

## Responsibilities and procedures concerning social safety at the UG

To the CvB and the University population, staff and students.

This letter is published on behalf of the University Council. We would like to address the recent article about Alice that was published in the UKrant on the 12th of January 2023. We are deeply concerned and disappointed that this has happened and we want to do better, in conversation with the CvB and University population. This article has once again brought up concerns about social safety at our University, which is what we would like to talk about today. We want to stress that the imbalance in power is vital to take into consideration when discussing social safety. It is important to have this conversation, because according to the I&O Research report of 2021, 1 in 10 female students in the Netherlands experience rape during their studies. The confidential advisor report, discussed during the University Council of November 2022, showed that 51% of complaints concern undesirable behavior (p. 6) University serves as a first model of a professional environment for most students, the UG has an important role in shaping the working culture students will come to expect in their future careers. If students learn that boundaries do not have to be respected, it will not only make the university a less safe environment, but it will also have consequences in broader societal views of consent and acceptable behavior. Furthermore, staff should be able to work in a safe environment.

First, we will introduce some of the problems in our current support system that we have identified and then we will continue with our recommended solutions and action points.

### Problems:

1. An overarching system of making complaints, centrally organized, decentralized solutions and help is lacking.
  - a. It is important to have a clear, easily accessible way of reporting a complaint for the whole of the University population.
  - b. The confidential advisor is still difficult to find, without a 'contact me' button, which was already brought up in the Committee of Governance of November as reflected in the minutes of December.
  - c. There is a lot of discussion going on in the University regarding where the responsibility of the University stops and where their 'zorgplicht' or duty of care ends. As soon as both parties involved are related to the University, we find that it is important the University does take action and responsibility to act adequately even if the act itself did not happen within University walls. The University has committed to this in their well-being vision, "ensuring a safe learning environment" (p. 5). Cases like these affect students and staff in all aspects of their life and work. Currently, there is an imbalance of power caused by the institution and it is important to show that cases are being taken seriously and that the zero tolerance policy is being actively enforced.
2. The 'vertrouwenspersoon' or confidential advisor not being able to take concrete actions on behalf of targets.
3. Understaffed counseling center
  - a. While we would like to target the problem at the root, it is also important to have a sufficient care system that can take care of the psychological problems that students and staff may experience in the aftermath of a

traumatic experience. Currently, there are waiting lists at the student psychologists, which make it more difficult for students to get the help that they need.

4. A general lack of trust in the UG as an institution, which makes students and staff hesitant of making complaints, which is shown under the article published by the UKrant. The unrest is also visible among students, who have talked to us and amongst themselves about their feelings after reading the article and their own experiences.

#### Solutions:

The solutions we recommend are built around mainly existing support structures and best practices. Our main aim is to create a more safe environment that makes it easier for both students and staff to make complaints and find the help that they are in need of.

1. Starting a 'this is not okay' (or similar name) campaign, which can touch upon the already existing 'ben je oke' campaign which makes it easy and accessible for students to find this button.
  - a. The UMCG has a button in the student support section of Brightspace and in their faculty tools. Students can easily access the button with the name 'this is not okay' and that will lead them to a flowchart.
  - b. The UMCG flowchart can serve as a best practice for the university as a whole. It indicates a clear division of where to go and who to talk to. It stipulates clearly the three options you have: 1) talk to your study advisor 2) report anonymously to your study advisor and 3) file an official complaint. It also explains the appointed people and their names. The second step makes it easier to recognize patterns, as the study advisor will go to the Vice-Dean in case of three complaints being made. It is necessary for students to be able to find this information in a clear, accessible way.
  - c. Implementing a more extensive feedback loop, that shows whether action is being taken after a complaint is made. This is also recommended by the confidential advisor in her report (p. 15).
2. Adding on to point 1, a communication campaign in general to find the confidential advisor, which includes what her position entails, is vital for making it easier for students and staff to find the right and already existing resources.
3. Using existing student initiatives to provide training about boundaries and consent to work on changing the culture at the university. Lijst Calimero will provide a more extensive memo on this.
4. Recognizing the vital role that study associations play in informal complaints, as they are often the first point of contact for students. Many have a buddy system in place, which matches students to each other and effectively makes them a first point of contact. The UG should make use of existing initiatives and professionalize them by making sure that buddies know how to help students on a first-aid basis and who to refer their students to.
5. Make changes to the complaints procedure to make it more effective and accessible in cases of undesired behavior:
  - a. There has been a nota produced by students from the UU that sets out a detailed description of effective changes to the complaint procedure that the

UG could adopt as well. We want to highlight, but not exclude the other points:

- i. Enabling the ombudspersoon or vertrouwenspersoon to conduct their own investigations, also into anonymous and bystander reports.
  - ii. Adopting a policy that specifically prohibits staff-student relationships (Point 8). Grooming is named as being a misconduct.
  - b. Including a CvB reaction and implementation the recommendations of the vertrouwenspersoon to increase the accountability.
6. We recommend implementing the YAG-report recommendations that have not been implemented yet.
- a. We want to stress the recommendations surrounding how we can take concrete actions about the source of the problem. This has also been brought up in the University Council of October as reflected in the minutes of November. All recommendations are explicitly and extensively explained in the YAG-report.
    - i. Revision of the complaint procedure, which still was drawn up in 2010.
    - ii. Disrupt the victim's dependency on the perpetrator & dismiss retaliatory action.
    - iii. Effective education for staff which can make staff more aware of their own behavior and the behavior of others.

We are looking forward to addressing the issues raised in this letter and to look for solutions together.

Signed by the University Council,

Naomi Scholte  
Faction member for the Studentenorganisatie Groningen

## References

- Amnesty International. (2021, June 9). Eén op tien vrouwelijke studenten slachtoffer van verkrachting tijdens studie. *I&O Research Report*.
- Lijst VUUR, PvdUs, DVS, UUinActie, UPP, & Lijst Zetel UMC Utrecht. (n.d.). *Adviesnota Melden (Seksueel) Wangedrag Universiteit Utrecht*. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zmllRICQtforb0vqdF8tu-0fwLBfL69X/view>
- Renker, M. H. J. (2022). *Bureau Vertrouwenspersoon RUG Rapportage 2021*. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
- Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. (2010, July 27). *General Complaints Procedure*. General complaints procedure. Retrieved from: <https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/organization/rules-and-regulations/vertrouwelijkheid-klachten-bezwaar-beroep/algemene-klachtenregeling-en.pdf>
- Ruyters, O., Wilson, E., Fleeer, J., El Kharbotly, A., Buciu, A., Hof, W., & Munniksmma, F. (2022). UG-vision on Student Well-being.
- @sog\_groningen (instagram). (2022). *Ben je oke?* Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce03Ui8l2dz/>
- Tauber, S., & Hilton, N. (2021). *Harassment at the University of Groningen*. Young Academy Groningen.
- *Umcg Flowchart*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 26, 2023, from [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x-lgcKBjw2Oa\\_EoMsysizTuVSmEhLRcq/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x-lgcKBjw2Oa_EoMsysizTuVSmEhLRcq/view)