

# Procedures for Supporting Social Safety

## Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences (FMG), University of Amsterdam (UvA)

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"The UvA stands for a good and safe work and study climate, in which staff and students treat each other with respect. Appreciation and trust are important values. Valuing performance, recognising each other's identity, assuming the other's good intentions - even when pressure increases" (UvA Code of Conduct 2020).

In addition, the code of conduct states that we do not consider the following (intimate) relationships to be permissible:

- relationships between students and teachers;
- relationships between PhD students and supervisors;
- relationships between supervisors who jointly supervise a PhD candidate (this point is also included in the new PhD regulations).

### **Goal**

The FMG wants employees and students to feel safe while working and studying. The procedures provided in this document are therefore meant for everyone working or studying at the FMG. We want reporting on situations of perceived threats to social safety to be easy, clear and accessible. Problems related to socially undesirable behaviour should be addressed swiftly and at the lowest possible administrative level. The procedures laid out below should provide guidance to those wishing to file a report and to those to whom a report is submitted on how to deal with behaviour which undermines safety and transgresses boundaries, or signals thereof. In addition to the procedure for staff members, we include a specific procedure for students and a step-by-step guide (see annex) for persons receiving a report.

### **What is meant by threats to social safety or boundary-transgressing behaviour?**

If a situation arises in which a person's boundaries are not respected or if undesirable behaviour occurs that damages a person's mental or physical integrity, then we consider this to be a situation that undermines social safety. Our starting point is when a person experiences a sense of lack of safety. This means that we are not only concerned with situations or forms of behaviour that can be objectively and universally perceived as boundary-transgressing. Examples of boundary-transgressing behaviour include bullying, active exclusion, aggression, physical or social harassment, discrimination or stalking.

## I. Procedure for staff members

### Responsibility and points of contact

*The head of department has final responsibility.*

The head of department is ultimately responsible for social safety within the department. For employees who wish to make a report, the head of the department - or manager of the department (for support staff) - where they work is therefore, in principle, the point of contact. This person will deal with a report of undesirable behaviour and, if requested, act as a mediator.

*Other persons in the organisation may also take responsibility:*

- If the report initially reaches a programme group leader or other manager (e.g., teaching programme or institute director) and the claimant indicates that he or she wishes to have the report dealt with there, this is possible.
- If the head of department is not considered a suitable addressee by the claimant, the claimant can report to one of the other persons indicated above or to the dean of the faculty.
- A recipient of a report other than the head of department must in any event inform the head of department.
- The recipient of the report shall always follow the step-by-step guide set out in the Annex and shall inform the head of department about the outcome of the process. It is particularly important that the head of department is aware of what is going on within the department.

### Procedure

The head of department or other recipient of a report will enter into conversation making every effort to avoid bias, discuss the issue with other members of the management board/team if desired, and intervene if necessary, following the step-by-step guide below. This is done with the utmost confidentiality. If this process does not lead to a satisfactory solution for all parties, or if the complaint returns, the dean will be informed of the situation. After discussion with the parties, she may make an informed decision on what further steps to take (e.g., external mediation or investigation).

### Anonymity

In principle, a report is not anonymous, but a claimant can ask the mediator for anonymity if there are good reasons to do so.

### Reporting

A written record should be made of all the talks that are held, so that it is clear what has been discussed with whom. Because the dean wants to be informed about these issues, the mediator should also report in writing to the dean on: the nature of the report, the approach taken, the reaction of the accused and possible follow-up steps. The dean may, in consultation with the head of department, decide whether the complaint is of such a serious nature that the report should be included in the accused's personnel file, or whether there should be consequences under employment law.

### Other possibilities

An employee may report boundary-transgressing behaviour to a [confidential adviser](#) for undesirable behaviour at one of the UvA faculties. The confidential adviser can then advise the claimant on how they might react to the boundary-transgressing behaviour. Because a confidential adviser treats a report confidentially and can only advise the claimant on an individual level, the UvA recently appointed an [ombudsperson](#) who can independently investigate and give institutional advice. Finally, an official complaint can be submitted to the [UvA Complaints Committee](#). Complaints to the Complaints Committee cannot be made anonymously.

For an overview of the various possibilities to report and the contact information of the confidential advisers see the [Social Safety Support Guide](#).

## II. Procedure for students

For students, there are various possibilities for reporting.

1. For a student, the study advisor, teaching programme director, mentor, tutor or teacher are usually the (first) point of contact to make a report; they can act as mediators. A student who makes a report to another student should be referred by this student to one of the above-mentioned persons.
2. If the student wishes the report to be formally pursued, the person receiving it must file the complaint with the teaching institute director and report this to the student. The teaching institute director follows the same procedure as the head of department does for staff members.
3. If the student does not wish the report to be formally pursued, the complaint only has to be reported to the teaching institute director; the student will be informed accordingly.
4. Students can also report via the [Faculty Complaints Desk](#). In that case, the complaint must relate to the conduct of an FMG employee during the performance of his or her job. Complaints cannot be made anonymously. After the faculty complaints coordinator has received a complaint and has checked its admissibility, the teaching institute director is usually asked to deal with the complaint and to act as mediator. If this is not appropriate, another staff member will be asked to deal with the complaint.

### Procedure for the teaching institute director

The teaching institute director is ultimately responsible for the social safety of students and follows the same steps as the head of department in the event of complaints from employees. If the process does not lead to a solution which is satisfactory to all parties, the head of department will also be informed of the situation. After discussion with the parties, the head of department may take an informed decision on what further steps should be taken (e.g., external mediation or investigation).

### Anonymity

In principle, a report is not anonymous, but a claimant can ask for anonymity if there are good reasons to do so.

### Reporting

The same applies here as for employee reports.

### Other possibilities

Students can turn to a [confidential adviser](#) for undesirable behaviour (just like staff). If necessary, the confidential adviser can help the student with reporting or filing a complaint. In the event of a conflict or problem with a fellow student, they can also advise (see also the [UvA Social Safety Support Guide](#)). Students can also report a complaint to an ombudsstudent. If necessary, the ombudsstudent can help the student report or submit a complaint (to the study advisor or to the Faculty Complaints Desk). In the event of a conflict or problem with a fellow student, he or she can advise (see also the [UvA Social Safety Support Guide](#)).

## **Annex:**

### **Roadmap for recipients of reports about socially unsafe situations**

The ultimate responsibility for the response to reports of threats to social safety and for ensuring a socially safe working climate lies with the head of department. This means that signals picked up by programme group leaders, other managers or teachers should always be reported to the head of department.

Below we present a step-by-step guide for the recipients of reports concerning threats to social safety at the FMG in which we make a number of suggestions and point out possible pitfalls in case of suspicions of socially unsafe behaviour. The aim is for the person handling the report to discuss the issue with the claimant, the alleged perpetrator and possibly witnesses. Such conversations must be properly conducted. This step-by-step guide should facilitate this process.

#### *General rules of the game:*

1. Always take the report seriously and try to gather as much information as possible from both parties.
2. Be empathetic, but never take action or draw conclusions without having heard the other party.
3. Seek help from third parties (e.g., head of P&O at FMG, Josien Hagen), if you are unsure whether you are going the right way, or if things get too complicated. She can put you in touch with the right people.

#### **Step 0: Recognise signals**

When might you notice that there is something wrong with someone? Change of behaviour, absence from meetings or get-togethers, declining performance.

#### **Step 1: Investigate the facts**

- a. You are approached by an employee who reports a situation affecting themselves (claimant). You should have a conversation in which you make sure the following is discussed:
  - What exactly happened? (concrete behaviour, no room for interpretation)
  - When/how recent or long ago?
  - With whom? How often? Has it happened before, when did it start? (You can consider having the claimant write down these first points.)
  - Has the claimant already spoken to the accused? If so, what has this conversation yielded?
  - What else has the claimant done themselves, have they discussed the situation with others?
  - Would they like to discuss the situation with the alleged culprit (in the presence of the mediator)?
  - What does the claimant ask of you?

*In general:* Show empathy, but do not yet draw conclusions about the information. Explain that you also want to talk to the other party (alleged culprit) and ask whether the claimant agrees. If not: you indicate that you still want to talk to the other party, because in your opinion this is very important. It can contribute to a solution for both the claimant and possible others. The claimant does not have to be involved, and their name will not be mentioned if they do not want this.

- b. You hear something from a third person (witness) about a possible claim. This is more complicated. Here are a few suggestions:
- Have an informal conversation with the witness and ask if the possible claimant knows that you are talking about this.
  - Ask the witness if they think you could have a conversation with the possible claimant.
  - Invite the possible claimant to a conversation - guarantee anonymity - and indicate to them that it is important that this behaviour stops, and that you would like to talk to the alleged perpetrator (in general terms) to ensure this.
- If you cannot speak to the possible claimant, try to convince the witness that reporting is the responsibility of the possible claimant. Consult with P&O.

**Step 2: Gather information from the other side (alleged perpetrator)**

- Talk to the (alleged) culprit
- Tell them what you heard
- What happened exactly? (concrete behaviour, no room for interpretation)
- Ask whether they share the interpretation, do they identify with it?
- In all cases: propose that claimant and accused speak to each other about what happened
- If this is not accepted: ask how the alleged culprit intends to solve this problem (note: do not take responsibility for the problem yourself). Possible questions: 'What can you do now?' 'What do you propose as a next step, as a solution?' 'How do you see your part in this?'

**Step 3: Determine your own position/vision as mediator (value-creating leadership)**

- What is your own view on this case?
- What would you do yourself?
- What moral/ethical considerations do you find pertinent?
- Obtain information from third parties while maintaining confidentiality, if the information is contradictory or incomplete.

**Step 4: Take action and follow up**

- Make agreements
- Who is going to do what, when? (options such as coaching, for example by colleagues, following a training course, etc.).
- Agree on a timeline and make an appointment for a follow-up meeting

**Step 5: Hold the follow-up appointment at the appointed date**

- How are both parties now feeling?
- What has been the impact of the actions undertaken?
- What went well, what could be better?

**Step 6: Report**

- Prepare a written report of the conversation with at least the following elements: date, persons present, purpose of the meeting, list of main points made in the meeting, agreements made and, if relevant, timeline and date of next appointment.
- Submit the report of the meeting to both parties, if they were both present, and seek their agreement.
- If the accusation is serious, ask the Head of P&O to have this report included in the personnel file.

## **Possible topics of discussion**

### **Position of the claimant**

- Does the claimant present themselves a victim? As an engaged member of the organisation?
- How afraid are they? Of what exactly?
- Do they take responsibility for changing the situation? (with a view to creating a safe atmosphere for everyone)
- How open/proactive is the claimant to taking action?
- How do they weigh their own moral responsibility?

### **Own role of person receiving the report**

- Personal leadership, self-knowledge and ability to keep an open mind
- What are the interests of the claimant and the alleged culprit?
- When will this claimant go to work happy again?
- What possible scenarios are there for how the situation might develop? And what are the implications of the various scenarios?

Roadmap drawn up by Cobi Watzetz (Occupational Health and Safety Service), Agneta Fischer (Dean) and Josien Hagen (Head of HR)