

A POLICY AGAINST UNDESIRABLE SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR WITHIN THE STUDENT COMMUNITY (BETWEEN STUDENTS)

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1. INTRODUCTORY

Undesirable transgressive behaviour is a serious issue, at various levels. First and foremost, it affects the safety and well-being of the students who are directly or indirectly involved. Experiencing undesirable transgressive behaviour can also seriously affect the academic prospects of those concerned. In addition, undesirable transgressive behaviour can have a toxic effect on the atmosphere and safety experienced by our student community on our campuses.

Undesirable transgressive behaviour covers various aspects. We define it as any behaviour that violates personal or generally applicable values and norms, crosses specific boundaries and (un)consciously causes or threatens to cause harm to others, the environment or oneself. We do not tolerate any form of undesirable transgressive behaviour within our student community at VUB, be it bullying, verbal, physical and online violence, racism or sexually transgressive behaviour. We do not tolerate discrimination, disadvantage or inequality based on gender, wealth, marital status, political or trade union beliefs, language, socio-economic situation, class, philosophy of life, religion, nationality, skin colour, ethnicity and migration background, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, physical and mental abilities or disabilities.

Undesirable transgressive behaviour is expressed in various forms. By definition, no one form is more serious than any other. It is the perception of the affected person and the perceived extent to which boundaries have been crossed that determines how serious the undesirable transgressive behaviour is. This perception also determines the long-term effect of the encountered undesirable transgressive behaviour.

The described policy, which has been discussed in detail below, focuses explicitly and exclusively on one specific form: undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. We define undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour as any form of sexual behaviour that can harm one's own integrity or that of other persons. Examples include unwanted touching, sexual comments, kissing against someone's will, sexual assault, rape, and so on. Certain elements of this Policy may extend beyond the narrow focus on undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour and also apply in cases involving other forms of undesirable transgressive behaviour. Finally, this Policy explicitly focuses on undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour among students at VUB. It mainly addresses the most common form: sexually transgressive behaviour by men towards women, without a gender-oriented approach. We therefore also include sexually transgressive behaviour committed by women and other gender-related sexually transgressive behaviour (e.g. on trans students, queer students, students with a non-heterosexual orientation, students with dysphoria, etc.).

Some elements of this Policy are undoubtedly also applicable or relevant in the context of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour between VUB staff members, or between VUB students and VUB staff. However, this falls outside the scope of this policy document. Wherever appropriate, we will consult and coordinate further with each other (Human & Organisational Management) in order to create a comprehensive policy.

2. GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR A POLICY AGAINST UNDESIRABLE SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

2.1 HEALTHY, SAFE AND POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS, FRIENDSHIPS AND SEXUALITY BETWEEN STUDENTS AT THE VUB

The VUB, which includes its student community, stands for a warm and connected university where we put people first. We want our campuses to be environments where students – young adults – live together in harmony, while respecting and trusting each other.

All of our students tend to make new friends when they arrive at our university. We encourage the development of friendships based on deep-rooted mutual ties. The friendships that our students form with each other play a positive role in their individual well-being because of the support they draw from them. These friendships also have a positive impact on the general warm and connected atmosphere within our university (student) community. For all these reasons, we are actively committed to initiatives that help us encourage and support social unity and the establishment of friendships among people at our university: the welcome week for new students, VUBuddy, the accommodation coach for boarding students, club life, and so on.

Most of our students, who are mainly between 18-25 years of age, discover relationships and sexuality at this stage of their life. Intimate relationships between students often develop in this phase of their lives. In sexual terms, quite a few young adult students often have successive (short- or long-term) relationships, which can often be quite diverse: hetero- and/or non-heterosexual, monogamous or non-monogamous. Gaining experience of one's sexuality is almost inseparable from the phase of development in which the majority of our young adult students find themselves, i.e. that of discovery and experimentation. This teaches them how to deal with the boundaries of intimacy, physicality and relationships. We need to give our students the space and opportunity to deal with this stage of their development in a meaningful manner. But consent is something that must be absolutely present in every intimate, sexual contact between students: there must be explicit mutual consent for intimate or sexual acts, either verbally or non-verbally. Consent is more about the presence of a "yes", and less so about the absence of a "no". It appears to be difficult to explicitly say "yes" in a non-verbal manner. However, being aware of non-verbal behaviour is certainly also crucial in the search for consent. Because non-verbal behaviour can certainly clearly show the absence of consent: the person pulls away, try to leave, and so on. Besides mutual consent, other criteria that are also crucial for healthy sexual or sexually-oriented contact between students include voluntariness, equality, self-esteem on the part of the person him/herself or the other party involved, sexual behaviour appropriate to the context, and the suitability of sexual behaviour to the functional level of the students concerned. These criteria, as described in the Sensoa Flag System, are essential for establishing a sexual relationship free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

On the part of VUB, we continue to focus on promoting an environment in which our students can experience relationships and sexuality in a healthy and positive way. These efforts are intended to contribute to the physical and emotional well-being of our students.

2.2 CODE OF CONDUCT

In accordance with the VUB Code of Conduct and as also set out in the Student Life Codex, we expect students to behave responsibly in their capacity as students, both on and off the VUB campuses. They must treat each other with respect, while taking each other's psychological and physical integrity into account. They shall not deliberately say anything that someone else may consider offensive or a violation of dignity. Students shall address people using the pronouns they themselves prefer (she/he/they).

Our students should be mutually supportive, especially in case of problem situations. Students who witness discrimination, disadvantage or undesirable transgressive behaviour must not look the other way but, rather, try to stop such behaviour, intervene actively and stand up for the victim. Students

must support each other in this respect. If students cannot or feel unable to stop undesirable behaviour, we recommend that they use distraction tactics and/or involve third parties. In such cases, we also ask them to report this behaviour to the VUB Report It Helpline. We are aware that some students feel unable to report such incidents, for fear of the ensuing consequences for themselves and/or the perpetrator. Students who wish to do so can therefore provide their evidence in a completely anonymous manner, if they so prefer. In such cases, the VUB Report It Helpline will completely anonymize the report and remove everything that is identifiable from the witness statement.

3. PREVENTIVE APPROACH TO UNDERSIRABLE TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR BETWEEN STUDENTS

3.1 IDENTIFYING RISKS

We know from research that students, especially female students, are highly likely to become victims of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour in higher education. For the United States, the figure is ¼ of female students. Unfortunately, the European figures are even higher: 31%. Young people moving from secondary to higher education are most at risk of becoming victims, especially in the first few months of the academic year. According to Dutch research, young people between the ages of 18 and 25 are four times more likely to be victims of sexual violence. This study also finds that first-year students, in particular, are especially vulnerable.

Any form of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour is serious and violates the integrity of the victim concerned. Undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour has a major impact. Persons who are or have been victims of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour often feel lonely. Their social relationships suffer, as does their ability to build relationships. Functional problems and long-term psychological complaints are common (concentration problems, anxiety disorders). That is why it is important that we try to prevent undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour wherever possible. Below we list the (empirically validated) risk factors for undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour specifically among students in the 18 to 25-year age group. Intervening in this area can help us prevent incidents of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour.

3.1.1 STUDENT-RELATED FACTORS

- DEVELOPMENT PHASE

Some students are in a developmental phase where they have new-found freedoms that they try to explore and experience. They also become more independent and self-reliant. At the same time, less control is normally exercised by parents. They establish new relationships and actively participate in the nightlife. Besides fun, interaction and experimentation, the nightlife scene also involves breaking social rules.

- USE OF MEDICATION, ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Some students go out frequently. When going out, some of them more frequently encounter the use of alcohol and drugs. Alcohol and drugs are precisely what makes young people very vulnerable to undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour, with use of these substances increasing the risk of incidents involving sexually transgressive behaviour. In a third of the situations where young people have been victims of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour, the victim and/or perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Women report this more often than men.

There are several possible explanations with regard to alcohol and drugs as risk factors. The influence of alcohol and/or drugs lowers the threshold for (sexual) contact with others. It blurs the individual's own boundaries and makes it more difficult for him/her to assert these boundaries. At the same time, alcohol or drugs give some students a false sense of increased power or self-confidence. The use of alcohol in combination with other drugs further exacerbates this effect (1+1=3), which makes the blurring of boundaries even greater. Combined use of these substances makes it difficult to detect and correctly assess signals for absence of consent (e.g. non-verbal behaviour). It causes the people concerned to no longer have any recollection of the alleged behaviour (blackouts) afterwards. This is problematic as it can lead to perpetrators not being aware of their own transgressive behaviour.

In addition, people can have (unrealistic) expectations about the sexual experience being better when they have had something to drink. These factors also increase the risk of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour facilitated by alcohol or drugs.

In European student cities, it is reported that students mistakenly accept undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour caused by alcohol and drug use as being part of the student nightlife

culture. It is a sign that we now think it is normal for partying students – especially women - to become victims of sexually transgressive behaviour. This mindset and culture is wrong. In turn, the assumption that such behaviour is self-evident and part of the scene increases the likelihood that students will become victims of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. At the same time, this prevailing mentality makes it very difficult to break the taboo surrounding the sexual victimisation of students as a result of alcohol or drug use.

- **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL STATE**

Young people who¹ have engaged in sexting, have dated via a dating app in the past year or who have had negative childhood experiences (emotionally neglected or abused at home, or other traumatic or anxiety-related experiences) are at greater risk of sexual violence. Re-victimisation involves real risks; having experienced sexual violence increases the chance of experiencing this again with another person. This can be explained because sexual violence is often more about abuse of power than sex; with perpetrators detecting signals of vulnerability that victims often emit subconsciously. This is in contrast to young people with better mental health, a more positive body image and higher self-esteem; they are less likely to come into contact with sexual violence.

- **LACK OF OPENNESS ABOUT EXPERIENCES (IN THE NIGHTLIFE SCENE)**

The absence of a positive personal bond between the student and his/her parents or other persons close to the student represents a risk factor for engaging in and/or experiencing undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. Students who do not communicate openly with their parents or those close to them about the nightlife scene and what they experience in it run the risk of increasing their chances of being a perpetrator or victim.

3.1.2 *FACTORS RELATED TO THE PERPETRATOR*

- **AGE DIFFERENCE**

Subjectively experienced coercion often plays a role in situations of sexually transgressive behaviour. This coercion is often accompanied by an age difference between the victim and the perpetrator. For young people whose first experience of sexual intercourse took place under duress, in 30% of cases the perpetrator was five years older or more, someone with whom they did not have a relationship or someone who was completely unknown to them.

- **GENDER OF AND FAMILIARITY WITH THE PERPETRATOR**

In society in general, the perpetrator of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour towards women is usually a man, and in that case often even known to them, e.g. (ex)boyfriend. As far as men are concerned, the perpetrator is just as likely to be a man or a woman, and often also a casual sex partner; for men, the perpetrator is therefore often also a person known to them.

- **OFFENCE COMMITTED BY AN INDIVIDUAL VS. A GROUP**

Men are more likely to be victims of an offence committed by a group of people (14% of men, compared to 5% of women).

3.1.3 *FACTORS RELATED TO THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT*

- **PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF FRIENDS**

The absence of friends, especially among women, seems to increase the chance of experiencing undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour in the nightlife scene. Having friends present can act as perceived protection against experiencing undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. Because friends sit together when they go out and stand up for one another. When going out, being together with friends can keep potential perpetrators further at bay and reduce the appeal of someone from the group as a potential target.

At the same time, the presence of friends can entail risks. If one of the friends within the group exhibits deviant (sexually transgressive) behaviour, this may encourage others from the same

¹ Sending nude photos or a video of themselves, or displaying sexual acts during a video chat.

group of friends to also engage in undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. It can also lead to peer pressure not to protect the victim. And if friends from the group themselves engage in deviant behaviour, their own chance of becoming a victim also increases.

- **MEMBER OF A GROUP**

First-year students who join a group (this can be an informal group, or an association) are more likely to come into contact with undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. This is often due to excessive alcohol consumption within groups of students. The peer pressure that can arise within a group of people around the same age plays a role. An example of this is peer pressure that causes students to engage in certain behaviours that entail risks concerning undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour - take binge drinking, for instance. But also the behaviour of some older students who seek out first-year students whose limits have not yet been set and possibly exploit the absence of such limits during their interactions.

- **GROUP COMPOSITION**

If a group is predominantly male, it appears that this factor leads to an increase in sexually transgressive behaviour.

- **HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STUDENTS**

Intimate relationships between students who have a hierarchical relationship can involve risks of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. An example of this is a relationship between a fresher member and a board member of a student organisation, between a first-year student and a VUBuddy (experienced VUB student who is studying the same as you and who helps you with the transition to university), or between a student and a student tutor. Such intimate relationships of a hierarchical nature harbour a very real risk of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour when the intimate relationship is not consensual, e.g. where participation cannot be considered entirely voluntary in some way or some form of coercion, harassment or exploitation is involved. But also when the relationship somehow goes against the interests of the person who appears to be the weaker member of the relationship. Or when a student, because of his/her ambition or admiration, sometimes does more to gain favour with the student that is 'higher' in the hierarchy.

- **PHYSICALITY AND TOUCHING IN STUDENT LIFE**

Student life outside of formal class hours often involves touching. Physical contact between students themselves and between (board) members of student organisations. This touching is part of the informal atmosphere that prevails between students: they give each other a kiss, share group hugs, give each other a pat on the back or comforting hugs, sit on each other's laps, and so on. Certain activities in student club life also involve physicality due to the course of events. Touch is a part of student life for some students; touch is a non-verbal form of communication and is therefore also important. It can contribute to the well-being of each individual student and to the feeling of being a close-knit group. However, when there is physical contact between students, it is crucial to put the integrity of each student first and protect it at all times; touching should never be allowed to degenerate into an unpleasant experience.

3.1.4 FACTORS RELATED TO TIME

The following usually applies: the later in the evening, the more often sexually transgressive behaviour occurs. The influencing factor, as frequently reported here, is alcohol and drugs that make possible perpetrators ever less inhibited and potential victims more vulnerable. The reduced level of social control and surveillance on the street/campus during the evening/night also plays a role.

3.1.5 FACTORS RELATED TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- **CAMPUS ORGANISATION**

The organisation of our university is more campus-based; our students go to class, live, study and relax on our (publicly accessible but) more or less defined campuses. On the one hand,

this centralised campus structure can create a feeling of togetherness - "we know each other". However, this feeling can also be misleading; the campus can be a micro-society where residents must try to deal with incidents of undesirable transgressive behaviour internally. On the other hand, it can make it less daunting for victims of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour on our campus, in that they can easily seek the help from VUB security, instead of having to go directly to the police.

- **ABSENCE OF GOOD LIGHTING**

Dark or poorly lit places on campus may pose risks for incidents involving undesirable transgressive behaviour.

3.1.6 *MEDIA*

- **CLASSIC MEDIA PORTRAYAL**

Images presented via advertisements, the classic media and social media can actually encourage undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. The same applies to images via the Internet (porn). These images sometimes depict women as playing 'hard to get'. Young people who frequently see such images then start to identify more with these images. And assume that it will be possible to establish (intimate) contact with a woman if they insist long enough. The importance of consent and actively requesting consent is barely addressed in the media, if at all, or is portrayed as something that is not sexy.

- **IMAGES IN PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL FOR STUDENT EVENTS**

In previous years, there have been frequent complaints from students, VUB staff and campus visitors about posters used by (some) student organisations to promote their events. Every now and then, outsiders also go around flyposting similar posters that provoke outrage. These posters often contain images that objectify and sexualise the female body. Such images represent women as 'wild animals that need to be tamed', or could be interpreted in this manner. Such images contribute to men's misconception that they need to conquer women when it comes to sexuality. This perception leads to attitudes that make it more difficult to recognise and acknowledge undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. In our own VUB student organisations we noticed that awareness about the impact of such images in promotional material is growing, with the number of such posters decreasing.

- **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Young people have a close relationship with the Internet; they spend a lot of time online and on social networks. These social networks offer students the opportunity to meet new people, maintain friendships, fall in love, enter into relationships and experience sexuality. Online, the threshold for certain behaviour is also lower than in "real life", without the disinhibiting effect that we experience in a physical environment. The elimination of this disinhibiting effect is at the root of a number of phenomena that are associated with or pose significant risks of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour: sexting, online flirting, grooming, catfishing, loverboys, etc.

3.1.7 *CULTURE-RELATED FACTORS*

- **EUROPEAN CULTURE**

In European nightlife, there is a mentality that certain transgressive behaviour is normal and is 'simply part of going out'. Examples include: someone touching your bottom, sexually-oriented comments, sexual harassment, and so on. There are also so-called rape myths, such as "women who are scantily dressed are "asking for it". This mentality is said to be more prominent in Europe than in the United States, for example.

- **MULTICULTURALISM**

Our multicultural society also entails superdiversity and intersectionality when it comes to sexuality-related norms and values. Where the boundaries regarding sexually transgressive

behaviour lie can therefore differ depending on the culture that young people grew up with during their upbringing. Of course, it is also important to respect this.

- **UNIVERSALITY**

At VUB, we regard the right to physical integrity and respect for sexual boundaries to be a universal principle in which we make absolutely no concessions. Regardless of culture, we are concerned about the normalisation of transgressive behaviour in the nightlife scene, and it being taken for granted and being (or having to be) accepted. It is a cultural characteristic that we must be able to reverse.

3.2 ACTION PLAN TO PROMOTE DESIRABLE BEHAVIOR AND TO PREVENT AND DEAL APPROPRIATELY WITH UNDESIRABLE TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

3.2.1 GENERAL CULTURAL CHANGE

- **NORMALISE TALK OF POSITIVE AND NORMAL SEXUALITY**

Talking about positive and normal sexuality is often still taboo. This is perhaps also the case at our free-thinking university. We need to help create an environment where it is normal to talk about sexuality that involves people setting their limits, and where it is seen as cool and sexy if you ask for consent first. Such an environment makes it possible for students to talk to each other (more) easily about sexuality, what they do not like and what they have already experienced. Gradually creating such a "basic" conversation and consent culture around sexuality contributes step by step to everyone's awareness that sex without consent is not acceptable. We thus make our students aware of the fact that "no means no".

It is essential for students to experience an atmosphere where they feel safe to talk about transgressive behaviour, consent and any incidents of undesirable transgressive behaviour. The pursuit of this safe atmosphere will be part of a communication (policy) plan on transgressive behaviour. The safe atmosphere and openness created in this manner will help students feel comfortable enough to dare to express feelings of discontent, preferably before any serious incidents have occurred. We must do everything to avoid a strict, dismissive atmosphere around these topics. Because, otherwise, we will only further exacerbate the taboo.

- **ELIMINATE FALSE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT UNDESIRABLE SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR**

Myths concerning sexually transgressive behaviour contribute to such undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. By myths we mean how we, as individuals and as a group, make assumptions about who commits undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour, who becomes the victim of it and how such undesirable transgressive behaviour arises. We must discourage and eliminate these false assumptions, and make efforts not to wrongly contribute to 'victim blaming'. We review the myths and false assumptions that exist among students. In this regard, as part of the VUB communication (policy) plan on transgressive behaviour, we are running a VUB campaign focused specifically on revising these assumptions.

- **AN ADVERTISING POLICY THAT ELIMINATES GENDER STEREOTYPES**

Working on cultural change also means focusing on getting rid of patriarchal gender stereotypes, while also explicitly paying attention to intersectionality. These stereotypes and views also exist on our campuses, sometimes even in the posters used by (some) organisations to promote their events. Some European countries (Great Britain), cities (Berlin, Sweden, Paris, Trondheim, Segovia, etc.) and universities (Queen's University and Brock University (Canada), State University (New York), The American University (Beirut)) have already implemented publicity-related measures in the past to reduce the exposure of men and women to gender stereotypes and combat the resulting indirect violence against women. Examples of such measures are: the ban on publishing men or women in a gender stereotyped activity, ban on presenting men or women simply as sex objects (without any relevance to the event/product),

ban on forms of publicity that present men and/or women in a derogatory manner. At VUB, we must therefore also focus on an advertising policy that portrays men and women in an equal and balanced manner in promotional campaigns. This advertising policy includes a set of guidelines that our own VUB departments and VUB student organisations can then implement easily when designing promotional material. It is beneficial to include the power of humour in the guidelines; campaigns that use humour to play with gender stereotypes are often very successful and often revelatory.

- **ATTENTION TO MALE VICTIMS, FEMALE PERPETRATORS AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that men can also be victims of sexually transgressive behaviour, whether the perpetrators are women or not, or other forms of sexual gender-related violence, such as that (partly) motivated by homophobia, transphobia or racism, for example.

3.2.2 DISTANCING OURSELVES FROM TRIVIALISING UNDESIRABLE SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Students often do not report an incident involving undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour that they have observed or experienced themselves. In some cases, students cannot recall the incident sufficiently or at all due to excessive alcohol consumption and/or (unintentional) drug use. Often, however, the reasons can be traced back to a tolerant culture of sexually transgressive behaviour. Students do not consider the incident itself serious enough. Or they don't think it's worthwhile reporting the incident. They don't think they have enough evidence to substantiate their story. They think that they themselves are (partly) to blame for the incident. They are afraid of the consequences of their report for the perpetrator but also for themselves, especially if the perpetrator has powerful connections. Or they have heard negative reactions from others to the effect that nothing was done about certain incidents that were reported. These thought and behaviour patterns perpetuate the prevailing culture of minimising or demonising incidents of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. We have to distance ourselves from the prevailing culture of taboo and silence that tends to trivialise and deny the facts. We need to discuss incidents within our university and student community in a mature manner. As a university community, on the other hand, all of us – lecturers, students, associations, staff, etc. - must accept full and firm responsibility: we must clearly acknowledge that every single situation or incident should not have happened. And, by extension, make every effort to prevent and seriously respond to such situations in the future.

3.2.3 INTEGRITY WOVEN INTO OUR ACTIONS

- **EVERYONE IS RESPONSIBLE**

Undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour is not an exclusively interpersonal matter between a perpetrator and a victim. There are often witnesses who, as bystanders, can play an important role in preventing sexually transgressive behaviour, offer assistance to victims and act as a witness during reporting. Indeed, many forms of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour are already covered by provisions set out in the criminal code. Anyone who is a witness to this and does not act in a responsible manner is, in principle, guilty of negligence. This can be included in the communication (policy) plan concerning transgressive behaviour.

- **A CLEAR AGREEMENT FRAMEWORK WITHIN EACH ASSOCIATION**

This is by no means an attempt to prohibit all forms of touching. However, each association must be able to rely on an appropriate agreement framework. Proactive rather than reactive, because frameworks developed in a reactive manner in response to incidents involving undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour often tend to be overly strict.

Such an agreement framework clearly indicates what can and cannot be done within the association in terms of relationships and sexuality. A framework of this kind lays down the

rules regarding relationships and sexuality within the association, as well as the rules to safeguard everyone's integrity. These rules apply to all (new) members, as well as to non-members taking part in activities or events organised by the association. These rules are not open to discussion. Such rules include, for example: not tolerating touching that causes pain or is experienced as disrespectful, or not accepting touching involving intimate parts of the body. In addition, the association can use discussion and consultation to reach an agreement on additional arrangements with the support of its members. Examples of situations where it may be useful to develop rules and agreements include relationships between (board) members, between the board and members, or for assignments or activities aimed at testing boundaries (initiation rituals, etc.).

We opt for a common framework of agreements for all VUB student organisations, embedded in the Student Life Codex. A single shared agreement framework offers numerous benefits. It relieves all associations of the burden to develop a separate framework themselves. An overarching agreement framework offers the best guarantees for maintaining consistency when board members change. Finally, a common agreement framework helps to provide uniformity and clarity for students who are members of different associations.

The development of an overarching framework must ensure that it is effective, safe, well thought out and coached in a professional manner. The involved associations must be able to give their opinion about it, with nobody allowed to impose their own views on relationships and sexuality. These prerequisites increase the likelihood of rules and agreements in the framework being accepted and adopted. This framework of rules and agreements then offers everyone who is part of the association the opportunity to experiment with relationships and sexuality safely and to their heart's content, while preventing undesirable transgressive situations at the same time.

The necessary understanding for this is normally shown by prospective members or visitors who are well aware of why these rules and agreements apply. It is then very important for board members to act as role models and, through their behaviour, communicate the rules and agreements arising from the framework accordingly. If one or more rules arising from the agreement framework are violated, the association must act in a consistent manner; non-response is not an option. If a rule is violated, the association shall not judge the perpetrator as a person but, rather, focus on his/her behaviour.

■ INTEGRITY AS SELF-EVIDENT CULTURE IN ASSOCIATION LIFE

In the interest of student association life, we must instil respect for everyone's integrity as a self-evident culture in the activities of each organisation. However, we cannot create this culture by simply compiling a framework of rules and agreements that (prospective) members and board members subscribe to. On the other hand, we can create this culture by clearly informing prospective members during the first conversation or meeting that respect for everyone's integrity is essential for the functioning of the association, and by clearly communicating that potential perpetrators of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour are not welcome in the association. These messages go hand in hand with the message to prospective members that they all have the right to determine their own boundaries, to express them, and to have them respected. Each individual in the association has a role to play in ensuring that everyone's boundaries are respected. Those at a higher level in the association (board members) have an important role in this regard in terms of alerting and intervening accordingly. Together with the associations, we are investigating how we can embed this culture as a self-evident factor in the way we operate.

3.2.4 *ENHANCE EXPERTISE*

■ AT INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: SETTING BOUNDARIES AND SEEKING CONSENT

The boundaries of relationships and sexuality are for the most part something personal. What feels pleasant to one person may not feel okay to someone else. In order to gain a clear picture

of this individual grey area and be able to assess where everyone's limits lie, it is important to test the boundaries. We need to make our students aware of this and train them how important it is to systematically check this with themselves and others. For oneself, the exercise involves: checking whether the other person gives signals that they consent to the interaction, whether the other person also takes the initiative, whether what you are doing is okay from their own position, whether you create the necessary space for the other person to indicate that they do not like something, whether there is any coercion or power imbalance and, above all, whether there is scope to indicate that it is also okay if nothing else happens and that there are no consequences involved.

Checking with the other person means that the student confirms whether everything is still okay through literal questions such as "is it okay for you?", "what do you want me to do?", "are you enjoying this too?", "okay with you if we..."? Besides verbal messages, it is also important to be sensitive to body language. And again: we need to make our students aware and train them that seeking consent is hot and sexy! We offer these training sessions together with experts (organisations).

- **FOR GROUPS OF VUB EMPLOYEES, ASSOCIATION ADMINISTRATOR AND CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS**

We have embedded the Sensoa Flag System in our policy-based approach towards undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour among students. This Flag System is a method developed in Flanders to assess sexual behaviour at case level, respond to it appropriately and curb such behaviour in the future (in a safe manner, where necessary). Based on the Flag System, we need to train administrators of associations and student counsellors to enable them to learn to "read" situations that can affect boundaries and integrity, and how to deal with them subsequently. A similar training programme on how to analyse and approach potential incidents is useful for VUB employees who may come into contact with (potential) incidents directly or indirectly, i.e. the accommodation coach, student psychologists, security guards, lecturers, exercise and sports department, etc.

- **FOR ALL POSSIBLE BYSTANDERS**

As a bystander, you may observe or experience a situation where someone else is at risk of becoming a victim of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. As a bystander, you can then actively intervene and act as the potential victim's 'defender', thereby playing an important preventive role. However, for bystanders to have the courage to take on the role of an active defender, they must have a strong sense of responsibility, have the necessary skills to respond in an active manner and be willing to bring about a change in the situation. Bystanders will feel this level of willingness especially if the potential victim(s) are friends, people who the bystander feels belong to the same group as them (even if they do not necessarily know them personally), or if they have more or less the same social identity. At the same time, we also need to raise awareness about actively and defensively taking on the bystander role towards male victims; rape myths make us less inclined to help men as bystanders. In short, this requires active training for each student so that they feel skilled and confident enough to act in an active and defensive role as a bystander, where necessary. This type of bystander training – organised from a gender and age-neutral perspective - focuses on recognising and pointing out undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour, how to act against it and how to deal with it when you notice it as a bystander. We organise these bystander training courses for students in a structural manner.

3.2.5 *INSTRUMENTAL EFFORTS TO INTERVENE IN SITUATIONS INVOLVING UNDESIRABLE TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR*

- **STUDENT ORGANISATIONS**

A bit like the logo published on the student card, we provide a label that can be used by recognised student organisations when promoting their events. This label – which associations can publish on posters for a party, for example - makes it clear that the association explicitly accepts the VUB Code of Conduct as the standard and is actively committed to creating a safe environment that does not tolerate transgressive behaviour. This is also helpful when conveying the statutes of the associations, in which the Code of Conduct is also mentioned, to (prospective) members and people taking part in activities and events.

- **ROOM REGULATIONS FOR VISITORS TO PARTY FACILITIES**

We issue room regulations that apply to all users of our party facilities (BSG room, BOJ room, tent, Tempus, Lounge Bar and fakbar (faculty café)). These room regulations explain that every visitor must behave in accordance with the VUB Code of Conduct, and that undesirable transgressive behaviour will not be tolerated. These room regulations include a nominal and detailed list of incidents as a result of which visitors must leave the room immediately and/or a (temporary) access ban will be imposed. We develop these room regulations in collaboration with the operators of our party facilities.

- **VISITOR REGISTRATION AND ACCESS BANS**

Justified by VUB's interest in organising events without problems in our party facilities, we intend to implement access control for visitors to events. The room regulations state that every visitor must, when requested, present their student card, identity card or admission ticket in their name; without identification, they cannot enter. The room regulations also explicitly state that visitors who do not comply with the room regulations are obliged to present their student card, identity card or admission ticket in their name when requested. This identity check has an important preventive value. Identifying the names of people who are in suspicious situations, or situations where the gut feeling indicates that the situation poses a risk of potentially undesirable transgressive behaviour, has a deterrent effect on potential perpetrators. Lifting the anonymity of potential perpetrators has a strong preventive effect; the thought that potential perpetrators are known makes them more likely to refrain from acts of transgressive behaviour. Finally, name-based access control is essential to check that no one enters who has exhibited problematic behaviour in the past, for which they have been banned from entering. The operators of party facilities keep lists of persons who have been banned from entering, in accordance with the GDPR and while duly observing the legal framework concerning private security.

- **A SAFE SPACE**

At large-scale events (e.g. parties or cantuses), a safe space is set up that is highly visible and easy for all visitors to find. Students can go to this safe space for earplugs or first aid, for example. But also if they do not feel safe or want to recover for a moment. Students who are concerned about a fellow student can also safely 'drop him/her off' there. There are posters at various locations at the event, informing visitors that they can go to the safe space for help or assistance.

- **USE OF BEACONS AT LARGE PARTIES**

Beacons are already being used on the Brussels Health Campus and the Main Campus, but for the time being they are only used to control the campus screens. We are investigating how we can also use these beacons to send push notifications via bluetooth to every visitor who enters or leaves a party zone. Via such a beacon, visitors entering a party location on campus would receive the message "let's have a great party tonight! Feel unsafe? Notify the organisers or campus security; we can help you (02-6291111)". If you leave the party location, you will receive the message "get home safely. Feel unsafe? Notify the organisers before you leave or call campus security; we can help you (02-6291111)."

3.3 TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

We will document the following overview of tasks and responsibilities in a clearly organised flow chart.

- **VUB AS AN INSTITUTION**

VUB is developing a Policy on undesirable transgressive behaviour, which includes the Code of Conduct. VUB ensures that every member of the student community and, by extension, the overall university community is aware of the Code of Conduct. A reference to the Code of Conduct on the student card should help in this regard, as should the renewed VUB website. The VUB implements a communication policy regarding undesirable transgressive behaviour. In line with this, the VUB will make all VUB students aware of the Code of Conduct via a communication campaign. Great attention is paid to this campaign at the VUB kick-off. In addition, we run a preventive mini-campaign twice a year: in mid-October (start of the initiation weeks, followed by Saint V celebration) and at the start of the second semester (the ski trips, release after the exams and being able to party again, etc.). Here, we focus on topics such as "ask for Angela", "Angel shots", getting home safely, spiking and drugs, consent, etc. from a preventive perspective. At the party locations on campuses, we are continuing our efforts to raise awareness about the Code of Conduct among visitors and inform them about the assistance provided.

The VUB does what is necessary to ensure that all students can act in accordance with this Code of Conduct. We focus on raising awareness and training, especially among the residential communities in the VUB student rooms.

The VUB informs the student representatives and the boards of the student organisations annually about the help available in the event of undesirable transgressive behaviour, so that they can then refer students who confide in them in a purposeful and easy manner.

The VUB also helps to facilitate the operation of the helpline for transgressive behaviour by offering resources, time and expertise.

- **VUB CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS & STUDENT ORGANISATION CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS**

The confidential counsellors can recognise signs of undesirable transgressive behaviour. They answer questions from students about the VUB Code of Conduct.

VUB organises annual training and intervention session(s) for the confidential counsellors. This is designed to allow the confidential counsellors to acquire the necessary knowledge (concerning the action protocol and referral, among other things) and skills (e.g. listening and conversation techniques), as well as exchange experiences with fellow confidential counsellors.

- **ON-CAMPUS CATERING AND HOSPITALITY**

Our on-campus catering and hospitality partners have a responsibility to create a safe entertainment environment in their businesses, and their immediate surroundings. Together with our concession holders, we are examining how we can give the 'Angel Shot' a prominent place on their drinks menu. The 'Angel Shot' is a fictional drink that acts as a security code to allow visitors to clearly inform the hospitality operator that they feel unsafe, that they need help and that intervention on the part of the hospitality business is necessary. If they so wish, we invite our concession holders to be part of awareness campaigns from the VUB (cf. putting up posters in their business).

As part of the drug and alcohol policy that we are currently working on, we are examining whether we can include a provision in the concession agreements whereby concession holders will not serve customers who are already drunk. The training courses that we organise for the bartenders of our associations (cf. tips, tricks and tools to successfully refuse drinks to customers) are also open to the employees of our concession holders. Finally, catering operators should ideally also keep an eye on the condition their customers are in when they leave to go home.

- **BAR STAFF (CATERING AND EVENTS)**

Bar staff are instructed to intervene in a de-escalating manner wherever necessary. Their role is mainly preventive: ensuring that possible situations concerning undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour do not 'go too far', and thus intervene in a timely manner. It may help to clearly inform observed potential perpetrators that undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour is not tolerated on the business premises and/or during the event. Together with the catering operators on campus, we are examining how we can incorporate this commitment into the concession agreements.

- **NIGHTLIFE SAFETY STEWARDS**

Associations that organise parties or cantuses appoint at least a pair of safety stewards from their association who remain sober throughout the entire event. They are clearly recognisable by their orange captain's armband with the VUB logo. Their job primarily involves walking around in the entertainment area, speaking to people who behave inappropriately, keeping an eye on vulnerable students and being continuously available as the first (safe) point of contact in the safe space (cf. above).

Initially, security stewards should try to de-escalate unsafe situations by talking to the people involved. They speak to potential perpetrators, help to divert potential perpetrators and potential victims away from each other (e.g. by calling a safe taxi for a potential victim so that he/she can get home safely, or they ask accompanying friends to bring the person home or to his/her room), or they verify information in a suspicious situation (e.g. where a drunken student is sitting outside and so-called 'acquaintances' come to the rescue). They can request help from VUB security or the additional event security personnel if necessary. In view of the wide range of duties, we organise the required training sessions for safety stewards.

- **SECURITY**

VUB security is present on the campus to monitor and maintain order and safety. During entertainment evenings (parties), the organising associations hire additional (external) security teams to provide extra surveillance of order and safety during the event, both indoors and outdoors, and to intervene if necessary. Focus should also be on the outdoor space they are helping to monitor. For example, if a student is very drunk and alone, the security guard must then perform a preventive role. In particular, arrange for friends to be present or call a taxi so that the student can get home safely.

Based on practical experience, it is advisable to work with a regular security team for such events, wherever possible. Hiring a regular team has the advantage that the security guards already know the facility well, are familiar with the risk-related areas of the party facility and the type of visitors (including potential perpetrators who are already known to them), and are well aware how such a party evening generally proceeds. Together with the operators of the party facilities and BSGgtv (umbrella student association), we draw up a list of reliable and highly professional security firms that can ideally also provide one or more female security guards. This list can be supplied to the association administration boards every year.

- **VUB REPORT IT HELPLINE FOR TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR**

Anyone with a question related to transgressive behaviour can contact the VUB Report It Helpline. The helpline coordinator is easily accessible to everyone, and acts as the point of contact.

An overview of the duties and responsibilities, both preventive and reactive (see chapter 3), has been presented in a clearly organised flowchart. First of all, a flowchart for students, which shows simply and clearly who they can contact from a preventive or reactive perspective in the event of undesirable transgressive behaviour. In addition, we have created a flowchart for VUB employees that provides insight into what VUB staff should do if they notice undesirable transgressive behaviour between

students in their department or during their work, and how they can best follow this up themselves. We organise training about using the flowchart for VUB staff members.

4. REACTIVE: RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS INVOLVING UNDESIRABLE SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR AND OFFERING ASSOCIATED CARE, LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOVERY

4.1 ACTION PROTOCOL TO RESPOND TO ACUTE UNDESIRABLE SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

4.1.1 BEST PRACTICE FOR RESPONDING TO A CASE OF UNDESIRABLE SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Young people who have experienced a situation involving undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour do not find it easy to tell their story. Many of them have never even shared their experience with anyone else. This is more so the case for men than for women. Because young people do not share their story, they are unable to obtain the (informal or formal) support needed to process their experience.

Students are more likely to tell their story if the conversation offers them a suitable opening to share their experience. If students decide to reveal their story of undesirable transgressive behaviour, it is important that we respond in the best possible way. There are approximately 5 rules that are helpful and important in this respect:

- BELIEVE WHAT THE VICTIM SAYS
Otherwise, victims will feel further betrayed if the people with whom they share their experience do not believe them.
- STATE THAT IT IS NOT THE VICTIM'S FAULT
Victims often feel partially responsible for the incident or think that they could have prevented an incident involving undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. You can help to remove some of this sense of guilt by explicitly stating that it is not the person's fault. You should point out that it is not up to the victim to adjust their behaviour; rather, it is up to the perpetrator to change their behaviour.
- YOU ARE NOT ALONE
This allows you to communicate to the victim that they are not alone in this experience.
- I AM GLAD YOU TOLD ME THIS
In many cases, a victim has been carrying the experience of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour around for a long time. It often takes a lot of courage to verbalise such an experience. You must acknowledge that courage.
- I'M GOING TO HELP AS MUCH AS I CAN
It is important for a victim to feel that revealing their story will improve the situation. With this message, you communicate to the victim that you will take steps to help end the situation. When doing so, do not guarantee confidentiality vis-à-vis the victim. Also inform the student of every step you take. Depending on who you are, the steps can vary: support the student to take certain steps themselves (contact the helpline, mediation with the suspected perpetrator, etc.), contact the helpline, the confidential counsellor, the suspected perpetrator, etc.

By talking to students about their experience with undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour in this manner, you indirectly convey the message that they do not need to feel ashamed. At the same time, you show them the necessary respect through this approach and allow them to experience the warmth and security needed to share their story openly. We will include these "first aid talk tips" in the draft of the VUB communication (policy) plan on transgressive behaviour.

4.1.2 PHASED REACTION

- PHASE 1: SEVERITY ASSESSMENT FOLLOWING SUSPICION, DISCLOSURE OR ASCERTAINMENT

If your institution (faculty, department, helpline, employee, etc.) or association has suspicions concerning a situation involving undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour, or if such a situation is revealed to you or you ascertain such a situation yourself, it is important first and foremost to focus on safety, support for the victim and the collection of further information.

- Any suspicion should be taken seriously. If you have suspicions, try to clarify the signs or signals on which your suspicions are based (what have you noticed, (since) when, etc.). Try to talk to the person you suspect is the victim, without suggesting anything yourself ("are you okay, I'm concerned?"). If necessary, try to ensure (physical and emotional) safety, wherever necessary. Also discuss your suspicions discreetly with the VUB Report It Helpline or someone else you trust at VUB (a head of department, VUB employee, someone from the Student Council, confidential counsellor, lecturer, etc.).
- Suspicions will be relayed to you by a victim, a witness, or someone else. If you are told of a situation involving undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour, it is important that you, as the person receiving the information, remain calm, make it clear that you believe the story, and do not react in a panicked or shocked manner. Actively listen to the person revealing the information, and find out what, where, when, and who was involved. However, do not ask any suggestive questions, and don't ask why.

As the person receiving the information, do not make any promises concerning confidentiality that you may not be able to keep. Inform the person disclosing the matter to you about the steps you will be taking next (e.g. helpline, etc.) and discuss the matter as soon as possible, preferably with the VUB Report It Helpline or someone else you trust. In the meantime, try to ensure a safe situation wherever possible (e.g. possibly arranging that the parties involved see each other as little as possible).

- You could also ascertain a situation involving undesirable transgressive behaviour yourself by witnessing it yourself or stumbling on such a situation. It is important to make an initial assessment at that moment. When ascertaining such a situation, you should focus first on maximising safety. This means you should try to put a stop to the sexually transgressive behaviour, or prevent it from being repeated. In order to ensure that such behaviour does not occur again, it is important to seek help from someone within the VUB. This can be security, a head of department, a VUB employee you trust, the VUB Report It Helpline, etc. In acute cases (e.g. rape) or situations that remain threatening, it may be necessary to call in VUB security or the police, as well as medical assistance for the victim. Contact can also be made with ZSG (Brussels sexual assault care centre). Then support and assist the victim in the best way possible (e.g. emotional support, going with them for medical support, etc.). Inform the persons involved of the further steps you will be taking (e.g. report to the VUB Report It Helpline or another competent party at VUB). As a witness of undesirable transgressive behaviour, it is important to act as a witness and speak out; this means you can hold the perpetrators responsible for their actions.
- PHASE 2: CONSULTATION AND ADVICE (INTERNAL/EXTERNAL)
If a student organisation or other organised group of students is aware of an internal incident involving undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour, that group must contact the VUB Report It Helpline as soon as possible. The VUB Report It Helpline will then investigate the report in accordance with internal procedures and, wherever possible, involve the local group.

4.2 DEFINING TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

We have set out the following overview of tasks and responsibilities in a clearly organised flow chart, combined with those from the preventive section.

- **VUB AS AN INSTITUTION**

VUB reacts strongly and consistently to reported incidents of undesirable transgressive behaviour. It is part of the VUB's role to make sure that we continue to pay constant attention to tackling transgressive behaviour with a view to preventing such behaviour. To this end, the VUB facilitates, among other things, the helpline against transgressive behaviour by making resources, time and expertise available.

Every year, the VUB informs student representatives and the boards of the student organisations about the help available, so that they can quickly refer students who confide in them.

- **VUB REPORT IT HELPLINE AGAINST TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR**

Anyone with a question, suspicion or complaint about undesirable transgressive behaviour can contact the VUB Report It Helpline. The helpline coordinator is easily accessible to everyone, and acts as the point of contact and the 1st line of care. The helpline coordinator receives the reports and performs the follow-up steps that are possible within the helpline. Depending on the desired follow-up steps outside the helpline, the coordinator can refer the matter to internal VUB bodies (e.g. disciplinary proceedings for students) and external bodies that may play a role in acting against undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour (e.g. police, ZSG care centre, the gender chamber of the Flemish Government, Unia, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, etc.).

- **VUB CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS & STUDENT ORGANISATION CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLORS**

If there is undesirable transgressive behaviour on campus between students themselves or between students and others (other members of the VUB community or external parties), the confidential adviser will act as a direct point of contact for complaints. Confidential counsellors shall treat all involved persons with respect and treat the information they receive as confidential. If the confidential counsellor establishes that serious undesirable transgressive behaviour has taken place (classified as a red flag in the Sensoa Flag System), he/she shall refer the matter to the VUB Report It Helpline against transgressive behaviour. The VUB Report It Helpline work group will further develop and fine-tune the precise procedures and workflows. The confidential counsellor him/herself shall remain constantly alert to the well-being of the victim and, if necessary, refer the victim for necessary support within VUB.

VUB organises annual training and intervision session(s) for the confidential counsellors. This is designed to allow confidential counsellors to acquire the necessary knowledge (concerning the action protocol and referral, among other things), and to exchange experiences with fellow confidential counsellors.

- **DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE/DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE**

A disciplinary procedure will be launched if the Vice-Rector for Education and Student Affairs receives a complaint about an incident involving undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour. This starts with a preliminary investigation in which the Vice-Rector hears the accounts of all the parties involved. At the request of the perpetrator and/or victim, the Vice-Rector can then organise a meeting with a view to reconciliation and/or reparation. In his preliminary investigation, the Vice-Rector also has the option of imposing protective measures, if necessary. The Vice-Rector may also refer the complaint to the Disciplinary Committee. That committee, which consists of 3 students and 3 academics and is chaired by the (representative of the) Rector, will hear the accounts of those directly involved. The Disciplinary Committee may take any additional investigative measures it deems necessary, which includes hearing the accounts of witnesses. However, the disciplinary committee cannot undertake investigations in the same way as a police investigation; after all, a disciplinary committee does not have the powers of an investigating judge.

At the end of its investigation, the disciplinary committee may impose a (combination of) disciplinary sanctions that are possible under the university's internal regulations. The disciplinary measures are limited to sanctions that have an impact on the study programme (units) pursued by the student, educational activities and facilities that students have access to at VUB. However, the disciplinary procedure may never lead to penalties like those published in a criminal record, or in a student file (throughout the higher education system). After all, the disciplinary investigation is not a criminal, police investigation.

If a student has been subjected to criminal sexual violence, we advise the student to seek the help of a ZSG centre and/or the police and/or the courts. As long as the police are still conducting a criminal investigation, the disciplinary proceedings will be limited to protective measures. The disciplinary procedure shall await the outcome of the police investigation in order to be able to impose definitive internal sanctions.

- **ZSG (SEXUAL ASSAULT CARE CENTRE) AND/OR POLICE AND/OR COURTS**

In case of an incident involving criminal sexual violence, the VUB Report It Helpline will advise the student who is the victim of such violence to seek help from the ZSG centre or report it to the police and/or the courts.

If sexual violence occurred less than 72 hours previously, it is important to prioritise the advice that the victim should seek help from a ZSG centre. The ZSG care centre will examine the victim for any traces that can be linked to the perpetrator, store them safely (up to 6 months after the facts have been noted) and document the violence committed. At the same time, a care centre can provide initial medical and psychological assistance, and offer the opportunity to file a complaint with the police, if desired, with the help of specially trained vice inspectors. Complaints can be filed in a care centre immediately, or up to 6 months after the first contact when the victim was examined. A care centre will also offer assistance (care, explanation and advice) to support persons that accompany the victim.

In cooperation with the Brussels police, we organise an information session to explain to our confidential student counsellors and relevant VUB employees how the Brussels sexual assault care centre operates. In collaboration with the Brussels police, we establish cooperation agreements to make it easier for students to file a complaint.

We have combined the overview of tasks and responsibilities, both preventive (see Chapter 2) and reactive, in a clearly organised flowchart. First of all, a flowchart for students, which shows simply and clearly who they can contact from a preventive or reactive perspective in the event of undesirable transgressive behaviour. In addition, we have created a flowchart for VUB employees that provides insight into what VUB staff should do if they notice undesirable transgressive behaviour between students in their department or during their work, and how they can best follow this up themselves. We organise training on using the flowchart for VUB staff members.

4.3 APPROPRIATE CONCERNS AFTER AN INCIDENT

- **SUPPORT PERSONS**

If students who have been victims of sexually transgressive behaviour can rely on support persons (e.g. a fellow student, room-mate, etc.), the impact of the incident on their lives can then also be limited. The effectiveness of support persons lies in simply listening to the victim without quizzing him or her about the details, and without (unintentionally) blaming the victim. It is thus important to have a social safety net for victims. This social safety net often means nothing more than just being there and providing unconditional support. And it is not really about focusing on social activities; victims often have little or no desire to do so (for a while).

- **TALKING TO THE PERPETRATOR (IF DESIRED, NEXT STEP BY THE PERSON REPORTING THE INCIDENT)**

We can assume that students who engage in undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour are already morally developed enough to assess what behaviour is acceptable and what behaviour is not. If a student subjects another student to undesirable transgressive behaviour and the person reporting this behaviour wishes to take further steps, it is important to talk to the perpetrator. At the VUB, the coordinator of the VUB Report It Helpline is best placed to conduct such a conversation. During such a (non-binding) conversation, we can make it clear to the perpetrator, based on the assessment criteria from the Sensoa Flag System, that the behaviour in question constitutes undesirable transgressive behaviour and must cease. Possible reparation can be considered in such a conversation, together with the perpetrator. The perpetrator should be informed about the possible consequences of the behaviour and the further steps that will be taken by the VUB.

We would also like to point out that persons reporting such incidents often do not wish to take any further steps. Without their involvement, it is difficult, if not impossible, to take further follow-up steps (such as a conversation, or possibly the start of disciplinary proceedings).

- ASSISTANCE

Student who is the victim of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour at the VUB can contact VUB itself for help and support. We offer a wide range of welfare services, including individual counselling by student psychologists. If an incident takes place on campus, the student psychologists from the Student Counselling service will contact the involved parties (usually the victim). If the need for counselling exceeds the possibilities of the university's own student psychologists, they can then refer the victim to an external body. All stakeholders at the VUB, to whom a report of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour can be made, are aware of the internal support programme that can be offered.

- COMMUNICATION

If a student becomes the victim of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour within our university community, our first priority is to maximise the safety of the victim. In addition, it is important to conduct a dialogue with the victim and his/her parents, friends and fellow students, though without infringing the legal obligations regarding the rights and privacy of all involved parties. In view of questions from the broad student community or from the media, we need to rely on a (yet to be developed) roadmap, which sets out the main guidelines for communicating about reported incidents of undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour within VUB. At the VUB, a working group is further examining the policy and operational approach for communicating about incidents involving undesirable transgressive behaviour.

4.4 GUIDELINES FOR RECOVERY AFTER AN INCIDENT

- SUPPORT AND SECURITY MEASURES FOR THE PERSONS INVOLVED

Following an incident, the VUB departments involved in organising recovery after an incident (e.g. helpline, disciplinary, confidential counsellor, student psychologist) will decide what support and safety measures (e.g. protective measures) should be taken with regard to the victim and possible perpetrator.

We can also arrange for mediation between the parties if both parties so wish. This can be done by the VUB Report It Helpline, but also during the reconciliation process within an ongoing disciplinary procedure.

Finally, after the incident has been dealt with internally in this manner, we will determine what information is provided to any other persons (e.g. fellow students, the board of an association, etc.) and what support we may offer them if necessary. We will communicate this to the parties involved in a transparent manner.

- INTERNAL MEASURES FOR PERPETRATORS

With regard to people who have been found to be (suspected) perpetrators, we will examine what sanctions we can impose within the scope of our disciplinary proceedings (protective measures, disciplinary measures, etc.). We will bear in mind that people make mistakes and that not every transgression should immediately lead to definitive exclusion. If definitive exclusion is deemed necessary due to the severity of the facts, we must ensure that we can conclude this situation in the best possible way for all the parties involved.

We will examine the possibility - eventually with external partners (cf. I.T.E.R (the outpatient centre for prevention, guidance and treatment of sexually transgressive behaviour) or CAW) - of developing and offering an accompanying programme for students who feel that they push others to do things that they themselves may not feeling comfortable doing. This accompanying programme, which focuses on behavioural change, is aimed at students who, after an incident, have come to the realisation that they are infringing the boundaries set by others and cannot stop this on their own. However, an accompanying programme that focuses on behavioural change is not really enough in itself to successfully prevent transgressive behaviour from reoccurring. We also prefer to guide perpetrators towards support programmes (e.g. at CAW) that focus on the general welfare of the perpetrator. Programmes that, together with the perpetrator, discover what they want in life and what they find important. The rationale behind this is that perpetrators who succeed in building a life where their primary needs are met in an appropriate manner, are much less likely to relapse into repeating such undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour.

4.5 GUIDELINES FOR LEARNING LESSONS FROM INCIDENTS

After each reported case where undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour is suspected, disclosed or ascertained, it is important for us to discuss and follow up on the steps taken. In addition, we need to evaluate how we responded after the incident. First of all, a thorough and critical evaluation of the various steps and how these were implemented can help us to effectively refine our action protocol/reaction plan. At the same time, the evaluation provides the impetus to develop any additional preventive measures that would help to prevent undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour, and to organise the support, guidance and follow-up provided to victims and perpetrators.

5. MONITORING AND COMMUNICATION

The VUB Report It Helpline registers the reports of transgressive behaviour. With the knowledge that these reports may under-represent what actually happens in reality, we use the data to monitor the number of incidents of sexually transgressive behaviour. By monitoring this data, it may be possible to check whether this Policy against undesirable sexually transgressive behaviour has an impact.

The VUB Helpline presents an annual report of the registered data to the Student Council.

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