

# Joint ENOHE / ACCUO Virtual Conference 2021

Programme with abstracts

## 21 September 2021

### Welcome and opening remarks

*(ENOHE President Josef Leidenfrost, ENOHE Vice-President Jean Grier & ACCUO President Natalie Sharpe)*

### Opening Plenary

Higher Education Ombuds and the Bottom Line: How Much is an Ombuds Worth?

*(Natalie Sharpe, Carolyn Brendon and Jean Grier)*

Higher Education Ombuds offices do many wonderful things - reducing conflict, ensuring fairness, and building trust among constituencies to name a few - while costing relatively little to operate; but do ombuds offices save institutions or governments money?

Ombuds view ourselves as working for the betterment of our institutions and society but those who directly or indirectly fund or are considering funding these offices are often more focused on whether an ombuds office has inherent economic value for the institution and the larger economy.

“Sure, an ombuds office is ‘nice to have’, but is the price-tag really worth it?”

Moving away from the simple \$\$\$/€€€ equation, this session also looks at ‘value’ in human terms – the importance of building trust, demonstrating fairness, and learning from complaints.

### A: Integrating our international students: the role of the ombuds

*(Paulo Peixoto, Joana Almeida and Dominik Drexel)*

Internationalisation of universities is a priority in many countries but can bring problems for the students. How do we develop the social and academic integration of international students, and how can the Ombuds assist in this?

### B: A glimpse into the post-COVID crystal ball: How can Ombuds Offices use predictions for the future of higher education to highlight their value to academic institutions?

*(Heather McGhee Peggs)*

Sharing five predictions for higher education priorities in the post-pandemic context from authors around the globe, the speaker will challenge participants to consider how they might use these in talking to their institutions about the benefits of ombuds offices post-COVID.

### C: The ‘Coronavirus Generation’ and the need to improve the world of online higher education

*(Doris Kiendl, Felicity Mitchell and Mirjam Meindl)*

The rapid move from classroom-based to online learning posed many challenges. "Millennials" – "or Gen Z", children (and hence our current students) born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, are generally marked by elevated usage of and familiarity with the Internet, mobile devices, and social media. They are sometimes also termed digital natives. Whilst many of them adapted quickly to the new regime, it is recognised that students are keen to return to face-to-face teaching, and some form of hybrid delivery seems likely for the future.

This session will give an insight into different examples of how institutions did or did not manage the changes since spring 2020 and how pedagogical changes affected teaching, learning and testing.

**D: What is our work as Ombuds about? – two experiences**

*(Wolf Hertlein and Jorge António Ribeiro Pereira)*

Looking at two different aspects of the ombuds role, the speakers look at the challenges to their professionalism and own human feelings of the daily task of helping people resolve their conflicts. What challenges do ombuds face in their own development process?

Beyond that, the ombuds office has an important role in identifying issues common to many students. How can ombuds use that pan-institutional knowledge to facilitate communication and come up with solutions for a challenging issue, thereby leading to an improvement in service quality?

**Closing notes day 1**

*(Josef Leidenfrost and Jean Grier)*

## 22 September 2021

**Plenary Session for ENOHE Participants**

(and anyone else who wants to participate)

University Governance and Ombuds Offices in Europe: What's next?

*(Josef Leidenfrost)*

After the Rome Communiqué, which was approved by almost 50 higher education ministers in November 2020, a new phase has begun for the introduction of Ombuds services into higher education institutions across Europe. Triggering discussions about development of Ombuds services and leading or assisting with the implementation of services are important elements in ENOHE's strategy for the coming years. The speaker will present a possible 'roadmap' for this, for discussion by conference participants.

**E: Privacy and GDPR compliance in a Social Media age**

*(Jean Grier, Guadalupe Barrera, Ryan Smith and Martine Conway)*

Ombuds offices are easily contacted by members of the academic community who have issues or problems, but complainants increasingly resort to social media if they have a grievance which they believe has not been addressed correctly or quickly enough. Confidentiality is one of the key principles of ombuds work, but how do you proceed when details of a case may already be circulating on social media?

For those in the European Economic Area (EEA), the General Data Protection Regulations are a further concern beyond the normal expectations of confidentiality, and in addition to the challenges posed by social media, this session will give a quick overview of the GDPR.

**F: How to be influencers in Higher Education #2**

*(Anna-Katharina Rothwangl and Michael Gruber)*

In this workshop session the speakers will discuss two cases dealing with two different issues of study regulations. Small group discussion will look at how the issues of good scientific practice and plagiarism are dealt with by ombuds in various countries and institutions, with a view to identifying best practice through consideration of a range of potential solutions to these common problems.

**G: Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed our work at the Ombuds's Office?**

*(Emilio Olías, Jose Antonio Gonzales De La Peña and Jorge António Ribeiro Pereira)*

We have all – students and staff – had to cope with huge and sudden changes to our *modus operandi* since the start of the pandemic. Now that we seem to be facing a more hopeful situation, the speakers reflect on whether the procedures put in place as a result of the pandemic are here to stay; or whether these are extraordinary and anomalous situations that should be dealt with by reverting to previous methods.

The delivery of online classes has been good for some, but has led to serious feelings of isolation for others. And it is not just students we need to consider – how do we feel about teleworking in our own roles?

**H: Ombuds and ...: positives and pitfalls of adding tools to the Ombuds toolbox**  
(*Jenna Brown, Thomas Brown and Ryan T. Smith*)

From its origins, the ombuds has been a designated neutral, working with members of a community in resolving conflict or grievance. While there are many commonalities among higher education ombuds globally, differences appear as this office evolves. Increasingly, ombuds are being asked to serve their communities in different ways. Restorative practices, conflict coaching, facilitated dialogue ... our presentation will explore these different tools and approaches to using them.

**I: Roma Constantinopolim et Claudiopolim retroque (From Rome to Istanbul and Babes-Bolyai and back)**  
(*Gizem Güray, Dégi László Csaba and Josef Leidenfrost*)

They say (ancient) Rome wasn't built in a day. Implementation of the Rome Communique of November 2020 on the necessity of Ombuds offices in higher education will also take some time. Several European countries do already have such institutions and others are expressing an interest in taking these developments forward. ENOHE is the umbrella organization for these developments, and in this session we will look at recent examples from Turkey and Romania, where the creation of Ombuds offices is happening now.

**J1: Managing the fall out**  
(*Felicity Mitchell*)

The pandemic has had an immeasurable effect on the wellbeing of students and staff in higher education providers, and on our own staff. We are seeing this in all aspects of our case work and complaint numbers continue to rise. This session will look at the challenges of providing a responsive, efficient and kind service, as well as a supportive working environment for our case-handlers.

**J2: What a difference a year and a half has made ..... or has it?**  
(*Karen Stulka*)

This session looks at the experiences of handling complaints in a Scottish University since the start of the pandemic - the challenges staff have faced in handling complaints and the challenges students have faced during this time when making a complaint. Is there a real need to change how we handle complaints and what can we learn from this unprecedented year and a half?

### **Closing Plenary Q&A**

We invite delegates to submit questions or comments on any of the points raised during the conference, and our panel of speakers will do their best to answer them!

**Closing remarks and thanks**  
(*Josef Leidenfrost, Jean Grier and Natalie Sharpe*)