

Annual report 2023

Ombuds Officer for students

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1 Introduction

We are proud to present the 2023 annual report of the ombuds officer for students at TU Delft.

The year 2023 was marked by an investigation by the Inspectorate of Education into social safety at TU Delft. At the time that this annual report was completed, the investigation report had already been published and announcements are being made regarding initial activities which are intended to generate organisation-wide input which can then be used to improve social safety.

Although the report mainly focuses on the situation of TU Delft staff members, students feel it is important that they are also involved in this process and they have since been invited to participate. This is the right decision because social safety is not just a matter for staff, but also for students.

Students have also offered to share ideas and many of them have been working hard with TU staff members and other organisations in recent years to bring about improvements for all students, whether affiliated to associations or not, in areas such as (sexually) transgressive behaviour, inclusion and welfare. Adopting an innovative and creative approach has meant that numerous steps have already been taken in the form of, for example, campaigns, covenants and workshops. As TU Delft faces the challenge of (further) shaping and implementing a major social innovation within its own organisation, students can make a meaningful contribution with their experiences and fresh perspective. Cooperation and co-creation will strengthen the connection between all groups within TU Delft.

One of the objectives of the ombuds officer for students is to improve that connection using case studies. If a conflict can be resolved in a particular case, questions can be answered or solutions found, that all contributes to the connection between students and their programme, or between students themselves. This will sometimes involve matters of social safety, but more often it will relate to issues concerning the application of rules and policies.

In this annual report, the ombuds officer for students explains the work performed in 2023. It was a year in which 17 students submitted reports, two anonymous reports were received and the ombuds officer was asked to express an opinion in a number of cases. These reports are discussed in chapter 3. Before that, chapter 2 briefly outlines the role of the ombuds officer for students at TU Delft. Chapter 4 contains several

reflections and recommendations following the cases and themes that emerged in 2023. Finally, the report lists action points for 2024 and discusses the professional training the ombuds officer underwent during the course of the year.

Wherever this annual report refers to the ombuds officer, this should be interpreted as a reference to the ombuds officer for students.

2 The ombuds officer for students

2.1 The ombuds officer for students at TU Delft

Students can report to the ombuds officer for students at TU Delft about policies that have an undesirable or unfair effect, about undesirable behaviour, or about incorrect or unfair treatment by an official, a student or a university body. The word 'report' has various different meanings and encompasses a wide array of signals and signs, complaints and other expressions of dissatisfaction.

The ombuds officer is independent and does not answer to any TU Delft body. Consultations with the ombuds officer are confidential.

A FAQ document for students and others was compiled in 2023 and contains practical information about the work of the ombuds officer. It provides an explanation of what the ombuds officer job entails and the methods used. It also explains the differences when compared with the role of confidential advisors. This FAQ document has been published on the TU Delft website¹. The 2022 annual report can also be found there.

The ombuds officer can be found on the 12th floor of the EWI building. An appointment can be made with her directly by sending an email to C.G.M.Wensveen@tudelft.nl, or by telephoning her on +31 (0)6-43213534.

2.2 The evolving role of the ombuds officer

As mentioned previously in the 2022 annual report, people's thoughts on the role and task of the ombuds officer are evolving. The annual report also stated that the role of the student ombuds officer would be reviewed.

Following a pilot for a staff ombuds officer at universities, the Universities of the Netherlands bureau developed a University Job Classification profile in 2021. That University Job Classification profile is also intended to provide a basis for the role of the student ombuds officer. The current regulations for the student ombuds officer were drafted from a different perspective and by 2023 they had not yet been updated.

Despite that, the ombuds officer and others have continued to reflect on the interpretation of the role. With this in mind, one of the steps taken was to compare various regulations for ombuds officers at other institutions. The formulation of new ideas was further aided by the growing experience with case histories which generated a better insight into the issues that arise in practice. Everyone is currently waiting for the

¹ *Role of the ombuds officer (Ombudsfunctie)*. (undated). TU Delft <https://www.tudelft.nl/over-tu-delft/strategie/ombudsfunctie>

outcome of a system analysis, which is being carried out within TU Delft, of the functioning and coherence of the entire reporting structure and welfare system, and this includes the confidential advisors and ombuds officers. The ombuds officer expects the outcome of this system analysis to provide useful insights which can then be used to configure the regulations and develop a description of the work carried out by the ombuds officer. In the opinion of the ombuds officer it is important for the new regulations to focus on the unique characteristics and themes of the target group of students. Given that these may (partially) differ from those of the staff target group, a unique interpretation of the role may be required.

The ombuds officer was interested to observe a particular trend over the past year, whereby more and more higher education institutions are appointing their own student ombuds officers. These institutions are creating separate ombuds officer roles by appointing one for students and one for staff. This is now the case at Leiden University, Delft University of Technology, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences in Leeuwarden, Utrecht University, Eindhoven University of Technology, Radboud University in Nijmegen and the VU Amsterdam. These student ombuds officers started a separate national peer performance group called The Peer Performance Group of Student Ombuds Officers 24 (*Intervisiegroep Ombudsfunctionarissen voor studenten, IOS24*).

The student ombuds officer expects this development to start providing an additional impetus which will help shape the role of the student ombuds officer, which will be tailored to characteristics that are relevant for the target group.

2.3 Internal contacts and activities

The ombuds officer also conducted a certain number of introductory consultations with TU Delft students and staff members in 2023. This is a continuous process. Among other things the ombuds officer met with a team of academic counsellors, the Diversity & Inclusion department and the board of InterDelft, which is the umbrella organisation of international student associations.

The ombuds officer participated in activities such as attending the kick-off of Accessibility week and the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion week, as well as in the autism experience circuit, a Talk that Talk game, and Time Out's Safe Space interactive performance.

The ombuds officer has regular meetings with staff from, among others, Education & Student Affairs, the Central Complaints Desk, the Diversity and Inclusion department, the Integrity Office and the Community liaison officer. Several times a year a consultation is also held with the EB's student affairs portfolio holder and the ombuds officer attends student council public consultation meetings.

In the spring of 2023 the ombuds officer relocated to the 12th floor of the high-rise Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science (EEMCS) building. She is now located on the same floor as the staff of the Integrity Office and the Diversity & Inclusion Office. This has made it easier to get to know and intensify the contact with these staff members. The ombuds officer has found this to be particularly positive and inspiring because these staff members have expertise and enthusiasm in abundance. The theme-based exchange of ideas, which comes naturally when working on the same corridor, is resulting in the cross-pollination of policy and execution and a deepening of knowledge and insights. The same can be said of the contacts with the confidential advisors, now that the ombuds officer is able to participate in the consultations and peer-to-peer learning meetings on a more regular basis and also maintain contact with them outside of these sessions.

2.4 External contacts and activities

The ombuds officer maintained regular contact with colleagues from other universities in 2023, for example by participating in consultations organised for ombuds officers by the Universities of the Netherlands bureau. The ombuds officer is a member of the Association of Ombudsmen in Higher Education (*Vereniging Ombudsmannen in het Hoger Onderwijs*, VOHO). Together with the staff ombuds officer, the student ombuds officer facilitated the members' meeting on 1 June 2023, which was held on the TU Delft campus. The ombuds officer assumed the role of secretary to the VOHO Board in 2023 and has since joined the VOHO Board in this capacity (as of March 2024). In collaboration with several other VOHO members, the ombuds officer also prepared a response to the draft of Mariëtte Hamer's recommendations to the outgoing Minister of Education on addressing sexual transgressive behaviour in higher education.

3 Reports to student ombuds officer: figures for 2023

This chapter presents the actual details of reports made by students to the ombuds officer in the year 2023. It discusses the number of reports, the part of TU Delft the reports concerned, the profile of the notifiers, how the notifiers contacted the ombuds officer and the subject of the reports. Chapter 4 then presents some reflections inspired by aspects of some of these reports by students.

3.1 How many reports were received in 2023?

In the 2023 calendar year the ombuds officer received 17 reports. Some of these are still being dealt with².

The table below compares the number of reports with the numbers of reports in previous years. The number of reports in 2023 is significantly lower compared to the year 2022, but higher than the numbers of reports in the years 2014 to 2021.

calendar year number	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	14	13	12	10	8	13	9	?	32	17

It is difficult to pinpoint the reason for the decrease in the number of reports. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

The majority of reports were from individual students. One report came from a student association.

The ombuds officer received two anonymous reports by e-mail in 2023. These reports have not been included in the above figures because insufficient relevant details are available on the reported issues.

In the case of anonymous reports - i.e. reports of which the origin is unknown to the ombuds officer - the ombuds officer has no options for taking action, for example in the form of consulting other parties involved. That would be contrary to the requirements of due care which apply to the handling of a case. However, the ombuds officer can provide general information, for example on how the ombuds officer works, their powers, confidentiality and independence. If an anonymous report relates to a particular case, the ombuds officer will only be able to comment to a limited degree and only

² An explanation of the term 'report' can be found in section 2.1

within the context presented. After all, the ombuds officer relies entirely on the information provided by the notifier and is not permitted to ask counter-questions to clarify the case or context. Nor can other people involved in the case be spoken to. The ombuds officer's options when it comes to providing advice are therefore very limited in the case of anonymous reports.

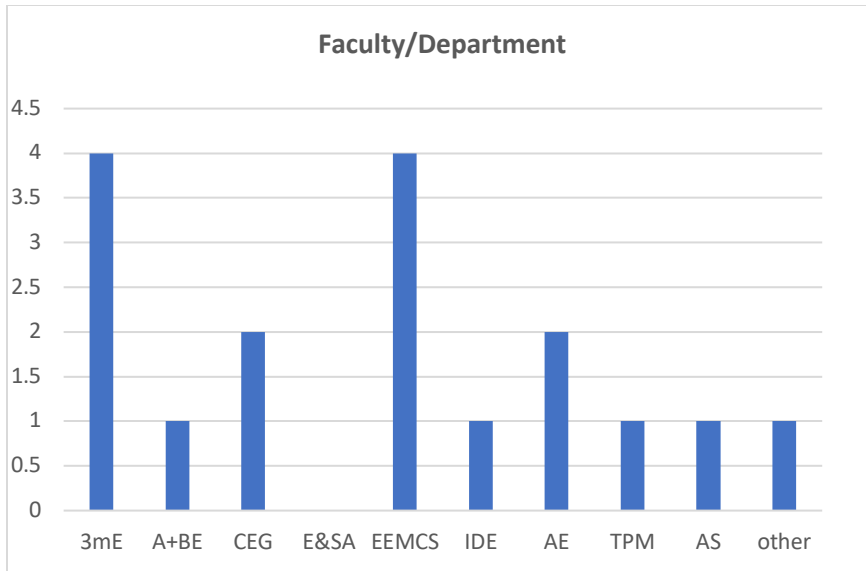
Apart from reports, the ombuds officer also received a number of requests to advise or provide input. These requests concerned issues such as the shaping of social safety policies and procedures, or how to conduct a conversation in a case that had already been taken up by others. These requests for advice are not included in the figures on the number of reports either.

3.2 Which part of TU Delft did the reports concern?

As was the case in 2022 the majority of reports came from students in the faculties 3mE (now: Mechanical Engineering (ME)) and Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science (EEMCS). In contrast to last year no reports were submitted concerning Education & Student Affairs in 2023. One report was not linked to any faculty or department. An explanation of the abbreviations can be found in the annex at the end of this annual report.

Once again, so few reports were made this year that they cannot be indicative of a trend or structure at a faculty or department.

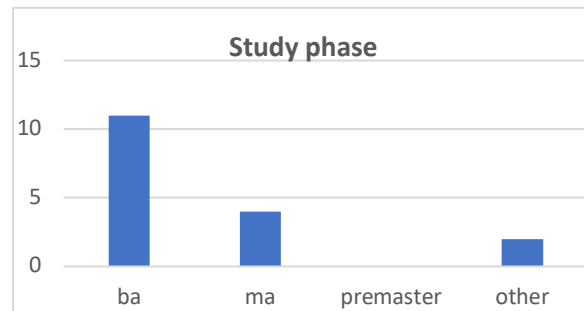
Faculty/Department	Number
3mE	4
A+BE	1
CEG	2
E&SA (Education and Student Affairs)	0
EEMCS	4
IDE	1
AE	2
TPM	1
AS	1
other	1
	17



3.3 A few characteristics of the notifiers

As was the case in 2022, most reports were made by Bachelor's students. The category 'other' refers to notifiers who are not students at TU Delft, such as prospective students, alumni or associations.

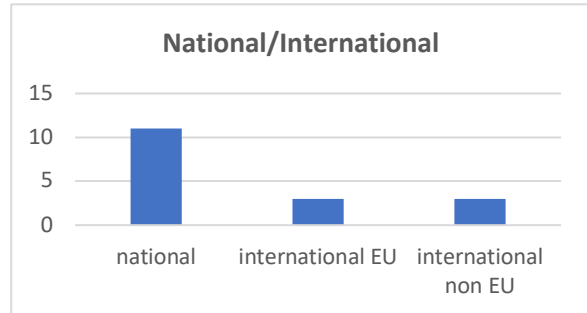
Study phase	Number
ba	11
ma	4
premaster	0
other	2
total	17



Approximately a third of the reports were made by international students. According to the 'Facts and figures for December 2023' international students account for 25.3% of the total student body³. The ombuds officer was sometimes told, during the consultation, that international students are less likely to make a report because they are less likely to raise issues because of a lack of time and money. This assumption is not supported by the figures provided.

³ Facts and figures (*Feiten en cijfers*). (undated). TU Delft. <https://www.tudelft.nl/over-tu-delft/feiten-en-cijfers>

National/International	Number
national	11
international EU	3
international non-EU	3



Two of the reports received in 2023 were from female students. This is about 12% of the total number of reports. This is significantly lower than in 2022, when around 44% of the reports were made by female students.

Female students account for 31% of the total student body⁴.

m/f/x	number
m	14
f	2
x	0

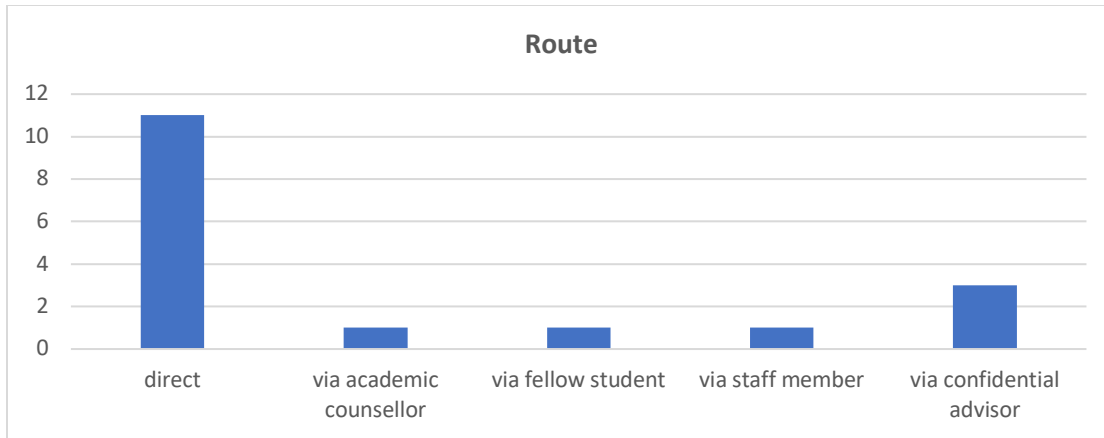
In this table the total number comes to 16 because one report came from an association.

3.4 How are reports made?

Most students contact the ombuds officer independently if they wish to make a report, for example via the TU Delft website. In a few cases, students were referred by others, particularly by confidential advisors. In another case, a student was referred by a TU Delft academic counsellor or other staff member, or by a fellow student.

Route	Number
direct	11
via academic counsellor	1
via fellow student	1
via staff member	1
via confidential advisor	3

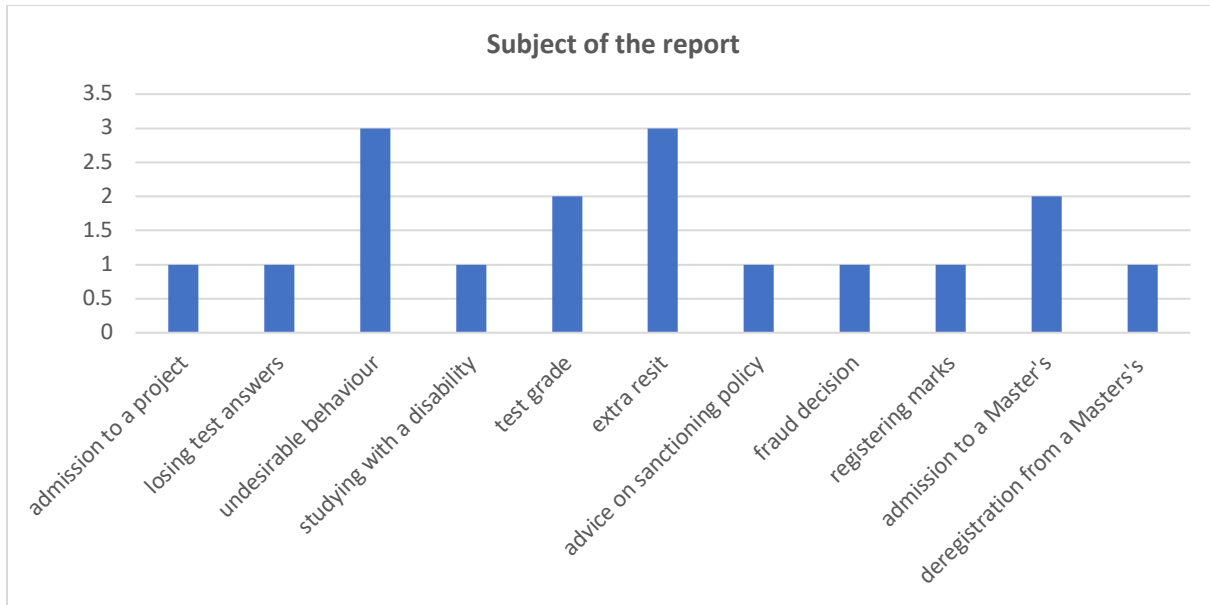
⁴ Facts and figures (*Feiten en cijfers*). (undated). TU Delft. <https://www.tudelft.nl/over-tu-delft/feiten-en-cijfers>



3.5 What are the reports about?

The subjects reported on are now discussed below. Sometimes students refer to multiple problems in a single report. One example concerned a problem with an application for an extra opportunity to take a test, along with perceived unpleasant treatment during a consultation. For the categories listed only the most prominent issue per report is mentioned.

Subject of the report	Number
admission to a project	1
losing test answers	1
undesirable behaviour	3
studying with a disability	1
test grade	2
extra resit	3
advice on sanctioning policy	1
fraud decision	1
registering marks	1
admission to a Master's	2
deregistration from a Master's	1



The majority of reports by students relate to problems with the way that legal rules, guidelines and policy are implemented. Students may disagree with a certain decision, for instance, or believe that their case warrants an exception. These problems often have a legal component. Subjects that came up in this regard in 2023 related mainly to admission, testing and applying for an extra resit.

The student ombuds officer received 3 reports of undesirable behaviour in 2023.⁵ These complaints related to interactions between a student and a lecturer, or between a student and other members of staff and then mainly to social interaction that was perceived as crude, unfriendly or intimidating.

This year the ombuds officer did not receive any reports regarding sexually transgressive behaviour.

3.5.1 Impression of reports

The ombuds officer provides further details on the subjects of the reports below. In doing so we have stayed as close as possible to the qualification given to the reports by the students themselves. The descriptions below do not imply that these qualifications

⁵ For the undesirable behaviour category, the subdivision commonly used in the description of psychosocial workload in the Working Conditions Act (*Arbowet*) has been followed. The undesirable behaviour categories are: direct or indirect discrimination, sexual harassment, aggression and violence, bullying and excessive workload.

were endorsed by the ombuds officer, or that an investigation was conducted into the factual accuracy, nor are they an indication of the seriousness of the issue reported on.

The theme of admission involved different types of admission, in other words admission to the programme, such as a Master's degree, or admission to a part of the programme, such as a graduation project. One student was not admitted to a Bachelor's project because she still had not completed a required subject. After the student herself had consulted with the coordinator about this problem, she was admitted to the project after all. Another student was not admitted to a Master's track admission test due to late registration. Because it was accepted that there was some ambiguity about the deadline for registration, the student in question was subsequently admitted after all. However, a rejection of a request for admission to some Master's subjects while Bachelor's tests were still outstanding was upheld.

The theme of testing involved a case where a student's examination answers had gone missing. In another case the report concerned the transparency of testing standards and assessment. The students in question eventually submitted the complaint to the Examination Appeals Board (*College van beroep voor de examens*, Cbe). Another student disagreed with the grade he had received. This report also fell under the authority of the Cbe.

The subjects of admission and testing are related to the reports on requesting an extra opportunity to take a test. Such requests are handled by the Boards of Examiners. Because of the burden on lecturers of having to make an extra test for a single student, requests for an extra resit are assessed strictly. Consultations with students have shown that requests for an extra resit are often made as a result of problems such as (serious) study delays and financial problems. Although this is true for many students, it is especially true for international students from outside the EU. The fact that the Bachelor's-before-Master's rule now applies again will have contributed to an increase in such requests.

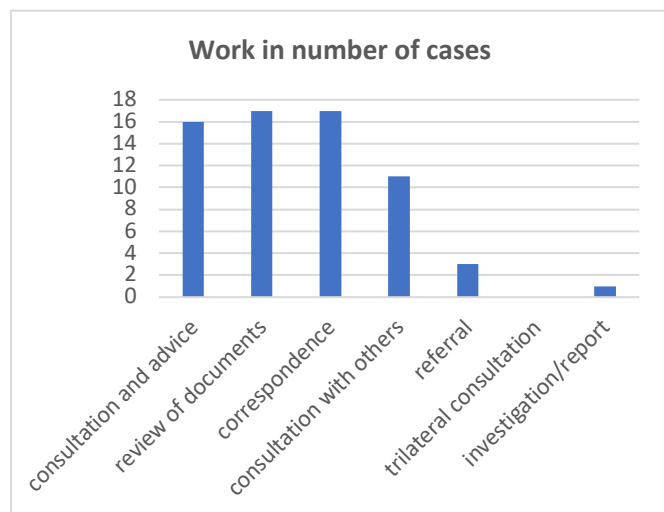
As far as the theme of undesirable behaviour is concerned, the issues raised were the manner of treatment by a lecturer during an examination and the way that feedback was provided on an assignment by a lecturer (in combination with a report on the poor organisation of teaching). In both cases the management of the respective programmes appeared to have responded by recognising the situation and by taking action. In another case of undesirable behaviour, the student making the report referred to harassment they had experienced. The students in question did not take the matter any further after reporting it to the ombuds officer.

One case concerned studying with a disability. The report related to the handling of an application for an effective adjustment under the Equal treatment of disabled and chronically ill people Act (*Wet gelijke behandeling op grond van handicap en chronische ziekte*). This theme is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.6 What work did the ombuds officer perform?

This section discusses the work⁶ done by the ombuds officer in response to the reports. The table below shows the practical actions taken by the ombuds officer in response to the reports.

Work	in number of cases
consultation and advice	16
review of documents	17
correspondence	17
consultation with others	11
referral	3
trilateral consultation	0
investigation/report	1



Chapter 3.6 of the 2022 Annual Report explains how the ombuds officer operates or may operate when a student reports a particular problem. This information is largely repeated below.

When a student submits a report - usually by email, sometimes by phone - the ombuds officer always invites the notifier for a consultation. That consultation usually takes place on campus in the ombuds officer's room and sometimes online, for example if the student is not in the country.

⁶ The work of the ombuds officer is summarised in the internal work description as: providing independent advice to the notifier (listening ear, explanation of e.g. regulations, advice), mediation (shuttle mediation, discussion facilitator), independently advising a faculty or department (consultations with staff, case exploration, written or oral advice), conducting investigations (focused on context and formation of decisions and courses of action, e.g. communication methods and manners) and investigating broader patterns or structural issues.

During the consultation the ombuds officer will often ask students to send written evidence, such as documents and e-mail messages, so that they can gain a better understanding of the context of the student's report. If necessary, a second consultation will follow to examine and discuss the content of those documents in more detail.

The consultations are an opportunity for the student and ombuds officer to get to know each other and for the student to tell their story. They discuss the report together and identify the facts and rules involved. During the consultation the student is given ample opportunity to share their needs and wishes, to point out what they find most important and to explain how they want the matter to be pursued. Options and possible solutions are identified.

The next step depends on the nature of the report and the student's preferences and may involve a referral to another official or body within the organisation, written or verbal advice, a second consultation with the notifier, a consultation with other parties involved, or an investigation.

In the case of a referral the ombuds officer will always consult in advance with the person to whom the case is being referred, or will help the student gain access to whoever they need to speak to.

In many cases the issue reported by a student relates to a decision that is subject to appeal or objection. In such instances the ombuds officer has no authority to deal with the report and will refer the student to the Examination Appeals Board or the Objections Committee. When doing so the ombuds officer will provide information on how the objection and appeal procedures are organised and the applicable deadlines.

With the student's permission the ombuds officer will also regularly conduct consultations with others (who may be) involved in the issue. Examples include an academic counsellor or central student counsellor, a head of Education and Student Affairs, or the person who is the subject of the report. These consultations are usually exploratory in nature and are aimed at obtaining more information on facts and practices. The ombuds officer will also often explore the possibilities and scope for a solution. In a few instances, a consultation will start resembling shuttle mediation. Sometimes an issue can be resolved using the additional information obtained. It is also possible that the student is satisfied by the explanation given, or finds it easier to accept the situation thanks to the information provided.

If, after an consultation, an issue has not been sufficiently clarified or resolved, the ombuds officer may - if they see fit - take a closer look at a case in order to obtain a

more detailed picture. In such instances the ombuds officer may prepare a report for the competent authority, along with a written analysis and recommendations.

In 2023, as in previous years, the tasks of the ombuds officer in all cases involved providing input and advice, studying documents and sending and receiving correspondence. In many instances the ombuds officer also consulted other parties involved in the reports, such as an academic counsellor, a lecturer or a Head of Education and Student Affairs.

In contrast to 2022 no tripartite discussions with all the parties involved were conducted in 2023. In one case the ombuds officer compiled a report.

4 Reflections and recommendations

4.1 Follow-up to reflections from 2022

In the previous annual report the ombuds officer formulated some reflections and made recommendations based on the 2022 cases. This section briefly discusses the follow-up to the themes of some of those recommendations.

In the 2022 annual report, the ombuds officer highlighted the need to promote awareness of the existence of the ombuds officer and make it easier for students to contact her. While the number of reports in 2023 does not point towards increased awareness of her existence, the ombuds officer does acknowledge that actions have been taken and are ongoing to improve awareness and accessibility. Incidentally, this relates not only to the ombuds officer, but to all elements of the welfare system.

Information on the TU Delft website on its integrity policy has since been expanded by the Integrity Office to include a separate page on the role of the ombuds officer. The annual reports of the ombuds officers have also been made available there online for the first time, so that everyone can familiarise themselves with the contents. This will make it easier to understand what the role of the ombuds officer actually means in practice. Furthermore, work is now underway from Education & Student Affairs to improve the student portal, with attention also being paid to the roles of academic counsellors, confidential advisors, ombuds officers and student psychologists. It is expected that this will further increase accessibility.

Information on improving clarity on the role of the ombuds officer and the relevant regulations can be found above under 2.2.

In 2022 the ombuds officer also recommended that students should be provided with better information about the graduation date that will appear on their degree certificates. Students are not always aware that, at TU Delft, the graduation date is determined as being the date of the last educational activity (the last exam or graduation presentation) and is therefore in the past. Problems can arise when, due to certain circumstances, a lot of time has elapsed between the last educational activity and the graduation ceremony. The graduation date is important for things like tuition fees and student grants and loans and in situations where students take double degree programmes, such as a double Bachelor's degree programme. The ombuds officer noted that the Rules and Guidelines of Boards of Examiners of some faculties now include an explicit provision on the date on the degree certificate.

In the 2022 annual report the ombuds officer further highlighted the importance of sustaining a focus on sexual harassment and other transgressive behaviour. Activities

were again undertaken in 2023 to keep this issue on the agenda. Section 4.2.5 discusses this in more detail.

4.2 Reflections and recommendations from 2023

The 17 reports made in 2023 represent a very small number, given that the university population is around 27,000 students. The reflections below are not intended to be interpreted as a verdict on the prevalence of a particular issue. Although generally formulated, they are not judgements or conclusions with regard to the TU organisation, staff or students in general. The reflections below are inspired by themes from some of the reports and represent an attempt by the ombuds officer to try and connect the issue highlighted in the case to a somewhat broader theme.

4.2.1 Number of reports

The ombuds officer wanted to establish the reason for the limited number of reports in the year 2023. Several explanations are possible. These include the following:

- Students are insufficiently aware of the existence of the ombuds officer.
- Students find it too difficult to contact the ombuds officer.
- Students are not fully aware of what the ombuds officer does.
- Reports by students are resolved satisfactorily elsewhere in the organisation via the Central Complaints Desk or other people, such as the Heads of Education and Student Affairs, and this means that there is no need for them to report the issues to the ombuds officer.
- Students are reluctant to report.
- Students do not have a good insight into what will be done with their report.
- Students are afraid of the negative effects of reporting.
- Students are not sufficiently confident that reporting can be worthwhile.
- Students have insufficient knowledge of the applicable rules and standards and are therefore unable to assess adequately whether it is worth reporting a particular situation.

Without an investigation, it is impossible to determine why the number of reports was so low. Among other things the 'Student Factsheet on the complaints procedure in Higher Education', which was published by the Inspectorate of Education on 30 March 2022, states that many students at universities (of applied science) do not know where to lodge a complaint, do not always feel free to lodge a complaint for fear of negative

consequences and are not always confident that their complaints will be taken seriously⁷.

The ombuds officer acknowledges some of the assumptions referred to. For example, a report was filed by a student who did not want further action taken for fear of negative consequences for the rest of their studies. The ombuds officer also sometimes receives a report at a very late stage because the student in question was unaware of her existence. However, the ombuds officer also notes that, in certain cases, issues have been properly resolved, for example by an education coordinator, academic counsellor, or other TU Delft staff member.

The system analysis report may shed more light on possible causes. It is also important to continue investing in accessibility and in explaining the role of the ombuds officer, as part of the entire welfare system. It is also a good idea to emphasise that making reports will not have a negative impact on the student in question. This has already been included in the currently applicable student ombuds officer regulations⁸. It might be helpful if this is also mentioned elsewhere.

4.2.2 Closure

Some student reports have made it clear to the ombuds officer how important the concept of closure can be. In this context closure should be interpreted as a need for a clear answer or solution to a problem that facilitates the conclusion of an issue. In some cases students reported a particular complaint to the ombuds officer which they had also previously submitted to (senior) TU Delft staff. In the follow-up to those reports, the ombuds officer then consulted the members of staff involved and established that the students' reports had been adequately addressed and actions taken. However, the students in question were not always aware of the consultations held and the measures taken. As a result of that it remained unclear to them what had happened with their report, or they were wrongly given the impression that nothing had been done. The complaint then lingers on in the students' minds, so to speak, making it difficult for them to put what had happened behind them. This is unfortunate because appropriate actions had actually been taken behind the scenes.

⁷ Inspectorate of Education. (2022). Student Factsheet on the complaints procedure in Higher Education (*Factsheet Studenten over de klachtenprocedure in het hoger onderwijs*). In Inspectorate of Education (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*). Accessed on 20 March 2024 at <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/binaries/onderwijsinspectie/documenten/themarapporten/2022/03/30/factsheet-studenten-over-de-klachtenprocedure-in-het-hoger-onderwijs/Studenten+over+de+klachtenprocedure+in+het+hoger+onderwijs.pdf>

⁸ See Article 9 of Annex 3 to the TU Delft Executive and Management Regulations

It is therefore advisable to provide feedback to students once measures or action have been taken. From the point of view of the privacy of the other parties involved, it will not, of course, always be desirable or possible to inform the student about the details of actions taken or all consultations held, but general feedback alone may be very helpful in terms of tying up loose ends and enabling the student to find closure.

4.2.3 Provision of information on the procedures used by Boards of Examiners

In one case a student voiced questions about the procedures used by a Board of Examiners. The student had been asked to attend a hearing by the Boards of Examiners about a proposed decision on an incident of fraud. The student stated that - in retrospect - he had not been adequately prepared for what was going to happen to him. As a result the hearing ended up being an unpleasant experience. The student stated that he believed it would have been better if more information had been provided in advance about the hearing procedure. The student had been unable to find very much relevant information on the website of the faculty in question. Further investigation of the issue revealed that there are considerable differences between faculties in terms of the information provided to students via the website about the practical procedures used by Boards of Examiners. Some faculties provide a lot of information, for example on the composition of the Boards of Examiners, meeting dates, request forms, and information on decision deadlines and other topics, as well as an explanation of the procedure if a student is invited to attend a hearing. Other faculties provide only limited information. The ombuds officer therefore recommends that information for students be improved and streamlined where necessary. Besides information on powers and procedure, the ombuds officer also recommends that theme-based information or a reference to it is also provided. Topics regularly reviewed include provisions for students with disabilities in the context of taking examinations, decisions on incidents of fraud and the policy for requesting an extra opportunity to take a test.

4.2.4 Studying with a disability

Cases from 2023 (as well as from 2022) highlighted the issue of studying with a disability and particularly on applying for an effective adjustment under the Equal treatment of disabled and chronically ill people Act (*Wet gelijke behandeling op grond van handicap en chronische ziekte*).

In recent years TU Delft has developed policy on Studying with a Functional Disability, as set out in the Studying with a Functional Disability policy plan. Policy document 2020-2022. The Horizon and Student Unlimited online platforms were also set up. In addition, the Education and Examination Regulations contain provisions for students in need of assistance.

Standard provisions have been drafted for common disabilities, such as ADHD and dyslexia, for example in the form of extra time during an examination or a low-sensory room. Requests for these are mostly handled and dealt with by the academic counsellors.

Based on the cases and consultations that the ombuds officer has had with staff and students who are involved with this issue, it has become clear that the processing of requests is more complicated when it comes to requests for effective adaptations that differ from standard provisions made by students who have a disability who do not fall into the already regulated categories.

In the opinion of the ombuds officer, there is therefore a need for a TU-wide improvement of the infrastructure so that requests like these can be dealt with efficiently and with the right motivation. At the moment it is not always clear who has the authority to decide on the requests and which assessment framework should apply. Although these requests account for a very small proportion of the total number of requests for provisions, it is important to develop a proper approach to dealing with them. If the process is difficult, it will take a lot out of the students involved, many of whom have already gone through a lot in their earlier school careers. However, it also puts a great strain on the time and energy of the staff involved. Academic counsellors also say they need more specific guidelines when it comes to assessing student requests, or advising on them.

In developing that approach it is important to consider how the needs and expectations of the student with a disability can be weighed against the requirements and interests of the educational organisation.

The ombuds officer therefore recommends that more expertise be developed for this purpose and that tools be devised so that the necessary considerations can be made. The ombuds officer appreciates the fact that there are many staff within the TU organisation who are committed to this issue. Policy officers from Education & Student Affairs are now also involved due to the link with the university's duty of care policy. This can help make processing procedures better and faster and contribute to more clarity in advance and well-reasoned decision-making.

4.2.5 Sexually transgressive behaviour

Although the ombuds officer did not receive any reports of sexual transgressive behaviour in 2023, she would like to reiterate at this point the importance of continuing to focus on this issue. That focus was certainly evident in 2023. For example, student confidential advisors are increasingly being appointed to student associations and training courses have been organised for them via TU Delft. In addition, the Safe Space theatre production was performed again and staff pursued a stringent and successful policy in the field of social safety, alcohol consumption and (sexually) transgressive behaviour during the Owee Week. The focus on this issue therefore seems to be becoming increasingly institutionalised and that is a positive development.

In January 2024, Mariëtte Hamer published her recommendations to the (outgoing) Minister of Education, Culture and Science on tackling sexually transgressive behaviour in higher education⁹. In doing so she highlights the special position of colleges and universities, which can play a pioneering role on this theme because these institutions are involved in many sectors of society and train professionals at a formative stage of their lives. This is precisely why she considers colleges and universities the ideal place to hold an in-depth consultation on desirable and undesirable behaviour. Her recommendations can boost efforts aimed at increasing knowledge and awareness and at continuing to improve ways of tackling sexually transgressive behaviour within higher education.

5 Action points for 2024

The ombuds officer has formulated the following action points for 2024, in addition to dealing with reports:

- Provide additional input for the revision of the TU Delft Student Complaints Policy and, where necessary, for a more detailed job description.
- Help to continue promoting awareness of the student ombuds officer as part of TU Delft's welfare system.
- Build up relevant contacts and networks inside and outside the organisation.

⁹ Hamer, M., letter of 24 January 2024, Recommendations to the outgoing minister of OCW on tackling sexually transgressive behaviour and sexual violence in higher education and research, rcgog.nl. Accessed on 28 March 2024 at <https://www.rcgog.nl/publicaties/brieven/2024/01/24/advies-aan-de-demissionair-minister-van-ocw-over-de-aanpak-van-seksueel-grensoverschrijdend-gedrag-en-seksueel-geweld-in-het-hoger-onderwijs-en-de-wetenschap>.

- Work on the further professionalisation and improvement of the network by participating in introductory sessions, regular and occasional theme-based consultations and relevant activities.
- Find out more about, and elaborate on, themes which are relevant to students that have resulted from cases and student-related developments within higher education. Make insights obtained accessible to others where possible, including by organising a seminar on the Equal Treatment of Disabled and Chronically Ill People Act.
- Board membership of the Association of Ombudsmen in Higher Education.

6 Professional training in 2023

In 2023 the student ombuds officer undertook various activities to acquire and/or maintain knowledge and skills. She did so by attending the five-day training course entitled 'The ombuds officer in a broad perspective' (*Ombudsfunctionaris in breed perspectief*) (Education for Professionals - Utrecht University) in March 2023. She also attended the meetings of the Association of Ombudsmen in Higher Education in June and December 2023. During these meetings, lectures were given on the Open Government Act (*Wet Open Overheid*) and the GDPR (by TU Delft staff members Erik van Leeuwen and Rinus Cost), on person-centred research (by Wico Verbaan, ombuds officer at Erasmus University Rotterdam) and on the topic of confidentiality (by Reinier van Zutphen, National Ombuds officer). The ombuds officer also participated in peer-to-peer learning meetings of the VOHO and those of the TU Delft confidential advisors.

7 In conclusion

I would like to thank all the students who took the trouble to share their concerns and experiences with me and I invite all students to continue to do so in the future. I would also like to thank everyone who was willing to answer questions and provide explanations and input over the past year.

Anyone wishing to make a report to the student ombuds officer, who has questions, or who wishes to provide input or feedback on the content of this annual report, the role of the ombuds officer, or other relevant topics, is very welcome to get in touch via c.g.m.wensveen@tudelft.nl or +31 (0)6-43213534.

8 Annex: Abbreviations

3mE	: Faculty of Mechanical, Maritime and Materials Engineering
A+BE	: Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment
CEG	: Faculty of Civil Engineering & Geosciences
E&SA	: Education & Student Affairs
EEMCS	: Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science
IDE	: Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
AE	: Faculty of Aerospace Engineering
TPM	: Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management
AS	: Faculty of Applied Sciences
EAB	: Examination Appeals Board
UFO	: University Job Classification System