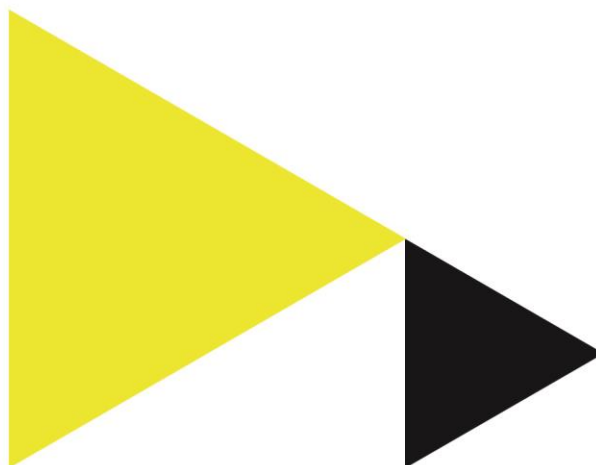


Annual Reports on Social Safety

An overview of the annual reports on social safety at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences: foreword by the Executive Board, summary and associated recommendations.

Student Affairs, Human Resources, Legal Affairs & Ombudsman.
2022



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Author

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Department

Student Affairs, Human Resources, Legal Affairs & Ombudsman.

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1. Foreword by the Executive Board

We believe it is vital to ensure that AUAS provides an inclusive and safe learning and working environment for all students and staff, one in which everyone can develop themselves and feels seen and valued, and an environment in which we can work together harmoniously. This requires a focus on vitality, work-life balance and a culture in which everyone can be themselves and let their voice be heard, and in which we hold each other accountable for agreements and desirable behaviour. Learning conditions for students and working conditions for staff must enable them to work together effectively, enjoy their studies and/or work, look to the future and enjoy a challenging and safe learning and working environment. We have defined our goals for achieving this as guiding principles in our updated governance model, our vision and mission statements, but also our Strategic Plan: *AUAS in Three Dimensions*.

We still have a way to go to achieve these ambitions, as shown by the accompanying annual reports. This is a task for the entire AUAS community, with a special role for all those in management positions. The primary concern is to maintain a professional and open dialogue between students and lecturers, within tutorial groups and for staff within their teams and between managers and employees. It is important that we continue to invest in this dialogue through training, coaching and other forms of supervision where necessary.

Circumstances sometimes arise in which an individual needs a third party to resolve a situation that someone perceives as undesirable, unfair or unsafe. That is why we have a number of people and bodies that play a special role in promoting and facilitating a safe learning and working environment, such as Student Information, student counsellors, confidential advisers, complaints officers, HR advisers, the Occupational Health and Safety Service and the Ombudsman. These officials and committees make a vital contribution to ensuring a positive and safe learning and working environment within the organisation. The Executive Board would like to thank them all for their efforts, commitment and contributions.

A number of these officials and committees have produced an annual report. We have read the following reports with interest:

- 2021 annual report of the confidential staff advisers;
- 2020-2021 annual report of the confidential student advisers;
- 2021 annual report of the Staff Ombudsman;
- 2021 report of the Inappropriate Behaviour Complaints Committee.

We believe it is important to learn lessons from these reports and to take action to improve experiences. We do this in a number of ways.

The chair of the Executive Board holds annual meetings with the confidential advisers, complaints officers and the ombudsman. We also use the aforementioned annual reports to improve the working procedures of teams, between managers and employees, to improve the complaints process and quality assurance in relation to social safety (as part of our safety and security policy).

We present the reports below. This overview contains a brief summary for each annual report, as well as a reflection on the recommendations set out in each report. Our goal is to further optimise this process. We want to do this starting next year by linking the distinguishing features of the reports even more extensively to other relevant information sources, such as the National Student Surveys and wellbeing surveys that we ourselves carry out. We hope that this will provide a foundation for better addressing the lessons learned and recommendations and enable us to take appropriate measures to promote social safety. This foreword by the Executive Board, the summaries of the accompanying annual reports and the reflections on the recommendations are the first step in this process. If we look at the reports and other signals and reflections we have received, such as the Labour Inspectorate's review in the spring, we can see that many measures have already been put in place to facilitate a positive and safe learning and working environment. It is good that the confidential advisers now have more capacity although it remains difficult to assess whether this capacity is sufficient. The reports show that the need for confidential advisers is greater in specific situations, such as last year's situation involving the AMFI degree programme. It is good that we have increased their capacity and reinforced their efforts by appointing an external confidential adviser and complaints officer.

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The last two years have been particularly unusual and turbulent due to the restrictions imposed on society and the university of applied sciences by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also had a major impact on the welfare and wellbeing of students and staff. This is also evident from the subjects that emerge in the reports of inappropriate behaviour. We can see that people are making use of the confidential advisers, complaints officers, occupational health and safety service and the ombudsman. It remains difficult to judge whether these statistics would have been higher if everyone had been able to visit the campus, or whether people would in that case have been better able to resolve matters themselves without additional support.

Continued efforts are needed to ensure the findability of all contact points that can provide advice and support, as is once again clear from these annual reports. We acknowledge the advice issued in this respect, which is in line with the priorities we have set for social safety. Attention needs to be devoted to this in the next year. We need to invest in raising awareness of the routes available to students and staff who need support.

We have set up a team, the Strategic Advice Team (SAT) for Social Safety, made up of individuals with a range of expertise in safety and security, social safety, student and/or staff wellbeing and communication, which will take control of implementing the Social Safety work programme. Some of the proposals set out in the annual reports are in line with priorities that have already been incorporated into the work programme.

The other proposals will be noted and added to the Social Safety work programme.

To sum up, we can state that a focus on social safety is and remains a priority, which is evident throughout the university. The annual reports show that we have an effectively operating support structure. The emphasis in the coming time will focus on raising staff and student awareness of this structure. We need to ensure that the threshold for seeking support is as low as possible. It remains up to all of us to take up our responsibility to commit ourselves to promoting an equal and open dialogue in a safe university.

2. Summary and recommendations per annual report

2.1 2021 annual report of the confidential staff advisers

With the drafting of this annual report, the confidential advisers will from this calendar year follow the calendar year cycle in line with the other annual reports on social safety and other topics.

It is worth noting that the period covered by this annual report saw the highest ever number of reports of inappropriate behaviour. A total of 183 reports were received compared to 64 in the previous year. One of the reasons for this is the special circumstances involving the AMFI (Amsterdam Fashion Institute) and the active call to get in touch. Another reason is that the confidential advisers have made considerable efforts in recent years to raise awareness of their role and improve their accessibility.

In this context, we draw a comparison with the latest Employee Job Satisfaction Monitor (MTO) held at the end of 2021, which also address the subjects of social safety and inappropriate behaviour. The scores show that these are top trending topics.

The general social safety of AUAS employees was measured based on questions about whether employees feel able to be themselves and to stand up for themselves. The average score was 7.6 which is similar to the national benchmark for higher professional education.

In terms of inclusion, we saw a high level of satisfaction with the measures taken to promote equality, inclusion and diversity. However, the reports of inappropriate behaviour also show that some employees who experienced inappropriate behaviour did not always report it. The most common forms of inappropriate behaviour are gossiping (23.9%), verbal aggression (10.3%) and discrimination (6.4%).

The annual report breaks down the number of reports into two types:

- Inappropriate behaviour: 63 reports in total, relating to matters such as bullying and gossiping, abuse of power, intimidation and sexual harassment, aggression and violence, and discrimination.
- Other behaviour: 120 reports in total, relating to matters such as workload pressure, management style, a socially unsafe environment and issues surrounding sickness and rehabilitation.

The three faculties with the most reports were:

Faculty of Digital Media and Creative Industries (with around 80% originating from AMFI)	79
Faculty of Business and Economics	26
Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Law	25

The confidential staff advisers make a number of specific recommendations:

1. Lower the threshold by making sure the confidential adviser process is clear. Currently, the organisation takes fragmented and different approaches to the process of contacting a confidential adviser and the follow-up process. It is important to adopt a uniform approach, contact procedure and post-contact follow-up process. Better findability on MyAUAS and improved visibility will help to lower the threshold. The confidential advisers will strive to make improvements in these areas over the next year. They will do this in collaboration with the relevant Communications Office and HR policy officials.
2. Ensure greater integration in existing HR measures, such as the Management Skills Development/Management Style training courses. The confidential advisers liaise with the responsible AUAS Academy officials and contribute issues and representative examples that can be used to practise holding

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discussions with employees and colleagues during learning sessions. The aim is for this to become a permanent component of these training courses.

2.2 2020-2021 annual report of the confidential student advisers

The confidential student advisers received 86 reports of inappropriate behaviour in the period 2020-2021. This number is almost three times the total received in the previous year (33 reports in the period 2019-2020).

Significant progress has therefore been made in terms of the position, findability and visibility of the confidential student advisers. Another reason for the increase is the recommendations made in the perception study carried out within AMFI. The advice given was to define the role more precisely and to improve the findability and visibility of the confidential student advisers.

This annual report breaks down the number of reports into five types, with most reports originating from the Faculty of Digital Media and Creative Industries with 20 reports (1), the Faculty of Technology with 18 reports (2) and the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Law with 17 reports (3):

- a. Bullying - a total of 25 reports;
- b. Sexual harassment and intimidation of which 11 reports concerned general intimidation and 19 reports specifically concerned sexual harassment;
- c. Discrimination on the grounds of beliefs, sexual orientation or gender - a total of 17 reports;
- d. Aggression and violence - a total of 5 reports;
- e. Other reports for which the confidential student advisers were not the appropriate contact point. These reports were of course listened to properly and the students were pointed in the right direction and/or referred: a total of 9 reports.

The confidential student advisers conclude that the recommendations from the perception study prompted by the situation at AMFI provide opportunities for learning when it comes to their role within our organisation. In addition, these recommendations have explicitly led to a number of changes to their role, visibility, findability and manpower. According to the confidential student advisers, the relevance of these recommendations is not limited to AMFI and they can also be applied and used as a learning tool for other faculties within our organisation.

Due to social developments in the area of inappropriate behaviour, the process for increasing the number of confidential student advisers was expedited. This included the appointment of three new confidential advisers (who have been active since May 2022) and an external AUAS confidential adviser for students. National Education Programme funding was used to finance this increase. The staffing levels for confidential student advisers at AUAS are as follows: the permanent staffing level of 0.2 FTE has been increased by an additional 0.6 FTE, bringing the total to 0.8 FTE. This increase can be maintained in 2023 using National Education Programme funding and bridging allowances. A review will be carried out in autumn 2022 to identify the next steps to be taken.

Moreover, the events surrounding *The Voice of Holland* Dutch talent TV programme show that a lack of reports of inappropriate behaviour does not necessarily mean that no inappropriate behaviour is occurring within our organisation. It is a matter of standards and values because what one student may view as normal behaviour can be viewed by another student as inappropriate behaviour. The confidential student advisers conclude that it is therefore important to look at the behaviours we agree to adopt in daily practice. We also need to proactively maintain a dialogue on these topics. The development of awareness programmes will help us do this.

To summarise, the confidential student advisers make the following 14 recommendations:

- Identify and update existing and current social policy. Is it complete and sufficiently up to date?
- Investigate on a regular and potentially anonymous basis whether students experience inappropriate behaviour (for example through a satisfaction survey).
- Facilitate discussions about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour within faculties and schedule this activity at least twice a year to ensure that, on the one hand, students become accustomed to talking to each other about these issues and, on the other hand, they get a better sense of the standards, values and boundaries of fellow students and/or staff.
- Continue to provide programme managers with information on the nature and the potential consequences of inappropriate behaviour and remind them of their duties and responsibilities in this area.***.

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- Continue to provide students with information on inappropriate behaviour and inform them of the role of the programme manager, student counsellor, confidential advisers, complaints procedures etc.
- Hold a meeting of managers and team leaders, absenteeism coaches, HR advisers and confidential advisers on the subject of culture and behaviour at least once a year.
- It is important that not only employees but also students are aware of social safety policy. It is extremely important that social safety is guaranteed. Social safety training for students during the induction week can help to achieve this.
- Mention the role of the confidential adviser at the start of teaching for new and current students and ensure that the contact details of the confidential advisers are easy to find. Clearly state the duties of the confidential adviser on the information page and define what is meant by inappropriate behaviour.
- Continue to invest in the quality of the confidential advisers in the form of training and by providing opportunities for peer review and give confidential advisers a key role in policy-making on social safety and inappropriate behaviour.
- Ensure coordination between various partners within our organisation such as the confidential advisers on inappropriate behaviour for staff and students, HR, the Central Representative Advisory Council, Programme Committee etc. Factor in here what data needs to be collected to further shape social safety policy within Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.
- Reach clear agreements with cooperation partners on who is the owner of which recommendation and action in consultation about this.
- Discuss newly signalled issues with faculty deans (and/or programme managers) to ensure that the annual report is not a surprise.
- Review the reporting process in Inproces (information management application) and, based on the evaluation of the annual report discussion and coordination with various partners, look at what information needs to be gathered to produce social safety policy proposals.
- Assess whether there is sufficient coordination and continuity between the reporting of reports of inappropriate behaviour to confidential staff advisers and confidential student advisers.

2.3 2021 report of the Staff Ombudsman

The annual report shows that the ombudsman has acted on the basis of her dual mandate. On the one hand, the ombudsman is responsible for assessing whether the applicable regulations and procedures have been properly implemented. The question is always whether the employee has been treated properly and with due care. On the other hand, the ombudsman is also tasked with flagging up potential institutional issues. These two mandates are based on two sets of regulations: the AUAS Staff Ombudsman Regulations and the AUAS Regulations Governing Reporting of (Suspected) Instances of Wrongdoing, Irregularities or Integrity Violations.

In summary, the annual report states:

- *Official complaints:* no formal complaints concerning the ombudsman's two above-mentioned mandates were submitted for assessment in 2021.
- *Reports:* the ombudsman made one report in the reporting year. The ombudsman is responsible for flagging up potential institutional issues to the Executive Board. Several employees in different departments of a faculty independently submitted a complaint about the same issue. This prompted the ombudsman to flag the issue in a report to the Executive Board.
- *Submitted cases* - as in 2020, a total of 38 cases were submitted to the ombudsman last year. The ombudsman handled these cases by providing advice and through conciliation. Of these cases, 36 originated from employees and two from students.

The Executive Board notes here that the ombudsman was not the appropriate party to handle the complaint in the two student cases and she therefore referred these cases to the relevant student complaints office.

It is striking that the 36 cases almost always originated from an incident. Many cases concerned a failure to follow correct procedure. In addition, the identified cause was often a lack of clear communication with common issues being no or too little communication.

The ombudsman recommends that all AUAS managers provide clear explanations in daily practice, communicating in a timely manner and with due care, to ensure that employees are well informed and to avoid misunderstandings. The ombudsman also recommends hearing both sides of the argument and seeking clarification from both parties where situations arise before drawing conclusions. This helps to avoid escalation and improve collaboration.

2.4 2021 annual report of the Inappropriate Behaviour Complaints Committee

This committee has also changed its reporting period from the academic year to the calendar year. As a result, reference is made to two periods: September to December 2020 and the whole of 2021.

There were no significant changes in the number of formal complaints submitted (in accordance with Article 10 of the Rules of Procedure of the Complaints Committee) in 2021 compared to 2020.

A total of 10 complaints and five reports were recorded, broken down into the two periods:

- September to December 2020: a total of four formal complaints and one report were submitted.
- The whole of 2021: a total of six formal complaints and four reports were submitted.

Formal complaints (total = 10):

The following faculties were involved:

Faculty of Digital Media and Creative Industries	4
Faculty of Business and Economics	2
Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Law	2
Faculty of Technology	1
Faculty of Health	1

The formal complaints were based on the following grounds:

Discrimination	3
Abuse of power	2
Verbal aggression	1
Sexual harassment	1
Treatment by the examinations board	1
Permanently intimidating behaviour	1
Combined: aggression, written violence and intimidating behaviour	1

Outcome:

Withdrawn	4
Unfounded	3
Manifestly unfounded	2
Manifestly inadmissible	1

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Reports (number = 5):

The following faculties were involved:

Faculty of Education	2
Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Law	2
Faculty of Digital Media and Creative Industries	1

The reports were based on the following grounds:

Discrimination	3
Abuse of power	1
Inappropriate behaviour	1

Outcome:

No complaint submitted	5
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The Complaints Committee sent the five employees who had made a report to the committee a detailed email containing information on the AUAS complaints procedure, including explicit reference to the confidential adviser and the MyAUAS intranet, where information can be found on how to submit a complaint about inappropriate behaviour. None of the reports ultimately led to the submission of a formal complaint to the Complaints Committee. The Complaints Committee did not make any specific recommendations or other specific requests to the Executive Board this year.