



2020 Annual report
UvA Confidential advisers
for inappropriate behaviour

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University of Amsterdam

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Introduction

Any inappropriate behaviour (sexual harassment, aggression, violence, bullying, discrimination) towards students or staff at UvA will adversely impact the safety of their study or work environment. This may have serious consequences.

Students and staff who experience inappropriate behaviour can contact one of the UvA's confidential advisers for support and for help in seeking a solution to the problem. This annual report sets out how many times the confidential advisers provided support to students and staff in 2020 and the types of inappropriate behaviour involved. It also looks briefly at the role, position and training of the confidential advisers.

The annual report describes the nature and number of reports of inappropriate behaviour by organisational unit and has the following functions:

- an informative function:* it specifies the number and nature of reports of inappropriate behaviour;
- a highlighting function:* the number of reports may be an indication that (parts of or the implementation of) existing policy on inappropriate behaviour needs to be modified;
- a justificatory function:* it enables the confidential advisers to justify the use of time and resources.

The report does not analyse the background to the reports of inappropriate behaviour made to the confidential advisers. This information is confidential and must not be divulged by the confidential advisers. The aim of this report is not to document instances of inappropriate behaviour. The number of reports should primarily be seen as an indication that people know how to access a confidential adviser. However, the report may provide further insights into the state of play with regard to social safety at the UvA. For further information, reference should be made to the employee monitor or the student social safety survey, for example.

1. Confidential advisers for inappropriate behaviour

Confidential advisers for inappropriate behaviour are there to support students and staff who experience inappropriate behaviour. Staff members not employed by the UvA can also consult a confidential adviser. Confidential advisers provide support and can help find a way to stop or de-escalate the inappropriate behaviour concerned. Confidential advisers guarantee confidentiality and will never take action without the consent of the person reporting the issue. The confidential advisers document reports of inappropriate behaviour in such a way that they cannot be traced back to the person who reports them. If necessary, confidential advisers refer people on to professional sources of support within the UvA or externally. Confidential advisers can also help students and staff submit a complaint to the complaints committee.

Positioning / appointment / facilitation

Every faculty and shared service unit of the UvA has at least one confidential adviser for inappropriate behaviour, appointed by the Dean or the Secretary General of the University. Confidential advisers are appointed for a period of 3 years and can be re-appointed without limitation. Confidential advisers are formally facilitated by the Secretary General/Dean so they can fulfil the role of confidential adviser effectively within their existing function.

Freedom of choice

The confidential advisers don't just provide support to students and staff from their own units: any student or staff member, wherever they study or work, can consult one of the confidential advisers. Consequently, students and staff have a choice as to who they contact and can choose to consult someone who is either close to their own unit or indeed slightly more distant from their own unit, for example.

Number / recruitment / diversity

In 2021 the UvA has 20 employees who fulfil the role of confidential adviser for inappropriate behaviour. Some of them act as confidential advisers for students only, some for staff only and others for both students and staff. Vacancies for the role of confidential adviser are filled through a process of open recruitment on the UvA's job vacancy page and through newsletters or an email to staff. Table 1 gives an overview of the changes in the number of confidential advisers in 2020.

Table 1 Changes in and makeup of confidential advisers in 2020

Confidential advisers	Total	Academic staff	Support and management staff
In 2021	20	6	14
Started in 2020	5	3	2
Stopped in 2020	6	1	5

When appointing confidential advisers, as much attention as possible is paid to the makeup of the group: the aim is to put together a diverse group of confidential advisers across the whole of the UvA (e.g. in terms of role, gender and background). The independent position of the confidential adviser is crucial for the performance of the tasks involved. Consequently, the role of confidential adviser must not conflict with any other role or function of the staff member concerned. Of the existing confidential advisers, 6 have an academic role and 14 have a support role.

Professional training

The confidential advisers have all been trained by an accredited training institution for confidential advisers. In addition, the confidential advisers coordinator organises professionally led peer review meetings and a training meeting on an annual basis. In 2020, however, these meetings did not take place due to COVID-19 restrictions. Online peer review meetings took place in February 2021. During evaluations, participants expressed their satisfaction with these sessions.

2. Reports of inappropriate behaviour by students and staff in 2020

Tables 2 and 3 provide an overview of the number of reports of inappropriate behaviour made to a confidential adviser by students and staff.¹ It is not possible to draw hard and fast conclusions from the making of these reports regarding the extent to which the environment within the UvA is socially safe or otherwise. Students and staff are not obliged to consult a confidential adviser if they experience inappropriate behaviour. The employee monitor and the student social safety survey (see Appendix 2) give a better indication of the incidence of inappropriate behaviour at the UvA.

The number of reports is documented on the basis of the unit from which the reporter of the inappropriate behaviour originates, even if the reporter chooses to consult a confidential adviser outside of their own unit. The reports are further subdivided by the nature of the inappropriate behaviour.²

Table 2 Number and nature of reports by students

Faculty	Sexual harassment		Aggression/violence		Discrimination	Bullying	Stalking	Other
	Verbal	Physical	Verbal	Physical				
ACTA					1			
Amsterdam Law School	2				2	4		2
PPLE	2							2
Faculty of Economics and Business	2	1			6	2		6
Faculty of Humanities	2	1	2		2	2		4
Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences	1	1	1		2	1		4
Faculty of Science		1	6					2
Total	9	4	9		13	9		20

In 2020, 44 out of a total of more than 34,000 students reported inappropriate behaviour to a confidential adviser. The number of reports of inappropriate behaviour by students fell by 8 compared with 2019 (52 reports).

Referrals

In the case of 7 reports of inappropriate behaviour, the reporter was referred on by a confidential adviser to a professional source of support such as a doctor or a (student) psychologist. None of the reports resulted in the submission of a formal complaint to the complaints committee.

¹ This is the total number of reports for distinct cases of inappropriate behaviour. It may be that one person reports several distinct cases or that several members of staff submit a single report together.

² Although sometimes the same report involves several types of inappropriate behaviour, generally speaking reports involve one main type of inappropriate behaviour. In this annual report, the reports are based on this main type of behaviour only.

Relationship between reporter and ‘perpetrator’

When documenting the number of reports by students, the relationship between the reporter and the ‘perpetrator’ of the inappropriate behaviour was also taken into account. In the case of 13 reports, the inappropriate behaviour was between students themselves and in the case of 31 reports it was between a student and a member of staff.

Other reports

The ‘other’ category comprises reports which did not involve inappropriate behaviour and/or where the nature of the behaviour was different to the above-mentioned categories. In the case of the 20 reports in this category, the reporter was generally referred on to another body within the UvA (e.g. study adviser, student counsellor or the examinations board) and/or the behaviour was different to the above-mentioned categories.

Table 3 Nature of the reports by staff

Unit	Sexual harassment		Aggression/violence		Discrimination	Bullying	Stalking	Other
	Verbal	Physical	Verbal	Physical				
ACTA	1		8			3	2	
Amsterdam Law School						2		14
PPLE							1	
Faculty of Economics and Business					3	4		1
Faculty of Humanities	1	1	3		4	6		5
Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences			3		3	4	1	4
Faculty of Science			5				2	3
AC						1		1
FS								
ICTS								
University Library			1			2		3
Other Units and Executive staff	1	1	2		1	3		
Total	3	2	22		11	25	6	31

In 2020, 69 out of a total of more than 6,700 staff reported inappropriate behaviour to one of the UvA’s confidential advisers. The number of reports of inappropriate behaviour by staff fell by 15 compared with 2019 (84 reports).

Referrals

In the case of 3 reports of inappropriate behaviour, the reporter was referred on by a confidential adviser to a professional source of support such as a doctor, psychologist or staff welfare service. None of the reports resulted in the submission of a formal complaint to the complaints committee.

Other reports

The ‘other’ category includes reports which did not involve inappropriate behaviour and/or where the nature of the behaviour was different to the above-mentioned categories. In the case of the 31 reports in this category, the reporter was referred on to another body within the UvA (e.g. confidential adviser for individual legal status, P&O or manager) and/or the behaviour was different to the above-mentioned categories.

3. Reflection on the reports of inappropriate behaviour submitted in 2020

Reports by students and staff

In 2020, the confidential advisers received a total of 113 reports of inappropriate behaviour from students and staff – 23 fewer than in 2019 (Table 4).

Table 4 Reports of inappropriate behaviour submitted to confidential advisers 2017-2020

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Students	37	27	52	44
Staff	37	49	84	69
Total	74	76	136	113

The decrease in 2020 in the number of times staff members and students consulted a confidential adviser is probably attributable to the fact that in 2020 the majority of the UvA's students and staff primarily studied or worked from home due to COVID-19 restrictions. The same trend can be seen in the 2021 employee monitor, which shows that 83% of respondents said that they had not experienced any inappropriate behaviour. This percentage was 78% in both 2017 and 2018. The increase in home-working and home study also resulted in an increase in inappropriate behaviour online.

Reports in relation to the employee monitor and the student social safety survey

Given the percentage of staff and students who said in the employee monitor and the student social safety survey that they had experienced inappropriate behaviour, you may wonder why the number of reports of inappropriate behaviour to the confidential advisers is not higher. This can be explained in part by the fact that both the employee monitor and the student survey include gossiping, theft and vandalism as socially unacceptable behaviour. These types of behaviour do not usually prompt people to approach a confidential adviser unless they take place in the context of inappropriate behaviour (e.g. bullying). Also, in 2020 there were more options for reporting inappropriate behaviour, e.g. the ombudsman and the external hotline for social safety. In addition, some staff and students who experience inappropriate behaviour will seek support from family, friends and colleagues and will not feel the need to talk to a confidential adviser.

4. Relevant developments in the field of social safety at the UvA

Creating a safe, healthy and pleasant study and work environment is no easy task and requires an ongoing investment in time and focus. It calls for an integrated package of measures, communication and good examples, which support and reinforce each other. A brief overview of the key developments in the field of social safety in 2020 is set out below.

- In October 2019 the UvA appointed an interim ombudsman in preparation for permanent recruitment to the role. The ombudsman has the authority to conduct an investigation into, mediate in and advise on structural issues and malpractices within the university. As an independent and impartial party, the ombudsman handles reports of inappropriate behaviour and tip-offs from students and staff. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Executive Board has extended the appointment of the interim ombudsman. The new ombudsman is due to be appointed in 2021;
- The UvA Code of Conduct for staff and students was amended in 2020. The Code of Conduct serves as a guide for appropriate and socially safe behaviour at the UvA;
- In response to cases within a faculty, the Executive Board asked an external commission to investigate the operation of the system of reports and complaints relating to social safety at the UvA. This commission issued an advisory report in November 2020;
- The social safety taskforce presented its final report to the academic community in February 2021 with recommendations for further improvements in policy, culture and communication and an integrated approach to the theme of social safety for staff and students;
- The UvA has appointed a temporary social safety manager to coordinate the various initiatives in the field of social safety;
- The UvA has contracted the Centre for Public Sector Labour Relations (CAOP) to set up and operate an independent social safety hotline. Current and former UvA staff and students can call this hotline to report inappropriate behaviour. Reports are handled confidentially, and the person making the report decides what information is or is not passed on to the UvA;
- The confidential adviser regulations were amended in 2020 and will be submitted to the central representative advisory bodies for approval in 2021, together with the revised regulations for the handling of complaints by staff and students of the UvA and the new regulations on the ombudsman;
- An e-learning course on social safety and a campaign to raise awareness of social safety are currently being developed.

5. Recommendations for strengthening the UvA's policy on social safety

Based on the reports submitted to confidential advisers for inappropriate behaviour, the confidential advisers also make a number of recommendations relating to the prevention and/or de-escalation of inappropriate behaviour:

- The UvA is an international university and is home to students and staff from a wide variety of cultural and social backgrounds. It is crucial that the UvA continues to pay attention to the intercultural skills of students and staff. This primarily applies to teaching staff because they deal directly with diverse groups of students;
- Managers play a key role in creating a safe, pleasant and healthy study and work environment. It is important therefore that managers are well equipped and facilitated to perform this role effectively;
- There is still a great deal of confusion over the role of the confidential advisers. Consequently, it is important to make it clear to students and staff what they can and cannot expect when consulting a confidential adviser;
- Every year, confidential advisers are consulted by students who want to tip the organisation off about inappropriate behaviour. Often they don't want to go as far as submitting a formal complaint and they don't need the support of a confidential adviser. The confidential advisers document these reports, but this task does not fit in well with their other duties. It is recommended therefore that a separate facility be set up for this purpose;
- It is not always clear to students who they can contact within their department if they experience inappropriate behaviour from a fellow student. It is recommended that each faculty/department makes it clear to students who they can turn to if they experience these types of issues;
- The confidential advisers need an administrative and record-keeping system to support their activities. Clearly, this system must comply with all the security requirements in terms of the safeguarding of privacy.

Appendix 1 Definitions relating to inappropriate behaviour

Inappropriate behaviour

- *Sexual harassment*
Unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours or other verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour where one of the following always applies:
 - submission to such behaviour is explicitly or implicitly used as a condition of a person's employment;
 - a person's submission to or rejection of such behaviour is used as a basis for decisions which affect that person's studies or work; such behaviour aims to adversely affect a person's academic or professional performance and/or to create an intimidating, hostile or unpleasant study or work environment, or results in a person's academic or professional performance being adversely affected or in the creation of an intimidating, hostile or unpleasant study or work environment.
- *Discrimination*
Making a distinction between individuals on the basis of religion, beliefs, political opinions, race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, civil status, pregnancy or other characteristics where there is no justifiable reason for doing so.
- *Aggression and violence*
Any incident in which a person is harassed, threatened or attacked either mentally or physically in circumstances which relate directly to the performance of work. Harassment is a form of implicit aggression which involves psychological pressure, sometimes in combination with the abuse of a formal or informal position.
- *Bullying*
The systematic exercising of unwanted emotional or physical abuse, by one person or a group of people, generally on one other person who cannot (or is no longer able to) defend themselves (e.g. making jokes at someone's expense, excluding or insulting someone or damaging their property).
- *Stalking*
The systematic, deliberate violation of a person's privacy, with a view to forcing that person to do/not to do or to tolerate something or to instil fear into them.

From: UvA Regulations on Confidential Advisers

Appendix 2 Employee Monitors 2017-2021 and student social safety survey 2019-2020

Employee Monitor

The two-yearly Employee Monitor was sent out to UvA employees in May 2021. The table below is based on the 2017, 2019 and 2021 employee monitors and provides an overview of the percentage of employees who say that they have experienced various types of inappropriate behaviour. It is important to note here that, generally speaking, people don't seek help from a confidential adviser for behaviour such as gossiping, theft and vandalism.

Table 5 Social safety Employee Monitor 2017-2021

	Employee monitor 2017 (N = 2,673) %	Employee monitor 2019 (N = 3,001) %	Employee monitor 2021 (N = 2,360) %
Gossiping	17	16	10
Bullying	7	7	6
Aggression (verbal)	9	10	9
Physical violence	0	0.3	0.2
Sexual harassment	0.9	1.4	0.9
Discrimination	5	5	5
Theft/vandalism	2	2	0.5
Stalking	0.5	0.5	0.6
Other	4	4	5

In the 2021 employee monitor, 83% of respondents said that they had not experienced inappropriate behaviour. In 2019, this percentage was 78%.

As in 2019, the 2021 monitor indicates that 64% of employees believe that inappropriate behaviour can be discussed openly, while 10% (2019: 11%) said that they did not believe this to be the case. 26% of respondents (2019: 25%) said they didn't know whether inappropriate behaviour could be discussed openly.

Of the employees who said in the 2021 monitor that they had experienced one or more types of inappropriate behaviour, 33% (2019: 38%) reported it to their manager, to a confidential adviser or to the ombudsman. Of these employees, 33% (2019: 28%) said that sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't report instances of inappropriate behaviour and, as in 2019, 34% said they did not report instances of inappropriate behaviour. The main reason for not reporting an incident is a lack of confidence in follow-up (49%). 41% of respondents said that the incident was not sufficiently serious to report and 36% were afraid of repercussions.

Student social safety survey

In the second half of June 2020 a survey was sent out to a sample of 8,312 UvA students. The monitor documented which types of inappropriate behaviour students had experienced at the UvA over the past academic year. The response rate was 12.7% (1,055 students). The circumstances in which this second measurement took place differ in two important respects from the first measurement in 2019:

- Due to the coronavirus pandemic, students spent far less time at the UvA. From the end of Block 4 (13 March) there was no on-campus teaching. Although the monitor defines "inappropriate behaviour at the UvA" as "inappropriate behaviour at the university, including in the context of your student accommodation, student association or study association", given the coronavirus restrictions, it is likely that certain types of inappropriate behaviour will be less common.

- Shortly before the invitations to take part in the survey were sent out, the newspaper NRC Handelsblad published an article on inappropriate behaviour by a lecturer in the Faculty of Humanities. It is likely therefore that the subject matter of this survey was more top-of-mind than it was at the time of the previous measurement. It is difficult to estimate what impact this has on the results of this survey.

In order to obtain a clear picture of the UvA as a whole, the results for over- or under-represented characteristics were weighted to the total student population. For the characteristics of faculty, gender and origin, a weighting factor was determined on the basis of the deviation of the response from the population. Consequently, the answers of some respondents are weighted more or less heavily for the statistics that relate to the UvA as a whole.

The table below provides an overview of the percentage of students who say that they have experienced various types of inappropriate behaviour. Here too it is important to note that people generally don't seek help from a confidential adviser for behaviour such as gossiping, theft and vandalism.

Table 6 Student social safety survey 2019-2020

	Student survey 2019 (N = 634) %	Student survey 2020 (N = 1,055) %
Bullying	5.4	8.0
Aggression (verbal)	4.0	5.7
Physical violence	1.3	0.5
Sexual harassment	3.7	3.9
Discrimination	6.5	7.5
Stalking	0.9	0.7
Gossiping	16.1	18.7
Theft/vandalism	3.8	2.2
Other	1.7	2.0
Not experienced any inappropriate behaviour	73.7	71.5

Compared with the previous year, there has been a decrease in inappropriate behaviour in physical proximity (e.g. physical violence, stalking). There was an increase in inappropriate behaviour which can also take place online (e.g. bullying, verbal aggression and discrimination). 71.5% of all the respondents in the survey said that they had not experienced any inappropriate behaviour. This means that 29.5% of respondents said that they had experienced one or more types of inappropriate behaviour. Roughly 22.1% of the respondents who had experienced inappropriate behaviour had experienced such behaviour more than a year ago.

There are differences between groups of students. Women, for example, experience inappropriate behaviour more often than men and reported more instances of sexual harassment in the survey. In addition, international students experience more inappropriate behaviour than Dutch students. Moreover, within the group of non-EEA students, there are major differences according to region, with students from Asia in particular experiencing relatively more discrimination.

Of the respondents who experienced at least one type of inappropriate behaviour, 3.2% said that they had reported it. The survey did not ask to whom they had reported the behaviour. Consequently, the numbers from this survey relate both to official complaints and to reports made to study advisers and confidential advisers, for example. The extent to which behaviour is reported depends on the type of inappropriate behaviour experienced and who it was perpetrated by. Physical violence was the most reported, followed by theft. The difference in cases reported between verbal aggression/harassment sexual harassment is significant. Sexual harassment is reported almost half as often.

In almost all types of inappropriate behaviour, fellow students are most likely to be the perpetrators. Just under a quarter of cases of sexual harassment and discrimination are perpetrated by lecturers; almost a third of cases of verbal aggression or harassment are perpetrated by a lecturer. Inappropriate behaviour by a lecturer is reported relatively more often than inappropriate behaviour by a fellow student. This is interesting to note because the hierarchical relationship between student and lecturer could make students reluctant to report the behaviour. On the other hand, an unequal balance of power could make students more inclined to approach an official body rather than trying to resolve the situation themselves.