

# Annual report 2023

Ombuds Officer for staff

### **Keep the alarm on the first Monday of the month going!**

*But only at TU Delft. D.I.R.E.C.T. Call to all staff.*

Make the way you as an employee perceive the behaviour of your colleague or manager a topic of conversation. Learn to do that. Have the courage to do that.

This should flow from the core values of TU Delft: diversity, integrity, respect, engagement, courage and trust, represented by the acronym 'DIRECT', and which form part of the code of conduct<sup>1</sup>.

However, codes of conduct are just words. How do you actually put them into practice? Where do you start? What exactly would you want to say? When is the right time to do so? How will that colleague respond? How might it affect the atmosphere in the department? Or worse still: how might it affect my career? Wouldn't it be better to just say nothing?

*No, that is not better!*

A good basis for social safety, and maintaining it, is something you create together. This is best done openly and through staying in contact with one another. This involves a culture change across the organisation. You can make an important contribution to this. *Take action!* Don't keep it to yourself; look for opportunities for making behaviour a topic of conversation. If you find this difficult (which is quite normal!), ask for support from another colleague, a mentor, your supervisor, or a confidential adviser, university social services or the Ombuds Officer. The social safety officers are where you can confidentially discuss the situation you are facing and get support in the process. The confidential adviser<sup>2</sup> offers a listening ear and, during conversations, mental support to the staff member.

University social services<sup>3</sup> provide coaching-based support for coping with problems relating to work and/or private life to help you as the employee to regain control of the problem you are experiencing.

The main aim of the Ombuds Officer<sup>4</sup> is to enable the parties involved (you and that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tudelft.nl/over-tu-delft/strategie/integriteitsbeleid/tu-delft-gedragcode>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tudelft.nl/over-tu-delft/strategie/integriteitsbeleid/vertrouwenspersonen/het-team>

<sup>3</sup> <https://intranet.tudelft.nl/-/bedrijfsmaatschappelijk-werker>

<sup>4</sup> <https://intranet.tudelft.nl/-/ombudsfunctionaris-personeel>

particular colleague) to reconnect and resolve the issue together. The Ombuds Officer does this by guiding mediation discussions from an independent position and adopting an impartial role.

The fact that the D.I.R.E.C.T policy can motivate individual employees to put behaviour up for discussion should not and cannot stand alone. A working environment needs to grow in which discussing behaviour becomes natural. The fact that a single employee has the courage to do so will not ensure the sustainability of D.I.R.E.C.T. though. This approach needs to become an attitude that is entrenched throughout the organisation so that, ultimately, excesses in terms of inappropriate or undesirable behaviour do not or hardly occur any longer. A joint effort is needed to achieve this. An effort that, in the Ombuds Officer's opinion, should be widely deployed and supported. Relying on good local initiatives, and these certainly exist, is not enough. If a culture change is needed on this issue, it can only happen if it is given time, it is taken seriously, awareness is created and there is a sense of incentive. Realising that the time spent on this will actually pay back in the long run, many times over. Because it saves time and energy that would otherwise be lost to resolving conflict situations in the workplace. This is where the Ombuds Officer comes in:

*The alarm on the first Monday of the month!*

Picture this: an alarm will go off across TU Delft at noon on the first Monday of every month. Without exception, all TU Delft staff will lay down their work and sit down together with their research group, team or department. For an hour. Staff will talk to each other, and this will include talking about social safety and behaviour. They will practice giving feedback as well as receiving it. Cases of undesirable behaviour and, even more particularly, desirable behaviour will be shared and discussed. The latter might very well be even more important. By starting the conversation about core values and social safety and how they are perceived within that organisational unit at research group, team or department level, you cultivate a group responsibility in which behaviour will become easier to discuss. Employees will feel supported by their closest colleagues, they will no longer feel they are alone. Besides that, colleagues see each other and feel seen, listen to each other and feel heard. This group responsibility and the creation of support for common courtesy and shared manners will also lead to undesirable behaviour becoming less common and desirable behaviour more so.

The first of these first-Monday-of-the-month meetings will probably be a little awkward. Who has the courage to say what is on their mind? People might be inclined to only skim the surface initially. Confidence will need to be fostered. It would therefore be good

if guidance is provided initially, or tools, such as TU Delft's card game<sup>5</sup>.



In an informal way, the cards provide guidance when it comes to holding a conversation between colleagues – without reference to individual cases, thoughts can be exchanged as prompted by the very useful questions in the game. It was specially conceived for TU Delft staff. The Ombuds Officer, too, likes using the game during mediation interviews if she suspects that a discussion might turn uncomfortable or falter. The card game then offers a light-hearted diversion, and it manages to break the ice. On TU Delft's LearningHub, there is an online training course, "Dealing with transgressive behaviour", which might be viewed together as a trigger for the conversation.

Effecting culture changes takes time and effort from everyone. As Ombuds Officer I can picture this future and strongly believe in the willingness of every employee to cooperate in creating an open and pleasant workplace, which is where you spend a large part of your time. Let us achieve a change of culture<sup>6</sup>!

Birgitte Peters

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<sup>5</sup>[https://intranet.tudelft.nl/documents/20147/0/TU\\_Delft\\_Leiderschap\\_Dialogospel\\_Spelbord\\_NED\\_def+%281%29.pdf/1d05db96-454e-faa9-14de-d8eecfe6c105?t=1653486674736](https://intranet.tudelft.nl/documents/20147/0/TU_Delft_Leiderschap_Dialogospel_Spelbord_NED_def+%281%29.pdf/1d05db96-454e-faa9-14de-d8eecfe6c105?t=1653486674736)

<sup>6</sup> Culture is used to mean the following here: "Set of norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions and emotions that determines how people within the TU Delft community interact with each other in a socially safe environment." (TU Delft)

### A word of thanks

I wish to thank very much all those employees who trusted me with their work-related issues, the Executive Board for giving me the trust to further implement and embed the ombuds function in the organisation, the Communication department for editing this annual report and all other colleagues for the meaningful and enjoyable conversations for the benefit of the ombuds function.

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### Literature

# 1. Ombuds Officer for Staff

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## 1.1 Introduction

The Ombuds Officer for Staff has been active at TU Delft for over two years. During this period, the Ombuds Officer observed that the governance for proper performance of the position could be improved. Bolstered by the trust of the Executive Board and the increase in hours from 19 to 28, the Officer took steps independently to achieve this. This was done by taking initiatives and sharing ideas, making adjustments where necessary. Creating the appropriate preconditions is crucial for proper performance of the position. This allows the Ombuds Officer to make an even better contribution to a pleasant and healthy working environment at TU Delft.

In this annual report, the Ombuds Officer for Staff accounts for the activities carried out in 2023. Recent developments, particularly those following the publication of Education Inspectorate report on 1 March 2024, will only be covered in the 2024 annual report.

*"Together, we make sure that TU Delft is a safe study and working environment."*

### Reading guide

The term 'report': The Ombuds Officer for Staff Regulations state that any staff member can make a 'report' to the Ombuds Officer about an issue. A report is defined as a notification that there is a particular issue within the organisation where the involvement of the Ombuds Officer is desired. In this annual report, we maintain the term 'report', albeit with certain nuances. The Ombuds Officer's involvement is high when mediation talks take place and the Ombuds Officer makes a recommendation.

The term 'submitter': The employee who files a report is referred to in the regulations as the 'submitter'. In this annual report, the (informal) term 'the employee' or 'the involved person' is generally used.

For readability:

- the neutral form (employee, person reporting), combined with the masculine form (he, him, his), was chosen as much as possible to refer to the employee he/she/they;
- for the sake of convenience, the masculine form is used for male as well as female PhD candidates;
- where Ombuds Officer is mentioned, it means Ombuds Officer for Staff;
- for the 'Staff Ombuds Officer Regulations', sometimes the term 'the regulations' or 'the Ombuds Regulations' is used;
- to make the various sections as readable as possible as separate units, some parts have been repeated in different places.

## **1.2 The Ombuds Officer: independent and impartial**

To optimally contribute to a pleasant and safe working environment at TU Delft, it is essential that the Ombuds Officer for Staff is able to operate independently. Therefore, the Ombuds Officer for Staff Regulations state that the Ombuds Officer for Staff is not managed by any body within TU Delft, and can therefore handle reports by employees in an independent, impartial manner. Impartial also means multi-partisan; all of the interests of the parties involved are considered and examined as much as possible. This is what the position of Ombuds Officer is all about: mediation. The Ombuds Officer does not represent the interests of one particular person (the employee) or another (the other colleague, the management), in the way a labour union or a lawyer would. The Ombuds Officer engages in discussions, inquires about the interests of each employee involved, investigates where and with whom the potential bottlenecks lie and explores the degree of willingness of those involved to open up to each other in order to reach a solution together. The Ombuds Officer guides this process.

## **1.3 Strictly confidential**

All contacts with the Ombuds Officer (by email, telephone and meetings) are strictly confidential. This works both ways. The person reporting is also bound by the confidentiality of what was written and said by the Ombuds Officer and others involved.

The Ombuds Officer discusses any step she feels might help resolve the issue with the person reporting first. The Ombuds Officer can only perform her mediating duties after receiving the consent of the person reporting. This duty of confidentiality is based on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, AVG in Dutch) and the Ombuds Regulations.

## **1.4 For whom?**

The Ombuds Officer works university-wide, for all faculties and all university departments. The Ombuds Officer is available to all employees, including (grant) doctoral students. Managers have the option to use the Ombuds Officer to facilitate conversations or to help them think through how best to approach a particular conflict situation.

## **1.5 When should employees turn to the Ombuds Officer?**

As soon as an employee struggles to resolve a conflict situation with another colleague or the management himself or foresees this happening, he can go to the Ombuds Officer. Preferably as soon as possible, because this increases the likelihood of working the conflict out well. No



referral (by the university health services doctor, for example) is required to make an appointment with the Ombuds Officer.

Together with the employee, the Ombuds Officer examines exactly what is going on from the employee's perspective, who the people involved are, and what seem to be the best options for resolving the issue. The Ombuds Officer discusses these options with the employee. He decides which one works best for him. The employee remains in control of his report.

### **1.6 What matters should employees take to the Ombuds Officer?**

The Ombuds Officer is available for any, or almost any, issue that disrupts or threatens to affect the working relationship. Such issues may be related to undesirable, inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour. A potentially diffuse organisational structure may play a role in disruption of labour relations.

The Ombuds Officer Regulations use the term 'issue' for problems that the employee can go to the Ombuds Officer with. This usually involves a question, dilemma, conflict or suspicion of wrongdoing regarding work, when consultation about it within the standing organisation stagnates or becomes gridlocked.

The Ombuds Officer is not authorised to handle issues for which the expertise falls under HR or legal affairs. For research integrity issues, there is the Confidential Adviser for Research Integrity. However, the Ombuds Officer does come into the picture if, for example, the communication surrounding such issues is not proceeding as it should.

The Ombuds Officer does not handle reports about situations that happened more than a year ago, as a rule, barring exceptional cases.

### **1.7 Why would employees choose the Ombuds Officer?**

#### *The mediation interview*

The Ombuds Officer's core activity is mediation. Employees can choose to approach the Ombuds Officer if they want to seek a solution with the other person through mediation. This is preceded by a confidential conversation of the Ombuds Officer with the person reporting the issue. The Ombuds Officer explains the mediation process, answers any questions the person reporting may have and then gives him time to consider whether he actually wants mediation as conflict resolution. If this is the case, the Ombuds Officer will ask in writing (by email) for permission to contact the other stakeholders. The person reporting sends the Ombuds Officer the contact details of the persons he thinks could contribute to the solution through mediation talks.

There are various types of mediation. The most straightforward form is for all parties to sit down and talk. The Ombuds Officer acts as a neutral moderator and uses intervention techniques to encourage the discussion partners to share those matters that are important to them and to investigate possible solutions. The conversation results in the discussion partners gaining a better understanding of each other's situation. Within this new situation, space can be created to work towards a mutually satisfactory outcome. Usually, one joint mediation session is sufficient. Shuttle mediation might also be applied. The Ombuds Officer opens up the lines of communication by talking to the various parties involved and aims to create connections so that the parties can move forward amongst themselves. In some cases, an informative telephone

call to the colleague or manager involved is sufficient. Here, too, the Ombuds Officer does not act until after receiving the written consent of the person reporting.

#### *Mediation by an internal Ombuds Officer*

The advantage of the internal Ombuds Officer is that employees know what to expect from the Officer's professional background and relevant knowledge and skills. In addition, the Ombuds Officer can respond quickly and appropriately to the possible influence of the person reporting's work environment on the labour dispute. The Ombuds Officer has easy access to the entire organisation and knows their way around it. From this position, they can properly assess how the conflict fits within the framework of the organisational unit and which individuals are involved. Conflicts are not necessarily just between those directly involved.

#### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality is an important aspect. Engaging with others involved in the conflict requires the employee to be willing to make himself known. If the employee is not prepared to do so, the contact with the Ombuds Officer remains strictly confidential, and the Ombuds Officer cannot intervene. In cases like this the Ombuds Officer will merely register the report. The employee always has the option of opting for mediation later.

#### *Registration of reports*

Registered reports can reveal possible patterns. This mere fact makes the arrival of the Ombuds Officer for Staff within the organisation valuable in itself. When multiple reports are received on the same issue, the Ombuds Officer takes action autonomously. This can range from having informal conversations to launching an investigation or alerting management or the Executive Board. During this process, the privacy of the people reporting remains guaranteed at all times; they are informed about it first and permission to take action on the basis on anonymity is also sought from them beforehand.

## **1.8 The Ombuds Officer for Staff's working method**

### *1.8.1 Strictly confidential*

In conflict situations, the stakes are often high for employees, or more precisely: this is often their perception of the situation. Employees have often been dealing with the stressful situation for some time before they turn to the Ombuds Officer. To give employees a sense of social safety and to reassure them that they can safely turn to the Ombuds Officer in a situation like this, the Ombuds Officer always emphasises their strict duty of confidentiality at the first contact. In turn, the Ombuds Officer also expects the employee to respect and comply with the same confidentiality.

### *1.8.2 First contact*

Employees can contact the Ombuds Officer by email or telephone. The initial brief and exploratory contact is followed by a meeting, usually within a week. The meeting takes place on campus, via MS Teams or by telephone, depending on what the employee prefers. Anonymity is guaranteed and, in this regard, the location of the appointment is important to employees. The Ombuds Officer has consulting rooms on the 5th floor of CiTG, at the end of the corridor where

the university medical service doctors, the practice support staff and university social service workers also are. The consulting room is located near the pantry of the A section, directly off lift A. This location usually meets the anonymity requirements of persons reporting. If required, the Ombuds Officer can also come to the employee's workplace or meet off-campus.

### *1.8.3 Intake meeting. Start of the mediation process. Handling of the conflict by the person reporting*

#### *Intake meeting*

Following a report, the Ombuds Officer invites the person reporting for an appointment, also known as the intake meeting. This conversation is strictly confidential. The employee is given the opportunity to explain his situation to the Ombuds Officer and tell his story. The Ombuds Officer asks clarifying questions to better understand the situation, examines the interests of the employee together with him and analyses the conflict. This way, the Ombuds Officer gets a good idea of what is going on, who is involved and what regulations, if any, apply. The Ombuds Officer can work with the employee to consider possible solutions, including mediation, which they then discuss. The Ombuds Officer explains the mediation process, answers any questions the person reporting may have and then gives him time to consider whether he actually wants mediation as a conflict resolution.

#### *Start of the mediation process*

If the employee agrees, the Ombuds Officer will ask in writing (by email) for permission to contact the other stakeholders. The employee shares the contact details of persons he thinks could contribute to the solution through mediation discussions. This starts the mediation process.

#### *Handling of the conflict by the person reporting*

An intake meeting is often sufficient to allow the employee to continue from there on under their own steam. During that discussion, awareness is often created about the conflict and the employee's position in it. As the Ombuds Officer discusses the employee's situation with him and asks questions, the employee may gain new insights and get a better understanding of his own situation. That awareness can help the employee better manage the conflict and take independent steps to deal with it. Therefore, the intake meeting is not only a first step towards mediation, but also a valuable moment for the employee to express and explore his thoughts and feelings.

Sometimes the Ombuds Officer keeps a finger on the pulse a little longer. The employee could keep the Ombuds Officer up to date regarding any follow-up, for example, or include the Ombuds Officer in email correspondence with the other involved parties.

*"The course is running smoothly again. Relationships have been restored; there is constructive cooperation again. Arrangements have been made for regular meetings to review the course and respond to and anticipate the results of the review in a timely manner. It is no longer accepted that trust be withdrawn in one fell swoop, but concerns must then have been raised in those meetings. A procedure is going to be developed that clearly describes the various roles. The Ombuds Officer's intervention and the report (which one side kept muttering about for not being clear enough) made those involved feel obliged to come to the table. The report served as a basis for starting the conversation and making clear agreements. These were officially documented."*

#### 1.8.4 Options for resolving the situation: Mediation, contributing ideas or just a listening ear?

##### Mediation

The Ombuds Officer's core activity is mediation. In the first conversation with the person reporting the issue, the Ombuds Officer explores with him whether mediation is the best option for that situation. If the person reporting opts for mediation, the Ombuds Officer asks for written permission to reach out to the other side, the other side's colleague(s) or manager(s) to whom the issues pertain. The person reporting is in charge of his process, so it is up to him to give the Ombuds Officer permission to take that next step. If for various reasons the person reporting does not want mediation, the Ombuds Officer will respect this stance. Other options are investigated with a view to possible referral.

There are various types of mediation. The Ombuds Officer:

- (after obtaining permission from the person reporting) creates openings in the communication lines with the other party; the person reporting can then move forward by himself;
- (after obtaining permission from the person reporting) inquires about the situation with the other party and reports back to the person reporting; the person reporting can then move forward by himself;

- (after obtaining permission from the person reporting) facilitates a mediation conversation around the table between the involved parties. To that end, the Ombuds Officer will have had an informative conversation with the other party to listen to his perception of the situation and to get an idea of whether mediation is appropriate.<sup>7</sup>

The informative conversations give the Ombuds Officer, who is impartial, a good overview of the different perceptions of those involved. On the basis of these, the Ombuds Officer decides whether to mediate and, if so, which intervention techniques to use to start the conversation. Everything that is said and written during mediation is covered by a duty of confidentiality, unless the discussion partners make other agreements. One mediation session is usually sufficient for the parties to move forward together again. This is occasionally followed by a second one. Sometimes working agreements are made in the mediation session. The Ombuds Officer may also write an opinion or recommendation on the basis of the Ombuds Regulations.

Sometimes a mediation session does not lead to the desired result in the sense that the parties have reached agreement on the resolution of the conflict. The talks that have taken place have been useful though; the parties have been able to communicate to each other their perspective of the situation, what their interests and wishes are and have been able to explore what the minimum conditions are for either continuing or choosing a different route. For example: Complaints Committee on Undesirable Behaviour, Arbitration Committee for Employees at TU Delft, TU Delft Complaints Procedure on Research Integrity, negotiations with HR, an external mediator (for exit mediation, for example) or a court case.

#### *Contributing ideas*

By contributing ideas or thinking along, the Ombuds Officer can create awareness by the employee regarding the conflict and the employee's position in it. As the Ombuds Officer discusses the employee's situation with him and asks questions, the employee may gain new insights and get a better understanding of his own situation. This awareness may help the employee to better handle the conflict and to take steps to deal with it independently.

#### *Just a listening ear*

If the employee values his privacy or fears consequences if it becomes known that he has approached the Ombuds Officer, just having a conversation with the Ombuds Officer is also an option. A second conversation may follow. In order to safeguard impartiality, contact with the Ombuds Officer usually stops after the second meeting. Multiple appointments with one party alone could lead to representation of individual interests, which is not the role of the Ombuds Officer. The Ombuds Officer then refers the person to, for example, an HR adviser. In a few cases, the employee appreciates it if the Ombuds Officer is copied (cc) in the email correspondence that aims to resolve the conflict. The employee may also give the Ombuds Officer feedback on the follow-up later on. The scope for the Ombuds Officer to address the issues in this situation is limited.

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<sup>7</sup>This does not involve hearing both sides, the way a complaints committee would. A complaints committee's investigation focuses on the facts, which are tested against the regulations. Legal proceedings with the Complaints Committee lead to a binding decision by the Executive Board if it is established that the person complained against is guilty of undesirable behaviour, after which a (disciplinary) measure may be imposed.

### 1.9 When is the Ombuds Officer not qualified?

The Ombuds Officer does not deal with the content side of legal questions or questions that are in the realm of HR expertise or research integrity content-wise. However, the Ombuds Officer does review whether the procedures and policies have been properly applied and have no unreasonable effects on the employee. The Ombuds Officer does not handle reports about situations that happened more than a year ago, as a rule, barring exceptional cases.

### 1.10 When should staff opt for the confidential adviser or university social services?

The confidential adviser has traditionally been a more familiar concept than the Ombuds Officer. How these positions differ is a question that is frequently asked.

Both offer confidential meetings and consider options on how best to proceed out of the conflict situation or deal with the issue. The difference lies in the role: the confidential adviser is there specifically for the individual employee, offers mental support during conversations and can help in drafting a complaint, for example. The Ombuds Officer is multi-partisan and facilitates mediation discussions to reach a solution that is best for all parties involved. University social services<sup>8</sup> offer coaching-based support for coping with problems relating to both work and private life, to help you as the employee to regain control of perceived problems.

#### *Referrals*

It is important to make it easy for employees to seek help without them having to worry about which officer to choose. We cannot expect an employee who is caught up in a conflict to comb through every detail on the intranet to find out about the differences between the two officers. That is why the confidential advisers and the Ombuds Officer have agreed to refer the employee if the other officer is a better fit. Referral based on the employee's needs is a good way to ensure they get the right support to suit their situation and preferences. It is ultimately up to the employee to decide which approach he think suits him best.

The university health services doctor may recommend mediation to the employer in the event of an employee's reintegration or work-related stress complaints.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://intranet.tudelft.nl/-/bedrijfsmaatschappelijk-werker>

## 2. Awareness of the Ombuds Officer within TU Delft

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### 2.1 Digitally

A separate page was added to the intranet (in two languages) for the Ombuds Officer<sup>9</sup>. Some faculties and departments also mentioned the Ombuds Officer in their newsletters. The Ombuds Officer was initially difficult to find via the intranet. This was improved during 2023, among others through the keywords provided by the Ombuds Officer and suggestions for listing additional links on the intranet.

### 2.2 In person

In order to increase the Ombuds Officer's visibility and communicate the Officer's approachability and accessibility as well as possible, the Ombuds Officer actively contacted several groups within TU Delft in 2023. These were fruitful and enjoyable meetings of introduction and presentation during which questions about the position were answered. The parties visited include university social services staff, Chair of the Board for Doctorates, deans, Delft Women in Science (DEWIS), directors of University Services, Diversity & Inclusion (D&I), Faculty Graduate School coordinators, Faculty PhD councils, Faculty secretaries, Health Safety & Environment (HSE), Safety and Security Department, Chairman of the Integrity Board, secretarial office of the Complaints Committee on Undesirable Behaviour (KOG), Knowledge Safety, Trade Unions Local Consultation Body, Management Team (MT) of faculties, Employee Participation, Aerospace Engineering Mentor meeting, Mobility, Personnel Committees of the employee consultation body, (the chair of) the Works Council, the team of student psychologists, University Graduate School (UGS), University PhD council (UPC), confidential advisers, internal Safety, Health, Welfare & Environment (VGWM).

In this way, the Ombuds Officer is developing knowledge of the culture of the organisation, the different faculties and the various university departments. These meetings help the Ombuds Officer to be able to put reports into the organisational context in order to effectively facilitate the mediation process. Mediation requires customisation, as each case is unique.

## 3. Internal and external contacts

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### 3.1 Internal

In order to shape the social safety infrastructure from the Ombuds Officer's position as effectively as possible, the Ombuds Officer has established cooperation with the confidential advisers and staff of university social services. Currently, however, this cooperation is on an adhoc basis and limited to a few confidential advisers. Structured consultation and a coordinator on behalf of the confidential advisers would be desirable to get a more complete picture of social safety and to be able to act effectively where possible patterns emerge.

Where possible patterns of undesirable behaviour by staff towards students emerged, the Ombuds Officer for Staff could contact the Ombuds Officer for Students confidentially. Of course, while guaranteeing the anonymity of those involved.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://intranet.tudelft.nl/-/ombudsfunctionaris-personeel>

### 3.2 External contacts

The Ombuds Officer is a member of the Vereniging Ombudsmannen in het Hoger Onderwijs (Association of Ombuds Officers in Higher Education, VOHO). The objectives of this association include promoting the expertise and effectiveness of Ombuds Officers in their work and increasing knowledge, improving skills, and the pursuit of professional practice of ombuds work in education. The association's members meet quarterly. The Ombuds Officer is also a member of the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE), an international association and informal network for Ombuds Officers in higher education. During the year under review, the Ombuds Officer also became a member of the Right of Complaint Association (Vereniging voor Klachtrecht). Previous work experience has resulted in the Ombuds Officer maintaining informal contacts with the Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Hague University of Applied Sciences and the Judicial system Netherlands.

## 4. Professionalisation

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In 2023, the Ombuds Officer started an Organisation Science module in order to arrive at a broader view of the dynamics of labour conflicts, more particularly adopting a systemic approach. This approach offers a deeper understanding of how conflicts between involved parties arise and which interventions are most appropriate. Several study days facilitated by the Association of Ombuds Officers in Higher Education (VOHO) were attended, including ones on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the investigative powers of the Ombuds Officer. The Ombuds Officer has a private practice as an employment mediator, and in that capacity she attended a master class in Business Mediation at the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Institute in Amsterdam and various webinars through the Nederlandse Mediatorsvereniging (Dutch Mediators Association, NMV).

In addition, the Ombuds Officer attended online and other training courses through TU Delft, such as R&D Future-oriented Development Interviews and Empathic Communication. The Right of Complaint Association offers meetings aimed at professionalisation of the handling of complaints through meetings and study afternoons.

The Ombuds Officer is also a member of three peer review groups, including one international one, in which other experienced Ombuds Officers for Staff in higher education participate. Moreover, the Ombuds Officer maintains regular contact with colleagues from other universities to exchange experiences about the ombuds function and possible approaches to cases. The anonymity of data subjects is guaranteed at all times.

## 5. Support for the Ombuds Officer for Staff

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In 2023, the Ombuds Officer was supported by a part-time management assistant.



## 6. Reports to the Ombuds Officer for Staff

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### 6.1 Number of reports

In 2023, the trend that began in late 2022 continued: cases became more complex both at the process level and in terms of content and number of people involved. And the number of doctoral candidates turning to the Ombuds Officer continued to rise.

The Ombuds Officer received 101 reports in 2023. The handling of these reports ranged from a single conversation to mediation. There were referrals too, for example, to confidential advisers, the faculty contract manager, HR, the Complaints Committee on Undesirable Behaviour, the Arbitration Committee for Employees and the Board for Doctorates. In a number of cases, the Ombuds Officer decided not to take on an issue due to not feeling qualified to do so. Of the reports, nine dated from 2022, while 14 other reports have not yet been finalised and will continue in 2024. One case has been ongoing since 2022.

As for the identification of persons reporting, there is no significant difference between the number of those identifying as female and those identifying as male; the ratio is about fifty-fifty. The Ombuds Officer was sensitive to cultural values and norms where these played a part.

*"I appreciate the accessibility of the ombuds officer, presence, and hearing ear. Also, her time to time requests for updates and offers for help were commendable. I further appreciate her calm yet professional manner of in-person communication that provides a safe environment for the employee to talk and share."*

### Number of reports for 2023

Notes to the table: The number of reports per faculty should be viewed in a nuanced way. A higher number may indicate a greater willingness to address conflicts by engaging the Ombuds Officer, resulting in a report as shown below. A lower number of reports may indicate different or internal ways of dealing with conflicts. A complete overview of reports by faculty is not available.

Faculty / Support department, 2023.	Total number of persons reporting 2022	Total number of persons reporting 2023	Academic Staff 2022	Academic Staff 2023	PhD 2022	PhD 2023	Support staff 2022	Support staff 2022
University Services	18	23	-	-	-	-	18	23
EEMCS	13	7	8	2	3	3	2	2
IDE	9	8	8	7	1	1	-	0
ME (3mE):	9	8	-	3	2	1	7	4
A+BE	7	11	7	8	-	3	-	0
TPM	2	6	1	4	1	2	1	0
CEG	2	5	1	5	-	0	1	0
AS/QuTech/RID	21	18	7	10	3	3	10	5
AE	5	7	1	2	4	2	-	3
Other	5	8		-		-		-
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>41</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>37</b>

Faculteit / Dienst	WP/OP Totaal	Totaal aantal melders WP/OP	WP	OP	Percentage
UD	4621	23	0	23	0,50%
EWI	1332	4	2	2	0,30%
IO	561	7	7	0	1,25%
ME (3mE)	1431	7	3	4	0,49%
BK	1422	8	8	0	0,56%
TBM	673	4	4	0	0,59%
CiTG	1445	5	5	0	0,35%
TNW / Qtech	2132	15	10	5	0,70%
LR	812	5	2	3	0,62%
Overig		8			
<b>Totalen</b>	<b>14429*</b>	<b>86</b>			<b>0,60%</b>
Faculteit	PhD's totaal	Totaal aantal melders PhD	Niet betaald	Betaald	Percentage
EWI	789	3	282	557	0,38%
IO	145	1	73	82	0,69%
ME (3mE)	553	1	176	411	0,18%
BK	279	3	193	99	1,08%
TBM	260	2	117	157	0,77%
CiTG	667	0	359	341	0%
TNW / Qtech	631	3	162	505	0,48%
LR	390	2	161	247	0,51%
<b>Totalen</b>	<b>3714*</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1523</b>	<b>2399</b>	<b>0,40%</b>

\* An employee may have multiple appointments (paid as well as unpaid) at TU Delft. In the totals, this employee is counted only once.

## 6.2 Description of the reports

The table below gives an indication of the issues among staff of TU Delft in terms of the perceived work situation. From this table, no unequivocal conclusions can be drawn about the actual facts. After all, establishing the truth or giving an opinion on facts and circumstances the way a court or complaints committee does is not the Ombuds Officer's job. The Ombuds Officer acts on the basis of the individual perspectives presented by those involved, and in so doing, together with those involved, looks to identify their interests and subsequently to find options for reaching a solution satisfactory to them. What the parties involved themselves identify as important is leading for the Ombuds Officer.

As to the numerical indication: where there may have been a pattern in an individual case, the Ombuds Officer explored it.

One report can be described in different ways when there are several aspects that play a role in the conflict. It was decided not to let a report fall into more than two descriptions.

Description of the report	More detailed description of the report
<p>Unsafe working environment, social insecurity - manager's undesirable behaviour experienced by the employee</p>	<p>Perceived undesirable behaviour such as bullying, harassment, abuse of power, being ignored, discrimination as a dissenter, prolonged conflicts within a team.</p> <p>Example of perceived abuse of power: the employee perceives a threat of dismissal due to the manner of communication.</p> <p>Example of perceived bullying behaviour: interview report not sent (or not on time).</p> <p>Example of perceived harassment: after trying to discuss the situation, the employee only sees the situation worsen.</p> <p>Example of feeling ignored: the employee does not get a response to their request for help.</p>
<p>Unsafe working environment, lack of social safety - employee's perception of being unfairly treated by the manager</p>	<p>Sense of not being heard/seen, sense of not being taken seriously, personal situation being belittled.</p> <p>Perception of being unfairly treated due to difference in hierarchy.</p> <p>Employee is not informed about discussions held while on leave.</p> <p>Miscommunication about where information does/does not end up.</p> <p>Employee is caught off guard by the content of the discussion / the presence of other discussion partner; no (or no timely) communication.</p> <p>Employee caught off guard by the negative performance appraisal.</p>

<p>Unsafe work environment, lack of social safety - showing insufficient leadership</p>	<p>Manager does not act adequately, or not in time, on the conflict or latent conflict, causing the conflict between employees or with management to escalate, cooperation within the team/with other teams to fail.</p> <p>Complaint(s) or complainant(s) will not be made known to the party accused.</p> <p>No impartial investigation of the complaints. Both sides not heard.</p> <p>New manager deviates from existing agreements made with the employee.</p> <p>Interview report does not match what was said. Interview report doesn't materialise/is late/too late.</p>
<p>Unsafe working environment, lack of social safety - employee's perception of manager's behaviour towards direct colleagues</p>	<p>Statements made by a colleague in violation of diversity and inclusiveness (including discrimination).</p> <p>Intimidation (two against one), gossiping, exclusion (not being asked to join during breaks), bullying (on the (incorrect) use of the Dutch language), discrimination, passive-aggressive language (placing blame on the other person), verbal attack (raising voice in front of other colleagues), victim blaming (placing the cause/blame of the undesirable behaviour on the person experiencing it).</p> <p>Stalking. Being bossy.</p>
<p>Doctoral candidate* has issues with supervisor(s)</p>	<p>Communication problems such as lack of clarity on the reason for the postponement of the GO/NO meeting. Relational problems and unclear expectations. Lack of trust. Perception of process regarding the NO-GO decision being unfair.</p> <p>Bullying behaviour such as non-compliance with agreements made for meetings, failure to provide feedback (on time), insufficient adherence to the doctoral candidates development cycle.</p> <p>Denigrating remarks in private.</p> <p>Doctoral student feels unsafe in contact with supervisor(s). Perception of threat of dismissal, perceived lack of objective guidance, feedback and improvement plans.</p>

Doctoral candidates and legislation and regulations	<p>Interpretation of contract.</p> <p>Question regarding possible additional allowance by TU Delft on awarded foreign PhD scholarship.</p> <p>Question on the deadline for reviewing the draft dissertation (the Doctoral Regulations).</p> <p>Extension of doctoral programme affected by Covid-19.</p> <p>Inadequate adherence to the doctoral candidates development cycle.</p> <p>Doctoral candidate caught off guard by the negative performance appraisal.</p>
Supervisor(s) has/have issues with doctoral student	<p>Communication problems due to personality differences.</p> <p>Supervisor(s) do not feel safe due to allegations related to undesirable behaviour.</p> <p>Disrupted communication for various reasons.</p>
Employee-manager relationship	<p>Communication problems regarding the scope of the position and the PhD that was promised.</p> <p>Employee's trust in supervisor has disappeared because supervisor suggests external mediation to employee.</p> <p>Miscommunication and mistrust due to not or no longer sitting down together to talk.</p> <p>Feeling hampered in participation.</p>
Cooperation	<p>Patent application.</p> <p>Team.</p>
Functioning, career development, promotion.	<p>Both sides not heard.</p> <p>Difficult communication.</p> <p>Opaque procedure.</p> <p>Receiving insufficient information.</p>
Sick employee, reintegration	<p>Sense of not being taken seriously.</p> <p>Disagreement regarding development plan.</p> <p>Lack of clarity on reintegration process.</p>
Legal status of employee	<p>Agreements on working hours, non-reasoned and unreasonable decision.</p> <p>Inadequate communication regarding a decision to be made or already taken.</p>

	<p>Perception of being confronted with a choice. Feeling pressurised to decide within a set deadline.</p> <p>Entering into/implementation of contract on cooperation.</p> <p>New ACT and permitted leave policy.</p> <p>Explanation of collective labour agreement provisions and expectations raised.</p> <p>Non-fulfilment of agreements following legal dispute regarding primary terms of employment.</p> <p>Concerns about the appointment and quality assurance of certain committees. Lack of transparency in compliance with procedures.</p> <p>Changes within the organisation do/do not constitute restructuring. Legal status of staff.</p> <p>Perceived lack of support in finding another job.</p> <p>Fixed-term employment contract expires while other expectations were raised.</p> <p>Lack of clarity on part-time appointment options.</p> <p>Long, opaque procedure regarding job classification or promotion.</p> <p>Lack of clarity regarding the range of tasks.</p> <p>Temporary replacement of colleague without associated facilities.</p> <p>Temporary contract is renewed several times but not converted into permanent contract.</p> <p>Conversation takes a different turn (about legal status) that the employee could not have prepared for.</p>
Pressure of work, workload	Overload due to other colleagues dropping out.
R&D meeting	Meeting report incorrect.
Informative	About mediation.
Other	<p>Problems with laptop.</p> <p>Opportunities to travel by train instead of plane as a sustainability measure.</p> <p>Climate in work rooms and available work rooms.</p>

Undesirable behaviour of an external partner towards a TU Delft staff member.
Objection to plans to replace the Coffeestar in the Library with a Starbucks.
External party perceives the working climate to be unsafe during the making of a documentary.
Guest of TU Delft does not have access to certain TU Delft facilities.
External party behaves unethically towards a TU Delft staff member.
Reimbursement for travel expenses and overnight stay promised to job applicant but not received.
Membership of the Works Council.
Stigmatising.

### 6.3 The duration of settlement

While, in 2022, most reports had a short turnaround time, from a few days to a few weeks, in 2023 the turnaround time had increased. This was mainly due to the increased complexity of cases, both at the process level and in terms of content, and the greater number of people involved.

### 6.4 Results

Mediation is not always appropriate for fully resolving all types of conflict, especially if the situation has been going on for a long time (years) or if there is an unclear (local) organisational structure. In such cases, intervention by the Ombuds Officer can be used to clarify the positions and interests of all those involved in the conflicting situation. During the mediation process, the employees involved can express themselves to each other, which can lead to a better understanding of each other's perspectives and what everyone's wishes, interests and limits are. This, in turn, may bring to light other appropriate solutions. The Ombuds Officer analyses each conflict with the parties involved on this point.

Successful mediation	11
No joint resolution after mediation	6
Closed after an intervention other than mediation by the Ombuds Officer	47
Referrals	18
Issues transferred to 2024	15
Other	4
Total	101



## **Notes to the Results table**

### Successful mediation

Mediation by the Ombuds Officer is considered successful when a resolution of the conflict has been arrived at, the staff members are talking to each other again, they are able to resume work together and cooperation between these staff members has been normalised again. In addition, the success of mediation is also measured by the fact that agreements reached before on, for example, dissertation defence, permanent employment, number of timetable hours, adequate adherence to the doctoral cycle and retaining a position are carried out after all. The result of mediation may also be to grant the employee's wish to take up another position within TU Delft. This can be an effective solution that improves the work situation for all involved.

### No joint resolution after mediation

In five cases, the mediation did not lead to a joint resolution, but it did yield greater clarity regarding the positions of the various discussion partners. This allowed follow-up steps to be taken, both by management and the employee himself. Since this is the point where the Ombuds Officer's role ends, the further course of these cases was not observed. In two cases, the distance between the parties was not lessened, due to the profound distrust that had developed, which could no longer be resolved through mediation. Those cases often involved a protracted conflict lasting years. Earlier intervention would certainly have helped. For this reason, the Ombuds Officer encourages parties to pay attention and time to incipient conflicts. Early on, a conflict can still be channelled and you can prevent employee(s) dropping out and the conflict having a negative impact on close colleagues. The Ombuds Officer would be happy to collaborate on this.

### Closed after an intervention other than mediation by the Ombuds Officer

Other interventions include shuttle mediation, where the Ombuds Officer shuttles between the parties to exchange information and clarify the situation. In addition, the Ombuds Officer offers confidential interviews as a listening ear, where the person reporting can tell their story in a confidential setting. Another possibility is temporary involvement without active intervention, where the Ombuds Officer allows the person reporting to decide for themselves if and when further action, such as mediation, should be taken. In some cases, persons reporting wanted to consider mediation options first, while in other cases no further response followed after the initial contact.

### *What exactly is shuttle mediation?*

Shuttle mediation is a form of mediation in which, at the request of the person reporting, the Ombuds Officer enters into a conversation with the other party to present the situation and see what is going on exactly. The Ombuds Officer acts as an intermediary, carrying information back and forth between the parties involved. The information obtained is then fed back to the person reporting. In most cases, this information is enough for the person reporting to bring the conflict to a close or to take further steps on their own.

### Referrals

In 18 cases, the Ombuds Officer referred the person reporting. This referral was usually preceded by confidential one-to-one meetings with the Ombuds Officer during which a clear picture of the situation was obtained together with the person reporting in order to be able to

provide appropriate options for help. When the issue was beyond the expertise of the Ombuds Officer, referrals were made to, among others: the Faculty Graduate School Officer, HSE adviser, the (PhD) mentor or university health services doctor/practice nurse. The Ombuds Officer referred persons reporting to the confidential adviser if they sought individual support in dealing with their case or if they only sought a listening ear and did not want mediation. Sometimes mediation was rejected because the person reporting felt the risk was too great, when for example they feared negative consequences for their further career or that they would not be given approval for their thesis by the supervisor(s) in order to obtain a PhD. If the person reporting wanted a formal pronouncement on their situation, they were referred to the Complaints Committee on Undesirable Behaviour, the Arbitration Committee for Employees or the Board for Doctorates, for example.

#### Issues transferred to 2024

Fifteen cases have been carried forward to the year 2024. Most of these cases require more time because of their complexity or because clarity on exactly what is involved still needs to be obtained. Some cases had just started at the end of 2023. In addition, there are four cases in which the Ombuds Officer is involved in general investigations into social security.

*“My overall experience is very positive and I fully support the ombuds officer establishment at TU Delft as this is a way to solve issues in the working environment without escalation.”*

## 7. How did the employees perceive the Staff Ombuds Officer?

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### The Ombuds Officer

The Ombuds Officer may ask the employee for feedback afterwards. The Ombuds Officer understands that staff can sometimes be reluctant to give feedback, possibly because of a sense of dependency. Moreover, there is general and understandable fatigue when it comes to the volume of evaluation forms, not only those of the Ombuds Officer but also other evaluation requests. A few staff responses can be found in this annual report. Staff also had the opportunity to indicate areas for improvement. Sometimes there was disappointment when the Ombuds Officer, who is bound by the Ombuds Regulations, indicated not being able to handle the case, or because, apart from a listening ear, she could not be of further significance when the person reporting wanted to keep their report confidential. Without the consent of the person reporting, the Ombuds Officer cannot intervene. Expectation management was difficult in some cases, especially where the Ombuds Officer was seen as a last straw. In those cases, the Ombuds Officer explained as well as possible what could and could not be expected, and what the employee's options might be through other channels, which meant that the decisions of the person reporting remained leading.

### The social safety system at TU Delft

A few staff members provided feedback on the social safety system at TU Delft.

- "As an employee, sometimes I do not know my rights, especially when an employee is from a foreign country. Therefore, reminding the rights of the employees would be very helpful to make more informed decisions about the next steps. Additionally, not all the mechanisms that the ombuds officer can offer to support the employee are clear. Knowing this will help especially in cases where the employee has concerns about whether to approach the ombuds officer or not. Further, more visibility, I mean in such a way that employees would know that there is an ombuds officer, will be helpful in general."

- "I wondered what would have happened if one of the participants had declined. Even if escalation is possible, being seen as a troublemaker for demanding my rights wouldn't be helpful. In this way, mediation might seem like a powerless instrument, but that seems to be more of a broad systematic issue."

*"I am very grateful for the help of the ombuds officer and the outcome. There are no longer any debates about whether I am fit for this job or capable of graduating. It felt like the ombuds officer were the first to take this to a serious level."*

*"The conversation was pleasantly led by the ombuds officer, there was a clear structure, which helped the conversation."*

## 8. Observations, findings and recommendations

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It is the task of the Ombuds Officer to focus attention on situations where things are not going well and to contribute to a good and safe working environment by applying their expertise. The recommendations previously made for 2022 remain valid and are considered to be repeated here. In addition, the Ombuds Officer makes the following recommendations based on the experience gained in 2023.

*At noon on the first Monday of every month: All TU Delft staff will sit down together with their research group, team or department.*

This recommendation is related to the foreword of this annual report, in which the importance of such meetings is explained and guidance is provided.

The Ombuds Officer recommends that the Executive Board starts actively supporting these conversations and creates opportunities for them (or has this done) across the university. The Ombuds Officer is willing to contribute ideas about how these conversations could best be fleshed out.

*Annual report data on social safety*

An anonymous, systematic recording and processing of reports regarding social safety is lacking. This makes it difficult to observe any trends and address them. The Ombuds Officer advises the Administrative Office to have software developed to systematically aggregate data from the various annual reports relating to social safety in an anonymous way. I&IC could develop software and ICT could manage it.

*Cooperation with social safety officers*

Structured consultation with confidential advisers, university social services and university health services doctors/practice nurses, as well as the appointment of a coordinating confidential adviser, is desirable. This would give us a more complete picture of social safety within TU Delft and allow us to act effectively where possible patterns emerge.

The Ombuds Officer advises the Administrative Office to pay attention to this.

*Local organisational structure.*

The Ombuds Officer noticed in a number of cases that where labour relations were disrupted a diffuse organisational structure at the local level played a role. When the structure of an organisation is unclear, roles, responsibilities and lines of communication can become blurred. This can lead to confusion, uncertainty and conflicts between employees and managers, and between employees themselves. Situations like this may result in reports being made to the Ombuds Officer. The Ombuds Officer recommends that management pay attention to this and ensure a clear and transparent organisational structure to promote a healthy and effective

working environment.

### *Communications*

Managers may find it difficult to speak out against an employee. It is likely that this is due to an excess of empathy by the manager for the employees (one or both), which results in a perpetuation of the situation of conflict. Lack of action or inadequate action can create a sense of social insecurity among employees, including for their immediate working environment. This situation can lead to reports such as perceived unfairness, arbitrariness and harassment being made to the Ombuds Officer. In such cases, the Ombuds Officer advises managers to take the time and calm that is needed to act appropriately and, if this is needed, seek support in this endeavour.

### *Relationship between supervisory team and doctoral student*

The ombudsperson noted that supervisors sometimes have difficulty with the working methods or attitudes of doctoral students, which they perceive as too independent, and do not know how to put their finger on it. This is partly due to the time pressure of the doctoral programme and of supervising other doctoral students, in many cases several of them. In such cases, this can lead to deterioration of both the working relationship (e.g. no longer reviewing papers, or not on time) and the personal relationship (lack of interest in the doctoral student personally). This has an impact on the doctoral student and can result in a downward spiral in the relationship that is difficult to repair. It is therefore important to intervene in a timely manner in case of possible stumbling blocks in the doctoral programme to prevent drop-out or delay and get the doctoral programme back on track. If necessary, the Ombuds Officer can be used to mediate in order to reestablish communication.

The Ombuds Officer advises supervisors to:

- be alert to incipient awkwardness in the relationship with the doctoral student,
- proactively seek support from the Graduate School<sup>10</sup> when communication problems and other challenges threaten to arise in the PhD process.

The Ombuds Officer advises the Graduate School to actively bring the available support options to the supervisory team's attention, as these may not be known or people may not recognise the need for them.

### *Peer mediation*

Approaching the social safety officers appears to be just a bit too big a step for some employees, and they therefore wait too long or refrain from taking it after all. It would therefore be a helpful addition if there were a somewhat more accessible and informal form of help at research-group or departmental level. One of the possibilities is peer mediation by colleagues. Peer mediation at work can be compared to first aid (for Accidents and Emergencies). Just as employees are trained as first aiders to provide first aid in the event of physical injuries or emergencies, employees could be trained as peer mediators to provide first aid in the event of interpersonal conflicts in the workplace. Prompt action can prevent the further escalation of conflicts. Peer mediation has the added benefit that it can help build a sense of community within the research group or department and strengthen the social skills of employees.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://intranet.tudelft.nl/-/graduate-school?p\\_i\\_back\\_url=%2Fa-z-informatiepaginas%3Fletter%3Dg](https://intranet.tudelft.nl/-/graduate-school?p_i_back_url=%2Fa-z-informatiepaginas%3Fletter%3Dg)

The Ombuds Officer recommends that the Administrative Office consider this. The Ombuds Officer is willing to contribute ideas or think along and contribute to the implementation of peer mediation.

*"The mediation process, in general, was a success, and it appears that my promotion is well on its way. As an employee from a foreign country, sometimes I do not know my rights. Therefore, reminding the rights of the employees would be very helpful to make more informed decisions about the next steps. Additionally, not all the mechanisms that the ombuds officer can offer to support the employee are clear. Knowing this will help especially in cases where the employee has concerns about whether to approach the ombuds officer or not. Further, more visibility, I mean in such a way that employees would know that there is an ombuds officer, will be helpful in general."*

### In conclusion

The Ombuds Officer encourages staff to view differences as normal and to regard them with curiosity. This could be an important step towards an inclusive and enriching work environment, especially in a diverse community like that at TU Delft. Discussing differences can lead to growth and better cooperation, even when conflicts arise. Differences in working methods, socio-cultural backgrounds or personalities sometimes only become apparent due to the conflict. In this way conflict may result in new forms of cooperation. The Ombuds Officer emphasises the importance of timely contact to be able to address problems and points out that early intervention can prevent energy-guzzling and stressful periods. A brief e-mail to the Ombuds Officer requesting an appointment will suffice. The employee example from the 2022 annual report aptly illustrates how mediation can lead to unexpectedly simple resolutions of seemingly complex situations:

*"It still seems odd, how we can work and talk at cross purposes as colleagues to such an extent that we can't figure things out anymore. Through mediation, I have now learned that some colleagues really won't understand you until you spell everything out for them. I had no idea that the solution could be that simple."*

It is important for all employees to have the opportunity to continue their development in a healthy and safe working environment.

## Sources

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### Useful links:

- Ombuds officer for staff: [Ombuds officer for staff - Intranet \(tudelft.nl\)](#)
- Landing page on intranet Social safety: [Sociale veiligheid](#)
- For doctoral candidates: [Promotiereglement 2023](#) (Article 20 Mediation)
- Confidential advisers: [Vertrouwenspersonen](#)
- University social services: [Bedrijfsmaatschappelijk werk](#)
- Complaints Committee on Undesirable Behaviour: [Klachtencommissie ongewenst gedrag](#)
- Arbitration Committee for Employees at TU Delft: [Geschillencommissie werknemers TU Delft](#)
- TU Delft Regulation on Complaints about Academic Integrity: [Klachtenregeling wetenschappelijke integriteit TU Delft](#)
- TU Delft Regulations for Reporting Misconduct: [Regeling melding onregelmatigheden TU Delft](#)
- Whistleblower Protection Act: [Klokkenluidersregeling](#)