Report

An investigation among current students, former students, and employees on how they experienced social safety at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute.

Translation authorized by Bezemer & Schubad of the original report in Dutch

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Management Summary

This report is the result of an investigation into perceived social safety in the Amsterdam Fashion Institute that Bezemer & Schubad conducted in the spring of 2021 on behalf of the Dean of the Faculty of Digital Media and Creative Industries of Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

Chapter I sets out the aspects of procedural accountability. It must be stressed that this is a perception survey of which fact finding is not the primary purpose. The purpose is to explore the (subjective) perceived social safety of the target groups: students, former students, and staff.
The investigation was carried out by conducting 109 semi-structured interviews with persons who volunteered to take part. The advantages (no one can say they were not heard & only persons who believe they have something to say are interviewed) and disadvantages (bias, only persons with strong opinions sign up) of voluntary participation are taken into consideration.
39 students and former students signed up. That is a very small number compared to the approximately 1,400 students who are currently enrolled at AMFI and the many thousands of former students. 70 out of 169 members of staff (employees & freelancers) signed up. That is a very large number. The representativeness of both numbers is discussed. In addition to signing up for an interview, members of the target groups were also given the opportunity to submit a written statement. 41 persons made use of that possibility.
All interviewees and other respondents were promised that their contributions would be anonymous and that third parties would not be able to trace back any information in the report to their person.
To assess social safety, this investigation uses the standards laid down in the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the branch-specific Occupational Health and Safety Catalogue, as well as the social safety standards adopted by AMFI and Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. In addition, the pillars of Psychological Safety in the Workplace that Prof Amy Edmondson describes in her theories are also drawn upon.

Chapter II discusses the social safety perceived by students and former students during their studies at AMFI. These experiences are dominantly negative to very negative. For example, 9 out of 39 state that they have been under professional treatment of a psychologist or other professional therapist to cope with the psychological damage sustained during their studies at AMFI, with several people mentioning PTSD. Furthermore, 15 of the 39 (not including the 9 in professional treatment) indicate that they suffer or have suffered from seriously damaged self-confidence, performance anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, severe stress, social anxiety and the like as a result of their studies at AMFI.
The main sources of the absence of social safety mentioned are: an extremely high workload, the behaviour of some lecturers supposedly aimed at breaking students' self-esteem and confidence, the unpredictability and arbitrariness of some teachers, the lack of constructive feedback, teachers behaving more like members of the jury in a contest than as teachers, intimidation by some teachers, competition among students, and the perception of being enrolled in a disorganised school that finds itself in a state of ideological confusion.

Students and former students also indicate that many - but not all - of the negative experiences date from the past and that first signs of a more humane AMFI are beginning to appear.

The chapter concludes with 22 short statements, pieces of advice, from (former) students to the institute's management.

Chapter III discusses social safety, as perceived by the 70 members of staff who were interviewed. Their experiences are dominantly negative and critical, albeit more nuanced than the experiences shared by students. Members of staff identify the following main sources of the absence of social safety: high workloads; the organisation being in a state of ideological confusion and chaos; the lack of direction, vision, and strategy; the perception of non-transparent, ad-hoc management practices; hypocritical window dressing; sharp divisions and cliquishness among faculty; and a lack of training and guidance. The vast majority of the 70 staff members interviewed state that they believe the criticism levelled at the organisation by students and former students to be justified. The researchers highlight that, in addition to criticism, the first signs of faith and confidence in the renewal process that is currently underway can be detected.

The chapter concludes with 70 short statements, pieces of advice, given by members of staff to the institute's management.

Chapter IV tests the outcomes of Chapters II and III against the frame of reference introduced in chapter I. It is concluded that all standards are severely violated at AMFI, making it plausible that - for many at AMFI - the organisation is or was not only perceived as being socially unsafe, but actually is or was unsafe.

The representativeness of the survey is also analysed in this chapter. There can be no doubt that the perceptions of the interviewed population of the faculty is representative. Despite the relatively small number of students interviewed, their contributions are to be considered meaningful and representative given the fact that their criticisms were endorsed by the vast majority of the 70 members of staff and given the additional supporting evidence provided by some of AUAS's own quantitative measurements. Other quantitative analyses, however, sketch substantially more nuanced pictures than the reality perceived by students and faculty. For example, the hard figures on student success rates and staff-absenteeism are many times more positive than evidenced by the output of the interviews.

Similarly, scores on factors such as perceived safety and general satisfaction in the most recent National Student Survey paint a significantly more positive picture than the one emerging from the interviews. This difference may be attributed to the renewal process that has been initiated by the institute.

In this chapter, the researchers also identify factors that impede or hinder social safety in the study and/or work environment at AMFI and factors that facilitate or encourage social safety, concluding that the systems and culture with regard to reporting the perceived absence of social safety warrant improvement.

The concluding paragraph makes 14 recommendations to the institute's management.

1. Draw up a clear, broad-based, and unambiguous multi-year strategy for AMFI, resulting in stability and fostering safety and security.
2. Achieve transparency, coherence, consistency, and predictability in the behaviour of the management team. Avoid ad-hoc and incident-driven decision-making.
3. Put an end to so-called management by window dressing. Convey a message that lines up with reality and historical facts, even if these conflict with the institution's desired image.
4. Create a clear, broad-based, and unified vision of education and of students' professional future. In doing so, prevent tension and insecurity among students and faculty, partisanship and cliquishness among faculty, and gaps in the curriculum, which only serve to increase insecurity.
5. Give a powerful impulse to the educational innovation that is already underway. Erase all traces of the educational approach that targeted the crude demolition of students' self-esteem and confidence, that was characterised by unpredictability, arbitrariness, subjectivity, and favouritism, and that forced students to reflect on intimate and confidential details about their private lives and personal histories in public, partly prompted by profoundly intrusive questions from teachers.
6. Promote collaboration and team building among students rather than competition.
7. Bring workloads for students and faculty to an acceptable level. No one seems to have a problem with hard work, but many are uncomfortable with workloads that lead to exhaustion, burnouts, tension, and absenteeism.
8. Bring some peace and quiet to the organisation. Calm it down. Ensure clear and above all final decision-making so that each decision taken does not always trigger a new debate. Be clear about the duties, powers, and responsibilities of coordinators in particular.
9. Create clarity about the position of AMFI as part of Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.
10. Do not take for granted that AMFI is inclusive and diverse in every way. Prevent students and staff from feeling excluded and/or discriminated against for various reasons (ethnicity, wealth, background, character).
11. Create a culture in which seeking help is not seen as a sign of weakness. Make sure that help is findable and reliable.
12. Work to create a culture in which it is clear what behaviour is expected of an AMFI-teacher and in which behaviour that deviates from these standards is not accepted and normalised, but addressed and tackled; a culture in which people are called to account when necessary.
13. Improve coaching and mentoring of new teachers and work on the continuing education and coaching of incumbent teachers. Critically evaluate the hiring policy that results in the high number of former students among faculty.
14. As managers, do not only consider necessary changes in the structure, systems, and culture of the organisation, but also pay full attention to the concrete composition of the AMFI workforce and to individual case histories.

The report closes with the observation that the first steps leading to improvement have been taken. The first positive signs are there to be noticed.

I. Introduction

I.i. Motives for an investigation and nature of the assignment

In March 2021 the Amsterdam Fashion Institute (AMFI) was in the news as the institute where Martijn N., the now-suspended director of MOAM, had studied, and where, having graduated he had remained active as a guest lecturer (until 2015) and as a parttime examiner. Martijn N. was accused of serious sexual misconduct. He is also said to have been suspended several times for misconduct during his studies. The publicity surrounding Martijn N. and AMFI's reaction to it caused considerable disquiet among students, former students, parents of current or former students, and current and former staff. People from these groups have expressed concern, have indicated that there is an unsafe working and learning climate at AMFI, and have said as much in the press, on social media, and on the specially created website www.timetotellAMFI.com, to which anyone who has had negative experiences with AMFI can e-mail their story via the e-mail address created for that purpose, truth@timetotellAMFI.com.

The negative publicity surrounding Martijn N. follows earlier negative publicity in June 2020. This was the result of a declaration of solidarity by AMFI with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which several students and former students found out of place, at odds with their own experiences, and hypocritical.

AMFI is part of the Faculty of Digital Media & Creative Industry (FDMCI), which is itself part of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS). AMFI has three main programmes: Design, Business and Development, and Branding.

The AUAS is committed to a safe working and study climate for staff and students. The Dean of the FDMCI has asked Bezemer & Schubad to carry out an assessment of the mechanisms for reporting undesirable behaviour, to determine which factors hamper or get in the way of social safety in the study and/or working climate and which ones facilitate or foster social safety. One element of the assignment is also to give students and staff who experience a lack of social safety the opportunity to share and/or discuss their experiences and perceptions with an independent person who can be an interlocutor without bias and without self-interest. The Dean of FDMCI has also requested advice on possible measures to be taken to optimise the social safety of students and staff.

Although AMFI cannot, in all respects in terms of its curriculum, be compared with related programmes such as ARTEZ, Design Academy Eindhoven, and the Royal Academy of Art, the disquiet around the question of social safety in each of these and other art programmes is similar—also at the international level. Studies have been or are being carried out at those institutions too. An analysis of this wider context is not part of the present investigative assignment.

I.ii. Stocktaking cultural investigation: an investigation of perceptions

The assignment that the Dean of the FDMCI has entrusted to Bezemer & Schubad is to carry out what is known as an investigation of perceptions regarding the social safety of current and former students and staff. How do they perceive their social safety? It is the perceptions of these groups that are key here. Ascertaining the truth is not irrelevant, but it does not determine the outcome of the investigation. In other words, if—as will become apparent—a number of former students and (mainly senior) current students state that they are suffering from PTSD, depression and eating disorders as a result of their education at AMFI, the investigators record this as their truths. The same goes for the statement of a lecturer that they received a lot of heart-warming gifts from students but never any negative criticism of any kind. No doctor's certificates on the one hand or tangible proof of the gifts on the other, are asked for. This does not mean that these subjective truths will not occasionally be considered from a different perspective—for example, that of the National Student Survey (NSE)—thus leading to the observation that there are other truths as well or that it is plausible that a subjective truth has an objective basis.

If AUAS wishes to attach consequences to the outcome of this investigation, for example in the organisational or personnel sphere, they must be aware of the nature of the assignment as it has been given: an investigation of perceptions in which ascertaining the truth is not the overriding concern.

The approach taken in a survey of perceptions is first and foremost qualitative. The number of participants in the study makes it possible to begin both Chapters II and III with some meaningful, albeit crude, quantitative data.

I.iii. Investigative methodology: interviews after voluntary applications and written statements

The investigators have based their analysis, conclusions, and recommendations on the results of interviews with persons who had voluntarily registered via the confidential e-mail address to which the investigators alone had access: *AMFI@bezemerschubad.nl*. The Dean of FDMCI gave Bezemer & Schubad complete freedom to have the total number of interviews determined exclusively by the number of registrations, rather than having them capped at a number that could be considered technically sound for investigative purposes. The deliberate dropping of this restriction resulted in 129 applications for interviews, an unusually large number for this type of investigation. Of these, 20 applicants withdrew, provided a written contribution, or did not respond after receiving an invitation via the planning tool that was used. Of the 109 interviewees, 70 are members of staff, 48 of that number being lecturers. The remaining 21 have minor or no teaching duties or hold coordination, support, management, or staff roles. Eighteen current and 21 former students took part in the investigation.

The method of voluntary submission rather than sampling was preferred because it was expected to yield outcomes that would be more meaningful and more relevant. That is because only those who felt they could contribute to the study and who were prepared to make the effort to sign up and free up one hour to do so, were interviewed. This meant that no one could claim that their personal story, whether for or against AMFI, had not been heard. With this aim in mind, applications that were submitted after the closing date were also handled with leniency.

The disadvantages of the method used of voluntary registration are obvious. Experience shows that bias arises since it is mainly outspoken opinions that are heard. That is because it is precisely those people who have either predominantly negative or really positive experiences who come forward. In the final chapter, the investigators account for the way in which they approached these drawbacks. The key point here is that the AUAS did not ask Bezemer & Schubad to conduct a quantitative study: individual experiences, including those of singular individuals, are more important in this study than the percentages of interviewees who shared positive or negative experiences. The report does contain, however, some statistically oriented remarks, referring, for instance, to recent and validated reports on student satisfaction and drop-out rates.

The investigators received indications from interviewees that staff members who were supposed to feel threatened by the investigation, had actively approached students to influence their potential contributions to the investigation, and that there were employees who had made agreements among themselves to make identical statements that in this case would try to exonerate a certain programme within AMFI. Voluntary registration carries the risk of such actions. Specific indications of the existence of such attempts to influence the investigation have not been found, but it cannot be ruled out they might have had an impact.

Thirty-nine of the interviewees—just over a third—are current or former students. That is remarkable: AMFI has approximately 1,400 current students and thousands of former students. One can only speculate about what motivated so many current and former students not to contribute to the investigation. Those who did participate put forward various theories on this score:
• Satisfaction with the programme, the idea being that it is mainly those who are dissatisfied who come forward with their opinions;
• Disinterest and the nature of AMFI students, who are thought to be primarily concerned with fashion and notoriously difficult to mobilise;
• Fear of discovery and negative consequences, notwithstanding the promise of anonymity;
• The unwillingness or inability to revisit traumas and a resolve to regard their time at AMFI as a closed period;
• Cynicism: the idea that this investigation is not going to help anyway.
Some evidence for the operation of each of these theories has been found.

The large number of staff who signed up is also striking: 70 out of a total of 92 employees with an employment contract, whether permanent or temporary, and 67 self-employed contractors. These

are numbers that, regardless of the content, indicate a high level of involvement. Even with these numbers, it cannot be ruled out that the resulting picture is not representative, but the chance is considerably smaller.

I.iv. Investigative methodology: interviews by invitation

Unlike an investigation further to complaints or reports, a cultural investigation or an investigation of perceptions does not have strict procedural safeguards in the context of possible legal consequences for a defendant or a person to whom the reports relate, such as the right to full access to the investigative file and the right, based on the adversarial principle, to defend oneself against accusations that have been levelled. Nevertheless, the procedure used by Bezemer & Schubad for this type of investigation contains the following stipulation: "*If, in the course of the investigation, it becomes apparent that one or more persons are the focus of the root-cause analysis, an interview with those persons will be conducted before the investigator draws up their final analysis*". This provision meets the requirements of procedural integrity and fairness wherever possible, but it cannot be equated with a formal adversarial process, given that the investigator's sources remain anonymous and that the aim is to ensure that allegations, incidents and the like are not traceable to individuals. At the beginning of each interview, in fact, all interviewees were promised anonymity, confidentiality, and the protection of sources.

The initial analysis of the results of the interviews led the investigators to invite two people for an interview as part of the root-cause analysis. The output of these discussions has been used in the same way as that of all the others in formulating the analysis and conclusions.

I.v. Investigative methodology: interviews and reports

The interviews were semi-structured. They were based on two lists of fifteen questions each, one for current and former students, and one for staff. After a few open-ended questions, such as 'Why did you apply for an interview?' and 'What do you think it is important to bring up about social safety?', there were five clusters of questions based on the pillars of Psychological Safety in the Workplace in the theory of Amy Edmondson, Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School: Attitude to risk and failure, Ability to discuss sensitive issues, Willingness to help, Inclusiveness and diversity, Appreciation, and Being yourself. It is worth noting here that, whereas the term 'social safety' has come into vogue in recent years, the term 'psychological safety' has recently emerged as a better alternative. In the present report, the term 'social safety' is still used for the most part, but in alternation with the new terminology.

This basic structure meant there was enough room for individual touches in each interview. Where appropriate, the basic structure was abandoned. This occurred frequently in cases where respondents' emotions were running high, or where it would have been inappropriate to limit their answers to the first open questions in view of the content involved.

All but two interviews were held via Teams or Zoom because of Coronavirus restrictions. These media did not appear to hinder respondents in any way from sharing personal and confidential information or showing their emotions. On the contrary, the investigators often got the impression that the intimacy of the respondents' home settings made for considerable openness and depth.

All respondents were promised confidentiality and the protection of sources. Statements by those with unique functions or about unique situations have been abstracted in this report to the point where individuals cannot be identified.

A working report of each interview was produced solely for the internal use of the investigators in drafting this report. An audio recording was made of each interview with the consent of each interviewee, exclusively for internal use only by the investigations secretary in drafting the interview reports. These recordings were subsequently deleted.

I.vi.   Investigative methodology: written statements

In addition to the interviews, 41 people e-mailed written statements to the investigators: Bezemer & Schubad had opened a special e-mail address for this purpose. 19 Individuals sent statements in addition to their own interviews, sometimes in stages with new information each time. 22 Individuals made statements in writing only. The investigators also drew on these written statements for the analysis and conclusions. Statements came from four current and seventeen former students, sixteen employees, and four parents of current or former students. Statement in this last category, which were not foreseen in the original investigative assignment, are dealt with in Chapter II, together with those by students and former students.

The statements range in length from many pages ("*the longest e-mail I have ever written*") to short statements ("*Some creative lecturers believe they belong to a higher species of human being than other lecturers*") and from heartfelt exclamations ("*Good luck opening the cesspool!*") to nuanced reflections and analyses. Many statements are emotionally charged and intense. This intensity can also be felt in some extensive, detailed statements that had clearly been written with a lot of care and attention by students who in some cases had graduated more than ten years before.

Even after registration for an interview was no longer possible, written statements continued to come in. At a certain point, after the forty-first statement had been received, the writing of this report had progressed so far that new statements could not be included in the investigation. The senders were informed of the reasons for this.

I.vii.   Definition and frame of reference

The result of an investigation of perceptions is to present the perceptions of respondents as

accurately as possible. But it does not stop there. After all, if, to take one example, several interviewees complain about serious forms of age discrimination, bullying, and intimidation, this is certainly an important perception that should be reported unfiltered. This perception may, however, be calibrated against the judgements of the Human Rights Board, for instance. If this calibration shows that there is no question of intimidation—that employees have rightly been called to account for their dysfunctional behaviour, for example—then the perception remains relevant, but it is considered in the light of the question of whether there is a culture of complaint in the organisation.

The definitions used in this study for the concept of social safety are taken, in hierarchical order, from the Working Conditions Act and the Working Conditions Decree and from the definitions that the AUAS and AMFI use themselves. The definitions from the Working Conditions Act that are relevant to this study are quoted here in the terminology used by the Health and Safety Catalogue for Higher Professional Education, compiled by Zestor, the Labour Market and Training Fund for Higher Professional Education.

The Working Conditions Act defines undesirable behaviour as 'psychosocial workload', which can be divided into three areas:

1. *Internal inappropriate behaviour: aggression, violence, and intimidation, sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying by staff.*
2. *Aggression, violence, and other undesirable behaviour by third parties such as students, parents, intruders, visitors, and suppliers.*
3. *Work pressure (this section is presented in detail elsewhere)*

We speak of work pressure when there is an insufficient balance between the workload and the employee's capacity to cope. This happens, for example, when the amount of work and the time pressure are too great in view of the employee's capacity to work.

Work pressure can also arise from other psychologically stressful factors, such as poor working relationships, disruptive events at work, a lack of clarity around tasks and job descriptions, and job insecurity. High work pressure can lead to work-related stress, which in turn poses a risk to health and can lead to a reduction in performance and employability as well as to absenteeism.

Students do not have employment contracts with their educational institutions and therefore fall outside the overall scope of the Working Conditions Act. The Zestor Health and Safety Catalogue is therefore not applicable to students. The Working Conditions Act itself is applicable if students perform work that is comparable to professional practice (Article 2.b. of the Working Conditions Act). Since the definitions in the Health and Safety Catalogue are taken directly from the Working Conditions Act, applying them by analogy is readily defensible in these cases, especially since it can be taken for granted that an institution for higher education will not want to apply lower standards of social safety for its students than for its employees.

In the context of the work pressure they experienced, students and former students in particular also make implicit and explicit references to the Working Hours Act, referring not only to the work pressure they have experienced as a social-safety factor, but also to the actual number of hours worked that would exceed as an ongoing matter the legal maximum of 60 hours per week, and thus also endangering their health and physical safety. The Working Hours Act applies exclusively to employees and is therefore not part of the assessment framework.

The AUAS itself defines social safety in the Preamble to the Rules on Undesirable Behaviour:

The AUAS is a widely accessible school where a wide variety of students and employees work together, study, and do research. Social safety, and a pleasant and healthy learning and working climate in which everyone feels welcome, are important conditions for this. The AUAS attaches great importance to a working environment in which employees and students can work and study in a safe and healthy way and with mutual respect. The AUAS wants to be a place where undesirable behaviour such as discrimination, intimidation including sexual intimidation, bullying, and aggression, is not accepted in any way. Undesirable behaviour must be open to discussion, and both staff and students must be accountable for such behaviour. Even if a staff member or student does not directly experience undesirable behaviour but witnesses it, they can take responsibility by raising the issue.

AMFI is working on a Code of Conduct, which was presented to the investigators as a work in progress that should be read more as a statement of ambition than as a description of the status quo. The most relevant passages from it are as follows:

1. *AMFI is a community that thrives on a diverse and inclusive body of students and lecturers. Our differences are what brings us together and what adds value to our community.*
2. *Students and employees of AMFI treat each other with respect. We do not do or say anything that someone else might consider a violation of their dignity and safety.*
3. *There is zero tolerance for any form of misconduct, e.g., harassment, bullying, racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, genderphobia, discrimination and inappropriate sexual behaviour. That includes but is not limited to expression through words, images, actions or behaviour.*

The 2018 AMFI Manifesto, which is prominently displayed on a wall just inside the main entrance of the AMFI building, is certainly also a relevant part of the assessment framework.

Why
We believe that fashion is a force for good
Who

> *We cultivate an environment of mutual respect and shared knowledge*
> **Through creativity**
> *We meet in an interdisciplinary space with curiosity, compassion and creativity*
> **How**
> *We learn by doing, embracing failure and achievement*
> **What**
> **We are a fashion community of change makers**

When respondents asked for a definition of the term social safety at the beginning of their interview, the answer always made reference to the above points.

In the final chapter, the perceptions of the respondents are considered from the perspective of these points. These perceptions will, where possible and relevant, also be considered from the standpoint of hard metrics that have been validated, even though they are incommensurable with them. For example, it can be interesting to compare the perception of various respondents that more than half of the students drop out on their way to graduation with the validated results of performance measures.

I.viii. Structure of the report

One hundred and nine interviews and 41 written statements make for a rich harvest. In order to structure this output without sacrificing its integral character, this report uses the focus areas of the well-known INK management model (see: www.ink.nl). The idea is emphatically not to screen the organisation for quality, but only to ensure the integral character of the organization at some level as the relevant aspects of the social-safety theme are being discussed.
"Relevant" in this context means that the aspects must be able to relate to the previously cited definitions of social safety from the Working Conditions Act, from Zestor, from the AUAS's and AMFI's own ambitions, and to the pillars of Amy Edmondson's theory.

The five organisational focus areas are clustered into three main groups. Under each main group, the most prominent themes are named. This procedure is applied twice: first in Chapter II, for the findings from the interviews with, and statements by, current and former students, and then in Chapter III, for the findings from the interviews and statements by the staff. In this context, "findings" means the results of the interviews and written statements, which are presented in the most neutral way possible.

Chapter IV contains the summary analyses and conclusions based on a comparison of the findings with the frame of reference. Some remarks are then made about the possibly objective character of the subjective perceptions and about the representative nature of the investigation.

The three main thematic groupings are as follows:

A. Leadership, policy, and strategy
- Leadership
- Clarity, or a lack thereof, around tasks and job descriptions and job security or insecurity
- Responses to disruptive incidents

B. Personnel and Resource Management
- Work pressure among staff
- Guidance, training, and coaching
- Recruitment and promotions policy, both in general and as regards former students of AMFI
- Diversity and inclusiveness
- Division of labour and allocation of tasks
- Contracts

C. Management of Processes
Chapter II (former students)
(including all educational processes, from admission to graduation, from pedagogy and didactics to how people are treated, from work pressure to educational costs)
- Work pressure among students
- Educational costs
- Make-up of the student population in relation to inclusiveness and diversity
- Educational aspects, pedagogy and didactics, and how students are treated as a general matter
- Training for the tough world of fashion, and reality school
- Breaking down to build up
- Assessments: Work or person
- Intimidation
- Substantive, pedagogical, and didactic competencies of lecturers
- Graduation rates, dropouts, and academic performance
- Interactions among students
- Differences among the three programmes
- Support structures, the culture around reporting, and procedures for reporting

Chapter III (staff)
- Views of education and educational innovation: Two camps
- Views of the fashion industry: Two camps
- Reflections on the criticism by current and former students
- Culture of interaction among employees
- Organisation
- Differences among the three programmes

- Support structures, the culture around reporting, and procedures for reporting

Component B (Personnel and Resource Management) is discussed only in Chapter III (Perceptions on the part of staff). Part C (Educational and Other Processes) comes in for ample attention in Chapter II from the perspective of current and former students, but it is also discussed in Chapter III. The topic of work pressure is discussed in the chapter on students in the context of educational processes and in the chapter on staff in the context of personnel management.

Of the focus areas from the Results section of the INK model, only the components "staff and appreciation by staff", and "current and former students" ("customers" according to the model) are used. These are reflected in the results of the interviews and the written statements.

In a study of perceptions, it is not only the planned structure of a report of that can shape the reasoning behind its final structure. The output of the interviews, which could not have been anticipated, also plays a role here. Therefore, a fourth category has been added to the division into three main groupings. It covers topics that fit either not at all or not that well into the first three categories, but that turned out to be important for the interviewees. Hence the name: D. Other important topics.

D.   Other important topics.
- Perspectives on this investigation
- AMFI's dealings with Martijn N.
- Comments on particular individuals
- Post-AMFI effects
- Past, present, future
- Recommendations to management

Social safety, or a lack thereof, has many facets. A system or a structure, a culture, and an individual can all be overlapping and/or mutually reinforcing factors, for example as regards behaviour that is perceived as intimidating. There are thus overlaps between the categories set out above, so that the overall categorisation is not always so cut and dried. However, that is not material to the outcome of this investigation.

I.ix.   Publicity and comments on particular individuals

Bezemer & Schubad conducts investigations and writes confidential reports on them. These reports are intended exclusively for the party that commissioned the investigation and the individuals it appoints. In this case, the commissioning party, the Dean of FDMCI, decided for reasons of his own, even before formally commissioning the investigation, to publish the results, i.e. this report, in full. The only consequence for this report is described below.

Cultures in organisations are made and borne along by individuals. Manifestations of the aspects of a culture are referred to as behaviours of the bearers of a culture. When asked about examples of social safety or a lack thereof, staff members and current and former students mentioned the names of individuals. Some of these names were mentioned more often than others. In this public report, no names are mentioned: neither those of the sources of information nor those of the individuals about whom something was said. The only exceptions to this are Martijn N. and the current director, Mr. Dirk Reynders. Although his name is not mentioned again beyond this one time here, he has a unique role and he is therefore recognisable even if he is not named.

A report about the working and study culture in any organisation that fulfils the assignment—among other things by identifying factors that hinder social safety, by giving a voice to students and lecturers, and by making recommendations for follow-up—cannot be written solely at an institutional level. References to the behaviour of individuals are inevitable, especially if one person is frequently perceived by the interviewees as hindering social safety.

Unfortunately, not mentioning the names of people who are mentioned more often than others as hindering social safety, does injustice to the other staff members who are seen by current and former students and colleagues as fostering social safety, but who are now in danger of being unjustly lumped together in generalising statements such as "*The feedback to students from some lecturers was felt to be unnecessarily coarse and hurtful.*"

I.x.   Miscellaneous

In the course of our investigation, we spoke with current and former students and to staff members who gave such clear reflections that they could have written their own analyses. It must be a cause for concern for AMFI that it is precisely these people who said they did not feel heard and that they were the ones who insisted on anonymity and untraceability. Nevertheless, their insights are gratefully used in parts of this report, sometimes with quotations, but always without acknowledgement of the source.

Fifteen of the 48 lecturers interviewed (both salaried and self-employed) (31%), said they themselves had graduated from AMFI, some very recently, others more than a decade ago. This ratio is slightly higher than for the whole of AMFI: 28% of the contractors and 24% of the regular staff members are former students. Unlike the results of the interviews with other former students, the results of the interviews with this special category of former students have, with a few exceptions, been incorporated into the chapter on the perceptions of lecturers. The substantive aspects of these numbers in relation to social safety are discussed elsewhere in this report.

The investigators took note of the reports on www.timetotellAMFI.com. A first scan shows that these messages largely correspond to the results of the interviews. The investigators also took note of approximately 50 posts on social media expressing support for the current director and for a senior

lecturer who is also a member of the management team. These posts were made after it had become known in the media that the student union ASVA was demanding the resignation of these two individuals. At that time, registration for participation in the study had already closed. Possible motives for the senders of these positive messages not to apply for an interview at an earlier stage have been mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Italicised passages in Chapters II and III are verbatim quotations, citations that have been paraphrased to avoid traceability to the source, or paraphrases of several quotations that have the same overall thrust. Almost all interviewees are quoted in this way. In some cases more than one quote has been included from the same individual, however, without creating an imbalance in the overall picture.

The investigators were not hindered or directed by AMFI of AUAS in carrying out the assignment. They were able to do their work in complete freedom. They were struck by the openness of many interviewees in sharing their passions, emotions and memories, painful as well as warm and beautiful.

This point is not constantly repeated, but it is important to realise that, wherever this report mentions *current and former students, lecturers, and staff*, it is only referring to the individuals within those groups who have contributed to this investigation.

II.   Perceptions of Current and Former Students

Introduction:

➤   39 current and former students were interviewed.
-      27 of them expressed a negative or very negative opinion about social safety at AMFI;
-      10 of them painted a nuanced picture of social safety at AMFI;
-      2 of them portrayed social safety at AMFI in positive terms.

➤   Twenty-one current and former students submitted a written statement.
-      19 of these expressed a negative or very negative opinion about social safety at AMFI;
-      One of them painted a nuanced picture of social safety at AMFI;
-      One of them of them portrayed social safety at AMFI in positive terms.

➤   Four parents of current and former students submitted a written statement.
-      All of them expressed a negative or very negative opinion about social safety at AMFI;

➤   Of the 39 current or former students interviewed:
-      Four said they had suffered burnout as a result of their studies at AMFI;
-      Nine said they were or had been getting professional treatment from a psychologist or other professional therapist to cope with the psychological damage suffered during their studies at AMFI. PTSD was mentioned on several occasions;
-      Fifteen (not including the 9 getting professional treatment) said they had suffered or were suffering from serious damage to their self-confidence, fear of failure, depression, suicidal thoughts, severe stress, or social anxiety and the like, as a result of their studies at AMFI;
-      The other 11 did not specifically report serious psychological distress or harm.

➤   Of the 21 current or former students who submitted a written statement (note that three of these were also interviewed):
-      Two said they had suffered burnout as a result of their studies at AMFI;
-      Five said they were or had been getting professional treatment from a psychologist or other professional therapist to cope with the psychological damage suffered during their studies at AMFI. PTSD was mentioned on several occasions:
-      Eleven (not including the five getting professional treatment) said they had suffered or were suffering from serious damage to their self-confidence, fear of failure, depression, self-mutilation, eating disorders, severe stress, and panic and bouts of sweating during presentations, job applications and the like, as a result of their studies at AMFI. One of them said he/she was scarred for life as a result of trauma suffered at AMFI;
-      The other three did not specifically report serious psychological distress or harm.

It will be clear that these perspectives strongly colour the remainder of this chapter and give it a

predominantly critical-negative feel. There are indications that the images portrayed by the current generation of students are less negative than those of former students, and that the beginning of a turnaround is noticeable. In addition, there is the question of the extent to which these perspectives are representative of all current and former students and their parents, a question to which quantitative analyses might possibly provide an answer. However, whatever the answer and whatever the nuances, these cannot detract from the seriousness and scope of the experiences presented below.

A. Leadership, Policy, and Strategy

- **Leadership**

Current and former students said they were angry—some also being bemused—at how the leadership prioritises the outside world over the world inside AMFI and prioritises image and branding over social safety and the improvement of education. *Exclusivity to the outside, a lack of social safety on the inside*. In this connection, some interviewees spoke with cynicism of the AMFI Manifesto: *Fashion is a Force for Good. Not if you are a student at AMFI. We Embrace Failure. This does not apply to lecturer X and lecturer Y, who will burn you down and humiliate you whenever they think you're failing. We cultivate an environment of mutual respect. Respect? AMFI cultivates a dog-eat-dog culture and a lack of social safety—that's what they're really saying!*

Current and former students generally see the presence and quality of leadership in vague terms. They do not see a clear educational and organisational direction. However, they do see, and are bothered by, the great differences in how students are treated and by the great differences in the pedagogical quality of their lecturers and of the three departments. Some wonder why management does not intervene with lecturers who are underperforming or whose ways of treating students are way out of line, and how it is possible that the three programmes within one school differ so much in terms of their views on education, in the way they treat students in social safety offered to its students. Management is perceived as the safest, and Fashion & Design as the least safe. Branding is somewhere in between, but on the wrong side of the line.

Many current and former students experience AMFI, in terms of leadership, coordination, and direction, as disorganised—and therefore as unpredictable and unsafe—when it comes to timetables, planning, curriculum structure, student evaluations and assessments and the like. Some said they believe that being disorganised is an intrinsic characteristic of artistic training. Others said they thought this was nonsense. A few said they were unsettled by what they saw as ad hoc decisions, not supported by a vision or a policy. It often seemed to them as though the management team thought it had to take immediate, uncoordinated action, without any internal coordination.

Students also said they felt that the speed with which AMFI set up working groups and task forces meant that it was taking decisions on an ad hoc basis. There were doubts about the sincerity of the intentions behind them and about the effect the advice from these groups might have. Some felt

there was scepticism on the part of older lecturers about doing anything with the output of these working groups. That was demotivating.

Some said they did not feel comfortable with AMFI's overall strategy and that they were left wondering whether they were being trained for the fashion industry of the past rather than that of the future. This feeling of uncertainty was reinforced by the isolated position of the first-year curriculum. There had been a radical overhaul of this first-year curriculum, but not of that for the following years, so that there was a break in the structure of the study that caused uncertainty and thus a lack of safety. It was felt that the new phenomenon of the hybrid student who does not specialise in one of the three programmes caused white noise more than anything else and increased uncertainty about the programme. Others saw new opportunities in this hybridity.

Statements by current and former students give the impression that they experience AMFI as an organisation in a state of ideological confusion that creates uncertainty and a lack of safety. Current students in particular, but by no means exclusively, see a difference—one calls it a sharp division, while another speaks of a clash—between the old guard of lecturers and the young. The old guard is said to be stuck in the fashion world of 1995. The new guard distances itself from that, sometimes explicitly and even in the presence of students. And it works the other way around, too. The new guard is said to have a different view of education, to know what is going on now, to be more reflective, and to be focused on personal development. It is said that, for the old guard, it would be taboo for a student to have the ambition to work for companies such as H&M or Zara, and that it would be quite unsafe to share that ambition with certain lecturers, who were particularly keen to produce the next Victor & Rolf.

Current and former students said they believed that the management of the AUAS had no idea what is wrong at AMFI in terms of social safety, and that, if they did know, they would surely have intervened. It was suggested that AMFI might possibly have a special status of its own. In any case, some lecturers were said to have made clear that they cherished that status and openly distanced themselves from the AUAS in the presence of students, claiming that AMFI has a higher or better standing than the AUAS.

Current students and a few former students said they recognised a change for the better initiated by the current director. They said he was showing commitment, that he had been in classes to observe, that – unlike others - he answered e-mails, and that he was aware of the urgent need to improve social safety. Disappointment about his performance, or the lack of it, was also heard. In the opinion of some students that is understandable, given that his directorship coincided with the pandemic and the commotion around Black Lives Matter as well as Martijn N., which cannot be blamed on him.

The changes in the make-up of the management team under the leadership of the current Managing Director were remarked on both appreciatively and critically. As these comments could readily be

traced to individual current or former members of the management team, they are not discussed in detail in this document.

- **Clarity, or a lack thereof, around tasks, and job security or insecurity**

Almost all current and former students complained about the unpredictable behaviour of lecturers during the assessments, with the exception of the lecturers in the Management programme. Only a few spoke of clear criteria and balanced judgments. Others refer to criteria that were themselves clear, but that were nevertheless overruled by a lecturer based solely on their personal judgment. Many said they did not know where they stood. The vast majority, including those who have graduated, said they were aware of the intrinsically subjective nature of evaluations of creative output, but that this could not excuse what they saw as dangerous arbitrariness and unpredictability, sometimes exacerbated by what they saw as the incompetence of a lecturer who could not even explain the central concept of a programme component.

This perceived lack of safety was only compounded when students got feedback on their work that they saw as meaningless and that only made them feel more uncertain: *Do your thing, I'm not getting your whole concept, This isn't fashion, This is just ugly, You're not AMFI material, This is too flat, Your work is sexless, Are you a bit of a lesbian maybe?* Many examples were given of feedback that was perceived as humiliating, unnecessarily negative, and abusive.

And this uncertainty and these feelings of humiliation only grew when some lecturers in the Fashion & Design department encouraged fellow students to contribute to the feedback, where the obvious hierarchy—the lecturer was seen as a god and would gladly allow that perception to stand—was such that "sensible" students always agreed with the lecturer and where other lecturers present, who had an evidently lower social status, did not even think of distancing themselves from the negative feedback in terms of content or tone.

As the feedback was always given orally, some former students made audio recordings of it, so that they could at least learn from it. Listening to these again in the context of this investigation reawakened traumas in some people. They felt like targets, and got the impression that feedback was being given, not to make them better but to break them down.

Many stories were about the perceived unpredictability and unfairness of assessments, especially in Fashion & Design. *If it was fabric, then it had to be leather. Or maybe not. If it was blue at first, green would have been better.* According to several current and former students, assessments were about the lecturer's personal opinions, and not about what you needed as a student. Students said they were sure that certain lecturers had favourites alongside people who could never do well. You got criticism, but you had no idea how it might help you or what you should do differently or better. You had no control over it, and that was intimidating. Before an assessment, you knew that you would be affected by something, but not in what way. And that would make you feel insecure. The gist of

assessments at Fashion & Design was said to be something like: *If it's not extreme, sexual or fashionable enough, it's not good. A dark twist to the designs would invariably ensure a high rating.* This was experienced as oppressive. Students said that the lack of arguments and the subsequent failure to clarify how the design could be improved caused them not only uncertainty but also a disproportionate amount of work. They never knew when their work would be good enough.

Some lecturers were said not to be able to put their own egos aside when giving assessments, and to always base their views on their personal taste and supposed superiority, leaving no room for growth, only for a sense of insecurity. Several current and former students said that they had started to conform to the personal tastes of the lecturer and the prevailing norm at the academy, and that they had stopped focusing on their own development. Thanks to these adjustments, they said, the diploma did come within reach.

There was a lot of discussion and constant incomprehension among the students as to why some would get good marks and others would not. And they failed to understand why it was that only some students, but not others, were granted an exemption from a programme component or had a deadline put off. On this score, student saw an arbitrariness that could only make them feel uncertain, and had the sense that they were playing a game of fawning and favouritism. One student's story would be believed without any checks, while another's would not. Because students were also competing with each other, this perceived inequality led not only to incomprehension but also to jealousy and an unpleasant study climate.

Current and former students alike complained about the uncertainty and that some lecturers would cause by applying double standards—one for themselves and one for the students—and by failing to set any examples: students would get a failing mark if they were five minutes late in handing in an assignment, while some lecturers would take all the time they needed and, after many complaints, would still not have responded to an e-mail or a document after two months. It was remarked that, if it suited lecturers, students had to stick to the rules, but had to ignore them if that's what the lecturers felt like. It seemed to current and former students that each lecturer had their own take on the rules.

- **Responses to disruptive incidents**
Current and former students saw AMFI's responses to the commotion around Black Lives Matter, and to the publicity surrounding Martijn N., as hypocritical denials of the reality of a lack of social safety at AMFI—as reactions that only served to increase that sense of insecurity. The way in which AMFI distanced itself from Martijn N., while at first he had been highly valued, was described as downright mendacious. In addition, from the perspective of their PR and branding expertise, students characterised the responses as highly unprofessional. And that in turn created doubts about the quality of the education they were getting.

B.   *Not covered in this chapter*

C.   Processes

- **Work pressure**

With two exceptions, current and former students complained about the *bizarrely/absurdly* high work pressure. They said that working through the night was the norm, especially at Fashion & Design. Lecturers knew that, they said, and some lecturers would also regard it as the norm. Students declared that their lives revolved entirely around AMFI, noting that there is nothing wrong with working hard and that every student would have to work through the night sometimes, but not like at AMFI, where study took over your life and where some students missed important events in their circle of family and friends (*as if you still had time for friends*) because they felt they had to prioritise their studies.

A student who asked during the introduction whether AMFI also had a student union, was said to have been looked at pityingly by the lecturer and to have got a scornful response along the lines of: *So you haven't cottoned on yet, young lady—huh.* Students described the introduction as if they were entering a monastery or some secret sect: *You won't see your parents again until Christmas, break up your relationship because you don't have time for that anyway, quit your side job because there's no room for anything other than AMFI.* It was said that a social life alongside AMFI was just not possible. You were expected to work seven days a week. Students living at home would sometimes be able to manage finishing an assignment on time because they could put everything aside for the sake of their studies. Two students stated that they did have enough time for friends, a part-time job and a student club, and that they never felt unsafe for reasons of work pressure or otherwise.

Some lecturers were said to have given some theoretical justification for the study pressure: the stress thus created would give rise to original ideas. And that was found to be interesting. Students said they knew that lecturers saw stress as proof of dedication.

Parents described how they saw their children suffer, at risk of being lost, under the pressure of work and stress, not to mention their neglect of their health.

A few spoke from their own experience or from second-hand experience of the use of energy-stimulating drugs to keep going. It was mentioned that a single lecturer would also regard that as the acceptable norm, adding that alcohol and drugs were also good for creativity. The argument about creativity was also used by current and former students in the Fashion & Design programme in a line of reasoning that they themselves in retrospect see as flawed—: *If you haven't worked through the night, your work can't be good.*

Current and former students said they knew for sure, from their own experience and partly on the basis of a survey they had carried out, that AMFI was flouting all the working conditions and other standards regarding work pressure, as well as the maximum number of hours that can be worked per

day, per week, and so on. It was reported that a survey that students had conducted themselves in 2017 and 2018 had found that 70% of students were working weeks of around 100 hours.

The fact that the often severe and personal criticism on students' labours that had been worked on day and night for weeks on end, was delivered at the very moment when a student was at their most vulnerable because of fatigue, was seen as especially unsafe.

Students who turned to the student counsellor or their tutor with questions and complaints about the workload were told it was just part of life and that everyone had to work hard. This type of reaction led many to seek the causes of their stress and insecurity primarily within themselves, and not just in terms of work pressure. Several statements describe feelings of relief at reading the posts and publications about this investigation and about the suffering at AMFI: *So I wasn't the only one after all! So it wasn't actually my fault!*

On a more practical level, some students noted that there were too few workstations (sewing machines), and that that added to the stress and the pressure.

The recent revision of the first-year curriculum was said to have led to a more acceptable workload. It was a pity, then, students, said, that they would have their work cut out for them in the second year, because there had been no overhaul of the curriculum for later years. The second year was said to entail twice as much work. Some former students who are now lecturers at AMFI (for this aspect, see also the next chapter) said they thought that some good elements had been dropped from the curriculum, but that the undesirable treatment had not changed.

- **Educational costs**

Current and former students in the Fashion & Design programme said they had felt pressured to spend large amounts of money on their graduation projects. Only the most expensive materials would be good enough. The amounts mentioned went from €5,000 all the way up to €10,000. Students with wealthy parents would be at an advantage, especially since students were explicitly told that education at AMFI was so demanding that combining it with a side job was impossible. Inequality, and with it a sense of unfairness and insecurity, also arose because some students but not others could afford to use professional models, studios, and designers for their graduation, and this with the knowledge, approval, and appreciation of the lecturers.

Some former students talked about large student debts which they incurred because they had to extend or discontinue their education because of burnout that had in turn been caused by AMFI or because they had received insufficient support. International students to whom the same thing happened spoke of feeling guilty towards their parents who financed this expensive education in this expensive city in this expensive country to make their child's dream come true.

Personal circumstances such as the death of a parent, an operation, or burnout came up in various statements about rising study costs. AMFI was said not to be able or willing to deal with these circumstances, not even after mediation by the student counsellor and not even if a single adjustment such as postponing a deadline would have helped. The decision was: *Stop and maybe resume your studies later.* This resulted in the additional costs of half a year or a whole year of study.

- **Make-up of the student population in relation to inclusiveness and diversity**

Diversity with regard to gender and LGBTQIA+ is not an issue at AMFI, other than the fact that some current and former students said they had the impression that male heterosexual students were given preferential treatment because AMFI specifically wanted to show that a fashion course is followed not only by gay students.

The difference between the street scene in Amsterdam and that in AMFI was said to be striking: AMFI was described as a white school. It was often added: a white school for rich kids from the western part of the Netherlands. Students from the periphery of the country said they had felt unsafe because of sarcastic remarks lecturers made about their accent and their supposed peasant background.

Students from underprivileged parents and students who did not grow up with design, museum visits, or expensive brand-name clothing stated that they felt disadvantaged and excluded by lecturers.

Students who were not from a European or North American background, said they had felt misunderstood and discriminated against. The international programme at AMFI was described as the regular programme, but in English, and it was noted, too, that some lecturers' command of English was so mediocre or poor that it got in the way of a good and open conversation. There was said to be no consciousness of, or room for, other cultures. Students who enthusiastically incorporated elements of their ethnic background into designs, fabrics, and patterns said they had received discouraging and disrespectful feedback. They acknowledged that it was quite possible that they were bad pieces of work—they were, after all, there to learn—but they asked whether the feedback could not have been given with a bit more understanding. However, white students who made tribal designs would be encouraged to do so. Both international and national students told us that their impression was that the vision of AMFI was: *Fashion is what Western people find beautiful and fashionable.*

A few said they had experienced exclusion and humiliation (*What a wallflower*!) because of their somewhat introverted personality and modesty. Extroverted characters with an exuberant style were said to be clearly at an advantage when it came to being appreciated by the lecturers. *At AMFI, you're an exception if you don't stand out.*

- **Educational aspects, pedagogy and didactics, and how students are treated as a general matter**

- Training for the tough fashion world and reality school

Students said there was nothing wrong with the educational concept of the reality school or with preparing current and former students for professional culture. But they said that, as they saw it, things went wrong when this concept was used as an explanation or excuse for what they felt to be a lack of social safety. The lecturers' argument would then be: *the fashion industry is tough—really tough—and we're preparing you for that by being tough on you now. This means that our feedback on your performance must be direct, confrontational, personal, and sometimes unpleasantly harsh. That will only make you stronger.*

Former students who now work in the fashion industry themselves said in no uncertain terms that they found this to be a *bullshit argument*: *Yes, the fashion world is tough, but I have never found it as tough or unsafe as at AMFI in all the years of my international career.*

Current students also said they had little sympathy for the argument around the alleged toughness of real life and the reality-school idea as an excuse for a lack of social safety: *It is forgotten that we are at AMFI to learn. We don't know everything yet, so it's awful when we're treated as if we've been working in the industry for years and can withstand harsh personal criticism. The fact that the fashion world is tough is not a licence for lecturers to give really personal, negative feedback.*

Both current and former students point to the feeling of uncertainty that arises because of the difference between AMFI's public ambition to reform the fashion world, make it more sustainable and more humane, and the continued emphasis on its very "inhuman" character under the concept of the reality school: *What does AMFI stand for now? Where do we stand?*

- Breaking down to build up

Current and former students said they felt that the pedagogical concept of some lecturers, certainly in Fashion & Design, consisted of belittling and breaking down everything that students brought to the table in terms of their own personality, tastes and insights, in order to build something beautiful, something better, on the *tabula rasa* thus created, something that corresponded for the most part to the tastes of the lecturer. The connection between "rasa" and "razor" is not accidental: students felt they had been shorn, razed to the ground.

Some of the current and former students who were interviewed said that this theory had worked for them. Many, though, said that they had never recovered, or recovered fully, from this process: they had been razed to the ground, but then there had been no growth, only permanent scarring.

A former student who became an AMFI lecturer described the theory and practice as follows: *It is assumed that a wound must be opened in order for you do a better job. The practice is/was: the lecturer goes home, and the wound stays open.* Another student referred to the life of Vincent van

Gogh in giving her view of the programme: *Art is suffering. Art is depression. And this also true of an education in art.*

- Assessments: Work or person

Current and former students said they were expected to put a lot of themselves—or rather everything—into their work, especially in collections in Fashion & Design and in presenting themselves as a brand in Branding. They said they recognised it can be difficult to do things differently, and they also liked the idea of putting their heart and soul into their work with gusto.

However, many students said in no uncertain terms that it was when they were judged, not on their work but on their personality, that they suffered intense feelings of a lack of social safety. Various sources gave detailed examples from one lecturer in particular who would ask probing questions and make suggestive remarks about an alleged lack of life experience when it came to clothing designs that did not have enough "lived experience" in them: *Are your parents still together, Do you have enough sex, Is everyone in your family circle still alive?* These questions were already felt in themselves to induce a lack of safety, but they are even more unsafe when you consider that fellow students and other lecturers were present during this kind of feedback. And sometimes be expected to laugh along.

In the Branding programme, similar remarks were heard when it came to the programme component Setting Yourself up as a Brand. Here students were required to engage in public introspection, which was experienced as very unsafe, where nothing could be hidden, where past traumas were brought to the surface, and where the lecturer did not hesitate to ask highly intrusive questions. Students said they had felt compelled to share private personal details, for example about mental health or family problems, in class—and all without the least guidance, help or aftercare. This part of the programme was said to have been set up differently in the new first year, so that it was less unsafe.

- Intimidation

Current and former students said they had felt intimidated by lecturers who had allegedly told them that their influential network in the fashion world could make sure that someone would never get a job—or that they would— and who had said that a student would never be able to graduate without their favouritism. Former students who are now active in the fashion world themselves and who have built up their own networks, cannot imagine in retrospect that they allowed themselves to be frightened by these lecturers' threats.

Some current and former students told of their fear, sometimes felt on a weekly basis, of being mistreated by some lecturers. It was not that they were in awe of their knowledge or authority, but that they were simply afraid of being ridiculed, belittled, or humiliated. The Fashion & Design programme and one lecturer in particular were frequently mentioned in this context.

Fear of intimidation by lecturers, and some in particular, also manifested itself in the great importance that many current and former students we interviewed attached to anonymity. It is only

based on this explicit condition that they were willing to contribute to this investigation. Criticism, they said, would lead to the settling of scores, and the fashion world is small. Others said they did not care anymore, and that they did not mind if their names were known.

- <u>Lecturers' substantive, pedagogical, and didactic competencies</u>

At the very least with amazement, but more often with criticism, current and former students spoke about the large number of ex-AMFI students who are now lecturers, sometimes with hardly any practical experience in the fashion industry, having gone almost straight from being a student to being a lecturer. Although this fact in itself raises questions about the substantive practical knowledge of the fashion industry of these lecturers at a higher vocational education institution, it says nothing about social safety. However, social safety does become an issue if these lecturers, as well as others, lack not only substantive but also pedagogical and didactic competencies and are seen as part of an AMFI clique, where the former students among the lecturers cannot serve as enough of a counterweight, or offer enough pushback to their own former lecturers who are now their colleagues, and are evidently also unable to reflect, based on their own experiences, on the lack of social safety for their students. Lecturers, according to current and former students, did not stand up for you: they were a clique and they protected each other. These kinds of remarks were not made about all the lecturers who have themselves been students.

Current and former students describe some lecturers not as coaches, mentors or trainers, not as people who wanted to make them better, but as harsh, vicious judges who tried to outdo each other in socially unsafe remarks in a Voice of Holland-like *contest.*

The image of a contest came up in many interviews and statements. Current and former students described how they felt forced to compete with each other and sometimes to steal ideas from each other, and how that created a lack of safety. And all this to catch the eye of a lecturer and get their approval. Terms such as *hell* and *dog-eat-dog culture* were used in this context. Other students talked about how they survived AMFI with the help of fellow students, who were described in those cases as peers rather than competitors.

The perceived lack of empathic and didactic qualities on the part of some lecturers was felt to be very unsafe, especially when it came to those aspects of the curriculum that were discussed above, where it was not the work but the personality of the student that was key. Respondents said it was precisely in those cases that there was no room for personal growth or development, but that the goal seemed to be *humiliation and the destruction of self-confidence*.

Some tell of being mocked for their speech impediment or dyslexia.

Several statements focused on perceived unequal treatment. The way the lecturer saw it, talented students could come late and also have to show fewer and incomplete designs. The students who were not valued as talented therefore not only felt treated unequally, but also neglected, because they got much less attention or none at all, even when they asked for it. However, even select

students who were allowed to follow the special honours programme had stories about inappropriate behaviour by lecturers.

Many students recounted how, as a 17-year-old straight out of high school, they were totally unprepared for the tough world of AMFI, and how this was not understood by lecturers in any way. Older, more mature students, who had, for example, first completed another course, said that they sometimes had compassion for these "children" and would try to help them. These more mature students also recounted how lecturers were shocked when they were rebuked or told that their behaviour was transgressive.

Students crying in the corridors or hiding in the toilets were said to be a familiar sight.

- <u>Graduation rates, dropouts, and academic performance</u>
Current and former students described feeling unsafe because lecturers would constantly emphasise that AMFI was actually a knockout race. During the introduction, with a certain pride in the elitist and selective nature of AMFI, it would be said that only a few would make it to over the finish line. One lecturer is said to have remarked, halfway through the first year: *There are still a lot of you, but the idea is to have more people get knocked out of the running.* Current and former students said they had seen the effects of this knockout race in others or had been victims of it themselves. Very high percentages were cited: *up to 70% would drop out in the first year.* Others pointed out *that it was difficult to determine the interim drop-out rate because many students had to take a gap year due to work pressure, or had to temporarily drop out due to burnout or other psychological complaints, or switch specialisations.*

Current and former students with ambitions in sustainability said they found it regrettable that a study programme such as AMFI, which preaches sustainability, was so careless with human talent and academic performance. They said they saw AMFI not as an education but as part of the waste-disposal sector.

It was not only during the introduction that predictions of failure caused stress. At the start of each semester, teachers would constantly stress how tough it was going to be. This was perceived as a form of scaremongering. How nice it would be, some students said, if there were a more positive culture in the school, if lecturers said, *Good that you're here. Together we're going to make this an interesting semester.*

- <u>Interactions among students</u>
The feeling of a contest described earlier came up in the descriptions of how students would interact with each other. There was no real kindness shown towards each other—their loss, your gain—in what was called an abusive culture. Respondents said that, in the first year, there were more students than there were places, and that showing your work to someone else would mean less of a chance for you. In the later years, this was not the case, but the culture remained competitive and students were pitted against each other.

The group dynamics were described as those of a high school, as if groups had to be made at gymnastics and you wanted to be in a group with these classmates here and not those over there. You had to be in the right group. And there would be a lot of gossiping about, and judging people on, looks. Students said they felt pressure to be thin, and that, before the recent revision of the first-year programme, students had to make a clothing design in which each was given the same amount of fabric. According to respondents, the lecturer said that you had to be thin, otherwise you would not fit into the garment, given the amount of material. One student who was not a size 34 to 36 said she felt intimidated by this. There was often no time for lunch, but the lecturer said it did not matter because the students had to stay thin. Among themselves, students talk a lot about dieting, counting calories, and not eating lunch.

Current and former students said that they did not dare tell each other about their vulnerabilities and/or any psychotherapy they were undergoing. They said you could get picked on for that. Sensitive topics were taboo.

Not all students spoke about their fellow students in terms of competition. More than one said they had had a lot of support from each other, that they had felt a felt mutual solidarity, and that they had *survived* AMFI thanks to the support of their fellow students.

- **Differences among the three programmes**

Students spoke about the large differences, in terms of social safety, among the three programmes (some spoke of departments, dimensions or streams) at AMFI: *Design, Branding, and Business and Development* (formerly Management).

Students said Business and Development was the safest. They said the organisation was up to par, the management were approachable and professional, the lecturers were predictable, and the assessment criteria were clear. Current and former students who switched from one of the other two programmes to Business and Development because they felt unsafe, described the move as a change from hell to heaven.

Design is described as the most unsafe programme. The reasons given for this were the pressure of work, the unpleasant personalities and the unpleasant ways different individuals had of treating students, the ways it would not be students' work but their personalities that would be assessed, the unpredictability and apparent arbitrariness of some lecturers, and the poor organisation of the programme.

Students found Branding unsafe, though not as unsafe as Design. The requirement to open yourself up during self-branding exercises was described as especially unsafe. Here, too, the assessments were perceived as unnecessarily subjective and arbitrary, though less so than in the case of Design. There were no lecturers in Branding who stood out as creating a lack of social safety in the same negative way as in Design. Students said that things were going in the right direction there, and that some of the Branding lecturers were really top-notch.

- **Support structures, the culture around reporting, and procedures for reporting**

Only a few students said they were aware of the existence of confidential counsellors, and those that did noted doubts about the neutrality and independence of these individuals. One remarked that if you do not feel safe within the institute, you do not feel safe with a confidential counsellor of that same institute either.

Students were aware of the availability and the role of the dean of students. Reflections on the functioning of the dean of students were quite varied. While some said that the dean had been a real help and support at a low point in their studies, others spoke of an official who downplayed and normalised the excessive workload (*that's just the way it is, everyone suffers from it all the time, if you can't cope with these hours and the workload then you're not suitable for the course*) or someone who just listened but did nothing else or said that they could not do anything because of a lack of options for exercising control or guidance.

The support of mentors was often spoken of in appreciative terms: *my mentor was a real treasure*. But then again, there was an additional remark that, in the end, the mentor could only listen and was powerless to help the student.

D.   Other important themes

- **View of this investigation**

No one doubts the usefulness or necessity of an investigation into social safety at AMFI. Former students regret that it is taking place only now. Positive expectations about the role of the investigation as a catalyst for much-needed change are interspersed with cynical statements such as 'nothing will actually change'.

(Former) students say they want to contribute to the investigation to spare others from what happened to them or as part of their quest to heal their wounds. Some have signed up to say that not everything about AMFI is bad or that, while the negative stories on social media are likely true, they do not reflect the whole truth.

- **AMFI's dealings with Martijn N.**

Disbelief is expressed when the investigators explain that the investigation concerns social safety in a broad sense and is not specifically aimed at AMFI's dealings with Martijn N. Former students insist on stating that they have been personally bullied and harassed by Martijn N. or have witnessed his transgressive behaviour, while AMFI teachers knew all about it but did not intervene. Former students say they are annoyed by the hypocrisy of AMFI in lauding Martijn N. when he became successful and using him as a figurehead and billboard and continuing to send students to him for their internships when AMFI knew or should have known that the environment was toxic and unsafe - physically, psychologically and socially. *It's sickening that Martijn N. was portrayed as a role model.* Former students accuse AMFI of even more hypocrisy, some even say lies, in the initial reaction to

the publicity surrounding Martijn N. - *as if they hadn't known what was wrong for some time!* One teacher in particular is mentioned as someone who strived to associate himself closely with Martijn N. when he was successful, but who quite ostentatiously distanced himself when the negative publicity emerged.

One student says he felt extremely unsafe. Martijn N. initially seemed to be romantically interested in him. This interest degenerated into a rape. The student did not report this incident to AMFI because, according to him, he didn't know how the school would react. He didn't expect the school to listen to his story. Martijn N. was important to AMFI; there were close ties and he did not know which side the school would choose and whether his report would be dealt with in an unbiased manner. He later informed the current director of his experiences with Martijn N. and received a letter of apology.

- **Comments about specific people**

It would do serious injustice to the experiences of many (former) students if mention is not made here of one teacher in particular who is named as a source of social insecurity. Numerous examples are cited of behaviour and comments perceived as unethical, narcissistic, irresponsible, manipulative and seriously transgressive. His tendency – although unqualified and unauthorised to do so – to medically diagnose the psyche of a student in front of the class has been mentioned on a number of occasions as the epitome of social insecurity. (Former) students who contributed to this investigation tell of the psychological damage they suffered that was caused by this teacher's arbitrariness, egomania and lust for power.

It would also do a serious injustice to the experiences of many (former) students if mention is not made here that various other teachers are spoken of with great regard, also in relation to social safety.

- **Post-AMFI effects**

The introduction to this chapter makes clear how many of the (former) students who contributed to this investigation state that they have suffered mentally as a result of their studies at AMFI. Various other effects have not yet become apparent from these overviews. (Former) students mention:
- *After graduating, I never wanted to put one foot in the AMFI building again.*
- *If I pass the building again, I could set it on fire.*
- *I avoid the Mauritskade; the anxiety returns and I get physically distressed when I get near it.*
- *The fashion world was my dream. Because of AMFI, I do not want anything to do with it ever again.*
- *It's been many years since I left AMFI, but I still suffer from psychological and physical complaints.*
- *I emigrated after AMFI because I really had to distance myself from Amsterdam.*

- **Past, present, future**

Little to nothing is reported about social insecurity at AMFI during the pandemic, i.e., the present. Many activities took place online.

The vast majority of the negative experiences described above date from the past, both from the most recent pre-COVID period and from much earlier. Former students who graduated ten or more years ago talk about – in their words – traumas that they suffered during their time at AMFI and which they still have to deal with in their day-to-day functioning. The current students who talk about their traumas, burnout and depression are, with a few exceptions, in their third and fourth years.

A few describe the future in terms of a tentative transition to a more humane AMFI, of which the first signs are already visible, for example in the reduced workload in the first year, the appointment of new coordinators and in curriculum changes that make students less vulnerable. These students also distance themselves from the recent publications in the NRC and het Parool newspapers and consider it sensation-driven old news. Others see a rudderless and directionless organisation with a mainly internally-oriented MT, an organisation in which an old and a young guard of teachers compete for primacy and the students are in a continuous state of uncertainty and insecurity.

- **Advice for management**

In all conversations, the (former) student was asked if he/she had any advice for AMFI management. Below is the unsorted total, which can also be read as a summary of students' perceptions as described in this chapter.
(Former) students did not hesitate to give their sometimes unvarnished opinions:

1. Fire a lot of the teachers, get rid of the bad apples and bring new meaning to the courses.
2. Temporarily suspend teachers who are part of the system so that they take some time to reflect on themselves.
3. Replace many teachers from the old guard, but not with former students who want to become teachers and who apparently have not learned from their own experiences or who are going along with the prevailing culture.
4. Radically review the programme in terms of deadlines and workload.
5. AMFI is no longer connected to reality and the world outside of AMFI. Bring in good, positive role models from the outside.
6. Fire the bullying teachers but keep the good ones, because there are definitely some good ones.
7. Make it clear that there is a counsellor available and create a culture where it's not seen as a sign of weakness to go to them.
8. Appoint a psychologist.
9. Do not hire former students as teachers and instead bring in people with professional teacher training. And offer a solid psychology and pedagogy course to teachers who need it.

10. Have all teachers take a basic communication course and a compulsory empathy course. Have them learn how to give positive, constructive feedback instead of just negative criticism. Have them learn how to make students feel safe when receiving feedback. Provide information on standards and values and on the prevention and discussion of transgressive behaviour.

11. Make it clear on what and how students are assessed and ensure that this is not deviated from. It needs to be clear why someone gets a 9 or a 3 and what someone who gets a 3 has to do to raise it a 9.

12. Provide a stronger student organisation.

13. Follow the codes of the AUAS.

14. Tackle the problem of the bad internships, especially the unsafe places.

15. Make sure that the teachers also communicate more amongst themselves.

16. Coach the coaches.

17. More practical support for international students as regards housing, insurance, etc.

18. More and better workstations and sewing machines.

19. Provide financial compensation to the (former) students who have had to incur additional costs through no fault of their own.

20. Have a common area for all students.

21. Listen to students and do something with their complaints, especially if there is a pattern in them.

22. Make sincere and full apologies for what hasn't gone right in the past.

III.   Perceptions of Staff

Introduction:

➢   70 employees were interviewed.
-     40 of them expressed themselves in (strongly) negative terms about social safety at AMFI;
-     24 of them provided a nuanced picture of social safety at AMFI;
-     6 of them presented a positive picture of social safety at AMFI.

➢   17 employees submitted a written statement.
-     15 of them expressed themselves in (strongly) negative terms about social safety at AMFI;
-     1 of them provided a nuanced picture of social safety at AMFI;
-     1 of them presented a positive picture of social safety at AMFI.

It will be clear that these proportions strongly colour the rest of this chapter and give it a predominantly critical-negative interpretation. According to the HR department, AMFI employs 159 people (employees & freelancers). The views of the 89 people not interviewed as regards social safety and social insecurity are an open question. But even in the hypothetical case that these 89 would all have a positive view, it remains a fact that 44% of their colleagues think otherwise.

A.   Leadership, Policy and Strategy

• **Leadership**
The initial response of many members of staff to questions about the perceived relationship between social insecurity and leadership, is a long list over the last decade of directors, managers, interim directors and interim managers, and periods without departmental heads and directors. The many changes of course and leadership styles caused insecurity in the staff, who would see AMFI's leadership not as a beacon of calm but rather as a source of instability and insecurity.

Even when mentioning the names of departed and sitting managers, the sharp division amongst the staff - also discussed elsewhere in this chapter - becomes apparent on various points. While some believe that it is good that the new director has cleaned house regarding the current composition of the MT in terms of social safety (the old MT is referred to as a *snake pit*), others mention the incomprehensible departure of two beloved figureheads.

This sharp division amongst staff leads to many instances of *some people .... others ..., he said / she said* content in this chapter. Where both sides of the divide meet is in uncertainty and concern about AMFI's future and reputation.

Some say the recent departure of the former MT members makes them feel unsafe. They do not know the reasons for their departures, believe they are entitled to know these, and now get the

impression that you can no longer be sure of your job within AMFI. From one day to the next, someone can go without any explanation or statement.

The current composition of the MT raises questions for some: *Why such a large MT, why from three to five people? What do these people do all day? Why such a large overhead when there are too few teachers given the workload?* There are rumours about unclear or even predetermined appointment procedures. Rumours and, in some cases, conspiracy theories appear more often in statements from staff as manifestations of a culture in which not everyone feels safe.

In addition to the size of the MT, the current selection of members also raises questions relating to social safety. The appointment of one of the MT members is described by many as a particularly galling decision as it is precisely this person who is said to be a major contributor to the culture of social insecurity. However, another staff member refers to this MT member as the best manager he/she has ever had.

In terms of social safety, staff speak about the other new members of the MT in a nuanced, expectant or positive manner, or they're giving them the benefit of the doubt.

The impressions of the current director vary. He is appreciated for his listening attitude; however, some say that this makes them feel uncertain. *He listens but doesn't say anything, and that's why I don't really know what to think of him.* He is attributed with a contemplative character. Some of the staff find this calming, while others say they miss the secure feeling of the captain at the helm calling out clear orders during the storm. The fact that the director has no background in the fashion industry and does not come from within the AMFI network is perceived both as reassuring – *finally someone from outside* – as well as a source of disquiet and uncertainty.

There is understanding for the effects that three major external factors (the commotion around BLM and Martijn N. and the pandemic) have had on the tangible performance of the new director. However, there is little understanding of how he wants to get to know the organisation. Although there is certainly appreciation for his desire to be actively involved in matters, him becoming a mentor to students creates feelings of insecurity. A student must have a relationship of trust with his/her mentor. How can a student tell the director about his problems with a teacher within that relationship of trust? And how can teachers still trust their director in this setting?

The overall impression from the interviews is that what applies to the new MT members - with one exception - also applies to the new director; people are hopeful or give him the benefit of the doubt. But he must now demonstrate his leadership so that people do not feel even more unsafe in all the current turbulence.

It is mentioned that, although the MT claims to be transparent, this transparency is not perceived as such. The MT frequently meets, but staff remain in the insecure and uncertain dark about their

agenda and the outcome of all those meetings. The flow of newsletters, memos, bulletins and emails from the MT is seen more as a source of opacity rather than a contribution to clarity.

In addition to being perceived as not very transparent, decision-making by the MT is also seen as unpredictable, ad hoc or purely reactive and incident-oriented – i.e., *putting out fires*. The big picture is sorely missed. This leads to feelings of uncertainty in one, resignation in the other *(it is what it is)* and also anger: *Why set up a diversity task force **after** the Black Lives Matter commotion!? Action is only taken **after** the backlash!*

The current MT as co-causative agent of perceived social insecurity is related to their alleged lack of management qualities, not to a lack of integrity. *They're not bad people. They're all lovely people. They don't see the big picture, but that's due more to incompetence than unwillingness.* However, these observations do not apply to the member of the MT that has previously been referred to. Stories are told about former MT members that indicate transgressive behaviour and a lack of integrity, but there is also mention of it being a taboo subject to talk about.

The internal dynamics within the MT deserve attention. Not every member always feels safe. One MT member is reported to publicly take distance from MT decisions.

The divisions amongst staff are also strongly reflected in the opinions they have about the organic position of AMFI within the entirety of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS). Some staff believe that the far too large AUAS interferes too much with AMFI, wants to squeeze everything into the AUAS mould, and has no respect for or insight into the unique nature of an arts education; these are often also the staff members who long for the independence of the past. There are also employees who would like the AUAS leadership to be much more emphatically involved within AMFI and for AMFI to be forced to give up its quasi-sacred separate status. Both sides of this spectrum miss a clear choice from the MT.

Employees contrast AMFI's big ambitions to reform the culture and ethos of the fashion industry - to make fashion sustainable, with the reality of everyday practice. Many say they see an organisation that does not sustainably and humanely deal with the talents of the people who work and study there and for whom AMFI is not the intended *Force for Good*. An organisation that not only does not achieve its ambitions, but about which the following is said: *It's never been as bad is it is now.* A statement that mainly refers to the cumulation of stressful experiences caused by BLM and Martijn N. that are perceived as chaotic and unsafe and the uncertainty about the outcome of and the steps following this investigation.

- **Task ambiguity and work insecurity**

A dominant cause of social insecurity in the results of the interviews and the written statements is the perceived uncertainty about mission, vision and strategy: the state of ideological confusion also described in the previous chapter. Many employees say they no longer know what AMFI stands for.

Teachers feel unsafe when giving feedback to students: *What are you allowed to say these days - how clear or to the point can you be? Obviously not as confrontational as previously, before all that criticism of art education erupted, but how much?*

Many staff members are blunt and firm in their articulation of the MT perceived as *indecisive, erratic* and having a *total lack of vision*. One member of staff who claims never to have felt unsafe also points to this defect as a cause of a culture of insecurity. The causal link between the lack of guidance and vision and social insecurity is completely clear to much of the staff. Of the employees interviewed, a number have previously worked for now bankrupt fashion chains and department stores. Independently of each other, they say that the current situation at AMFI reminds them very much of the pre-bankruptcy phase of these companies: a lack of strategy and clear choices, no longer knowing what the brand stands for, a reactive approach to situations, ad hoc decision-making and staff who feel insecure and unsafe. Added to this memory is the following observation: *If AMFI were a company, we would have gone bankrupt a long time ago.*

A teacher who describes himself/herself as a naturally optimistic person uses the metaphor of the sinking ship whose crew does not know where the leak is, so that everyone will go down with the ship and perish.

The revision of the curriculum in the first year is frequently cited as a source of ambiguity and uncertainty. *Why has this revision not been extended to the second year? Why has the entire curriculum not been considered from the professional perspective and why has the first year been treated as an isolated issue? Why was the working group that had to revise the first year so broadly or – according to others – so narrowly facilitated? And what were the responsibilities of the coordinator of this educational reform?* These and other unanswered questions lead to tension and friction amongst staff.

Another oft-cited cause of the unsafe feeling of a rudderless organisation with an unclear strategy is AMFI's so-called window dressing management, which is seen as hypocritical. *In the shop window are beautiful apples, but behind them lies the rotting fruit.* Everything is about appearances, for the image, too many trendy words, a branding as a visionary school that is not lived up to. According to some staff, the MT is more worried about bad press than about the safety of teachers. One teacher mentions in this context the tension between the fine words of the AMFI Manifesto, *that suddenly appeared on the wall*, and reality. *AMFI is only concerned about image; education is not sexy but well-known former students are.*

The tone of voice of the MT's internal communication is also seen as an aspect of perceived social insecurity. This tone of voice gives the impression that AMFI is one big family and that everything is going well. In doing this, the MT does not address the major divisions amongst the employees and everything that is not going well, but instead misjudges and denies, thereby not taking seriously the real problems and concerns of the staff.

Ambiguity and uncertainty also manifest themselves in the position of the coordinators within the organisation. Some of them are themselves uncertain about tasks, job description, authority and responsibilities. That uncertainty also affects the staff they are supposed to coordinate. Are the coordinators teachers with a special task or are they the lowest layer of management that can give formal assignments to other members of staff? The conflict and friction that arise about this cause a feeling of insecurity. Some coordinators also experience insecurity due to the – in their view – arbitrariness with which coordinator positions are removed or assigned and the facilitation that is seen as completely inadequate in hours per week, leading to excessive workload and stress.

- **Reactions to major events**

Staff look with the same critical eye as students at the way AMFI reacted to the commotion around Black Lives Matter and Martijn N. Teachers with a background in branding are bothered by the unprofessional way in which AMFI portrayed itself as a brand in these incidents: *What intern wrote this? We feel that we've been put in danger because of the clumsy rubbish messages that AMFI posted on Instagram.* Pleasure in and pride at work are compromised in a way that touches on feelings of psychological insecurity because a number of staff felt ashamed about the school where they worked. The school didn't turn out to be as safe as they always thought, and, unlike previously, it no longer felt safe to tell external parties with confidence that you worked at AMFI.

All staff who contributed to this investigation say they always had doubts about the integrity of Martijn N. Everyone claims to have distanced themselves from him long before the negative publicity erupted and/or claims to have warned the management of his behaviour.

B.   Personnel Management and Resource Management

- **Workload**

The guide for new AMFI staff is called Survival Guide. And, as one teacher explains, that is the perfect name for it because that is the key to working at AMFI: survival. Not everyone describes their work in those terms, but high workload, stress and overload are key words in many interviews.

In more or less strong terms, all teachers and staff in other positions say that they work considerably more hours than determined in the scope of their employment: the full-timers (many) more hours than the standard annual amount of 1,659 hours in the CAO-HBO (CLA) and the part-timers work (many) more hours than contractually agreed: I get paid for three days, but in practice I work six.

The high workload leads to stress. Employees experience insecurity, fly off the handle, get into arguments and experienced tension, especially towards the end of the school year and when approaching deadlines. Many mention impending or existing burnout in themselves or with colleagues. The *last man standing* phenomenon has been identified, whereby the one colleague who is still standing has to take on the work of all the colleagues who could no longer cope. *Because you don't want to let down the students.*

Coffee and lunch breaks are not scheduled or – it is also said – not used as genuine breaks. With a mixture of pride and horror, some teachers say that at certain peak times of the year they work from 8 am to 8 pm straight through without a break, assessing students. One student sighed: *You wouldn't want to be the last student.*

Questions about the causes of the perceived high workload and why employees do not adhere to the limits of their own CLA or demand compliance with it, result in a range of answers:
- *I am always there for my students. They can always text or email me;*
- *There is too much work for too few people;*
- *We drive ourselves and each other crazy here by always giving in to demands and letting ourselves be rushed;*
- *We are forced by the AUAS to cut back and make the groups bigger;*
- *AMFI is poorly organised. Things are often done twice or are done for nothing because decisions are reversed or assignments were unclear;*
- *We work in a creative profession; we are not very into CLAs. We follow our passion;*
- *This is how it's always been and there is no other way. It is AMFI's culture, for students and for teachers;*
- *I cannot leave my students and my colleagues in the lurch;*
- *I made my objections known to my supervisor. He nodded understandingly, but nothing changed;*
- *I complained to my supervisor and received the following in response: Your generation always whines about the hours; my generation just gets on with the work;*
- *I dare not complain to my supervisor, I have a temporary contract;*
- *My supervisor also suffers from burnout;*
- *You're considered a wimp when you complain about high workload, so I keep my mouth shut;*
- *After each consultation, an informal follow-up meeting of colleagues begins in which we talk amongst ourselves about the just concluded meeting. This can take a while;*
- *Lack of clear and decisive decision-making, whereby a discussion is never concluded and each decision that you thought was made, is just the start of a new discussion.*

One member of staff declares to no longer suffer from the workload and still gets the work done. He/she says that he/she is always available during working hours, but no longer reads emails or texts in the evening and at weekends, let alone answers them.

Several teachers say they are struggling to lead by example: How can we approach students on deadlines if we are unable to meet our own deadlines due to high workloads?

- **Guidance, training and coaching**
The existence of the Survival Guide does not alter the fact that a lot of the staff express perceived uncertainty and insecurity because they were *immediately thrown into the deep* end and put in front of the class without any guidance at the start of their job at AMFI. In particular, several now-

departed managers are said to have been ardent supporters of this method of learning the profession as AMFI teacher. AMFI is reported to have no coaches or buddies for starting teachers.

Both their senior colleagues and the former students who have become teachers themselves, sometimes without relevant practical experience in the fashion industry and/or without pedagogical or didactic qualifications, complain that this category of teachers is supposed to know and understand everything, when that is emphatically not the case. This causes feelings of uncertainty and insecurity.

According to the interviews, study days for teachers would mainly be used to discuss ad-hoc issues and put out fires, not to talk about essential issues such as social safety/insecurity or to train the teachers. *The sad consequences of this are now visible*, it is noted.

Teachers without the required didactic qualification are encouraged by some managers to obtain it, but not by others. Some supervisors who also teach or taught lessons themselves would not have this qualification themselves and would be disparaging about the usefulness and necessity of such training. Teachers with professional teacher training speak with surprise, concern and anger at the lack of pedagogical and didactic competences of some of their colleagues and the *shameful way* of dealing with students that result from this.

There is little room for peer feedback and reflection, not in the time available and not in the culture. Some complain that colleagues mainly tear each other down instead of giving professional and constructive feedback. Another notes: *Colleagues are discussed, but mainly behind their backs.* This results in social insecurity. A personnel assessment system does, so it is reported, not exist or at least is not used.

A few detect a strain of anti-intellectualism within AMFI, while others say they are encouraged to obtain a Master's or PhD or to continue to develop in other ways.

- **Hiring and promotion policies: general and former AMFI students**
In the past, competences would get little consideration in the hiring and promotion policy: *The ego triumphs. The people with the biggest mouths get the best positions at AMFI.*

According to statements in interviews, the high proportion of former AMFI students amongst AMFI teachers touches on the topic of social safety in several respects, examples include:
- The high proportion would contribute to cliques forming and to a strongly internally oriented culture with too little room for fresh ideas from outside;
- The former students would unwittingly and unconsciously contribute to perpetuating the harmful educational practices that they themselves have undergone; they did not know that it could be done differently and think that this is how it should be done;
- The former students often do not dare to call to account their former teachers (now current

colleagues) on socially undesirable behaviour when necessary;
- Former students who, without relevant practical experience, almost immediately switched from the role of student to that of teacher, would put themselves and others in socially unsafe situations in the absence of substantive and educational competences.

An important caveat to the above is that some of these former students have shown in their interviews that they are capable of making razor-sharp analyses of what is wrong at AMFI and how things could be different and better. This category of teachers also notes that a change for the better is noticeable in the general mentality at AMFI.

Explanations for the high proportion of former students come down to the fact that they were already in the AMFI network when a vacancy arose. One statement in particular deserves to be mentioned: a former student says he/she had lost all self-confidence and self-esteem during his/her own studies at AMFI and was therefore afraid of never being able to get a job. *Because I would never be good enough, I had become my own biggest critic because of AMFI. So when I was unexpectedly able to get a job there, I took that opportunity even though I had resolved to never again enter the building.*

- **Diversity and inclusiveness**

Staff describe AMFI as a white school, and a few even add '*with a colonial point of view*'. Many members of staff say to have only recently become aware of this or to perceive the lack of diversity as a problem, that they *never really asked themselves whether you can ask a student from Asia the same thing as a student from Amsterdam.* Some still don't see a problem with this and think setting up a Diversity Task Force is unnecessary or see it as *window dressing*. For others, the Diversity Task Force can certainly contribute to resolving a genuine perceived lack of social safety. This also comes with the warning: *Diversity is not a branding opportunity.* If it is used as such, AMFI will become even more unsafe. Another warning focuses on the uncritical embracing of diversity as a vague ideology in which teachers feel unsafe because they no longer know what is and is not appropriate or politically correct. Staff from non-Western backgrounds speak in a significantly more nuanced way and more critically about diversity and inclusiveness at AMFI than their Western colleagues.

AMFI is unanimously seen and experienced as a socially safe environment for students and staff on all parts of the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. As regards a different position on the diversity spectrum, several teachers state *that AMFI is an elitist school, a super privileged institution for rich kids.* This statement is denied by some.

- **Division of work and tasks**

Much of the perceived social insecurity is causally related to various aspects of the process of division of work and assigning tasks:
- During the revision of the first year, a lot of attention was paid to the personal development of students. Coaching students places high demands on the social and communicative competences of teachers. They must also feel an affinity with this part of the programme. In

practice, however, during the initial revised first year, it turned out that many of these hours had been allocated for technical reasons to teachers whose weekly tasks had not yet been completely filled. These were sometimes teachers who showed no affinity whatsoever with this part of the programme and/or clearly did not have the necessary skills. This resulted in social insecurity, primarily for the students and also for the teachers who had to provide this knowing that they could not do it and for their colleagues who had to stand-by helplessly and watch. In this context, it is also reported that a coaching-oriented refresher course was initially planned for the intended teachers of the Personal Development component, but was later scrapped;
- There is discord and uncertainty about the formal authority of coordinators to assign lessons, classes, tasks and the like to their colleagues.
- In general, there is talk about lack of structure, lack of transparency and cronyism in the allocation of work.

- **Contracts**

Uncertainty and feelings of insecurity around the conclusion and renewal or extension of contracts, both regular employment contracts and contracts with freelancers, were for some just one part of their big story about AMFI, for others it was the only reason they signed up for an interview. Stories are told about unfulfilled commitments, sloppiness and cronyism. Invoices from freelancers would typically be paid too late.

C.   Processes

- **Views on education and educational reform: two camps**

In addition to leadership, the division amongst AMFI staff most clearly manifests in the views on education and educational reform, especially with the teaching staff.

One camp is referred to as *the old guard*. Less friendly terms include *the Fossil Unit*, *the hard core* and even *the Gestapo*. The other camp will be referred to in this report as *the young guard*. No clear names for this camp were heard in the interviews. The existence of the two camps is denied only very sporadically.

The division between the old and young guard runs partly along the strict lines of age and years of service, but the substantive differences (views on fashion and on education) are certainly just as important.

The old guard speaks with sadness and anger about breaking down programme components built with love, feels written off and wonders: *Is there a place for older teachers, where is the appreciation for experience?* Their sense of security and pride in the strong AMFI brand with its successful track record has disappeared. The young guard seems to have insufficient recognition for what has been

built up in the past. Some long for the *esprit de corps* of the past and for the safety and security of the smaller, independent AMFI that had not yet been merged into the AUAS. *And a longing for an MT that acts in line with the DNA of the educational programme.*

Representatives of the young guard say that the old guard mobilized to vote against educational reform. Or banded together to all sign up for an interview as part of this investigation to talk about the positive side of AMFI. It is mentioned that some teachers from the old guard are guilty of abuse of power: they would *instruct their students to post positive messages on their social media.* Other alleged members of this old guard are said to be only concerned with their retirement.

The old guard points to the proven success of the approach in which the student was sometimes bluntly confronted with his/her own failure, with trying to get to the essence of a personality or of a design, sometimes not very gently. Not to humiliate or bully the students, but to allow them to grow and prepare them for the harsh realities of the fashion world. The young guard sees this fundamentally differently. It's out of date to speak *condescendingly to students and to judge based on mistakes instead of encouraging and stimulating them*, and the argument of preparing them for the brutal world of fashion is stupid. *AMFI is not the fashion industry; our job is to educate people and change that brutal world for the better. Just because you've got abused, doesn't mean that you have to abuse us.*

While one sees the revised first year as a success with more attention to personal development, social safety and less workload, the other sees a detrimental loss of professional knowledge and a lack of preparation for the following years of study.

The two camps meet during weekly meetings called weeklies, which were held online during the pandemic. There was no escalated conflict, but no one felt secure enough to name and discuss the tensions.

- **Views of the fashion industry: two camps**

The differing views of the current and future fashion industry generally run along the same lines as those on educational reform.

The young guard believes that the old guard is teaching based on the long-outdated idea of the star designer – wanting to train the new Iris van Herpen – and states that it is just not-done or even taboo to be involved as a student or teacher in cheap mass-produced brands. The old guard denies this.

The young guard speaks passionately about sustainability and are intrinsically motivated by it. One representative of the group states that the title of this report should be: From Ego to Eco. Some representatives of the old guard also talk about this ambition, but less passionately.

- **Reflections on the criticism from (former) students**

The various views described above can also be found in the reflections of staff on the current

criticism from (former) students.

Many of the staff interviewed do not doubt the veracity of students' critical posts on social media. Some say they are remorseful for not intervening when they knew or should have known that students were treated incorrectly or even transgressively by their colleagues. *It's only now that I realize how students have suffered and been frequently exposed to humiliation and trauma.* There are teachers *who are ashamed that they were blinkered, teachers who are ashamed that they sent students to unsafe environments, teachers who no longer trust each other, teachers who are annoyed by AMFI's excuses.* Employees say they do not doubt the veracity of the story that some teachers are intimidating their students by threatening to ruin their future careers. One teacher forbade her own child from going to AMFI because it was a terrible school with unkind and vicious teachers. In their interview, several teachers found it difficult to concentrate on their own experiences of social safety because the social insecurity of their students was more important to them.

Some members of staff have a more nuanced view of the criticism. They categorically do not deny that some students have severely suffered under AMFI, *but not everything is bad at this beautiful school* and many students enjoyed their studies as a steppingstone to a great career. *The complainants exaggerate, but they don't necessarily lie.* All the current negative comments do an injustice to AMFI and that makes them angry. Or: *there is definitely a toxic environment, but not with me because I have really good contact with my students.*

There is also a very small group that explicitly distances itself from the posts on social media. The critical stories are untrue or at least greatly exaggerated, and some of the students who talk about how they were harmed by AMFI had mental health problems before they attended AMFI. One teacher also notes that the current generation of students simply can't take anything anymore and this used to not be the case. *If you come from an environment of pampered coddling, then the feedback can be quite a slap in the face.* Or: *Today's students are more sensitive because they are constantly online with each other. And: If parents would ask me, I would advise them that they can safely send their child to AMFI.*

And finally, there is the warning to the investigators from a teacher who in turn anticipates the above: *Don't believe the employees who deny that things are seriously wrong, who say 'I don't recognize this in my classes'. If that denial continues, nothing will change.*

The recognition or non-recognition of the social insecurity of students exacerbates the division among staff and thus the feelings of social insecurity.

- **Interaction culture amongst staff**

Some employees say that there is a lot of gossip at AMFI. Others say they have no idea about this because they would never gossip themselves. But the most common answer to the question about gossip at AMFI is that employees do not gossip much about each other – but instead about the MT –

and are mainly looking for outlets for their emotions and seeking mutual support in the midst of the current turbulence.

AMFI is an unsafe organisation, but it is safe within my team: as long as it involves a select circle, employees say they are certainly willing to help each other, call each other to account about mistakes and dare to admit mistakes made. But this is certainly not the general culture. One colleague and supervisor inspire more confidence than the other in this respect. Some colleagues have a complete lack of trust and are more likely to experience fear or even intimidation or bullying. Only a few see AMFI as an organisation that learns from its mistakes – *albeit in fits and starts.* The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle is not recognized in practice. *It seems like we do not even reach the P.*

The current atmosphere is characterized by a few in terms of n*egativity in the corridors and an eerie feeling, a mix of people who give off dark vibes*. Others feel unsafe or irritated *by the culture in which everything can be criticized, by the culture of complaining or the current emotion-driven culture in which people are allowed to say anything*. A teacher refers to the social culture of the recent past with the word *hate*. Another speaks of a lack of professional friendliness and courtesy that appears to be the normal AMFI.

The diva culture that some teachers maintain causes resentment among many. *The teacher as the academic version of the outdated idea of a star designer.* Resentment of what is perceived as a ranking system among teachers can also turn into a feeling of insecurity: *There are creative teachers who believe they belong to a higher species than other people. This explicit behaviour towards students and colleagues is inappropriate and creates an unsafe environment.* The argument of some *that that's just how creatives are and they cannot change*, is qualified by others as nonsense and part of a malign culture of tolerating bad behaviour.

Some new members of staff mention not only the lack of guidance but also the feeling of not being welcome, being ignored or even noticing hostility. They feel like outsiders in what they perceive as a closed, highly-political crony culture. The word *snake pit* is mentioned a few times.

The predominantly negative and critical statements about the culture of interaction are nuanced or denied by some: *I feel very safe; there is always something going on somewhere but I really enjoy working at AMFI. The atmosphere is good and confidence has returned.* Some point to their long tenure to indicate that, while there is a lot wrong and that there are big and real problems at the moment, they would never have lasted as long if the balance of their work experience was ultimately not good: *Working at AMFI is addictive.*

- **Organisation**

The strongest statement about the quality of the internal organisation is: *I've never seen such a poorly organised school; it takes more and more energy to survive in this chaotic environment.* Other statements are more nuanced, but at their core are the messy structure of some programme components, last minute and ad-hoc decision-making, late availability of schedules and the like.

Chaos, messiness and unpredictability are seen as sources of uncertainty and insecurity.

It is widely stated that the MT should take more responsibility for organisation, planning, scheduling and the like.

- **Differences between the three departments**

The descriptions by the staff of the differences between the three departments are very similar to those of the students.

- Business and Development is perceived as the safest environment;
- Branding was perceived by many as unsafe, but expectations about the new manager are positive.
- Design is perceived by teachers who work there themselves and by teachers from the other departments as the biggest problem: *there is a hard core of teachers who cannot or do not want to look beyond their own programme and do not understand the students and just deny the problems*. There is also a reign of *arrogance*: *we are the best, the centre of the world, and the students must comply.* Design teachers would *compete in who could be the meanest* in assessments. Teachers who likely belong to that hard core – although they will never call it that themselves– feel just as unsafe. They describe the feeling of being easy targets, of having successfully trained many years of students with an educational method that has proven itself in practice and which is now suddenly unsafe.

- **Support structures, reporting culture and reporting structure**

With a few exceptions, the counsellor is now well-liked. *I was initially unfamiliar with the existence of the counsellor, but I'm glad to have been there. I didn't know counsellors existed, but now that I do I plan to use the service.*

Many of the staff members interviewed say they have been to the counsellor, go there regularly or to have sent colleagues there. Satisfaction with the support received is expressed more often than the disappointment experienced by a few that the counsellor listened well but was unable to do anything.

D.   Other important themes

- **Views on this investigation**

None of the 70 members of staff interviewed disputed the usefulness and necessity of an external investigation; on the contrary, the most frequently heard answers are *urgently needed and inevitable*. Emotions colouring the responses include:

- *Sadness that it is necessary, but good that it's taking place;*
- *Anger that it is only now being done;*
- *Optimism, because this investigation is the beginning of change;*
- *Cynicism, because this investigation is a sham;*
- *Nervousness about this conversation in the context of this investigation;*

- *Mixed feelings; this investigation is the final straw; I don't want to be a whistle-blower anymore.*

Here, too, the two camps manifest themselves in diametrically different views:

- *The investigation is urgently needed because it would be nice if AMFI was seen in a more positive light;*
- *I hope that the investigation will get to the heart of the matter and will uncover all the old pain.*

- **AMFI's dealings with Martijn N.**

Some teachers express the same disbelief as the students when they hear that this investigation focuses on social (un)safety in general and is not specifically focussed on Martijn N. It has already been noted that all the staff interviewed say they have always known that social insecurity prevailed in Martijn N.'s environment and distanced themselves from him long before the publicity and to have experienced discomfort at the sight of him being brought in by colleagues as a role model. Some provide specific examples of this and say to have lost sleep over it, while others only provide general statements. It is reported that, due to poor internal communication, the internship agency did not know or could not have known that it was unwittingly actively mediating in sending interns to Martijn N.'s unsafe organisation.

One teacher stated in detail that he/she was quite aware of Martijn N.'s transgressive behaviour, got along with him but did not dare to intervene for fear of the consequences.

- **Comments about specific people**

In many interviews, a few people and one in particular are explicitly mentioned as instigators and supporters of the prevailing culture of social insecurity. Colleagues express themselves in very critical terms about the behaviour, the harmful effects of that behaviour and the overbearing attitude of this individual:

One employee declares that absolute lies are being told about this person and that this person is quite knowledgeable and easy to work with. Another employee (former student) found this person to be helpful during his/her own studies.

- **Advice for management**

In all conversations, staff were asked if they had any advice for AMFI management. Below is the unsorted total, which can also be read as a summary of staff perceptions as described in this chapter.

1. *As MT, determine a clear course and set future goals and social safety will increase.*
2. *Properly set up procedures and processes.*
3. *Set the bar less high for us.*
4. *Teach the teachers.*
5. *Maybe everything just needs to be demolished and rebuilt.*
6. *Optimistic, this investigation is the beginning and we'll accomplish it together.*
7. *Don't cover things up, acknowledge that there are issues.*

8. *Certain people have to leave.*

9. *More diversity in hiring teachers.*

10. *Conduct performance reviews.*

11. *Don't get angry at criticism.*

12. *Action instead of shouting, talk less and practise what you preach and be careful with your staff.*

13. *Another supervisor, more connection between the three departments, no islands.*

14. *Continue on the good path already taken.*

15. *Set out a strong vision*

16. *Remove the bad apples.*

17. *Be more convincing in vision and mission.*

18. *Bring in people with connecting qualities.*

19. *Take responsibility, really show penitence.*

20. *Listen carefully and take people seriously.*

21. *Admit mistakes and acknowledge when you can't do something.*

22. *Promote an open culture, don't immediately get defensive.*

23. *Teach what you preach.*

24. *Take fewer small and jerky steps.*

25. *Take a good look at the people who work at AMFI, ask what they need, give them space and stand up for the human aspect.*

26. *Replace people who are unable to perform their duties.*

27. *No quick fixes!*

28. *We are in transition and on the right track, but ensure that the people attached to the old ways can still participate.*

29. *The hierarchy is not necessary, give people responsibility and trust.*

30. *Get rid of the people who constantly cross the line.*

31. *Walk the talk.*

32. *Pay attention to the signals from the old guard because many people don't feel heard.*

33. *AMFI should focus on inclusiveness and sustainability.*

34. *Listen better and take action. Inaction will further damage trust.*

35. *Create and follow fixed rules.*

36. *Be alert to and take action on transgressive behaviour.*

37. *Look at yourself and be honest.*

38. *Be clearer about the content and the direction in the educational field.*

39. *Speak the truth – not fantasy.*

40. *Don't say the door's always open when it's not.*

41. *Now that we can see what's going on, continue with the change.*

42. *Be open to what the students are saying.*

43. *Trust staff and invest in them. More training in the field of diversity, inclusiveness and*

sustainability. Maintain the upward trend.

44. *Listen to what the students say about social safety. Register which internship companies are not safe.*

45. *The current management does not and will not function.*

46. *Management can leave.*

47. *Do not just suggest transparency - be transparent.*

48. *There must be a purge to process the past.*

49. *Prioritize!*

50. *Be honest and think about it. And don't be so hypocritically surprised by the reports of insecurity.*

51. *Try to understand more about what's happening in the workplace.*

52. *Listen and be open to different views. Do not judge.*

53. *Make sure there's more connectedness in the teams. Give teachers tools to not only provide an education but to also deal with the mental well-being of students.*

54. *Ask yourself why this investigation was needed, develop a long-term strategy and make drastic changes.*

55. *More clarity about direction and vision and how to achieve it.*

56. *A mistake has been made, AMFI has not moved fast enough and that has to change with this generation of students.*

57. *Change the structure and reorganise the teams.*

58. *Set up a decent onboarding programme for new staff.*

59. *More openness, speak more to people instead of talking about them.*

60. *No storytelling, but story doing.*

61. *More delegation, more confidence in the people who are there now.*

62. *More vision, more clarity and more transparency.*

63. *Take into account that AMFI education is not a standard AUAS education.*

64. *Less window dressing and more focus on education.*

65. *Practise what you preach.*

66. *Arrange social safety training for all managers.*

67. *Inclusion is not well understood; embed it within the organisation.*

68. *No one has to leave the MT, but there has to be more opportunity to express yourself, otherwise things will continue to stew.*

69. *People from the MT need to go; I hope what's being said about them isn't true.*

70. *Never waste a good crisis.*

IV.   Analysis, Conclusions, Recommendations, Concluding Comments

IV.i.   Introduction

The basis for this investigation is the assignment from the Dean of the Faculty of FDMCI of the AUAS to Bezemer & Schubad to carry out an assessment of the reporting structure for undesirable behaviour, to answer the question of which factors hinder or prevent social safety in the educational and/or working environment, and which factors facilitate or stimulate social safety. Another element of the assignment is to give students and staff who experience a lack of social safety the opportunity to share and/or discuss their experiences with an independent person who can be an interlocutor without bias and without self-interest.

The fact that the second part of the assignment has been fulfilled is evident from Chapters II and III, which report on the experiences of the (former) students and teachers shared in the interviews with the investigators.

This final chapter covers the first part of the assignment: which factors frustrate and/or block social safety in the educational and/or working environment and which facilitate or stimulate it? In summary, is there social safety or social unsafety? In answering this question, the key elements of the reference framework set out in Chapter I shall be used. Conclusions will be drawn and recommendations formulated.

IV.ii.   Factors that impact social safety

The assignment formulation contains the question of which factors hinder or block social safety in the educational and/or working environment and which factors facilitate or stimulate social safety. For this purpose, the individual experiences and perceptions of the interviewees must be translated to a higher level of abstraction, although this translation is not necessary for many members of staff because they have already analysed their own experiences in organisational terms.

Social safety is determined both by human interaction and by (lack of) organisational structures. Examples of the former are bullying, discrimination and (sexual) harassment. The investigators did not notice explicit manifestations of bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment. It is more difficult to comment on the phenomenon of micro-discrimination and micro-aggression. That is about comments and/or questions that unnecessarily draw attention to, for example, a non-Dutch origin. The investigators believe that this is or has been the case with regard to students of non-Western origin. With regard to intimidation, the investigators can only say that practically all (former) students and many employees (but not all) mention this. The conclusion of the investigators is therefore that intimidation plays a role in the direct interpersonal contact at AMFI, and that micro-aggression is certainly not absent.

In addition, there are elements within an organisation that can make a major contribution to feelings

of social insecurity. While in the case of human interaction as a source of social insecurity, 'bullying, discrimination and (sexual) harassment' are fairly universally referred to, things become more complicated when dealing with the factors related to the structure of an organisation. Because that is different in every organisation.

Below, the investigators identify and organise the factors that contribute to social insecurity which they have distilled from the interviews. This ignores individual differences; students, teachers/employees, the management team and the educational concept are discussed in a general way.

- Leadership, vision and mission, strategy

1. A perceived lack of a clear, supported and unambiguous multi-year strategy for the educational programme, leading to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity.

2. A management team that is perceived as not transparent and more interested in improving the image of AMFI rather than improving social safety and which manifests in unpredictable, ad-hoc and incident-driven decision-making.

3. Management team's responses to public unrest/issues that are considered unprofessional, hypocritical, not congruent with reality and a denial of historical facts, thereby causing feelings of uncertainty and insecurity.

- Education

4. An educational concept that is perceived as very unsafe because it focuses on the heavy-handed breaking down of students' self-image and self-confidence.

5. An educational concept that is perceived as very unsafe because the assessment of students is characterized by unpredictability, arbitrariness, subjectivity and cronyism.

6. An educational concept that is perceived as very unsafe because students feel compelled to reflect publicly on intimate and confidential details from their private lives and personal history, partly in response to intrusive personal questions from teachers.

7. An educational concept that is perceived as very unsafe because students are encouraged to consider their fellow students as competitors in a rat race.

8. A lack of a clear, supported and unambiguous vision of education and of the future professional perspective for students, leading to friction and uncertainty amongst students and teachers, and ruptures in the curriculum's structure that cause insecurity;

9. A workload perceived by students and teachers as extremely high, leading to exhaustion, burnout, tension and breakdowns.

- Diversity, inclusiveness and culture

10. A non-inclusive and non-diverse organisation in which students and staff feel excluded and/or discriminated against for various reasons (ethnicity, wealth, origin, character).

11. In the absence of perceived transparency, a culture in which rumours and conspiracy theories can thrive, leading to feelings of insecurity.

- <u>Organisation</u>
12. An organisation that is perceived as chaotic and therefore unpredictable and unsafe, in which conflict around tasks, authority and responsibilities of the coordinators in particular is a major factor.

- <u>Personnel and personnel policy</u>
13. Formation of different camps amongst the teaching staff, partly as a result of the lack of a common vision, leading to tension, uncertainty and insecurity amongst both students and teachers.
14. The formation of cliques within the teaching staff as perceived by students and teachers, partly as a result of the shared AMFI background of many teachers, partly leading to acceptance and normalization of non-standard behaviour of teachers.
15. Lack of guidance for new teachers, leading to the unsafe *feeling of being thrown in the deep end*.

- <u>Individual case studies</u>
16. Behaviour of individual teachers, perceived as intimidating by students, that in terms of social insecurity goes far beyond the educational concept described in general terms under 4 -9.

There are also factors that contribute to social safety. These are also discussed in general terms, ignoring individual differences and nuances:
1. The beginning of confidence in the new director's actions as leader of the new MT.
2. The vision behind the revision of the first year, leading to a lower workload and more respect and appreciation for students.
3. The fact that this investigation has been commissioned.
4. Confidence in the proven strength of the AMFI brand.
5. Confidence that an AMFI diploma means something in the fashion industry.
6. Behaviour of individual teachers that is perceived by students as supportive and which helps them cope with their perceived social insecurity.

The factors described above can be read as just as many points of attention for management, in addition to the advice for the management from the respondents in the final paragraphs of Chapters II and III and the recommendations at the end of this chapter.

IV.iii. **Confrontation of the findings with the frame of reference: conclusion**

The list of 16 factors with a negative impact on social safety in the previous paragraph is in line with the fact that the scope of almost every claim from the AUAS's and AMFI's own social safety ambition statements is unequivocally refuted by the statements made in interviews and written documents by students, former students, parents of students and employees. The higher standards from Zestor's

Occupational Health and Safety Catalogue are also clearly transgressed according to the experiences of the participants in the study.

- Conclusion: *AMFI is perceived by the vast majority of people who have contributed to this investigation as socially unsafe to highly unsafe, according to its own standards, those of the AUAS and those of the Working Conditions Legislation.*

The fact that every standard in the frame of reference is breached does not mean that all elements of every standard have been breached. For example: the elements in the Zestor definition of *Unwanted Behaviour* are *aggression, violence and intimidation, sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying*. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the investigators did not observe discrimination and sexual harassment as explicit forms of social insecurity.

The conclusion drawn above is described subjectively in accordance with the approach of a perception study and limited to the participants (*'is experienced by the large majority'*). Without prejudice to the fact that the assignment - a qualitative perception study - was fulfilled, this observation raises two questions:

- To what extent is there more than subjectively perceived insecurity and is there justification in the round for saying that a factually unsafe study and working environment exists in AMF? Is it possible on the basis of the requested assessment to draw conclusions about the reality at AMFI?
- To what extent can the reality experienced by the 39 current and former students also be the reality of the thousands that were not interviewed? This question as to the representativeness of the 39 current and former students requires handling in a subsequent and separate paragraph.

Although their focus was not on establishing the truth, the investigators have no reason to doubt the veracity of the statements made by students. It is probable that somewhat dramatic statements alternate with ones that at times are understated. Many statements are nuanced and testify to adequate reflection by the respondents on their own functioning as well. The statements cover a broad period of time and, although largely similar, do not give the impression that they are in any way coordinated. In short, the mere statements justify the assumption that it is more than the subjective perception of these students that AMFI is socially unsafe. In addition, the compelling argument is that the vast majority of interviewed staff (70 out of a total of 159) recognise and endorse the criticism of their current and former students about the social safety of AMFI. This significantly reinforces the plausibility of the conclusion that, not only in the experience of current and former students but also in reality, an unsafe study environment exists in AMFI.

The image is more nuanced when it comes to the staff. But the mere fact that they do not portray a solidly uniform image of the social safety or lack of it, combined with the overwhelming general tenor and sheer number of their statements, reinforces significantly the plausibility of the conclusion that, not only in the experience of staff but also in reality, an unsafe working environment exists in AMFI.

In short: Bezemer & Schubad would not expect a fact-oriented investigation to have had a different

outcome from this perception study: The study and working environment at AMFI was and is in fact socially unsafe. It is important to note that the unsafe study climate is showing signs of improvement.

It is virtually impracticable to describe comprehensively all the breaches of the standards in the frame of reference. Nor is that necessary because the results of the interviews speak for themselves. The most telling examples follow in the contrast below. For this purpose, it is more powerful to reflect on the breaches of standards with quotes from Chapters II and III than with aggregated abstractions in the words of the investigators.

Working Conditions Legislation and Zestor's Occupational Health and Safety Catalogue	Practice
Undesirable behaviour internally: aggression, violence and intimidation, sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying by staff.	The diva culture that some teachers maintain causes resentment among many. The teacher as the academic version of the outdated idea of a star designer. Resentment of what is perceived as a ranking system among teachers can also turn into a feeling of insecurity: There are creative teachers who believe they belong to a higher species than other people. This explicit behaviour towards students and colleagues is inappropriate and creates an unsafe environment. The argument of some that that's just how creatives are and they cannot change, is qualified by others as nonsense and part of a malign culture of tolerating bad behaviour.
We speak of pressure of work when there is an insufficient balance between the workload and the work capacity of the staff member. This happens, for example, when the amount of work and the time pressure exceeds the staff member's capacity for work. Work pressure can also be caused by other psychologically stressful factors, such as poor working relationships, drastic events at work, lack of clarity about duties or job description or work insecurity. A high workload can lead to work stress, which poses a risk to health and can lead to a reduction in performance and employability, as well as staff loss.	The guide for new AMFI staff is called Survival Guide. And, as one teacher explains, that is the perfect name for it because that is the key to working at AMFI: survival. Not everyone describes their work in those terms, but high workload, stress and overload are key words in many interviews. In more or less strong terms, all teachers and staff in other positions say that they work considerably more hours than determined in the scope of their employment: the full-timers (many) more hours than the standard annual amount of 1,659 hours in the CAO-HBO (CLA) and the part-timers work (many) more hours than contractually agreed: I get paid for three days, but in practice I work six.

	The high workload leads to stress. Employees experience insecurity, fly off the handle, get into arguments and experienced tension, especially towards the end of the school year and when approaching deadlines. Many mention impending or existing burnout in themselves or with colleagues. The *last man standing* phenomenon has been identified, whereby the one colleague who is still standing has to take on the work of all the colleagues who could no longer cope. *Because you don't want to let down the students.* Coffee and lunch breaks are not scheduled or – it is also said – not used as genuine breaks. With a mixture of pride and horror, some teachers say that at certain peak times of the year they work from 8 am to 8 pm straight through without a break, assessing students. One student sighed: *You wouldn't want to be the last student.*
AUAS Scheme Undesirable Behaviour	
AUAS is a widely accessible university where a large diversity of students and staff collaborate, study and work in education and research.	The difference between the street scene in Amsterdam and that in AMFI was said to be striking: AMFI was described as a white school. It was often added: a white school for rich kids from the western part of the Netherlands. Students from the periphery of the country said they had felt unsafe because of sarcastic remarks lecturers made about their accent and their supposed peasant background. Students from underprivileged parents and students who did not grow up with design, museum visits, or expensive brand-name clothing stated that they felt disadvantaged and excluded by lecturers.
Social safety, a pleasant and healthy learning and working environment where everyone feels welcome, are important conditions for this.	➢ Of the 39 current or former students interviewed: - Four said they had suffered burnout as a result of their studies at AMFI; - Nine said they were or had been getting professional treatment from a psychologist

	or other professional therapist to cope with the psychological damage suffered during their studies at AMFI. PTSD was mentioned on several occasions;
	- Fifteen (not including the 9 getting professional treatment) said they had suffered or were suffering from serious damage to their self-confidence, fear of failure, depression, suicidal thoughts, severe stress, or social anxiety and the like, as a result of their studies at AMFI;
	- The other 11 did not specifically report serious psychological distress or harm.
AUAS attaches great importance to a working environment in which staff and students can work and study safely, in a healthy and mutually beneficial manner. AUAS aspires to be a place where undesirable behaviour, such as discrimination, sexual or other forms of harassment, bullying and aggression, is not tolerated in any way.	Current and former students said they had felt intimidated by lecturers who had allegedly told them that their influential network in the fashion world could make sure that someone would never get a job—or that they would— and who had said that a student would never be able to graduate without their favouritism. Former students who are now active in the fashion world themselves and who have built up their own networks, cannot imagine in retrospect that they allowed themselves to be frightened by these lecturers' threats. Some current and former students told of their fear, sometimes felt on a weekly basis, of being mistreated by some lecturers. It was not that they were in awe of their knowledge or authority, but that they were simply afraid of being ridiculed, belittled, or humiliated. The Fashion & Design programme and one lecturer in particular were frequently mentioned in this context.
Undesirable behaviour should be discussable, and both staff and students should be able to address such behaviour. Even if members of staff or students do not experience unwanted behaviour directly themselves but witness it, they can take responsibility by raising the	Some teachers express the same disbelief as the students when they hear that this investigation focuses on social (un)safety in general and is not specifically focussed on Martijn N. It has already been noted that all the staff interviewed say they have always known that social insecurity prevailed

question of behaviour.	in Martijn N.'s environment and distanced themselves from him long before the publicity and to have experienced discomfort at the sight of him being brought in by colleagues as a role model. Some provide specific examples of this and say to have lost sleep over it, while others only provide general statements. It is reported that, due to poor internal communication, the internship agency did not know or could not have known that it was unwittingly actively mediating in sending interns to Martijn N.'s unsafe organisation.
AMFI Code of Conduct	
AMFI is a community that thrives on a diverse and inclusive body of students and teachers. Our differences are what brings us together and what adds value to our community.	Staff describe AMFI as a white school, and a few even add '*with a colonial point of view*'. Many members of staff say to have only recently become aware of this or to perceive the lack of diversity as a problem, that they *never really asked themselves whether you can ask a student from Asia the same thing as a student from Amsterdam.* Some still don't see a problem with this and think setting up a Diversity Task Force is unnecessary or see it as *window dressing*. For others, the Diversity Task Force can certainly contribute to resolving a genuine perceived lack of social safety. This also comes with the warning: *Diversity is not a branding opportunity.* If it is used as such, AMFI will become even more unsafe.
Students and staff of AMFI treat each other with respect. We do not do or say anything that someone else might consider a violation of their dignity and safety.	Current and former students described some lecturers not as coaches, mentors or trainers, not as people who wanted to make them better, but as harsh, vicious judges who tried to outdo each other in socially unsafe remarks in a Voice of Holland-like contest.
There is zero tolerance for any form of misconduct, e.g., harassment, bullying, racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, genderphobia, discrimination and inappropriate sexual	The perceived lack of empathic and didactic qualities on the part of some lecturers was felt to be very unsafe, especially when it came to those aspects of the curriculum that were discussed above, where it was not the work but the

behaviour. That includes but is not limited to expression through words, images, actions or behaviour.	personality of the student that was key. Respondents said it was precisely in those cases that there was no room for personal growth or development, but that the goal seemed to be *humiliation and the destruction of self-confidence*. Some tell of being mocked for their speech impediment or dyslexia.
AMFI Manifesto	
Why *We believe that fashion is a force for good*	Employees contrast AMFI's big ambitions to reform the culture and ethos of the fashion industry - to make fashion sustainable, with the reality of everyday practice. Many say they see an organisation that does not sustainably and humanely deal with the talents of the people who work and study there and for whom AMFI is not the intended *Force for Good*. An organisation that not only does not achieve its ambitions, but about which the following is said: *It's never been as bad is it is now.*
Who *We cultivate an environment of mutual respect and shared knowledge*	Many of the staff interviewed do not doubt the veracity of students' critical posts on social media. Some say they are remorseful for not intervening when they knew or should have known that students were treated incorrectly or even transgressively by their colleagues. *It's only now that I realize how students have suffered and been frequently exposed to humiliation and trauma.* There are teachers *who are ashamed that they were blinkered, teachers who are ashamed that they sent students to unsafe environments, teachers who no longer trust each other, teachers who are annoyed by AMFI's excuses.* Employees say they do not doubt the veracity of the story that some teachers are intimidating their students by threatening to ruin their future careers. One teacher forbade her own child from going to AMFI because it was a terrible school with unkind and vicious teachers.

Through creativity *We meet in an interdisciplinary space with curiosity, compassion and creativity*	The young guard speaks passionately about sustainability and are intrinsically motivated by it. One representative of the group states that the title of this report should be: From Ego to Eco.
How *We learn by doing, embracing failure and achievement*	A former student who became an AMFI lecturer described the theory and practice as follows: *It is assumed that a wound must be opened in order for you do a better job. The practice is/was: the lecturer goes home, and the wound stays open.*
What *We are a fashion community of change makers*	The tone of voice of the MT's internal communication is also seen as an aspect of perceived social insecurity. This tone of voice gives the impression that AMFI is one big family and that everything is going well. In doing this, the MT does not address the major divisions amongst the employees and everything that is not going well, but instead misjudges and denies, thereby not taking seriously the real problems and concerns of the staff.

IV.iv. Supplemental considerations of the conclusion

Chapter I of this report describes that the semi-structured questionnaire used in the 109 interviews is based, inter alia, on the theory of *Psychological Safety in the Workplace* by Amy Edmondson, Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School. Although this theory does not form part of the frame of reference, its superficial application also contributes to the further substantiation and nuancing of the conclusion drawn above.

In chapter I.v., the pillars of *Psychological Safety in the Workplace* were mentioned which according to Prof. Edmondson are important indicators of psychological safety at work and in a learning environment. These are: Attitude to risk and failure, Sensitive themes can be discussed, Readiness to help, Inclusivity and diversity.

These pillars have been addressed directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly in the interviews. The investigators are forced to conclude, from the point of view of Edmondson's (proven) theory, that

psychological safety is lacking. There are too many noises from both current/former students and staff that in order to avoid criticism you do not stick your neck out, – in other words, people avoid risks. In this respect, the investigators note that the social/psychological safety is also an obstacle to innovation.

For the same reason, i.e. avoidance of criticism, investigators sense the accustomed reluctance among current and former students and staff to raise transparently sensitive issues. The unanimous criticism of Martijn N.'s activities for AMFI speaks volumes in that regard.

The willingness to help each other is hampered by the silo culture. Perhaps this is inherent in the far-reaching specialisation of a number of teachers and 'silos' are difficult to avoid because of such specialization, but this does not detract from the fact that people themselves refer to a silo culture. The investigators add that a silo culture not only creates a lack of psychological security but also inhibits synergy. And that is another key pillar for an organisation such as AMFI to stride robustly into the future. After all, fashion is not static, fashion is dynamic, and technical developments in the fashion industry require synergy.

The twin themes of inclusivity and diversity, the fourth pillar of psychological security according to Edmondson's concept, are present for one of them but not sufficiently present for the other. All sections are in agreement on the total acceptance of LGBTQI+ students and/or staff. However, the investigators are more critical with regard to the true acceptance/inclusion of non-white students. True acceptance/inclusion means that the educational programmes and the assessment of students take account of the different cultures and subcultures from which students originate. Some teachers are aware of this but others think it is nonsensical. However, this is clearly an issue. While culture and subculture may not play a role in mathematics because of the universal assumptions within that field, fashion has so many subjective dimensions that cultures and subcultures cannot be avoided.

In one of her latest publications[1], Professor Edmondson once again presents the Likert scale by which she identifies and measures *Psychological Safety* in organizations, this time using seven statements:

1. *If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.*
2. *Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.*
3. *People on this team sometimes reject others for being different.*
4. *It is safe to take a risk on this team.*
5. *It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help.*
6. *No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.*
7. *Working with members of team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.*

As explained, the persons interviewed were not explicitly asked to score these statements on a five- or seven-point scale (totally agree - totally disagree). The statements were formulated as open questions in the interviews, for example: *Do you feel that you can engage with colleagues and your*

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1 Amy C. Edmondson, The Fearless Organization - Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation and Growth, Wiley, 2019

supervisor in open conversation about difficult or sensitive topics? Do you ever ask for help from colleagues or your supervisor? Do colleagues ever ask you for help? Can you be yourself on the team in which you work? In what way are you able to be and in what way not? The qualitative answers given in the interviews on these and other theoretically based questions make it highly likely that AMFI, as an overall organisation for current and former students and staff, would also score as unsafe on the Likert scale. And reinforce the conclusion that the application of Amy Edmondson's theory would lead to one and the same conclusion as the application of the frame of reference used.

At the same time, the investigators should and will apply some important nuances. When *team* is understood not to mean the totality of AMFI but rather their own, smaller team in which daily collaboration takes place, current and former students and staff experience more security. In addition to the current and former students who regard their fellow students as competitors and would certainly not dare to expose their vulnerability to each other, there are also examples of students who relate how they helped each other as peers to survive AMFI. And there are staff who state: *AMFI is an unsafe organisation, but it is safe within my team*: as long as it involves a select circle, they are certainly willing to help each other, to address each other about mistakes and to admit to having made mistakes.

Incidentally, it is interesting to read in the same publication *What Psychological Safety is Not*:
- *Psychological Safety Is Not About Being Nice;*
- *Psychological Is Not a Personality Factor;*
- *Psychological Safety Is Not Just Another Word for Trust.*

In other words: You are not obliged always to be nice to each other and uncritical, or always foster an atmosphere of ease or comfort. And in a healthy organization, social safety is not related to an introvert or extravert character. The fact that students in an educational setting such as AMFI have to be subjected to criticism, even strong criticism that takes them out of their comfort zone, does not mean that these situations would immediately qualify as psychologically unsafe situations. After all, it is often 'le ton qui fait la musique'.

IV.v. Representativeness also in relation to quantitative analyses

Above all, each student that experiences social insecurity is one too many, especially if that experience were to lead to burnouts, PTSD, depression and other distress. To this extent, any demand for numbers is completely irrelevant.

However, there remains the essential question as to the extent to which the 39 current and former students interviewed are representative of the total. All answers to this question are speculative. However, two things are worth noting:

- In this context, the acknowledgement and recognition by staff (mainly teachers) of students' criticisms concerning social safety at AMFI is also relevant. Staff do not limit this

acknowledgement and recognition to a restricted group. This acknowledgement and recognition is therefore indicative of a certain representativeness of the group of students and former students who participated in the study for the total.

- Quantitative analyses produced by AMFI itself and by external parties provide both indications and contraindications for the representativeness of the group of participants for the total number of current and former students. Moreover, the relevance of this finding is limited: quantitative returns from surveys and qualitative returns from interviews are not incomparable. Nevertheless, there follow some quotes from the AMFI document Report on reflective fact-finding study re social safety AMFI (April 2021) provided to the investigators:

- *Scores for the student studies (NSE, etc.) up to and including 2018 give a low score (<3.4 on 5-point scale) for the following thematic scores: teachers, study guidance, review and assessment, course load, internship and course and quality care. In this context, it should be noted that there are few thematic scores and scores for elements which are below 3.0. When they are lower, the scores are often just below 3. Elements that score less are for example 'the way your course responds to complaints and problems', having a score lower than 3 for 2015-2017. There is however 1 really negative outlier in the NSE for the thematic score internship and course that was below 3 in 2015, 2016 and 2018; this is mainly due to the subscore 'preparation for internship by the course, while it is striking that the scores for 'General Atmosphere' and 'Would you recommend the programme to family/friends' almost score a 4 out of 5 each time. After 2018, the scores generally get better and more compliments are given in the open comments.*

- *2018 went into somewhat more detail: AMFI students are significantly less satisfied with their teachers than students on a similar course in the HBO [Higher Professional Education] fashion sector. In the main, they are less satisfied regarding the educational quality of their teachers, the way in which feedback is provided, the accessibility of teachers outside of contact hours and the degree of the teachers' involvement with the students. On the theme of study guidance, AMFI score students lower than a comparable course in the HBO fashion sector. This applies to all the questions on this theme: the possibility of guidance, the quality of guidance and the extent to which the course takes the initiative in support or guidance. AMFI students are also less satisfied with their course load than the national average. This applies to the distribution of course load over the academic year and the feasibility of deadlines. The assessment of internships, internship preparation and internship guidance shows a steady upward trend. The subscore 'preparation for internship by the course' was a negative outlier in 2018 as we saw also in previous years. For quality of care, the score for 'the way your course responds to complaints and problems' is low; and the score for 'the way your course handles the educational evaluations' is also low.*

- *HBO monitor 2019: Completed by 39 former AMFI students (BA Technical Commercial Garment Technology). 20.5% of the former students were (very) dissatisfied with their teachers.*

- *100 days monitor 2019/2020 Completed by 84 of the 442 first-year students. AMFI students are*

significantly less satisfied with their course than students on other AUAS courses. More than half of AMFI students (52%) consider teachers to have high expectations of them. The open answers were filled in by half of the students (42). In the open questions, students are particularly critical of the new programme that in 2019 does not always work well in terms of organisation. The workload seems to be significantly better. Most students also say that they are very happy with their course and that the atmosphere and course load are fine. Two students comment about a negative and/or unfair attitude of teachers.

These and many other conclusions from the internal investigation (e.g.: *Teacher feedback can be far too harsh and often seems based on individual teachers' opinions and is not shared constructively with a student but is shared when multiple classmates are present. Students are belittled. This makes them insecure and some have developed fear of failure*) correspond to the experiences of the 39 students interviewed.

This is fundamentally different from the figures for intermediate deregistrations and success rate figures: current and former students tell the investigators that up to 70% of students would drop out in the interim. However, the figures show a different picture:
- Exit monitor 2019/2020 A total of 43 (of approximately 1,200) students deregistered in the interim (P, BA and MA). About half of them (23 students) completed the questionnaire. Reasons for quitting often relate to: • Course content (for 83% of the students who deregistered) • The organisation of the course (for 87% of the students who deregistered) • 10 out of 23 students indicated 'I don't feel at home' as a reason for dropping out • 8 out of 23 students indicated 'insufficient study guidance and support. • Indications from open answers: criticism rather than support from teachers, not accessible to students with functional disabilities, excessive workload.
- Exit monitor 2020/2021: A total of 28 (of approximately 1,200) students deregistered in the interim (P, BA and MA). About half of them (14 students) completed the questionnaire. Reasons for quitting often relate to: • Course content (for 72% of the students who deregistered) • The organisation of the course (for 72% of the students who deregistered) • Indications from open answers: not comfortable with the manner of teaching, not impressed with the teachers, excessive workload and little guidance.

In addition to the above-mentioned Report on reflective fact-finding study re social safety, AMFI provided the investigators with the most recent Cohort Analysis of the success rate for the student cohort that started their studies in 2019:

- Cohort Analysis: Of the cohort of 399 students who started at AMFI in 2019, 14% had dropped out after one year. 84% had passed the propaedeutic examination after one year (i.e. successfully completed the first year of their course). In the seven previous years, both percentages were significantly less favourable (drop-out rate 34-41% and passed propaedeutic examination after one year 31-40%).

It seems plausible that current and former students' inaccurate image about success rates and drop-

out rates that is not supported by the figures cannot be attributed solely to a lack of judgement. After all, as repeatedly said, it was the teachers themselves who would continuously emphasize that AMFI is actually a drop-out race. During the introduction, the elite and selective nature of AMFI would be cited with a certain degree of pride as meaning that few would make it to the finish line. A teacher allegedly said halfway through the first year: There are still a lot of you but the intention is that more people will drop out.

The positive developments in the success rates are also reflected in the results of the most recent NSE. These became known during the course of this investigation. The AMFI scores on the five-point scale now are no longer lower but higher or completely consistent with those of similar courses in the fashion sector:

Theme scores	Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences	Similar Course
Theme score Content and design of the tuition	3.64	3.64
Theme score Alignment with professional practice / professional career	3.42	3.45
Theme score Teachers for the course	3.53	3.57
Theme score Study guidance	3.48	3.66
Theme score Review and assessment	3.53	3.44
Theme score Involvement and contact	3.76	3.64

In particular, the subfigures on the Theme involvement and contact are indicative of the positive effects of the innovation process established. The feeling of safety is almost 4 on the five-point scale.

Theme: involvement and contact	Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences	Similar Course
To what extent do you agree with the following statements: (1 - strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree)		
I can reach teachers if I need to.	3.72	3.58
I get feedback on my work that helps me understand the material	3.60	3.52
I feel safe to be myself at the institution where I am studying	3.96	4.09
I feel at home on the course I am studying	3.75	3.76
I feel inspired by what I learn during my course	3.87	3.67
I am regularly engaged in learning and working with the lecture materials	3.95	3.43

In addition to the regular classes and assignments, I am also actively engaged with my course	3.87	3.58
Teachers appreciate student feedback about the course	3.47	3.46
My course is open to feedback from students	3.67	3.69

It should be repeated that any assessment of the degree of representativeness of the current and former students involved in this investigation is purely speculative. The investigators do go so far as to say that, apart from a single exception, they have not found any obvious contraindications to there being a meaningful degree of representativeness: the number of students and former students involved in this investigation was small but this does not mean that their powerful signal may be ignored. The investigators would emphasize that recent figures suggest that the representativeness of respondents for the former student population is greater than for the current student population. The current students are more satisfied and this extends to factors with an impact on social safety.

As with the students, figures can also be quoted for the staff who show a more positive picture than is outlined in the interviews. For example, an interview cycle definitely exists: In the 2019 Staff Monitor, 85% of AMFI staff indicated that they had an annual interview less than a year ago. And the dramatic picture of *last man standing* as a result of ubiquitous burnouts does not hold up when measured against the industry-compliant sickness absence rates of the entire faculty and of AUAS. However, these nuances cannot eliminate the fact that the question of the extent to which the 70 employees interviewed are representative of the total is actually irrelevant. Even in the hypothetical case that all 90 non-interviewed staff would fundamentally disagree with their 70 colleagues and outline a very positive picture of AMFI as an employer and as a school, the conclusion remains that there is a deeply divided team of which approximately 40% (70 minus the one individual who presents a positive picture) experiences AMFI as a socially unsafe working environment.

IV.vi. **Assessment of the Reporting structure**

The last part of the investigation assignment to be discussed is an assessment of the reporting structure and culture within AMFI. The findings from Chapters II and III that are relevant to this section are repeated in italics below.
- students
- teachers

With a few exceptions, the counsellor is now well-liked.

These findings are largely self-evident in terms of how they translate into conclusions and recommendations:
- The awareness of and access to the support structure for students in particular can be greatly improved. A common complaint voiced – even from respondents with big questions, concerns and problems – was that people were unaware of the existence of confidential counsellors. Some students say they lacked a student psychologist or counsellor, although such were available.
- For students and teachers who were aware of the existence of the support structure, there was

in some cases a lack of confidence as to the independence and professional distance of the persons involved in the support structure. Prerequisites for a properly functioning support structure are guaranteeing the independence and professional distance and having confidence in that guarantee.

- Persons who request help must have the confidence - and this cannot be taken for granted - that the support structure can do something for them. And that depends on the perception of the managerial support for the policy against unwanted behaviour and unacceptable forms of behaviour on the part of the persons requesting help.
- On the other hand: student and staff expectations of counsellors and confidential advisers are not always real. Student counsellors are not psychologists or brokers for student housing. And confidential advisers are limited in their scope of action precisely because of confidentiality. Managing these expectations warrants attention.
- AMFI as an organisation missed important signals about the insecurity surrounding Martijn N. due to defective or missing communication between teachers, mentors, the internship office and members of the management team. This finding differs from that of the claims of interviewed teachers but is consonant with the experiences of many interviewed students. Teachers who distanced themselves from Martijn N.'s investigators would have mentioned him as an example to students, promoted his company as an internship address, or hired him as a guest teacher or external assessor.

Even more important than all organisational aspects is the culture in the institution. Students describe a culture in which asking for help is seen as a sign of weakness. If that culture is left in place, then there is no point in making any changes in the structure around reporting.
Support for the policy against unwanted behaviour and unacceptable forms of behaviour will only be created if all those responsible, and especially managerial staff, visibly endorse it by:

- Displaying positive exemplary behaviour;
- Being open to students and staff who are suffering from unwanted behaviour;
- Having the (visible) willingness to intervene in the case of reports about unwanted behaviour;
- Discussing of their own accord desirable and undesirable behaviour in a serious way on both informal (chats during coffee) and formal opportunities (performance reviews).

The investigators deduce from the interviews with some of the teachers in particular (the old guard) that there is scant support for the policy. This means that in the future use should be made of training teachers and other staff about their duties and responsibilities regarding unwanted behaviour: awareness training and training in skills to deal adequately with situations of unacceptable behaviour (counteracting the inability to respond adequately).

Even the best support structure will not achieve much in the absence of visible and evident support for a policy against unwanted behaviour. Those in need of help will make little use of it. And if anyone does make use of it, in the absence of support, the confidential adviser may not be able to do anything. And that will be another source of complaints.

IV.vii. Present and Past - How to proceed - Recommendations and Final Remarks

Whatever happens, AMFI will have to come to terms with its past. That process begins with the frank recognition, sorely missed by many, that things have not gone well in the past and that students have been harmed at a vulnerable stage in their lives. A frank recognition of its own failure. And not an excuse that puts the blame on the other person (*We are sorry if former students have experienced our way of doing things as painful*).

A member of staff rightly notes as advice to the management that there will have to be a cleansing at AMFI in order to come to terms with the past. Referring to the student's quote about teachers who open but never close wounds, a process of healing will need to take place.

The recommendations forthcoming from this investigation are self-evident and/or explicitly mentioned in the foregoing. In summary:

1. Ensure that there is a clear, sustained and unambiguous long-term strategy for the department, resulting in stability and fostering feelings of security and safety.
2. Inculcate transparency, coherence, consistency and predictability into the management team's behaviour. Avoid ad hoc and incident-driven decision-making.
3. Put an end to what is referred to as window-dressing management. Let the message be congruent with reality and the historical facts, even if they conflict with the desired image.
4. Implement a clear, sustained and unified vision of education and the future professional image of students. In doing so, avoid frictions and uncertainties among students and teachers, partisanship and clique-forming among teachers and gaps in the design of the curriculum that lead to insecurity.
5. Give a powerful boost to the educational innovation that has already been set in train. Eliminate all trace of the educational approach that was directed towards the heavy-handed erosion of students' self-esteem and self-confidence characterized by unpredictability, arbitrariness, subjectivity and favouritism, and which forced them publicly to reflect on intimate and confidential details of their private life and personal history, partly prompted by profoundly intrusive questions from teachers.
6. Promote collaboration and team building among students in place of competition.
7. Bring the study and work pressure for students and teachers to an acceptable level. No one seems to have any trouble working hard. But not under the kind of pressure that leads to exhaustion, burnouts, tensions and drop-outs without offering any form of assistance and/or guidance.
8. Introduce a sense of peace into the organisation. Ensure clear and, above all, definitive decision-making so that a decision taken does not always trigger a new discussion. Be clear about duties, powers and responsibilities of the coordinators in particular.
9. Clarify the position of AMFI as part of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.
10. Do not take it for granted that AMFI is inclusive and diverse in all respects. Prevent students and staff from feeling excluded and/or discriminated against for various reasons (ethnicity,

income, background, character).

11. Develop a culture in which seeking help is not a sign of weakness. Make sure that this help can be found and that it is reliable.

12. Work on a culture in which others are called to account, one in which everyone is clear about what behaviour is expected of an AMFI teacher and where behaviour that departs from expectations does not become accepted and normalized but is addressed.

13. Improve the guidance for new teachers and work on the ongoing training and coaching of teachers already in tenure. Evaluate critically the recruitment policy that results in the high number of former students among the teachers.

And furthermore:

14. As responsible executives, consider not only necessary changes in the structure and culture of the organisation but also pay full attention to the concrete composition of the AMFI staff and to individual casuistry.

Certainly not everything from the past was wrong. AMFI also has a rich history that it can reference with pride. In order to extend this history into the future, major changes are needed in many areas, ranging from the vision for education and professional image to guidance of students, and from organisation to staffing levels. This report contains several pointers in that regard.

The beginning of this change is visible: in the revised first year, in the still somewhat hesitant confidence in the direction of the newly assembled management team and in the widely held awareness that things have to change.

Annex: Semi-structured questionnaires for staff and current and former students

Semi-structured questionnaire staff

1. What do you think about this investigation being conducted?
2. What is the reason you signed up for an interview/conversation?
3. What do you think is important to bring out about social safety at AMFI?
4. Where people work, mistakes are made. How do you, colleagues and your supervisor deal with mistakes that are made? Is it easy for you to report it yourself if you make a mistake? How do others deal with that? Do you feel that you learn from mistakes?
5. Do you feel that you can engage with colleagues and your supervisor in open conversation about difficult or sensitive topics? How does that work in practice? Are there taboo topics?
6. Do you ever ask for help from colleagues or your supervisor? Do colleagues ever ask you for help? If so, what happens then?
7. Can you be yourself in the team where you work? In what way are you able to be and in what way not?
8. The themes of inclusion/exclusion are widely used nowadays. Themes: gender, ethnic background, LGBTQI+. How inclusive/exclusive do you consider AMFI to be? Comment.
9. How do you and your colleagues and your supervisor handle gossip. Is there a lot of gossip? On what subjects?
10. How do you feel about possibly excluding or ignoring colleagues? Does that happen? If so, in what way? Who is affected by that?
11. Can you say how you experience the management style of your supervisor? Possibly that of the senior supervisor? Do you discuss that with him/her?
12. What do you think are the real blockers to communication at the institute?
13. Are you aware of the confidential adviser? Other support structures? Would you make use of them? Why or why not?
14. What can you do yourself to optimize social safety at AMFI?
15. What can the leadership/management/AUAS do?

Semi-structured questionnaires for students and former students

1. What do you think about this investigation being conducted?
2. What is the reason you signed up for an interview/conversation?
3. What do you think is important to bring out about social safety at AMFI?
4. You come to AMFI for your education. Part of that will involve your study results/your work being assessed. Is this done in an honest manner at AMFI in your opinion? Do you believe the criteria on which assessments take place are (sufficiently) objective? And (sufficiently) respectful? Do you feel that some students are being favoured?
5. Do you feel that you can engage in open discussion with fellow students and teachers about difficult or sensitive topics? How does that work in practice? Are there taboo topics?

6. Do you ever ask for help from fellow students or teachers? Do people ever ask you for help?
7. Can you be yourself at the school? In what way are you able to be and in what way not?
8. The themes of inclusion/exclusion are widely used nowadays. Themes: gender, ethnic background, LGBTQI+. How inclusive/exclusive do you consider AMFI to be? Comment.
9. What about gossip? Does that happen on the course? In what way? On what subjects?
10. How do you feel about possibly excluding or ignoring students or teachers? Does that happen? If so, in what way? Who is affected by that?
11. What for you are the sources of stress in your course? Can you talk about them?
12. Are you aware of the confidential adviser? Other support structures? Would you make use of them? Why or why not?
13. What can you do yourself to optimize social safety at AMFI?
14. What can the leadership/management/AUAS do?