

Culture Shift in Progress: Two Years of the Sexual Safety Programme at Maastricht University



Executive summary

This report outlines the development, implementation, and challenges of the Sexual Safety Programme at Maastricht University (UM) from February 2023 to April 2025. The programme was initiated in response to alarming findings from national (Driessen & Polet, 2021) and UM research (Wellum et al., 2021), which highlighted high rates of sexual violence in higher education. Strong voices from many communities in the Netherlands have urged institutions to take action, and the advocacy from UM students and staff has reinforced the urgency of addressing this issue. This commitment was first formalised with the signing of the 'Let's Talk About Yes' manifesto in November 2021 (Maastricht University, 2021). Building on this momentum, UM acknowledges its responsibility to foster a safer working and learning environment by initiating and committing to the Sexual Safety Programme.

This document provides a theoretical background for the selection of interventions and the approach to sexual violence prevention, as well as a quantitative overview. It acknowledges the challenge of limited capacity for further data analysis on the effectiveness of the programme, but still aims to report based on the available data.

Over the course of two years, the programme has developed and delivered a broad array of evidence-based interventions, including training, communication campaigns, policy development, and bystander engagement, while also encountering substantial structural and capacity challenges along the way.

A journey of change

We are living in challenging times. Around the world, the fight against sexual violence and the pursuit of gender equality are under increasing pressure. Across Europe and globally, there is a growing backlash against the progress made toward inclusivity and equality, often manifested through harmful rhetoric, legal actions, and societal divides. The growing divide between conservative and progressive views, exacerbated by the online environment, creates a self-reinforcing cycle that polarizes young people and entrenches gender-based violence.

The statistics on sexual violence are staggering, and the trends both in the Netherlands and worldwide are deeply unsettling. A disturbing shift is taking place, with young men showing increasing tolerance for violence against women and the perpetuation of harmful rape myths, such as "she asked for it" or "she lied." At the same time, the rights of women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and trans communities are under threat. The rising backlash against diversity and inclusion initiatives is not just concerning—it is dangerous.

Leading the Sexual Safety Programme at Maastricht University has been an immense honour. As the first university in the Netherlands and Europe to embark on this journey, we had to be both creative and courageous in our approach. The process has been both rewarding and challenging—navigating between those who feel progress is too slow and those who feel it is too fast. Throughout, I have strived to bring as many people on board as possible, knowing that the strength of this movement lies in collective action.

This work is not a sprint; it is a marathon. While the group of individuals and institutions engaged in this cause is growing, there is still much work to be done. The road ahead is long, but the effort is necessary. Therefore, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the success of the Sexual Safety Programme and to those who continue to be part of its ongoing implementation. – *Joyce Grul*

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1. Context and rationale: sexual violence in higher education

Sexual violence is a pervasive societal issue that does not spare higher education. Research indicates the following statistics and the definitions used in the research are included:

- **1 in 2 women and 1 in 5 men in the Netherlands experience physical sexual violence in their lifetime.** (De Graaf et al., 2023)

Physical sexual violence includes touching without consent, groping, sexual assault, and rape.

- **19% of women and 3% of men in the Netherlands have (ever) experienced rape.** (Driessen & Polet, 2021)

Rape is defined as sexual penetration without consent. Sexual penetration is entering a body (vaginal, anal, or oral) with a body part (such as a finger or penis) or object.

- An online survey conducted in over 45 universities and research organisations in 15 countries in Europe with over 42000 responses reported that **31% of the respondents' experienced sexual harassment since they started working or studying at their higher education institution.** (UniSAFE, 2022)

Sexual harassment includes unwanted verbal, nonverbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, such as comments on looks or body, sending of images with sexual content, making sexist jokes or touching you.

- The most recent figures published by Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2025) show the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual violence among university students in the Netherlands. **In the past 12 months, 52% of women and 19% of men enrolled in university education reported experiencing some form of sexual violence;**
 - • **16% reported experiencing physical sexual violence.**
 - • **15% reported experiencing online harassment.**
 - • **27% reported experiencing offline, non-physical harassment, such as unwanted sexual comments.**

- **Nearly 11% of female students are raped during their university years and 1% of male students.** (Driessen & Polet, 2021)

Rape is defined as sexual penetration without consent. Sexual penetration is entering a body (vaginal, anal, or oral) with a body part (such as a finger or penis) or object.

- **At UM, 46.9% of students who participated in the study report at least one incident of sexual harassment or violence since enrolment** (Wellum et al., 2021). For students who reported experiencing sexual violence;
 - **9.8% of students experienced non-consensual penetration (rape)**
 - **25.4% of students experienced non-consensual touching**

Sexual violence refers to non-consensual penetrative acts (also known as rape), attempted non-consensual penetrative acts (attempted rape), and non-consensual sexual touching (such as groping, kissing, fondling, etc.).

Sexual harassment refers to behaviours with sexual connotations that do not include sexual touching, but may include e.g., sending unsolicited sexual images or making inappropriate sexual remarks.

Unfortunately, this list includes little information on the prevalence of such incidents in academia or university workplaces. While research has explored the underlying causes and confirmed that these incidents do occur, there is currently a lack of studies specifically measuring their prevalence.

Risk factors in academia—such as hierarchical structures, power imbalances, and competitive environments—exacerbate this issue. Furthermore, normalization of harassment, lack of accountability, and fear of retaliation for those who report (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2018, 2020, Naezer et al., 2019, Zara, et al., 2024). European studies (e.g., UniSAFE, 2022) and national reports, such as 'Harassment in Dutch Academia' (Naezer et al., 2019), confirm the high prevalence of this issue among university staff. **Further, these studies show that minoritised individuals are at greater risk, yet often excluded from prevention and support efforts.** UM prides itself in being an international community and attracts a culturally diverse group. In our opinion, that also means that we have a social responsibility to foster shared values and norms, in line with Dutch legislation, and to develop an intersectional program that respects cultural differences and serves our international community.

The sexual safety programme uses sexual violence as an umbrella term for behaviour that is sexual in nature and crosses a person's boundaries. Examples include catcalling, inappropriate comments, sharing sexual imagery without consent, unwanted touching, sexual assault or rape. It does not have to be physical. It can also be online, verbal or non-verbal. Sexual violence is not limited to any gender, age, sexual orientation, physical/mental disability or skin colour. People of all genders can perpetrate or experience sexual violence.

The target of the Sexual Safety Programme is an overall reduction of sexual violence – which is possible through the implementation specific interventions - and to include our foundational attitudes and beliefs that contribute to an environment where sexual violence is allowed to continue (Senn et al., 2017; Coker et al., 2011; Alberta University, n.d.). But in response to sexual violence, positive social support really makes a difference compared to negative social support which can lead to more mental health issues. Negative reactions like victim blaming are even called 'the second rape'.

It is important that we not shy away from this topic because experiencing sexual violence, like rape, can have a severe effect on the person's physical and mental wellbeing, both short term and long term. In turn, this would also influence the person's academic or work success. For students this could lead to lower grades (Jordan et al., 2014; Potter et al., 2018; Stermac et al., 2020), delaying or failing assessments (Stermac et al., 2020), and (considering) dropping out of courses classes or programmes (Krebs et al., 2007; Baker et al., 2016; Mengo & Black, 2016). First year students are in the most vulnerable position and therefore more likely to experience sexual assault than students in later years (Kimble et al., 2008). Several reasons for this have been put forward, including first year students' relative vulnerability as new students (Armstrong et al., 2006); their lack of knowledge regarding the specific scripts sexual assaults often follow

(Schwartz, 1997); and their lack of experience around alcohol (Gross et al., 2006). At the same, in the Netherlands: at the age of 18.7 years, half of young people have experienced penis-in-vagina penetrative sex. As a result, most university students are still forming and exploring aspects of their sexual development during their enrollment.

A comprehensive approach to prevention

At Maastricht University, we believe in creating an environment in which people can grow and flourish. We stand for a safe learning and working environment and sexual safety is a fundamental part of that. UM shares the feeling of urgency and takes responsibility to contribute to a safer environment through prevention of sexual violence.

Drawing on recent evidence (Bonar et al., 2022), UM's approach is aligned with what is necessary for comprehensive sexual violence prevention at universities. The review outlined that a comprehensive approach should include the following goals:

1. Changing societal attitudes regarding the continuum of behaviours that comprise sexual violence
2. Developing programmes, policies, or other prevention approaches to stop perpetration and hold perpetrators accountable,
3. Empowering potential victims with knowledge and skills to act on their own behalf to defend their sexual rights without victim blaming, and
4. Facilitating the empowerment of bystanders- staff and students - to disrupt harmful social norms, intervene on others' behalf, and support survivors

In line with the second goal of the programme, several steps were taken to centre the wishes of victims/survivors in the aftermath of harmful experiences. Options such as restorative justice (herstelbemiddeling) and comprehensive training for support staff and the social safety team were explored to facilitate healing and accountability outside of formal investigative procedures. In addition, training and support options for individuals who exhibited harmful behaviour were explored, with the aim of preventing recurrence. These efforts are particularly relevant in light of existing legislation. For instance, UM is not legally authorised to take formal action in cases that occur outside of the university context. Nonetheless, all victims/survivors, bystanders, and individuals who (think they) have exhibited harmful behaviour—regardless of where the incident took place—remain entitled to access support services at UM.

2. Sexual Safety Programme overview

The Sexual Safety Programme was launched in August 2023 under the leadership of the Programme Manager for Sexual Safety (appointed February 2023). It consists of five interconnected components:

1. Training for students
2. Training for employees. For this component we make a rough division for interventions between:
 1. Employees in contact with students
 2. Employees as coworkers – workplace sexual safety
3. Policy, regulations, and procedural development

4. Communication
 1. Internal communication
 2. Awareness-raising within UM community
5. Monitoring and evaluation

This component is designed to support both future research on the prevalence of sexual violence within the UM student population and the effectiveness of individual components, trainings, and interventions of the Sexual Safety Programme, as well as to monitor their implementation.

Selection of interventions

The Sexual Safety Team has developed an evidence-based approach in co-creation with students, staff, and researchers. For the implementation of the programme the team has invested in internal and external network of key-persons, experts, student associations, departments, and organisations. These network building activities are excluded from this report.

UM is pioneering in the Netherlands and Europe, most programmes a university should offer have been developed in the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. For implementation, interventions needed to be based on a solid foundation of evidence, best practice, and should have gone through some kind of evaluative process that demonstrated it reduced rape-increasing attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. The latter consideration is particularly important in the field of sexual violence prevention, where programs that are frequently given at universities have been shown to be ineffective (e.g., consentbased programs – see Beres et al., 2020 for more information), or have had an adverse effect, such as making some groups of participants more likely to perpetrate sexual violence (see for example Bosson et al., 2015; Malamuth et al., 2018; Stephens & George, 2009). Furthermore, we take the wellbeing of victims/survivors into account by ensuring our work is trauma sensitive and we have integrated a gender-transformative approach—one that seeks to reshape gender relations and norms to be more equitable and increase the empowerment of women and girls. This can only be realised by including boys and men and contributing to their emancipation.

To create awareness and behavioural change a diversity in courses is desired: we do not expect a potential perpetrator with low internal readiness for change to change his/her/their mind and behaviour after attending one bystander intervention workshop. However, we believe that change is more likely if this person attends the ‘Are you okay?’ lecture, watches an online sexual violence prevention programme like *RealConsent*, and is surrounded by peers and staff who have followed or indirectly benefitted from a bystander workshop. Therefore, a variety of programmes that target both staff and students is necessary.

Implemented interventions

The first activities and highlights of the programme are:

- Information: 1) [website page](#) with information on sexual safety (introductory), 2) [website page](#) with information on support, 3) [canvas course](#) (advanced), 4) [flyer](#), 5) posters, 6) [Instagram page](#) *sexualsafetyum*, and 6) [UMployee page](#) *Sexual Safety Programme & Green Dot*.

- *The media library on the Umployee page includes background documents, programme plans, and the 2023 evaluation.*
- Training for staff in support functions (e.g. student deans, study advisors, and UM psychologists) and the social safety teams for employees and students on sexual violence and receiving disclosures
- E-module for all staff on receiving disclosures (academic year 2023-2024)
- Lecture for all incoming students during the faculty introduction; the *'Are You Okay?'* lecture
- Green Dot – evidence-based, university-wide bystander training aimed at cultural change
- *Flip the Script with EAAA™* (the train the trainer is offered as elective at UCM) – evidence-based sexual violence prevention programme for female identifying students

As a foundation, we said that everyone should have access to information on sexual violence support and prevention. Therefore, we developed a website, a Canvas course with extensive information and resources, a Umployee page, an Instagram account, a flyer, and posters for distribution.

Incoming students begin with the *'Are You okay?'* lecture during their faculty introduction. The aim of the lecture is to: 1) increase knowledge and awareness of sexual violence, 2) establish shared norms at UM, 3) increase knowledge of existing support at UM through the Social Safety Team, and 4) empower students to be part of violence prevention and inspire them to use available opportunities within UM. To lower the threshold for seeking support at faculty level, most lectures are provided by the study advisors of the respective faculties, showing that the initiative is supported locally.

Our future goal is to follow this lecture with an e-module, inspired by the evidence-based *RealConsent* programme from the US, aimed at behavioural change to reduce victimisation and perpetration. The idea is to launch a university-wide campaign for 6–8 weeks after the start of the academic year, during which we promote the e-module and organise activities for the student community. We are currently working on a project proposal to develop a Dutch sexual violence prevention e-module for students.

Throughout the year, the Sexual Safety Team aims to support additional workshops, community activities, and the implementation of *Flip the Script with EAAA™*. The latter is an evidence-based programme designed for female-identifying

Green Dot Background and Research

Bystander programmes are a vector for changing societal attitudes regarding behaviours that have been linked to sexual violence. A good bystander education programme teaches individuals how to spot signs of sexual violence, stop violence from occurring, and how to support survivors after the attack.

Bystander education programmes take a wider community approach for violence prevention rather than targeting individuals (e.g., *RealConsent*, *Flip the Script with EAAA™*), which means that community members become more sensitive towards issues of sexual violence (Banyard, 2004). Therefore, bystander programmes are seen as a vector for changing societal attitudes.

For students who were enrolled at a university, Green Dot increased significantly increased bystander behaviours and decreased sexual violence acceptance, compared students who did not participate in a Green Dot programme (Coker et al., 2011). One study which compared a university with Green Dot relative to two using no bystander programme, found a significant reduction of sexual violence (specifically alcohol- or –drug-facilitated sexual violence) (Coker et al., 2015); similarly, after four years, rates of sexual violence were 25% lower at a university which implemented Green Dot compared to two universities which did not implement Green Dot (Coker et al., 2016).

students, who are most at risk of experiencing sexual assault. *Flip the Script with EAAA™* equips students with the knowledge and skills to recognise the risk factors leading up to sexual assault and to prevent it, resulting in a 46% reduction in completed rape and a 63% reduction in attempted rape in the following year compared to women in the control group (Sen et al., 2015). Other forms of sexual violence were also significantly reduced, and these positive effects remained evident two years later (Sen et al., 2015).

UM has two certified *Flip the Script with EAAA™* campus trainers who, in turn, can train female-identifying students for certification (train-the-trainer). These certified students can then offer the 12-hour workshops to women and female identifying students. The target age group for participants is up to 30 years old; potentially, the workshops could also be conducted by and for young employees, such as PhD candidates, in the future.

One of the additional activities is the integration of sexual violence prevention in education, therefore the Sexual Safety Programme seeks collaborations with project and research courses. However, the core focus of the Sexual Safety Programme remains the lecture, e-module, and Green Dot.

To empower bystanders, Green Dot was chosen as a university-wide initiative. It is being rolled out for all students and staff, with trained UM staff members as facilitators. Workshops are organised on request in collaboration with students, departments, or faculties. The implementation strategy is under development and the aim is to integrate the programme in existing structures and processes. Green Dot workshops are reinforced through online and offline marketing campaigns as well as physical booster activities.

For all staff members, the e-module *Receiving Sexual Violence Disclosures* was made available during the academic year 2023–2024. The aim was to raise awareness, build knowledge around sexual violence in higher education, and provide tools for staff to offer a first trauma-sensitive response, give referrals, and attend to their wellbeing. Because the Sexual Safety Programme encompasses all faculties and service centres, we found it essential that every staff member has access to training. We also brought the e-module to the attention of HR and the Leadership Academy, as staff in these roles are expected to possess such skills. Since the module was based on the UK context, we decided not to continue its use and instead included the development of a Dutch version in our project proposal to secure funding.

For support staff and the social safety teams for employees and students, we organised multiple trainings—including one on receiving disclosures using a training actor—as these staff members are in a position to offer longer-term support to victims/survivors.

3. Tracking progress: quantitative overview

From 2023 to early 2025, the Sexual Safety Programme implemented a wide range of activities, including training, awareness-raising, internal communication, and research initiatives. The table below provides an overview of these efforts, organised by year and theme. Routine communication activities—such as distributing flyers and posters, updating the Canvas course, website, Umployee, and Instagram—have been excluded from this summary, although they played an essential role in ensuring programme visibility. These communication efforts are resource-intensive and require substantial capacity, often competing with other core tasks of the programme.

The revision of the internal reporting and complaints procedure for students and staff was taken up by the legal department (MUO) in 2023. The programme manager for sexual safety was involved in an advisory capacity. A first draft of the revised procedure was shared in autumn 2024. Stakeholders are currently awaiting the second draft or final version. Once finalised, the procedure will still need to be reviewed and approved by several departments before it can be implemented.

Lastly, the Sexual Safety Programme does not provide direct support or receive reports. Its role is to inform students and staff about available internal and external support options. The programme contributed to the establishment of the student social safety team in 2023, but the responsibility for offering trauma-sensitive support and following up on reports lies with the Social Safety Teams for students and employees, as well as other key functions within the university. The quality of this support is essential for building trust in both the university and the Sexual Safety Programme. While the programme actively advocates for trauma-informed approaches and advises on related policy where appropriate, support remains outside its responsibilities.

2023

Activity	Topic of training	Target group	Number of training	Estimated number of participants	Notes
Skills development staff in support functions	Introduction into sexual violence, with specific attention for LGBTQI+ and bicultural students	Staff in support functions (e.g. confidential advisors, study advisors, UM psychologists, student deans and coordinators social safety)	2	59	
	Responding to sexual violence disclosures (with training actor)		6	49	
	Procedure training		0	0	Delayed to unknown period
	'Are you okay?' lecture training	Primarily study advisors	2	22	
Student panels for co-creation and feedback on the development and implementation		Students	4	80	

Walk in -event to ask questions, share ideas or input		Students	1	1	
Stand at INKOM		Incoming students	1	<i>No student count</i>	At the start of the INKOM +/- 3000 flyers were distributed
'Are you okay?' lecture	<i>'Are you okay?' lecture</i>	All first-year students (bachelor, master, and exchange)	All faculties: 33 lectures	7000-7500	August During the faculty introduction +/- 7500 flyers were distributed
	E-mail follow up <i>'Are you okay?' lecture</i>	All first-year students (bachelor, master, and exchange)	1 e-mail	8000	
	E-mail online <i>'Are you okay?' lecture</i>	All students expect first years	2 e-mails (initial e-mail and reminder)	+/- 23000 students	
E-module for responding to sexual violence disclosures	E-module participants	All employees (different communication strategies for departments and specific functions)	1 e-module	180	Academic year 2023-2024
	Follow-up event		1 event	4 participants	
Social safety theatre shows		All students and employees	4 shows (2 in Dutch and 2 in English)	740	
<i>Flip the Script with EAAA™</i>	UCM elective 'tackling violence'	UCM students	1 elective	4 students of all course participants certified to give training in Q1 and Q2 2024	This elective offers part of the train-the-trainer.
Government commissioner Mariëtte Hamer discusses sexual safety	Working visit & townhall meeting	Students and employees	1 event	+/- 150 attendees	

2024

Activity	Topic of training	Target group	Number of training	Estimated number of participants	Notes
Skills development staff in support functions	Introduction into sexual violence, with specific attention for LGBTQI+ and bicultural students	Staff in support functions (e.g. confidential advisors, study advisors, UM psychologists, student deans and coordinators social safety)	0	0	
	Responding to sexual violence disclosures (with training actor)		2	15	
	Training in talking to an (assumed) perpetrator after sexual violence (with training actor)		3	20	
	Procedure training		4	41	Need for more trainings in 2025
	'Are you okay?' lecture training	Primarily study advisors	2	15	
Student panels for co-creation and feedback on the development and implementation		Students	7	50-60	One specifically with SBE student council
Education	Global studies year 3 project supervision	Students	1	5 students in project group	Goal: Development new sexual safety posters
	Master thesis FPN	Students	1	1 student being supervised by FPN	Topic: Inclusion of men in sexual

					safety programme
Green Dot	Focus groups Green Dot	Staff and students	5	50	
	Green Dot stakeholder meetings	Staff	5	12	
	Train-the-trainer	Staff	1	17	As of April 2025, there are approximately 10 active trainers, due to a combination of personal and organisational factors.
	Workshops	Students and staff	0	0	
	Research line for effectiveness Green Dot	Students and Staff	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>	Led by FPN Research team: 5 staff members. Initial response rate questionnaires is high.
'Are you okay?' lecture	'Are you okay?' lecture	Incoming exchange students	10 lectures at 6 faculties	Attendance numbers received from 5 faculties: 239 of 273 exchange students have followed the lecture (89%)	February
	Follow-up email	Incoming exchange students	<i>No complete overview</i>	Delegated to International Relation Office (IRO's)	
	'Are you okay?' lecture	All first year students	<i>No complete overview</i>	+/- 75000 students	August

	Follow-up e-mail	All first year students	2 e-mails (initial e-mail and reminder)	+/- 8000 students	
	Canvas course e-mail	All students (expect first years)	1 e-mail to all students	+/- 23000 students	
Workshops	Meet & Chat	Students	1	<i>No student count</i>	
	Grensverleggers programme	Students		Group of 4 students	External programme but with the goal to develop an initiative for safer campuses at home university
	Wheel of consent workshop	Students	1	<i>Not applicable</i>	Cancelled
	Gelijkspel workshop & evaluation	Students in collaboration with SV Koko and Saurus	1	65	Gelijkspel received a negative evaluation.
	How to have sex movie screening at Lumiere	Students and staff	1	+/- 60 attendants	
	Queer sexual safety workshop	Students	1	8	In collaboration with Queercon and UCM
Flip the Script with EAAA™	UCM elective 'tackling violence'	UCM students	1 elective	11 participants, no certified trainers	This elective offers part of the train-the-trainer.
	Workshops for students		2	<i>Not applicable</i>	All cancelled due to different reasons
Real Consent testing days			3 groups (female, male, and non-binary & genderqueer students)	14	

2025 (until April)

Activity	Topic of training	Target group	Number of training	Estimated number of participants	Notes
Skills development staff in support functions	Introduction into sexual violence, with specific attention for LGBTQI+ and bicultural students	Staff in support functions (e.g. confidential advisors, study advisors, UM psychologists, student deans and coordinators social safety)	-	-	Once the budget is approved and capacity is increased, this programme pillar should be prioritized for reactivation.
	Responding to sexual violence disclosures (with training actor)		-	-	
	Procedure training		-	-	
	'Are you okay?' lecture training	Primarily study advisors	2	-	Planned in June 2025
Student panels for co-creation and feedback on the development and implementation		Students	-	-	One upcoming panel in May with the Student Project Team
Education	Global studies year 3 project supervision	Students	1	5 students in 1 project group	Goal: Researching information needs university students regarding sexual wellbeing and violence
	Master thesis FPN	Students	3	3 students being	Topic: Green Dot

				supervised by FPN	
Green Dot	Train-the-trainer	Staff	-	-	Following budget approval and increased capacity, this programme pillar should be repeated.
	Workshops	Students and staff	Staff: 19 workshops Students: 3 workshops	+/- 350	
	Research line for effectiveness Green Dot	Students and Staff	<i>Multiple questionnaires</i>	165 questionnaire responses	Led by FPN The research line includes pre- and post tests
'Are you okay?' lecture	'Are you okay?' lecture	Incoming exchange students	-	<i>No complete overview</i>	February
	Follow-up email	Incoming exchange students	-	<i>No complete overview</i>	
	'Are you okay?' lecture	All first year students	-	-	Upcoming in August
	Follow-up e-mail	All first year students	-	-	
	Canvas course e-mail	All students (expect first years)	-	-	
Flip the Script with EAAA™	UCM elective 'tackling violence'.	UCM students	1 elective	<i>At the moment six students have signed up</i>	This elective offers part of the train-the-trainer. Upcoming June 2025
	Workshops for students		-	-	No implementation plan yet.

Project proposals

In addition to core activities, the Sexual Safety Programme has actively pursued external collaborations and the development of project proposals to expand its reach and impact. These efforts focus on strengthening evidence-based prevention, building sustainable partnerships, and supporting student-led initiatives.

2024

- Initiated the development of a national project proposal for evidence-based e-modules on sexual violence prevention, targeting both students (inspired by *RealConsent*) and employees. The proposal is being developed in collaboration with eight other Dutch higher education institutions, with submission planned for summer 2025.

2025

- Contributed as co-applicant to two research proposals submitted to ZonMw, focusing on the effectiveness of the Sexual Safety Programme as an institutional intervention. Both proposals were not honoured, however Marieke Dewitte (FPN), is on personal title part of the winning proposal.
- Partnered with SHE Collaborates (FHML) in submitting a European collaboration project proposal aiming to improve the implementation of sexual violence prevention and support in higher education.
- Providing ongoing support to the development of *Ölelve*, a UM student association focused on sexual safety, community building, and peer education.
- Supporting the University Council's dialogue group on social safety in the context of study, sports, and student associations.
- Secured municipal funding for a project to develop social media videos promoting positive sexuality and healthy relationships.
- Submitted a second proposal to the municipality to translate booklets—offering conversation tips after receiving a disclosure—into multiple languages.

4. Organisational capacity and development

Between February 2023 and September 2024, the Sexual Safety Team operated with fluctuating staffing levels. For a short period, peak capacity was reached with four team members totalling 2.3 FTE, supported by two student assistants working an average of four hours per week. However during this time, workload was high and not all activities were implemented—for instance, the cultural sensitivity training and the evaluation of training for support staff were not carried out. In comparison, Otago University has successfully implemented an evidence-based, effective, and university-wide prevention programme for students and staff started with 3 FTE for support, policy, and training (Beres, at al., 2019) . Besides that, they also had a scientific research director. Currently, their team has grown into a well-established and adequately resourced unit.

Along with the Sexual Safety Team, numerous staff members and departments worked closely with us to support the implementation of this programme, although their hours are not reflected here. For example, the Marketing & Communication departments of the faculties have taken on the planning and coordination of the '*Are you okay?*' lectures; study advisors have delivered these lectures; the SSC communications team has sent out follow-up emails; Green Dot instructors have facilitated the workshops; and FPN researchers have led the Green Dot evaluation. Many more staff members have played a critical role in bringing this programme to

life. We want to express our sincere appreciation for the dedication and support of all these individuals and departments.

The working budget for the programme, excluding personnel costs, has varied across the years: €185,000 in 2023 (realized), €92,650 in 2024 (realized), and €110,000 in 2025 (submitted for approval). The budget for 2025 was submitted to management in July 2024, and as of now, a decision is still pending. Looking ahead to 2026, the working budget is expected to decrease as the programme stabilizes, as reflected in the budget proposal for 2025.

Since September 2024, the Programme Manager (0,8 FTE) has been solely responsible for maintaining operations while awaiting budget approval for long-term team expansion and contribution to programme activities. Luckily, since autumn one of the Green Dot instructors has been available for 0.2 FTE to support the coordination of the workshops. This limited capacity has affected the team's ability in 2024 and 2025 to:

- Sustain training series for (new) staff in support functions to provide trauma-sensitive care
- Develop communication materials and booster activities, expand Green Dot implementation, and invest in sustainability
- Develop and implement new initiatives based on evaluation and student feedback, such as a follow-up to the *'Are You Okay?'* lecture and a project to translate [booklets with tips on receiving disclosures](#) into multiple languages, in collaboration with the international community.
- Organize and facilitate the train-the-trainer sessions for *Flip the Script with EAAA™*, followed by its implementation.

6. Challenges identified

The challenges discussed here relate to the organisation and implementation of the Sexual Safety Programme. These are separate from the challenges related to the content of the programme and its training sessions.

- **Visibility and engagement across faculties:** While some improvements have been made, manually distributing posters across faculties is time-consuming. We also know that few students engage with the Canvas course, and that being physically present—such as setting up a stand during lunchtime where people can interact—is one of the most effective ways to increase involvement. However, this is only effective if students can sign up for something afterward. The same applies to faculty members, where presenting at CPD activities or teaching days could help boost engagement.
- **Internal communication:** A key challenge has been the lack of effective communication regarding the progress and availability of initiatives led by the Sexual Safety Team. This communication gap also extends to the distribution of important documents that have required significant time and effort to develop. Specifically, the “Consent at Work and Study” document (which is a working title)—developed over a two-year period—has been completed but has not yet been communicated to the UM community. This points to a broader issue of policy development and the need to keep the UM community informed and updated. This report itself was created in part because the lack of communication by the sexual safety team that has left the community unaware of key updates.

- **Balancing awareness-raising with social safety teams' employee and student capacity:** As awareness-raising initiatives and workshops increase, so does the number of students and staff seeking to report incidents. It is important to consider the capacity of the social safety teams when planning additional communication efforts or events to ensure they can handle the increased demand for support.
- **Policy development and implementation delays:** There have been delays in developing and implementing policies, such as those related to the procedures followed by the board of examiners when a student requests accommodations after experiencing sexual violence (see Chapter 6).
- **Cultural change and accountability:** A key challenge is the fear of "cancelling" individuals, which prevents meaningful cultural change. While not all mistakes should be accepted, everyone deserves a fair process and the opportunity to hold themselves accountable and learn. We must create a learning culture where individuals can reflect, grow, and be held accountable in a constructive manner. However, how to do this in practise still requires further consideration
- **Ensuring inclusivity of minoritised groups:** A lot of the information and workshops are directed at white, cis, and heteronormative audiences, which excludes minoritised groups. To address this, it is essential that programmes and outreach efforts are designed to be inclusive of minoritised groups. This can be done by offering workshops tailored to their specific needs and preferences. For example, creating safe spaces where participants feel comfortable among known peers, or ensuring that facilitators are knowledgeable about consent in LGBTQ+ communities or the intersection of sexism and racism. However, it has been difficult to prioritise this over other programme components with minimal capacity.

7. Unmet needs and strategic gaps

Despite substantial progress, several key components of the Sexual Safety Programme remain underdeveloped due to resource constraints:

- **Visibility at faculties and student-led facilitation:** One area needing further development is the visibility of the Sexual Safety Programme within faculties and student-led activities. Specifically, peer-to-peer disclosure workshops, facilitated by trained students, are an important part of an effective sexual violence prevention programme but have yet to be integrated.
- **Integration into staff development:** Integrating prevention efforts into existing staff development programs, such as the UTQ and tutor training, is necessary to increase staff involvement, ensure the programme's long-term sustainability, and of course to contribute to prevention of sexual violence within the educational setting. In the original 2023 assignment for the Sexual Safety Team, the development of a sexual safety component for the UTQ was included, but it remains unrealised.
- **Programme evaluation:** While feedback has been collected for programme components such as training for support staff, there has not been the capacity to analyse the data. Also delayed is the repetition of UM's report on 'Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment among Maastricht University Students,' which is due for a succession.
- **Joint complaints procedure:** A missing step is the initiation of collaboration with Zuyd University of Applied Sciences and Open Universiteit to revise our joint complaint procedure. The current definition of sexual intimidation is outdated, and this procedure also serves as a reference for UM's reporting and complaints process related to social

safety, including sexual violence. In collaboration with the legal department (MUO), we are looking into the feasibility and possibilities within labour law.

- **Trauma-sensitivity of policies:** There is a need to evaluate the trauma-sensitivity of policies within the Boards of Examiners across faculties. We have received feedback indicating that students were required to file a police report to receive study accommodations, which is not trauma-sensitive.
- **E-module on responding to sexual violence disclosures for managers:** The e-module/training for managers on how to respond to sexual violence disclosures needs to be implemented as a core component of their training. Managers are often the first point of contact for staff, making this an important tool for improvement.
- **Regular community events and conferences:** Another unmet need is the continuation of regular community events, such as the D&I conference series on sexual violence prevention and support, which provide opportunities to update and engage both students and staff. These events are important for building a sense of community and addressing ongoing issues.
- **Broader communication strategy:** There is a gap in our communication strategy, particularly when it comes to reaching all employees. Using Umployee alone risks missing key groups, such as scientific staff at the faculties. Overall, the Sexual Safety Programme lacks sufficient resources to effectively organise prevention efforts for staff members. The project plans written at the end of 2023 for staff members fell outside the scope and budget approved for 2024. Of course, implementation of such activities should be done in collaboration with the Social Safety Team for employees.
- **Training for support staff on conversation techniques and cultural & trauma sensitivity:** It is essential to offer training for support staff on conversation techniques and cultural and trauma sensitivity. This is particularly important within our international community, given the diverse values and knowledge around sexuality and sexual violence. The 2024 D&I review further highlights this need. In general, all the training for support staff should be offered regularly to ensure positive support.

8. Recommendations for the Future

1. **Secure sustainable staffing:** especially looking ahead to the development (2025-2026) and implementation (2026-2027) of the evidence based e-modules for (all incoming students) and for staff. These e-modules are imperative for sexual violence prevention. The project proposal will be submitted in summer of 2025.
2. **Securing buy-in from leadership and faculties for dedicated time for Green Dot instructors:** To ensure a sustainable trainer workforce, we need at least 3-4 instructors per faculty and service centre, each receiving 8 hours a month to focus on Green Dot and deliver a minimum of two workshops. It's paramount to secure the buy-in before the next train-the-trainer session, because that is our last moment for recruitment and training of instructors for the upcoming years. During the previous period, we observed that some instructors dropped out because the allocated 8 hours were not supported by leadership, making it difficult for them to fulfil their commitments.
3. **Embed peer-led education for 'peer-to-peer disclosure'** as a programme pillar and increase informal activities across the faculties. Implementation through future student association sexual safety but sexual safety programme has to offer training to ensure trauma sensitivity of the ambassadors while conducting their work.

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