

## **The development of a Health and Wellbeing strategy in a Dutch University**

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### **Indicate your track:**

1. Scientific and practitioners' research presentations
  - a. Bottom-up and community-driven interventions
  - b. Institutional interventions and policies
  - c. Policy-Level insights

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to give an overview of the institutional interventions and policies and their developments at one university in the Netherlands.

### **Design**

In order to identify institutional interventions and policies different representatives from the University were contacted. A number of online conversations and email correspondences were conducted. In addition, desk research was performed. Documents (e.g. reports, strategies) were collected and analysed.

### **Results**

#### *Alliance EUniwell*

The university is partner of EUniWell, the European University of Well-Being. This is an alliance of eight universities from different countries established in 2019. The alliance's aim is to promote an inclusive well-being agenda for students, staff, and society at large by offering new, innovative, interdisciplinary, and international opportunities for collaboration and development across education and research. The university is leading the development of a HR well-being policy and is developing joint HR guidelines to support innovative and inclusive staff development programs at three levels.

### *Caring Universities*

Several Dutch Universities, including the one studied in this project, have bundled their resources and set up the platform Caring Universities. Since summer 2021, Caring Universities offers free online programs to improve the mental well-being of PhD candidates. There are 4 programs, developed by clinical psychologists, aimed at improving your mood, reducing stress, dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and diminish the habit of procrastination. All programs are free of charge and offer online coaching.

### *Healthy University Programme*

Since 2019 the university is an associate member of the UK Healthy Universities Network. This network supports the university to develop and implement whole university approaches to health, wellbeing and sustainability. From 2020 the university have set up their a Healthy University programme to create a positive, healthy working environment where both staff and students can reach their full potential. As well as organizing a range of activities to boost vitality, the healthy university program aims to kickstart a movement that both prioritises health and makes health and vitality an integral part of the university identity. One example is the organization of a Healthy University Week, held every year in October, where staff members can take part in a wide range of healthy activities. In addition, a Healthy University website is created which offers lots of tips for creating a healthy and pleasant work environment.

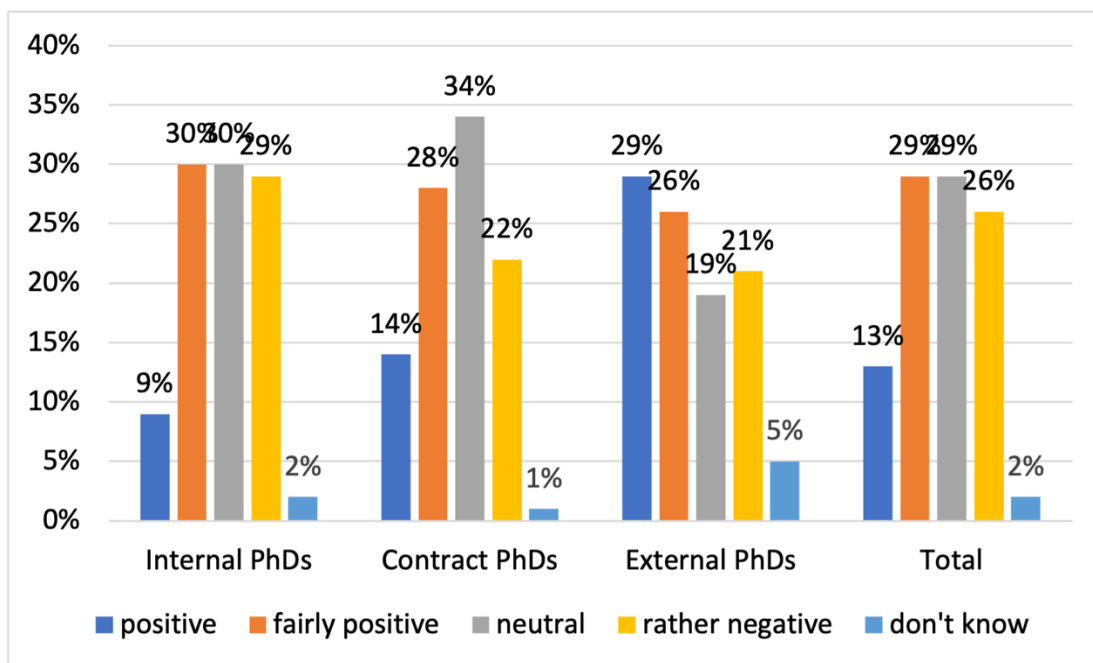
### *Training courses for Early career Researchers*

HR learning and development offers training courses and webinars free of charge for all type of PhD candidates. Examples of webinars are: Burnout First Aid Kit and How work-life balance can bring less stress and more joy in our life. HR learning and development also offers workshops for PhD candidates and postdocs with practical information and tips on how to deal with mental health issues. Examples from 2021 are: ‘how to take care of your mental health’ and ‘how to avoid a burn-out’.

### *Data collection on mental health and wellbeing of PhD candidates*

In order to monitor the mental health of PhD candidates, the university conducted in 2021 a survey study. When asking about the impact of the PhD track on the wellbeing of PhD

candidates we received mixed results (see Figure). 29% of the external PhDs (PhDs who do not in principle receive any funding and write their thesis often alongside their regular work under the supervision of a supervisor from the university) experienced a positive impact. This is a much higher percentage compared to internal employed PhD candidates (9%) and contract PhD candidates (14%; who receive a grant or scholarship in their country of origin which enables them to conduct their PhD research) 14%. In general, 26% of PhD candidates perceived the impact of the PhD trajectory on their wellbeing as negative. The same survey showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has a negative impact on the mental health on the majority (74%) of the PhD candidates.



## Implications

The university is currently discussing how to start monitoring the effectiveness of their activities, and how those monitoring results could be used to refine the programme even further.