

Annual report of the Personal Circumstances Committee (CPO) for the academic year 2019-2020

April 2021

This annual report provides an overview of the activities of the Personal Circumstances Committee (CPO) during the 2019-2020 academic year. The remarks and recommendations of this report are presented first.

Remarks

1. In many respects the situation of last year followed a similar pattern as previous years, but with a few major differences. First the number of applications for a Force Majeure Allowance increased significantly from 72 to 132, of which still 90% had to be recognized. The total sum allowed to students more than doubled, which means that within two years it increased from around €53.473 to €271.268.

This seems in contradiction with the general study progress (expressed in EC's). This progress didn't deviate from the figure of last year. The increased number of applications could indicate that in general the position of students seems to be more vulnerable. There might be other reasons as well such study delays due to long-term (chronic / psychological) problems, enhanced by Covid-19, the FOBOS scheme is becoming better known to students, etc.

This all shows that good individual support for students is crucial to maintain the reputation of Twente University with regard to its quality of education and its people first mission.
2. Secondly, the Covid-19 crisis has created a really different situation for many students. While the government exempted insufficient feasible study programme due to Covid-19 from the FOBOS regulation recognized circumstances, the committee still was faced with Covid-19 effects in its assessment of applications. In a considerable number of applications from non-EU/EEA students for a Force Majeure Allowance and/or a MoMi exempt, we found that Covid-19 coincided with psychological stress and special family circumstances.
3. Also due to the Covid-19 crisis, no negative binding study recommendations were given and as a result of that the CPO didn't have to assess any personal circumstances under the BSA terms. However, we were able to compare some numbers with 2018-2019 and to overview the final BSA-recommendations issued to students whose recommendation was postponed in 2018-2019. The number of postponed recommendations appeared to be higher than the number of students whose personal circumstances were recognized by the CPO. In those cases, most students made use of a hearing. This explains the difference.
4. As a result, the annual report will not give an indication whether the situation for new bachelor students have improved. In previous years we noted that especially for non-EU/EEA first-year students, sometimes barely 18 years old, it is a major challenge not only to migrate to a profoundly different country but also to integrate into a new study environment that is often very different. The expectation is that the number of non-EU/EEA first-year students will drastically increase coming year through the location of Twente Pathway College on campus.
5. As in previous years, we feel a need to highlight the position of non-EU/EEA students. The assessment of applications requires the CPO to list a main ground, but especially in applications from non-EU/EEA study delay has coinciding causes. Among these students psychological problems are more common than among Dutch students. Special family circumstances result more often in study delay, and we still find that international students encounter housing problems. An increasing number of students mentions financial problems as a cause of study delay. Especially foreign students are dependent on scholarships or sponsors and often face

problems with obtaining their scholarships and moral pressure to fulfil the requirements set for the scholarships. While Twente University is becoming more international and inclusive, the co-occupation system of student houses is a major hurdle in this process.

The CPO does not recognize language skills as such as an issue in the handling of applications. Insufficient English language skills can be an underlying cause of problems such as social isolation (not everyone speaks English in the workplace). Not speaking Dutch can lead to problems with accommodation and internships.

6. Every year new students with psychological problems enter Twente University. Some study programmes have a student support system which is able to spot these students, and do draft individual study plans. On the other hand, the applications the CPO receives show that this is not common practice and that in other programmes, high workload and BSA stress may cause that the psychological problems become more severe than needed.

Recommendations

1. In our annual report of last year, we made strong recommendations about the responsibility of the university to facilitate study success factors such as safe housing environments and a stable financial situation. As noted, especially non-EU/EEA students are facing these issues, but not only these. The CPO is pleased to see that these recommendations have become part of the recent Student Wellbeing Action plan that was presented in February 2020. While it is too early to see the effects of this plan in the figures of last year, we truly hope that despite the current Covid-19 crisis, the new plan will result in an increase of student wellbeing and a reduction of applications.

Recommendations CPO 2018-2019

1. A safe financial environment is a precondition for study success. For all students, but especially for non-EU/EEA students, the support structure should be aimed at having all financial issues settled before the start of the academic year. Grant providers should provide scholarships with reasonable conditions.
2. A safe housing environment is a precondition for study success. For all students, but especially for non-EU/EEA students, housing should be available before the start of the academic year and for more than just the first year of study.
3. After the start of the academic year, the support structure should be aimed at academic and social integration.
4. Study programmes should organize their internships in such a way that no student is delayed in their study programme.
5. Attention should be paid to assisting students in overcoming feelings of shame and in showing them the way in the administrative system when they need help.

2. While non-EU/EEA students pay the institutional tuition fee, the maximum allowance of € 8,000 these students can be granted under the current FOBOS regulations is based upon the restricted (lower) tuition fee, which Dutch and EU/EEA students pay. As a result, while the latter students get a full return of tuition fee per month delay, the non-EU/EEA students only get a small proportion of their tuition fee returned. For reasons of equity among students, and considering the financial stress among non-EU/EEA students, we strongly recommend the WAR working group to adapt the FOBOS regulation on this point. The extra costs for FOBOS fund could be covered by using a small percentage of the non-EU/EEA student tuition fees as “a FOBOS insurance”. Accordingly, the expected budget must therefore be adjusted.
3. Currently, information about the use of a hearing is only detailed on the website, but not in our regulations, although the foundation lies in the WHW. It is recommended to take a closer look at

the (legal) foundation and the principles of the hearing, to compare these with reasons for making use of it (real-life examples) and subsequently make some agreements on this matter.

Report 2019-2020

Introduction

The CPO is an advisory body of the Executive Board of Twente University. It implements the financial support regulations of Twente University. These are:

1. as part of the **Profiling fund:**

1.1. The [FOBOS Force majeure allowance scheme](#)

On behalf of the Executive Board of Twente University, the CPO decides on payments to students under the FOBOS scheme. The recognized circumstances for the allowance are laid down in the law on higher education (WHW) and include:

- Illness and psychological problems,
- Pregnancy and delivery,
- A physical, sensory or other functional disorder,
- Exceptional family circumstances such as illness or death of partner, parents, child, brother or sister, divorce of parents, relationships problems,
- Home, social or integration problems
- An insufficient feasible study programme.

1.2. The [FOBOS Activism grants scheme](#)

The Student Union, together with the umbrella organizations, allocates the available grants to the organizations. The granting of Activism grants is standardized and is officially handled by the CPO registry. Applications are only assessed by the CPO in deviating situations.

1.3. The [FOBOS support scheme for Top-level athletes and Top-level artists](#)

The committee Top-level Sports and Arts determine whether applicants meet the criteria. The granting of grants is standardized and is officially handled by the CPO registry. Applications are only assessed by the CPO in deviating situations.

Also, the CPO is responsible for the assessment of personal circumstances under the terms of:

2. [\(Binding\) recommendation rule for first-year Bachelor students \(BSA\)](#)

The CPO assesses the legitimacy, duration and severity of personal circumstances and advises the Programme Director.

3. [Modern Migration policy \(MoMi\)](#)

The CPO assesses the legitimacy, duration and severity of personal circumstances of non-EU/EEA students with a study visa. The CPO advises the MoMi Committee on the assessment of circumstances in relation to the lack of study progress for the purpose of omitting a notification to the IND.

This report will provide information about the assessment of applications concerning regulations of the Profiling fund, such as the Force Majeure Allowance, Activism Grants and Top-level Sports and Arts, and also information about the assessment of personal circumstances for the (Binding) recommendations rule for first-year Bachelor students (BSA) and the Modern Migration policy (MoMi), respectively.

1. Profiling fund

The conditions for financial allocations from the profiling fund are described in the regulation Support for Students in Exceptional Circumstances (FOBOS – Financiële Ondersteuning Bijzondere Omstandigheden van Studenten). The schemes included are:

- Force Majeure Allowance Scheme
- Activism Grants Scheme
- Support Scheme for Top-Level Athletes and Top-Level Cultural Activities

1.1. Force Majeure Allowance

When students apply for financial support in case of study delay due to certain specific circumstances, the committee does (or does not) recognize the circumstances, the period of delay and determines the extent of the support. Table 1 shows the number of applications, percentages recognized and the total allocated amount of financial support. Table 2 shows the distribution over the various recognized categories.

Table 1: Force Majeure Allowances 2017-2019

	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Applications assessed	75	73	135
% granted	84	93	90
Allocated amount (Euro)	53.473	112.522	271.268

The number of applications in 2017 and 2018 was more or less stable. In 2019 we see a significant increase in the number of granted applications. This is due to a higher percentage of granted applications and an often longer recognized delayed period. Good communication within the chain of study counselling ensures that students are more aware of the available facilities.

The awarded amount is a compensation for the tuition fee in the recognized period. We can see a substantial increase in the awarded amount, which is partly due to the number of applications from students paying the institutional tuition fee (non-EU/EEA students).

The Force Majeure Allowance scheme holds a maximum to be awarded per student of 24 months up to a maximum amount of € 8,000. Because of the difference in tuition fee between EEA and non-EEA students, this maximum may result in unequal treatment.

Table 2: Force Majeure Allowances academic year 2019-2020, per category

Category	Months awarded		Applications assessed		Rejections		Amount awarded (€)	
	EEA students	Non-EEA students	EEA students	Non-EEA students	EEA students	Non-EEA students	EEA students	Non-EEA students
Illness	539	86	59	17	2	2	92.089	76.839
Physical, sensory or other impairment	233		19		3		38.625	
Special family circumstances	96	33	18	13		3	16.474	35.833
Pregnancy/childbirth	18	4	4	1			5.019	2.417
Insufficient feasible educational programme	3		1		1	2	521	
Other circumstances	8	6	2	1			1.389	2.063
Total	897	129	103	32	6	7	154.116	117.152

Table 3 shows the distribution over the regions (EEA- and Non-EEA students). Proportionately Non – EEA students applied roughly twice. Proportionally, Non EEA students submit a request for reimbursement almost twice as often as EEA students

Table 3: Force Majeure Allowances academic year 2019-2020, per region

	EEA students	Non-EEA students	total
students enrolled (#)	11192	1518	12710
students enrolled (%)	88,1	11,9	100,0
Applications assessed (#)	103	32	135
Applications assessed (%)	76,3	23,7	100
Applications assessed per students enrolled (%)	0,9	2,1	1,1

1.2. Activism Grants

The activism grants are awarded per calendar year in expected arrears. The available grants are allocated over the categories by the Student Union in close consultation with the Umbrella Boards. The allocation of these grants is standardized and handled by the CPO Registry. Only in deviating situations, applications are assessed by the CPO. This was not necessary for the 2019-2020 academic year. Table 4 shows the number of grants awarded for the calendar year 2019.

Table 4: Activism Grants calendar year 2019, per category

Category	Number of grants awarded		Number of applications		Number of rejections		Amount awarded (€)	
	EEA students	non-EEA students	EEA students	non-EEA students	EEA students	non-EEA students	EEA students	non-EEA students
Study	1.218	34	206	7	1		209.179	14.988
Arts and Culture	132	4	56	2	4		22.317	1.672
Social	316		98				53.904	
Sports	637	2	165	1	6		103.431	343
Other	69	2	24	2	1		11.845	1.500
Pub/Clubhouse/Shop	180		54		1		30.042	
World	29	34	6	20		1	4.978	31.644
Business	30	4	12	2	1		5.150	4.221
Category 3	473	21	102	8	1		82.745	20.504
Category 4 Teams	712	33	86	5	2		123.602	27.063
Total	3.796	134	809	47	3	0	647.194	101.935

1.3. Support Scheme for Top-Level Athletes and Top-Level Cultural Artists

The Top-sports/arts committee assesses the applications for recognition of top-level athletes and top-level artists. Athletes and artists can be recognized in category 1 or 2. Students in both categories get tailor-made study counselling and may use UT facilities such as the fitness room free of charge. In category 1, the student is entitled to financial compensation. These grants are awarded per calendar year in expected arrears, before December 1st. The compensation has a maximum of 4 grants per student per academic year, of which one grant consists of 1/12th of the tuition fees paid. The allocation of these grants is standardized and handled by the CPO Registry. Only in deviating situations, applications are assessed by the CPO. This was not necessary for the 2019-2020 academic year.

Table 5 shows the numbers of recognitions over the 2019-2020 academic year and the number of grants awarded to students who were recognized in category 1.

Table 5: Top-level sports and arts recognitions

Academic year 2019-2020	EEA students	Grants awarded	Non-EEA students
Category 1	20	49	0
Category 2	23		0
Total / total amount	43	€ 8.411,73	0

2. (Binding) recommendation rule first-year Bachelor students (BSA)

The (binding) recommendation rule of the academic year 2019-2020 differs from the 2018-2019 academic year. Usually, students that are at risk of not meeting the BSA requirements due to personal circumstances, submit an application to the CPO for recognition of those circumstances, after which the CPO advises the programme director. Due to Covid-19 and necessary adaptations, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science urged higher educational institutions to see whether giving a binding recommendations in 2019-2020 with the usual procedure and requirements would still be reasonable. In line with that request, the UT decided that no negative (binding) recommendations will be issued to first-year Bachelor students who do not meet the requirements of the BSA per 31 August 2020. This resulted in the postponement of the student progress evaluation for these students on the grounds of Covid-19, which gave these students the opportunity to fulfil the requirements of the BSA before the end of the academic year 2020-2021.

2.1. Numbers of first-year Bachelor students UT

The total influx of new first-year Bachelor students in 2019-2020 (cohort 2019) was 2649, based on the numbers of enrolment, which implies that students enrolled in two programmes and students that switched programmes are counted twice.

The dropout rate for the first academic year is 23%, including students who switched to a different programme and students who quit their programme. As table 6 shows, this percentage is lower than in previous years. Table 7 shows the numbers of first-year Bachelor students based on nationality. The influx numbers increased again in relation to previous years. The number of students from non-EEA countries has increased the most.

*Table 6. Influx and dropout of first-year Bachelor students, based on numbers of enrolments**

	2017	2018	2019
Total influx	2.008	2.323	2.649
Total dropout in year 1	28%	29%	23%

* Including students who switched to a different programme and students who quit their programme.

*Table 7. Influx of first-year Bachelor students based on nationality, based on numbers of unique students**

	2017		2018		2019		increase 2018-2019
Total NL	1.347	69%	1.439	64%	1.547	61%	7,5%
Total EEA	511	26%	599	27%	729	29%	21,7%
Total non-EEA	94	5%	194	9%	264	10%	36,1%
Total	1.952	100%	2.232	100%	2.540	100%	13,8%

*Percentages and numbers may differ slightly due to rounding

2.2. Numbers of BSA-recommendations

With the automatic postponement on the grounds of Covid-19 in 2019-2020 for all first-year Bachelor students who did not meet the BSA requirements, assessment of personal circumstances by the CPO was not necessary. As a result, a comparison with previous years regarding the specific circumstances that the CPO assessed cannot be made. Still it is useful to compare the number of positive recommendations and postponed ones with those in 2018-2019.

In **2018-2019**, the number of positive recommendations issued was 1.530, including among others those issued with due regard for personal circumstances and students who were first-enrolled in

previous years. The number of students that received a negative (binding) recommendation was 439, including some issued despite personal circumstances. Of these students, 46 were first enrolled *before* the 2018-2019 academic year. According to OSIRIS, for 129 students the recommendation was postponed until the 2019-2020 academic year because of personal circumstances.

In **2019-2020**, the number of positive recommendations issued is 1.614, including those issued with due regard for personal circumstances and those for students who were first-enrolled in previous years. 31 students who were enrolled before the 2019-2020 academic year received a negative (binding) recommendation. For 774 students the recommendation is postponed until the end of the 2020-2021 academic year based on the Covid-19 regulations. The final recommendations of these students will be included in the CPO annual report of 2020-2021.

2.3. BSA-recommendations compared to CPO advices

In **2018-2019** the CPO handled 191 applications, of which in 168 cases the circumstances were recognized. Table 8 shows the BSA-recommendations issued after the CPO advice was given. As mentioned, according to OSIRIS the number of students whose recommendation was postponed until the 2019-2020 academic year because of personal circumstances, was 129. This is more than the number of students whose personal circumstances were recognized by the CPO: the number of 129 includes 4 students whose circumstances were assessed but not recognized by the CPO and 22 students who did not consult the CPO. In almost all of these cases the recommendation was postponed after a hearing.

Table 8. Types of recommendations issued by the programmes in 2018-2019 after CPO advice

BSA-recommendations	Circumstances recognized by the CPO	Circumstances not recognized by the CPO	Circumstances not assessed by the CPO
Total	168	23	
Positive recommendation, >45 EC (student has met the norm)	28	5	
Positive recommendation, <45 EC (i.e. with due regard for circumstances or because student is found suitable for programme)	25	3	
Negative recommendation	13	11	
Recommendation was postponed because of switch programme	1		
Recommendation was postponed until 2019-2020 because of personal circumstances	103*	4	22

** incl. 2 recognitions for MoMi, used for BSA-recommendation.*

2.4. Final BSA-recommendations issued by programmes in 2019-2020

Table 9 shows that, of the 129 students whose recommendation was postponed in 2018-2019, 91 received a final positive recommendation in 2019-2020. 50 of these students met the BSA-requirements. The remaining 41 students did not meet the BSA-requirements, but did receive a positive recommendation, for example with due regard for personal circumstances or because the student was found suitable for the programme. A negative (binding) recommendation was issued to 26 students.

Table 9: Types of final recommendations issued in 2019-2020 to students whose recommendation was postponed in 2018-2019 because of personal circumstances

Final BSA-recommendations	Circumstances recognized by CPO in 2018-2019	Circumstances not recognized by CPO in 2018-2019	Circumstances not assessed by CPO in 2018-2019	Total (%)
Total	103	4	22	129 100 %
Positive recommendation, >45 EC (student has met the norm)	36	1	13	50 39 %
Positive recommendation, <45EC (i.e. with due regard for circumstances or because student was found suitable for programme)	33	2	6	41 32 %
Negative recommendation	24	1	1	26 20 %
Not re-enrolled for 19-20 academic year	6		2	8 6 %
Dropout (stopped or switched) during academic year	4			4 3 %

3. Modern Migration Policy (MoMi)

The Modern Migration Policy requires all non-EU/EEA students with a residence permit for study purposes (known as 'MoMi students') to achieve sufficient study progress every academic year. This study progress amounts to 50% of the EC's the student could have obtained during the academic year, relative to their moment of enrolment. Students with insufficient study progress must be reported to the IND by law. However, it is possible to think that some circumstances can cause a study delay. To omit such a notification to the IND, the regular UT-regulations regarding MoMi state that it is necessary to have a recognition of circumstances by the CPO or that a signed Study Progress Form is submitted to the MoMi Committee.

Table 10 shows the increase of MoMi students at the UT and the applications assessed by the CPO. For study year 2019-2020, there were 46 CPO applications of which the CPO handled 40. Six students withdrew their application prior to the CPO meeting because they met the MoMi requirements or because another procedure was (more) applicable.

Table 10: MoMi applications to the CPO

Academic year	(rounded) numbers of MoMi students*	MoMi applications handled by CPO	% of MoMi students
2016-2017	400	14	3,5 %
2017-2018	560	28	5,0 %
2018-2019	750	32	4,3%
2019-2020	945	40	4,2%

*Monitored MoMi students at the UT for August that year

Due to Covid-19, additional national guidelines were determined regarding the study progress monitoring mentioned in the Code of Conduct for international students in higher education. The additional national guidelines mentioned that Covid-19 can also be a justifiable reason under certain circumstances. Universities drew up their own clarifying regulations. The UT divided the students whose lack of study progress could be justified based on Covid-19 into two categories. Summarized:

Category A: Students with a study delay due to (personal) circumstances as a result of the Corona crisis need to have their circumstances assessed by the Committee Personal Circumstances (CPO) if those circumstances have led to insufficient study progress (<50%).

Category B: Students who can't continue their education, graduation assignment or internship, and therefore incur a substantial study delay as a direct consequence of the fact that the Corona crisis required them to interrupt, for which no alternative could be provided, and thus have insufficient study progress (<50%). The lack of study progress of those students was, with the adoption of the regulations, classified as justified based on educational force majeure leading to insufficient educational feasibility¹. The management of the programme can decide for which students within the programme a justification in terms of B is appropriate, within the requirements mentioned.

Table 11 presents the circumstances that according to the non-EU/EEA students have led to their study delay. Of the 40 handled files, the CPO recognized the circumstances in 36 cases and did not recognize the circumstances in 4. The table clearly shows that most of the students whose personal circumstances were assessed by the CPO indicated psychological problems (15) or the Corona crisis category A (12) to be their main cause of study delay. Of the 36 students whose circumstances were

¹ [Quote from [established UT regulations regarding MoMi and Covid-19](#)] A Corona-related study interruption: This type of insufficient educational feasibility is a direct consequence of a force majeure situation that could not reasonably have been foreseen or anticipated by a study programme and therefore cannot be regarded as the circumstance as referred to in the context of the profiling fund that the study programme is insufficiently feasible ("Servicedocument OCW 24-4, 2.8.1 bullet 3")

recognized by the CPO, the notification to the IND was omitted for 33. Additionally to table 10, the notification to the IND of another 40 students was omitted on the grounds of category B of the Covid-19 UT regulations.

Table 11: MoMi applications assessed by the CPO according to the circumstances

Assessed circumstances	Circumstances recognized by the CPO	Circumstances not recognized by the CPO
Total	36	4
Psychological circumstances	15	
Medical circumstances	2	1
Exceptional family circumstances	4	
Student activism	1	
Infeasible study programme	1	
Corona crisis (category A)	12	3
Other, which would cause extreme unfairness if the circumstances were not recognized	1	

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