

DECLARATION OF INTENT

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel wants to be a Compassionate University.

Situations of serious illness, death, sorrow, mourning and long-term (informal) care form an essential part of life. These situations have an impact on everyone who is confronted with them and can also put pressure on a study or work situation. Sometimes this can even lead to excessive stress, social and psychological problems, burn-out, or study failure.

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel acknowledges that the situations described above are also part of daily life in the university community, and that we need to pay particular attention to them.

Based on the basic values and philosophy of our university, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel wants to be a university community where everyone encourages, facilitates and supports each other during such difficult moments and experiences in life. We want to recognize, acknowledge, and deal with such situations; in particular, during instances of serious illnesses, chronic handicaps, grief, and the effects of long-term care.

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel already offers a wide range of care services and professional assistance to support the well-being of students and staff. It goes without saying that these actors must remain active in order to help reduce the negative social, psychological and medical consequences of serious or life-threatening illness, death, grief, mourning and long-term (informal) care.

A compassionate university, however, is defined by more than providing structured care within a legal framework. We want to create a university community that recognises that caring for one another in situations of distress, pain, suffering, sorrow and personal loss is not only a task for health care and social services, but the responsibility of everyone.

We want to encourage every member of the university community to share the conviction that difficult moments and experiences in life can occur to any one of us. Anyone who is confronted with such a situation should be given the opportunity to deal with it in a dignified manner within their work or study environment.

This declaration of intent can lead to a structural framework that facilitates and supports dealing with difficult situations.

By 2021 we want to make the Vrije Universiteit Brussel a place where the entire university community supports and promotes the principle of a compassionate university.

Based on the basic values and philosophy of our university, we want to make the Vrije Universiteit Brussel a place where every member of the university community will, at all times, be given the possibility to deal with care and loss in his or her own way.

The Vrije Universiteit Brussel aims to take up a pioneering role with regards to the principles of a compassionate university.

In order to achieve these objectives, we will consider to develop sub-objectives and action points. Possible action points are:

- To make the existing professional health services more accessible to the members of the university community and to encourage members of the university community to make use of it.
- To encourage and facilitate new bottom-up initiatives and to highlight special initiatives as best practices.
- To encourage managers and professors, through training, coaching and best practices, to consider the impact of major situations on their personal well-being, and that of their staff/students.
- To make experiences of serious illness, death, loss or care, through a wide range of activities such as exhibitions, debates, lectures, themed moments, (press) articles, etc., more visible within the university community.
- To facilitate a place and time where the commemoration of death and loss, alone or in a group, can take place.
- To recognize that diversity, in the form of ethnic, religious, gender and sexual identity as well as social origin and language, leads to a specific experience of serious illness, loss, grief and care and express this diversity as much as possible in our ambition to become a compassionate University.
- To evaluate and adjust each year the objectives to become a compassionate university with the help of a group of ambassadors of all relevant actors from the university.
- To acknowledge and stimulate a compassionate attitude in the university community with the help of this declaration of intend.

Brussels, 19th November 2019

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Prof. dr. Caroline Pauwels,
Rector

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Eddy Van Gelder,
Chairman of the Board