

Evaluatie CPO 2016-2017

Versie: 29/10/18

In the academic year 16-17, the Commissie Persoonlijke Omstandigheden, as merged committee of the former BSA-, MOMI- and CVA-committees, considered app. 200 student dossiers. These dossiers fall in the various categories: requests for financial support (FOBOS), advice on delayed BSA, advice on MOMI and advice on 'onstudeerbaarheid'.

Below follows a brief report following the mentioned categories.

To facilitate reading, the first paragraph contains observations and suggestions/conclusions for further practice of the CPO.

Observations

- The way of working of the CPO in 'the chain' of monitoring, advising and judging seems generally appreciated by all concerned.
- The Student Affairs, Coaching and Counselling (SACC) has provided expert and very efficient support to the CPO.
- The CPO works with two paradigms: a circumstance is recognised if there is medical documentation to support that and in case of a social circumstance the studentendecaan judges the evidence: these paradigms work well.
- The committee noted a seemingly large number of first year students (30-40) that experience (recognised) problems of a (permanent/structural) psychological nature. It is difficult to say if this is abnormal or due to an efficient registration.
- The committee wonders what happened with the document 'Keten Studiebegeleiding' of 2016. Is any decision made on its recommendations?
- The student advisors are the first contacts with the students and assess if circumstances can be a recognised cause for delay and/or warrant an adjusted study plan. The CPO, in her meetings in July endorses these assessments; there has rarely been a difference in judgment.
- The university has to define more precisely where the responsibility lies in case students do parts of their curriculum (minor) abroad because they chose to do so. This not only considers quality of education but also claims of 'onstudeerbaarheid'.

Suggestions and conclusions

- If a circumstance has a permanent nature (disability, psychological issue) it is (very) advisable to make and document a study plan with the student.

Even in case little or no changes to the standard program are made, it is good to have a possible cause for delay on file.

- Only if an existing medical history is on record at the start of the study, should the CPO recognise circumstances for study delay. The CPO/FOBOS rules should be adapted with this ruling.
- In general it is advisable that, in case of delays, adjusted study plans are made and put to file.
- It would be wise to change the paradigm on compensation entirely to waiving of a (actually paid) fee for the period of non-study and not for any other costs. This makes it clear-cut: the university provides education at a fee cost for the student and when, because of a recognised circumstance, actual study could not take place, the fee is waived for that period.
- Increased attention is needed for international students as Dutch medical facilities are regularly not accessible for them.
- Efficiency in the CPO-meetings with student advisors can be increased by filtering out and making delegated decisions in clear-cut cases.

FOBOS

Financial support falls into 2 categories: activism (clubs, committees, sport, culture) and 'personal circumstances' as defined by law. For the first category the UT has mandated the Student Union to define the rules by which the 'beursmaanden' are divided between the various activities (see web document). The SU reports independently on its activities, so this category is excluded from this evaluation.

In case of personal circumstances the CPO decides on behalf of the CvB on the duration and amount of compensation. The CPO judges the severity of the circumstance. The general rule is that the student must either receive (documented) medical attention from a BIG-recognised person or, in case of serious social circumstances, meet with one of the Studentendecanen who will then pass judgment.

In the academic year 16-17 42 applications were submitted for financial support. Of these 88% was accepted.

The CPO uses a simple algorithm to determine the (integer) number of months for which compensation is awarded.

When the period of the recognised circumstance is identified, a check is done whether any study results have been obtained in that period. If so, an equivalent of 1 month per 5 EC is subtracted from the recognised period. The period for which compensation can be awarded is maximised to the curriculum duration + 1 year (or + 2 in case DUO also compensates 1 year) and also maximised to the apparent amount of EC that still has to be obtained in the study phase considered. The compensation roughly covers the actual study costs (fee per month and some travel allowance).

A fair compensation for international students, often studying on a bursary or grant, is sometimes hard to determine since they might have no other means to cover their cost of living. The compensation for Dutch students is roughly based on the monthly equivalent of the tuition fee. It would be simple and transparent if the university would reimburse only a tuition fee for all students by way of compensation for a period not studied.

It is sometimes difficult for the CPO to determine an actual period if a circumstance has a more permanent background (some psychological circumstances, a certain level of disability). The apparent circumstance will influence the study intensity continuously with ups and downs. It would help in such cases to make an adjusted study plan; for clarity towards the student and as a 'reference' for delay that has occurred in study progress. An adjusted study plan will obviously lead to a longer period of study than the official curriculum duration. A study plan, based on a recognised circumstance, gives a basis for compensation as not the full 100% of education as provided by the university each year is 'consumed'. The C+1 (or C+2) ruling caps the financial support.

BSA

In the three years of the BSA-system the number of requests for a delayed BSA has been successively 120 ('14-'15), 90 ('15-'16) and 150 ('16-'17). Neither the student advisors nor the committee members can indicate a particular reason for these considerable fluctuations. 150 applications amounts to roughly 10% of the population of first year students.

The breakdown of these requests is as follows:

16% of the applications are a direct consequence of a 'physical' calamity¹ in a particular period.

42% of the applications are of psychological nature² of which half are reported as temporary problems and the other half are of a permanent nature.

30% of the applications relate to calamitous family circumstances.

The remaining 12% was rejected by the committee (several because of insufficient documentation).

There is no reference to compare these data with but the committee is concerned about the high percentage of serious problems with a psychological background. 60 to 70 first year students appear to have significant psychological problems that warrant recognition by the CPO. Recognition only follows when a medical statement is present. Half of these problems are, in one form or another, of a permanent character.

To be successful in an academic study an adequate level of proficiency in e.g. reading and writing ability, ability to concentrate, analytical skills is needed.

¹ Like a period of disease, surgery.

² Like ADD, autism, PDDNOS, anxieties, migraine etc. There is no hard distinction with 'physical calamity' of course.

When it is known, also by the student, at the beginning of the study that a student might face (documented) difficulties in one of these area's (dyslexia, ADD etc), the committee finds it the responsibility of the student to report this at the start of the study.

In several cases such medical cases are not reported to the study advisors. The committee often observes that entering students, in case already a medical history is known, on their own wish, want to continue with the full study load while it is questionable if that is always advisable. Such positive attitude by the student is commendable but the CPO then often misses documented feedback to the students in case progress is not as good as wanted.

For an advice on BSA this is not such a problem since the CPO will only state that there is a recognised influence of the circumstance on study progress. For requests for financial assistance it is however hard to define the period. Like mentioned under the evaluation of FOBOS it would create greater clarity (also for the student) if adjusted study plans or an agreed different study speed, are documented. It is always possible to modify these agreements when circumstances change.

A second observation is that half of the cases in this category report their circumstance only at the moment of their claim for a delayed BSA. This is very late in the year giving an overload of work for organised meetings with student psychologists and studentendecanen. In part this is due to the BSA-procedure: at the end of the year you can judge if you will meet the criteria for a positive BSA or not. However the CPO has also noted that students bring up their circumstances only when there is a need to do so to obtain a delayed BSA. Sometimes medical help only starts then, triggered by a request for delayed BSA and the need for medical documentation. In some cases it would have been better if medical attention was started in an earlier stage. The BSA procedure is not intended as the moment for a medical checkup.

Feedback from the student advisors (present in the committee meetings on BSA) indicates that in the majority of such cases reported at a late date, students not just play the card of their circumstance; there *are* serious circumstances. The situation can be made more transparent (for all involved) if it is made compulsory for students to report at the beginning of their study if there is a medical history possibly influencing their study progress. It remains the students' choice to start with a full load, but it gives the possibility for documented feedback. In some cases students do not want anyone in their surrounding to know of his background; it must be stressed that student advisors operate in confidentiality and are there to help students.

The present ruling is that students who experience a negative influence on study progress because of their circumstance, have to report that on short notice to the student advisor. This rule is not always adhered to and the question is if the CPO should be strict and not recognise circumstances if not reported in time. A problem here is that sometimes the consequences of a circumstance are only noted later in the year. But again; student advisors are there to judge this.

It is not advisable to move applications for a delayed BSA to earlier in the academic year: when in e.g. January a circumstance for a delayed BSA is recognised, delayed advice becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. Only in serious cases when a 'functiebeperking' is recognised from the beginning it is clear that other criteria have to be used (and documented) for a BSA.

The way of co-operation of the CPO and student advisors is appreciated; it is good that the advisors are present to provide additional information and also to see how the CPO uses the criteria. There is a sense of common practice and difficulties that advisors, and the CPO, experience are shared and discussed. A meeting between CPO and all student advisors during the academic year has been very useful and appreciated.

There is an enormous drawback in the procedure: 3 meetings were needed at the beginning/half of July to discuss and decide on 50 cases each meeting. On top of that, each student has to meet with a studentendecaan (and/or psychologist) creating an almost impossible agenda for all concerned. The administrative support in collating the files for each student (including mail correspondence and Osiris data) creates an enormous amount of data in a short time frame. All this data must be correct as (in the case of financial support) decisions are made that need to be defensible in court. The CPO wishes to thank SACC for the well qualified support in this.

Some efficiency can be gained if clear-cut cases are pre-processed and not discussed in full by the entire committee.

MOMI

In '16-'17 15 requests were received for advice on MOMI. The CPO notes that foreign students can sometimes end up in very stressful situations where expectations (from themselves or their kin) meet with reality in an environment far away from home. Often a stressful situation is reported at a late stage and insurance issues prevent proper medical care.

It remains a difficult ethical issue: on one hand a university needs to be an international 'playing field' and can be a great force in caring for global responsibility. As a consequence the university has to take the consequence of dealing with sometimes very difficult medical, social and cultural issues from international students. 'Home' is far away for them and the university somehow has to provide for the void and not leave these students to their own devices. They have little or no access to medical facilities. There is a need for targeted care (and proper information for incoming students!).

This becomes most dramatic if the student appears not really qualified for the program and lingers on. A particular personal circumstance is recognised only once by the IND, but we have seen a concatenation of different circumstances in

consecutive years in some requests. A situation of shame sometimes prohibits leaving the program.

Studeerbaarheid

Only 3 cases of insufficient studyability (onstudeerbaarheid) were presented in 16-17.

One case is of strategic interest as it concerns an individual minor carried out at a foreign university. By law the university is responsible for the quality of the program (and is accredited for that), but the execution of part of a program abroad can hardly be the responsibility of the UT. In this case the student went abroad expecting to follow a program in the native language and a proper introduction thereto. After arriving, that introduction proved non-existent and after one month the student came back with no credits. The question here is where starts the responsibility of the student (it is an individual minor, chosen by the student so it is his responsibility to come back with credits of proper quality) and where starts that of the university (it is only the university that can properly assess the quality of the foreign institution and give its blessing). The UCO has to provide guidelines for this and create clarity for the students.

CPO members:

T. Mouthaan (chair, former dean)
M. Evertzen (former student advisor)
G. van Lieshout (former Educational Director)
Th van den Boomgaard (Educational Director)
C. van Dijken (studentendecaan, advisor to the CPO)
J. Greven (secr, griffie)
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