



2023-2024 Report

University Ombudusperson

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Regulatory Framework

In compliance with the Regulations Governing the Powers and Functions of the *University of Deusto's Ombuds Office*¹, which are in line with the basic principles set out in provision 14 of the current legislation (Spanish University Organic Law -LOU 6/2001), the Annual Report on the activities carried out by the University Ombudsperson from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024 is hereby presented. This date marks the end of the period, in accordance with the guidelines contained in article 15: "The University Ombudsperson shall draw up an Annual Report which will include a detailed account of the activities carried out during the previous academic year. The Annual Report will include information on the number and type of complaints submitted, those which were not accepted for consideration and the reasons, as well as those which were accepted and the results of the procedures. The Report will not contain any confidential or personal information that may identify those concerned".

This Report will be disseminated to the University of Deusto community through the usual channels, such as the internal systems, Extranet and social networks. This document is made available to the general public on the Ombuds Office² section of the University's website, where it can be easily consulted together with reports from previous years. This year, a summary of the report was presented at the Academic Council session held on 21 November 2024, accompanied by a reflection on the actions taken, concluding with words of gratitude to the entire university community, as the 2024-2025 academic year marks the end of the current appointment.

In drafting the Report, an effort has been made to ensure respect for the rights and freedoms of all members of the university community, while maintaining due confidentiality in the handling of personal data and cases presented. Likewise, the information on the actions undertaken throughout the year has been provided with the utmost transparency.

¹ Approved by the Academic Council at its meeting of 14 March 2013, published in *BOUD No. 45*, and amended by the Board of Directors on 20 October 2020, published in *BOUD No. 77*, 30 October 2020.

² <http://www.deusto.es/cs/Satellite/deusto/es/universidad-deusto/aldezle-defensora-universitaria>

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Overview

The report will largely follow the outline of reports from previous years to facilitate comparison of data.

In line with the activities performed in previous years, the University Ombudsperson strived to serve all the people who approached the service to request assistance or intervention over the past academic year. Efforts were always made to solve issues through dialogue, trying to reach a consensus.

We would like to thank the University's bodies and those who contributed with their information and help in resolving issues. We would also like to thank all those who placed their trust in our service and contacted the Ombuds Office to file a complaint, lodge a claim, request consultation or report a problem and, most often, request intervention. We would also like to offer our most sincere apologies to those who did not feel adequately defended by the University Ombudsperson's proceedings, or who may feel that their rights were not adequately recognised.

1. Previous considerations nature of the consultations

The following types of procedures were addressed last academic year:

- **Complaints.** These are cases in which the person concerned considers that an action, fact or decision made by a university body or individual undermines their rights. This kind of complaints should be submitted to the Ombuds Office after having exhausted all other available channels for resolution. Nevertheless, people often contact the Ombuds Office for guidance, help or advice to resolve a problem, although they are aware that the service only takes action once other available resolution channels have been exhausted. In some cases, the complaint lodged may not be appropriate for consideration by the Ombuds Office for several reasons, in which case it is dismissed.
- **Consultations.** Those interested contact the service because they require advice, information or help concerning the following: regulations, administrative matters, etc., which are often related to requests for assistance in their work or workplace relationships. The procedures often involve personal matters and are submitted to the heads of the University's management bodies, which will usually provide a prompt solution to their problem. In some cases, information alone suffices.
- **Mediation** is one of the interventions offered by the Ombuds Office. This is an increasingly recommended course of action for resolving conflicts

arising in university life upon specific request of a community member or a group. No mediation took place last academic year.

- And, lastly, **ex-officio actions**. These procedures are undertaken by the Ombudsperson when the University or one or more of its members undertake actions or make decisions that infringe the rights of its members. No ex-officio procedures took place in the 2023-2024 academic year.

The Ombudsperson does not have decision-making power in some types of cases but may make recommendations or suggestions, or prepare reports to deal with the submitted complaints. It is the responsibility of the academic or management authorities to take due action where appropriate in each case.

Accepting a request for consideration marks the beginning of the process. Requests may be **rejected for consideration** when the requirements established by the Regulations Governing the Powers and Functions of the University Ombuds Office are not met (Article 9). All complaints submitted through the web form were processed. However, as some procedures were forwarded to various levels of the University, the Ombudsperson's services had to wait for their resolutions on several complaints.

Finally, and beyond the regulated actions, as already noted, individuals seeking support and a space to be heard also turned to the Ombuds Office last academic year. In all cases, they were attended to, assisted, and, depending on the situation, given advice.

2. Data, analysis and description of procedures

This section presents the statistics for the matters addressed by the service, along with a summary of the procedures undertaken during the 2023-2024 academic year.

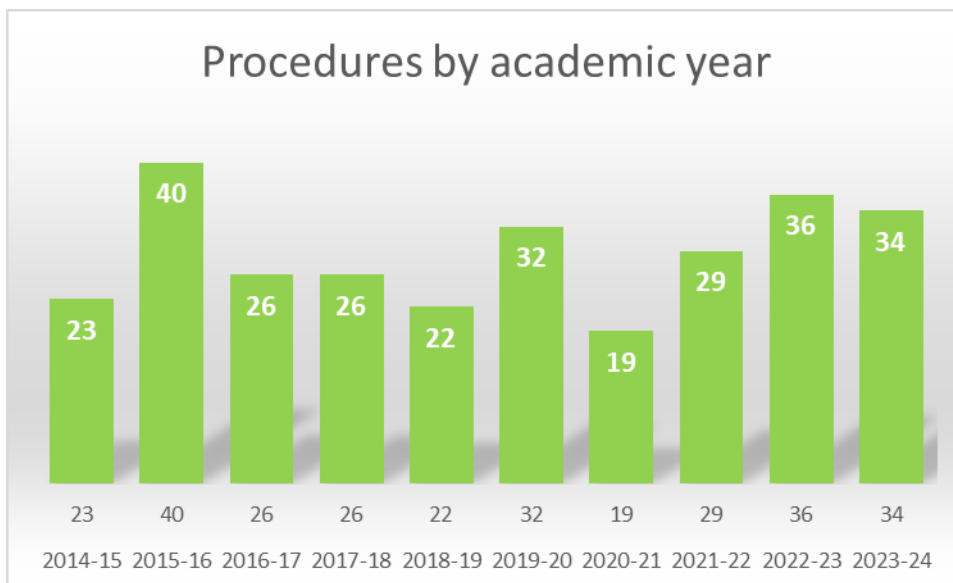
Both complaints and consultations were resolved through the customary procedures run by the Ombuds Office: analysis of the situation and causes, interviews with the authority, body or service involved, request for information or reports. According to the type of case, the most frequent communication channels used with the persons and bodies concerned were personal appointments with the Ombudsperson, or by phone and often by email. Videoconferencing was also a way for dealing with and resolving issues. According to the type of case, reports were issued, and recommendations were sent to the relevant individuals, services or bodies to compensate for damages or enhance the service concerned.

a. Issues addressed

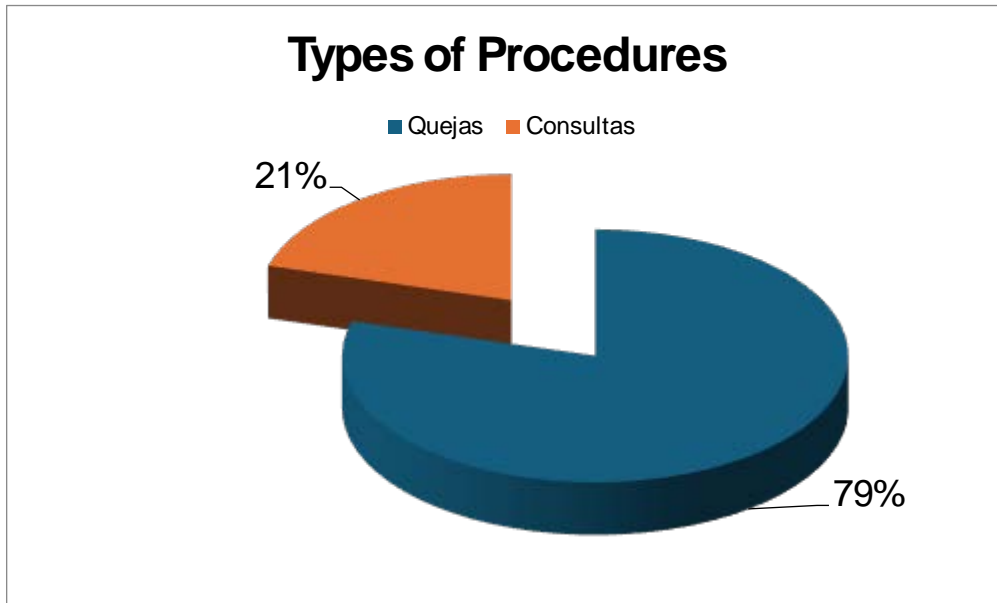
Below are the charts for the following data: development of procedures, types of actions, distribution by campus, distribution by language used, distribution by sector, distribution by centre and service, distribution by group and sex, distribution by education level and outcome of the resolutions. Finally, a table showing the procedures and a description of the grounds for request and distribution by group is also included.

i. Development of procedures

In the 2023-2024 academic year, 34 people approached the Ombudsperson, 2 fewer than the previous academic year. As for the individuals who sought assistance last year, it should be noted that three of them represented a group. One represented a doctoral student group, another represented a group of students to raise a concern about inappropriate teaching practices, and lastly, a mother raised a complaint about the teaching staff on behalf of other parents. For the first time, we assisted an individual from the Vitoria-Gasteiz campus.



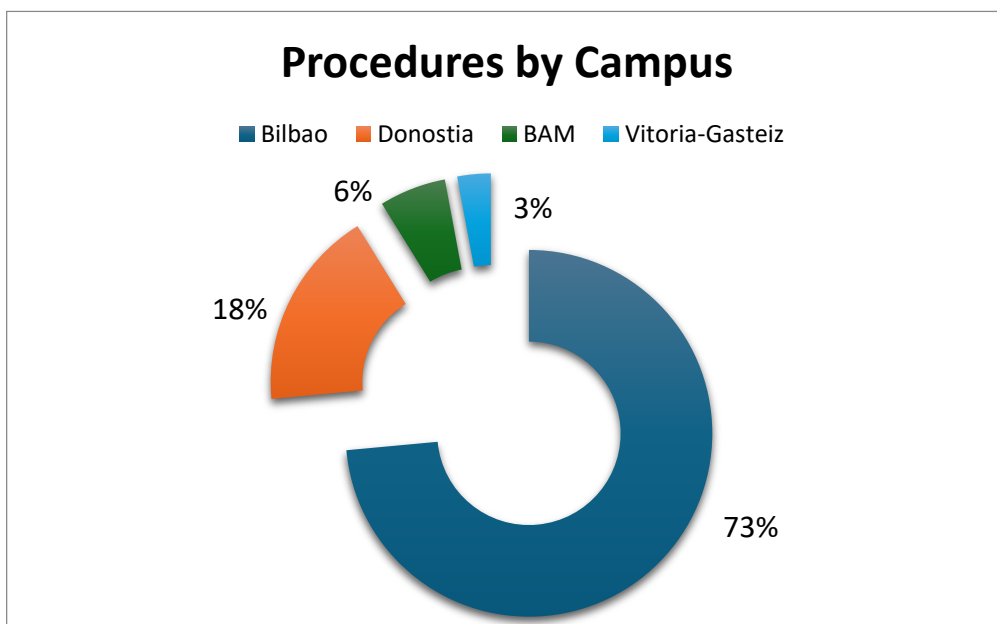
ii. Types of procedures



Regarding the type of requests, almost one in four actions were consultations, a proportion almost identical to that of the previous year.

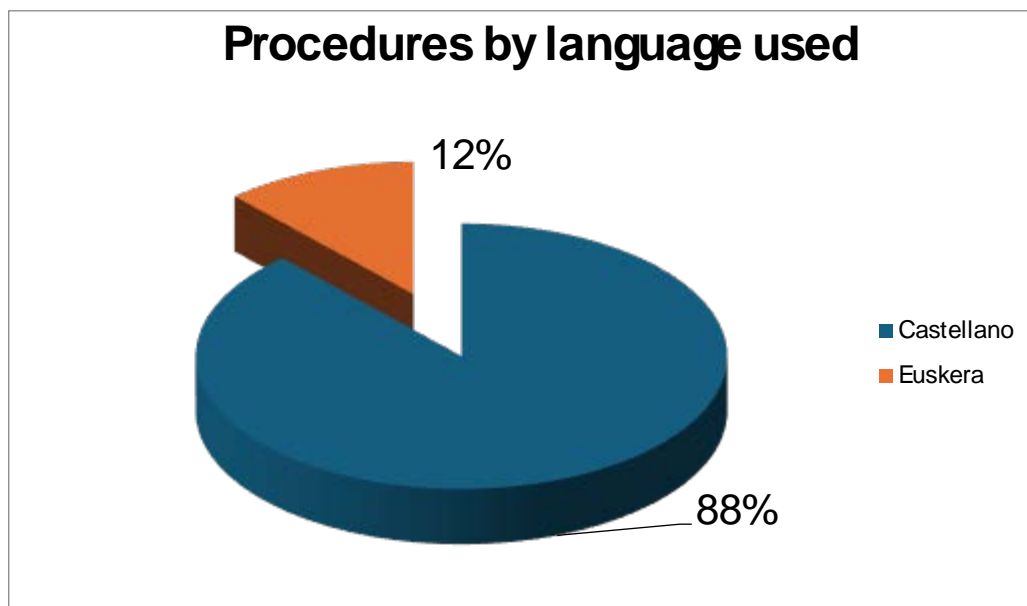
The initial channel for submitting requests was the form available on the University Ombudsperson's website. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were also conducted.

iii. Distribution by campus



The Bilbao campus, accounting for 73%, continued to be the campus with the highest number of interventions, while the number of actions on the San Sebastian campus remained the same compared to the previous academic year. Two individuals from the Escuela Universitaria de Magisterio Begoñako Andra Mari (BAM), an institution affiliated with the University of Deusto, approached us, as well as one person from the Vitoria-Gasteiz campus.

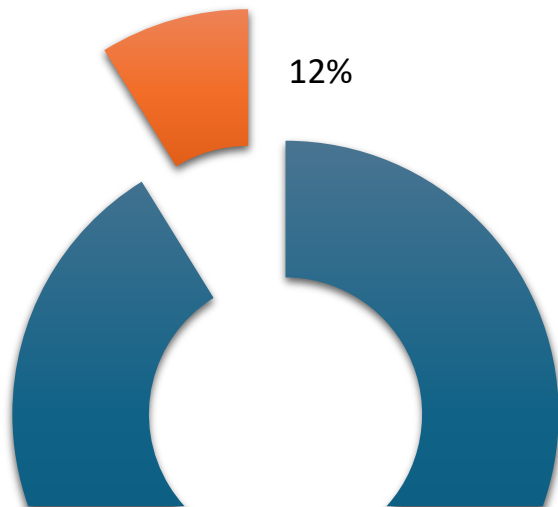
iv. Procedures by language used



When submitting requests, Spanish remained the most used language.

v. Distribution by sector

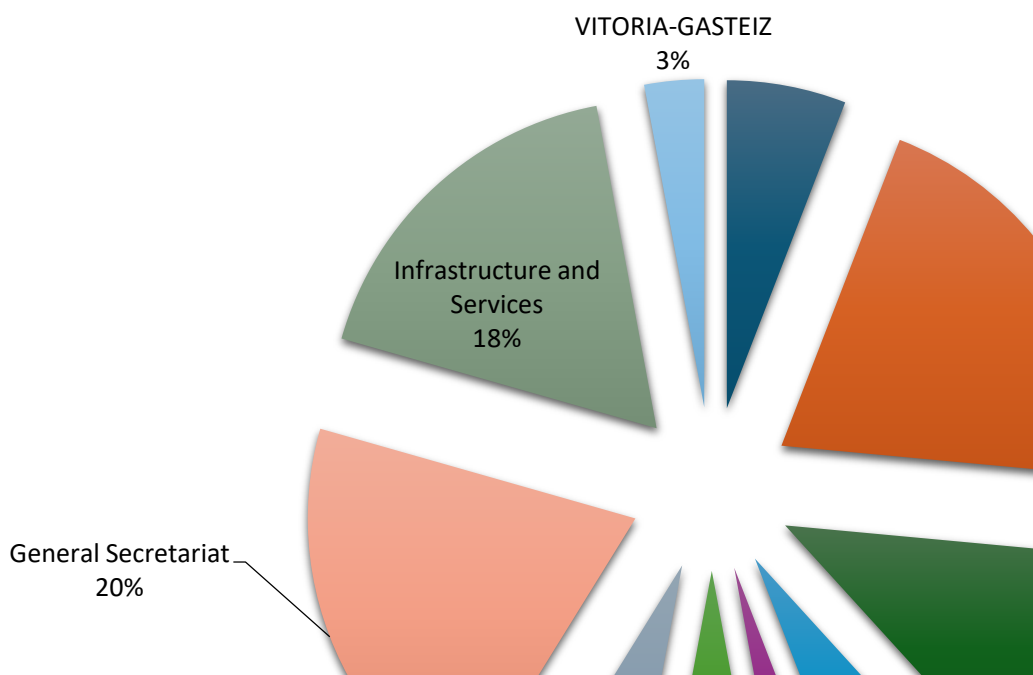
Procedures by group type



Once again, students were the group that most frequently demanded the services of the Ombuds Office last academic year. On four occasions, it was family members who first approached, rather than the students themselves. This year, no one from technical, administrative, or services staff or from the teaching and research staff contacted the service.

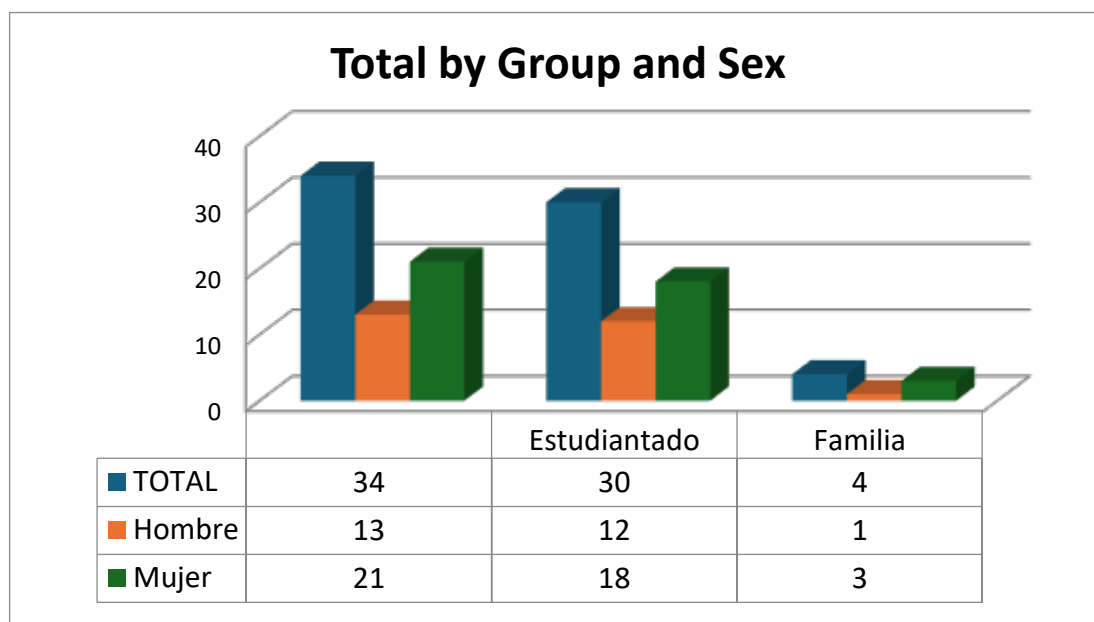
vi. Distribution by centre and service

Procedures by Centre



During the assessed period, there was a significant increase in actions within the General Secretariat, with a total of 7 cases, equalling the number recorded at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities.

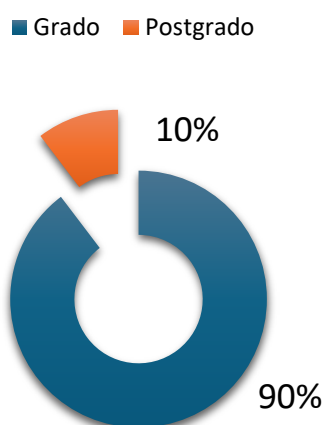
vii. Distribution by group and sex



There is an 8 percentage point difference, with women comprising the majority among those seeking assistance from the Ombuds Office. While drawing firm conclusions is challenging, the gender gap has widened compared to the previous academic year.

Distribution by education level

Procedures with Students by Education Level



Regarding education level, as in previous years, undergraduate students, with 26 cases, were by far the largest group contacting the Ombudsperson, while postgraduate students amounted to 3.

viii. Outcome of the resolutions

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Compared to the previous academic year, the percentage of favourable resolutions for those who filed complaints decreased significantly. Unfavourable

outcomes generally relate to complaints that are difficult to accept, as they conflict with clear regulations, such as those concerning student progression and continuance. Four out of ten resolutions were unfavourable. It is also important to note that assessing the exact outcome of an intervention is not always straightforward, as it is not always a matter of a clear-cut result. In other cases, the resolution might not be exactly what was requested but is managed in a way that partially satisfies the complainant.

i. Procedures by request type

Grounds for requesting action	Students	Family
Problems with various requests, grants...	4	
Complaints about infrastructure, facilities, group work room in the CRAI Library,	3	
Complaint about fee refunds	3	
Complaint regarding non-inclusive language in General Secretariat documents	1	
Complaint regarding antisemitic language in class	1	
Disagreement with the assessment system, assessment results	1	2
Problems arising from student progression and examination regulations	4	1
Complaint regarding inadequate support from the Final Year Project tutor	3	
Complaint regarding approach towards students and quality of teaching	5	1
Inadequate teaching practice in master's programme	1	
Complaint regarding late grading of assessment tests.	1	
Complaint about discrimination due to lack of service in Basque	1	
Queries regarding internships	2	
Total	30	4

b. Reflections and data assessment

In the 2023-2024 academic year, 34 people contacted the Ombuds Office, 2 fewer than the previous academic year. Of these, 7 were inquiries and 27 were complaints or claims. Regarding the individuals who sought assistance from the Ombudsperson last year, it should be noted that three of them represented a group. One represented a doctoral student group requesting the use of inclusive language in the enrolment renewal document, another raised a complaint about inappropriate teaching practices, and a mother submitted a complaint regarding teaching staff on behalf of other parents. More frequently, individuals are reaching out to us primarily via email or phone. All those who contacted us were students or their family members. Unlike the previous academic year, no members of the technical, administrative or services staff, nor the teaching and research staff, contacted the service in the 2023-2024 academic year. For the first time, there was an inquiry from the Vitoria-Gasteiz campus.

When analysing the interventions by type, in the 2023-2024 academic year, they can be grouped into three main categories: quality of general services, students experiencing difficulties with progression, teaching-learning processes and quality of teaching.

In the first area, the cases are varied: complaints about the lack of parking at the San Sebastian campus, low classroom temperatures, the use of group study spaces in the library and student services across various departments. In the aforementioned academic year, complaints regarding the General Secretariat increased significantly, especially during late July, early August and September, when the requested student services were not provided with the immediacy expected or required. This issue particularly affected students who no longer resided in Bilbao or nearby areas, claiming that they were unable to contact the office by phone or that their emails went unanswered. It might be worth considering additional support to provide a better service. Finally, in this category, this is the first time a formal complaint has been received regarding what the student perceived as a violation of their linguistic rights in receiving services from certain departments that assist students, such as the General Secretariat, International Relations, or Deusto Law School, in either of the two official languages of the Basque Autonomous Community, specifically in Basque. In this regard, we anticipate the prompt approval of the 3rd Language Policy Master Plan to ensure the University's commitments are upheld and to improve services.

The second area, as in previous years, is mainly focused on complaints concerning student progression and continuance issues. In this regard, there have been various cases but the underlying issue remains the same: the difficulties students face in continuing their studies at our university. Students having difficulties progressing in their studies according to the regulations argue the need to further explore and analyse their circumstances. They complain that some lecturers and tutors do not provide sufficient information about the regulations, the specifics of certain situations, or additional exam sessions. The details of study programmes, the complexity of combined programmes, and the

involvement of various faculties make the task of providing support and tutoring more difficult. It is important to continue improving in this area, for example, by preparing student guides. Here is an illustrative example of a complaint: "I realise my son made mistakes in planning his studies and did not choose the best strategy when selecting courses for the 2023-2024 enrolment, as he was unaware of the regulations. However, I believe the greater mistake lies with the lecturers who are unaware of the regulations of the university where they work. The tutor's apologies are of no use, quite the opposite." The cases we receive are specific and isolated, and most of the time, they are brought to us as a last resort. However, our understanding of the issues is based on this reality. Hence, the recommendation to create a kind of guide for lecturers and tutors on student progression and continuance, resits, etc. Finally, in this section, as in previous years, there continue to be inquiries about what to do when a student is dissatisfied with the assessment they received.

The third and final section refers to complaints about the quality of teaching. What has caught our attention is that, in the 2023-2024 academic year, we received significantly more complaints than in previous years. These complaints have come in various forms, ranging from first-year undergraduate students who were surprised by the treatment they received, the tone used, or the inconsistency in the assessment criteria set by lecturers, to a master's student who even requested financial compensation for poor service, such as the lecturer's absence and last-minute changes to projects. It is also not the first time that we have received complaints about poor supervision from the Final Year Project tutor. A student who was not properly guided and advised received a significant setback during their defence. Given the limited time to rework the project with the same tutor, they decided not to attend the resit exam and requested a change of tutor for the following year. There was also a complaint about a lecturer who did not provide grades within the expected timeframe for the regular exam session, which had consequences, such as limiting the time available to prepare for the resit exam. To conclude, it is worth reflecting on the lecturers who receive complaints through various channels regarding poor practice in their performance. There is an evaluation of the academic staff, and from the perspective of the specific cases, we observe that over the years, certain complaints about particular lecturers have recurred. It is to be expected that those responsible will take action and provide support to address these shortcomings, difficulties, and issues related to how students are treated, tutored, taught and assessed by the teaching staff. Being aware of the difficulties, we encourage the relevant authorities to address these situations with determination, resisting the urge to overlook them.

Lastly, regarding the process of filing complaints and claims, an increasing number of students or their families contact the Ombuds Office without having exhausted the ordinary channels, or while still awaiting a response from other bodies. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the processing of complaints and claims often marks the beginning of improvements in certain processes, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of service quality. Indeed, it is beneficial for an institution as complex and large as ours to face demands, complaints, suggestions, etc., confidently, as this brings to light situations and issues that need to be addressed.

3. Institutional actions

i. External activities

We attended the annual CEDU (State Conference of University Ombudsperson Offices) meeting held in October 2023 in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. We discussed topics such as Artificial Intelligence and Ombuds Offices, as well as the LOSU (Organic Law of the University System) and the defence of the rights of the university community. We celebrated the 25th anniversary of the National University Ombudspersons' Meetings and signed a declaration, from which I would like to share four paragraphs:

On the occasion of the 25th meeting, we expressed our recognition of the work carried out by colleagues who have worked in Ombuds Offices over the past 25 years. In our case, we extend our heartfelt thanks to Rosa Miren Pagola, who established the Ombuds Office in May 2013.

We emphasise their role in safeguarding the rights and freedoms of the entire university community in relation to the actions of various bodies and services. Our aim is to promote best practices and enhance the quality of university life, guided by the principles of independence, fairness, autonomy, and confidentiality.

The journey undertaken has been significant, though it remains essential to deepen the role of University Ombuds Offices, which is unique and distinct from the responsibilities assigned to other university units. It is also important to urge university authorities to ensure, in all cases, full collaboration, as well as adequate provision of human, technical, and financial resources. It is essential to provide University Ombuds Offices with recognition and treatment that align with the importance of the crucial role they are entrusted with. To elaborate on this, we urge taking advantage of the upcoming reforms to university statutes, as required by the Organic Law of the University System (LOSU).

We are also facing new challenges, such as those arising from the University Coexistence Law and the associated development of regulations and bodies specifically aimed at regulating the relationships among members of the university community, as well as the new whistleblowing channels, which must be implemented in accordance with the Whistleblower Protection Law.

In the same vein, we have had several meetings with the Ombudspersons of the universities of Unijes, Loyola Andaluc a, and Ramon Llull (Catalonia) respectively, to coordinate and support each other in addressing the different challenges and difficulties faced by our respective universities.

II. Students

Once again, two training courses were offered to students last academic year in collaboration with *Deusto Campus*. In the first semester, it was on "Tools and techniques for positive conflict management: negotiation and mediation"; in the second semester, it was on "Bullying and Cyberbullying". Prevention and Intervention Tools". Both were highly successful, both in terms of participation and in the final assessments and satisfaction of all those involved.

4. Final remarks

The Organic Law of the University System (LOSU) states that the actions of the Ombuds Office are aimed at improving university quality in all areas and at promoting coexistence, a culture of co-responsibility, good practices and ethics. For this reason, last year we emphasised the application of the Coexistence Law and highlighted the following: *We have not done our best in relation to the Coexistence Law. We need to engage in serious self-criticism, as we continue to fail to implement everything required by this law. In fact, we have failed to comply with it. We have not approved coexistence rules, nor have we implemented the coexistence committee; and we have not determined the role of the Ombuds Office. We should begin by being self-critical for not being able to decisively involve those directly responsible for this issue. Yet there are other University bodies that can also contribute in this regard, including students, as they are also directly involved, for example, by taking part in the coexistence committee.* The ruling is not so much about coexistence based on disciplinary regulations but rather on mediation and redress. So much for the reference to the previous report. In February 2025, it will be three years since the Coexistence Law was published. We acknowledge that we may not always feel completely comfortable emphasizing a regulatory matter, as our approach often focuses on prioritising the individual, considering circumstances and contexts, and sometimes even relativising the rules. At times, we highlight the potential implications or consequences of a strict adherence to regulations, rules, deadlines, and similar constraints. However, we are discussing rules related to coexistence, values, mediation in the face of coexistence issues, and the participation of all members of the university community. The goal is to improve and shift a mindset and culture that is sometimes disciplinary and punitive, which, in our view, often lacks an educational approach.

This explains both our insistence and our discomfort.

On the other hand, it was also noted that European regulations are in place to address anonymous complaints or requests. However, to this day, as far as we are aware, the system remains non-operational. In the last two years, there has been an increase in the engagement of students' family members when making complaints or inquiries to the Ombuds office. One family member specifically expressed it as follows: "I don't see where I can file a complaint". We insist that it is essential to activate the system and make it available to the public. I hope

that before concluding my work in the Ombuds Office, we will have been able to address the rights of the university community as outlined by the relevant laws.

As usual, I would like to conclude by thanking all those who have contacted the Ombuds Office for the trust they have placed in our service. We hope we have adequately addressed their concerns, even when the response was not as expected.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the entire university community for the respect and consideration shown to the Ombudsperson.