

ABUSE OF POWER

VICTIMS ABOUT MISCONDUCT BY DISMISSED PROFESSOR

"THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE CAME TOGETHER, WE NOTICED A PATTERN" See page 5, 6 en 7



P3

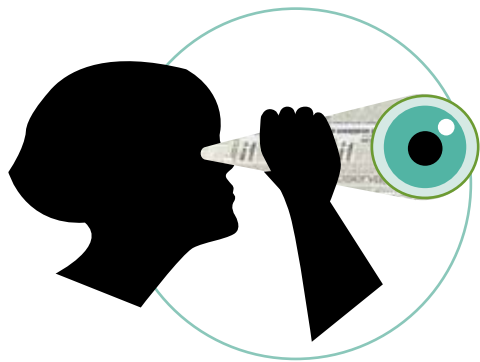
Together on the train
Students from Tragos, Koko and Circumflex go on a trip to the zoo with refugee children



P4

A room of one's own
Fotis Barlakas from Greece: "The Netherlands is a very open-minded country when it comes to gay rights and pride"





Riki Janssen

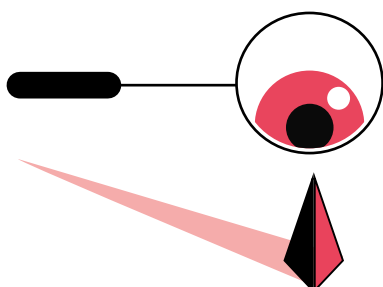
Sometimes I have an awkward moment. Like recently, when my colleague CF asked me when I'd be conducting the next round of appraisal interviews. It had been a while, after all. I checked and realised the most recent round had taken place pre-Covid. Whoops. Awkward, and a shame. Appraisal interviews – they're called Personal Development Plan interviews these days, but we still use the old term, though I couldn't tell you why – are not an ordeal at the *Observant* office. They serve as a moment of reflection and introspection, to put it formally. In other words, we take an hour to sit down with a cup of tea or coffee and talk about how the employee is doing. How have they been feeling, what energises them, what drains them, do their work tasks still suit them, do they have the right amount of responsibility? And, last but not least, where do they see

“ editorial Choice means loss ”

themselves in five years and what will it take to get them there? Workload came up again. As I wrote before, our workloads skyrocket at regular intervals. “We're struggling to keep up as it is, we often don't have time to really think things over, but we all keep saying that we should be doing more, even in our plans for the upcoming academic year”, the feedback went. Indeed, our wish list for the next academic year, from August 2023, was as follows: more articles about student life, more about research, more investigative journalism pieces. We hadn't quite stopped to consider who would be doing all that work. “We've been trying for years to make choices – yes to this, no to that – but we always end up doing everything anyway, if we can.” It was a crystal-clear analysis, and it was spot on.

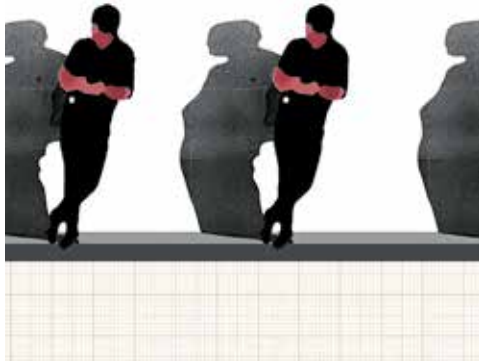
Making choices is not our strong suit. But last Monday, at our last big meeting before summer break, we did it. We looked each other in the eye and decided it's time to change course (those conversations were a good incentive). Investigative journalism will get priority. As will any news, whether it's about research, internationalisation, or workplace harassment. With everything else, we'll just have to choose – yes to this, no to that. We'll undoubtedly miss out on a few great stories because of it, but that's all part of the game. Choice means loss.

*Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the *Observant* office*



splinters

A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column.



Queue models

Queues – that is a word that seldom calls up visions of joy, unless it has ‘no’ in front of it. Mathematician Dennis Schol from Eindhoven, however, spent four years on this topic. For his thesis, he developed various mathematical models from queues.

Schol focused on chains within companies where various suppliers make parts and so people have to wait until everything is ready before the final product can be assembled. But, he tells sister newspaper *Cursor*, the models are applicable to all situations in which a new task presents itself before the present task has been completed. Whether that is the following customer who wants to pay a bill, the next patient who needs an operation, or another company that places an order. In all cases, people have to wait and Schol's models can be of use. If, for example, you know which part you have to wait on longest, you can take that into account or make a new deal

with your supplier. “Or take the helpdesk of a call centre,” says Schol. “You don't want your customers to have to wait long, but you also don't want your employees twiddling their thumbs half of the time.” So, the question is: how many employees do you need exactly?

The great challenge

Students could do with a few more challenges in their lives, Wageningen University & Research thought about five years ago. A WUR Student Challenges Team was set up, which has organised sixteen challenges so far. The idea: students work on a problem in teams, for example ‘come up with a sustainable agricultural project that contributes towards a healthy environment for Washington’.

Some students find it so much fun that they have already worked on multiple challenges. “It is addictive,” says master's student Tijmen Visser to sister newspaper *Resource*, having participated twice already. At the moment, he is spending three evenings a week delving into waste flows. For the ReThink Waste Challenge, his team is trying to retrieve protein from agricultural waste which can be transformed into extracts for protein shakes. If their idea wins, they will receive 6,000 euro to create a start-up.

Fellow student David Mornout, who after participating twice is now helping to organise the challenges, thinks it is “a brilliant learning environment. The great thing about it is that if it doesn't work, it is not a disaster and if it does work, it is fantastic.” Previously, he worked on designing a sustainable campus in China – including a trip to that country. “Being allowed to do that as an inexperienced person: very special!”



Stealing without feeling guilty

You could read it everywhere these past weeks: self-scan checkouts bring out the thief in a lot of people. According to Statistics Netherlands, shoplifting has increased by more than 30 per cent in 2022 compared to 2021. Students also have their share in this. “I would feel guilty towards myself if I didn't do it,” says psychology student ‘Thomas’ to sister newspaper *Mare*. “They are almost inviting you to do so at the self-scan,” says the recently graduated ‘Mark’. “I would feel more guilty towards a cashier. Then it is much more personal.” Meanwhile, local supermarkets have had their bellyful. “Students have made a sport out of it,” says Hoogvliet manager Joey Groenenberg. “I hear that in some student houses, they keep a tally of how many euros they have stolen.” According to him, students don't realise what the consequences are. “We increase the number of random checks and are quicker to call the police.” Students who get caught are given a fine of 181 euro, an injunction, and a reprimand. “That is not a criminal record, but a kind of note that you are registered with the police.” Anyone who wants to become, for example, a lawyer or a clinical psychologist could have a tough time with this when applying for a job.

Thomas also got caught out. “The police told me that I had the right to remain silent and the next time I would be given a criminal record. I never thought about the possible consequences. I felt like I could always get away with it. Now, I have to explain to my friends every time why I am not allowed into Hoogvliet.”

Disposable cups disappear at UM

From 1 July, Maastricht University will discontinue the use of disposable cups at the coffee machines. In doing so, it will follow the so-called Single-use plastic (SUP) guideline by the European Union, introduced in order to reduce the amount of plastic in the environment. But what will be the alternatives? Earthenware cups, bring your own mug from home, a returnable mug with a deposit?

The Dutch government has two dates: 1 July 2023 and 1 January 2024. The first applies to food or drinks that you take with you (to go). The second date applies to food or drinks to stay, for a coffee, tea or other drink that you consume on location. To prevent confusion, all changes at UM will take place on 1 July, said Rabbe Dormans, advisor for environmental and sustainability issues in one of the University Council's committee meetings, last

Wednesday.

Eurest Campus, catering company in among others the student cafeteria, will switch to the Billie cup. This is a returnable mug with a 1-euro deposit. The catering company or coffee bar will wash them in the dishwasher and reuse them. Lids also cost 1 euro and are non-returnable for hygienic reasons, said Dormans. The Billie cup can be used for the coffee machines too, but bringing your mug from home is also possible, as is an earthenware one from the department (many UM locations have small kitchens and a dishwasher). 'Plastic-free' cups, like they produce in Germany, will not be used in the Netherlands. "The government interprets the EU guidelines differently, and hence the cups are not recognised as being 'plastic-free.'" It appears that they do contain a polymer, to prevent them from leaking. Bandito Espresso, the operator on the Oxfordlaan and the Faculty

of Arts and Social Sciences, had set its sights on just such a 'plastic-free' cup, but as this is not accepted, Bandito is now looking at other solutions.

UM now needs to bring the change to everyone's attention as quickly as possible, "because it will be 1 July, before you know it," says Dormans. "We need to think about how we are going to deal with this at large events, such as open days. There is also the question whether there are sufficient 'facilities' for students. Many employees have access to a small kitchen, but students don't."

This week, Dormans informed Observant that there will be a transitional period until 1 January, during which the disposable cups can be used in case of an 'emergency' and will be available in a central location in the buildings, such as the reception desk.

Wendy Degens

Students go on field trip with refugee children



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Surprised looks from commuters at Maastricht Station this Wednesday morning. "Special ticket required," reads the sign next to the train bound for Rotterdam Central. It is reserved for a group of about 150 refugees plus some 20 members of the student associations Tragos, Koko and Circumflex. Other passengers are directed to another platform for the regular train.

On initiative of the student associations, the group is visiting the Rotterdam zoo Diergaarde Blijdorp today. From Rotterdam station, they will travel there by vintage tram. But first the intercity will stop in the Limburg

towns of Beek and Echt, where a number of refugee families will also board. In total, there are about a 100 children and 50 parents, all staying in the South Limburg region. They are from Ukraine, but also numerous other countries. The outing is sponsored by the NS (Dutch Railways), as part of the 'Spoorwensdagen' in which the transport company 'makes wishes come true.'

It was Tragos that submitted this 'wish' to the NS, reveals chairman Thijmen Vermeer. "We try to get involved in charities in the area every year. Previously, these included the Ronald McDonald House and Stichting

Matchis, which focuses on stem cell donation. Given the war in Ukraine, this time we chose to organise a fun activity for refugee children. The NS then came up with the idea of going to Blijdorp." Koko and Circumflex, which together with Tragos form the Maastrichtse Kamer van Verenigingen, also turned out to be interested and helped the NS with the organisation. Members of the three associations will travel with them today to accompany the refugee children at the zoo. "As well as to entertain them on the train."

Dennis Vaendel

“



The value of life

Sometimes we encounter challenges in our personal, academic, and professional lives that make us question the purpose of life. I recently came across some oriental wisdom, which offered me more insight into this question.

A son goes to his father and asks him what the value of life is. The father hands him a stone and says: "If you want to know the value of the stone, take it and go to the market. If anyone asks the price, don't say a word; just raise two fingers."

The boy takes the stone and heads off to the market. He gets there, and an old man approaches him. "How much is this stone?," he asks. The boy does not say a word and raises two fingers. The man says: "Two euros - I will take it."

The son rushes home and tells his father someone wanted the stone for two euros. The father then tells him to take the stone to a precious stone store. "When you get there, if anyone asks you for the price, don't say a word; just raise two fingers."

The son gets to the precious stone store and sees an old woman at the counter. She sees the stone and jumps up, screaming. "Oh my God, you have the stone I have been looking for my whole life. How much do you want for it?" Again, the boy doesn't say a word and raises two fingers. The old woman says: "200,000 Euros - I'll take it." The boy can't believe his ears and runs to his father. He tells him what happened at the store. The father responds: "Son, I hope you now understand the value of life. Life is about where you place yourself. You can decide whether to be a 2 or a 200,000 euro stone. Some people love you, and for them, you are everything. Others see you as a commodity. For them, you are worth nothing. So it is upon you, my child, to decide the value of your life."

Jamiu Busari, associate professor of medical education at FHML and dean Health Professions Education (HOH Academy Aruba)

”

series a room of one's own

"This country is so progressive, even the royals celebrate drag"



Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Fotis Barlakas (21), a bachelor's student of Global Studies, pays 420 euros per month for a 14 m² room in a student house on Het Bat, Maastricht.

Growing up in Thessaloniki in Greece, which Fotis Barlakas says is a very conservative country, he was always insecure about his identity. He only came out as gay three years ago when he moved to Maastricht for his studies. "The Netherlands is a very open-minded country when it comes to gay rights and pride. It's easy to make friends and be myself here." In fact, when he was on Tinder in 2021, he met a friend who is a drag queen.

This friend encouraged him to try drag for the first time. When he did, Barlakas fell in love with everything drag.

Drag identity

This friend, along with the drag sisterhood he has met in the Netherlands, encouraged him to "buy the cheapest make-up" and drag outfits so that he could perform. Even though he believes he initially looked bad in drag

because he had no idea what he was doing, "I fell in love with it all". He most loves the transformation that comes with dressing up, and promotes drag as an experience. His drag queen name is Alectrona.

Alectrona wears the shiny platform shoes and high heels displayed on his shelves. She "can automatically be a diva", is high maintenance and needs her hair brushed constantly before going on stage to perform. He first

performed in April 2022 at LGBTQI+ Café Rosé in Maastricht. "I don't remember much from my first performance. It was so intense I had a memory blackout." But he found out that he absolutely loves the attention. The transformation in drag "allows you to really feel the character like an alter ego".

Memorable performances

"I do love some sparkles", he says, laughing. Barlakas is extremely proud of the progress he has made in his drag performances. He now performs all over the Netherlands. During his latest show, he "really felt great" on stage. Though he usually lip-syncs upbeat songs and enjoys dancing on stage, "I can also be very sexy."

Alectrona's most memorable performance was on King's Day last year, when he performed for the King and Queen of the Netherlands. He was on stage near Vrijthof, with a big screen in the square broadcasting his performance on national television. Queen Máxima came up to him after the show and told him how beautiful he looked in drag. "It just goes to show how progressive the country is – the royals were celebrating drag!"

One downside of doing drag are the expenses. He does get paid for his shows, but "I constantly have to buy clothes and make-up. Travelling around the country is also expensive. Because of this, I struggle to compete with drag queens who have a higher income."

Influencer

Another thing you notice when you walk into Barlakas's room is the pink foam in the shape of bricks on the wall. As a YouTuber and TikToker, Barlakas needs a fun background for his videos. He posts make-up tutorials, transformation videos and – more recently – comedy on Instagram and TikTok.

Next to the pink and silver foil background are posters and postcards (mainly of the goddess Venus from various artists) from his travels. The most eye-catching one is a Moulin Rouge poster, which stands out from the others because of its size.

Barlakas has visited over 24 countries, the most memorable of which was Croatia. "I enjoy travelling. Travelling on your own can be a very liberating experience." But it can also be scary, he says, remembering encounters he had in Cracow, Poland. In the conservative country where many people hold prejudiced views against homosexuality, he felt insecure wearing earrings. "I got a lot of cold stares from people. I was very shocked – I hadn't expected that much hostility."

Kathryn van den Berg

A series about students and their student room

“



Attack on our freedom

I was looking forward to this lecture, but at the end of it, I was seriously worried...

On a sunny afternoon earlier this month, the experienced journalist and blogger Jon Worth was on the curriculum in my master's. *Social media in EU lobbyism* was the big headline for this lecture, a super interesting topic! I was very excited, and beside me, around fifty other master's students assembled in the lecture hall of FASoS.

The lecture started well with many interesting facts and insights. But at one specific point, all of the sudden, the friendly and tolerant atmosphere in the lecture hall changed. What happened? Mr Worth criticised Twitter's new owner Elon Musk for making the platform more unregulated, and then a student asked: Is Twitter not more free now, as there is less regulation? The lecturer seemed to feel seriously attacked by the question and the substantiation the student gave.

As the student wouldn't agree with him, Mr Worth started to ask him very personal questions ("Have you ever received death threats on Twitter? Have you?"), and the helpless student just said "I don't think you should ask this question here", followed by a very direct "answer the question!" from the lecturer's side. "You are simply wrong", Mr Worth told the student for having a different opinion then him.

It went on like that, and I had enough. Is that seriously the tolerance, the freedom of academia that we hold high at our university, every time when there is a special occasion to do so? When students get singled out and personally attacked for asking a critical question? I raised my hand and asked Mr Worth if a lecture or rather a personal discussion was scheduled, because I couldn't stand it anymore. Also, nobody said or did anything! Just a minute after my intervention, a few other students applauded me in our Whatsapp group (they were completely silent in the lecture hall), saying that they felt uncomfortable as well, calling the situation an interrogation. But others also played it down, as "it's a guest lecturer", or "I have been interrogated by the police, and it was nothing like that". Whether it's Mr Worth's opinion or the student's opinion that you agree with, is for you to decide. But what every single person at our university should agree with is that this culture of discussion is neither okay, nor desirable. Academia is one of the last bastions of the freedom of opinion, the last place where (many) people think freely. Let's fight to keep it like that. In every tutorial, every lecture, every publication. With words, acts and our hearts.

Simon Wirtz,
master's student at FASoS

”

VICTIMS ABOUT MISCONDUCT BY DISMISSED PROFESSOR

“I HOLD IT AGAINST HIM THAT HE ABUSED HIS POWER”

After an independent investigation, Maastricht University has decided to dismiss a professor from the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences because of sexually unacceptable behaviour. Four victims tell their stories. “He played on women, knew when they were weak and then he pounced.” In a written statement submitted by his lawyer, the dismissed professor denies a number of allegations, like playing on women, but also expresses regrets.

Text: Wendy Degens Illustrations: Simone Golob

“We could not believe our ears when we heard, we said: ‘Whaaat? Is he married? Does he have children?’ That did not fit with his behaviour at all.” Back when they were doing a master's at FHML five years ago (when the professor was a co-ordinator), for some victims even eleven years ago, his behaviour was conspicuous. “He made inappropriate remarks, jokes, often with a sexual undertone. Yes, actually all female students felt uneasy with him,” says one of those interviewed (for reasons of privacy, all wish to refrain from having their names in the newspaper). If there was a party, organised by the university or the students themselves, then prof X (his name is known to the editorial team) was present. “He went out with us, acted like he was one of us. He also liked to buy rounds of drinks.” Another one adds: “He was plying you with drink to get you drunk.”

GOING HOME

One of his victims, a young colleague of the

professor at the time, remembers just such a drinks evening. “No matter how often I said: ‘No, I'm going home now, no, I don't want another beer, no, you don't need to take me home. Uncountably often.’ But he kept going on and on and he saw me home. Only to start kissing her, uninvited, when they were alone. “I still had a clear enough head and managed to ‘stop’ it.” But that doesn't make the impact any less, she concludes. Someone else, a student at the time, had a similar experience, also during a party with a lot of alcohol. “I recognise so much: the pushiness, going too far without consent, feeling that there is no way out. What if you say ‘no’? What consequences will that have for your study? Will he make life difficult for you? The fact that he abused his power, I hold that against him, very much.” The professor denies having forced himself upon women, his lawyer writes. On the contrary, he says that he “was asked to come along”. On many occasions, he had said ‘no’, his reply states.

X regrets the kissing, as well as the “impact – in retrospect – it has had on the witnesses”. In his view, however, this was “never uninvited” and “mutual. Nevertheless, he should have known better, according to the lawyer. And: “The persons concerned were sometimes so drunk that he didn't think it was safe to let them cycle home.”

BLAME

Talking about what happened is difficult for the victims. *Observant* speaks with them two by two, in person and via Zoom. It is a wound that, partly because of the investigation at the university the past few months (more on that matter later), has been ripped open. There is a feeling of shame, even after all those years. “At the time, you gloss over it, saying to yourself: ‘That is just the way he is,’ because that was what everyone said who had dealings



“THIS IS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE CULTURE OF FEAR AND THE EXISTING HIERARCHY”

with him at the time. Moreover, I blamed myself, because: ‘I shouldn’t have drunk so much.’ But even when there was no alcohol involved, X went too far. “He kept making advances, at the university and outside. He harassed with e-mails, wanted to make another appointment to meet. He even went as far as getting hold of your schedule so that he could see exactly when a lecture was finished and so you were ‘free.’”

The professor denies having stalked; he “had better things to do than check everyone’s lecture schedule”. He would rather call it “amicable” behaviour and maintaining “contacts” within his network.

ESCAPE ROUTE

The word grooming is mentioned. Another victim, a young employee at the time – “he referred to me as ‘subordinate’” – cannot describe it as anything else. “He took the initiative, went a step further each time. I went along with it, arrangements to meet were becoming more frequent.” With mutual consent, initially. “Until the moment I realised: ‘I’m stuck. How can I get out of this? I was completely isolated.’” Still, she ended it, but X didn’t accept ‘no’. She tells of how she was intimidated, physically as well. “If I said ‘no’, he threatened me, said that he could end my career.” X’s behaviour escalated, she continues, both in public and behind the closed doors of his office. “He made sexual remarks about me in the presence of students, humiliated me in front of colleagues and management. During one-on-one meetings at the office, I was constantly planning my escape route. I made sure that I knew how the space was laid out, that I could see him at all times, that I was out of arm’s reach and had a free path towards the door – just to reduce the chances of him touching me. Because whenever I pulled away, he saw that as a game and started laughing.” She also suffered with feelings of shame and blame. “I felt that I had put myself in that position by choosing the path of least resistance. But actually, it shouldn’t make any difference. ‘No’ is ‘no’, also for a person in charge with a position of power. What he did, is and will always be sexual abuse.”

HAVE A GOOD CRY

X’s version is at odds with this. According to him, it was her initiative to start a “long-term relationship” and in his view, terminating it was “mutual”. The professor also states that there was no (physical) intimidation. He states that relations were good, even after he had heard that a report had been filed about him. He says that he went to the victim “to have a good cry and to ask for advice, a meeting of which she stealthily made a recording that she later submitted [in the UM’s external investigation, ed.]”.

REPORTS

After a few reports made about the professor in autumn of 2022, UM commissioned the Partners in Integriteit agency to investigate the matter. Gradually, more victims made contact – they had heard that something had been initiated. “It felt hypocritical not to participate. This was a way to prevent there being more victims, naive students 19, 20 years old, like I was at the time, who rely on their teachers completely.” In the end, five women filed a report of sexually unacceptable behaviour (which is the reason why the university wants to dismiss him; apparently there is an audio recording in which X admits to sexually abusing women who worked at UM). But the investigation was not limited to those five. According to the victims, ‘Partners in Integriteit’ interviewed more than fifteen women as well as men. This included other forms of misconduct: intimidation, abuse of power and bullying. The last three things did “not come out during the investigation,” the professor states in his reply. He does admit that he should have reported the “long-standing mutual relationship”. The professor and his lawyer are also critical about the approach of the investigation agency. Parts of his replies and “evidence to the contrary” are supposedly not included. X



But even when there was no alcohol involved, X went too far. “He kept making advances, at the university and outside. He harassed with e-mails, wanted to make another appointment to meet”

also feels that the investigation report has not been submitted to him in full. He emphasises that he was never held to account for his behaviour until September 2022. “UM may give an explanation for this, but it is a fact,” he replies.

According to X, the number of reports filed is not five, but only two (the UM spokesperson also mentioned five at an earlier stage).

The victims believe that the actual number of victims is much higher than the number of reports; one of them adds: “Some did not want or dare to submit a formal report.”

CULTURE OF FEAR

The qualification “narcissist” was made multiple times in the interviews with *Observant*. X is said to be someone who feels “superior to others”. “He could not handle the success

of others, as if he felt threatened by it. Your success was always his success.” The professor belittled and was capricious, the victims agree, “he could fly off the handle just like that”. You could not talk about expense claims, “then he would give you what for,” one of them remembers.

“The fact that things could get that far, is a consequence of the culture of fear and the existing hierarchy,” concludes one of the victims who experienced X as a student and later on as a

young colleague. “The whole system is failing and I hope that that will change. That is why I am speaking to *Observant*. PhD students and postdocs depend on their supervisors, they have temporary contracts and are therefore in a vulnerable position. Having a good connection with your supervisor is of great importance. In order to get on, you need someone to help you. But this man mentally destroyed people and only thought of himself. No matter how hard you tried, how many hours you spent, how much you put up with, ultimately it meant nothing.

Do people know where to go with

UM set up a central point (Concerns & Complaints Point) last year where employees can go with questions and complaints about unacceptable sexual behaviour, intimidation, pestering, aggression or discrimination. They are subsequently – if they want to – referred to

someone like the ombuds person or the confidential advisor. UM has had a confidential advisor in-house for some years. Moreover, there are separate confidential advisors for PhD students at every faculty. A total of nineteen. The only external confidential advisor for



It broke me, I quit. I no longer work in the academic world, and as an outsider, I see clearer than ever how sick that culture is.” Other interviewees left their jobs at UM too. The “horrible hierarchy”, the general atmosphere and X’s behaviour played a role in this, they say.

X understands that the system has failed, “if that is the case, this should definitely change”.

COLLEAGUES

Last year, things started to happen. Why did nobody raise the alarm sooner? “You don’t dare to confide in anyone, they could be his friend, for all you know.” Another: “When he shouted at me once about something, I went to see a ‘superior’ and asked him what I should do. He literally said: ‘Let me know when you find out.’ He was troubled by it as well. Nobody wanted problems, so you

just let it happen.” Still, this ‘superior’ did eventually, months later, raise the alarm, she says.

What you also shouldn’t underestimate, someone else says, is that you keep your mouth shut for the sake of colleagues, PhD students, for example who are in the middle of their track and are dependent on the professor.

Moreover, they didn’t know where to go with their story. “I had no idea that there was a confidential advisor for PhD students.” Someone else thought that this person had a kind of advisory role, “that you could approach this person for a subsidy application”. Ultimately, they all found a listening ear in the form of a professor who openly devotes himself to social safety. “That is when the pieces of the puzzle came together,” they all agreed. They noticed “a pattern of abuse of power”.

The qualification “narcissist” was made multiple times. X is said to be someone who feels “superior to others. He could not handle the success of others, as if he felt threatened by it”

INAUGURAL LECTURE

The person they trusted, turns out to be Daniël van den Hove, professor of Neuroepigenetics at FHML, who has been arguing for a better approach to abuse of power in the academic world. Last September, he spent a part of his inaugural lecture on the subject of ‘social safety’. Not everyone was happy with that, said Van den Hove at the time in an interview with *Observant*. Prior to this lecture, he was intimidated by a colleague. He had asked Van den Hove in a threatening manner whether ‘it was such a good idea’, discussing a subject like that in a speech. Inquiries now prove that this colleague was X.

Van den Hove: “I would rather not say too much about it at this time, it is not about me. But I won’t deny it. Although it cannot compare to the partially ruined lives of immediate victims, this case has also had a tremendous impact on me and my family. The – unfortunately only – positive thing is that all of this symbolises a sign of change. For ten years, people had no faith in reporting this anywhere. Now victims finally have the courage to step forward and UM shows that such behaviour will not go unpunished.”

X denies that he intimidated Van den Hove and adds that he was “never told” that he was alleged to have done that. He does regret “greatly that persons were or are still negatively affected by his behaviour”.

APOLOGIES

“These past months were intense,” says one of the victims about the investigation by Partners in Integrity. “During the interviews, they went into all kinds of details, memories that I had suppressed. But I understand why they did it this way. It had to be done thoroughly.” The outcome was unsure up to the last moment for all those involved. “Who knows what he would have said in his defence. I consider the fact that he is being dismissed as a victory. I have been gone from the university for quite some time, but now that this is all coming out, I can really put it behind me.” He never offered an apology, they say, not even after the investigation that proved that he had gone way too far. “He doesn’t even recognise his mistakes, what a nerve.”

The professor writes that he did offer his apologies and expressed his regrets with the dean.

STRONG TOGETHER

The fact that several people were able to tell their stories, created a ‘group feeling’ – “being strong together”. “I might never have done it by myself, I’m not that much of a hero. It is a very big step to report someone, because in a manner of speaking you are also reporting against the institute, against the university.” The fear that all this may still have consequences for their careers, has not disappeared for some. This is corroborated by the fact that X is supported by various parts of the university. When the investigation started, last autumn, the professor was suspended. X says that he “was isolated from his other colleagues” and had nothing to say about the reason given for his absence, which “was determined entirely by management”. Even when the message came from the Executive Board that X had made serious mistakes, the victims noticed that some colleagues nevertheless continued to support him. “That is a pity and painful. We won’t put someone in the pillory just like that! If I had wanted to do that, I would have come up with something. Then I would not have gone through such an intensive process.”

Observant spoke with four victims. These interviews yielded an article that was submitted to the professor for a reaction (he replied in writing via his lawyer). Parts of his replies have been included in the article. His more elaborate reaction can be found in the online version.

their cases?

PhD students (not appointed by UM) is stationed with FHML. More and more facilities have also been set up for students the past few years. UM is on the right track, the victims

say. “We cannot expect the change to go quickly and flawlessly. Mistakes are made, even in this case, and the university will have to learn from them. We have a long way to go, but with this

decision the university, at any rate, has become a little safer.” Another person wonders if the complaints points are visible enough. She also feels that the subject should become the topic of dis-

cussion on a wider scale. “Give a lecture for students, tell them what is normal and what is not in the contact with fellow students as well as lecturers and where you can get help.”