Action Plan Social Safety at Leiden Observatory

Version 1.0 - 15-Dec-2022

Summary

In this document we present our plans for a cultural change process at Leiden Observatory. We first briefly describe the **current social safety situation** at our institute, in particular in the light of the recent dismissal of a senior professor. We subsequently formulate the **main goals**, propose a list of **ten actions and measures** to reach these goals, and present a **timeline for implementation**. We also present a **communication plan** that will inform staff and students about progress and **evaluation** of the effectivity of the actions and measures taken.

Current Social Safety Situation at Leiden Observatory

The immediate reason for this action plan on social safety is the dismissal of a senior professor for unacceptable behaviour towards colleagues. This behaviour included bullying, abuse of power, and sexual harassment. This has been, and still is, an impactful case for many individuals and for the institute as a whole. The long term nature of the behavior that has led to the complaints implies that signals have not been recognized and/or not responded to in an effective way.

It required the courage of several complainants to bring this case in the open. While it is encouraging that they were supported by many witnesses, and that when the institute management brought it to the attention of the Faculty and University Executive Board this resulted in appropriate actions, it shows that Leiden Observatory is currently not sufficiently equipped for such cases. There is also a risk that this is a symptom of broader underlying issues concerning social safety. For this reason, social safety, and prevention of harassment in any form, is at the focal point Leiden Observatory management, and the main reason for this plan.

This plan is the result of input from many people inside and outside the university, and is inspired by the report on Social Safety in Dutch Academia published in July 2022 by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW): https://www.knaw.nl/en/publications/social-safety-dutch-academia-paper-practice

Main Objectives

Leiden Observatory is an institute with staff and students of ~50 nationalities under one roof. Social safety is an absolute prerequisite for a good academic climate and working and study environment where people can flourish. We need to ensure that unacceptable behavior is addressed sooner in the future. It is important that people do not feel any barriers to discussing and reporting unacceptable behavior. For that we need to apply self-reflection and bring about the necessary cultural and behavioral changes. This cultural change process has four main goals:

G1. Process the impact of the case

G2. Define, address, and minimize unacceptable behavior at our institute

G3. Improve communications within the institute

G4. Further stimulate equity and inclusivity

The plan will take into account different target groups within the institute: Some colleagues have directly experienced or witnessed unacceptable behavior. Others have been impacted indirectly by the news about what has happened in our institute, and the discussions that have been ongoing in (social) media and in many interactions with colleagues, friends and family. Different actions in this plan will need to satisfy the needs of these different groups of people.

We will need to collectively discuss what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a wide range of situations and interpersonal relationships, and train staff and students accordingly. We also need to learn how to address unacceptable behavior in an effective and timely manner. The probability of unacceptable behavior is significantly reduced in a workplace with clear, open, and well-defined communication channels – both from (under)graduate students, postdocs, scientific and support staff to management as vice versa.

Actions and Measures

This section sets out the heart of the social-safety action plan, with direct links between the four main goals (G1,..,G4) and the proposed action and measures. For each action the target group (TG) is indicated.

Actions related to G1: Process the impact of the case

A1: Organize an institute-wide workshop by a corporate psychologist on how people deal with difficult experiences, and what influence this can have on an entire institute [TG = all].

A2: Arrange meetings in smaller groups of scientific staff, with guidance of corporate psychologist, to process what has happened and find a way forward to deal with the new situation [TG = groups of staff]

A3: Offer personal support for individuals [TG = individuals]

Actions related to G2: Define, address, and minimize unacceptable behavior at our institute

A4: Communicate University Code of Conduct within the institute, and define and discuss how the code is implemented on the institute level, and make resources available to get such discussion going. Make sure it is clear for everyone why this code is important, and that it is reviewed periodically. Make efforts to also involve people who are normally less likely to be heard and give everybody a voice [TG = all].

A5: Organize training and courses to raise awareness on behavior, and further develop professional skills. This has a broad aim to improve the culture at Leiden Observatory. Training and courses will have to be recurrent, and some obligatory. Some examples of subjects [TG=all; staff]:

- Supervision skills
- Leadership skills
- Bystander training
- Giving/receiving feedback
- Open & effective communication
- Intercultural communication
- Implicit bias

Opportunities for developing these skills should be included in the standard package for all staff. We will conduct a survey to hear other possible suggestions, and to learn which groups would be interested in participate in which courses.

A6: Define a system for correcting behavior. The starting point will be that everybody at the institute is aware of the code of conduct and understand why it is important. Addressing unacceptable behavior is key. We will need:

- Designate persons throughout the organization to assist in the event of problems
- Make a template that can be used to make clear "if-then" arrangements

The designated people will need to be connected up in a network for advice or possible follow-up.

Actions related to G3: Improve communications within the institute

A7: We will survey other institutes (Science Faculty, Leiden University and others) on how to improve transparency concerning processes on promotion, performance, and development, as well as information management (such as board decisions, etc.). We will subsequently implement best practices, after consultation with all stakeholders.

A8: We will investigate how to improve information flows about potential issues and general work-floor climate to management. One avenue is to facilitate the Institute Council, which has representatives from all groups in the Observatory, to take a more pro-active role and have regular meetings with a representation of the institute management

A9: The governance structure within our institute is being reevaluated, as all other institutes within the Faculty of Science. One of the likely outcomes is that instead of one scientific director the institutes will be led by a three-headed board (Scientific Director, Educational Director and Executive Director)

Actions related to G4: Further stimulate equity and inclusivity

A10: Continuous monitoring of, and seek for improvements for, procedures on new hires at all levels to minimize (un)conscious biases. This will be done in close collaboration with the EDI committee at Leiden Observatory, and at NOVA.

Other measures that will serve to stimulate equity and inclusivity are workshops and courses on the themes of implicit bias and intercultural communication, as mentioned under A5.

Timeline for implementation

This action plan on social safety contains ten action points, each with their own timeline or timescale.

- Action point A1, A2, and A3 concern processing the direct impact of the case (G1), which should be concluded before the end of Q2/2023.
- Defining and discussing the Rules of Conduct (A4) is a prerequisite for other action points and hence need to be done early in the process – in Q1/2023. A similar time scale is needed for the definition of a system for correcting behaviour (A6)
- Action point A5 concerns training and courses. We will plan monthly activities, including obligatory and optional elements, throughout Q1–Q4/2023. Courses and workshops will be continued to be offered each year – possibly on a Faculty or University-wide scale.
- Action points A7 and A8 concerns the information flows through our institute, requiring significant consultations. We will implement these in Q2 and Q3/2023.
- Action point A9 is about the governance structure of our institute and that of others in the Faculty of Science. The timescale for this is outside our control, but is anticipated for Q1/2024.
- Monitoring of procedures to improve inclusion and diversity will have to be a continuous effort, starting immediately.

Communication plan and evaluation of actions and measures

The management of Leiden Observatory will first start with a round of consultations among all stakeholder groups – (under)graduate students, postdocs, support and scientific staff), and within the Faculty of Science and University, before implementing the plan. This will start with presenting the first version of this plan on December 15, 2022, to the scientific staff and subsequently the entire institute. This will be followed by (at least) monthly updates via email and when necessary in-person meetings.

Some actions and measures will be easier to evaluate than others. We will consult experts to learn what the best courses of action are in this regard, such as polls, surveys, and interviews, but also monitoring of attendance of courses and workshops.