



31 January 2020

**REPORT ON THE ACTIVITY OF THE ACADEMIC OMBUDSMAN**

**FOR STUDENT AND EMPLOYEE AFFAIRS**

*from 1 January to 31 December 2019*

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## Context

The position of the Academic Ombudsman was appointed by *the Order No. 30 of the Rector of the University of Warsaw of 16 August 2011 on the appointment of the Academic Ombudsman at the University of Warsaw* (hereinafter referred to as *the Order No. 30*). On 1 November 2011, the position was taken by Anna Cybulko. At the end of September 2012, Anna Cybulko was appointed for the second term of office (the first full term, i.e. four years), covering the period from 1 October 2012 to 1 October 2016. On 1 October 2016, Anna Cybulko was appointed for the second full term of office, which ends on 30 September 2020.

The present report is based on the provisions of § 11 of *the Order No. 30*, according to which: ‘Ombudsman is obliged to deliver written report on her/his activities to the Rector each year by the 31st of January.’

## Activity report

### Competence

In 2019, the activities were carried out in accordance with the principles and procedures developed in previous years and covered all areas of the competence of the Academic Ombudsman indicated in *the Order No. 30*.

The main areas of activity include:

- Conflict prevention and ADR promotion, including promoting a work and study environment free from discrimination and mobbing as well as actions enhancing equality and diversity.
- Domestic and foreign cooperation for the promotion and development of ADR and for the enhancement of equality and diversity.
- Direct support actions – intervention in reported problem cases.
- Signalling actions (*whistleblowing*) and suggesting development and repair system solutions.

### Conflict prevention and ADR promotion

The Academic Ombudsman undertook the following proactive promotional and educational activities in 2019 as part of supporting the development of alternative dispute resolution methods within the university and the promotion of a work and study environment free from discrimination and mobbing:



1. The Ombudsman, together with her Team, the Promotion Office of the University of Warsaw, and Equal Opportunity Specialist Julia Kubisa, PhD, was involved in the development of the 'We Are All Equal' promotional and information campaign targeted at the community of the University of Warsaw. The aim of the campaign is to emphasise that there is no place for discrimination at the University of Warsaw and to assure the persons who experience it that they are going to find support at the university. The campaign is part of the activities implementing the European Charter for Researchers programme and the HR Excellence in Research strategy at the University of Warsaw. The strategy envisages the implementation of activities in the field of equal treatment and increasing knowledge and awareness regarding anti-discrimination.
2. The Academic Ombudsman and her Team continued the cyclical activities of the mobile information point, which aims to educate and disseminate knowledge about aid institutions operating within our university. In 2019, the activities were addressed to the Faculty of Management, the Faculty of Education, and the Faculty of Applied Linguistics. The purpose of the meetings was to disseminate knowledge about the Academic Ombudsman for Student and Employee Affairs (Ombudsman) and other aid institutions operating within our university. The employees of the Academic Ombudsman Team together with the employees of the Centre for Dispute and Conflict Resolution at the Faculty of Law and Administration of the University of Warsaw provided information on the competences of individual institutions, methods of obtaining support, methods of reporting cases, places and dates of office hours, etc.
3. In September 2019, the Academic Ombudsman and her Team conducted a workshop entitled 'Prawny kontekst pracy psychologa w akademickim centrum pomocy psychologicznej' [Legal context of a psychologist's work in an academic psychological help centre]. The workshop was aimed at the employees of the Psychological Counselling Centre of the University of Warsaw and the Psychological Counselling Centre of the Medical University of Warsaw. The purpose of the meeting was to present the legal obligations and restrictions in the work of a psychologist with a client and to develop optimal practices and solutions in the work of the psychologists at the Psychological Counselling Centre of the University of Warsaw.
4. As part of activities in the field of equality education and anti-discrimination prevention at the University of Warsaw, the Academic Ombudsman and Equal Opportunity Specialist Julia Kubisa, PhD, co-organised a series of meetings devoted to the implementation of equality policy for the University of Warsaw.



The meetings were attended by the Rector's Proxy for HR Development, representatives of the International Relations Office, the Promotion Office, the Office for Persons with Disabilities, the Legal Office, the Office for University's Integrated Development Programme, the Office for Quality of Education, and the Office for Structural Projects.

5. In 2019, the Academic Ombudsman supported the Equal Opportunity Specialist in the ongoing work on the development of the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) for the University of Warsaw and Gender Equality Plans for three pilot units: the Faculty of Law and Administration, the Faculty of Economic Sciences, and the Faculty of Physics. By the end of 2019, draft plans were ready, which in 2020 would be subject to consultation and then adopted.
6. The Academic Ombudsman and the Equal Opportunity Specialist prepared a draft document indicating the recommended behaviour for university employees in the case members of the academic community suffered discriminatory acts of hate outside the university ('Instrukcja postępowania w przypadku pobicia i innych aktów nienawiści na tle dyskryminacyjnym wobec studentów, doktorantów lub pracowników UW,' ['Instruction on dealing with beatings and other discriminatory acts of hate against students, doctoral students, or employees of the University of Warsaw']). The Instruction is to be implemented pursuant to an order of the Rector of the University of Warsaw.
7. Since the second half of 2019, the Ombudsman has been engaged in intensive works on developing a procedure to prevent sexual harassment and a more general anti-discrimination procedure. By the end of 2019, drafts of both documents were ready; they are currently at the stage of internal consultations with university experts in this field.
8. The Academic Ombudsman cooperates with numerous organisational units and collective bodies operating within the university. The cooperation includes mutual transfer of cases within the competence as well as joint problem solving and seeking adequate solutions. In 2019, the Academic Ombudsman cooperated with, among others:
  - Equal Opportunity Specialist at the University of Warsaw Julia Kubisa, PhD.
  - The Anti-Mobbing Committee of the University of Warsaw established by *the Order No. 65 of the Rector of 22 June 2018* in the field of preventing mobbing at the university and with Anti-Mobbing Coordinator of the University of Warsaw Magdalena Miksa.



- The Rector's Committee for Preventing Discrimination – on the occasion of interventions regarding complaints about discrimination against employees or students.
- The Centre for Dispute and Conflict Resolution at the Faculty of Law and Administration, including in the area of mediation.
- Offices of the University of Warsaw, in particular: the Promotion Office, the International Relations Office, the Office for Student Affairs, and the Office for Persons with Disabilities.
- Student self-government representatives, in particular the Scholarship Appeals Board, the Student Self-Government Board, the Doctoral Student Self-Government Board, the Ombudsman for Student Rights, and the Consultant on Sexual Violence in the Team of the Ombudsman for Student Rights.
- Students' clubs and student organizations, including the Queer Students' Club and the Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit Students' Club.
- Representatives of Residents' Councils of Students' Dormitories.

### **Domestic and foreign cooperation**

As part of national contacts, the Academic Ombudsman cooperates with other Ombudsmen of Polish universities, including with Bartłomiej Chłudziński, the Academic Ombudsman of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Michał Czapski, the Ombudsman of the Medical University of Warsaw, Sławomir Gliniański, the Student Ombudsman of the University of Wrocław, and Katarzyna Jurzak, the Rector's Proxy for Student Safety and Security of the Jagiellonian University.

As from the third quarter of 2019, the Academic Ombudsman and the Equal Opportunity Specialist of the University of Warsaw have been preparing an international conference entitled 'Przeciwdziałanie molestowaniu seksualnemu w środowisku akademickim – w kierunku standardów i procedur' [Prevention of sexual harassment in the academic community – towards standards and procedures], together with the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, which is to take place on 16 March 2020 at the University of Warsaw.



The Academic Ombudsman also represents the University of Warsaw at events organised by central institutions: conferences, seminars, and expert meetings. Among the major national activities in 2019, it is worth mentioning:

- Speech in the Discussion Panel ‘Etyka w mediacji’ [Ethics in mediation], which took place at the headquarters of the Polish Lewiatan Confederation. The panel was organised in the framework of the project ‘Centrum Arbitrażu i Mediacji – Koordynator przy Konfederacji Lewiatan’ [Centre for Arbitration and Mediation – Coordinator at the Polish Lewiatan Confederation] (April 2019).
- Participation of Anna Cybulko and Magdalena Miksa in the Seminar of Academic Ombudsmen, which was held at the Medical University of Warsaw. The aim of the seminar was to present the institution of an ombudsman and mediator on the basis of the new act as well as to discuss possibilities of cooperation within the Federation of the University of Warsaw and the Medical University of Warsaw (May 2019).
- Participation in the NKN Forum debate ‘Ścieżki kariery – rozwój kadr szkolnictwa wyższego i nauki’ [Career paths – development of higher education and science staff] organised at the University of Silesia in Katowice. It was the fourth meeting in a series of nationwide community meetings initiated by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, constituting a platform for dialogue and exchange of experience concerning the most important aspects of the new act Law on Higher Education and Science and possible solutions regarding its implementation (July 2019).
- Visit of the Academic Ombudsman and her team at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Participation in a meeting aimed at cooperation and exchange of experience in the scope of the work carried out by the Rector’s Committee at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń to develop procedures in the event of harassment and sexual harassment (October 2019).

In 2019, the international cooperation of the Academic Ombudsman covered four main areas: implementation of the international project ‘Advocacy Establishment for Students through Ombudsman Position (AESOP),’ cooperation with the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education, actions aimed at supporting new equality solutions at the University of Warsaw, and development of partnerships within the 4EU+ Alliance. A brief overview of the most important activities forming part of the indicated areas is presented below.

Since 2014, the Academic Ombudsman has participated in the implementation of the international project ‘Advocacy Establishment for Students through Ombudsman Position (AESOP)’ financed by the Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive



Agency (EACEA) acting on behalf of the European Commission, whose partner is the University of Warsaw. The project leader is the Akaki Tsereteli State University in Kutaisi, Georgia, and the goal of the project is to develop the institution of an Ombudsman in selected Georgian, Ukrainian, and Azerbaijani universities based on models from partner states, including the University of Warsaw. In the course of the project, the Academic Ombudsman and representatives of her Team took part in the following events: a working meeting in Kiev, Ukraine, dedicated to the coordination, planning, and quality control of the project (participation: Anna Cybulko, date: April 2019), a working meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan, devoted to the evaluation of the project's results (participation: Magdalena Miksa and Elżbieta Felkner, date: May 2019), conference in Kutaisi, Georgia, summarising the project (participation: Anna Cybulko, Agnieszka Siedlecka-Andrychowicz from the Centre for Dispute and Conflict Resolution at the Faculty of Law and Administration of the University of Warsaw, date: July 2019). The project was completed in the third quarter of 2019. The project resulted in the appointment of the position of Ombudsman at nine universities in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine.

Almost from the beginning of her activity, the Academic Ombudsman has been an active member of the European organisation of academic ombudsmen (the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education – ENOHE), where she intensively cooperates with European ombudsmen in order to exchange experience and to supervise and develop new institutional solutions. On 26–28 June 2019, the Academic Ombudsman took part in the ENOHE conference entitled ‘Defending and Protecting Rights within Higher Education: Stocktaking, Looking Ahead’ organised by the University of León, during which she delivered a speech entitled ‘Is small (really always) beautiful? On different ways of complaint handling in large and not quite so large institutions,’ together with Josef Leidenfrost (Office of the Austrian Student Ombudsman, Vienna, Austria), and Felicity Mitchell (Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, Reading, UK). Following the elections held at the general meeting of the ENOHE members, on 27 June 2019, Anna Cybulko was appointed a member of the ENOHE Board and became the treasurer.

The Academic Ombudsman has been nurturing foreign contacts aimed at gathering knowledge and good practices supporting the introduction of new solutions for equality, diversity, and anti-discrimination at the University of Warsaw. Study visits constituted one of the elements of the cooperation. In September 2019, the Academic Ombudsman and Equal Opportunity Specialist of the University of Warsaw Julia Kubisa, PhD, were guests at the Trinity College in Dublin, which is the coordinator of the SAGE (Systemic Action for Gender Equality) project. In the



framework of the SAGE project, actions on gender equality have been developed and implemented at seven European universities. The purpose of the visit was to learn about regulations, procedures, and good practices in the field of equality and inclusion that could also be applied at the University of Warsaw. The Academic Ombudsman also took part in the Legal Seminar on non-discrimination and gender equality, organised in Brussels by the European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-discrimination serving the purpose of the European Commission.

While developing cooperation under the 4EU+ Alliance in October 2019, the Academic Ombudsman had the pleasure to host Mr. Gad Køhlert, the Student Ambassador at the University of Copenhagen (UCPH). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss cooperation within the ENOHE and to exchange professional experience and good practices in solving student problems as partner universities within the 4EU+ Alliance.

### Direct support actions

The Academic Ombudsman fulfils the obligations arising from *the Order No. 30*, according to which her tasks include helping individuals and organisational units of the university in resolving disputes and conflicts and in dealing with violations of the principles of the academic life. Statistical data showing the number, type, and thematic cross-section of the cases received by the Academic Ombudsman in 2019 is presented below.

The statistics also show the number and type of actions taken.

### Number of reported cases

In 2019, 240 cases were reported to the Academic Ombudsman. 12 cases were continuations from the previous year. Detailed data on the reported cases and the dynamics of changes are presented in Table 1 and Chart 1 below.

Table 1. Reported cases in 2012–2019.

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of reported cases	130	125	111	125	118	146	196	252
- cases from the current year	130	114	103	119	111	134	185	240
- cases continued from the previous year		11	8	6	7	12	11	12





Chart 1. The dynamics of the reported cases in 2012–2019.



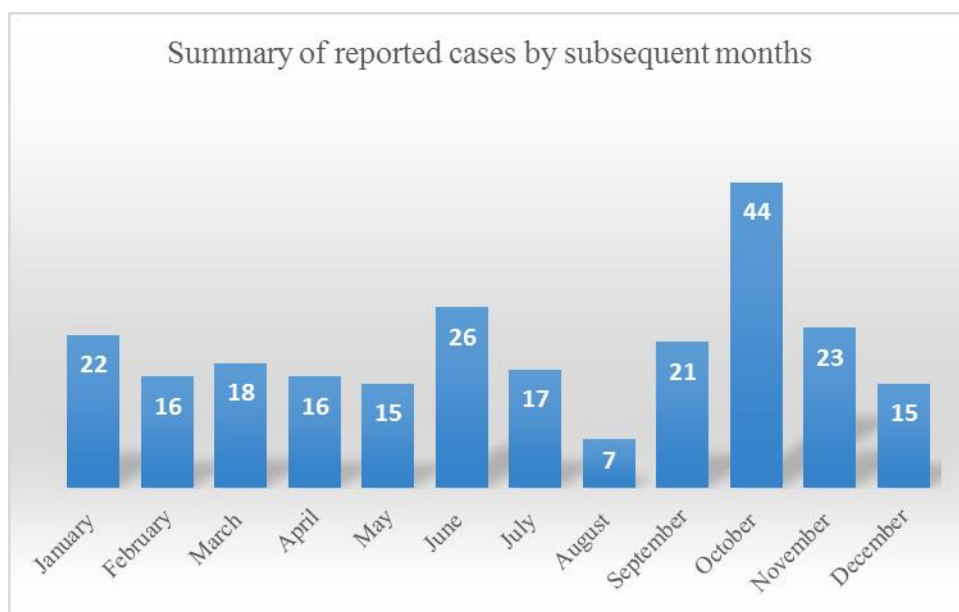
According to the presented data, the dynamics of the reported cases is still on the rise. Since 2018, the number of reported cases has increased by nearly 30%, while since 2017 – by more than 70%. It seems that the reasons for the increase in the number of reported cases are both more widespread knowledge about the possibility of obtaining support from the Academic Ombudsman and the impact of the ‘We Are All Equal’ promotional campaign, emphasising that there is no place for discrimination at the University of Warsaw and that the people who experience it will find support at the university. The increase in the number of problems, and hence also of the reported cases, could have also been influenced by the difficult period of managing the university with relation to the changes linked to the 2.0 reform.

Out of 252 reported cases, there are 38 cases in which no action was taken due to the fact that the appointments did not take place as a result of cancellation, the reporting party’s non-appearance at the appointment, or no response to the invitation. Out of 38 cases, 68% were reported by students, whereas 32% – by employees.

As in the previous year, the number of reported cases depended significantly on the academic calendar. The highest number of reported cases was observed during the term examinations (in January and June) and at the turn of the academic year (in October). A chart showing a summary of reported cases by subsequent months is presented below.



Chart 2. Summary of reported cases by subsequent months.



### Reporting parties

Pursuant to § 4 of the *Order No. 30 of the Rector of the University of Warsaw*, the Ombudsman takes action:

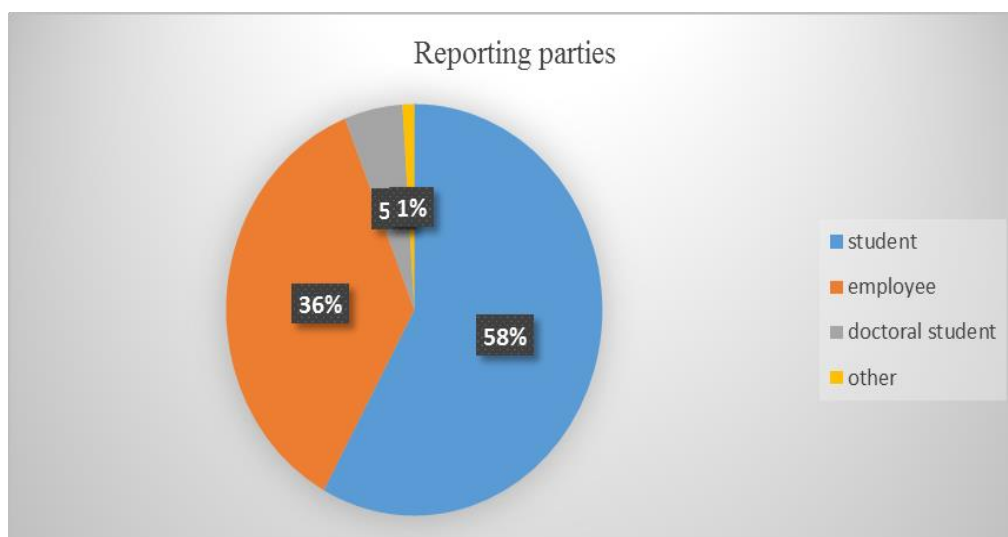
- after a case is reported by a member of the interested academic community,
- at the request of student or doctoral student self-government bodies,
- at the request of the Rector,
- on own initiative.

Most often, cases are reported to the Ombudsman by the interested parties themselves (232 cases) who present their problems individually or in groups. Problems are also reported by direct superiors or by representatives of the authorities of a given unit (18 cases), asking for support in analysing and diagnosing the problem or for a direct intervention in the case. There were also cases reported by relatives (2 cases).

Among the persons reporting a problem, more than half were students, and slightly less than 40% were employees: scientific, administrative, and scientific and technical ones. Only 5% of reported cases came from doctoral students (a detailed distribution of reported cases is presented in Chart 3).



Chart 3. Percentage share of the persons reporting cases.



Compared to previous years, the number of cases reported by students almost doubled, whereas the number of cases reported by employees increased by one third. The dynamics of cases reported by doctoral students has not changed significantly. Details are presented in Table 2. Due to the dynamics of the changes, the proportions changed to some extent: in 2018, 55% of the cases were reported by students and 39% – by employees; in 2019 student problems already constituted 58% of all cases, whereas employee problems – 36%.

Table 2. Comparison of cases by the status of the entity in 2017–2019.

Status of the entity	Number of cases		
	2017	2018	2019
Student	79	86	146
Doctoral student	4	10	12
Employee	63	61	91

The year 2019 is another year in which the Academic Ombudsman received cases from all faculties and most units of the University of Warsaw. This can be seen as a signal that information about the existence and actions of the Academic Ombudsman has reached all academic units. The list of reported cases by unit is



presented in Table 3. In addition to the faculties, the list includes categories such as: didactic units (i.e. College of Inter-area Individual Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Inter-Faculty Individual Studies in Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Centre for Foreign Language Teaching, Physical Education and Sports Centre, Inter-Faculty Studies in Environmental Protection), didactic and scientific units (i.e. Centre for Europe, Institute of the Americas and Europe, University Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development, American Studies Center), scientific units (i.e. Centre of New Technologies UW CeNT, Biological and Chemical Research Centre, Centre of Migration Research, K. Michałowski Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, Interdisciplinary Centre for Mathematical and Computational Modelling, Centre for Forensic Science), and other units (including the University of Warsaw Library, the University of Warsaw Publishing House, the Faculty Residence Hall).

Table 3. Summary of reported cases by unit.

Faculties and units	Number of cases
Faculty of 'Artes Liberales'	3
Faculty of Applied Linguistics	14
Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Resocialisation	3
Faculty of Biology	12
Faculty of Chemistry	4
Faculty of Economic Sciences	5
Faculty of Education	5
Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies	1
Faculty of Geology	5
Faculty of History	9
Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies	4
Faculty of Law and Administration	15
Faculty of Management	4
Faculty of Mathematics, Informatics, and Mechanics	11
Faculty of Modern Languages	18
Faculty of Oriental Studies	15
Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology	10
Faculty of Physics	5
Faculty of Polish Studies	12
Faculty of Political Science and International Studies	24
Faculty of Psychology	12
Central Administration	6



Student Dormitory	8
Didactic units	11
Didactic and scientific units	9
Scientific units	8
Units supporting didactics and research	3
Other	16

Table 4 shows faculties and units by the number of reported cases. Compared to the previous year, the number of reported cases from individual units increased significantly. Despite changes in absolute numbers, the proportions of reported cases are similar to those in previous years. The group of faculties with the largest number of reported cases remains unchanged. The Faculty of Political Science and International Studies (prior to 2017, the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science), the Faculty of Modern Languages, and the Faculty of Law and Administration have remained in the top five for five years. The Faculty of Applied Linguistics appears in the top five roughly every other year.

Table 4. Faculties and units by the number of reported cases.

Faculties and units	Number of cases
Faculty of Political Science and International Studies	24
Faculty of Modern Languages	18
Faculty of Oriental Studies	15
Faculty of Law and Administration	15
Faculty of Applied Linguistics	14
Faculty of Biology	12
Faculty of Polish Studies	12
Faculty of Psychology	12
Faculty of Mathematics, Informatics, and Mechanics	11
Didactic units	11
Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology	10
Faculty of History	9
Didactic and scientific units	9
Student Dormitory	8
Scientific units	8
Central Administration	6
Faculty of Physics	5
Faculty of Geology	5
Faculty of Economic Sciences	5



Faculty of Education	5
Faculty of Chemistry	4
Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies	4
Faculty of Management	4
Faculty of 'Artes Liberales'	3
Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Resocialisation	3
Units supporting didactics and research	3
Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies	1
Other	16

It is also persons from outside the university, e.g. employees of the Polish Academy of Sciences or other universities, that ask for help. There are cases reported by private individuals who feel discriminated against in their workplace. The Academic Ombudsman also receives requests for help in private matters, e.g. writing a divorce petition or mediating in family conflicts. In all these cases, the Academic Ombudsman informs the interested parties that her competence is limited to the area of activity of the University of Warsaw and, if possible, redirects the persons in need to other aid facilities.

### Subject matter of the cases

#### Student cases

The largest number of cases reported by students concerned matters related to the organisation and course of studies. The reported cases covered the following topics:

- removal from the student roster,
- resumption of studies,
- problems with graduation,
- problems with passing exams,
- problems with passing a subject,
- problems with passing a language course – certification exam,
- change of substantial rules during the studies,
- manner of conducting classes by lecturers,
- evaluation methods of lecturers,
- issuing student documentation,
- not releasing a decision on time,
- problems with registration for classes,



- problems with student internship,
- problems with settlement of the Erasmus programme,
- pursuing a second major,
- individual course of studies,
- transmitting a subject,
- fees for educational services,
- health leave,
- foreign students – residence card, deportation threats,
- difficult contact with lecturers.

The second category in terms of the number of reported cases are conflicts and communication difficulties. Misunderstandings occurred in various types of relationships, both horizontal, i.e. between students, and vertical, i.e. misunderstandings with a thesis supervisor or lecturer. There were cases of students complaining about the work of the faculty offices, in particular about the way they were treated by employees or about the misleading nature of the information provided. This group includes cases generally classified as ‘dormitory life difficulties.’

In 2019, the number of complaints about discrimination, harassment, stalking, and breach of ethics increased significantly. The complaints concerned, among others, unethical behaviour of students towards students and lecturers towards students. There is also a new category of cases (occasionally signalled in previous years) related to offensive information published in social media.

### **Cases of employees**

The subject matter of the cases reported by employees falls within the scope of the following areas: conflict, mistreatment (mobbing or discrimination), working conditions and staff policy, and unethical behaviour of students or other employees.

The conflicts were horizontal: between colleagues, or vertical: between the supervisor and subordinate. Most of the conflicts were of relational and organisational nature, but there were also cases where it was the substantive/scientific issues or issues related to different values shared by the parties that were the core of the differences between the parties. The reported conflicts were generally binary in their nature, but more complex group cases were also observed. Both the interested employees themselves and their superiors who observed a conflict in the team asked the Academic Ombudsman for help. Employees also reported conflicts and communication difficulties between lecturers and students.



In the cases where there was a reasonable suspicion that mobbing or discrimination could be an issue, the Academic Ombudsman suggested redirecting the case to the Anti-Mobbing Coordinator or to the Committee for Preventing Discrimination. However, the final decision to undertake these actions was up to the person concerned.

In addition, employees asked the Academic Ombudsman for help with matters related to working conditions and staff policy, covering in particular such topics as:

- remuneration,
- pension protection,
- regulation of the scope of obligations,
- co-financing of courses,
- leave,
- bonuses,
- employee assessment, including assessment of the conduct of classes,
- competition proceedings,
- intellectual property protection,
- official orders breaching the regulations,
- improper performance of official duties.

The complaints about unethical behaviour often concerned the manner of conducting public discourse – both on social media sites gathering employees as well as, e.g. during Scientific Councils or Faculty Councils. Lecturers also complained about unethical behaviour of students towards lecturers, including harassment and stalking.

### **Actions taken**

Pursuant to § 7 of *the Order No. 30*, the Ombudsman may take the following actions in the reported cases:





- providing relevant information on the functioning and legal regulations in force at the University of Warsaw;
- indicating units/persons competent to deal with the case;
- providing support in settling the matter by obtaining information or clarifying the matter in the appropriate unit;
- providing support in conflict resolution: diagnosing the problem and selecting the solution to resolve it;
- recommending/conducting mediation;
- presenting the Rector with information and recommendations, within the scope of the Ombudsman's obligations, regarding the identification of necessary system changes and methods of the university's operation.

Table 5. Types of actions taken by the Academic Ombudsman.\*

Action taken	Number of cases
Providing information on the functioning and legal regulations in force at the University of Warsaw;	117
Indicating units/persons competent to deal with the case;	13
Intervention in the unit (obtaining information or clarifying the matter)	25
Coaching (support in diagnosing the problem and selecting the solution to resolve it)	29
Mediation (recommendation, conduct)	15
Signalling in writing (providing a description of any difficulties encountered and/or recommending necessary system changes or corrective actions).	4

\* The summary is of a simplified nature, in fact the categories are not completely separate, some matters may fall into several categories.

The category 'Providing information on the functioning and legal regulations in force at the University of Warsaw' includes both helping the people reporting a problem to understand their own factual and legal situation and to choose optimal solutions and supporting the units of the University of Warsaw in the proper interpretation and application of binding legal regulations. This activity often involves identifying individuals or persons competent to deal with the case. On the other hand, the interventions indicated in the second item 'indicating units/persons competent to deal with the case' include situations in which the Academic Ombudsman did not undertake any support actions but only redirected the reporting person to the appropriate person or unit. Coaching activities covered support provided by the



Academic Ombudsman in situations of conflict or harassment of the employee (in particular where there was no consent to mediation or intervention) and development support for employees experiencing difficulties in their professional life.

### Signalling

In practice, the Academic Ombudsman fulfils the signalling obligation by providing relevant information on the occurring difficulties and on the need to introduce changes to both the Rector and Vice-Rectors as well as heads of academic units, in particular Deans and Vice-Deans. Messages about minor problems are transmitted orally, while information on significant systemic difficulties is provided in writing. In 2019, the Academic Ombudsman prepared four such written signals:

- July 2019, Vice-Dean for Student Affairs of the Faculty of Economic Sciences – opinion on crediting a foreign language. [*The entry on crediting a foreign language indicated in the syllabus in the wording ‘preferred economic language’ cannot be regarded as a formal requirement leading to the obligation to pass the economic English language.*]
- August 2019, Vice-Rector for Human Resources and Financial Policy – Suggestions for amending *the Order No. 18 of the Rector of the University of Warsaw* on determining the mode and conditions of the competition procedure for the position of academic teacher at the University of Warsaw. [*The matter of access of the candidates to the competition documentation and justification of the Selection Board’s decision.*]
- October 2019, Vice-Dean for Student Affairs and Quality of Teaching, Faculty of Management – signalling repeated inappropriate behaviour of a lecturer.
- December 2019, Dean’s College, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies – signalling repeated inappropriate behaviour of a lecturer.

It is worth emphasizing that the problem of inappropriate behaviour of a lecturer is usually solved in direct cooperation with the lecturer and her/his superiors. Situations in which it is necessary to provide written signal to the dean’s authorities are exceptional.

### Summary

It should be emphasised that the number of reported cases increased significantly. On the one hand, the reason for the significant increase in the reported cases may be the natural and expected growth dynamics associated with the progressive rooting of the institution of the Academic Ombudsman in the university system, additionally



enhanced by the ‘We Are All Equal’ promotional and information campaign, on the other hand, it may be the increase in the number of organisational and legal difficulties experienced by members of the academic community and interpersonal conflicts related to the implementation of the higher education reform based on Act 2.0. As a consequence of a significant increase in the number of reported cases, it is necessary to change the course of action: the Ombudsman should delegate cases to the members of her Team more frequently and standardised action methods in the case of recurring problems should be introduced. In order to maintain fluency in responding to the reported problems, it will be necessary to expand the Ombudsman Support Team in 2020.

It is worth noting that since Act 2.0 promotes the introduction of the position of Academic Ombudsman at universities, the solutions existing in this field at the University of Warsaw acquire a model character. Consequently, the Ombudsman receives many inquiries from other Polish universities regarding the principles and operational methods of this institution.

Employees and students of the University of Warsaw can benefit from more and more systemic support in the event of problems – of organisational and professional nature as well as personal. The actions of the Academic Ombudsman, the Equal Opportunity Specialist, the Rector’s Proxy for HR Development (with the support of a growing training department), the Office for Persons with Disabilities, and of the Psychological Counselling Centre are increasingly interconnected, laying foundations for a stable system of aid and support for all members of the academic community.

In the course of the activities of the Academic Ombudsman in 2019, a change of the atmosphere in the area of enhancing equality and diversity was clearly noticeable. Actions taken by the university itself, including in the course of the implementation of the obligations arising from signing the European Charter for Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research strategy adopted by the university, and by such institutions as the Commissioner for Human Rights or non-governmental organizations, e.g. the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, change the context of the university’s functioning, emphasising the inadequacy of actions and behaviours leading to inequality, discrimination, or harassment as well as the need for active steps to prevent and counteract such practices. The university’s activities in this area manifest themselves in, among others, the work on Gender Equality Plans, the ‘Instruction on how to deal with beatings and other acts of hate on the grounds of discrimination against students, doctoral students, or employees of the University of Warsaw,’ and in the work on developing a procedure to prevent sexual harassment and a more general anti-discrimination procedure. The activities result in a growing



change in the awareness and attitudes of employees and students who are increasingly ready to report to the aid institutions the old, well-known problems in the field of discrimination and harassment with fresh hope for their resolution.

A growing problem, to which the university still does not have a good answer, are mental and emotional difficulties, increasingly experienced by members of the academic community – both employees and students. These problems significantly affect the ability to work, study, and use the academic offer, and sometimes also reduce the comfort of work and affect the sense of security of other people in the environment. The second important problem is the growing lack of clarity within the values and principles recognised at the university. Increasingly, we are dealing with situations in which different groups of employees have different views on what is right and proper. It seems that such problems could be solved by adopting the Code of Ethics, which will be a document regulating common academic principles. The need to introduce the Code of Ethics is reported with increasing frequency by both employees and students.

*The report was prepared by Anna Cybulko*