

Outbreak Management Team members  
CC: Minister of Education, Culture and Science  
Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport

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*Date* 11 January 2022  
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*Subject* **Urgent call to open higher education and senior secondary vocational education campuses**

Dear OMT members,

We – the student unions JOB, ISO and LSVb, the Netherlands Association of Senior Secondary Vocational Schools, the Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands Association for Psychiatry, the National Youth Council and the Universities of the Netherlands – are writing you this letter to send a strong message that educational institutions in senior secondary vocational education, higher professional education and university education must be able to welcome all students back on campus as soon as possible.

The pandemic has been going on for nearly two years now, and this has had a major impact on the quality of teaching and learning for all students. Schools and universities have come a long way in providing online education for certain courses, but lecturers and students miss meeting in person. This is essential for professional training and knowledge transfer. It is also important that lecturers can once again teach to the best of their ability and look their students in the eye.

Furthermore, an educational institution is not only a learning environment, but also a living environment: for young people, daily face-to-face contact with fellow students and lecturers is crucial to their social development, with all the consequences that entails. When the educational institutions reopened after the first lockdown, it became clear yet again how much students and lecturers had missed this interaction. As the new Minister of Education, Culture and Science Robbert Dijkgraaf also pointed out: our students represent one of the most vulnerable groups that are in a highly formative phase. That phase can no longer be put on hold.

This is affecting our students' well-being. Recent research (by Statistics Netherlands, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment and the Trimbos Institute) as well as monitoring by the Ministry and by the educational institutions themselves confirm that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the well-being of young people. The extent of psychological issues among young people – ranging from loneliness, depression and sleeping problems to total apathy – is alarming. Current studies, done during the pandemic, once again make it painfully clear that young adults are deteriorating the most in terms of mental health. For lecturers and other staff at the institutions, the ongoing uncertainty about whether and how teaching activities can safely take place is also a source of stress and increased workloads, which are already very high.

Despite the rising infection rate, all this calls for a long-term solution. We wholeheartedly support the new Minister of Education, Culture and Science Robbert Dijkgraaf's plea

to open the remaining educational institutions as soon as possible.



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