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THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch Universities Guide for Protecting Scientists Against (Online) Threats and Harassment

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Protecting Scientists Against (Online) Threats and Harassment

Foreword

Scientists are increasingly being faced with threats, harassment and hate messages as a result of their media appearances and other publications. Now the Dutch universities are joining forces to introduce various national measures which are intended to protect both staff members and the universities themselves. This 'Guide for Protecting Scientists Against (Online) Threats and Harassment' contains measures for providing the best possible support to employees who face threats.

We, the rectors of the universities, encourage our researchers to use their knowledge and insights to benefit society. But when this leads to harassment and threats, we view this as a direct attack on both academic freedom and freedom of personal expression. We stand firmly behind our researchers and we will report any threats to the police. We aim to protect and support our scientists, and we wish to create a climate in which any threats made to them by members of the public are clearly condemned.

This guide presents recommendations for our organisations, our staff and their managers. Moreover, we as universities are collectively introducing the following measures:
- The universities define a shared standard for reporting incidents within the organisation and for deciding which cases are reported to the police. In this way we underline that threats to and harassment of university staff are always unacceptable.
- All universities are introducing broader support measures in terms of both prevention and response. In this way they ensure that staff receive all the support they need, for instance by providing training in online resilience and offering psychosocial assistance.
- The universities are creating a joint platform entitled WetenschapVeilig ('Science Safe'). This is being set up as an independent foundation modelled on PersVeilig ('Press Safe') and with the task of improving, at the national level, issues such as information gathering, information provision, measures and interaction with bodies such as the judicial system and the police.

We thank everyone who has helped to realise this guide, especially those who have shared their own experiences of harassment, threats and hate messages.

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1 Introduction

1   Introduction

Universities encourage their scientists to publicise their research and scientific vision. However, when these scientists do make media appearances, they may face many kinds of (online) threats, harassment and hate messages. This in turn creates a sense of insecurity and fear, and can discourage researchers from engaging in the public debate – something which is in conflict with upholding academic freedom and scientists' freedom to express their opinions. Other university staff, up to the management board, sometimes find themselves faced with abuse and threats simply due to their jobs or their contribution to the public debate.

Dutch universities are committed to providing a safe environment for their students, staff and visitors. Universities value and promote qualities such as collegiality, integrity, equality, respect, openness and consideration for others. Any form of undesirable behaviour such as sexual harassment, other forms of harassment, bullying or discrimination is unacceptable for the universities of the Netherlands. This message is communicated on all levels, beginning with the Executive Boards and including everyone involved in education and research. The universities are committed to responding as effectively and appropriately as possible to cases of (alleged) undesirable behaviour.

In order to protect free speech, legal rulings show that proper protection must be given to publications or media appearances regarding issues of public interest. So there is all the more reason to ensure that researchers and other staff who receive threats in any form can rely on their institution to support them. As such, Dutch universities need a good range of resources and actions for responding to such situations. This guide aims to meet that need: based on good practices, it describes how to protect university staff against threats and harassment.

This 'Guide for Protecting Scientists Against (Online) Threats and Harassment' sets out how institutions can protect their staff against threats and other forms of harassment and abuse that result from media appearances or the general public debate, and what steps institutions can take to support their staff during and after such incidents. It provides a framework for action based on what can be done by universities and other institutions (such as the press initiative PersVeilig ('Press Safe'), as well as recommendations given by people who themselves are or have been faced with threats.

1.1   How frequent are (online) threats and harassment?

Every university in the Netherlands has staff who have received threats following media appearances or simply due to their job or field of research. All these institutions have indicated that their staff faces (online) threats, harassment and hate messages very frequently and that this is a cause for concern. Examples cited by the universities include researchers who require permanent protection (sometimes for years on end) due to concrete threats, diversity officers who receive hate messages when their appointment is announced, and staff members who receive hundreds of abusive messages each time their name is mentioned on Twitter. Exactly how often threats and harassment of scientists and other university staff occur is currently unknown.

The threats that actually make the news, such as threats to COVID-19 researchers or doxing incidents (where scientists' homes addresses are shared on social media), are just the tip of the iceberg. During the writing of this guide it was often reported that threats have grown more frequent, more diverse and more serious in recent years, especially those made via social media. However, neither the institutions nor central bodies record any structural figures on how often threats or abuse occur, or on their nature or seriousness. Hence it is not possible to define the exact scope of the problem. Furthermore, there are no accessible figures for reports made to the police about threats to scientists, but it is estimated that police receive several dozen reports a year concerning threats made against university staff. One indication is provided by a recent survey carried out among Dutch researchers and other university staff by ScienceGuide[1]. This survey revealed that 43 percent of the 372 participating researchers was threatened, abused or otherwise harassed following a public appearance in the last five years. Of these, 86% states that they have become more cautious in their public statements. Moreover, in 2021 *PersVeilig* commissioned a study[2] of the aggression and threats aimed at Dutch journalists, which showed that 81% of the 689 participating journalists had indeed experienced threats. Since there are strong parallels between journalists and scientists in the media, this figure provides another indication that threats following on from media appearances are frequent. More than half of the surveyed journalists believe that incidents of a threatening nature have increased in number in the past five years.

1.2   Who is the guide for?

The main reason for the creation of this guide is that scientists are being threatened or harassed after media appearances. When researchers appear on television to talk about their specialist field, this is quite frequently followed by hundreds of malicious, abusive or genuinely threatening messages on social media. Of all university staff, researchers are most visible in the public debate. However, there are also many examples of other people with, in principle, lower media visibility to also find themselves faced with this problem. There are regular incidents in which both academic staff and/or support and management staff become the target of threats, harassment and transgressive behaviour due to who they are or what they do.

1   Survey conducted by ScienceGuide (2021): https://www.scienceguide.nl/2021/07/wetenschappers-zwichten-voor-intimidatie/
2   Research conducted by I&O Research on behalf of PersVeilig (2021): https://www.persveilig.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Agressie-en-bedreiging-richting-Journalisten2021.pdf

This kind of attack can be triggered by a blog, an interview, a Tweet or even just a job title. Consequently there is a broad need for ways of responding to insecurity on social media, both within the institution and with respect to the world at large.

As such, this guide is intended for all university staff and for their supervisors and managers who have been, are or may be faced with (online) insecurity.

1.3   Academic freedom and freedom of expression

The Dutch universities are unequivocally committed to upholding academic freedom and to their duty of care for their staff who engage in the public debate. Not all public statements by university staff automatically fall under academic freedom; that only applies when these statements relate to the person's job. This relationship to the researcher's job also makes clear the difference between academic freedom and freedom of expression. For researchers, their freedom of expression falls under academic freedom as long as their statements are related to their job. However, this does not mean that only scientifically proven opinions are covered by academic freedom. Scientific opinions that are expressed in the public debate by university staff in their capacity as researchers (in other words, not as private individuals) also fall under academic freedom. When researchers express their opinion on issues outside their own field, they do not write or speak as scientists. Here they are not making use of their academic freedom as a researcher, but of their freedom of expression as a citizen. It is the personal responsibility of researchers to keep their opinions as a scientist separate from their opinions as a citizen and to carefully indicate the nature of their input to the public debate.3

1.4   Basis for this guide

This Dutch Universities Guide for Protecting Scientists Against (Online) Threats and Harassment draws on various information sources. Interviews were conducted with, among others, integral safety specialists, communication specialists, HR specialists, confidential advisers, diversity specialists, executive members of staff and various employees of Dutch universities who have experienced threats or harassment.

In addition, other organisations of relevance to staff who are threatened (online) were also consulted. These include the police, the Public Prosecution Service, PersVeilig (initiated by the journalism sector), the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW), the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB), the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR) as well as the Ministries of Education, Culture & Science, Economic Affairs & Climate Policy and Justice & Security. Furthermore, available documentation from these organisations and institutions, such as safety protocols and policy documents on public safety, was also consulted.

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3   https://www.knaw.nl/nl/actueel/publicaties/academische-vrijheid-in-nederland

1.5　Guide to reading

Chapter 2 discusses good practices and points for attention in the policies of the universities, highlighting the considerations that play a role here. Chapter 3 sketches a framework for action that can be used to respond to and prevent threats and (online) harassment, and indicates which issues need to be considered in response to and in the aftermath of incidents. A distinction is always drawn between aspects that the institution needs to take into account and aspects that employees themselves can influence. The appendices include itemised action points for the institutions and for employees.

Terms such as 'scientist', 'researcher' and 'employee' are used interchangeably, as are 'institution', 'university' and 'employer'. This is because university employees may exercise different functions and because scientists may be associated with various institutions.

2 Policy of the universities

2   Policy of the universities

Every university can cite examples of threats, harassment and hate messages directed at their staff, both online and physically, and both from within the organisation and from outside it. In this chapter we set out good practices and points of attention for organisations. This is based on an inventory of the current measures for social safety and on conversations with selected university staff. The institutions apply their own safety policies which do not always explicitly state how to deal with threats resulting from, or made through, use of (social) media. We discuss approaches taken within various organisations and which may be useful for other organisations.

2.1   Awareness of the issue

It may sound so obvious, and it is seldom mentioned explicitly in documents such as policy guidelines, but: the effectiveness of all good practices and guidelines stands or falls with the awareness of and attention given to the issue. Awareness of what happens or can happen when a researcher takes part in the public debate, awareness of the employee and their experiences, and awareness of what happens afterwards. And in each case ensuring that this awareness results in concrete attention. Awareness and attention, or the lack of it, is the most frequently cited issue in people's experiences of how institutions respond to threats. It is the key factor for the employee that determines how they experience the support they receive with regard to threats and harassment. This relates to their reporting of the incident and the response to this report and also to the provided subsequent care and follow-up actions. In many cases it is the person's direct line manager who is notified following an incident.

2.2   Responsible and proactive

Employers are responsible for ensuring a safe working environment for their employees. This means it is crucial for organisations to take a proactive attitude, paying attention to indications of unsafe situations and offering their staff support and guidance. We see how threatening incidents or (online) expressions of hatred can have long-term effects on the well-being of employees.

The direct line manager of a threatened employee is often the first point of contact following an incident. Hence it is important to inform and train managers about their role and task. Fact-related knowledge is important – managers and administrators must be aware when an event is transgressive and when it is not; in cases involving racism and sexism this is not always clear to everyone. What is crucial is that, as previously mentioned, managers are aware of

the impact caused by threatening incidents and the position in which their staff find themselves, and that they respond accordingly.

Here additional awareness and attention is required for employees who are particularly vulnerable. These may include young employees, early career researchers, women, people with a migrant background, LGBTQIA+ orientation or a physical disability: threats or harassment are often aimed specifically at such factors. Follow-up care, especially in the case of traumatic experiences, is another important point of attention: what can managers offer in terms of coaching and guidance? It is important that the initiative for this is not solely the responsibility of the employee. It is helpful to have a clear assignment of roles and responsibilities for proactively reporting and responding to incidents and unsafe situations. Reports of threatening incidents can submitted to various parties: to the manager, to the communication department or to the security department. So it is important that all parties are aware of the protocol and procedure to be followed.

2.3 Clear, accessible and findable information for staff

When staff are faced with harassment or threats, they need to be able to find information about what they can do and they must be able to report the incident. A national contact and advisory point is being set up, and moreover incidents can always be reported to one's own institution. The visibility and findability of information and of a contact point are crucial if these are to work properly, whatever form they take. In short, ensure that employees are informed to the maximum about a contact point for safety and security. There are various ways of promoting this, for instance through awareness campaigns featuring posters on the campus, informative e-mails and newsletters, and also by stressing the presence and purpose of the contact point when onboarding new employees or in media training and other forms for training.

Some universities, for instance, are developing a matrix for employees that lets them search an overview to find out who they contact with which problems. Others are working on an interactive guide in which employees can see where they get appropriate help for a particular situation. Ensure that instruments like these are as visible and findable as possible. When providing employee information about situations where they can or should seek help, explicitly mention threats made through social media and threats following media appearances.

2.4 Contact and advisory point, and expert team for social safety

The universities are jointly setting up the WetenschapVeilig ('Science Safe') contact and advisory point. In addition to this, it is important that universities ensure a good structure for their own process. A good practice already being applied by some universities is to create a contact point or a contact and advisory point for social safety where the reports are channelled to a core team or an expert team for social safety. It is important that this expert team comprise various disciplines so that all expertise can be brought to bear when incidents occur and quick

responses are possible. An expert team consists of staff members who have expertise in their own domain and also have affinity with social safety.

Possible team members are a (student) psychologist, an ombudsman, a diversity officer, a lawyer, an HR manager, a confidential counsellor, a member of the international office, an (online) communication specialist and the social safety coordinator. The expert team can be asked to contribute its ideas when dealing with an incident. This creates an integral approach and a wider network, hence preventing situations where people who make reports are shunted from one point to the next. Employees faced with threats emphasise how important it is to have a single contact point where they can discuss the threatening events (as opposed to having to constantly repeat their story to people with various functions or areas of expertise). This is easier to realise with a core team. Once the WetenschapVeilig national contact and advisory point has been set up, this core team can also function as a contact point.

We should note here that it is important consider and clearly state who a procedure is intended for and for what type of situation. Some institutions have a protocol that sets out the situations in which people can turn to a contact point. To give one example, is it open for all kinds of threats, both internal and external, or only for reporting threats following appearances in (social) media or publications? Can students who receive threatening responses to their work also turn to this contact point? Can managers or colleagues report an incident on behalf of another employee? Within what time period can people making a report expect a response? Can the contact point be reached on a 24/7 basis? Each institution needs to ensure clarity on issues like these.

2.5 Shared standards for reporting incidents to employers and the police

The universities propose a shared standard for reporting incidents and in what cases these should also be reported to the police. This means that the decision on whether or not to report an incident to one's own organisation and on whether or not to report it to the police is less specifically the decision of those directly involved. Moreover this offers more insight into the nature and scope of incidents. Standard reporting of incidents to the institution also makes it easier to decide whether the police should be notified or not. For this reason, standard reporting is applied for cases involving threats, physical or sexual violence, stalking and break-ins and theft. The following considerations play a role here:

– Making it standard procedure to report incidents to the institution creates more insight into the nature and scope of threats.
– Researchers feel supported when it is conveyed that threats are not 'part of the job', but instead should always be reported.
– If it is standard procedure to report incidents, researchers in a vulnerable position do not need to weigh up for themselves whether there is any point in reporting them.
– If there are shared standards for which cases should be reported to the police, the employer can adjust to the situation better and adopt a protective role with regard to the researcher, for instance by reporting the incident to the police on the researcher's behalf.

– Standard procedure for deciding which cases should be reported to the police will clarify communication with the public prosecutor and police.

2.6   Communication

The inventory of good practices regularly highlighted the role of communication departments. If it can be expected that a theme which a researcher talks about in the media will generate negative responses, it is often seen as helpful if they can discuss this beforehand with staff of the communication department. These staff can help to estimate risks and possibly take preventative measures. If the communication department has already contacted the researcher prior to their media appearances, this is experienced as supportive and also makes it easier to determine a (public) response to threats. Here too the principle is: the effectiveness stands or falls with researchers' level of familiarity with the role that communication can play.

Communication professionals in an institution often indicate that they can play a role in the follow-up response to threatening or harassing incidents, for instance with regard to social media monitoring. Some universities maintain social media teams whose tasks include monitoring responses to researchers. In this way they can keep track of developments and pass on concerning cases to the security department. A threatened employee can experience this as very supportive. Communication departments state they can respond more effectively when they have an action list with regard to (online) threats and hate messages. Communication staff with experience in assessing harassing or threatening responses can provide added value in such cases. Moreover, communication departments can draw on their expertise to advise whether and how an institution or an executive board should respond to threats to their staff in the media. The tone and content of official responses are extremely important; it is not unusual for these responses to be met with further expressions of hate.

2.7   Internal harassment and threats

This guide focusses on external threats, meaning threats originating outside the institution itself. Unfortunately harassment or threats to university staff – through social media or in other ways – are also regularly made by colleagues, students or even managers within one's own institution. It hardly needs to be said that that such internal threats usually create a great sense of insecurity. In order to ensure a healthy organisation in which everyone can do their work in a good and safe atmosphere, it is important to take an unequivocal stand against all forms of harassment and threats. It is also important to clearly state who employees can turn to if they feel unsafe due to actions of colleagues, managers or other persons within the organisation. The guidelines and procedures within the institution apply to such situations as well. If concrete threats are made, then in internal cases too it is important to report these to the police, with the support of the institution. HR needs to aware of dysfunctional working relationships and can apply resources such as coaching, supervision, mediation or arbitration with an aim to repairing inter-staff relations.

3 Approach before, during and after (online) threats and harassment

3 Approach BEFORE, DURING and AFTER (online) threats and harassment

Various aspects of good employer or employee behaviour are important at different moments. In this chapter we describe three phases (before, during and after threatening incidents) in which institutions and employees should consider differing points of attention. The recommendations in this chapter are formulated on the basis of interviews with researchers and other staff members who have experienced threats, integral safety specialists, communication specialists, HR specialists, confidential advisers and diversity specialists at the institutions. In addition, other organisations of relevance to employees who are threatened (online) were also consulted. These include the police, the Public Prosecution Service, PersVeilig (initiated by the journalism sector), the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW), the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB), the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR) as well as the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science, the Ministry of Economic Affairs & Climate Policy and the Ministry of Justice & Security in order to inventory their best practices. The recommendations in this chapter are relevant at various levels within the institutions.

BEFORE	3.1 Awareness and prevention

3.1.1 Institutions

- The institution, in its role of employer, is responsible for the safety, health and well-being of the researchers and other staff members who it employs. This means that for every type of publication or media appearance that may involve risks, employers must ensure sufficient preparation time and preventative measures, as well as effective media training that also gives attention to the possibility of threatening responses.
- Ensure that the institution itself is prepared for threats and agree with all parties a procedure in which tasks, responsibilities and actions are set out clearly. It is important that the range of actions regarding threatened employees is anchored within the institution's (social) safety plan. This applies both to preparation and to concrete procedures in response to incidents and follow-up care.
- When making media appearances, a researcher may be expected to base their statements on scientific research, but this does not mean that their contribution to the public debate is, or should be, confined to this level. As long they remain within

the confines of academic freedom, (see Section 1.3), the researcher should be given protection following any participation in the public debate.
– Make it standard procedure to report threats and harassment. A good internal incidents registration process will help to provide an overview.
– Clearly state the possibilities for reporting such incidents, both at the national level and within the institution. Also give attention here to employees in dependent or vulnerable positions, because these persons in particular may find it harder to report incidents. An internal contact point must be functional and visible for the institution's employees. If an institution decides on another structure for reporting and responding to safety-related incidents, then once again: ensure it is functional, findable and visible for all members of staff.
– In (media) training, also devote attention to good security for (social media) accounts, for instance through two-step verification.
– Provide media training that also devotes attention to (online) safety for early career researchers (such as PhD students) and other staff members with jobs relating to media and public debate, such as diversity officers. The institution should also devote attention to these themes during onboarding of new employees. In addition, it is useful to refer to this in regular training courses devoted to themes such as making pitches, leadership paths and personal developments paths.
– Devote attention to the risk of harassment and threats to employees who carry out field work or research in public spaces.

3.1.2 Employees
– The employee should ensure they are aware of the current preventive measures and take part in offered training in the area of media and safety.
– The employee should of course express themself in (social) media within the boundaries of legal freedom of expression, and hence not express themself in ways that are racist, sexist or threatening.
– The employee should be familiar with and observe general academic guidelines as to how employees should behave towards each other and members of the public.

DURING 3.2 Responding to a threatening incident

3.2.1 Institutions
– It is important that all incidents can be reported to the employer. From this point on, the employer is responsible for supporting the employee in the follow-up actions.
– If harassing or threatening messages are posted on the social media accounts of the employer, or come to the employer's attention in other ways, the employer should on its own initiative take action to inform the employee of this and to deal with the incident. Do not just leave it to the employee to take action by themself.
– In the event of safety-relevant incidents, the employer should stand with the employee, providing full support. Threats, harassment and hate messages occur

in very many forms, and hence the actions in response to this may vary too – but it always starts with reporting them.

- If a criminal offence has been committed – such as a threat, violence or another form of harassment – then in principle this will be reported to the police. It is preferable that the employer or client makes this report to the police. The employer files the report instead of the employee because the process of filing a report with the police is often perceived as stressful. Following unpleasant events, this can form part of the employer's duty of care. Moreover, it is the employer's address that is included in the report to the police, not the employee's, which provides the employee with additional protection.
- The institution ensures that employees have a single contact point so that they don't constantly have to repeat their story. As a consequence, employees will feel better heard.
- The institution can consider issuing a public statement or declaration of support; this is felt to be particularly supportive if it is done quickly after the incident and explicitly stresses that a threat made to someone because they are carrying out their work/ research is completely unacceptable. This applies to all employees, including those who are less visible or well-known.
- It is essential to ask the employee what they need, but it is also important to set out the various options. The employee is in a stressful and unusual situation, so they cannot be expected to precisely grasp or express their needs.

3.2.2 Employees

- The employee should report incidents to their employer. There are many ways of reporting threatening incidents: to a manager, to a contact point, to the communication department, to the security department or to the HR department, to cite just some of the options.

AFTER

3.3 After an incident

3.3.1 Institutions

- It is important that the employer continues to stand with the employee, also in the longer term. Full support remains necessary because the events may be traumatic and also because it is not unusual for the threats to continue and even to resurge in the event of new media appearances. This can mean that professional support or advice needs to be called in as part of follow-up care.
- All managers within an institution should be aware that incidents can always occur. Some incidents are precisely that – incidents – while other researchers, once they have appeared in the media, can expect new threats or harassment during and after every appearance they make. Furthermore, employees may also become or remain the target of threats without making their own media contributions.

- It regularly happens that, after a while, threatened researchers or university staff begin to feel that it is their fault, that it's due to the way they do things or how they communicate. Don't leave employees with the feeling that they should express themselves differently. A specialist field, extreme right, extreme left, interest groups, schools of political thought, diversity, government policy – these are all themes which can generate very strong and very numerous responses. What is important is that the institution continues to back up and stand with the employee, irrespective of the theme that they publicly discuss (while of course remaining within the boundaries of freedom of expression).
- If researchers or other threatened members of staff are associated with several institutions, the employer should maintain contact with any other employers. This type of contact is not always maintained as a matter of course: it regularly happens that universities, university medical centres, research institutes and, for instance, ministries find it difficult to liaise with each other.
- It is also important to consider, together with the employee, how the threats may influence the employee's ability to carry out their tasks. Employees who have been confronted with threats often report that their concentration and attention suffer for a longer time as a result. All the more so if the responses they have received are unexpected, intense and threatening.
- The employer should devote additional attention to employees who are in a vulnerable position, for instance because they have a temporary contract. Incidents that are experienced as a result of, for instance, engaging in the public debate must not influence decisions regarding their further employment.
- Consider together with the employee how they can feel supported to participate further in the public debate. At the same time, of course, respect the employee's boundaries. Also respect the employee's experiences with regard to safety/security: take issues such as sexism, racism, validism and homophobia seriously and do not make these a subject of discussion.
- If employees 'get used to' harassment or threats because their field of work leads to many negative responses, and they continue to make public/media appearances, then it is important to monitor the employee (for instance by means of regular checks) to see if there are any changes in the employee's requirements for support or practical matters.

3.3.2 Employees
- The employee should stay in touch with a contact person within the institution as long as threats or their consequences continue. The contact person may be a manager, an HR officer or a confidential counsellor, or also someone in the security department or communication department.

Appendices

Appendix 1
Action points for institutions

The following action points are derived in part from PersVeilig and have been discussed with professionals at the institutions and with researchers who have experienced threats or harassment. The action points are relevant at various organisational levels within the institution. Awareness and attention at all levels is important for an effective policy to ensure that employees know they have support and to enable threats to be addressed.

At the level of the organisation

✓ Ensure a clear assignment of roles and tasks and a clear procedure for dealing with (online) incidents, harassment and threats. Anchor these elements in the existing safety/security policy and ensure that the assignment of roles and tasks and the procedure are widely known.

✓ As institution, introduce a zero-tolerance policy regarding threats to and harassment of employees. State clearly that this always needs to be reported and indicate the options for reporting such incidents.

✓ Set up a contact point to which threats can always be reported. Keep a record of reported incidents in order to reveal the scope of the problem.

✓ Ensure that managers at the institution recognise the urgency of the problem or provide them with corresponding training. It is important that these managers are aware of the protocol and procedure to be followed.

✓ As institution, adopt a clear internal and external standpoint on issues such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and validism. Provide clear definitions and information in the area of diversity and inclusion and communicate these to managers, the security department, the communication department and the executive board.

✓ Ensure that employees are trained in online resilience and in (safe) use of social media.

✓ Ensure that employees receive all necessary support, including psychosocial assistance. Take (online) threats seriously, because these can have major consequences for employees. Harassment and threats do not come under the category 'part of the job'.

✓ Employees with a temporary contract or employees who have a strongly dependent relationship of another nature with their line manager often feel even more vulnerable and may be afraid to report the threat.

Ensure a safe working environment in which all employees feel able to report incidents.

For managers

✓ Understand and acknowledge the seriousness of the situation for the employee involved.

✓ Ensure that any threats are reported to the police on behalf of the employee, while for instance involving the security department.

✓ Many people who have been confronted with (online) hate or threats wonder if they themselves are to blame for the insults and threats. Reassure the employee that they have done nothing wrong.

✓ If the situation demands, a public display of support for the employee can be considered. All the more so if the situation involves serious threats or a large quantity of hate messages.

✓ Offer the threatened employee the option that the institution can compile all the messages; this task can be handled by the communication department, for instance.

✓ Arrange with the communication department that employees are not tagged in media messages issued by the institution if they would prefer this not to happen.

✓ Monitor social media responses and if possible immediately remove threatening and harassing messages; also report such messages or responses to the social media channel. Before doing this, make screenshots and similar which may later serve as evidence.

✓ Threatened employees often feel alone, so offer them a social safety net. One option is to involve their immediate colleagues, which can be felt as very supportive.

✓ Ensure good follow-up care and support, which can improve the employee's sense of safety and well-being.

Appendix 2
Action points for employees

The following action points are derived in part from PersVeilig and have been discussed with professionals at the institutions and with researchers who have experienced threats or harassment.

✔ Before making a media appearance, find out what information is available on you on the Internet and decide what you want or don't want to be available.

✔ Ensure that your social media accounts are well-protected, preferably using two-step verification and a password manager.

✔ Ensure that work-related and private accounts are linked to each other as little as possible.

✔ If necessary, ask the communication department for help and advice with (social) media issues. You can find lots of tips at addresses such as https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/ and https://digitalfirstaid.org/en/topics/harassed-online/.

✔ Report (online) threats, harassment and hate to your employer. You can do this through a contact point or directly to your line manager, the communication department or the security department. Receiving threats is not part of your job, and it may be possible to take steps against this.

✔ It can be useful to get ideas and input from someone else, too.

✔ Carrying out field work or research in public spaces can sometimes also lead to threatening reactions. Report these and ask your line manager or your university to contribute ideas about how you can work safely.

✔ If you receive concrete threats, let the institution report these to the police on your behalf, or file the report yourself if you prefer.

✔ Save all threatening or harassing messages. Make screenshots. If certain messages are not in themselves a criminal offence, an accumulation of messages from certain persons can still lead to criminal prosecution on the basis of stalking.

✔ It may be even more difficult to compile material after having suffered a traumatic experience. Ask other people to do this for you (speak to the communication department, line managers, colleagues or friends) if you don't wish or feel able to do this yourself.

✔ Block people who send you hateful or harassing messages and, if possible, report them to the social media platform in question.

✔ Ask yourself how seriously you should take online threats or harassment. There are tools available online to help you make this assessment, such as www.troll-busters.com or www.degoedezaak.nl.

✔ Pay attention to your own mental state. Harassment, hate messages or threats can have major consequences. Be aware of this and seek help if this is offered to you or if you feel that you need help.