

## SUMMARY:

The Pre-Conference workshop entitled "Ombudsman - solving conflicts" was part of the 10th ORPHEUS conference in Belgrade and was open not only to PhD candidates but for other interested participants of the ORPHEUS conference as well. Approximately 40 participants, including around 15 PhD candidates, participated in the two-hour workshop. The first lecture entitled "Managing the supervisors" was given by Prof. Robert Harris who talked about building a successful relationship between a PhD candidate and a supervisor. The second lecture was given by Prof. B. Rakić who shared his experiences as the Ombudsman of the University of Belgrade. Afterwards, Vesna Ćorić talked about Institutional Ombudsmen at the University level and gave an overview of the differences between existing Ombudsman positions as well. After an open and constructive discussion between workshop participants and speakers, all participants that were not PhD candidates left the room. Based on the presentations and discussion the remaining PhD candidates agreed on the conclusions below, describing how the optimal Ombudsman position should look like from the PhD candidates' point of view.

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## WHITE PAPER

### PURPOSE

**Confidential conflict counseling** is a service that has to be formally organized. This service is oftentimes provided by a person in the position of an Ombudsman.

The aim of the workshop was to get informed about the topic "Ombudsman - solving conflicts" and to openly discuss the different attributes/aspects of this position with the goal of forming a consensus from the PhD candidates' point of view, on how the optimal Ombudsman should look like.

### INTRODUCTION

An ombudsman<sup>1</sup> is an **independent, impartial, confidential** and **informal** advocate providing assistance in the resolution of conflicts. The tools of the Ombudsman are: Giving advice, acting as mediator between conflicted parties, and referring the visitor to the appropriate authority.

Ombudsmen function on different University levels, e.g. at Department, Faculty or University level. In this consensus document we refer to an Ombudsman that is available for conflicts arising in PhD education and that can be addressed by anybody involved in PhD education.

### PROBLEM AREAS

The problem areas on which the Ombudsman can give advice on are topics related to scientific integrity such as authorship, fraud or plagiarism but also

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<sup>1</sup> The Ombudsman can also be referred to as Ombudsperson in order to avoid gender discrimination.

other issues of PhD candidate life such as problems with the supervisor or other issues related to academic career.

#### QUALIFICATION

The Ombudsman should be an active professor and scientist. The Ombudsman should work for a different faculty or university in order to have the necessary distance to the conflicted parties. It is not necessary that the Ombudsman is a lawyer by profession, because he/she does not take legal action. If needed the Ombudsman, can refer the conflicted parties to a lawyer.

#### SKILLS & EXPERIENCES

The ombudsman should possess the following skills and experiences:

- Ability to communicate in the local and in foreign languages
- Computer skills relevant for communication and archiving
- Ability to negotiate positively with PhD candidates, professors and academic staff
- Problem solving and initiative
- Ability to work independently
- Report writing and basic data analysis
- Knowledge of how the university system works

#### APPOINTMENT

An ombudsman and a vice-ombudsman should be appointed. In order to avoid conflict of interest, in case the ombudsman is involved in the presented conflict, the vice-ombudsman will mediate the conflict.

The Department/Faculty should handle the nomination of the ombudsman. The PhD candidates' union should approve the choice of the nominated candidate.

The mandate of each ombudsman should be 2 years and can be renewed.

#### EVALUATION

The Department/Faculty puts in place an evaluation system. This can consist of published annual reports of the ombudsman about his/her activities (holding the identities and all communications in strict confidence) or the results of an anonymous feedback questionnaire.

#### RENUMERATION

The ombudsmen will not receive an additional salary for their engagement. Instead, the workload of the engagement should be compensated by a reduction of other university obligations.