

Manifesto point 4: our reporting and complaints procedure is accessible to the whole university community. It is transparent and provides clarity and detail, so that students and staff who have experienced sexual violence know exactly what to expect from a procedure. This information is easy to find.

Transparency about what can be expected from the reporting structure and the complaints procedure is the basis for students to decide whether to use these services. In the staff's experience, accessibility to support can be improved by providing widespread information, a diverse and well-trained team of confidential advisors, adequate guidance towards external help and a low-threshold first point of contact.

How to make the reporting structure and complaints procedure accessible and transparent?

Challenge: Lack of trust stands in the way of accessibility.

During the conference, staff members shared how many students believe that if they report sexually transgressive behavior, they will not be taken seriously, and nothing will be done about it. This prevents them from making use of the reporting structure.

Solution: Provide students with clarity and detail about what to expect from the procedure.

Building trust is a complex and long-term process. A good first step in that process is openly communicating with students by asking about their expectations and providing them with detailed information about what is possible.

Examples of working towards better accessibility and transparency:

- 1) There is a comprehensive, accessible, and clear guide to the reporting structure and support services at university and beyond.**

During the conference, several institutions discussed their work on improving visibility and accessibility of the reporting structures and support services. Some institutions **created a guide to, or a flowchart of, all the significant services**. These guides or charts should explain what a student can expect after reporting a complaint or requesting help. When should a student reach out to a study advisor, a confidentiality person or a student psychologist? What level of help can they expect from each of these services? When should a student reach out to external organizations such as Centrum Seksueel Geweld?

Information about the reporting structure and support system is written in understandable and inclusive language. Concrete language such as 'sexual violence' or 'sexually transgressive behavior' is clearer than terms such as 'undesirable behavior'. At universities with a (partly) international student body the information must also be available in English. One institution even has a "panic button" available in all languages.

- 2) Creating a low-threshold first point of contact**

Another issue raised in the conversation was the need for an accessible first point of contact at a university.

All students should know where to go first when they experience sexual violence (see the discussion on making students well-informed here: [Link to Point 2.](#)). There were questions about whether there should be a hotline dedicated specifically to sexual violence. In relation to this, there was a discussion about **the handling of dilemmas around confidentiality and safety when students come forward**. Two issues were raised. Firstly, there is the well-being of a student who must be referred to Centrum Seksueel Geweld or another external professional as a confidential advisor is about initial help and guidance but not long-term counseling. Secondly, there is the matter of safety among the entire university community. There was a discussion about **which internal steps should be taken after an initial report** has been made to make sure no further harm is done.

3) Adequate personal guidance from the university towards further steps.

Confidential Advisors and other staff members who frequently interact with students know where to refer students with needs that exceed the university's abilities. They are up to date with the legal procedures regarding sexual violence so they can guide students in filing an effective police report. These staff members are also familiar with a trauma-sensitive approach (see further discussion here: [Link to Point 3.](#)).

During the conference, there was a discussion about **the limits of the scope of help that the educational institution should provide to the student**. For support requests that go beyond the possibilities of the institution, the student should be referred to adequate external help. This way the students will still feel supported and will reach out for help when needed.

3) Effective communication.

For an in-depth discussion about how to effectively communicate information about the reporting structure and more see: [Link to Point 2.](#)

4) Diversity among Confidential Advisors

It has been brought up by some members of staff, that in their experience, the composition of the team of confidential advisers also plays a role. Students express to feel more comfortable reaching out to people with similar life experiences or with similar characteristics, such as cultural background, gender or race.

5) Involving students

"(...) together with student associations and HAN confidential advisors, we are looking into appointing contact confidential advisors within student associations. This will make discussing experiences of (sexually) transgressive behavior more accessible to students."

- *Staff Department Education, Research or Quality Assurance, HAN University of Applied Sciences.*

A permanent presence of student representatives in the reporting structure can increase the level of trust and communication between the institution and the student body. This can be in the form of Student Confidentiality Persons or other formal student positions in the support services, as well as by permanently including student representatives in the action group or other team involved in drafting educational institutions' anti-sexual violence policies. Read more on student engagement here: [Link to Point 6.](#)