

June 2024

Dear Students and Colleagues,

At its meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, the Executive Board discussed the 2023 annual reports prepared by the student ombuds officer, staff ombuds officer and the team of confidential advisors. We would like to express our gratitude to everyone for their efforts and the reports. TU Delft aims to become a leading university at which integrity and social safety are paramount. Social safety, specifically, is a very current topic at our university - one that deserves priority and our continuous attention. The three annual reports contain valuable data, which we would like to share throughout the university. The recommendations and action items will be addressed and prioritised as much as possible in conjunction with other ongoing initiatives, such as the implementation of *Plan for change: towards a socially safe TU Delft*.

Several new internal confidential advisors were recruited in the last quarter of last year, increasing the size of the team from seven to ten people. The number of conversations with confidential advisors rose in 2023. The staff ombuds officer was also contacted by staff members more often than had been the case in previous years. By contrast, students were less likely to knock on the door of their ombuds officer; she will be exploring the factors behind this in greater depth. What is just as important as ever is that the network of confidential advisors and ombuds officers is easily accessible for anyone with something on their mind. From that perspective, the increase in the number of conversations is a positive development. Nevertheless, the annual reports again contain examples of what can go wrong in the work and study environment – sometimes with a significant impact on the people affected – and that makes for uncomfortable reading. In addition, the confidential advisors rightly note that they want to be an easily accessible and approachable safety net for students and staff, but not a panacea for all the problems that exist in the organisation.

Encouragingly, the recommendations made in the three annual reports fit well with the findings of an integrity system analysis recently commissioned by TU Delft as well as with the *Plan for change* drawn up in response to the report on social safety by the Inspectorate of Education. They advocate, for example, that following training courses should be encouraged and, to a certain extent, made compulsory. Leadership involves integrity-related duties, which require the necessary knowledge, tools, and skills. Reference is also made to the importance of a new university-wide code of conduct and better-structured complaint and reporting procedures, which provide guidance when things are not going well or boundaries are crossed. Clearer agreements and communication is needed regarding who students, staff members, or managers can turn to for support, information, or possible formal follow-up action. There needs to be clarity about what people can expect. Once a procedure has been concluded, it is important to give feedback about it in an appropriate manner. The student ombuds officer refers to the importance of 'closure' in this context.

Another common thread in the three annual reports is the call for an open culture, with greater scope for learning and a strong focus on mutual discussions and awareness. There is much to be gained from jointly reflecting on areas of doubt. It takes time and effort, but is ultimately worthwhile. Not rushing to judgement but rather jointly and constructively exploring specific dilemmas relating to work and study can not only make us all wiser and better at what we do, but also connect us in new ways. A genuinely curious and inquisitive attitude is very much consistent with the general idea of the university - and with the kind of academic community TU Delft wants to be.

There is a great deal of work to do. This is further underscored in these annual reports. As the Executive Board, it is our responsibility to be at the forefront of the process of change, serving the entire university community. Wherever new policies or more infrastructure are needed in the area of integrity and social safety, we will facilitate this and provide additional funding. We undertake to tread carefully whenever we ourselves

are involved in the handling of a signal or report, because we are only too aware that everyone should be able to trust us in that. In a broader sense, too, we want to set a good example, by talking to each other and others more often and by reflecting on the choices we make in our day-to-day working practices.

Kind regards,  
TU Delft Executive Board

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Rob Mudde  
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