



Deusto

Aldezle
Defensora Universitaria
University Ombudsman

ANNUAL REPORT

June May
2014 2015

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Legal Framework for the University of Deusto Ombudsman

In compliance with the General Regulations concerning the organisation and role of the University of Deusto Ombudsman¹, the Annual Report on Management is hereby presented, in accordance with the basic principles established in the fourteenth provision of the applicable law (LOU 6/2001). The report covers the activities conducted by the Ombudsman from 1 June 2014 to 30 May 2015, the date on which the exercise was closed at the Academic Board meeting of 18 June 2015. This report will subsequently be disseminated among the university community.

The Report on the Ombudsman's practices complies with the requirements in article 15 of the Regulations: “the University Ombudsman shall draw up an Annual Report, which will include a detailed account of all the activities performed during the previous academic year. This report will include information about the number and type of complaints received, those that were not accepted for consideration and the reasons therefore, and those that were accepted and their outcome. The report will not contain any confidential or personal information that may identify those concerned”. Accordingly, all possible efforts have been made to reconcile respect for all members’ rights and liberties and the rules governing university life, in the strictest confidence with regard to the treatment of the persons and cases put forth, notwithstanding transparency concerning information on investigations, etc. carried out throughout the year.

Additionally, the report for the first operating year was submitted to the Academic Board in Bilbao, as well as at the Board of Governors meeting held in San Sebastian². The report was disseminated during the first week of September taking advantage of the beginning of the academic year with the intention of achieving the greatest impact on UD staff, as well as among students, especially newcomers. A variety of communication channels were used for this purpose, both internal, via the Intranet for UD staff and via the Extranet and social networks for the student body. Its public dissemination was carried out by posting the document in the Ombudsman’s Office section of the University website, where it can be easily consulted³.

¹ Approved by the Academic Board on 14 March 2013 and published in the (Deusto Official Gazette) *BOUD* no. 45, Tuesday 14 May 2013.

² In its regular meetings held on 9 June 2014 and 19 September respectively.

³ <http://www.deusto.es/cs/Satellite/deusto/es/aldezle-defensora-universitaria>

Introduction

This is the second report to be submitted since the University Ombudsman was appointed⁴. During this year, the actions taken and decisions adopted have been based on the relative security that can be acquired in such a short period of time, which, however, has been enriching and fruitful in terms of experiences and encounters. During all this time, the guiding principle in our daily tasks has been to assist University community members. Promote their rights, receive them and attend any complaints concerning the performance of University bodies and services or its members' specific actions. All of the above have been carried out in compliance with Article 1.1. of the Regulations, and have, in some cases, been based on a literal interpretation of said regulations. Efforts have been made to ensure compliance with the duties entrusted to the University management team and structures. With due regard to the principles of independence and autonomy, in every case our procedures have been oriented to improving the quality of the different services offered in the various scopes of university life.

This report presents the cases that have been attended throughout the year to the University community, publishing the information available, ensuring that confidentiality is respected and making known the management actions carried out during this period of time. Nevertheless, the University Ombudsman does not intend to merely transmit statistical data which do not always convey the complex and often eventful activity that is characteristic of the current moment in the university world. The main reason for describing the actions carried out by this service is to share with the university body the issues that have been dealt with, accompanied by an initial analysis and some brief final remarks, which could perhaps be taken into consideration by the University community.

Prior to closing this section, we would like to express our appreciation to all the University bodies, and especially to the people who have collaborated by helping with the service and the tasks which we have been entrusted with. While the obligation established in the Regulations (Articles 5.2 and 6.2 and 3), concerns personal collaboration and providing data and information requested by the Ombudsman, we understand that the added workload this involves is not always easily manageable. For this reason, we would like to express our gratitude to the Rector and his Cabinet; to the deans and vice deans, in particular the Vice Deans of Students who have helped us; to the Administrative and Services staff, and we cannot fail to mention the head of the

⁴ 15 May 2013.

UD Communication Office, who has always collaborated efficiently in all the different cases for which we needed their assistance.

We would also like to extend our appreciation to the Director of Deusto Forum, the Student Chamber and the members of the University community who have worked with the Ombudsman's Office. Those who have presented cases to solve, or requested consultation or information must also be mentioned. Mutual collaboration has contributed to improving interpersonal relationships within our University community and prompting reflection on general ethical principles and the individual and group responsibilities that concern each of us in our respective scopes so as to enjoy greater harmony and shared experiences. Finally, we would like to express our thanks to all the individuals who have been actively involved in this report.

The following sections include the various actions conducted during this year. The purpose of the first part is to provide information. The type and nature of the procedures are therefore compiled in a fairly detailed way, supported by graphics and tables followed by data assessment. The Ombudsman's institutional proceedings, both external and internal, are then presented, to conclude with some final remarks.

We have used neutral, inclusive words in this report without making allusions to gender. In those cases where the masculine gender has been used to refer to both gender groups, we have tried to avoid repeating expressions that make reading difficult.

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Previous considerations and nature of the consultations

The Ombudsman's task has been based on a key principle: maximum accessibility to all the members of the University community. The greatest possible effort has been made to ensure the practices are always based on independence and neutrality, which are distinctive characteristics of the Ombudsman. The criteria for resolution of the cases have been as follow: care when listening, flexibility in solving the cases, prompt implementation and later monitoring, always respecting the authority conferred to the different bodies.

This year the main objective has also been to make the service visible. It has been a great challenge to make the Ombudsman's Office and the activities it carries out known to students and staff, without overlooking outreach with its dissemination and openness. We have also done our utmost to make the student body ponder issues concerning rights and obligations in the context of their university studies.

The types of procedures that we have dealt with during this academic year have been as follow:

- **Complaints.** Those cases in which the person concerned considers that an action, fact or a decision made by a University body or individual undermines their rights. These kinds of complaints must be submitted to the Ombudsman only after having exhausted all other available channels. Nevertheless, although people are aware that the Ombudsman's Office only takes action as a last resort, they often contact the Ombudsman's Office for orientation, help or advice to solve their problems. Due to various reasons, the complaint lodged may not be appropriate, in which case it will be dismissed.
- **Consultations and queries.** Most people contact the service for these reasons. They seek orientation, information and help regarding different matters: regulations, administrative actions, policy, and often coexistence or work issues. The procedures often involve personal matters and are submitted to the heads of University management bodies, who generally solve the problem rapidly. In some cases, information alone suffices.

We have distinguished several types of consultations: those which appear in the formal codified procedures, express consultations and another much more common kind, which is not codified but have also been attended. The latter type have not been codified due to people's reluctance to have information stored in a database that could provide clues about their identity, even if they are guaranteed the right to privacy under the confidentiality principle. In other

cases, people may not wish the Ombudsman to intervene unless they expressly notify otherwise. These cases have not been included in the statistical data, although they have been attended with same attention and diligence as others, although with a different action mode.

- One of the Ombudsman's interventions is also **mediation**, which is increasingly recommended to solve conflicts arising in university life at the specific request of a community member or body. The Ombudsman acts as negotiator between the parties involved in the conflict, aiming to achieve a satisfactory agreement for both. During this year, two mediations have taken place.
- And, lastly, **ex-officio actions**. When the existence of University acts or resolutions or the actions of one or more members of the University community have undermined the rights of the members, ex-officio actions are carried out by the Ombudsman. Ex-officio actions can also take place when related to the quality control of the university system. These actions are rare and during this year there has been only one ex-officio action.

The Ombudsman does not have legally binding decision making powers and may recommend, suggest or elaborate reports according to the type of complaints made. The academic authorities or the head office have the responsibility of taking appropriate action according to the case. During this exercise three recommendations and two reports have been registered.

Accepting complaints, etc. for consideration marks the beginning of the process resulting from the application submitted. Requests may be rejected for consideration when the requirements established by the Regulations governing the powers and duties of the Ombudsman are not fulfilled. During this year, eight cases have not been accepted for consideration.

Finally, we would like to highlight a type of action which, despite not being included in the Regulations, has a meaningful role in the Ombudsman's daily activities. When facing a problem or difficult situation, a large number of community members have contacted the Ombudsman without actually filing a complaint or claim. These individuals simply needed to be listened to, requiring attention and assistance regarding a personal situation resulting from a University-related action. It could be said that, in these cases, the Ombudsman has, above all, listened, given advice according to the circumstances and offered support. Although these kinds of actions do not form part of the Ombudsman Office's duties in the strictest sense, we believe it is helpful for those concerned and is a voluntary and relevant act of kindness, without contradicting or replacing the legally constituted regulations.

Data, analysis and description of procedures

A graphic summary of the procedures conducted this year is presented below. For the reasons mentioned above, other kinds of interventions that we have carried out via different means have been excluded from the statistical record and detailed information. However, in every case, an interview concerning the case was held.

Complaints and queries have been solved through the usual personal procedures implemented by the Ombudsman: analysis of the situation and causes, interview with the authority, body or service of the case concerned, and requests for information or reports. According to the type of case, the most frequent communication channels used with the persons and bodies involved in the cases have been personal appointments with the Ombudsman, contact with the Secretary's Office, phone and often email. After the proceedings have been completed, the person submitting the complaint has, in almost all cases, received written notice of the resolution. Reports were issued in two cases and recommendations were sent to the person, service or body concerned in another three, with a view to improving the corresponding service.

The average resolution time was from one to two weeks. One case required two months and a half to solve, and another took five months. The latter of these was unfortunate as it was a mere technical problem and the delay was unnecessary once the resolution had been made.

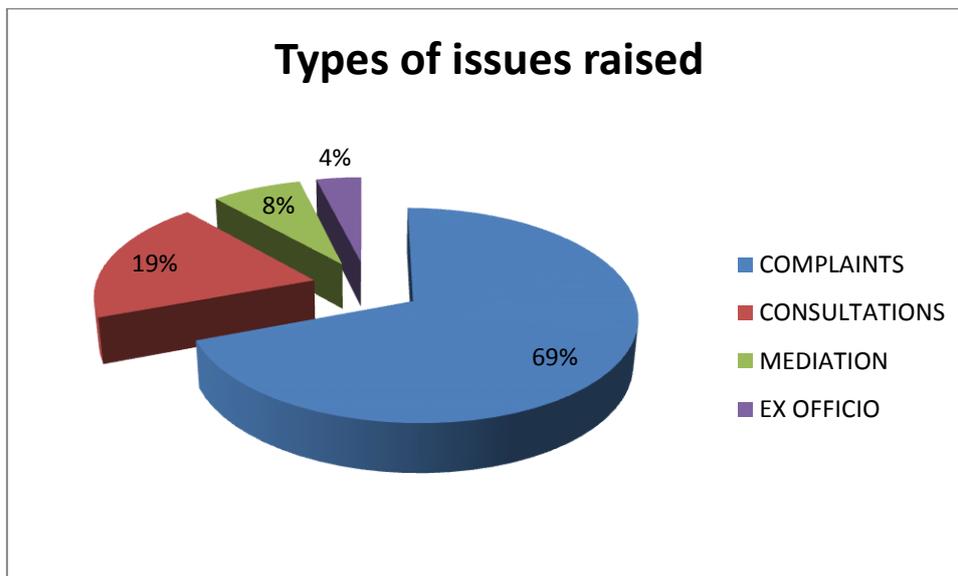
Eight cases were rejected for consideration. The reasons for rejection were mainly not having exhausted the ordinary procedures or the complaints were unfounded. Nonetheless, in these cases the applicant was attended, assisted and offered the requested guidance and information.

1. Issues covered

This section includes this year's actions by means of graphics which show: the issues raised, distribution by the academic years covered in the Report, language used, distribution by sectors, services and faculties, groups and sex, issues by faculties and groups, type of degree studies, status and outcome of the resolutions. Finally, the content of the issues is described, with the corresponding distribution by groups, which is presented in a table.

I. Types of issues

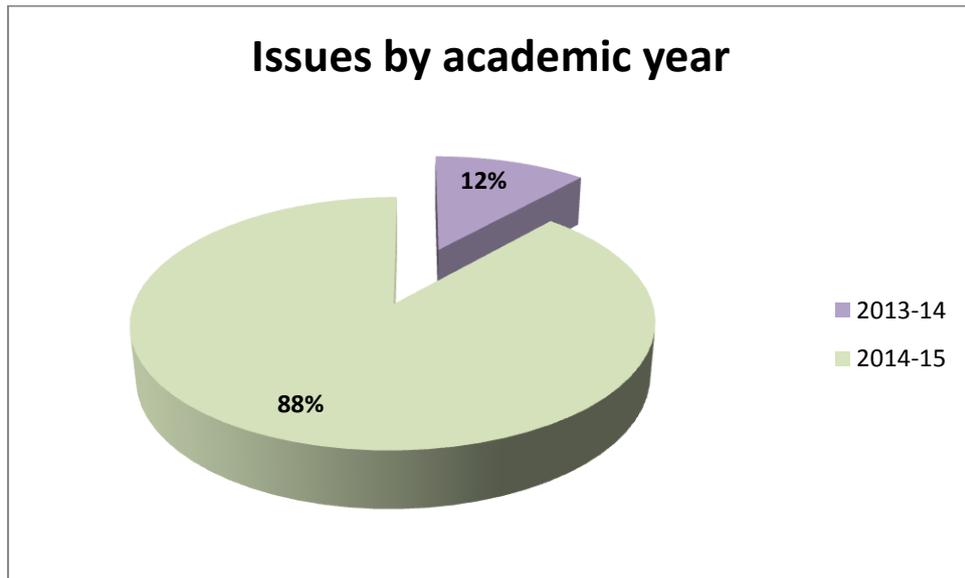
During the year covered in this report, 26 actions were carried out, 5 of which were formulated as queries by users and 18 as complaints, 2 of them being declared confidential at the request of the people concerned. Moreover, two mediations and an ex-officio action took place. In all, 4 more procedures than last year were carried out. Regarding the distribution by campuses, two issues concerned the UD in San Sebastian and the rest referred to Bilbao.



As has already been mentioned, express consultations which were attended almost immediately were not counted. Nor were confidential consultations, which included the cases of personal support and guidance. For this reason, the statistical data show fewer consultations than complaints.

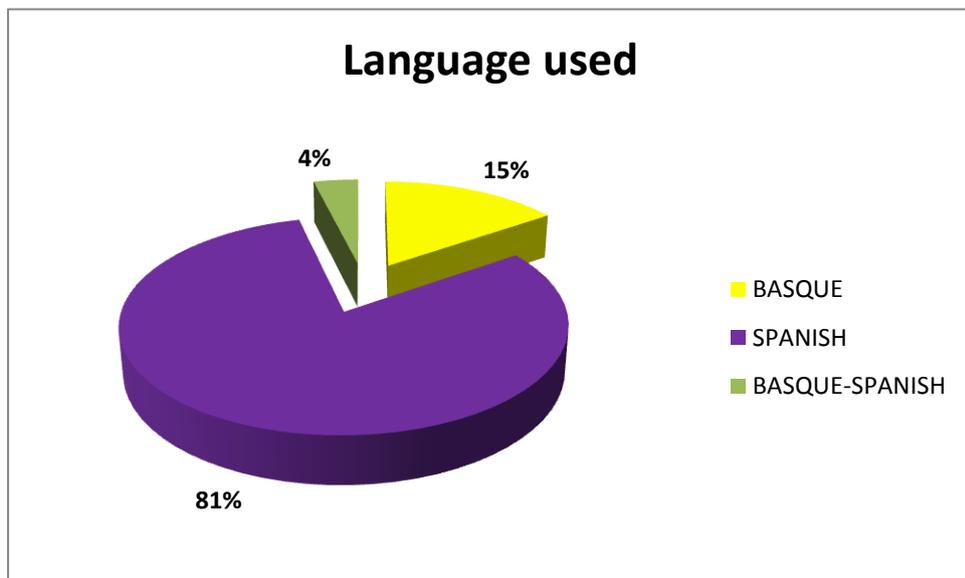
The Ombudsman was contacted in various ways: As per complaints, the first contact was via computer in 85% of the cases. The rest were direct visits to the Ombudsman or previous contacts at the Secretary's Office, 13%; while 2% were phone calls.

II. Issues by academic years



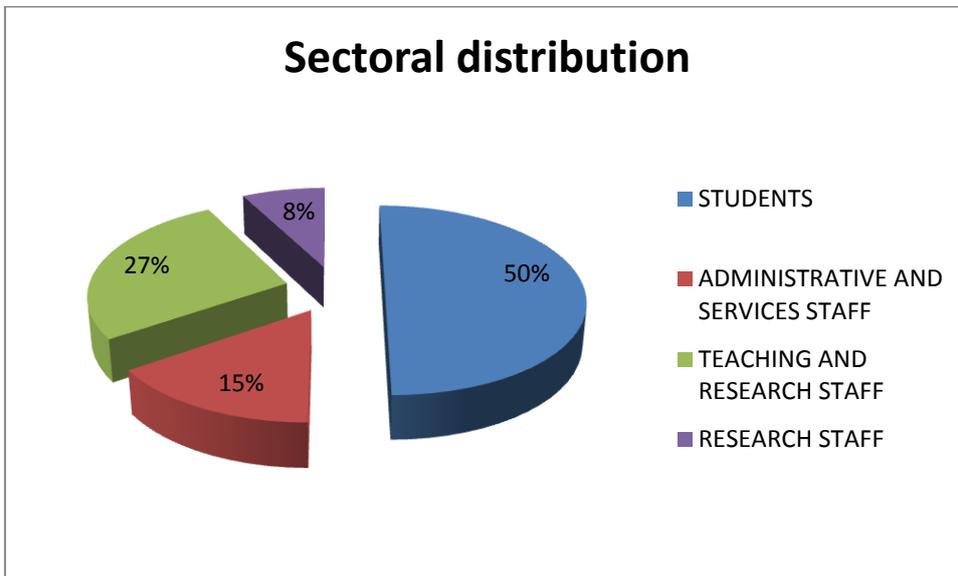
Of the total complaints, 3 were put forward at the end of the (June-August) 2013-14 academic year and the rest correspond to 2014-15 (September-May)

III. Language used



21 consultations were held in Spanish, 4 in Basque and one was bilingual, Basque-Spanish.

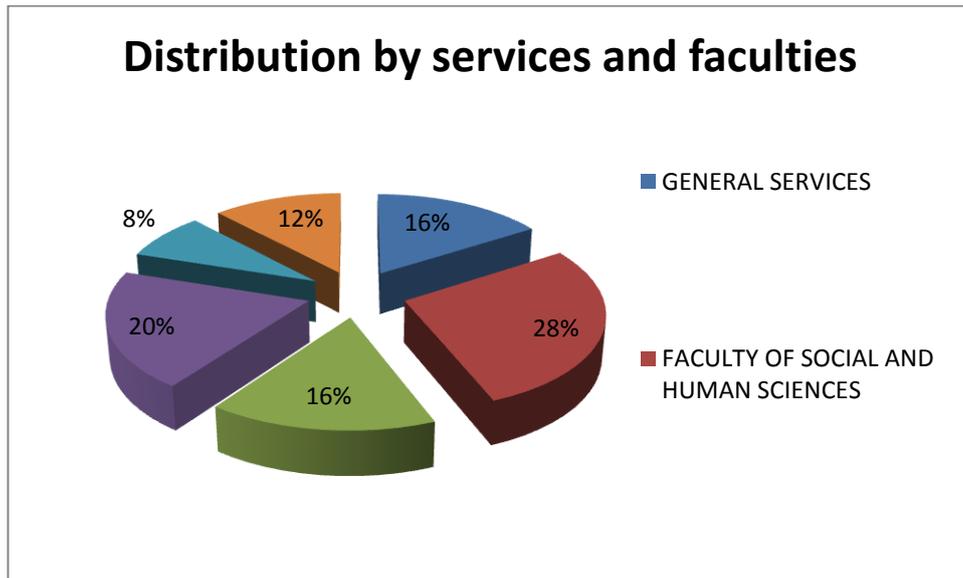
IV. Sectoral distribution



Half of the cases submitted to the Ombudsman's Office were from students (13 cases) who were, therefore, the group that most used these services. Teaching and research staff follow with 7 issues; 4 were from the Administration and Services staff and 2 came from research staff.

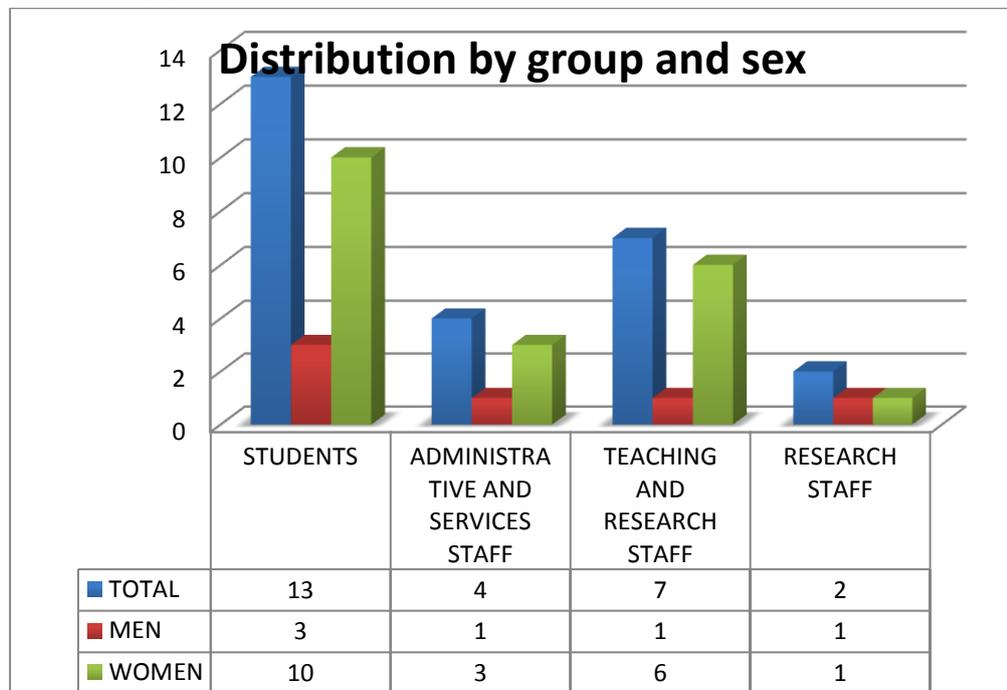
4 actions, two concerning students, one related to teaching and research staff and one from the Administrative and Services staff were group actions. One of the two coming from students denounced a situation that affected a wider group, not only students, but a large part of the University community (cyber-bullying).

V. *Distribution by services and faculties*



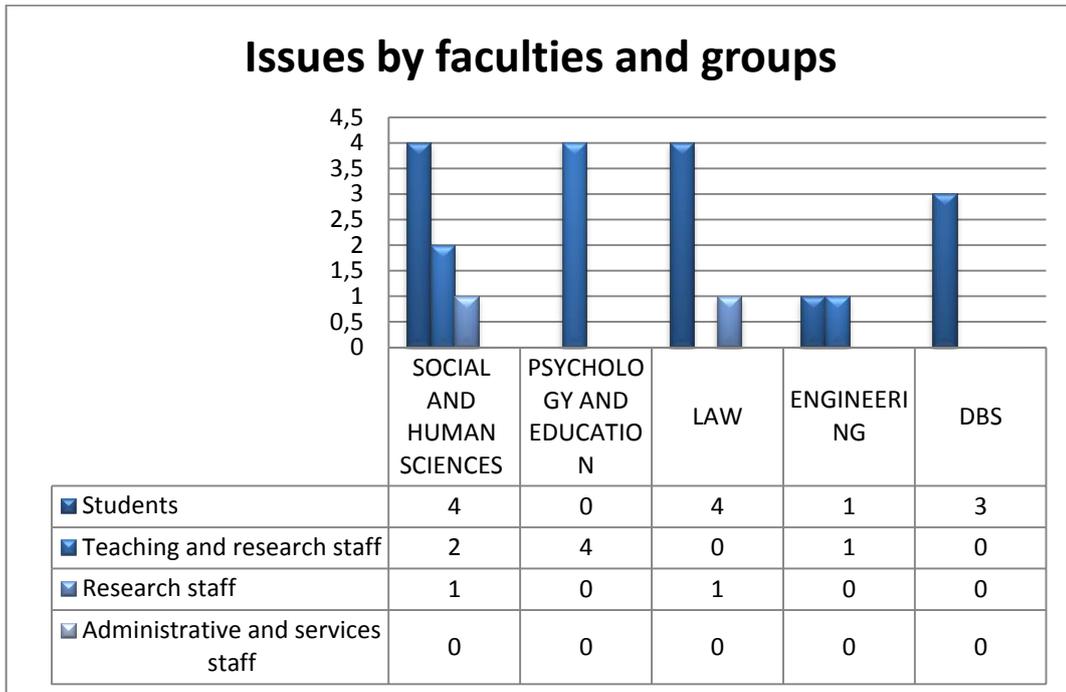
The number of cases dealt with by faculties is as follows: General Services, 5 actions; and by faculties: Social and Human Sciences, 7; Psychology and Education, 4; Law, 5; Engineering, 2; and lastly, Economics and Business Administration, 3.

VI. *Distribution by groups and sex*



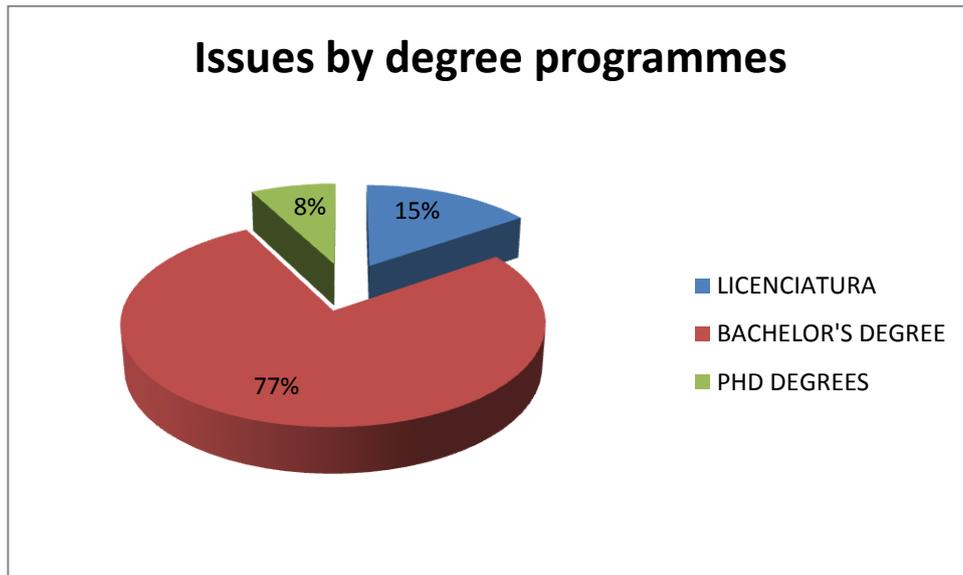
As for groups and sex, the graph shows remarkable differences regarding requests. Except for research staff, the number of women is higher than the number of men in every group.

VII. Issues by faculties and groups



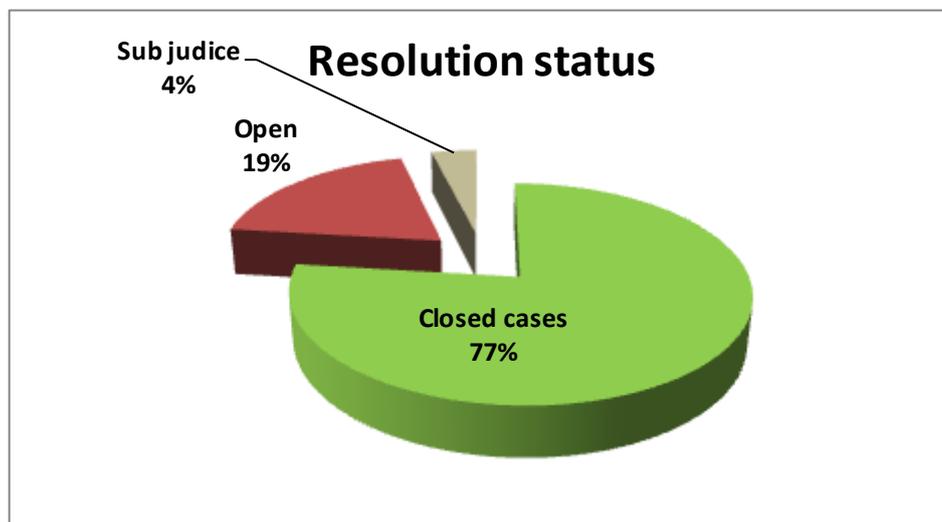
The relation between faculties and groups varies. Social and Human Sciences and Law share the same number of cases involving students and research staff, while the highest number of teaching and research staff-related cases come from Psychology and Education. In any case, when considering the total number of groups, the number of cases is not very significant.

VIII. Issues by degree programmes



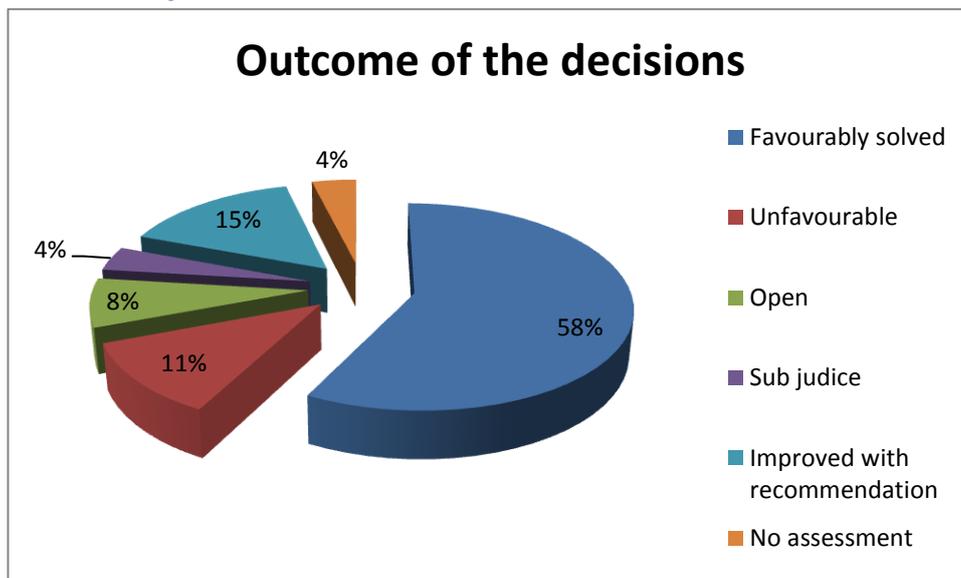
Regarding the degree programmes, data regarding students who have made use of the service are distributed as follow: 10 involve Bachelor's degree students, 2 Licenciatura students and 1 was a PhD student.

IX. Current status of the resolutions



Data regarding percentages are as follow: closed cases: 20; cases open: 5; sub judice: 1

X. Outcome of the decisions



Data regarding percentages are as follow: favourably solved: 15; unfavourable: 3; sub judice: 1; improved with recommendation: 4; no assessment: 1; open: 5.

After reading the data, it can be stated that the percentage of favourably solved cases could be increased by continuing to work on those that are still open and even monitoring those that are required to have an improvement plan.

XI. Actions by causes and groups

The reasons prompting the complaints and enquiries were quite varied. The following table shows the nature of the issues by groups.

Actions by cause	Students	Teaching and research staff	Research staff	Administrative and Services staff
Economic issues and administrative management	X			
Problems related to grants and economic	X			

aid				
Fees for academic transcript requests	X			
Issue of degree certificates	X			
Graduation ceremonies	X			
Complaints about teaching / teaching staff	X			
Assessment systems	X			
Thesis supervision	X	X		
Exam dates	X			
Cyber-bullying	X			
Student assessment		X		
Interpersonal relationships with students		X		
Interpersonal relationships with Administrative and Services staff		X		
Protocol service		X		
Individual Plan on Academic Work Schedule (PIDA) assessment		X		
Computer service		X		
Office location		X		

Bureaucratic problems			X	
Relationship between principal investigator and research team members			X	
Facilities and services				X
Security and health				X

2. Data Evaluation

The number of actions in the current year has been higher than last year's, yet not significantly. Like the previous year, the student body submitted most of the cases, closely followed by the teaching and research staff. The excellent work carried out at the request of the deans' offices must be highlighted, both by the Student Vice-deans and the tutors, who solved problems in the faculties themselves with no need to appeal to higher bodies. Many of the students that seek the Ombudsman's assistance are generally not aware of the channels available to them at their own faculty. In any case it would be advisable to facilitate communication so they are aware of this, although we know that efforts are being made in this respect. Some of the issues raised are recurring. Issues concerning grants and economic aid have noticeably decreased, in relation to last year's caseload, as the unfavourable situations which took place last year have not happened again. Some topics related to Management and the Secretariat have also occurred again, and except for a few, were not significant and have been solved rapidly and correctly. Teaching has obviously been a more important issue when it comes to students. Exam dates also entail actions. Isolated cases concerning teaching assessment systems are recurring. There have been no serious conflicts in any of them, although sometimes greater diligence and delicacy were lacking when dealing with the cases.

All in all, there were general and habitual topics, which would be difficult to eradicate completely, and although they are structural problems to a certain extent, they should not be overlooked: financial aid and grants; topics related to Administration or the Secretariat and, on the other hand, specific issues which are not conflictive but require attention and effort as they are individual cases and often affect people's feelings.

Cases related to teaching and research staff vary widely. Specific cases which had to do with the location of the office, work performance, student assessment or, from another perspective, issues regarding a service which led to improving the good practices in place.

Interrelationships between different groups were also dealt with during this year. Perhaps the most sensitive issues were those regarding lecturer-student relationships. On occasion, a change in students' attitude toward lecturers can be noted. The lack of due respect students owe lecturers may even lead to situations that could be considered bullying. In this sense, we could also refer to cyber-bullying, which has been noted among students. This is the group where it most often occurs. Cyber-bullying could be defined as cross-cutting, as it has also affected other sectors at the Bilbao campus. Some cases have gone viral, with non-University agents acting anonymously and illicitly in our community and damaging the atmosphere of conviviality, especially among students. There is little or nothing the University IT services can do to counter these attacks. Nevertheless, the Ombudsman's Office chose a line of action to track them systematically and assist the affected people.

The teaching and research staff's concern regarding improvement in the management and planning model has been remarkable and the subject of consultation at our services. The Individual Plan on Academic Work Schedule (PIDA) assessment has also been part of our procedures.

As for other topics related to the academic field that were relevant last year, although no explicit complaints were made, references to the pressure involved in supervising Undergraduate Final Year Projects were noted. This year, however, the comments that have reached the Ombudsman's Office have been much calmer and better scheduling within the lecturers' academic programmes seems to have eased this pressure to a certain extent.

As per languages, the use of the Basque language among the teaching staff was also a subject submitted to the Ombudsman's Office. The lack of or minimum use of Basque in some degree programmes was a matter of complaint, although, due to fear or distrust, it was not formulated as such. The Ombudsman Office's position with regard to this topic is sensitive since this involves factors which fall beyond the Ombudsman's scope of intervention. Nonetheless, the commitment to internationalisation, which is so necessary, should not hinder this requirement.

Topics related to the services sector have been raised from time to time. However, as already mentioned above, these decisions must be fast and, except in the case of extremely complex problems, delays in the execution of previously decided matters cannot be allowed and certainly not be prolonged as has occurred in some cases.

When counting the total actions implemented, some collective cases were also registered as individual. Nevertheless, this does not affect the reliability of the information provided.

Finally, in closing, it must be noted that 58% for favourable resolutions and 11% for unfavourable ones are reasonable figures when considering the 15% rate of improvement plans that was set –the rest refer to cases which have not been closed yet. Some complaints were not solved as this service would have preferred, although the best possible arrangements were made for the parties concerned.

3. Institutional actions

A variety of internal and external institutional actions were carried out by the Ombudsman during this year. Institutional tasks play a relevant role in the Ombudsman's work as shown in the description of activities listed below.

i. External actions

Participation in meetings with other university Ombudsman Offices plays a vital role in this section. Some meetings in this framework are the Ombudsmen State Conference-CEDU, of which the University of Deusto forms part, and the G9 Universities, public universities in an Autonomous Community to which Deusto's Ombudsman is invited twice a year, a sign of courtesy and respect which is sincerely appreciated. The UD is also a member of the European Network for Ombudsmen in Higher Education ENOHE, a European Ombudsmen network (with several members in the USA, Canada, Mexico and Australia) These associations share an objective: discuss solutions to common problems at the higher education level, increase knowledge, compare working methods, improve abilities and development of competences and learn from each other's experience and knowledge.

Along these lines of collaboration, in June 2014, the Ombudsman attended the tenth Ombudsmen Meeting of the G9, which was held in San Sebastian. The topics discussed were distributed in four working sessions as follow: Implementation of the Decree at different universities; responsibilities and actions of departments and faculties in subjects with high failure rates; impunity/sanctions for misbehaviour of the teaching staff, the Administrative and Services staff and the student body, cases regarding psychological problems.

In October 2014, the Ombudsman attended the seventeenth University Ombudsmen State Meeting and the General Assembly meeting held in Badajoz during the sessions and round table discussions, ideas were shared on the following topics: Subjects with irregular academic outcomes; copying; plagiarism; copyright and intellectual property; cancellation of registration and refunds. Moreover, a round table discussion on the following topic was held: University Ombudsman Offices in the Ibero-American context: current situation and cooperation projects. The online journal, Rued@, created by the CEDU itself and targeting University Ombudsmen, was presented at the meeting. It aims to be a journal on university, ethical and rights issues.

In March the Ombudsman attended the first 2015 Ombudsmen Meeting of the G9, held in Madrid. The topics, which had been previously prepared and analysed in depth, were: Regional government allowances for teaching and research staff; committees on cronyism; adaptation of the working place for lecturers with chronic health problems; and universities' own degrees.

And finally, as regards Ombudsmen's meetings, the Ombudsman's attendance to the *Meetings on regulatory changes planned by the Ministry*, held in April in Madrid, must be underlined. The chosen topics were: Bachelor's degrees 3+2; new certification system for teaching and research staff and creation, recognition and accreditation of universities. The analysed documents were: RD 43/2015 of February the 2nd, which modifies Royal Decree 13/93/2007 of October 29, which establishes the planning of official degree programmes. Royal Decree 99/2011 of January the 28th was also examined, which regulates official degree programmes. The draft decree which modifies R.D. 1312/2007, and establishes the national accreditation required to gain access to university teaching staff positions and the draft decree for the creation, recognition and accreditation of universities and university faculties were also analysed. The Ombudsman from La Rioja, José M^a Aguirre and the University of Deusto Ombudsman gave talks on this last draft decree.

Furthermore, as approved in the eleventh Annual Conference of the European Network for Ombudsmen in Higher Education (ENOHE), the "Warsaw Resolution" was presented at the Ministerial Conference and 2015 Bologna Political Forum held in Yerevan, Armenia. The main recommendations issued in the aforementioned document focus on the importance of naming university Ombudsmen in countries where they do not yet exist so as to safeguard students' rights and those of the rest of the university community members.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the Ombudsman met with the Ombudsman of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, Dr. Catalina Romero, with a view to exchanging experiences and establishing bonds between both Offices.

ii. Internal actions

The 2013-14 Annual Report was submitted to the Academic Board on 14 June 2014. The Report was likewise presented in the plenary session of the Government Council held the 19th of September 2014.

Regarding the institutional acts which the Ombudsman has attended, the inauguration of the academic year and the diploma giving ceremony for new graduates of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences must be highlighted.

The Ombudsman attended the first Meeting on the Apostolic Territorial Subject held in Loyola in April, following an invitation from the apostolic delegate of the Apostolic Territorial Platform (PAT) from Loyola, Txema Vicente SJ.

The Ombudsman also attended the conference on "centrality of victims" organised by Deusto Forum in March, and the gathering which was officially called to protest the massacre at the University of Garissa (Kenya) and held in April in the Memory Square, located at the Bilbao campus.

Some of the most relevant meetings included in this report are those that were held with the teaching staff, Vice Rector of Faculty, Identity, Mission at the San Sebastian campus, José Javier Pardo SJ; with the Vice Rector of International Relations and Student Affairs, Álvaro de la Rica, and with the Vice Rector of Academic Organisation, Educational Innovation and Quality and General Secretary, Begoña Arrieta, as well as with several deans so as to discuss issues related to the cases submitted. Additionally, introductions and courtesy meetings have been held with both representatives of the Bilbao and San Sebastian Trade Union Committees, Fabián Laespada and Miguel Castiella, respectively. Communication issues have been discussed with the Head of Communication, Magdalena Izaguirre.

At the beginning of the course, actions were taken to inform students about the Ombudsman's Office. Faculty coordinators have also assisted in this task.

A workshop (2 ECTS) entitled "Tools and techniques for the positive management of conflicts: negotiation and mediation" was organised to spread information about the service and inform students. The course, available at both campuses, was taught in Bilbao in February and was particularly popular among participants.

In collaboration with Deusto Forum, a World Café was held at the Bilbao campus last April, open to students from all faculties. The event, which dealt with the rights and obligations of university students, was attended by Iñigo Lamarka, who spoke at the

presentation and the closing ceremony. A significant number of students attended and the event was positively valued by the participants.

During this year the Ombudsman continued to visit the San Sebastian campus on a monthly basis, which also provides the opportunity to contact with faculties and services and meet the people in charge. The efforts and initiatives aimed to offer activities at the SS campus have not been successful during this second year. Finding convenient schedules is currently the main obstacle. However, we hope that this difficulty will be solved next year. The Ombudsman visited Deusto Business School in Madrid in April. The Ombudsman had the opportunity to meet and greet the staff, offer information about the University Ombudsman's responsibilities and know more about this leading business school's creation and progress.

In conclusion, the Ombudsman attended the Equality Commission meeting, held in March and was a member of the working group in charge of preparing the draft of the University's Harassment Protocol.

Final remarks

The University of Deusto is aware of the turbulent times that higher education is currently experiencing and that uncertainty may create the obligation to react and respond to changes that are urgently demanded. On the contrary, improvement of the university system requires calm assessment and reflection. Nonetheless, in line with the activities carried out during this second year, the Ombudsman's Office would like to share some thoughts that aim to improve the quality of the procedures and actions.

As per the number of people making use of the service, which was considerably higher than last year, the average number of interventions has not increased greatly. This indicates that the Ombudsman is more widely known and that the service is reliable. Although data are not always tangible, there is clear interest in this procedure which ensures actions with guarantees. The Ombudsman's Office is therefore positively valued as an institution, although there still remains a great deal of work to be done for the service to be integrated within the university framework. In this sense, we have confirmed that the service is still not sufficiently known by a large number of students and that numerous people from different groups are reluctant to use it. We are aware that, in addition to continuing with our efforts to make it known, time is needed so as to overcome the problems, adjustments, etc. of the initial stages.

We consider that the excellence of the service is of paramount importance. We have at all times intended to answer, attend, process and, when possible, solve the issues that have been entrusted to us as soon as possible. This availability, together with an approachable attitude toward the people who seek our assistance is vital when acting within the different scopes of competence. Improvement of the service is and must be based on respect for people.

Aiming to guarantee the rights and freedoms of all the people in the community, the Ombudsman's independence and autonomy have been safeguarded at all times, not being submitted to any other university authority. The authorities we have addressed and whose respect and consideration we appreciate have also agreed on this point. We understand that the Ombudsman's requirements deriving from the application of the service's competence may sometimes be considered bothersome, as they always aim to rectify or improve behaviours. However, in all cases we do our utmost to avoid censuring or expressing a critical judgement. We intend to improve or correct any action, etc. that has been the object of complaint or claim and provide data regarding our activities in this report.

Institutional collaboration with the different representatives of the University community has been courteous and even satisfactory. With some exceptions, our requirements have been rapidly and willingly answered, although sometimes greater collaboration between centres when sending information and tracking the cases would be welcomed.

The resolution of some particular and specific cases has not agreed with the recommendation or request made by the Ombudsman. This leads us to ponder that, even though we have to comply with rules and regulations, strict enforcement in all cases may lead to harmful or unwanted consequences for the person concerned. We believe that even today we can still apply the *epikeia* that we inherited from the Classics, namely, the "moderate and careful interpretation of the law, according to time, place and personal circumstances" (Spanish Royal Academy) in specific cases." Ultimately, we refer to humanism in application of the law, for the benefit of the person concerned, rather than an unconditional imposition.

The final assessment of this year's actions is positive, although we always believe that there is room for improvement. Any assistance that can be rendered will be welcomed, as well as any remarks. By working together, we aim to make this service and the nature of the Ombudsman's activity, which is still new within our University, more widely known. This service should be understood in the sense for which it was created, as a key institution which reinforces the culture of ethics, responsibility and trust among the members of the University community.