



The Executive Board

20 September 2021

Response to letter dated September 14th, 2021, from The Executive Board

Dear members of the Leiden University Executive Board,

Thank you for your response to our letter of 3 September. We are heartened that you have taken an interest in our concerns and that you provided detailed explanations of the steps the University has taken up to the present to promote campus safety. In what follows, we explain why our fundamental concerns remain and propose ways the University can promote a safe and inclusive campus that is conducive to teaching and learning.

As stated in our letter of 3 September and our letter of 8 September to the University Council, our group wishes to contribute to constructive actions in three key areas.

First, with respect to the adequacy of arrangements for in-person teaching from a health and safety perspective, current arrangements remain inadequate.

We are still in a pandemic. Despite claims to the contrary, the position that in person teaching in groups of up to 75 people *without facemasks and without distance* is safe is not sufficiently grounded in empirical evidence and is dramatically out of step with practices in most other neighboring countries. *For many of us*, it is akin to being close to 75 unmasked people in a train or bus for 90 minutes. Claims that classrooms are sufficiently ventilated and that there is no need to mask are based on insufficient evidence. For many, the sense of danger is palpable. Already, numerous staff have related stories to us of feeling exposed and unsafe while teaching large groups of (sometimes coughing) students in enclosed spaces.

Second, we ask the Executive Board to demonstrate a clearer leadership role. We recognize that circumstances surrounding the return to in-person teaching were, in respects, beyond the University's control. However, we would like to see the Executive Board promote principles and best practices across all the University's faculties.

Third, the Executive Board should affirm that staff and student concerns about health and safety are not a nuisance or ill-founded, as they are entirely legitimate. On this basis, staff should not be put upon to demonstrate some exceptional reason for their concerns about what are real health risks. Further, the University should affirm that teaching staff should determine what risks they are prepared to take. Correspondingly, staff should determine their mode of instruction without being subject to interrogation, negative judgement, or worry.

Moving forward with concrete steps

We seek to work with the University in forging a more effective approach. Along these lines, we call on the Executive Board to adopt and implement the following changes:

1. We are encouraged that the University recognizes that all teaching staff have discretion in determining safety measures in their classrooms, including wearing masks. We call on the Executive Board to publicly affirm this by communicating this to all students and faculties so as not to place the onus on staff.
2. We call on the Executive Board to communicate clearly to all University faculties, staff, and students that wearing masks in crowded spaces is still the recommended best practice and to ask students to practice social distancing where possible.
3. We call upon the Executive Board to indicate clearly that staff may teach online or in mixed mode when they judge their personal health to be at risk without subjecting staff to invasive questions about what are entirely legitimate health concerns.
4. The Executive Board has noted the logistical challenges in teaching online or in a mixed mode. We maintain that these challenges can be addressed by allowing students to follow online lectures via laptops in rooms designated for that purpose, either in rooms reserved for their class or in clearly designated open classrooms.
5. Your letter states that “the GGD is not concerned about potential outbreaks.” We are. We call on the university to publicize concrete measures that will be taken when outbreaks occur.
6. The claim that ventilation standards as outlined in the Building Decree are sufficient is unsupported, while many staff continue to teach in rooms with no windows or windows that cannot be opened. We call on the Executive Board to substantiate this claim.

In your letter you have noted that “many lecturers are very enthusiastic about being able to teach in person once again, and that the buzz of students on campus gives them a great deal of energy.” We are no less enthusiastic about the possibility of teaching in person. However, we are not pleased with the directives announced and hastily put in place and can only be enthusiastic about teaching in-person if *all of us* feel safe. To this end, we ask the Executive Board to take a stronger leadership role in ensuring a safer campus in the interest of the health and wellbeing of the entire University community.

Signed,

Members of the Teaching Safely in a Pandemic @ Leiden University