# UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

# Breaking the silences:

## Social safety at the University of Amsterdam (UvA)

*Problem analysis and recommendations of the Social Safety Taskforce
January 2021*

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...when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent we are still afraid
So it is better to speak...

*Audre Lorde (1978)*

Silence enables the reproduction of the culture of harassment and abuse. When we don't speak about violence we reproduce violence. Silence about violence is violence.

*Sara Ahmed (2016)[1]*

A culture of silence is a dangerous culture.

*Amy C. Edmondson (2019)*

1.   Speaking Out [Blog] https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/06/02/speaking-out/, geraadpleegd op 27 november 2020.

# 1.  Introduction

Knowledge flourishes in creativity, debate and experimentation – not fear. In an organization dedicated to learning, teaching and discovery, the silence of students and of scientific and support staff who are afraid to speak up, to ask questions, or to propose changes hinders study, education and research alike. Although social safety is the necessary condition for *all* learning and working at the university, national and international research shows that universities and academic culture more broadly often fail to provide this basic foundation (see e.g. Dauber & Warner 2019; Naezer et al. 2019; UUK 2016). Recent cases at the Faculty of Law[2] and the Faculty of Humanities[3] at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) show how transgressive behaviour can continue unabated for years, often with disastrous results for the individuals affected.

This is the final report of the Social Safety Taskforce. The report addresses everyone who studies or works at the University of Amsterdam. It is a call to break the silences surrounding transgressive behaviour: the silence of victims who do not report or are not heard; the silence of colleagues and bystanders who know something is amiss but do not act; the silence of people in positions of leadership who do not recognise problems, listen, or respond in time; and the silence in our training about acceptable and unacceptable conduct and how to prevent and address its occurrences.[4] Before we address the substantive findings, however, we describe the assignment and goal of the Taskforce, its approach and offer a roadmap of the report.

## 1.1 Goal and assignment of the Social Safety Taskforce

The Social Safety Taskforce was established by the UvA Executive Board in September 2019 to propose an integrated approach to strengthening social safety for all UvA students and staff and to catalyse improvements in culture and policy within our university.

In a nutshell, the assignment of the Taskforce has been:

1. Promoting and inspiring improvements in policy, culture, and communication with regard to social safety at the UvA;
2. Providing solicited and unsolicited advice on social safety;
3. Including all layers of the organisation in the working process, being visible and jumpstarting the conversation about social safety.

The Taskforce was given no responsibility itself for ensuring social safety or amending policy. Instead, its recommendations are addressed to the Executive Board.

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2. More information about this case: https://www.uva.nl/en/shared-content/faculteiten/en/faculteit-der-rechtsgeleerdheid/news/2019/05/reaction-to-nrc-publication.html.

3. More information about this case: https://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/about-the-university/social-safety/safe-environment/safe-environment.html.

4. This ambition is in line with the recommendations of an external committee, which has found that managers, students, and employees alike believe that these issues have not been sufficiently discussed until recently (De Gaay Fortman et al. 2020, 8). The committee has concluded that social safety at the UvA needs "encouragement".

The Taskforce was asked to recommend improvements in policy, culture and communication in the following areas: 1) strengthening the organisation and prevention; 2) monitoring and signalling; and 3) the physical and online environment.[5] The formal side of ensuring social safety, including the handling of complaints and the positions of the Ombudsperson and confidential advisors, has been examined elsewhere[6] and reforms are underway.[7] As the willingness of students and staff to speak up depends on their trust in the system (Fernando & Prasad 2018), this report largely focuses on their subjective experiences.

## 1.2 Approach of the Taskforce

### Solicited and unsolicited advice and communication

The Taskforce had regular exchanges with key actors in ensuring and regulating social safety: the president of the Executive Board, the departments of Human Resources and Legal Affairs, the Ombudsperson, and the Social Safety Coordinator, appointed since September. The Taskforce advised on and contributed to various initiatives and plans, including the Strategic Plan and the Code of Conduct, an e-learning program for people in management positions, the social safety support guides for students and employees, information on the UvA website, the formulation of the assignment of the external committee social safety, and a survey about the social safety of students.

### Promoting the conversation on social safety

The Taskforce developed a concept for an awareness campaign with input from all layers of the organization (for details see recommendations in the final section). Part of the campaign are performances of a theatre play on social safety in each faculty, followed by discussions with the respective deans. The programme had to be cancelled twice, in the spring and fall of 2020, due to the Corona measures. In addition to raising awareness, the Taskforce had hoped to learn from the post-performance discussions about inter-faculty differences, for example concerning experiences with specific problems and interventions to increase social safety. The plays will be performed as soon as the corona regulations permit. The Taskforce has delivered a detailed outline of the programme.

### Identify defects in policy, culture, and communication in all layers of the organisation

The Taskforce collected and analysed both internal and external knowledge about our university to understand where improvements are necessary and to develop recommendations.

*Internal knowledge includes:*
1. Letters, notes, and policies of the formal dialogue between the Executive Board and the Central Works Council (COR), the Senate, and the Central Student Council (CSR);
2. Decentral reports about activities, policies, and meetings (e.g. on Faculty level);
3. Various surveys;
4. Nineteen conversations with administrators from across all faculties and service units, student representatives, PhD representatives, and experts on specific topics. The Taskforce selected these actors to identify problems and the need for improvements in management, as well as to gain an overview of ongoing initiatives;[8]

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5.   These domains are identified in the Overzichtsnotitie Sociale Veiligheid (Policy overview on social safety). https://www.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/uva/nl/over-de-uva/over-de-uva/sociale-veiligheid/190205-overzichtsnotitie-sociale-veiligheid-def.pdf (in Dutch, pdf).
6.   See the BING report (2019, January 29) Report Quick Scan University of Amsterdam; De Gaay Fortman et al. 2020 "Social safety requires reinforcement" Investigation into the social safety system at the University of Amsterdam. https://www.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/uva/nl/over-de-uva/over-de-uva/sociale-veiligheid/2020.10.30-report-external-committee-on-social-safety.pdf.
7.   For an overview of various actions in the field of social safety, see: https://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/about-the-university/social-safety/safe-environment/safe-environment.html
8.   Between September 2019 and May 2020, the Taskforce spoke with the deans of all faculties, the directors of operational management of the faculties, the directors of service units, the board of the PhD Council, the Senate, a delegation from the CSR, Amsterdam United, the CDO, the HR department of the UvA and the VU.

5. Five group conversations with students, PhD students, scientific staff, support staff, and employees in management positions. The aim of those conversations was to distil group-specific problems and needs. Participants had been recruited through announcements in various newsletters;

6. Eighty-one online questionnaires submitted by students and employees. The questionnaires have been provided to those who could or did not want to participate in group conversations. See appendix 1 for the protocols and ethical guidelines that we developed for the group conversations and questionnaires; see appendix 2 for summaries of the conversations and questionnaires;[9]

7. Calls for help. The Taskforce received regular requests for advice or support from all corners of the university, ranging from individual employees to heads of departments, research groups, teaching management, and student organisations. While these requests exceeded the mandate of the Taskforce, they provided an unexpected but important contribution to the identification of problems (e.g. fragmentation of expertise) and needs (e.g. guidance for those in managerial positions);

8. Unsolicited advice. Students, scientific and support staff reached out to us through mail, via telephone and on social media or spoke out publicly about social safety at the university and what they thought needed to change.

Finally, the work of Taskforce benefitted from regular exchanges with, among others, the Chief Diversity Office (CDO), the Ombudsperson, and a sounding board group consisting of representatives of the Central Works Council (COR), the Central Student Council (CSR), the Senate, the Chief Diversity Office[10] (CDO) and a Faculty Diversity Officer. During these meetings the Taskforce received feedback on its work in progress, plans and activities.

*External knowledge consists of:*
1. Reports that external committees have written about the UvA;[11]
2. Dutch and international research, reports and policy papers.

The work of the Taskforce stands on the shoulders of this rich internal and external knowledge. We have tried aim to approach social safety from the perspective of a broad range of groups at the UvA and to contextualise our insights in broader developments in higher education. We aim to break some silences already by presenting multiple visions and experiences regarding social safety. We also try to fulfil our assignment by including all layers of the organisation in our analysis. The size of the UvA, the relatively short time span, and the complexity of the issue has inevitably imposed limits on what we have been able to present here. Also, this report is no scientific study. Additionally, we highlight things that are not going well more than those that work reasonably well already. Despite these and other inevitable limitations, we hope that this report will empower students and PhD candidates, support and scientific staff, academic leaders, and administrators to break the silences and to act proactively within their own roles and capabilities.

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9. A total of 197 people started filling out the anonymous questionnaires (68 percent Dutch, 32 percent English). Of these, 81 people submitted the questionnaire, 20 of which were students and 61 employees. Only submitted questionnaires are included in this report. See appendices 1 and 2 for more detail about the procedure concerning the interviews and questionnaires.

10. For more information about the sounding board see https://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/about-the-university/social-safety/taskforce/sounding-board/sounding-board.html

11. For a list of consulted documents, see appendix 3.

## 1.3 Roadmap

The five sections of this report provide the basis for the three overarching recommendations, detailed at the end: a social safety expertise team, periodic social safety self-evaluation, and an awareness campaign. The ability to recognise socially unsafe situations is a precondition for breaking silences. In the following sections we therefore ask: what is social safety? Who is responsible for ensuring social safety of students and employees? Who is most vulnerable? What are the manifestations of transgressive behaviour? Is such behaviour incidental or structural? Answers to those questions are diverse.

Next we describe three root causes of feeling unsafe: asymmetrical power relations and hierarchies, the current system to handle reports and complaints – henceforth the social safety system – and its limits, and the lack of diversity and structural inequality. Subsequently, we present proposals for the domains strengthening the organization and prevention, monitoring and signalling, the physical and online environment and the subjective experience with the formal social safety system. We then list specific measures that we recommend for students, PhD-students, employees, and Faculty management and the Executive Board. The final section presents three overarching recommendations and explains how these can help the organisation to implement many measures that we propose for the domains and specific groups.

# 2.  Social safety: meaning and responsibility

A shared conceptual framework is a fundamental first step for solving problems. How does the UvA define social safety and the responsibility for its safeguarding? How does this understanding of social safety relate to the perspectives of employees and students?

## 2.1 Defining social safety

Social safety is a catch-all term. The UvA follows a broad definition, articulated in the Dutch Working Conditions Act (*Arbowet*): 'Social safety in the workplace means knowing and feeling that one is protected from undesirable forms of behaviour and the threat of danger resulting from human actions within or in relation to the university.' Social safety thus encompasses the physical and digital environment and affects the entire UvA community: *all* permanent and temporary staff, students and visitors. Ensuring social safety is the shared responsibility of directors, staff, and students, with a special responsibility for those in leadership positions.[12]

In our conversations and in the online questionnaires submitted to the Taskforce, UvA students and staff across faculties and services had similar understandings of social safety, with slight differences in emphasis regarding who is responsible for ensuring it. Many emphasized that social safety is a 'feeling' generated by the behaviour of those in one's direct learning or working environment. Ideally, 'freedom', 'respect', 'empathy' and 'being able to be oneself' are core values in the culture of a department or service, where raising difficult issues such as transgressive behaviour does not have adverse consequences. Most were clear about antitheses of social safety: fear and feelings of being trapped, excluded, or mistrusted.

## 2.2 Responsibility for social safety

The employees and students who spoke with the Taskforce or shared their vision in the online questionnaires believe that the UvA as a community is responsible for ensuring social safety for all. This also includes bystanders and visitors. At the same time, those in key positions have more power and thus particular responsibility. The individuals we talked to and who submitted online questionnaires unambiguously saw ensuring social safety as the duty of deans and managers, and, ultimately, of the Executive Board.

There is lack of clarity concerning the chain of responsibility, as well as who is responsible for which problems at the University – the ensemble of routines to deal with social safety that we call the "social safety system". The discussions and questionnaires submitted to the Taskforce revealed that the UvA's social safety system is poorly understood by both students and staff. Our conversations revealed that those in leadership positions are also struggling with lines of responsibility and that not all are equally informed. Many underlined the need for clear university-wide communication about the legal frameworks, norms, values, and behaviour the UvA stands for – which permeate all layers of the institution.[13]

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12.   University of Amsterdam (5 February 2019) Overzichtsnotitie Sociale Veiligheid.
13.   This point emerges from the views of staff and students collected by the Taskforce, both from the questionnaires and from the group discussions.

Some groups brought up specific problems. People in leadership positions argue that social safety is related to one's place in the academic or workplace hierarchy, which determines one's relative dependence and vulnerability. Both scientific and support staff thought that leaders of departmental and work units – and more generally those in 'higher positions' – are responsible for ensuring social safety and thus creating a pleasant working environment.

Students focus less on management and more on the university as a whole. Most of their day-to-day contacts are with lecturers and study advisers, whom they see as responsible for ensuring social safety. Many students explicitly mentioned that any operational definition of social safety should consider intersecting problems arising from power structures based on among others gender, ethnicity/ race, religion, sexuality.

Students expressed how their experiences outside of the university, with their fellow students as well as with persons from outside the UvA community, influence their studies. Experiencing transgressive behaviour – including but not limited to sexual harassment and sexual violence – can have serious, long-term consequences. The boundaries between what takes place on and off campus is thus not always clear. For some students, the two worlds merge.

There is general agreement on the meaning of social safety. In theory, there is also agreement on the actors that need to ensure social safety at the UvA. Yet, how exactly this functions in practice – who needs to act, how and when - is unclear for many. While this is problematic, this particular issue is relatively easy to tackle in communication and with training (e.g. see recommendations on prevention).

# 3.     Feeling unsafe: some numbers

In discussions about social safety at the UvA, people often ask: is feeling unsafe a structural or an incidental problem? Which forms of unacceptable behaviour occur? Are they typical of the UvA or certain departments and faculties, or do they reflect a broader pattern? We present the available numbers first, before illustrating some examples of transgressive behaviour.

Caution is warranted. Numbers can give us a general impression of the forms and extent of transgressive behaviour affecting different groups in the UvA community. But we know from cases inside and outside the UvA, as well as from the scientific literature, that transgressive behaviour in academia is systematically under-reported (see e.g. Bondestam & Lundqvist 2020; Clark-Parsons 2018; Gronert 2019; Welsh et al. 2006).[14] The UvA *Employee Monitor*, for example, did not signal the long-standing problems within a department at the Faculty of Law.

### UvA Monitor on Social Safety among Students[15]
The 2020 UvA Monitor on Social Safety among Students found that 29 per cent of students had experienced inappropriate behaviour, whether in their studies, in student housing, or in student associations. Malicious gossip was mentioned most often (19%), while four per cent said they had experienced sexual harassment. Women (6.6%) were more likely to be sexually harassed than men (0.5%). International students were more likely to experience transgressive behaviour than Dutch students. Non-European students – most notably students from Asian countries – experienced more discrimination. While transgressive behaviour mostly occurred among students, teachers were also reported to engage in behaviour such as sexual harassment (23% of cases), discrimination (24%), and verbal aggression or intimidation (29%). In only 3.2 per cent of all cases was the incident in question reported.

### Netherlands Network of PhD Candidates (PNN) survey[16]
A PNN survey in 2020 found that 18.6 per cent of PhD students in the Netherlands have experienced some form of transgressive behaviour. These include cases of discrimination (8.6%), breaches of the Code of Conduct on Scientific Integrity (4.9%), sexual harassment (3%), or 'other', including bullying and harassment (4.5%). Female PhD students (20.5%) were more likely to suffer transgressive behaviour than their male counterparts (13.4%). Women experienced the lion's share (95.5%) of sexual harassment, while men were more likely to experience discrimination based on nationality (45.9%), ethnicity (32.4%) or skin colour. Discrimination based on nationality was most common (61.9%) among international PhD students regardless of gender; discrimination based on gender was most common (63.3%) among their Dutch peers. Most PhD students knew where to go for support within the institution; just under half (47.6%) had made use of such services. For cases of discrimination, where to turn for support was less clear.

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14   https://www.sciencemag.org/features/2020/01/academic-bullying-desperate-data-and-solutions
      (consulted 18 December 2020).
15.  The UvA has conducted an internal survey on social safety, following discussions with the Central Student Council
      in 2019.
16.  Matthijsen, L. & Kanbier, N. (2020) Asking the relevant questions: Workplace malpractices: Discrimination Sexual
      Harassment Breaches of the Code of Conduct. Promovendi Netwerk Nederland (PNN).
      PNN-PhD-Survey-Report-Workplace-malpractices.pdf (hetpnn.nl) consulted on 7 January 2020.

### UvA/ACTA Employee Monitor[17]

The UvA/ACTA Employee Monitor 2019 reports that 22 per cent of employees have experienced transgressive behaviour in the workplace. Topping the list is malicious gossip (16%), followed by verbal aggression and intimidation (10%), bullying, psychological violence and exclusion (7%), discrimination (5%), theft and vandalism (2%), sexual harassment (1.4%), stalking (0.5%) and physical violence (0.3%). Inappropriate questions, lying and negative behaviour (4%) were also mentioned. In most cases, perpetrators were colleagues. Most employees (64%) thought that transgressive behaviour could be addressed. The incidents were formally reported in 38 per cent of cases within the respective institutions.

### VAWO Academic Union survey[18]

In the VAWO's 2019 survey of Dutch university employees, 49 per cent of respondents considered their working environment socially unsafe, women somewhat more so than men. Among the respondents, 44 per cent had personally experienced transgressive behaviour – again women more often than men. Also here, malicious gossip topped the list. In addition, respondents mentioned the withholding of information, abuse of power by supervisors or professors, exclusion, discrimination, humiliation, bullying, and sexual harassment. Most respondents (73%) attributed transgressive behaviour to poor leadership.

Taken together, these surveys give a general impression of transgressive behaviour at the UvA and at Dutch universities more generally. We see differences between groups. Those that have traditionally been under-represented in academia – women, people of colour, international students – or are at the bottom of the academic hierarchy due to their career stage – for example PhD students – are particularly vulnerable. This reflects a broader pattern found in harassment research: marginalized groups, including women, people with disabilities, and ethnic and sexual minorities, are more likely to be the victims of harassment than others (Naezer et al. 2019: 10; Mahmoudi 2020).

Being marginalized in more than one way adds to one's vulnerability (Collins 1989; Hollis 2018; Hudler 2019; Jordan-Zachery 2019). Research on sexual harassment shows that international students are the most vulnerable; their unfamiliarity with the environment makes them an attractive target for perpetrators (Brubaker et al. 2017). For academics, age can be a risk factor. Young academics experience negative behaviour such as bullying more often than their older counterparts, who are more likely to be part of decision-making bodies in the institutional hierarchy (Zabrodska & Květon 2013).

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17. Results Employee Monitor UvA 2019. Information available for employees UvA https://medewerker.uva.nl/en/content-secured/az/employee-monitor/results-2019/results-2019.html.
18. "Social safety of employees at universities: research results" May 2019 on behalf of FNV VAWO.

# 4.        Manifestations of transgressive behaviour

Which kinds of transgressive behaviour do different groups at the UvA experience or witness? Answering this question is essential for employees and students to recognise whether they experience or observe an unsafe situation. Here we draw on our discussions across different layers of administration, group conversations with students and staff, the online questionnaires submitted to the Taskforce, and sources such as the report on transgressive behaviour from the Dutch Network of Female Professors (LNVH).

The LNVH report distinguishes between different, sometimes overlapping, forms of transgressive behaviour in the academy: academic sabotage, sexual harassment, physical and verbal threats, disparagement, and exclusion (Naezer et al. 2019: 19-23). Its authors point out that incidents are rarely isolated but structurally linked to various forms of intimidation. Experiencing transgressive behaviour often has negative physical, psychological and professional consequences, including depression, decreased motivation, fear, post-traumatic stress, and increased alcohol consumption (see Bondestam & Lundqvist 2018; McLaughlin et al. 2017; Naezer et al. 2019).

Although the LNVH typology is based on the experiences of female scholars, it largely mirrors that of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU).[19] As the different forms of transgressive behaviour – and how they are related[20] – reflect findings in the literature (see Harford 2018; Metzger et al. 2015; Romero-Sánchez et al. 2017; Savigny 2014), we begin with a typology:

1. Academic sabotage: impeding the intellectual work of scholars and students. Sub-types include rendering contributions and ideas invisible; refusing promotion; not supporting career development; refusing access to physical or digital spaces; describing colleagues or students as incompetent; physically or financially ruining research.
2. Sexual harassment: any conduct with a sexual connotation that has the purpose or effect of affecting a person's dignity. It can be verbal (comments, innuendo), non-verbal (inappropriate staring, certain gestures), or physical (touching).
3. Physical or verbal harassment: psychological, physical or verbal harassment, aggression, threats or assault, including shouting, swearing or getting too close physically. It can take the form of a hate crime motivated by hatred based on ethnicity/race, religion, sexual orientation, a disability, or a transgender identity (UUK 2016: 10).
4. Disparagement and micro-aggressions: behaviour that intends or results in humiliating people in front of others, or without other people present. It can be expressed in sexist, discriminatory, or racist jokes. Wrapped in humour or disclaimers such as 'I'm not racist, but…', these kinds of expressions can be subtle (Wekker et al. 2016: 48).
5. Exclusion: behaviour that socially excludes people. For example, by speaking Dutch in international company, socially isolating people by ignoring them, not involving them, or not inviting them to activities (typology by Naezer et al. 2019: 19-23; VSNU website).

All of these manifestations of transgressive behaviour occur in some form at the UvA. With the above typology in mind, incidents can be clearly categorized. A crucial point here is that incidents are not always clear cut for victims and bystanders. There is often a large grey area in which a border may or may not have been crossed at any given time.

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19.    https://www.vsnu.nl/Arbocatalogus_psa.html (consulted 18 December 2020).
20.    For example, the relationships between sexist humour, social acceptance of sexism and violence against women; denying academic contribution and sexism; accommodating care responsibilities and appreciation of academic work.

## 4.1 Academic sabotage

Various forms of sabotage came up in our discussions. Supervisors mentioned that promotion is a complex issue, which can lead to tensions. In some cases, these tensions are interpreted as academic sabotage. Some members of the support staff, for instance, highlighted the lack of clear criteria to take part in specific talent programs to further prepare themselves for the next step in their career. Another example that came up was the refusal of access to shared digital environments.

Career obstruction has been addressed by the Central Works Council (COR) as well as the Works Council of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences (OR-FMG). Building on the LNVH report (Naezer et al. 2019), an online meeting in November 2020 sought to recognise the problem and make it more visible. Participants in safe break-out rooms shared examples and possible solutions on the themes of exclusion (e.g. from board positions relevant for promotion), intimidation, abuse of power, and the glass ceiling.[21]

Students mentioned exclusion or not being kept informed of developments in group assignments by fellow students. Bullying and malicious gossip by fellow students, especially online, meant that some students no longer dared to participate in seminars actively. Female students said they were more reluctant to speak when male students dominated discussions (see also Slaughter 2012).

PhD students mentioned a male-dominated culture in research seminars, in which more senior men in particular take up all the space and time. Some female PhD students felt overwhelmed or dared not say anything, rendering them less visible. This robs them of chances to develop professionally, which can have negative long-term consequences for their careers.

Our conversations and the online questionnaires revealed that substantive disagreements can generate social unease. Students mentioned feeling intellectually constrained when their ideas were rejected on epistemological or ideological grounds; others felt punished through low grades or harsh criticism for choosing particular topics for their thesis or writing assignments. PhD students also mentioned this. These are tricky issues in teaching and PhD-supervision. Providing feedback and criticism on work in progress and ideas is one of the most important tasks of lecturers and PhD-supervisors; being able to deal with criticism is part of the learning process of students and PhD-students. Whether criticism is fair will vary from case to case. Some students feel that they have insufficient room to develop themselves due the lack of diversity in the classical canons and the curricula and research traditions that are built on those canons (see e.g. Roggeband et al. 2016). Views and approaches deemed heterodox can lead to prolonged bullying and the denigration of academic work by established scholars.[22]

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21. See report of meeting 12 November 2020 OR FMG and COR on career obstruction: https://medewerker.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/medewerkersites/fmg/fmg/ondernemingsraad-fmg/adviezen/najaar-2020/rapport-gebroken-carrieres-05-20-04.pdf.
22. See the experience of Jo Boaler at Stanford University: https://web.stanford.edu/~joboaler/ (consulted 20 December 2020).

## 4.2 Sexual harassment

Our discussion of sexual harassment among students and staff is informed by developments elsewhere. A recent review of the international research found the under-reporting of sexually transgressive behaviour in academia to be a persistent, structural problem (Bondestam & Lundqvist 2018). Some examples:

With one in five female students sexually harassed during their studies, President Barack Obama set up a Task Force in 2014 to turn the tide:

> *Most often, it's by someone she knows – and also most often, she does not report what happened. Many survivors are left feeling isolated, ashamed or to blame. Although it happens less often, men, too, are victims of these crimes. (White House 2014: 2)*

Universities Australia launched its *Respect. Now. Always.* program in 2016 to prevent sexual violence and to improve how academic institutions respond.[23]

Sexual harassment does not only take place on campus. It also happens at conferences (Sapiro & Campbell 2018), during field work (Mügge 2013; Sharabi 2020), and during internships (Diamond-Welch & Hetzel-Riggin 2019). The line between professional and private life is often less clear during trips and informal networking events such as drinks and dinners. Perpetrators can be colleagues and students from other universities, patients, or research participants.

The various monitors, as well as the well-publicised cases at the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Humanities show that sexual harassment and violence also occur at the UvA. In our discussions, we heard of male students sexually harassing female students in communal areas such as libraries. While examples of sexual harassment and violence were hardly mentioned in in the conversations with and online questionnaires submitted to the Taskforce, this does not mean that the subject does not affect the UvA community. Following the publicising of the case at the Faculty of Humanities in 2020, students and staff spoke out in online and offline protests. The Our Body Our Voice foundation has been working on awareness and prevention among students.

Sexual harassment has been on the UvA's internal agenda for many years. In the spring of 2019, some 25 UvA staff and students attended expert meetings on sexually transgressive behaviour among students.[24] The attendees included representatives of the Central Student Council (CSR), the Central Works Council (COR), student associations, the Chief Diversity Office (CDO), Student Services (StS), various study programs, a student doctor, and a student counsellor. The meeting focused on the needs for: 1) accessible information and raising awareness; 2) information on referrals; and 3) a clear and explicit UvA policy. The report of the meeting emphasizes the UvA's responsibility to support prevention and accountability, and mentions the University of Leuven as a positive example.[25]

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23. https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/project/respect-now-always/ (consulted 20 December 2020).
24. See appendix 3.
25. https://admin.kuleuven.be/thema/gg (consulted 20 December 2020).

## 4.3 Physical or verbal harassment

Examples of verbal harassment include students yelling at desk staff or harassing other students or members of staff. PhD students mentioned uncomfortable situations with their supervisors when discussing personal topics on Zoom or at their supervisor's home. In the context of Covid-19, students pointed to proctoring software for surveilling online exams as an invasion of personal space.

Especially in city-centre campuses and facilities, homeless people and drug addicts coming in and hanging around makes students and employees feel physically unsafe. So does the layout of some of the old buildings. Students expressed not feeling safe with exams and in student housing in remote, poorly lit areas.

Academics who enter public debates on sensitive political issues such as racism, gender diversity, or vaccination are frequently attacked and threatened online via Twitter or email.[26] While attacks on academics are not new, the speed at which hate is mobilized online is a recent phenomenon (Scott 2018). The difference with offline bullying is that the online environment is less likely to intervene against cyber-bullying, online stalking, or sexting (Linvill 2019).

## 4.4 Belittling and micro-aggression

Sexist, racist, transphobic, and other discriminatory jokes and comments are examples of transgressive behaviour. Bystanders often remain silent and do not intervene (see also Wekker et al. 2016: 48-49). Examples mentioned in our conversations include lecturers illustrating a point by referring to male genitalia or a colleague leaving penis-shaped cookies at the coffee machine. Ethnic minority and international students cite discomfort when professors and fellow students fail to challenge stereotypes in lectures and discussions, because they too do not recognise them as something problematic. Muslim students mentioned as examples of such stereotypical connotations 'terrorism', Chinese students 'authoritarian China' and 'Covid-19', and students with African backgrounds 'racism', 'colonialism' and 'underdevelopment'.

Students referred to student-led WhatsApp groups, in which students criticize and ridicule lecturers. They felt that boundaries had weakened in the online environment during the pandemic, made worse when people had never met each other. Most lecturers are unaware of what is said about them in the WhatsApp groups for their courses. Lecturers and support staff mentioned anonymous evaluation forms as a place where students can 'go wild' and make hurtful personal comments. This is experienced as particularly hurtful and disrespectful when course evaluations are shared with other teachers.

Some students and staff oppose inviting certain controversial speakers onto campus, for example those who denigrate women. If the UvA does not take a stand, it will, in their view, reproduce a culture of tolerance towards sexism or racism. Others point to the importance of inviting speakers with different viewpoints and to the space the university should provide for open discussion.[27] Heated debates about academic freedom and safe spaces are embedded in broader international discussions in higher education about the relationships between identity, inclusion, diversity, political correctness, censorship, and freedom of expression (for different approaches in the USA, see Harvard Presidential Taskforce 2018; Kronman 2019; Roth 2019).

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26. https://winw.folia.nl/actueel/134225/leuk-dat-onderzoek-tot-de-dreigtweets-en-de-haatmails- (consulted 12 January 2021).
27. See the debate surrounding Jordan Peterson's lecture in 2019: https://www.folia.nl/opinie/124865/de-uva-moet-niet-bijdragen-aan-de-normalisering-van-extreemrechts (consulted 21 December 2020).

## 4.5 Exclusion

Let's Do Diversity analysed the many forms of exclusion that employees and students experience at the UvA (Wekker et al. 2016). This report was frequently mentioned in discussions, in protests against institutional racism, as well as in hallway conversations. The report described the process of 'othering' as an active, everyday form of exclusion that takes place at the UvA:

> *Othering has to do with the efforts to see oneself as someone with a 'normal', positive social identity by (positive) comparison with others. Others are seen as different, as less 'normal', or even as people who have fewer rights to their opinions, norms, cultures and experiences, and have to adapt. They are seen as outsiders, as others. […] Othering is a way of taking distance from and inferiorizing others because of the way they are and/or live. (2016: 45-46)*

Confirming the findings in surveys, our discussions and online questionnaires identified international (PhD) students as particularly vulnerable. Social isolation is a common problem. Subtler forms of exclusion are experienced when Dutch is the language of communication or jokes, or when misunderstandings arise due to cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication (e.g. about physical distance or how one is addressed or ignored). Norms and values as well as the boundaries of acceptable behaviour are not always clear to international students and staff.

Critical students point to the near absence of non-binary students and staff in influential positions, causing concern that their perspectives will be ignored. Students also emphasized the vulnerability of first-generation students. Multiple conversations with both administrators and students identified students with psychological problems as in need of specific care.

Staff and students also mentioned other kinds of exclusion including lack of recognition and appreciation, heavy workloads, fierce competition, and lack of community.[28] In group discussions and online questionnaires, several staff members mentioned informal communication circuits as contributing to feelings of inequality and exclusion. Scientific research shows that when these networks are male-dominated, they can lead to 'informational disadvantage' for women and negatively affect their careers (Bohnet 2016: 89-90).

The different and overlapping forms of transgressive behaviour that are distinguished in the literature are recognizable at the UvA. Some might argue that the UvA is an academic institution as so many in- and outside of the Netherlands, and that transgressive behaviour is simply part of that. Indeed, a lack of social safety is not an UvA-specific problem, contributing to the complexity of the issue. Yet, the UvA can take advantage of the current momentum and attention to the issue and learn from insights and initiatives from other institutions. The typology above offers the UvA leadership, employees and students tools to discuss transgressive behaviour and to recognize and label it as such. A respectful exchange between different perspectives within units and departments about grey areas – what is 'OK', and what is not? – is a crucial step in this process.

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28.   UvA radio was founded to create more sense of community. https:///www.folia.nl/actueel/126376/internationals-beginnen-uva-radio-de-uva-heeft-geen-community-feeling (consulted 22 December 2020).

# 5.    A multi-headed monster: the causes of feeling unsafe

'Feeling unsafe is a multi-headed monster,' one person replied when asked about its underlying causes. The interwovenness of different causes was evident in our conversations and in the online questionnaires submitted to the Taskforce, as well as in the existing literature. In essence, the monster consists of unequal power relations, distrust in the system, and lack of diversity (see also Ahmed 2012; Naezer et al. 2019), exacerbated by the way in which academic work is organized and funded. For some academics this is inherently related to the corporatisation of universities: neo-liberalisation and market forces have led to deteriorating relationships and increased bullying in the workplace (Zabrodska & Květon 2013). In the Netherlands, it dovetails with concerns about workload, recognition, and appreciation voiced by the movement of university staff and students WOinActie, the VSNU, the Young Academy, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and others. Below we describe the root causes of feeling unsafe based on the experiences of various groups at the UvA.

## 5.1 Power relations and hierarchy

Relationships of power and dependence have been identified by many studies as key factors perpetuating unacceptable behaviour in the academy (e.g. Mickey & Zippel 2018; NAS 2018; Sapiro 2018).[29] The effects of hierarchy and unequal power relations are numerous and certainly not unique to the academy. In her research on psychological safety within organizations, Amy C. Edmondson finds a negative correlation between a high degree of hierarchy and the degree to which bystanders or stakeholders feel able to speak up. More mistakes are made in organizations where employees do not feel psychologically safe. In hospitals and aviation, this is a matter of life or death. In highly hierarchical systems, subordinates fear correcting or contradicting those higher up. The problem also lies with those in leadership positions who do not listen to those they supervise: 'the higher ups in a position to listen and learn are often blind to the silencing effects of their presence' (Edmondson 2019: 79). In our conversations, UvA staff pointed out the ignorance of people in key positions about how others experience this power and dependence.

Many people in leadership positions at UvA believe they are highly accessible: "my door is always open." So why do so few staff report transgressive behaviour? Some senior figures genuinely wonder why the barriers are so high and what it would take to be informed. Others, in contrast, see the lack of reports from colleagues as a sign of things going well. Either way, there is a high chance that staff do not feel psychologically safe to knock on that door.

People in key positions sometimes struggle with what to do in the absence of clear structures of accountability. Although they hear signals, they cannot act on them without breaking confidentiality. Often no one is willing to lodge a formal complaint as the stakes of breaking confidentiality and anonymity are high. There is also no procedure to address recurring situations. Senior staff realize that they do not hear everything; problems often only land on their desks when things have gotten out of hand. The trick is to keep talking to colleagues. A common problem is that lines of responsibility are often unclear, allowing problems to fester for too long.[30] This happens, for example, when a case is referred to a person higher up in the hierarchy who then fails to act.

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29   https://www.asanet.org/best-practice-suggestions-preventing-harassment-and-other-abuses-power-your-department (consulted 21 December 2020).

30   This was also found by the External Committee on Social Safety. De Gaay Fortman et al. 2020 Social safety requires reinforcement. Investigation into the social safety system at the University of Amsterdam.

Academics in senior positions sometimes lack leadership skills, given a lack of training or feeling that management is a necessary chore, which detracts from scientific work.[31] Participants in Taskforce discussions and online questionnaires mentioned poor empathy, underdeveloped skills for guiding novice researchers, and lack of management training, and they felt that the concentration of power among managers and professors was making the workplace less safe. PhD students, early career scientists without tenure, and interns often depend on a single professor or a few managers under whom they work; their social safety depends on the values and integrity of a few. As upper management guides the hiring of new managers, it has great influence on the culture within a unit.

Combined with small, specialist and/or physically segregated groups, the concentration of power can create a microculture with its own norms of behaviour. Our discussions and questionnaire revealed examples of professors who do not tolerate rebuttal or who do not intervene. Staff described the concentration of managerial power as oppressive, especially when it concerns promotion or when the person has a conflict with an authority figure. The small size of the Dutch academic world and/or specialist circles makes it even harder for those experiencing problems to speak up.

The culture of silence, non-intervention, and not lodging formal complaints was mentioned as a problem in Taskforce discussions and the questionnaire, as well as by the External Committee on Social Safety and the UvA Senate. The Gunning-Schepers committee, which advised the VU Amsterdam on social safety, came to similar conclusions.[32]

Staff and students alike cited overlapping social and professional/study networks as a barrier to accountability. Relationships overlap and boundaries blur, making it difficult to discuss problems. If a conversation about transgressive behaviour goes badly, it has consequences for professional and study relationships as well as for social life.

Competition, workloads, and scarce financial resources were cited by both junior and senior staff as breeding grounds for feelings of unsafety. Some criticized the competitive culture in which colleagues fight for grants and positions, creating a bad atmosphere and sometimes leading to quarrels. Senior scholars can raise a lot of money and gain recognition through PhD projects. One lecturer thought that relations in teaching are more horizontal than in research, as teaching staff is relatively less dependent on their supervisors. Some support staff mentioned that the scientific staff and business operations expected them to be available non-stop. Appreciation for the university's core tasks – education and research – goes primarily to those who are visible in carrying them out. All the support that makes education and research possible is often forgotten.

## 5.2 The social safety system

Many people we talked to saw the functioning of the current social safety system as a reason people feel unsafe at the UvA. Where can one go? What will be done with a complaint? Examining how the social safety system functions has not been part of the assignment of the Taskforce. We can, however, shed light on the perception of the functioning of this system. This is useful input for its evaluation and improvements in communication.

There is a high threshold for reporting transgressive behaviour. Reasons mentioned to the Taskforce include fear of breaking anonymity, insufficient information about the system, warnings from colleagues or fellow students, feelings of loneliness, and the dependency relationships of potential complainants.[33] It is not always clear where one can go to find independent support outside the hierarchy, without jeopardizing one's anonymity or position. International students and staff often do not know where to turn and cannot count on a network within the organization for support.

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31.  See also observations of the External Committee on Social Safety. De Gaay Fortman et al. 2020 Social safety

32.   Gunning-Schepers Commission (29 May 2018). Gunning-Schepers, Irth & Vandenbroucke-Grauls. (2018) Adviescommissie Gunning. Vrije Universiteit. https://www.vu.nl/nl/Images/Brief_CvB_en_Briefadvies_Gunning_NED_ tcm289-886848.pdf consulted on 12 December 2020.

33.  See also External Committee on Social Safety, p.11-12. De Gaay Fortman et al. 2020 Social safety requires reinforcement. Investigation into the social safety system at the University of Amsterdam.

In the group conversation with students, participants identified having a disability or psychological problems as barriers to seeking help or to reporting problems. Some express fear of shame and of institutional stigmatization as someone with a mental health conditions. Having to repeat the same story over and over again is another barrier.

In our conversations and the questionnaires submitted to the Taskforce, the functioning of the social safety system was directly linked to the concentration of power, especially when the same person holds overlapping influential positions. If a problem arises with that person in one context, it will affect other areas as well. Interests, loyalties and friendships overlap. Various PhD students referred to this concentration of power as a barrier to turning to a colleague or a confidential advisor. For example, when the advisor is part of a small group in charge, there is fear that the problem – and the identity of the one raising the problem – will become known to one's supervisor. There is a deep sense that 'complaining' and bringing problems to light will undermine one's own position and career.[34] Support staff also cited negative career consequences and the fear of being 'punished' as reasons not to raise problems.

The concentration of power and not knowing what to do fuels a culture of silence and non-intervention. As a result, signals or reports of transgressive behaviour are downplayed or go unrecognised. Participants in our group discussions thought that deans, operational management and central and decentral human resources departments are doing too little to tackle structural causes. Whereas some referred to holding perpetrators accountable for damages, they had insufficient means to hold superiors to account. While people in key positions may be afraid of those above them or fear negative media attention, the difficulties of speaking up about transgressive behaviour mean that problems often fester. A culture of non-intervention seems to prevail more strongly among scientific staff, whose work generally is more autonomous than that of support staff.

The current system thus throws staff and students back on themselves. There is too much focus on what victims should do better. They may be referred to the occupational health and safety department for coaching, but there is scant follow-up care. Several participants described a feeling of 'loneliness with a problem'. The people they turn to are empathetic and 'are very sorry', but no one is responsible for finding a solution or for the individual's well-being. In the current system, whether a problem is addressed largely depends on the initiative of the person in the leadership role.

Unsafe feelings grow when confidential advisors, the occupational health and safety services, senior staff and management cannot provide solutions. Circulating horror stories contribute to feeling unsafe, even for people not experiencing problems, with some staff and students concluding that they have nowhere to turn. Some students see the case at the Faculty of Humanities as a sign that the UvA does not care about the interests of the affected students – a confirmation that the system is fundamentally broken.

Both scientific and support staff pointed to the lack of protocols when there are problems caused by students. It is difficult for staff to complain about students, for example about bullying, while students are more likely to complain to a training committee or the exam board. Most participants in the group conversations consider a formal complaints procedure as a last resort.

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34. The Central Works Council describes the same pattern. The complaints structure is perceived as ineffective because the confidential advisors are part of the organization and 'have an interest in their own role as employees and thus cannot take a value-free independent position' (COR 19/016, p.3).

## 5.3 Diversity and structural inequality

Diversity and structural inequality, in the broadest sense of these terms, are thorny subjects inside and outside the UvA. Opinions differ on meanings, causes and solutions. There is general agreement that the UvA is not diverse enough. The diversity memorandum (Nota Diversiteit) announced measures such as a more diverse staff, more female professors, and more visibility for female scientists and scholars of colour. Measures for students include mentoring programs for first-generation students with a 'migration background', encouraging talented (research) students with a 'migration background' to obtain a PhD, and a more inclusive curriculum.[35]

Some in leadership positions see the under-representation of women in influential positions among both the scientific and support staff as contributing to unsafe feelings. The scientific literature finds a relationship between male-dominated leadership and a culture in which certain tasks or jobs are considered atypical for women. Such stereotypes can contribute to a culture in which sexual harassment is normalized (see Dey et al. 1996; NAS 2018).

Taskforce discussions and questionnaire responses revealed that some students do not feel heard in an institution that is far from diverse. Diversity is not only about promoting women but about thinking intersectionally, with more attention to, among other things, different gender identities and race/ethnicity. A number of students stated that the full implementation of the Wekker report on diversity is necessary to ensure social safety for all.

The literature identifies power relations and hierarchy, misfunctioning of the social safety system, and lack of diversity as factors that diminish social safety. The accounts of UvA employees and students illustrate how these factors play out in daily practice. Together with the definitions and manifestations of transgressive behaviour recounted above, they form the fundament for the solutions and measures that proposed in the next sections.

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35.  Universiteit van Amsterdam (2019) Diversity Document, p17, 23 - 24. https://www.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/uva/en/about-the-uva/uva-profile/diversity/uva-diversity-document-020919.pdf.

# 6.  Solutions and measures per domain and group

What are possible solutions to improve social safety for employees and students at the University of Amsterdam? Answers here will follow the four domains of the UvA's policy overview on social safety: 1) prevention and strengthening of the organization; 2) monitoring and signalling; 3) the physical and online environment; and 4) the perception of the social safety system. We also list a number of group specific measures that transcend these domains. The Taskforce believes that solutions based on ideas and advice from the UvA community are a powerful way to tackle the root causes of transgressive behaviour mentioned above.

## 6.1 Better safe than sorry: strengthening the organization and prevention

Examples of transgressive behaviour inside and outside the UvA show that problems do not arise overnight. Behaviours can creep in slowly and become normalized over time, even if they are the subject of hallway conversations. At the same time, there are also many places where things are going well and where problems are apparently resolved in a timely manner. What preventive measures would improve social safety at UvA?

Social safety must be integral to the UvA's entire apparatus of learning and professional development and assessment. It must feature in all introductory programs for new staff and students so that they are familiar with codes of conduct, can recognize, discuss, and label transgressive behaviour, and know how to respond. This entails building a constructive culture of open feedback and dialogue in which everyone can participate regardless of their place in the academic or workplace hierarchy. It also means that people in positions of power must be able to invite feedback from employees, and teachers from students. Existing programs such as Intreeweek, Basic Qualifications Education, and talent and leadership programs for professors and laureates of prestigious scholarships provide ready infrastructures. For students, social safety – e.g. active bystander training - can be part of the first-year training module for basic academic skills (for international examples see Bovill 2019; Graham et al. 2018; Harless 2019; UUK 2016; White House Taskforce 2014; Wood & Moylen 2017).[36]

One effective tool for staff, including those in leadership positions, is the 360-degree feedback, in which colleagues, like one's manager, peers and so on provide feedback on one's performance.[37] It needs to be well supervised so that junior colleagues to feel free to give genuine feedback. 360-degree feedback could be input for one's personal development plan. While it is already used by HR,[38] apart from the AMC it is not yet a structural part of evaluations and performance interviews.

People in leadership positions are not only responsible for social safety but should be role models in ensuring safe and inclusive learning and working environments. This should be considered in assessments, appointments, and reappointments to key positions.[39]

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36. https://www.uwe.ac.uk/life/health-and-wellbeing/staying-safe-on-and-off-campus/speak-up en https://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/research/interventioninitiative/about/about/#AIeL1BqK4BlYcD13.99 (consulted 21 December 2020)
37. Formalizing feedback in assessment procedures is mentioned in a May 2019 letter from the COR (COR 19/020) and in a 2019 Senate opinion.
38. Information about UvA Annual Interviews https://medewerker.uva.nl/content-secured/az/jaargesprek/jaargesprek-tools/jaargesprek-tools.html.
39. See also COR letter (COR 19/u016).

Leadership is often seen by academics as a burden as it takes time away from work such as publishing and winning grants.[40] Academic leaders, like teachers, should be supported in their continuing professionalization (see VSNU 2018). International examples include the Resource Center for Training and Professional Development at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Center for Workplace Development at Harvard. Good leadership should be rewarded; bad or negligent leadership should have clear consequences. On top, we need to focus on team building, team evaluation, and possibly team training based on such evaluation. Successful completion of a leadership course should be a condition for the appointment to or renewal of a managerial position.

UvA human resources advisors play a key role in strengthening our university. They advise staff and those in leadership positions, facilitate discussions about bottlenecks and solutions, mediate in conflicts, and propose structural improvements. Human Resources should offer tailor-made courses on social safety for managers in academia.[41]

All students and staff must have a good overview of the various places they can turn to with problems large and small. A start has been made with the social safety support guides for students and employees. They should be complemented with a social safely support guide for scientific and support staff in managerial positions. More publicity must also be given to the assessment framework for domestic violence, which offers professionals and organizations guidance in determining what to do when there are signs that something is amiss (at home).

In different corners of the organisation, the UvA has made a good start with measures to prevent transgressive behaviour. And it is encouraging that the importance of prevention is broadly appreciated. Prevention focuses on eliminating the abuse of power and crafting clear guidelines for bystanders and victims of transgressive behaviour.

Some measures (like the social safety support guides) are centrally coordinated in the UvA; others (like leadership trainings) are often decentralized. This creates fragmentation across interventions and expertise about good and bad practices. Across all groups the Taskforce has observed the desire for an enhanced overview, for guidance in selecting adequate preventive measures, and a central, accessible social safety go-to team.

## 6.2 The tip of the iceberg: monitor and signal

Both explicitly transgressive behaviour and its many manifestations in the grey area are not being properly addressed. While anonymous questionnaires and the supervisor's 'open door' are important, they are insufficient. Those in leadership positions often seem unable to be sufficiently well informed to take action in early on. Seeing problems too late or losing sight of them is further complicated by the lack of information exchange between managers regarding transgressive behaviour. Maintaining a paper trail about signals received that never amounted to formal complaints is no common practice. Background information gets lost, particularly during changes in management. People in key positions as well as teachers need to identify socially unsafe situations. These responsibilities must be clearly defined.

The UvA already uses periodic tools that map elements of social safety for specific target groups such as the risk assessment and evaluation, the staff monitor, the PhD social safety monitor, and the social safety survey for students. Confidential advisors' annual reports, the Ombudsperson, and the complaints procedure also provide quantified overviews. To gain deeper insight into problems, these reports can be supplemented by group conversations that include people from outside the department or unit in question. Departments and units should be encouraged to discuss the various monitors as a group, which would also contribute to the culture of open dialogue.

40. See also External Committee on Social Safety, p.10.
41. COR19/020 p.3.

To sum up: responsibilities for the monitoring and signalling of problems are currently too vague and unclear. These responsibilities should be spelled out clearly, in writing, for both lecturers and those in a leadership position. This can help restoring trust in the social safety system. It signals that tackling problems is a shared responsibility, and that they are also addressed when victims do not want or dare to report them themselves.

## 6.3 Physical and online environment

Students feel unsafe on some UvA residential campuses.[42] Information about student housing should clearly indicate where students can go when they experience problems in their housing units. There must be a dedicated go-to place for students when they feel unsafe on campus; the ASVA Student Union has set up a hotline to this end.[43] It is especially important that students from outside the city or country, without strong networks, have places to go for support when they feel unsafe or have experienced an unsafe situation.

What is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour during drinks or parties at UvA locations, or off campus with fellow students and colleagues? Guidelines and discussing the limits of appropriate behaviour will contribute to clarity. Study and student associations can play a role here and provide points of contact. There are already several student initiatives, for example the appointment of confidential advisors by the Machiavelli student association for political science, and a campaign of the foundation *Our Body Our Voice to raise awareness*.[44]

The way students and staff interact online has become even more important during the Corona pandemic. Our conversations and questionnaire responses have underlined the need for clear rules for online conduct – between students, between colleagues, and between students and staff. A basic directive for student, staff and alumni WhatsApp and Facebook groups is overdue; it could then be adapted to the needs of specific groups. Rules for email etiquette published by the University of Technology Sydney are a good example.[45] Support should be available for students and staff who have suffered harassment or threats related to their studies or work on Twitter or email. Preventative measures need to address cyber-bullying.[46]

Socially unsafe situations do not only occur on UvA premises, but also at home, at conferences, or in bars. These additional spaces should be addressed explicitly in discussions about social safety and its grey areas. During its conversations with the heads of faculties and service units in the fall of 2019, the Taskforce noticed that they did not (yet) have online social safety on their radar. Its urgency has only grown further during the corona pandemic and the attendant turn to online teaching and meetings. The online environment should become an integral part of policy and communication about social safety at the UvA.[47]

## 6.4 Perceptions of the social safety system: reports and complaints

Members of staff in our conversations and questionnaire emphasized the importance of a well-functioning complaints system. The threshold to take the formal route such as consulting confidential advisors and the Ombudsperson currently is too high. It is also often unclear who is responsible for follow-up care. The thorough investigation of complaints would lower the threshold for reporting as it creates confidence that complaints are taken seriously. The UvA's diversity memorandum also underlines this point.[48]

42. See the stories about the student housing campus in Daalwijk in Folia: https://www.folia.nl/actueel/125505/internationals-in-daalwijk-leven-in-angst-ik-durf-s-avonds-niet-naar-buiten.
43. https://wp.asva.nl/meldpunt/en/29-2/ (consulted 22 December 2020).
44. https://www.folia.nl/actueel/141213/klachten-over-sociale-onveiligheid-bij-studievereniging-machiavelli consulted 28 (December 2020).
45. https://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/helps/self-help-resources/email-etiquette (consulted 13 January 2021).
46. See e.g. the rules of the Irish Ulster University for cyber-bullying: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/peopleandculture/employee-benefits/equality-diversity/dignity-at-work/cyber-bullying, consulted on 08-01-2021.
47. See the blog on social safety in the age of COVID-19 (ombudsperson) https://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/about-the-university/social-safety/ombudsperson/blogs/blog-january-2021.html.
48. See Diversity Document, p.30.

While there is a need for ways to report complaints anonymously, there is also fear of possible 'witch hunts' or retaliation with an unfounded report.[49]

The external committee pointed to the gap between the formal and 'soft' sides of handling complaints. Its report states that at the Faculty of Humanities, the system was unable to distinguish between the various aspects of social safety in the students' complaints properly. There was also insufficient registration so that later complaints were barely associated with previous ones, if at all. Care and aftercare in reporting transgressive behaviour or in lodging a formal complaint must be guaranteed.[50] Partly in response to the external committee, steps are now being taken to improve the system of lodging complaints: increasing options to research cases, lengthening the limitation period, improving access for international students, and opening the system to former UvA students and staff. But to be effective, formal improvements must be accompanied by improvements on the 'soft' side of the system, including prevention, change in organisational culture, and better aftercare.

The Taskforce has observed distrust of employees and students in the social safety system. Recent measures to improve the system are promising. In addition to these ongoing measures, it offers two pieces of advice. First, diversity in the staffing of different positions of this system must receive explicit attention. Although white women are now highly visible, other forms of diversity - such as, but not limited to, race/ethnicity and gender identity - are still too invisible. More diversity in positions in the social safety system can contribute to confidence in the system, especially because students and employees of colour and other structurally underrepresented groups in academia experience more transgressive behaviour. Second, recognizing past mistakes, lessons learned, and improvement measures taken is important for restoring trust – for example by making an archive accessible on the online social safety platform (see recommendation under awareness campaign). This offers transparency about the UvA's learning process.

## 6.5 Measures for specific target groups

The problem analysis in the previous sections shows that different groups, due to their position or role, have different needs in the field of social safety. Based on these needs, we recommend a series of measures that we have grouped into four categories: for students, for PhD students, for support and academic staff, and for faculties and the Executive Board. Investing and implementing these measures will not take place overnight and should be dealt with in collaboration with various responsible units and representative bodies. The Social Safety Expertise Team can facilitate this (see recommendations in the next section).

***Students***
- Guidelines for the relationship between safe spaces and academic freedom;[51]
- Rules of conduct for dealing with lecturers and staff in private environments such as a teacher's home and off-campus venues;
- The option to appoint a second assessor in case of conflict with a teacher;
- A mentoring program for international students and students who need it;[52]
- Attention to (reports of) transgressive behaviour between students;
- Access to training on social safety for leaders of student organizations.[53]

49. See also the wishes of the CSR (2 April 2019) and the External Committee on Social Safety p.13.
50. This is recognized by the Executive Board in its response to the findings of the External Committee on Social Safety. See https://www.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/uva/nl/over-de-uva/over-de-uva/sociale-veiligheid/executive-board-response-to-the-report-social-safety-needs-encouragement.pdf.
51. See FMG (November 2019) Policy on Free Speech and Safe Space: https://gsss.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/subsites/graduate-school-of-social-sciences/organisation/policy-on-free-speech-and-safe-space-of-the-fmg-uva_.pdf.
52. See Diversity Document.
53. See COR letter and expert meeting on students and sexual violence.

### PhD students

- Assess PhD supervisors not only for the number of degrees they deliver but for the quality of their supervision. Make a PhD guidance course or a periodic refresher course mandatory for all supervisor;[54]
- Organize feedback from PhD students about supervisors' performance;
- Make PhD guidance part of supervisors' annual performance assessment;[55]
- Strictly maintain at least two and ideally three *active* supervisors for each PhD student and expand organized feedback sessions with other researchers;[56]
- Clear guidelines on what PhD students can expect from supervisors;
- Annual interviews of PhD students by independent assessors;
- Buddy system for international PhD students and those who need it. Buddies cannot have a dependency relationship with the supervisor and should, if necessary, come from another department;
- Strengthen the UvA PhD community.

### Support and academic staff

- Tailor-made courses and information for support staff;
- Encourage and support increasing diversity within teams;[57]
- Provide models and support for talking about social safety within work units and departments;
- Involve external assessors in decisions on promotions and transfers;
- Develop tools for the early detection of microcultures emerging in closed teaching and research groups;
- Facilitate and support networks for under-represented groups such as women and employees of colour;
- Organize broad consultation and participation for appointments to powerful positions, including academic stars with impressive CVs;[58]
- Treat parties equally in cases of conflict and when necessary use external mediators.[59]

### Faculties and Executive Board

- Establish an external mirror specifically for social safety, such as an Advisory Board;
- Provide transparency into policy and follow-up of problems;
- Develop a flow chart with transparent accountability structures on social safety;
- Clearly communicate the consequences and sanctions for transgressive behaviour;
- Clearly communicate a code of conduct for desirable and exemplary behaviour;
- Work to increase diversity in key positions;[60]
- Encourage and facilitate an inclusive culture;[61]
- Encourage a culture of open feedback and dialogue;
- Acknowledge and reflect on mistakes and shortcomings, and develop steps for improvement (see Edmondson's Leader's Tool Kit for Building Psychological Safety 2019).

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54. See Senate advice.
55. See Senate advice.
56. See Senate advice.
57. See Diversity Document.
58. See Senate advice.
59. See also the report of the External Committee on Social Safety on conflicting loyalties.
60. See also Diversity Document.
61. See also Faculty of Law, Aanvullend Facultair beleid FdR [Additional faculty policies on social safety], 29 March 2019. https://medewerker.uva.nl/en/faculty-of-law/organisation--future/policy/our-social-safety/social-safety.html

# 7.    Overarching recommendations

Social safety at the university is an emotional, fraught and political subject, embedded in a web of structural social inequality, insufficient diversity in positions of power, and pressure to perform. These structures are durable, and change – if and when it happens – is slow. It is precisely in this suboptimal context that a safe university is the moral responsibility of each and every member of the UvA community. It is a necessary investment in students' learning and in the contributions that UvA staff make to science and society. The UvA will benefit from setting a good example for students, who are the leaders of tomorrow and will determine the moral climate of their future workplaces (Barratt-Pugh & Krestelica 2019).

There is no simple recipe for guaranteeing social safety, as the problems, causes, needs and solutions are complex. Alongside a procedural apparatus that creates trust, social safety needs to be an integral part of the entire work and study process. The proposed solutions and measures in the previous section can be major steps in this direction. The will and energy to do better is there. While many groups in recent years have worked hard to make problems visible and find solutions, knowledge about what goes well or wrong remains fragmented. All target groups need a clear overview of rules, current actions, and available expertise. To support this, the Social Safety Taskforce recommends that the UvA establishes: 1) a Social Safety Expertise Team; 2) a Periodic social safety self-evaluation; and 3) the awareness campaign *Break the Silences*.

## 7.1 Social safety expertise team

The existing system would function more effectively with a permanent social safety expertise team.[62] It would be a hub in the web of departments and services responsible for various facets of the system such as Legal Affairs and HR. For greater visibility, the team could be part of a *House of Social Safety* with officials such as confidential advisors, the Ombudsperson, and the Complaints Committee. The expertise team would not take responsibility away from the existing unit or department but support it to better execute its responsibilities.

The team should consist of members of staff of varying seniority and expertise as well as a member of the student body, and contribute to improving the policy, culture and communication of social safety. Anyone who works or studies at the UvA would be able to contact this team for:

- Integrated case guidance, direction and aftercare;
- Policy advice;
- Resources for raising awareness such as the development of a guide for leaders;
- Overview of quality training modules and courses, and guidance on their development;
- An accessible source of information;
- First-line response to reports from staff and students;
- Best practices on social safety within the UvA, at other universities in the Netherlands and abroad, and from scientific research;
- Programming of social educational activities;
- Institutional memory on cases;
- Network of local partners and crisis centres providing assistance 24 hours a day;
- Network of experts;
- Identifying specific needs and developing proposals to address them.

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62. VU Amsterdam established an Expert Team on Worrying Behaviour in 2018, where employees can report transgressive behaviour confidentially to a trained multidisciplinary team. The aim is to identify and monitor early and to follow up on reports and provide aftercare (Stevenson & Van Den Berg 2020: 15-16).

Broad support, commitment and ownership are essential for success. The activities and advice of the expertise team should be built on cooperation with different target groups and bodies. Cooperation with student organizations and action groups is essential for culture change (Bovill et al. 2020; Linder et al. 2016; UUK 2016; Page et al. 2019; Sharp et al. 2017).

When a case surfaces, the expertise team would be able to call upon *rapid response teams* to advise and guide faculties, services or departments (see Lazarra et al. 2014). Rapid response teams consist of experienced people who work according to protocol; their members could be drawn from people inside or outside the UvA community. The expertise team could design scenarios in advance and create a preliminary team for each. Rapid response teams should be equipped with adequate training, support, and appropriate allowance for hours.

## 7.2 Periodic social safety self-evaluation

Social safety is not yet part of the periodic evaluation of faculties, departments, research groups, services and training. In consequence, ensuring it now falls on people who may not consider it a central part of their work. Our discussions revealed that staff and representative bodies need clearer structures of accountability. The Taskforce recommends developing a basic *periodic social safety self-evaluation* to be designed by the expertise team.[63] Services and faculties can further tailor these self-evaluations in consultation with their communities and submit them to the Executive Board for approval. The self-evaluation must then become part of periodic evaluations by the Executive Board. This can, for example, become part of the periodic administrative consultations with faculties and service units. Faculties and service units should be able to demonstrate how they work to monitor and ensure social safety at the level of the department, research group, and team.

## 7.3 Awareness campaign 'Break the Silences'

Awareness is fundamental for recognizing transgressive behaviour and socially unsafe situations. The Taskforce has created and tested a concept of a campaign: *Break the Silences*'[64] The campaign focuses on awareness, recognition, and the labelling of socially unsafe behaviour, for and by everyone in the organization. A poster and social media campaign will confront students and staff with personal experiences of feeling unsafe and ambiguous situations in the 'grey area' at the UvA. Examples of positive and negative behaviour will encourage reflection among potential perpetrators, victims, and bystanders.

The goal is to make people aware of different worlds and perspectives, of the effects certain behaviours can have, and of the possibilities to do something about them. In addition to its various actions, the campaign includes an online platform for students and employees. Here everything concerning social safety comes together – from help in discussing difficult topics to tips, courses, meetings, performances, dialogue sessions, podcasts and the social safety guides. To promote transparency, this would be a good place for an online overview of documents on cases, reports, responses, and actions for improvement. It would allow the university to provide insight into its learning process and what it has done to address problems.

To further the conversation on social safety, the Taskforce recommends performances of the Dutch Actors Society's play *The Learning Curve*, followed by a discussion about transgressive behaviour in the academy. The Taskforce has provided scenarios for such events (that had been originally planned for 2020). The play will be instantly recognizable to scientific staff, PhD students, research support staff, and academic managers in all faculties. The Taskforce recommends having an interactive piece tailor-made for students, teachers, and educational support staff based on real incidents and experiences at the UvA in 2021, such as *Time Out*.[65]

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63. https://www.asanet.org/best-practice-suggestions-preventing-harassment-and-other-abuses-power-your-department (consulted 15 January 2021).
64. See appendix 4.
65. https://podiumt.nu/timeout/ (consulted 28 December 2020).

## 7.4 Finally: breaking the silences by listening and taking responsibility

The UvA is a large organization at the centre of society and the city of Amsterdam, as well as a major player in national and international science. Inequalities and injustices in the university as well as prevailing norms and values in specific units have an undeniable impact on the UvA community. Improving social safety for all people who study or work at the University of Amsterdam must therefore begin with the UvA community itself. The ambition is that everyone will be able to recognize and name behaviour that undermines social safety, will know what to do, and will take action. This requires us to break the many silences by listening, and by taking responsibility.

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# Overview of appendices final report Social Safety Taskforce (in Dutch)

***Breaking the silences: social safety at the University of Amsterdam (UvA)***
***Problem analysis and recommendations of the Social Safety Taskforce***
***January 2021***

### Appendix 1
Methodology in-depth discussions and questionnaires Social Safety Taskforce

### Appendix 2
Summaries of questionnaires and group discussions

### Appendix 3
List of documents consulted

### Appendix 4
Concept for awareness campaign "Break the silences"

**Read the appendices:**
https://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/about-the-university/social-safety/taskforce/report-taskforce/report-taskforce.html

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