

The background of the entire page is a child's drawing. It features a grid of thick, hand-drawn lines in shades of pink, purple, and red. In the center of the grid, there is a small, green, stick-figure-like person with their arms raised, as if they are climbing or standing on the grid lines.

# The Most Normal Thing in the World

Studying with additional support needs

**ECIO**

**inholland**  
hogeschool

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# Foreword

Mieke van den Berg

Executive Board member, Inholland University of Applied Sciences

My sister has multiple disabilities. My parents made sure she had everything she needed to flourish. Even so, it took an alert primary school teacher to see her and say, 'Have her hearing tested'. It turned out that she could hardly hear anything at all. She wasn't stupid, she just heard almost nothing. She was 11 when we found out.

I've always had a soft spot for people who land outside of the system, who don't quite keep pace, or fit in. Diversity & inclusion are among the most important themes for the university of applied sciences, which is great. But to be honest, when we think of inclusion, we initially think of people with a migratory background, or people who are LGBTQ+. People with special needs have not been at the forefront of our mind for very long. I point out this group everywhere, in meetings and get-togethers, so that studying with additional support needs will become the most normal thing in the world for everyone. Diversity & inclusion is now part of our Strategic Plan. We've signed the UN treaty, though it's crazy that we need to. It should be a given that everyone belongs, can be themselves and has equal opportunities to flourish.

How is it going now? Is it sorted?

To be honest, I don't know.

We have student advisers. I know them, they are very good. There are no complaints or cries for help in our in-tray, so yes. But if I let my intuition speak, I think, Are we doing enough? Do the student's questions reach the right person in the right place?

We want to grow our mindset within Inholland. Make space for difference, and not consider it weird. If you have to stand for half a lesson, you have to stand for half a lesson. What we call normal has to expand.

I sometimes get irritable with my sister, when she hasn't got her hearing aid in for instance, and I have to repeat something five times. I say, Turn the thing on. Because I don't want to have to keep on explaining. But actually...I don't know what it's like for her. She's bound to have a good reason for turning it off now and then.

Let's try to be a college where everyone can be who they are, and be seen for who they are. Let's see if we can help each other, to be comfortable with who we are and who we want to be.

And, you know... people with an impairment, or with support needs, have often had quite a journey, they are so strong! They can make teams stronger.

I say, that is the one thing we have to make possible.



# Introduction

Irene Witteman

Inholland University of Applied Sciences Education Policy Department

*Not everything of concern to students can be captured in a policy document. That's why we've tried to avoid policy terminology as much as possible in this book. Which, it turns out, is quite difficult.*

## Motive

We began to evaluate our Studying with a Disability policy in 2017. With the policy scan developed by ECIO (the centre of expertise for inclusive education) in hand, and supported by ECIO adviser Judith Jansen, we held conversations with many individuals within our organization. We spoke to students, student advisers, education developers, examination boards, team leaders, lecturers and educational support advisers about accessibility, information provision, support, flexible learning routes, testing and examination, and quality assurance.

How are we doing? What is going well, and where are the opportunities for improvement? Beautiful, in-depth, rewarding conversations.

But what to do with all those results and points to improve on? Write yet another policy document, which would hardly be read? How could we create the awareness and urgency for improvement within ourselves instead of on paper?

We decided to take these questions, which we had been pondering for some time, to the experts: the students themselves. We found many of them willing to think with us, each bringing their own strengths, vulnerability and unique talents to the table.

They have proved themselves to be our best teachers over the last few years. And they still are.

## We Have the Courage to Learn from Each Other

We started our journey in awareness creation by organizing panel discussions and putting together a feedback group to enable maximum student participation. Students took up the initiative to self-organize as a community. With ECIO and a number of students, we started organizing 'Studying with Support Needs' workshops for staff from any and all levels of the organization.

And that's how we got to know each other. We started looking at our organization through students' eyes. For example, we learned from Amir how unsafe it can feel as a first-year student going to an unknown student adviser for the first time to take a proof of diagnosis, not yet knowing that it will be handled confidentially. We learned from Kim that the fear of handing in written work cowered behind her apparent indifference and procrastination. She had been condemned for writing mistakes too often. Karin explained how much energy it takes to bring focus to her graduation research, because she always gets entangled in the chaos of information in her head. And that that's why she's been trying to graduate for three years now.

We learned from Tom how left out you can feel if your heart condition means you can't go to school every day, and the examination board doesn't always show flexibility. Peter helped us to understand how misunderstood you can feel if you aren't accepted at your internship because of your difficulty with social interaction, and how his depression is always lurking around the corner. We learned from Jens, who finds himself panicking because although people want to help him, he feels like he is being sent from pillar to post; as if no one wants to take responsibility. He often feels lost in our large organization. And from Meriem, who slipped into loneliness during the process of graduating, becoming socially isolated due to the lack of compulsory meetings at school. Her teachers thought she was unmotivated.

All of them students who are struggling with their health, their studies or with life itself. Often not visibly to us. Anne made the biggest impact with the fewest words. She was suffering from depression and social anxiety following her sister's suicide. In consultation with her psychologist, she decided to join one of the workshops as an exercise in participating in group activities again. No mean feat. We asked the students at the end of the intensive workshop whether they wanted to share anything else with the participants. Anne spoke: "You don't really need to know everything about my condition. Just ask me how I'm doing once in a while." How inspiring and substantive our programme was that day; Anne summarized what the entire workshop was actually about in a few sentences.

*Was it really that straightforward? Did Anne not simply make an appeal to our core values? Ask how things are going in a 'personal and accessible' way, so that every student can feel that he or she belongs? Is this not the way to learn a lot from each other?*

And the other way round, students learned from staff too: How complex it can be to offer every student exactly what he or she may need at a given moment. That we cannot always see what is going on inside a student's mind from outside.

How all of us can struggle to provide the right guidance and facilities at times, while the entire education system is (still) too focused on ambitious students whose development follows educational expectations. How we have to juggle the roles of teacher and care provider. That we also have to teach students to cope with the structure of an unruly society, within which they will have to work later.

And the students saw how the staff can struggle with the complexities of life too, and the limitations that sometimes come with them. That we too can feel unseen or unheard within our large organization.

But the students experienced, above all, how extensive the involvement and willingness to think along with them was.

## The Strength of Personal and Accessible

Our values are well described in our Strategic Plan (2022-2027):

*"Our core values of 'personal & accessible' and 'everyone belongs' are reflected in our diversity and inclusion policy. Inholland wants to be an accessible college, where the bottom line is equal opportunities for all students and staff. Diversity and inclusion require processes of structural change, supported by the entire organization and reflected in the organizational culture rather than one-off actions."*





No matter how beautifully we formulate our core values, no matter how much we read, write or research, how many consultations we organize on the theme, no matter how comprehensive our policy document, or how many UN treaties we sign up to, is it not ultimately about our own -personal and professional- connection with each student, regardless of label, diagnosis or disability? It seems so straightforward.

And yet, it doesn't always work. Not every student is able to make their support needs known or visible. Not every member of staff is able to help a student with all their struggles. We cannot fix everything for the students. And we don't have to. But do we (feel we) have the space and time sometimes needed to help an individual student over a hurdle? And what is the hurdle? Because a student can't always express exactly what it is they need. In which case, it is up to us to provide guidance in a way that can support the student in this as well.

The number of students in need of support is growing, but this trend is not just in higher education. Symptoms of psychological distress among young adults has increased considerably in recent years. Waiting lists for mental health care are getting longer and longer. What does this mean for our own university of applied sciences, where we too are seeing an increase in the number of students experiencing mental stress in one way or another in their studies or in their lives? And what is our position when students who need specialist help to function properly within their studies do not receive it due to the rolling back of care provision? As said before: are we able to give every student the support he or she needs? It is complicated. For example, how do we deal with students who aren't able to maintain their studies independently, and who we lose sight of? Do we let them go, or do we hold on to them?

Where is the boundary of our duty of care? Shall we have a conversation about that? We would warmly welcome that.

## We Do It Together

In the meantime, we keep on going. Keeping the connection between staff and students at our core. We are getting better at embracing our differences. Student-assistants are now part of our team, and are very welcome contributors. The community is growing. Students here know how to find each other for mutual support. More and more issue-based events are being organized for students and staff. We experience positive communication with the student advisers and the teaching staff concerned. We will reinforce our working relationship with ECIO in the coming years to continue our professionalization and to apply a structure to our endeavours for the long term. In the short term, we will work with students to build an accessible website to improve information provision. And we will strengthen our own learning through a network of committed staff. Because we cannot implement our core values in a tangible way without a certain level of passion. And of course, we will keep up the conversation. As much and as often as possible.

Student Success Centres, places where students can ask fellow students questions with ease, have now been set up for all our students, thus focusing on student wellbeing and connection. Coaches+ are increasingly available for students with educational and other support needs. We have recently started a pilot at some of our locations, where the student advisers' office works closely with a psychologist's practice in the region to prevent students from dropping-out because of a lack in specialist care.

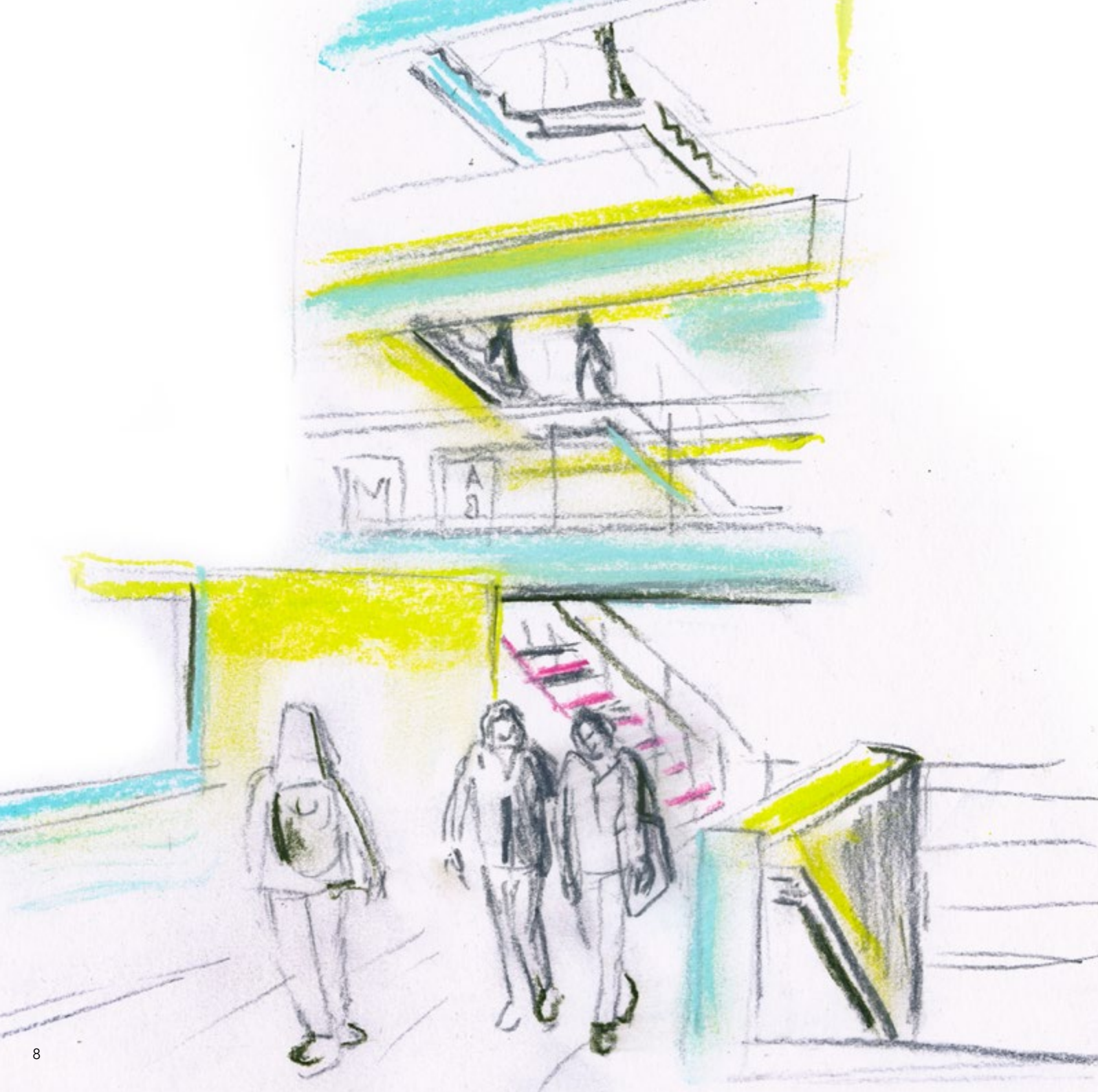
Alongside this, student wellbeing and student participation are given a lot of attention through large-scale campaigns to enable students to access available services more easily and quickly at the moment they may need them.

Our lecturers work together, through expertise and research, to provide support on issues such as inclusion, participation and wellbeing. The number of students within our university of applied sciences who feel supported and helped is growing.

But we still have a way to go. We cannot say (yet) that all our students feel heard and seen, and that all our endeavours are successful with immediate effect. But we will continue to focus, in collaboration with our students, colleagues and the ECIO, on improving how we connect with students and their support needs.







### A Different Form

Two visual artists and a theatre practitioner, all from Art Partner, spoke with students and staff from all areas of the college to create this booklet. These weren't 'ordinary' conversations. Guided by the artists, students with additional support needs sat down and talked with members of staff. They talked about what studying with support needs is like, and they shared personal experiences, both of where they felt that they had not been fully seen, and where they felt that they had been seen for who they are. They listened, to each other and to the silence between the words. They literally swapped places, taking on each other's role and advising each other from that position. Everyone's openness was impressive and inspiring.

These encounters inspired, nourished and gave insight to the theatrical dialogues and images that are woven into this book.

We have tried to avoid labels as much as possible in how we present the dialogues. A student is more than his or her disability.

That's not to say that labels aren't important. On the contrary. They have become part and parcel of the social and educational system: If you want to make use of extra facilities, psychological help, or extra care, you will -in most cases- need official proof or a diagnosis. That is just how it is. And as long as we continue striving to be an inclusive university of applied sciences for all our students, and view them above all as people developing into professionals, people who we want to be connected to, it's just fine for now.

*Our university of applied sciences is large, a lot is happening for students with additional support needs. It is impossible to be aware of all the initiatives within the different courses we provide. Let this be an invitation to share.*

### Reading Guide

The chapters and themes in this booklet are based on the Maatstaf committee's national policy framework. This framework stipulates facilities that are mandatory for educational institutions in order to provide reasonable and adequate assistance to students with a disability.

Per chapter, you will find a theatrical dialogue, tips which students and staff exchanged in the artist-led conversations, ECIO advice, and a QR code linking to more information.





# 1. The Question Behind the Question

Theme: Ensuring Quality

Students want to feel seen and heard. That is why the university of applied sciences is working on an adequate policy to make education accessible in every way to all students and to make studying feasible for all students. Also, students regularly ask for extra help; therefore, efforts are made to safeguard expertise in various forms of guidance for students requiring support.



Two people, a study coach and a student. They already know each other, have each other's number. They laugh at the building, so grey and square. I miss having green around me, says one. The other says, There are artificial plants now, which is a start. But the music room, Yes indeed, that is nice, and the coffee machine, Yes, because you can meet people there.

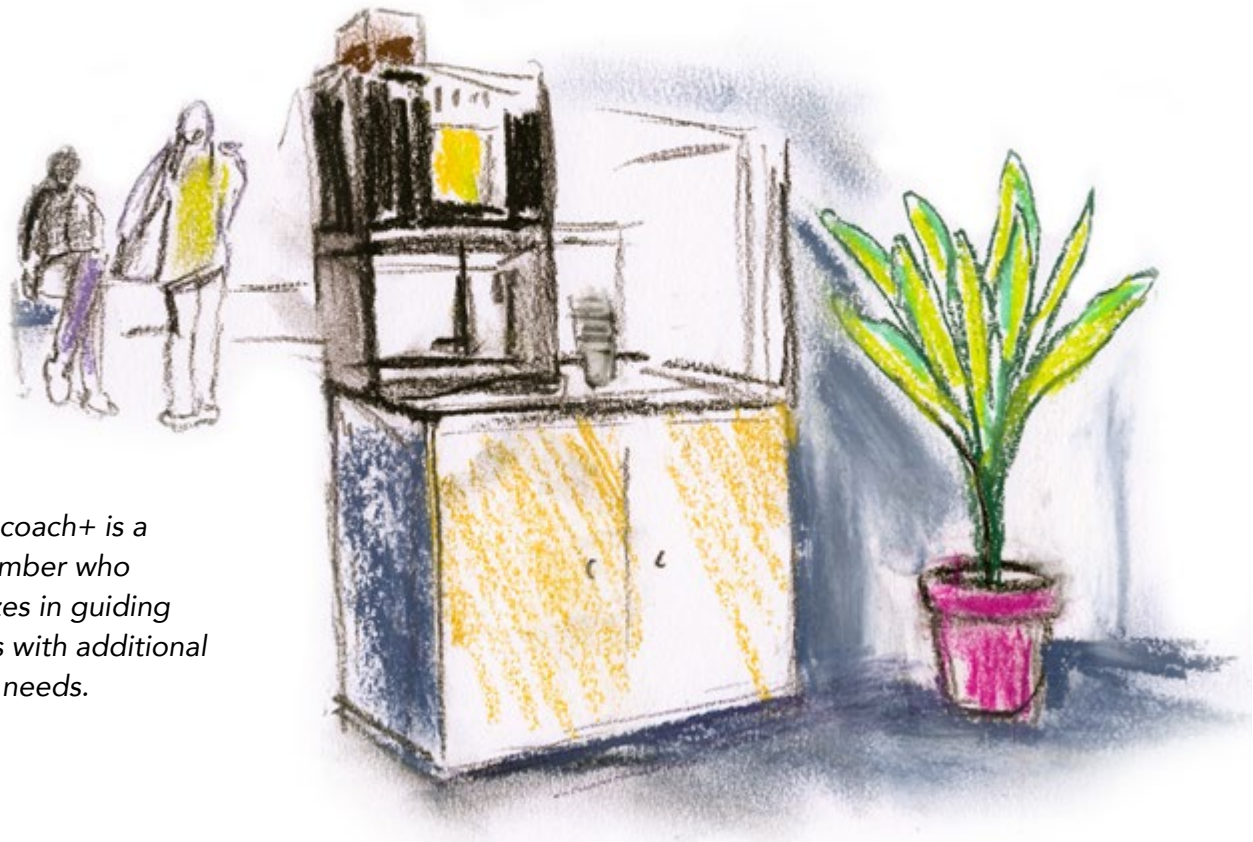
Study coach+: I feel terrible we didn't realise we were excluding you.

Student: You can get a very literal answer if you ask a question in a clumsy way.

Study coach+: Do you mean that you phrased the question awkwardly?

Student: I mean... it's hard to know exactly what help you need. I had to present an argument to explain what was going wrong. But sometimes I don't understand it myself.

Study coach+: It's clear we aren't good at hearing the question behind the question. But are we really aware of this?



A study coach+ is a staff member who specializes in guiding students with additional support needs.

Study coach+: You can't measure Personal and Accessible, it is an awareness, which you have to be attentive to even when hiring and training people. The teaching method is always the same in my experience. It develops, but always within the same framework. And some people just don't fit within that bandwidth. We need more staff who understand students who have additional support needs.

Student: And as a student you have to know yourself very well.

Study coach+: We would like to talk about personal development within the course, but there's no time for it.

Student: It's our fault too, you wouldn't believe how busy we are making ends meet. I have to run straight to work from class.

Study coach+: Do you know what we should do? Always ask, Have I answered your question correctly?

Student: It actually sounds very simple.

Study coach+: But it's not.

**Tips**  
"Students should engage in conversation. Let us know when you're having trouble. That you've encountered an obstacle and would like to talk about it."

"View students as professionals-in-training."

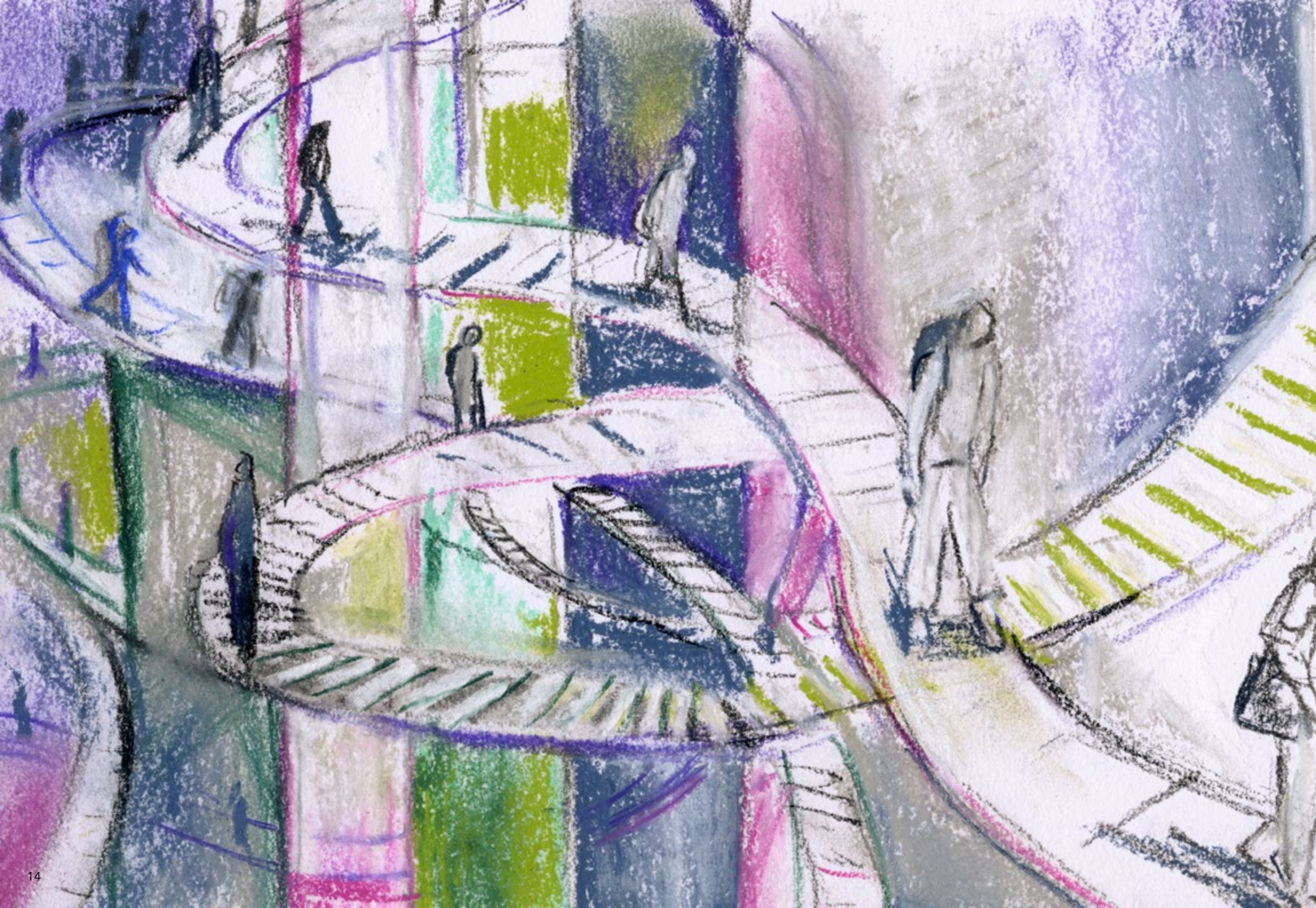
"What do I need as a member of staff? A good relationship with my colleagues, with the team. So that we can talk about anything, so that everyone can be themselves."

**Advice**  
The organizational structure of the college is a mystery to many students. Knowledge of it can help them to direct questions and communicate obstacles within the organization. Information about where and who shapes policies around studying with additional support needs for example. And insight into how students' personal stories and levels of satisfaction guide them.

Students with additional support needs are experts by experience. Are they actively invited to participate in discussions about accessibility and feasibility during their course of study? Students indicate their willingness to do so, especially if it is facilitated. It often leads to new ideas for strengthening bonds with fellow students, or for evaluating educational services. Or for your course vision on inclusive education and student care.







## 2. Resonance

Theme: Information and Education

The process of going to college often begins with wanting to know what the course is going to be like. Isn't it good if students can find information about studying with additional support needs at that point? What are other students' experiences? Who knows how to arrange extra time for the first test?

Students often tell us how important it is that information is easy to find, realistic and clear. And to (always and repeatedly) be told who to go to with questions. Every staff member has a part to play in this.



If information is hard to find, isn't applicable or doesn't speak to you, if your voice isn't heard or your vulnerability finds no resonance, the consequences can be dire.

Student adviser: Once you go to a student adviser, if you have gathered the courage, then you really have to be listened to... because you haven't gone to the supermarket; you need help, you can't do it all alone.

Student: I needed help. I have additional support needs. I have severe dyslexia, fear of failure. I asked for help, I fought for it. But I gave up.

Student adviser: Why?

Student: I didn't feel seen or heard.

Student adviser: When did you give up?

Student: In year one.

Student adviser: Which year are you in now?

Student: Year five.

Student adviser: Please come and see me!



Student: I do everything myself.

Student adviser: I'm very sorry to hear that.

Student: I'm tough, in the end I got help from outside.

Student adviser: But not all students will have your staying power, how many won't have dropped out...?

Student adviser: A lot is possible at this college in terms of individualised support. Really a lot.

Student: This is the first time I've heard that.

Student adviser: Really?

Student: Yes.

Student: You have your mentor for questions. There's Intranet Iris - way too much information there. There's moodle, a.k.a. noodle. Argh. I can't see the wood for the trees, I can't find what I'm looking for.

Student adviser: You couldn't find the people you needed then either?

Student: I'm telling you, I've given up. I'll get my certificate and be gone. Well ok, I have heard good things about you between classes.

Student adviser: Now I'm embarrassed...

Student: Maybe I should have met you sooner...

Student adviser: The university of applied sciences can be a contradictory place; we believe in inclusion, but there is an enormous pressure to achieve. Those two things get in each other's way. I am troubled if a student is upset to get marked with a seven. A seven is good!

Student: Fear of failure means that even if the examiner just stands behind me, I start crying, the letters start dancing and then everything goes black. That is fear of failure.

Student adviser: Students are vulnerable. In addition to student advisers, there are also support tutors. A lot of students don't know this, and nor do staff for that matter, there is confidential support for them too. Everyone needs a safe environment to be able to talk.

**Tips**  
"What works for students? The idea of being able to be yourself. Fitting in in your own way."

"Taking more time in order to make every step clear to the students is very worthwhile."

"What I expect from students? To show commitment be open. Be courageous."

**Advice**  
Students want reliable and appropriate information about what the possibilities of studying with additional support needs are. They want to feel addressed. An expert being available for questions and who will engage in a personal conversation at an open day, for example, is more than welcome. This could include the study adviser, educational support advisers, student adviser and of course, current students who have additional support needs.

Things develop quickly. It's important to keep information up to date. Students with additional support needs who have been studying for a while, know which information works for them. They can help improve things too. Around the use of specific words, for instance, and inclusive language and communication tools, such as the website or the intranet.

It can be complicated for students to disclose their additional support needs. An advantage of doing so is that support can be put in place sooner. What works? Always let students know how the personal information they share will be dealt with. Who will receive this information and why. And who won't.

Find information for students with learning support needs on this website:







### 3. A Reason for the Chaos

Theme: (Physical) Accessibility

Legislation stipulates that buildings, classrooms and facilities must be as accessible as possible. How important is it that students and staff don't experience unnecessary barriers when accessing the course? Can you always use the lift? Are spaces sheltered enough to prevent you from getting too distracted or overstimulated?



A staff member and a student are happy, they have both just been told that they have ADHD. The label brings peace of mind! Well, not peace exactly, but the chaos makes sense, has an explanation.

Facility staff member: We have the Service Point. You can ask 99 out of every 100 questions there. Every location has one. It is the linchpin in the support services wheel.

Student: I don't know where it is...

Facility staff member: Students shouldn't think they have to figure everything out themselves. Students are afraid to ask for help. But you get so much further if you do ask.

Student: I actually talked to the student adviser before I started my studies. What do you need? I was asked. What do you need?

Student: I went to a teacher around this time last year and said things weren't going well, that the depression was coming back. He literally said, Do you actually want that diploma?

Facility staff member: Seriously?

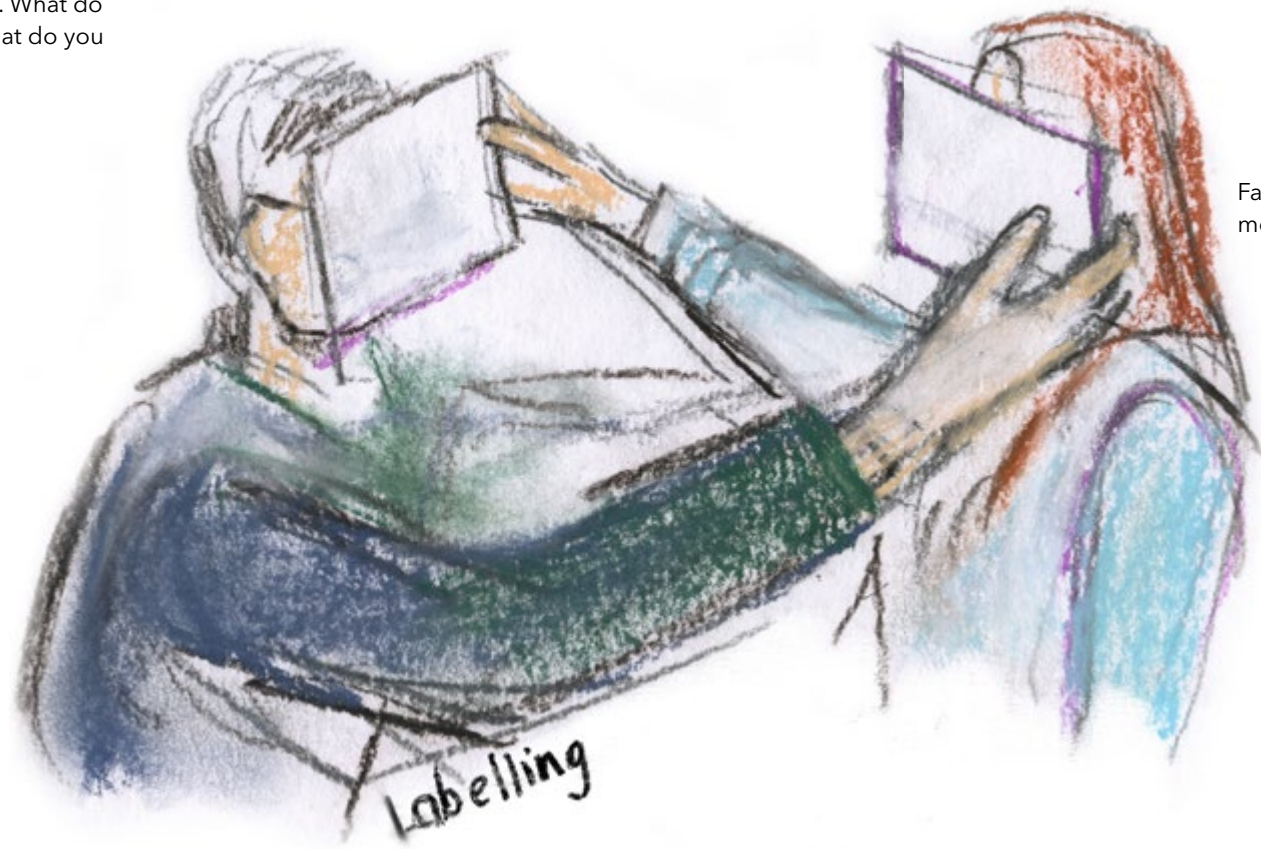
Student: Yep.

Facility staff member: I'm touched by how open you are.

Student: This building is a maze. Yes, obviously follow the signs if you can find them. The buildings are just not autism-friendly.

Facility staff member: Oh?

Student: So busy. There is some logic to how its numbered, but not really. And classrooms' numbers can suddenly be changed. But I do find logic in Inholland's illogic.



Student: Students and teachers who are also neurodivergent understand me more easily.

Facility staff member: Neurowhat?

Student: Basically, people like you and me, people with ADHD. And autistic people, and everyone in the DSM5 handbook.

Student: It continues to amaze me that some people have such a hard time putting themselves in other people's shoes.

Facility staff member: Your 'difference' can evoke a kind of primal fear in people, because it confronts them with their own shortcomings.

Facility staff member: It makes me sad that some students are sent from pillar to post. Because that's not what we're here for! That is what we want to avoid. We will get there together.

**Tips**  
"What works? If you are trying to get clarity around a certain issue, discuss it with a group of students."  
  
"Accept the limits of possibility. No matter how difficult that can be."

**Advice**  
Public buildings, such as educational institutions, have to comply with building regulations Building regulation is structured to guarantee a basic level of accessibility. Creating a physically accessible building provides opportunities to make spaces more enjoyable for everyone. Consider good acoustics, spacious corridors, short distances and good lighting. Students and staff with specific impairments have specific accessibility requirements. An annual tour through all the facilities with a group of students who have additional support needs usually results in very concrete pointers for improvement and leads to proactive solutions.

Building accessibility is not just about enabling independence. It is also about the sensory, spatial and social experience of spaces. How do you create space for comfort and routine? How do the spaces encourage social interaction and self-confidence? Physical accessibility contributes to inclusion in this way too.







## 4. Even if it's Fleeting

Theme: Guidance

Students who have additional support needs are advised to contact the educational support adviser and/or student adviser for any service provision needs. But who is there for students to call whenever things aren't going well? Who keeps their ears and eyes on how students are doing, and is able to refer them on when necessary?

Personal guidance is important for all students. Guidance is often especially welcome in the form of someone for students with additional support needs to talk to about how things are going, or to be able to discuss a taboo-issue around a disability.



Connection is crucial. It can make a huge difference even if it is, or seems to be, fleeting.

Student:	I never liked my course, it was alright, but not fun. I kept plugging away, because I didn't know what else to do. When COVID hit, it became even more difficult to like my course. I sank into a deep pit.	Educational support adviser:	You shouldn't immediately refer a student on to someone else, but think 'what else can I do?' Teachers have to be careful not to get stuck, keep learning too.
Educational support adviser:	I was ill for quite a while and didn't even get a call from my manager.	Student:	You shouldn't say 'you have to' too much.
Student:	I needed help and asked Inholland for it, but had to make do with a monthly meeting with the educational support adviser.	Educational support adviser:	You don't have to.
Educational support adviser:	Unfortunately, I experience a big difference in what we say and what we do. We have to show our own vulnerability too. There is not enough human contact, it bothers me that that doesn't happen.	Student:	You may. Do you want to connect with me? Can I connect with you? It doesn't have to be long, or complicated. Just a question, like, let me think, how are you?
Student:	Me, too. It's important to keep seeing each other as human beings, and ask each other how we're doing, and what the other person needs to feel better, to function better. Talk to each other and listen to both sides of the story. Make promises and actually take action. Express your appreciation for each other.	Educational support adviser:	How are you?
Educational support adviser:	I get energy from students, and appreciation. Thank you.	Student:	And then I'll try to answer honestly, and not the usual cheerful 'good' even when it's not true.
Student:	Dare to see us as equals.		
Educational support adviser:	You have to put yourself in your students' shoes. Imagine how they experience things.		
Student:	A lot of people find it hard to empathize.		



**Tips**  
"What works for students? Being honest with yourself about your insecurities. Nobody is perfect. Self-confidence and trust."

"Talk to students who have been in before, or who have been hanging around in the classroom for a while."

"Don't approach a student in front of everyone. Ask them after class. How are you? Can I help you with anything?"

**Advice**  
Good guidance stands or falls on expertise. How can a university of applied sciences ensure expertise? What makes someone an expert? Students indicate that for them it means you know which obstacles they could encounter in relation to their support needs. This knowledge can help to identify how a student is doing. And to determine who can contribute to solutions, within and outside of the institution. And when referral is needed.

What students value is a sparring partner who inspires confidence, asks open questions and dares to be clear. And who can sense when and where to speak to a student on a personal level. Consistency in supervision, such as a lecturer, educational support adviser, or student adviser, strengthen the bond between student and college course. The support of fellow students is also very valuable. It is not a given that students will have the same supervisor throughout their course. They do value it though.

Every key moment in the course of study has key figures who are able to offer support to students at that moment, and who can undertake important actions.







## 5. Staying in View

Theme: Learning Routes

Following and completing the standard curriculum and learning outcomes are the basis of what all students are expected to achieve. A disability can be a reason for an adapted learning route. For example, because a student takes longer to finish a course due to illness. Or because students have to take modules in a different order.

Students with additional support needs are expected to have control over their study choices. That isn't necessarily easy. A supervisor is an important link in making choices, and can also keep an eye on whether the adapted learning route is being followed.



Where do we stand? Side by side? On opposing sides? Or behind each other as support, a safety net, even to feel safe?

Lecturer: The basic idea is, everyone participates. It's not a game where someone is 'out'.

Student: The reality is, you veer off course, fall behind, and out of view.

Lecturer: Everyone should stay in view.

Student: I didn't have much contact with the school or my peers. I was between two worlds, the world of classical piano and that of Inholland. It was survival. I felt, I have to make it, I felt rushed. If I had been a top athlete there would have been a handbook, a route, but not for me. It felt like I was on my own. I was walking my own path, which I found pretty lonely.

Lecturer: You don't want a student to be lonely, but it's complicated if they take a different route.

Student: I did my best with everything but sometimes I felt unheard.



Lecturer: You have to be brave enough to speak up if something isn't working.

Student: Sometimes you have to pull feelings out of me.



Lecturer: It's ok if it takes longer, your way.

Student: This past year I have been seen and heard. Contact and support every Monday really helped.

Lecturer: We need to think even more about what things feel like for a person, give that space, acknowledge and name it.

Student: Walk next to each other, step by step, start by making sure you understand each other.

Lecturer: I don't know if I understand you.

Student: I can understand that.

Lecturer: Shall we start by me walking with you?

**Tips**

"First talk to a lecturer you get on with."

"What works for me as a student? More understanding, the power of the class. Not too pushy. That it's OK. That it is good my way, even if it takes longer."

"What I need as a member of staff? Being given space, filling in my own lessons. Appreciation and trust, a pleasant working atmosphere."

**Advice**

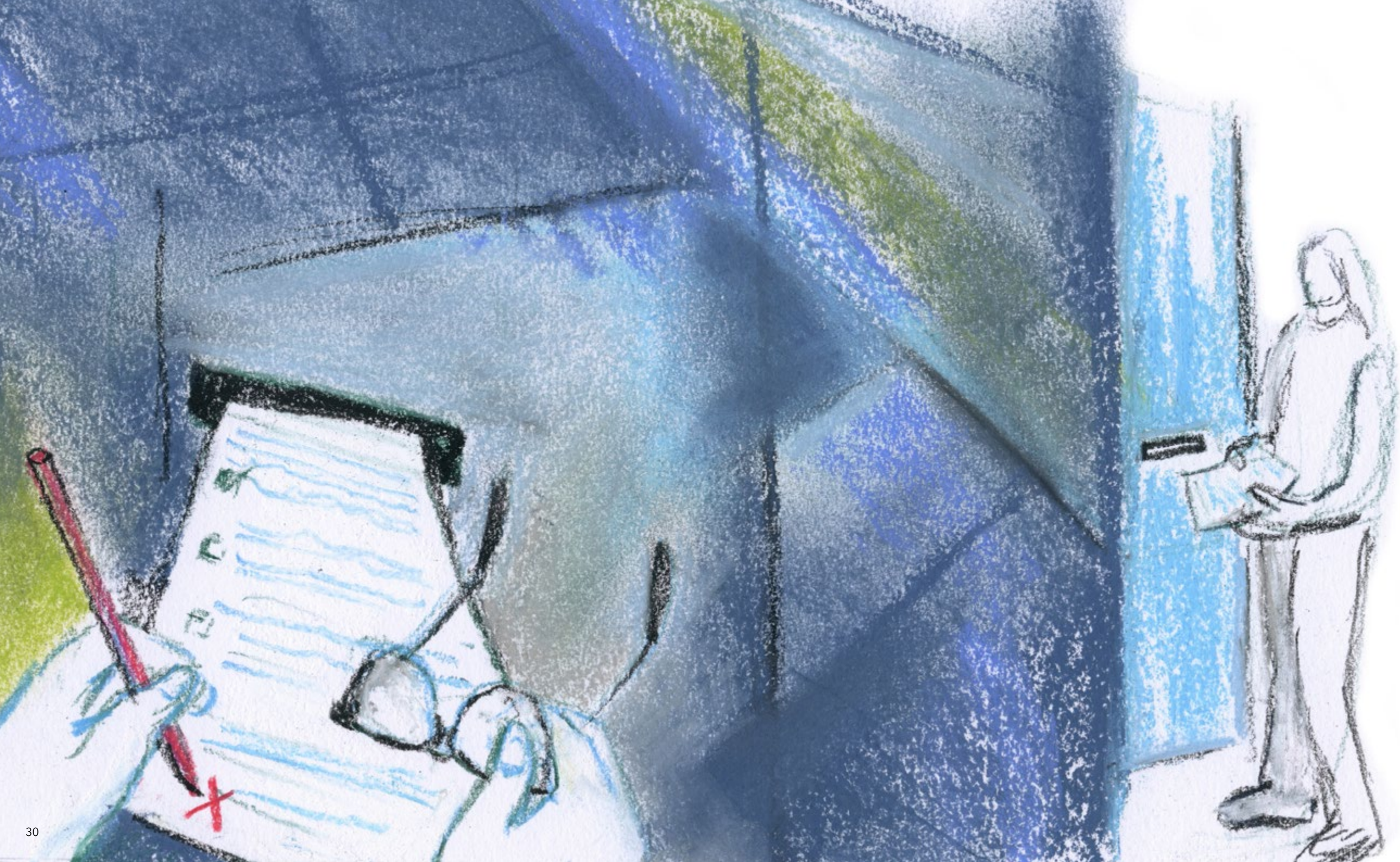
We are increasingly focussed on flexible education, personalized learning and anticipating students' wishes and those of the professional field. These developments in education are a good fit with what students who have support needs require.

A tailor-made learning route means that a course creates space for students with support needs to attain the final qualifications. By having extra time or support, or by following modules in a different order. This requires proactivity and awareness that you as the course provider share the responsibility with the student for designing, following and bringing the alternative learning route to a successful conclusion. And it requires you to be willing to learn from the experience.

The law stipulates that study material also needs to be suitable and accessible for every student. Individual customization takes time and money and is not necessary. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers suitable education with equal opportunities for every student. An educational design that takes the diversity in learning styles, backgrounds, interests and challenges into account. And so, is accessible for all students. Read more about UDL in this guide:







## 6. Two sides

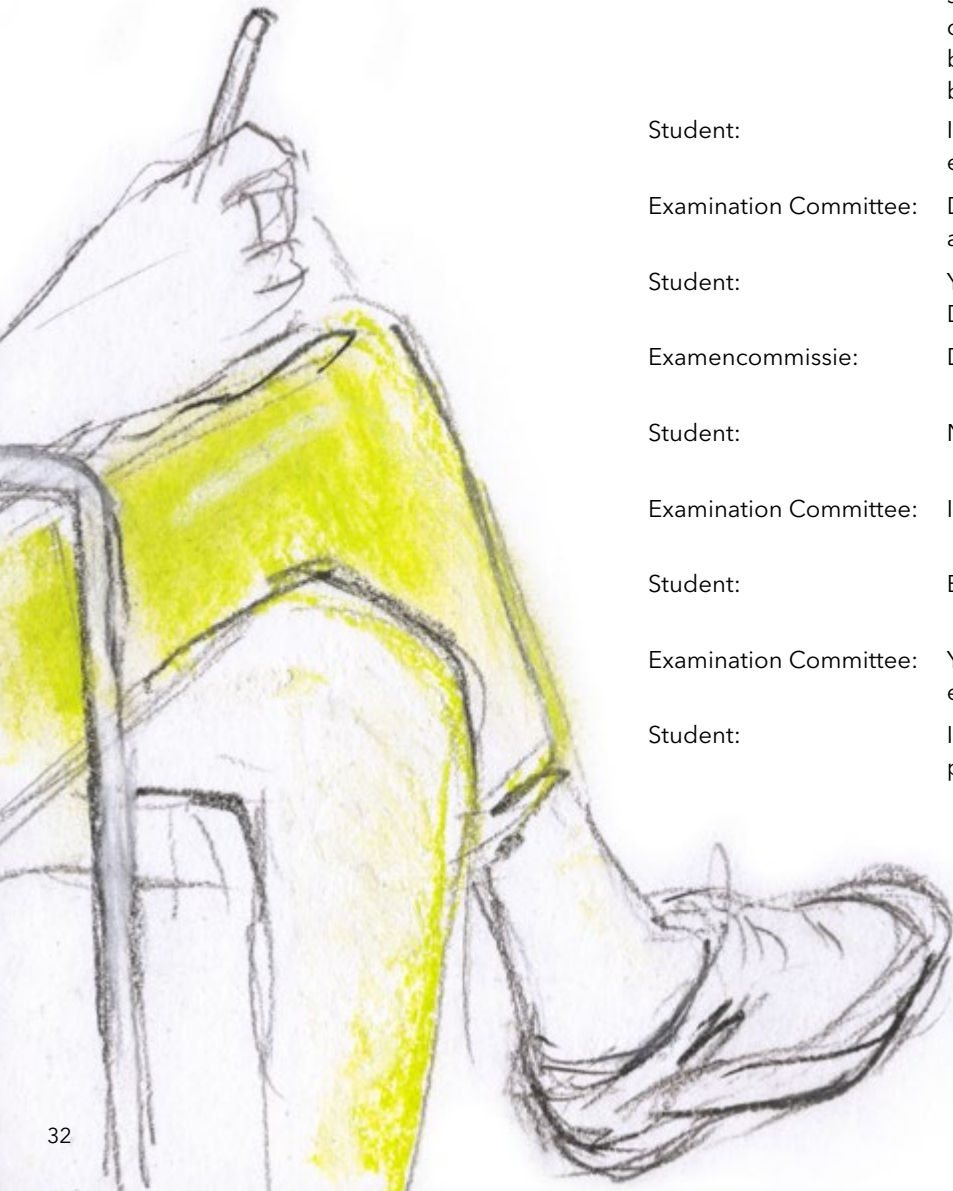
Theme: Testing and Examination

Students increasingly make use of extra facilities around testing. Because a student needs more time for a test due to a disability, for example, or needs to take an exam in a different form or at a different time.

That the quality, or degree of difficulty, of a course or exam must not change due to facilities around testing is paramount for everyone involved. Members of an examination board are key in making these accessible and inclusive tests and exams possible.



There are two sides to every story. At least two. Sometimes you can be so deeply entrenched in your own story, that is difficult to have insight into the other person's story.



Examination Committee: I don't know a single student in a personal way, precisely because we want to treat everyone equally.

Student: People with a disability, like me, how strange that sounds, more should be done for us.

Examination Committee: The Examination Committee is bound by rules. And there are so many requests. Not everything is possible. If every student wanted their own space because they can't cope with being overstimulated or something, it just wouldn't be possible, we'd have to look for three new buildings.

Student: I received a rejection e-mail without any explanation. I was having cancer treatment.

Examination Committee: Did you have a statement from the student adviser?

Student: Yes. What happens to those dean statements? Do you look? Do you read them?

Examencommissie: Do you have an educational support adviser?

Student: No.

Examination Committee: I would go to your educational support adviser.

Student: But I don't have one.

Examination Committee: You still have to attend the course. We are external, we only make decisions.

Student: I asked ten different teachers, Can you help me please? I was referred on every time.



Examination Committee: I don't know if it's possible in terms of privacy, but we, the Examination Committee, need more information about someone's disability to make better decisions, and offer things too.

Student: We only communicate in writing. It's a small miracle that we are sitting in the same room.

Examination Committee: There is still a lot of distance between us.

Student: I wish I knew how we could talk.

Examination Committee: I don't know exactly what is stuck in between us, but it won't shift easily.

Student: I've worked it out on my own.

**Tips**  
"What do I expect? A student who shows initiative and respect. Open to guidance that may or not be there."

"What helps me as a student? The ability to see beyond yourself."

"What do I need as a student? Space, despite boundaries."

**Advice**  
The Examination Committee handles requests for adjustments to tests and exams. Requests are not always honoured because the Examination Committee has boundaries to guard. It is important that they do so. Students indicate that this makes them aware of the distinction in roles within the organization. Acknowledging the difference in roles helps in the mutual search solutions that both meet the students' needs and assures the quality of examinations.

Sharing good, approved alternatives, and student experiences, provide insight into the legal wiggle room for adjustments in testing.

Investing in good relationships between staff with different roles is worthwhile. By scheduling regular meetings for example, and by speaking to each other informally without a direct reason. This investment pays off the moment you have a concrete student case.







## 7. Know Yourself

Theme: Internship: Should I mention it or not?

An internship is the perfect opportunity for students to gain work experience. A suitable internship is not always easy to find, especially for students with a disability. This could be because a student might require some adaptation within the internship. Or because a student is wary of disclosing the disability.

An internship supervisor can support the student in these circumstances, also in having conversations about the above, so ensuring that the internship is and remains accessible.



A conversation between a member of staff and a student, Superman. Superman wears sunglasses indoors and out to filter all input. Inventive!

Superman: I was told that being autistic I'd be better off not starting the course.

Internship coordinator: Why would anyone say that? What does that achieve?

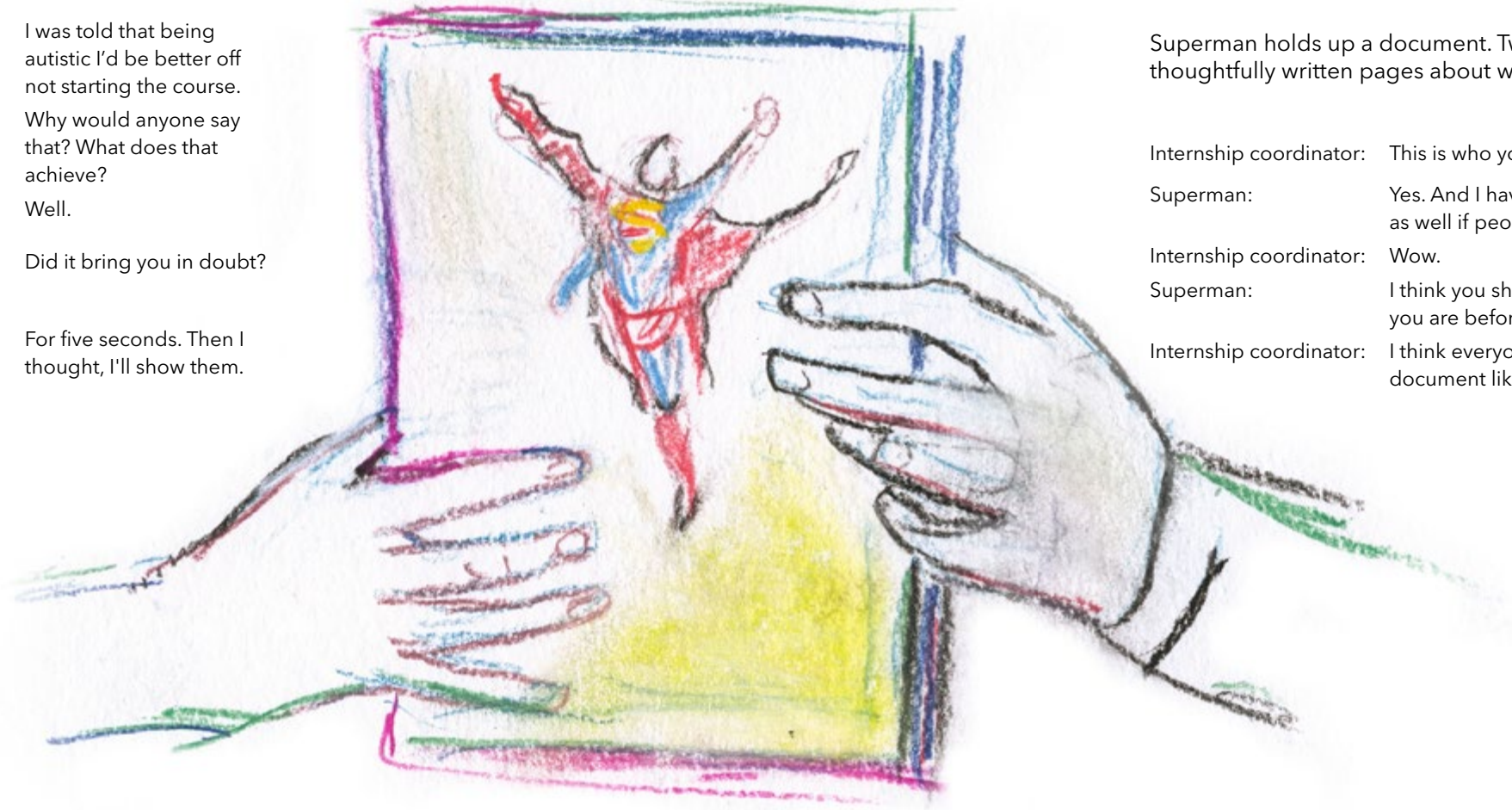
Superman: Well.

Internship coordinator: Did it bring you in doubt?

Superman: For five seconds. Then I thought, I'll show them.

Internship coordinator: How can I help you?

Superman: Good one... I still have to find a way to formulate that.



Internship coordinator: With regard to internships, I evaluate any support needs per student. I don't have any guidance or manual on how to do it, which I don't mind. And I don't know what everyone 'has', which I like. I don't want to stick a label on anyone.

Superman: You would almost have to be a psychologist to be able to guide every student towards a diploma.

Superman: On my MBO course I didn't say that I am autistic. And that went wrong... since then I've learned to explain how I work so well that I don't scare employers off anymore. I can name my weaknesses and my strengths. I'm doing well.

Superman holds up a document. Twelve thoughtfully written pages about who he is.

Internship coordinator: This is who you are?

Superman: Yes. And I have a short version as well if people need it.

Internship coordinator: Wow.

Superman: I think you should know who you are before you're 30.

Internship coordinator: I think everyone should make a document like that.

**Tips**  
"What do I need as a student? That you can be who you are, a pleasant learning environment, connections for later in your working life. An open attitude, inclusive."

"As a student, accept that there are limits to what is possible."

"A pitfall for students? Taking too long to speak up when things aren't going well. Shame. Wanting to do it alone."

**Advice**  
Students have to keep choosing whether or not to disclose a disability. A place within the college where they can go to with questions about personal development and the route to work is therefore welcome. And that they know how to find that place.

It is not a given that students who have support needs will remain within the college's vision after graduation. Students like to choose in what way and how regularly they want to stay involved. An alumni network assists contact and can add to further development of young people who find it more difficult to find their way in the labour market.





# Asking = The Most Normal Thing in the World

Epilogue inspired by a conversation between Nina van Doesburg, member of the Education Policy Department (and former student), and Jasper Stedema, student.

If your hands are full, you ask someone to open the door for you. And if there turns out to be no door handle, you look for it together. One helps the other through the door, because otherwise they won't get any further. This is the case for students with support needs. There is a call for help.

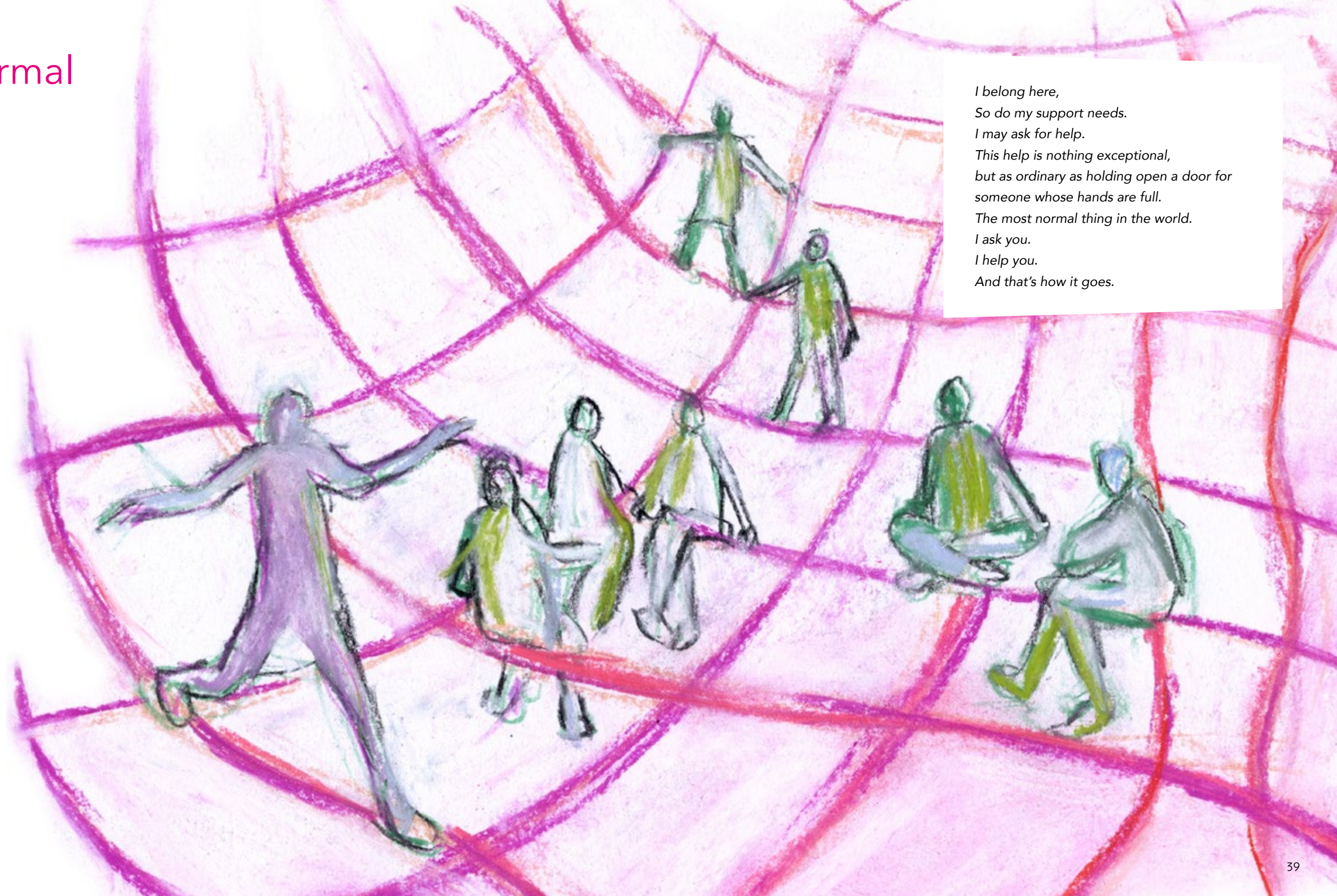
A whole world can lie behind that request for help; the 'coming out' - shall I mention it or not? the stigmas - 'Oh, you are autistic. I know someone who's autistic who likes this and this', 'but I don't', and the journey of self-discovery someone has already made - a twelve-page manual.

Because not everything is easy, these students are (by necessity) very advanced in terms of self-knowledge. Because you can't formulate your support needs just like that. You need to know how you are.

Couldn't that actually be a goal for all of us? To know who we are, what we love, what we find difficult, what we need help with?

So that we can empathize with others better, and don't have to hide our vulnerability, but can let it be taken into account in what we do and say.

*I belong here,  
So do my support needs.  
I may ask for help.  
This help is nothing exceptional,  
but as ordinary as holding open a door for  
someone whose hands are full.  
The most normal thing in the world.  
I ask you.  
I help you.  
And that's how it goes.*





# To Conclude

Irene Witteman and Judith Jansen

Four years ago, in a café in Den Bosch with Bart Muusse, a passionate former colleague of Education Policy at Inholland University of Applied Sciences. We dreamt of a book full of images and stories of staff and students with additional support needs. The talks and meetings within Inholland around the Studying with a Disability policy had just come to an end. The stories wouldn't let go of us; they deserved a stage.

We share successes, wishes and our own vulnerability in our collaboration. Developing and implementing a policy for studying with additional support needs demands perseverance and the courage to keep on insisting that everyone matters. We continue to seek out the effective routes within the education system, together. We can do that only in connection and on the basis of personal meetings. Those are therefore the building blocks of this book too.

We would like to thank all students and staff for their openness and involvement. Without their courage, knowledge and dedication, no book.



# Research and More

## “Seen and Heard” No achievement without relationships

Focussing on a sense of connection within Inholland University of Applied Sciences sounds so obvious, but it won't happen by itself. It starts by letting students feel that they are seen and heard. It is striking that often very small things make the difference, such as knowing a student's name, saying hello in the hallway, asking how they are. An open, approachable attitude with an awareness of the student experience. This makes it easier to talk about feelings and experiences, stress or self-doubt for instance, before they progress to being a sign of illness or cause for dropout. These seemingly small things can have a big, sometimes hidden, impact.

Rutger Kappe  
Professor of Study Success  
Inholland University of Applied Sciences



## “Towards an Inclusive Working Environment”

What stays with me most is having to make a part of yourself -namely your disability- invisible in order to be regarded as a fully-fledged colleague; instead of embracing someone and ensuring that reasonable adjustments are put into place so that people who can and want to work can -despite their disability- actually get on with working. Inclusion is about being yourself, about being seen and valued for who you are. We saw in our research that organizations focus mainly on the diversity of the workforce, but that the people we interviewed focused on inclusion: see me as a person and let me truly belong.

Machteld de Jong  
Professor of Diversity Issues  
Inholland University of Applied Sciences



## Together We Make an Impact: #jebeginthier campaign

Studying has much more to it than just following your studies. It is finding your feet in student life, making friends and developing yourself. Successfully completing your studies so you can face the future with a good feeling. How? By having positive contact with other students, teachers and coaches, by having the right tools and guidance. But above all, by doing it together. We are increasing the visibility of what Inholland has to offer in terms of student wellbeing support with the campaign #jebeginthier and a webpage which provides an overview of the available support. Authentic stories and concrete examples guide students and staff to the right support at the time they need it.

Carlijn Hendriks  
Student Wellbeing Campaign Director  
Inholland University of Applied Sciences



**ECIO** advises and supports tertiary education institutions in making education more inclusive. So that all students have optimal conditions for study in the course of their choice, and can progress on to a job that suits them: learning without barriers.

We work together with diverse (regional) partners, student organisations, interest groups and the business community to realize impact. We focus on future-proof education that moves with the continuing digitalization and flexibilization, and which is student-centred.





# Colophon

## With thanks to

All the students and staff who were prepared to have such open conversations, with each other and with the artists.

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[www.ecio.nl](http://www.ecio.nl) or [www.inholland.nl](http://www.inholland.nl)

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