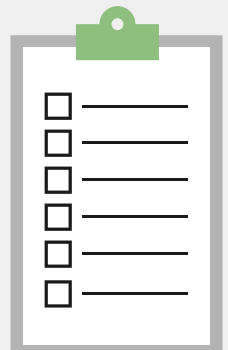
# WHAT TO EXPECT?

This course will help you get to know yourself better, so you can interact better with others and have a more clear idea of your future.

You will focus on individual development, social development and professional development by means of assignments and questions. The main goal is reflection on yourself, the way you are, and do things. Everything you write down in this workbook will be private and only for your own growth. It is important that this course feels like a safe space where you can ask questions and share your findings and progress with your peers and your teacher. Dare yourself to look at yourself with a critical perspective and allow yourself to grow.

# THREE DOMAINS

## 1 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT
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In this part you will learn more about yourself first, which will help lay the groundwork for the other domains. Understanding your personality, values, and norms will help you to make decisions that align with you and your goals. This can alliviate worries or help adress your problems approptiately. In this domain you will also learn how to constructively reflect on yourself.

## 2 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
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Now that you understand yourself better it is time to understand yourself in relation to others. Not only the realtionship with your peers, but also your family members, friends, and collegues. This part is all about learning to communicate effectively, which includes conveying your wants and needs, and trying to understand others. This way you can improve all your inter-personal relationships.

## 3 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
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In the last part you will apply all that you have learned to figure out where you want to go from now. This means that you will reflect on what type of work environment works best for you, learn about the positions in your field, and learning how to present yourself. All these insights and assignments will give you new perspectives on the future. It also gives you the freedom to decide this for youself.

# DOMAIN 1: INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

# DOMAIN 1

## Personality Test

Taking a personality test can provide valuable insights into your own personality and behaviour, helping you to develop greater self-awareness and become a more well-rounded individual. This can lead to personal growth, improved relationships, and greater success in both personal and professional settings. It can help you gain a deeper understanding of your personality traits, including your strengths and weaknesses.

In addition, personality tests can provide insight into your communication style and preferences, which can help you better understand how to interact with others. Personality tests can help you identify potential career paths that align with your personality and interests. By understanding your personality traits, you can gain insight into the types of work environments and tasks that are best suited to your strengths and preferences. This can help you make more informed decisions about your career path and increase your chances of job satisfaction.

Personality tests can provide valuable insights, but they are not perfect!

Keep in mind that the results are just an aspect of your personality and that your personality may be differ in different situations with different people.

# Assignment 1

Answer the questions as honoust as possible

Trying to answer in the 'right' way, can lead to inaccurate results. This can hinder the personal growth of the student.

### _Step 1:_
### _Take the personality test that is described in the course manual_

### _Step 2:_
### _After taking the personality test try to answer the questions down below as honestly as possible_

Are you surprised about the outcomes of the test?
Why or why not?

_____

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_____

_____

Do you think your family will agree with the test outcomes?
What will they confirm?

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What are my strengths and weaknesses? Identify the traits and characteristics that you scored highly on and those that you scored lower on.

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# DOMAIN 1

## Values

Knowing and understanding your values is a critical aspect of self-awareness. It helps you identify what is most important to you and what drives your decision-making. By aligning your actions and behaviours with your values, you can make progress toward your personal and professional goals. It will help you set goals that are in alignment with what you want to achieve in life. Values can provide a framework for making difficult decisions.

Discovering personal values can also help you find meaning and purpose in your life. When you understand what is most important to you, you can focus your energy and efforts on the things that matter most, leading to a greater sense of fulfilment.

Discovering and developing your values is a process that takes time and a lot of reflection.

It is important to be patient as you navigate this process, and you should allow yourself some space to explore and grow.

You should keep in mind that values are personal and that they can differ from the values of other people.

Values can also have different meanings for different people.

# Core Values

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acceptance | Courage | Genius | Optimism | Smart |
| Accomplishment | Courtesy | Giving | Order | Solitude |
| Accountability | Creation | Goodness | Organization | Spirit |
| Accuracy | Creativity | Grace | Originality | Spirituality |
| Achievement | Credibility | Gratitude | Passion | Spontaneous |
| Adaptability | Curiosity | Greatness | Patience | Stability |
| Alertness | Decisive | Growth | Peace | Status |
| Altruism | Decisiveness | Happiness | Performance | Stewardship |
| Ambition | Dedication | Hard work | Persistence | Strength |
| Amusement | Dependability | Harmony | Playfulness | Structure |
| Assertiveness | Determination | Health | Poise | Success |
| Attentive | Development | Honesty | Potential | Support |
| Awareness | Devotion | Honor | Power | Surprise |
| Balance | Dignity | Hope | Present | Sustainability |
| Beauty | Discipline | Humility | Productivity | Talent |
| Boldness | Discovery | Imagination | Professionalism | Teamwork |
| Bravery | Drive | Improvement | Prosperity | Temperance |
| Brilliance | Effectiveness | Independence | Purpose | Thankful |
| Calm | Efficiency | Individuality | Quality | Thorough |
| Candor | Empathy | Innovation | Realistic | Thoughtful |
| Capable | Empower | Inquisitive | Reason | Timeliness |
| Careful | Endurance | Insightful | Recognition | Tolerance |
| Certainty | Energy | Inspiring | Recreation | Toughness |
| Challenge | Enjoyment | Integrity | Reflective | Traditional |
| Charity | Enthusiasm | Intelligence | Respect | Tranquility |
| Cleanliness | Equality | Intensity | Responsibility | Transparency |
| Clear | Ethical | Intuitive | Restraint | Trust |
| Clever | Excellence | Irreverent | Results-oriented | Trustworthy |
| Comfort | Experience | Joy | Reverence | Truth |
| Commitment | Exploration | Justice | Rigor | Understanding |
| Common sense | Expressive | Kindness | Risk | Uniqueness |
| Communication | Fairness | Knowledge | Satisfaction | Unity |
| Community | Family | Lawful | Security | Valor |
| Compassion | Famous | Leadership | Self-reliance | Victory |
| Competence | Fearless | Learning | Selfless | Vigor |
| Concentration | Feelings | Liberty | Sensitivity | Vision |
| Confidence | Ferocious | Logic | Serenity | Vitality |
| Connection | Fidelity | Love | Service | Wealth |
| Consciousness | Focus | Loyalty | Sharing | Welcoming |
| Consistency | Foresight | Mastery | Significance | Winning |
| Contentment | Fortitude | Maturity | Silence | Wisdom |
| Contribution | Freedom | Meaning | Simplicity | Wonder |
| Control | Friendship | Moderation | Sincerity | |
| Conviction | Fun | Motivation | Skill | |
| Cooperation | Generosity | Openness | Skillfulness | |

# Assignment 1

What is important to you in the life?

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*What are some qualities or characteristics that you admire in others? Why? For example, who is your role model? And why?*

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*What are your top 5 values? And prioritize these values (looking at the assignments above) Tip: use the list of values*

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After discussing some ethical dilemma's in class. What are some things that you would never compromise on, no matter what?

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# DOMAIN 1

## Reflecting

Reflection can help identify your values, goals, and aspirations. By reflecting on experiences and considering what is most important to you, you can develop a sense of purpose and direction, which can motivate you to work towards your goals and achieve personal growth. Reflection also helps develop a better understanding of yourself, your thoughts, and your feelings. By reflecting on experiences, you can gain insights into your strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, which can help make better decisions and improve your overall well-being.

Reflection encourages you to think critically and analyze your experiences from different perspectives. By asking yourself questions and considering alternative viewpoints, you can develop stronger problem-solving skills and become more open-minded.

By reflecting on your emotions and the emotions of others, you can develop empathy, communication skills, and social awareness.

Reflection is a skill that takes practice.

It's important that you are honest with yourself. Be honest about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Reflection is not about judging yourself or someone else.

It is important that the reflections are focused on the present moment and improving the future, rather than dwelling on the past.

# Assignment 1

Write down 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses in different areas, such as academics, social skills, and personal characteristics.
How can you leverage your strengths and work on your weaknesses?

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Create a personal growth plan that includes specific goals, action steps, and a timeline. You can draw, make a mindmap or write it down.

Fold your personal growth plan and glue it on here

DOMAIN 2: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

# DOMAIN 2

## Giving and receiving feedback

**In the university, there are many courses that use the peer-to-peer feedback structure for increasing the quality of the student's work. In workplaces giving feedback and receiving feedback is a normal way of interacting with colleagues. As someone who produces work it is important to properly learn how to deal with comments and feedback. For the benefit of others, it is also helpful if you learn how to give constructive feedback. Outside of people's work giving and receiving feedback can also be very personal. In this case, comments on your behaviour are considered feedback as well. In order to become a well-rounded professional, it's therefore important to learn how to receive and use feedback as well as to give it. Especially because you should be able to give your own opinions at work and have those insights be listened to.**

## Important

Remember that the recipient can disagree and disregard the feedback. Which means feedback doesn't have to be factually correct. When both people understand this it gets much easier to give comments and to disagree with them.

# Assignment 1

*Discuss your results or work from one of the assignments of domain 1 in a group of three students. One other person will listen and ask questions and the other will observe the conversation.*

*To make it productive ask the observer to take into account something you want to work on (e.g. saying 'uh' or using your hands too much).*

What are questions or comments from the listener that gave you insights?

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How will you use the feedback you got from the observer?

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What will you do differently next time to improve the giving and receiving of feedback?

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# DOMAIN 2

## Personal boundaries and needs

**We as people all have a different set of instructions and needs. There are people with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, high-sensitivity, but also top athletes, people with a business and so much more. Add the diversity of personal issues people can be dealing with and you have an unlimited amount of needs and personal boundaries that can be helpful to communicate when working together. It is important for you to learn that you can ask for adjustments according to your needs, but also to know how to communicate when you don't feel comfortable adjusting for someone else (a.k.a. personal boundaries). This will lead to you to be even more comfortable at work or study and create healthy work relationships. These healthy relationships will help decrease experiencing work disatisfaction, the chance of you job-hopping, and your chances of getting a burn-out.**

*Asking for your needs to be met is one thing. Accepting that they sometimes cannot be met is another thing.*

The teacher will ask you to sit in a circle with no tables in front of you. They will walk you through a mindfullness based meditation. It is a lot different than what you might be used to, but we challenge you to take it seriously and try. The idea is that you scan your body to see what it needs. Are you a little tired or do you feel calm? Is something annoying you? Are you hungry or thirsty? You don't **have** to find something, but see how it goes.

Next the teacher will ask some of you to discuss what you felt or realised. Try to figure out if there is something you want differently. It could be something to do with the classroom, but also your seat. Try and be bold in stating your request. The teacher will make sure the request is met and discuss it with you afterwards. In case you don't like a change, speak up! This is an important part of working together and discussing your own personal boundaries. There is usually a good middle ground.

# Assignment 1

Please write down what the goal of this exercise was and if it helped with gaining new insights.

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Describe a time where you did not communicate your thoughts or wants well.

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Based on the above situation, what could you have done differently? Do you think it would've helped you?

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# DOMAIN 2

## Understanding others

**As stated in the part above, people have different manuals. This means people behave differently by default. Behaviours that differ should not be grounds for a troubling relationship once you understand that you might not be very compatible. Instead gaining insight in different behaviours, reactions, perceptions can greatly benefit your own self-development and help you grow. You have to work together in university and afterwards, which sometimes goes badly due to differences in behavioural patterns and opinions. Understanding this and learning how to communicate about this can be very powerful for teamwork. In domain 1 you have learned about your own personality, but in this part the goal is to understand how to learn to communicate with people who behave or communicate differently.**

# Assignment 1

**For yourself, write down whether the relationship with each of the other people in your workgroup is considered a red, orange, or green and how you notice that.**

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**Do you see changes in your own behaviour towards others based on these colours?** *(example: I tend to look the people I'm green with in the eye more)*

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**Can you think of possible explanations for why these people give you a red, orange, or green feelings? How does this influence your perception on them?**

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**Do you think others have written you down under red or orange? If so, can you think of possible explanations of why would they perceive you like that?**

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# DOMAIN 3: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# DOMAIN 3

## What am I looking for?

**Everything you do, you do for a reason. Knowing what reasons underline your actions is helpfull for identifying your passions and interests. These underlying reasons are called your intrinsic motivation and it is driven by your internal desires, values, and interests, rather than external awards or pressures. When you are intirinsically motivated in your studies for example, you are more persist in te face of challenges and you feel more control over your academic pursuits. Outside of your studies it also plays a role on a more personal level, it helps you develop emotional resilience and a growth mindset. By the following assignments and questions you will get a better and more elaborate view on what you are looking for (in the future, on a personal and professional level).**

### QUESTION:

*If you don't have to take into account money, other people's perception, your own abilities or talents. What is the thing you would do (now or in the future)?*

# Assignment 1

*Several questions will give you more insight in your intrinsic motivation. Try to answer them for yourself first and discuss your answers with a peer afterwards.*

Manager or colleague: What kind of management do you need in a workplace? Type and intensity of guidance? The way in which you are best guided?

*It is less important to know exactly what intirinsically motivates you right now, but do keep in mind all the benefits of knowing your intrinsic motivation*

What kind of tasks do you like to perform at a workplace?

What gives you energy in a workplace? What conditions are desirable in a work setting to allow your talents and interests to flourish?

Work capacity: How many hours are you willing and able to work per week? Also indicate if it is important to divide these hours over the week in a certain way. You can also indicate here how much travel time you want and can.

# DOMAIN 3

## What is the offer?

It is important to know what career opportunities are available to help you make informed decisions about your studies, career goals, and future. Understanding the different career options can help you focus your studies and gain relevant skills and experience. A lot of students have trouble finding out wat to do after their studies. Gaining experience in the field or topic can help you figure out what you do or do not like. In university there are a lot of ways for gaining experiences, namely: extracurricular courses, minors, internships, shadowing days and more. In some cases you will have to prepare for the career path you want apporpriately. This chapter hopes to help you get there in a shorter amount of time. Knowing what career opportunities are available can also help you set realistic expectations for your future.

# Assignment 1

**Write down a few keywords that can help you find job listings based on your education or interests.**

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**Search on job vacancies. Which job listings catch your attention? Why?**

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**Would you be able to respons to the listings you want? Is there something you need to be able to?**

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## COULD YOU USE MORE ASSISTANCE? THE UNIVERSITY HAS COUNSELORS, STUDENT ADVISORS, AND DEANS READY TO AID YOU IN YOUR QUEST.

**Discuss your findings with the teacher. Do they have some relevant insights for you?**

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# DOMAIN 3

## Presenting oneself

Matching your own wishes and capabilities with possible career options is important because it can help you find a career that is fulfilling and sustainable in the long term.

If you pursue a career that does not align with your interests, values, and strengths, you may find it difficult to stay motivated and engaged. This can lead to frustration, disappointment, dissatisfaction and even to burnout or career changes later on. If you match your wishes and capabilities with possible career options, you are more likely to find a career that aligns with your passions and skills. This can lead to a greater sense of purpose, satisfaction, and success in your work.

In a career context, presenting yourself effectively can help to create new opportunities, build professional relationships, and demonstrate your value to potential employers, clients, and colleagues, which can help you to stand out from others and achieve your career goals.

Remember that career paths can be fluid. It is important to remain open to new opportunities and be willing to adapt to changes.

# Assignment 1

Make a LinkedIn profile and make at least 15 connections. Focus on your own profile. What decisions did you make? Did you use a professional picture, and what relevant work experience did you list?

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Reflect on previous career tasks you completed, which decisions did you make? and are content with it? Write something about the task and your experience with it. What would you have done the same and what would you do differently?

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# Assignment 2

What steps are you going to take in the near future to orient yourself on possible masters, job positions and/or organisations that seem interesting to you? Try to indicate this as concretely as possible, based on SMART goal-setting.

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Create a professional resume and write a letter of motivation for a job application. Get feedback from two peers and give feedback to two peers. Which feedback did you incorporate?

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**Fold your resume or motivation letter and place it here**

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