

Know your students!

four student profiles and how students matching those profiles become engaged and emotionally energised

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Colophon

With many thanks to all the students and lecturers who helped with this research. This booklet would not have been possible without your valuable input!

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Preface

Personal and accessible – that’s what we stand for at Inholland. Genuinely putting these values into practice every day means that lecturers and students really know and understand each other and respect each other’s differences. For this to be achieved, it is essential that we listen to each other properly and ask open-ended questions. Not every student has the same needs and same way of expressing themselves. Because as well as pursuing their degree, students have so much more on their minds when studying. How do you stay motivated? And how do you deal with setbacks? The relationship with the lecturer is incredibly important here. This is because the lecturer’s role extends far beyond merely conveying information. How can you better engage your student during a class? And what do you do if a student comes to you with a personal problem? There are no simple answers to such questions. That is why it is so important that everyone is seen and heard in education and has their needs identified and acknowledged.

For this ‘Know your students! booklet, students and lecturers told their stories about four different student profiles based on engagement and emotional exhaustion. These four profiles have their own character traits and needs. It goes without saying that every student is unique, and no two students are exactly the same. However, this is also what makes this such an elusive issue. That being the case, how are you supposed to deal with all the differing needs of hundreds of thousands of students studying in the Netherlands, not to mention those studying abroad? The four identifiable student profiles in this booklet offer direction and create awareness for both students and lecturers. This booklet also provides some practical tools. For instance, students can test their own levels of engagement and exhaustion, and lecturers can use the discussion pointers to find out a student’s needs and what is required in order to meet them.

I believe that, if we all listen a little more carefully and ask each other a few more questions, we will make our applied university an even nicer place. The experiences and tips in this booklet can help us do this. In this way, we can all help to ensure our staff and students are engaged and energised.

Marije Deutekom

Member of the Executive Board of
Inholland University of Applied Sciences

No two students are the same

Obtaining credits, studying for exams, attending classes, engaging with fellow students and lecturers, living alone or with others, and taking part in extra-curricular activities: there is a fair amount for students in higher education to take in. There are also numerous external factors – such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the changing labour and housing market – that affect students. However, students experience these situations differently and deal with them in different ways. How can we ensure that, notwithstanding these stress factors and differences, as many students as possible become and remain engaged and energised?

Happier students tend to be more engaged and generally achieve better study results.¹ That is why student well-being is also a widely researched and important topic. The search is on for measures to promote student well-being and success. Having a clear idea of how things are going for a student and what they need is a starting point. This booklet helps readers to identify different student profiles and understand what is needed to improve student success. We zoom in on two key aspects of student success: engagement and emotional exhaustion.

As a lecturer or student in higher education, you will undoubtedly have had to deal with students who suffer from huge pressure to achieve, while others seem to survive their studies without a care in the world. Or you may have one student who is virtually devoid of motivation, while another is keen to commit to their studies and fellow students in all kinds of different ways. And we all know those students who immerse themselves in the subject matter and ask lots of questions out of interest, while others only want to know what will come up in the exam. Some students will be more engaged – bursting with energy, enthusiastic and capable of becoming absorbed in their studies. Others will be more emotionally exhausted and more likely to feel drained at the end of a day of studying, will feel that studying is very demanding and may even feel burnt out by their studies.

Engaged yet exhausted?

Academics and practitioners have long thought that students are either engaged or exhausted, or somewhere on the spectrum in between. Engagement and emotional exhaustion were seen as two extremes on a continuum and therefore seemed to be opposed to each other: a positive state versus a negative state. Engagement and burnout (which includes emotional exhaustion) were seen as two opposites.² An engaged student who is enthusiastic and wholly absorbed in their studies will generally not be emotionally exhausted. And an exhausted student who experiences great difficulty in getting

through a day of studying will generally not be engaged. However, there are recent indications that engagement and exhaustion can also coexist. Engagement and emotional exhaustion are therefore now more frequently examined as two independent aspects.³ Based on available data collected with the Student Well-being Monitor of Inholland University of Applied Sciences, we have followed the new research direction. The data showed that engagement and emotional exhaustion are not in fact opposites and that there are many students who are both engaged and exhausted. Through interviews with lecturers and students, the four student profiles were examined in greater depth. This classification was established using questionnaire data and explored using in-depth in interviews. As a result, four student profiles, so to speak, have been developed that lecturers can use to observe their students' well-being, discuss issues and help or refer students if necessary. Students can also use these student profiles to better understand themselves or their fellow students better, discuss this and take action. Students (and people in general) often have long-lasting issues that have a negative impact on their emotional well-being.⁴ Identifying different student profiles helps to increase awareness and mutual understanding.

Tools for lecturers and students

Various people working in education, including lecturers, study coaches and student counsellors, can use this booklet to identify how a student is doing and what they need to become more engaged or experience less emotional exhaustion, for example. The needs of students identified and the experiences of lecturers described in this booklet provide points of reference that can be used to create an engaged and energised class. Students can use the booklet to become more aware of their own well-being and the characteristics that foster or hamper student success. This will enable them to take steps to work on their own level of engagement and become more energised, or even work on the well-being of fellow students. The results are also intended to inspire students and encourage them to talk to each other about well-being in general and student well-being in particular.

1

Boulton, Chris A., et al. "Student engagement and wellbeing over time at a higher education institution." *Plos One* 14.11 (2019): e0225770.

2

Leiter, M. P., et al. "Research companion to organizational health psychology." *A mediation model of job burnout.* Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar (2005): 544-64.

3

Salmela-Aro, Katariina, and Sanna Read. "Study engagement and burnout profiles among Finnish higher education students." *Burnout research* 7 (2017): 21-28.

4

Dopmeijer, J. M., et al. "Monitor Mentale gezondheid en Middelengebruik Studenten hoger onderwijs. Deelrapport I. Mentale gezondheid van studenten in het hoger onderwijs." (2021).

Exploring the four student profiles

Quantitative study – Student Well-being Monitor

Data from the Student Well-being Monitor (SWM) 2021 of Inholland University of Applied Sciences was used to explore student profiles.⁵ The monitor was developed and conducted by the Study Success research group and is intended to monitor the well-being of Inholland students using a wide range of well-being indicators (such as symptoms of depression, resilience and pressure to perform). It also features engagement and emotional exhaustion. The 2021 cohort is the monitor's first measurement.

The SWM 2021 was conducted in May, almost at the end of the academic year, when most examinations have already taken place. We included only full-time students in this study, because part-time students and students on dual study programmes are generally at a different stage of life and some of the data obtained (such as living situation and study delay) are impossible or difficult to interpret for those groups. The final student profiles are based on the results of 1,460 full-time students.

Emotional exhaustion was measured using five statements with a response scale of 1 ('never') to 7 ('always').⁶ To classify low and high emotional exhaustion, we used the Statistics Netherlands (CBS) cut-off score of 3.21.⁷ Engagement was measured using three statements, again with an answer scale of 1 ('never') to 7 ('always').⁸ There is no cut-off score for engagement that would allow it to be classified as high or low. We defined a score of 4 or higher as a high level of engagement. This means that the student feels engaged (on average) a few times a month or more often.

Qualitative study – interviews

Based on the four student profiles found in the quantitative study, interview questions were prepared for students and education staff (hereinafter referred to as lecturers). Students and lecturers from both Inholland University of Applied Sciences and other higher educational institutes were interviewed. In the interviews, we asked students to tell us what they are like as students and the extent to which they experience engagement and emotional exhaustion. The students were then shown the four student profiles and asked whether they recognised these profiles, which they felt fit them best and whether that profile was constant or had changed over time. The students were then asked to talk about their own study-related strengths and pitfalls and to indicate how the transition from low to high engagement and from high to low emotional exhaustion can be effected. After the interview, students were asked to answer the same questions about engagement and emotional

exhaustion in the SWM 2021, to test whether the quadrant they regarded as the best fit for them also matched the measurement instruments.

The lecturers were also asked whether they recognised the four student profiles and to identify the characteristics of the different profiles. In addition, the lecturers were asked whether they adapted their didactic approach to the student profiles and what they could do to increase the student success of students matching the different student profiles. A total of 13 students and 10 lecturers were interviewed between March and September 2022.

Student profiles based on engagement and emotional exhaustion

The cut-off scores mentioned earlier were used to create a quadrant model based on the 1,460 students who participated in the SWM 2021. The vertical axis indicates how engaged the student is with regard to their studies, i.e. whether the student is bursting with energy when studying, enthusiastic about the study programme and completely absorbed in it. The horizontal axis indicates how emotionally exhausted the student is by their studies, i.e. whether the student feels drained after a day of studying and whether it takes a lot out of them to study. This produced the following division into student profiles:

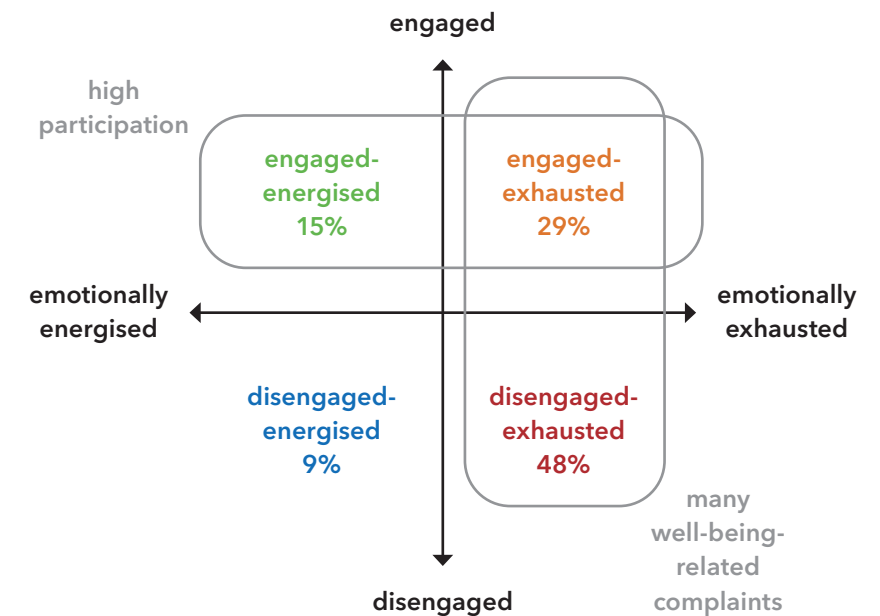


Figure 1: Quadrant model based on questionnaire data (n= 1,460) containing student profiles based on engagement and emotional exhaustion.

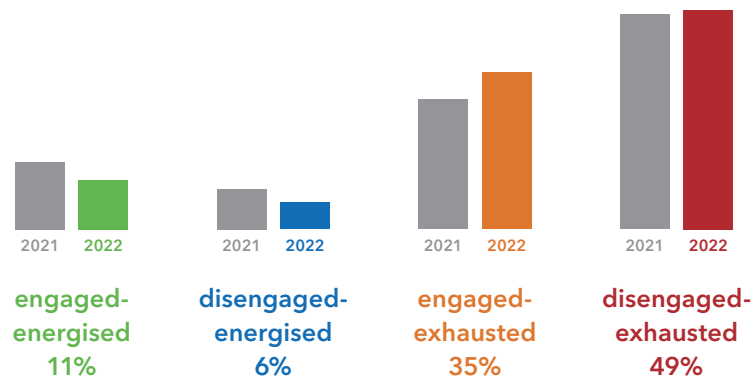
The SWM 2021 was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, teaching still took place partly online, and there were restrictions on events and social contact. In the SWM 2022, we chose to use different instruments to measure engagement and emotional exhaustion. When we transform these instruments and apply the same cut-off scores, we see differences of between just 1% and 6%. We can also still conclude that the proportion of disengaged-exhausted remains the highest, followed by engaged-exhausted, engaged-energised and disengaged-energised as the smallest group:

5 <https://www.inholland.nl/nieuws/studentenwelzijnsmonitor-resultaten-en-vooruitkijken/>

6 Schaufeli, Wilmar B., et al. "Burnout and engagement in university students: A cross-national study." *Journal of cross-cultural psychology* 33.5 (2002): 464-481.

7 <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2011/43/meer-werknemers-met-burn-outklachten/burn-outklachten>

8 Schaufeli, Wilmar B., et al. "An ultra-short measure for work engagement." *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* (2017).



Among the 13 students interviewed, however, we see a very different distribution. The engaged-energised students are strongly over-represented (46%, n= 6), and the disengaged-exhausted students are strongly underrepresented (15%, n=2). This is probably because of the convenience sample method used and because engaged students are more likely to accept an invitation to an interview.

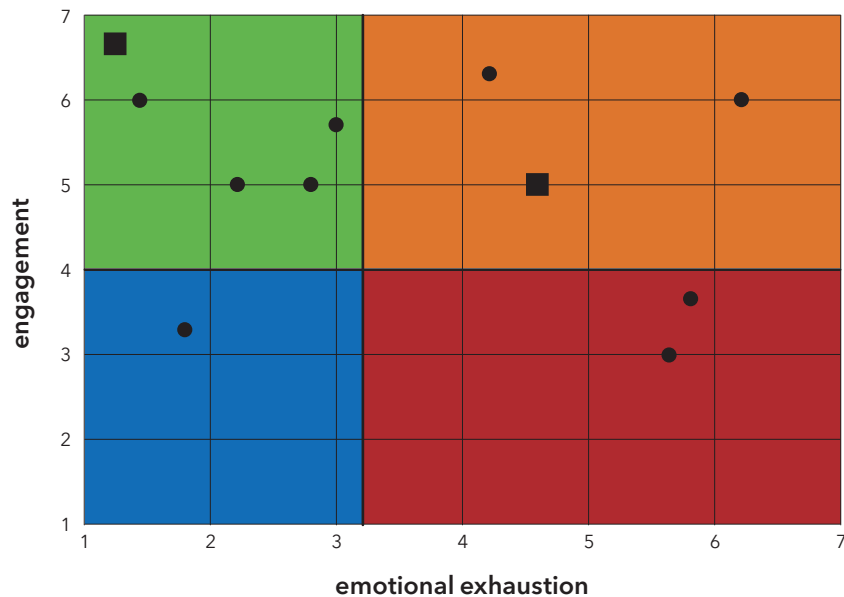


Figure 2: Quadrant model showing scores of interviewed students (n= 13) based on engagement and emotional exhaustion. Note: the squares represent two students with exactly the same scores.

The different student profiles are set out one-by-one further on, together with their corresponding characteristics and specific needs based on the SWM data and interviews with students and lecturers.

disengaged-energised



Characteristics

A disengaged and energised student is typified by a low level of engagement but also a low level of emotional exhaustion. Of all four student profiles, this group is the smallest in terms of size at about 9%. However, a small peak can be seen among third-year students (mostly in the internship year) and students taking longer than normal to complete their studies. Students matching this student profile participate little within the educational institution, often both within the programme and in extra-curricular activities. In addition, a disengaged-energised student has relatively few well-being complaints and a low stress level. Out of all four student profiles, the this student therefore experiences the least pressure to perform.



I passed everything. The programme is a bit too easy at times. I definitely could do more. But when I see that I'm passing everything, that's fine by me. I really don't feel the pressure to get top grades.

– disengaged-energised student



You become lazy if you don't feel any performance pressure at all.

– engaged-exhausted student

According to the students and lecturers interviewed, a disengaged-energised student is clearly identifiable. Showing relatively little commitment to their studies and seeming not to make them a high priority, while still eventually obtaining the required credits, is what mainly characterises this student profile. Some students and lecturers identify a student matching this student profile more as someone who is solitary, while others find that those matching this student profile consider the social aspect more important than studying itself. Positive aspects that were mentioned included being goal-oriented and not exhausting themselves to obtain a slightly higher grade.



This profile is exactly like my flatmate. He really doesn't care, and he makes no effort to connect with fellow students, but he still gets passing grades.

– engaged-energised student



They participate less anyway, but you can also identify them by the way they ask questions. They are not learning for the learning process, but rather for the results. It's all about the end goal.

– lecturer

On the other hand, lecturers also indicated that these students do not really have a goal in mind with their education other than obtaining their degree. For example, students matching this student profile want to pass for the sake of finding a job, but they are not motivated by the curriculum and the educational institution itself.



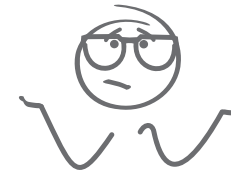
When you engage with them, you notice they really don't have a sense of purpose. Sometimes, they don't feel sufficiently challenged.

– lecturer

Requirements

Since this student is not engaged, an obvious solution could be to make the degree programme and lesson activities more attractive. For instance, one disengaged-energised student indicated that benefit could be achieved from the social aspect of the degree programme, with scope being created for formal and informal interaction with fellow students and sociable activities. However, one lecturer did say that there are limited opportunities to make the degree programme more

attractive in terms of content in all areas and that a student matching this student profile should be assessed to see if they are following the right degree programme. There are several ways in which that engagement could be increased within the framework of the programme, though.



We can convey the material in as fun a way as possible, but when an economist starts telling me about calculation models, I think: "Yes, I can see that you're enthusiastic, but this is not making my heart beat any faster."

– lecturer



With disengaged-energised students, you need to do something in the area they like. For example, you could let the class choose a topic for a project. They need a topic that gets them hyped, and if they can use that in class, they will be enthused.

– engaged-exhausted student

Their low level of engagement and possible prioritisation in other areas (such as work or social activities) makes students matching this student profile more difficult to engage in lessons. One lecturer indicated that they adapt on the occasions when students are more or indeed less focused as a way of increasing willingness to come to class and actively participate.



I'll sometimes change my lesson plans around. There's absolutely no point in teaching a difficult topic at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon. I'll do it another day.

– lecturer

On the other hand, another lecturer indicated that the material could sometimes be insufficiently challenging or connected to practice and that providing more challenges and allowing individual input can activate engagement. This has to do with the low level of participation and involvement combined with the relatively low study delays incurred and relatively little stress experienced by students matching this student profile.



Last year, I supervised two girls and formed the impression that it was simply far too easy for them. As a result, they had become disengaged as well.

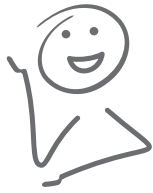
– lecturer



Give people who are already active in the field the space to contribute what they see in practice.

– engaged-energised student

Another option could be to hold a disengaged and energised student up to a mirror, although this confrontational method may actually create resentment in the student. This should be done in a respectful way. One lecturer explained how he tries to activate disengaged students.



Once I have explained something, I ask: "Can you explain that in your own words to a fellow student?" It won't be long before you find out whether they have been paying attention. And if they haven't, I say: "You don't have to come to my class. You are a guest, and you are most welcome, but don't waste your time when you are here." And these can be very interesting conversations, and you sometimes do see them respond to it.

– lecturer

On the other hand, it may actually help to give students matching this student profile space to organise their studies themselves and not overburden them with too many activities. For example, it was indicated several times in the interviews that students matching this student profile can be more active and engaged in other areas, such as work or sports. As long as the level of well-being is good and students matching this student profile pass the courses, the space could be facilitated and it may not be necessary to intervene.



It makes no difference to me if you are in bed with a hangover or have to go to the dentist. You could miss three tutorials, for example. But if you do, take responsibility.

– lecturer



If you are not ambitious, you just do your work, and that's enough to keep you happy.

– lecturer

engaged-energised



Characteristics

The engaged-energised student is typified by a high level of engagement and a low level of emotional exhaustion. Given this characterisation, this would appear to be the most ideal student profile. The proportion of engaged-energised students seems to be highest in the first academic year and appears to decrease over the academic years. Out of all four student profiles, students matching this one have the fewest well-being issues and incurred the fewest study delays. Of all the student profiles, students matching this one participate the most, especially within the degree programme. They also feel very connected to the higher education institution and lecturers.



That's probably because I was looking for that connection. If I studied like most of my classmates, I definitely would not feel connected. They leave as soon as class is over, and I always hang around for a bit.

– engaged-energised student



These are the students who often lead the way. Incredibly eager to learn. They truly are in the right place and have no doubts on that score. Because doubt brings about exhaustion.

– lecturer

Both lecturers and students can identify engaged-energised students. There were many references to their being in a 'flow' or an 'upward spiral', with the successful completion of courses further fuelling their engagement and energy. It was also mentioned in one interview that students matching this student profile are particularly visible at the start of a degree programme, because that is when they are interested and open to everything. If the degree programme is the right one for them and they are seen by the educational institution, they remain in that flow. They have a positive attitude, trust in their own strengths and take the degree programme seriously:



Not every day is fun. In general, though, I go to school full of energy. That's down to my personality. For instance, I think: "Let's do this, it's going to be a fun day." Only you can make that happen. They can't make your day for you; that's something you have to do yourself.

– engaged-energised student



I think I do slightly more than the average student. But when I do something, I do it right the first time. It doesn't make sense to me to spend half my time following the lecture and the other half looking at my mobile phone.

– engaged-energised student

Engaged-energised students indicated that they also recognise themselves in the engaged-exhausted profile at certain times, for example during a busy exam week. The pressure to perform causes a certain level of exhaustion. It is worth noting that engaged-energised students described a feeling of release and indicated that they would enter a new term filled with energy, while the more exhausted students indicated that they still needed to recover from the previous term and felt overwhelmed by the new one.



When you have spent two months working on a report and then hand it in, there's a moment when you think: "Pff, that's one down." But I'll quickly switch myself back on again. You have spent so long working towards it, and your motivation decreases. Nonetheless, you have done it and completed it.

– engaged-energised student

Requirements

Although the engaged-energised student seems to be an ideal student, both students and lecturers also identify points to look out for. For instance, students matching this student profile may start to irritate students matching other profiles because they set the bar high not only for themselves but also for others. This can be particularly evident in group work. As a lecturer, it is important to be alert to what are known as "free-riders" in a group project, who lean on the work of the engaged-energised student and do little work themselves. On the other hand, it is also important to keep an eye out to make sure that the engaged-energised student does not take over the whole project, for example by evaluating both individual efforts and group collaboration.



I can work as part of a group, but I find it incredibly difficult to relinquish control, because if I do something myself, I know it will be fine. And that sometimes means I do 80% of the work when we have a group project.

– engaged-energised student



The person can sometimes be too enthusiastic and want to do too much, leaving less room for anyone else to do something.

– engaged-energised student

Both students and lecturers indicated that it is important to continue to give engaged-energised students sufficient attention, even if students matching this student profile seem to be doing well. For instance, experiences were described where previously engaged-energised students can nevertheless veer towards being disengaged-energised or engaged-exhausted. Providing them with a sufficient challenge and keeping them involved are important if engagement is to be maintained:



'I'll sometimes give them a slightly more prominent role, for example, by having them answer the questions from other students.

– lecturer

As far as preventing emotional exhaustion is concerned, it is important that engaged-energised students continue to feel that the educational institution is there for them. Recognition for their good work is very important for students matching this student profile. Students shared experiences during the interviews where they felt they had been treated unfairly, causing so much stress, frustration and insecurity that they moved, temporarily or otherwise, to the exhausted side.



In years one and two, I had no mental issues at all. In the third year, though, I had a few problems with the degree programme itself. Something had gone amiss with communication about a deadline, and that meant we hadn't handed in the group assignment. The supervisor then terminated the course for us because he said we weren't taking it seriously. I wanted to tell my side of the story and talk about what had happened like adults, but the supervisor wasn't remotely interested in doing that. And the university rallied behind the supervisor as well. That's when I felt that the degree programme had let me down.

– engaged-exhausted student



I sometimes feel that the study programme isn't cooperating in making sure I achieve a particular result and reach my full potential. I am one of the few students who goes through the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER) to find out about my rights and obligations as a student. Regrettably, I see little compliance with the regulations.

– engaged-energised student

engaged-exhausted



Characteristics

The engaged-exhausted student is typified by a high level of engagement, but also a high level of emotional exhaustion. On those two aspects, the engaged-exhausted student is the opposite of the disengaged-energised student. Like the engaged-energised student, this student is also more represented among first-year students, and the proportion of engaged-exhausted students decreases in subsequent years of study. Like the engaged-energised student, the engaged-exhausted student participates a great deal within the higher education institution. Of all the student types, they engage most in extra-curricular activities and are happy to work with fellow students. In terms of well-being, though, this student is most similar to the disengaged-exhausted student and experiences relatively high levels of depressive symptoms and stress. Students matching this student profile experience the highest level of performance pressure, especially from within themselves.



I am a hard worker and have the necessary perseverance. I am also sociable, although I can sometimes be a little insecure. I have a fear of failure and sometimes experience a high level of pressure to perform. I then shut down completely. I sometimes struggle with procrastination, and I am a perfectionist.

– engaged-exhausted student



I experience a fair amount of family pressure. There are several doctors in the family, so that makes you want to go along with it. And when my parents were overworked, I had to tell them about my problems with the TV on, but when I got a good grade, the TV would go silent. They're still in a bit of denial about this. Yet I still feel that, if I perform well at school, I'll get attention from my parents.

– engaged-exhausted student

Procrastination, perfectionism and striving for appreciation, in particular, were cited by many other students as characteristics of the engaged-exhausted student. Other students also indicated that they are really keen but have to put in more effort than, for example, engaged-energised students. They also indicated that they are active in many different areas and therefore sometimes exceed their limits.



I want it all. I want to be able to go on holiday, play sports, earn money, but also get good grades. I need to set myself apart from the rest, but I don't want to be a nerd. I'm doing more in my studies but also more outside them than other students. I go above and beyond.

– engaged-energised student who indicates that they are engaged-exhausted when it comes to exam periods

Like the engaged-energised student, the engaged-exhausted student often has a strong sense of responsibility for the work being handed in. In particular when combined with perfectionism and pre-existing stress symptoms, this can create tensions in group work.



A group member committed plagiarism on two occasions. I pointed this out to him. I also emailed my lecturer, but absolutely nothing was done about it, and he was given a passing grade. I'm a bit angry about that.

– engaged-exhausted student

Requirements

The engaged-exhausted student is quick to feel a failure and does not want to disappoint anyone, including themselves. Both engaged-exhausted students and lecturers recognised that students matching this student profile have acquired a certain status and cling firmly to it, such as never having to repeat a year, never having to take a resit or always getting good grades. This also reinforces feelings of shame and insecurity when that status is jeopardised or others have high expectations that the student cannot entirely live up to. Since this group already feels high performance pressure from within themselves, students matching this student profile may benefit from not feeling any additional pressure from outside. This can be done, for example, by letting them know that it is all right to make mistakes and learn. Some respondents actually indicated that high expectations from outside can intensify emotional exhaustion.



During internships, I felt a lot of performance pressure from the school, my internship-organisation and myself to deliver a product and act professionally, even though I didn't have all the knowledge. When I arrived at my internship-organisation, they said: "you're a student at a university of applied sciences, you know everything." But that's not true at all, so I felt I was disappointing them when I didn't know things.

– engaged-exhausted student



Students also start leaning heavily on an engaged-exhausted student, saying: "obviously, you'll get a 9." So when that person gets a 7.5, they experience a feeling akin to shame.

– lecturer

Although the engaged-exhausted student has very strong characteristics such as drive and commitment, the biggest pitfall they face is not putting themselves and their own well-being first. Education and counselling focused on dealing with stress, personal development and planning were mentioned as a way to facilitate the transition from being emotionally exhausted to being emotionally energised.



Examples include providing assistance with choices and planning. Provide opportunities in mentor groups to look closely at personal pitfalls and how to deal with them.

– lecturer



I knew a boy who really struggled with planning and therefore became very stressed because he had to do everything at the last minute. He slept badly through worry. [...] Many of them are at their wits' end. I think it helps to give them extra guidance to help them organise everything a little better.

– lecturer

In addition, study pressure is inevitable; after all, students are expected to perform to a certain level in order to eventually complete their studies successfully. Some stress factors are avoidable, though. Unclear or incomplete communication concerning assignments, timetable issues, major differences in lecturers' opinions and assessments, and simply giving negative feedback were mentioned as common practices within higher education that have an adverse effect on students' well-being and learning. For the engaged-exhausted student, in particular, this can be the straw that breaks the camel's back.



We had lots of exams in quick succession last week. When we showed that to the lecturers, even they said it was too much. In the end, this was down to the person responsible for the timetable, but this has a huge impact on the students. And it's important to have plenty of clarity about assignments and reports. When you have to start working out everything yourself, that also consumes a lot of energy.

– engaged-exhausted student

Finally, emotional exhaustion in engaged-exhausted students is not necessarily caused simply by too much work and too great a challenge. Fatigue can also set in when the work is monotonous. Students matching this student profile will then remain engaged through interaction with students and lecturers and/or by being active within the university of applied sciences outside the courses, but the energy generated by the studies themselves may then begin to wane.



You do assignments and derive less and less satisfaction from them. It's also because assignments seem more and more repetitive. At one point, everything was the same.

– engaged-exhausted student

disengaged-exhausted



Characteristics

The disengaged-exhausted student is characterised by a low level of engagement and a high level of emotional exhaustion. Students matching this student profile are the opposite of engaged-energised students, and this student profile seems to be the least ideal. Of all four student profiles, the group of disengaged-exhausted students seems to be the largest. The proportion of disengaged-exhausted students is particularly high among fourth-year students and students taking longer than normal to complete their studies. Students matching this student profile are also more likely to live on their own compared with those matching the other student profiles. Disengaged-exhausted students participate the least within the higher education institution and have the most well-being issues. This group also incurs the most study delays compared with those matching the other student profiles:



This year, I have completely let go of things. For example, I am now a week behind and have stopped reading the literature. I haven't lost interest in my studies, but things are just not working out.

– disengaged-exhausted student



I'm not allowed to retake my exams now because there is a new curriculum. This means I've had to go back to the second year. I'm now doing my internship in the summer just to avoid falling further behind. But the university isn't doing anything to help me.

– disengaged-exhausted student

Most students and lecturers found it hard to identify this student profile clearly and were shocked by the number of students belonging to this quadrant. On the one hand, this could be because a student would not readily and willingly identify themselves as disengaged-exhausted. In addition, lecturers, for example, indicated that those matching this student profile might not ask for help and will have dropped out of sight. Both students and lecturers do, however, think that those matching this student profile are often not on the right programme and leave it early. While engaged-energised students seem to experience an 'upward spiral', a 'downward spiral' is identified in those matching this student profile.



I think this is a student who does not feel entirely at home or has their doubts about this. I also think, if you don't go for it, things won't improve either and you'll end up in a negative spiral. I do think it's a very high percentage. I don't recognise this as far as my own programme is concerned, but looking Inholland-wide and from what I hear, the COVID-19 pandemic really did hit hard.

– engaged-energised student

Some interviewees, by contrast, indicated that we should be cautious about concluding that the programme is not a good fit or that the student cannot cope. They indicated that there may be stress factors outside the study programme at play that make those matching this student profile unable to become absorbed by the programme at a particular time and become emotionally exhausted.



People have lots of things going on. They are young and just starting their studies, have children or are in the middle of a divorce. They then leave, and that's not because they can't handle the programme.

– engaged-energised student



Being disengaged because the degree programme doesn't suit you or disengaged because of the COVID-19 pandemic are two different things.

– lecturer

In addition, some students indicated that they occasionally felt obstructed by a lecturer, fellow students, the programme or the educational institution as a whole. They indicated that this was one of the factors that had led to their ending up in the disengaged-exhausted quadrant.



You try to resolve everything as far as possible. But then you are offered an extra resit as a solution. I'm absolutely not going to get something out of that if the same lecturer who has always obstructed me is going to grade it this time as well.

– disengaged-exhausted student

Requirements

Although only two of the students interviewed were characterised as disengaged-exhausted, there were several students who indicated that they sometimes belonged to this quadrant. The students experiencing emotional exhaustion indicated that they were not given the space to make mistakes, or more mistakes, and their situation was not properly understood. For them, acceptance from the higher education institution is important, as is being better able to accept the situation themselves.



Normalise the fact that things won't go smoothly every now and then. You are always required to be prepared and read the literature. Ultimately, though, that's not how you motivate people [...] If there's a particular home situation that makes it difficult to attend compulsorily, it could be even more frustrating.

– disengaged-exhausted student

Lecturers also indicated that the resources currently provided are not really suited to those matching the disengaged-exhausted student profile. Although many resources for students are available within the higher education institution, relatively few students make use of them. Previous studies have also found that students who are doing less well, have more difficulties at finding resources. Both lecturers and students indicated that contacting students from the institution would be beneficial.



Obviously, we have student buddies, a pilot involving a student psychologist and student counsellors. But those are things where you as the student have to take the first step. And that's not something a disengaged-exhausted student is going to do. I think we need to move away from the usual suggestion of: "contact someone who doesn't know you."

– lecturer



I see many students who have obtained only 30 credits, for example, but still want to go on to the next year. I will then schedule a one-on-one meeting with them to ask how they intend to do that. And I've found that kind of conversation to be very useful because you might find out, for example, that they have had personal problems. Maybe the university could do more along these lines. Or lecturers in collaboration with the student counselling service. I've been doing this myself at the moment because I am the module leader.

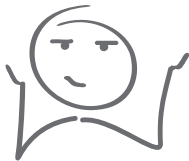
– lecturer



There was a classmate who told me that things weren't going well and therefore the project wasn't running smoothly. I told him he should contact a student counsellor. At least that shows that you're being proactive. However, he later said he hadn't been able to make an appointment in person, only via Teams, and he wasn't keen on that.

– engaged-energised student

Lecturers also told that others should not be too quick to judge students who do not actively participate in class or do not come at all too soon. Lecturers recognised this in colleagues and had the impression that this makes students disappear even further beyond the spheres of influence of the higher education institution. Some students also indicated that the relationship with the lecturer can have a huge impact on the student.



I caught myself thinking: "Here we go again. He never comes to my classes, who does he think he is?" That's the wrong way of looking at it, because you don't know the reason. If I don't know the reason, I contact them.

– lecturer



The connection with the students is the most important thing. Obviously, you have to do everything yourself, but the lecturer is a key link in the process.

– engaged-energised student

Summary of student profiles

Disengaged-energised

Smallest group of almost 9%, but clearly identified

Characteristics:

- Barely participates
- Few well-being issues, in particular low performance pressure
- Lax, puts in little effort, does just enough to get by, goal-oriented, studies are a low priority, but is possibly very active in private life

Needs:

- Make study activities more attractive with more scope for social interaction
- Take account of attention span/make participation easier (e.g. as few content-heavy lessons as possible on Monday morning or Friday afternoon)
- Make lessons more challenging
- Discuss low levels of participation and discover what is behind them
- Allow for other priorities in the student's life

Engaged-energised

Roughly 15% of students; is clearly identified

Characteristics:

- High level of academic participation and cohesion
- Few well-being issues and the most motivated
- Is in a flow, open to feedback, approachable, derives visible pleasure and energy from their studies, can find group work irritating

Needs:

- Prevent them from taking over group projects and/or a reduction in engagement because of 'free-riders'
- Give them a prominent role e.g. let them help in lessons
- Give recognition for work and commitment

Engaged-exhausted

Nearly 30% of students; is clearly identified

Characteristics:

- High level of extra-curricular participation and cohesion
- Many well-being issues, in particular high pressure to perform
- Puts a great deal of time into studies, wants to do well, perfectionistic, can become overwhelmed, sometimes a little insecure, go-getter

Needs:

- Beware of imposing expectations or excessively high expectations, and show understanding if things turn out less well on occasion
- Offer personal development support.
- Offer clear communication and avoid unnecessary stress (e.g. timetabling problems).
- Offer sufficient variety and meaning in the studies or study assignments

Disengaged-exhausted

Largest group of about 48%, but is not clearly identified because a student matching this student profile is rarely present or may not express emotional exhaustion

Characteristics:

- Participates rarely and incurs many study delays
- Many well-being issues and the least motivated
- Is in a negative spiral, has personal problems, may not be on the right programme, quieter, does not take the first step to report problems

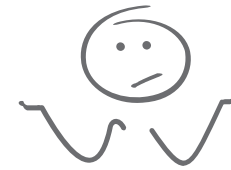
Needs:

- Initiate a conversation to find out whether the student is in the right place or explore what is needed to promote study progress
- Accept that things are not going particularly well and allow time and space to recover. Resources should also be offered, though
- Actively identify problems and, as a lecturer/an educational institution, take the first step towards making contact
- Beware of biases and, as a lecturer, build a positive relationship

Transition from disengaged to energised

Students and lecturers also shared general experiences and recommendations on how to transition disengaged- to energised students, or to keep students energised.

1. **The relevance of the course materials to practice is clear and related to the rest of the programme.**



The integration between courses was very weak to begin with. All the lecturers were doing their own thing. But students could feel that too, and would ask: "why do I have to learn this?"

– lecturer



Make the purpose of the course clearer. There were often only four of us in the class at a time, because the rest didn't know what the point of it was.

– engaged-exhausted student

2. **There is room in class to connect with each other – between lecturer and student and also among the students themselves.**



When students have no connection, they are sometimes mercilessly hard on each other in peer reviews. They can muster little sympathy for each other.

– lecturer



The classes I teach are very open, to make it very personal. I've noticed that a great conversation always ensues if I share my story and I ask the others to do the same.

– lecturer

3. There is a wide range of activities with which students are familiar, and there is freedom of choice, both within and outside the curriculum. This allows students to develop and do what suits them.



Educational institutions provide many resources that you can use to develop yourself further. Most people don't really see the treasure chest they have before them.

– engaged-energised student



I'd love it if our first two years formed the basis of an Associate Degree. They don't all have to reach the finish line, just as long as they can take the next step in their lives happily and healthily.

– lecturer

Transition from exhausted to energised

In addition to general pointers on how to engage students and keep them engaged, students and lecturers also shared general experiences and recommendations on how to make the transition from emotional exhaustion to emotionally energised:

1. **Students are asked how they are, and a personal conversation is initiated even if there is no immediate reason to do so.**



It's not what you say but how you say it. When I ask: "How are you?" I often notice that students respond openly.

– lecturer



I think it starts with good conversations: "how are you and where are you getting stuck?" Less question-driven conversations, but rather simply initiating the conversation and then seeing where it goes.

– engaged-energised student

2. **The educational institution focuses on physical well-being and basic needs such as sufficient exercise, healthy eating and sleep.**



If you are more physically fit, you will also feel better balanced.

– lecturer



What I miss is that health plays an important role in well-being, including sport and sleep, and I think we should pay more attention to that in education as well. You have certain things firmly in hand. If you are very stressed but start doing plenty of exercise, your brain will produce a substance that counteracts stress.

– lecturer

3. The route to support is clear and accessible.



I think more prominence should be given to study skills. A kind of school manual containing information such as: "how to be a good student and where to turn if things don't go well." If there are problems, where to turn for help remains a mystery. At the supermarket, you know where to go, but at an educational institution, it's a nightmare trying to find what you need.

– lecturer



I have worked at several educational institutions, and I think it is handled very well here, at least as far as accessibility is concerned. The student counsellors could maybe be made a little more available. They are not always easy to find. But when I was there, things did run pretty smoothly.

– engaged-exhausted student

Exercise for students: what student profile are you?

If you would like to know how you score on engagement and emotional exhaustion, carry out this short exercise. For each statement below, circle the number that best describes you. By then calculating the average scores, you can position yourself in the quadrant model.

Do you recognise yourself in this student profile? And would the recommendations given by students and lecturers in this booklet also fit your situation? You can also track the changes in your levels of engagement and emotional exhaustion by answering the questions weekly or monthly and positioning yourself in the quadrant model.

This way, you can keep track of the transitions you are going through and reflect on your needs and requirements. Lecturers can also use the questionnaire and quadrant model below in class or during study progress interviews. This tool can be used to initiate the conversation and monitor students' well-being.

Step 1: answer the statements and calculate your average scores

Engagement

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Occasionally	Regularly	Very frequently	Always
I have an abundance of energy when I study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am enthusiastic about my study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am completely absorbed in my study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Average score for engagement add up the scores and divide by three:							

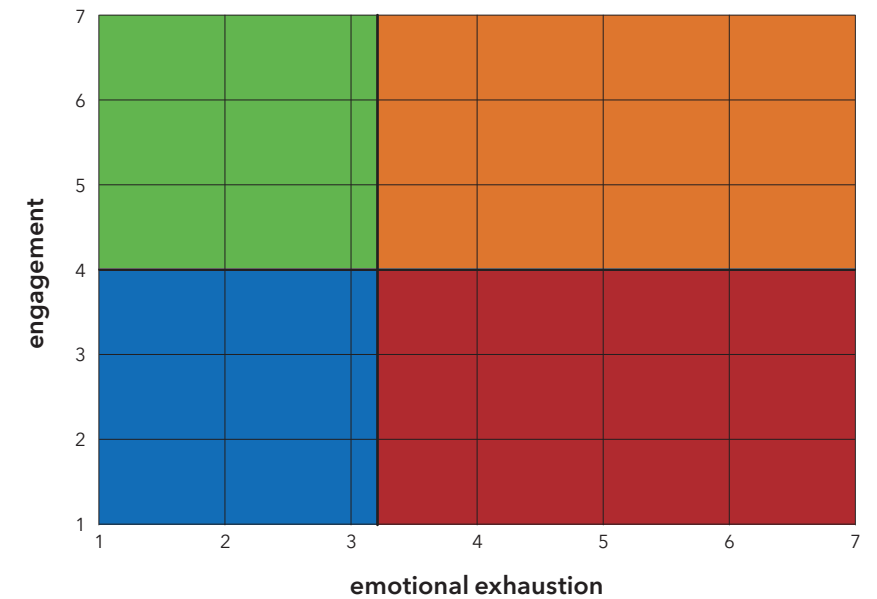
Emotional exhaustion

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Occasionally	Regularly	Very frequently	Always
I feel mentally drained by my study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel empty at the end of a study day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel tired in the morning when I get up and have to start another study day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It takes a lot from me to spend a full day studying or following class	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel 'burned out' by my study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Average score for emotional exhaustion add up the scores and divide by five:							

Step 2: put a dot where your scores converge

When you have calculated your average scores for engagement and emotional exhaustion, you can put them in the following graph. Put your score for engagement on the vertical axis and the score for emotional exhaustion on the horizontal axis. Then look to see where those scores intersect and put a dot, cross or, if applicable, a number there if you want to monitor your scores weekly or monthly. The thick lines are the cut-off scores that distinguish the four different student profiles:

- **disengaged-energised**
engagement below 4 and emotional exhaustion below 3.21
- **engaged-energised**
engagement above 4 and emotional exhaustion below 3.21
- **engaged-exhausted**
engagement above 4 and emotional exhaustion above 3.21
- **disengaged-exhausted**
engagement below 4 and emotional exhaustion above 3.21



Step 3: reflect, discuss and, if appropriate, take action

Now that you know your scores for engagement and emotional exhaustion and know which student profile/quadrant you fall into, you can ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I recognise myself in this student profile?
- Have I been in this quadrant for a while, or is this a recent development?
- How does this result make me feel? Was the result as expected, or did it take me by surprise? And am I happy/satisfied, or am I worried?
- Would I like to remain in this quadrant or change this student profile?
- What do I need if I am to stay in this quadrant (if you are satisfied)? Or what do I need to move to another quadrant (if you would like to change student profile)?
- What can I do myself?
- What do I need from others?

Write down your answers. Then discuss them with a fellow student who has also done this, or discuss your answers with your lecturer or study coach. The tips from this booklet can also aid you in becoming more engaged and energised.

**Exercise for lecturers:
Know your students!**

We analysed questionnaire data and spoke to several students and lecturers for this booklet. Based on research, several student profiles with their own characteristics and requirements have been identified. Regardless of the student profile, though, the following applies to all students: start the conversation and get to know them! Simply starting the conversation can contribute to better bonding and a student feeling more secure about indicating what they need. Getting to know a student will also help you to identify them more accurately. If the student struggles to put into words what they need, it may be useful to talk about specific requirements based on the identified student profile(s). For example, a conversation can be started with a disengaged-energised student about possible challenges and the space they need, and you could talk to an engaged-exhausted student about the performance pressure they experience and how this can be reduced. It sounds so simple, but it still does not happen often enough in practice. Below are some discussion pointers with example sentences that could help to start the conversation.

	Disengaged- energised	Engaged- energised	Engaged- exhausted	Disengaged- exhausted
General opening conversation	Do you have five minutes to spare after class? Could I have a quick chat with you then? How are things going with your studies at the moment? And how are you in general?			
Specific opening (if the student profile has already been identified)	I have the impression that you are often absent or doing other things. Is that also how you feel?	I have the feeling that everything is going really well. Is that also how you feel?	I have the impression that you are experiencing a great deal of study/other pressure. Is that also how you feel?	I have the feeling that things aren't going particularly well with you. Is that also how you feel?
Identifying engagement	Are you enjoying your degree programme? Does it enthuse you? Does it energise you? Do you find it useful/worthwhile?			
Identifying emotional exhaustion	Does your degree programme make you feel mentally exhausted? Does studying all day long take a lot out of you? Do you feel burned out by your study programme?			
Making a subject open to discussion	Do you find the [lesson/study activity] insufficiently interesting? What can I do to make them more interesting?	How are your group projects going? Are you all doing roughly the same amount of work? Would you enjoy helping with or contributing ideas to a [lesson/study activity]?	Do you feel intense pressure to perform from yourself or from others? Do you notice that you are a perfectionist or have a fear of failure? Do you need counselling in this regard? Is there anything about the [lesson/study activity] that is unclear? What can I do for you in this regard?	Are there any major problems/stress factors you are encountering at the moment, in connection with your studies or your private life? Would you like to tell me more about that? Do you feel sufficiently at home in the degree programme/at the educational institution? What do you need to feel more at home? Or have you thought about something that might suit you better? Is there anyone you can talk to about your problem/stress factor? Have you talked to anyone about this before?
Referring on where necessary	Do you need help or support? Have you thought about [resource]? [Give an explanation if necessary]			
Feedback	Have you been able to make an appointment with [resource], or have you already been? Did it help you? Will you let me know how it goes?			

Table 1: Discussion pointers with example sentences to help students along the way.

Earning credits, learning for exams, being present during classes, interacting with fellow students and lecturers, living on your own or not, participating in extra-curricular activities: there is quite a lot that comes down on a higher education student. There are also numerous external factors – such as the corona pandemic and the changing labour and housing market – that affect the student. But students experience these situations differently and deal with them in different ways. Despite these stressors and differences, how can we ensure that as many students as possible become and remain engaged and energetic?