



Annual Report 2020 Complaints Committee of the University of Twente

Adopted on 9 June 2021



Composition of the Complaints Committee of the University of Twente

On 1 January 2020, the Complaints Committee of the University of Twente (hereinafter: the complaints committee) consisted of the following members:

- Ms Y.J. Bouwman-Bakker, external chairperson;
- Ms J. Wesseling-Lubberink, deputy external chairperson;
- Mr W.C.J. Beekman, member nominated by the Consultative Body on Personnel Matters of the University of Twente (OPUT);
- Mr L.J.M. Ketting, deputy member nominated by OPUT;
- Mr H.A. Akse, member nominated by the employer;
- Mr J.F.C. Verberne, deputy member nominated by the employer.

In 2020, a number of changes were made to the composition of the complaints committee.

When asked in the course of 2020, Mr Beekman indicated that he did not wish to be reappointed; his appointment expired on 29 June 2020. As a result of his departure, OPUT nominated a new member for the complaints committee. The Executive Board appointed Mr M.A.H. van Gessel for a period of four years, starting on 1 October 2020.

Ms Wesseling-Lubberink stepped down as deputy chairperson on 1 November 2020. In light of the small number of complaints, it was decided in consultation with the Executive Board not to appoint a new deputy chairperson to the complaints committee. To ensure that practical arrangements remain in line with the regulations, the complaints procedure has been amended on this point.

Should it be necessary to deputise for Ms Bouwman-Bakker, a member of the complaints committee may temporarily assume the role of chairperson.

Ms C.G.M. Jenniskens supported the complaints committee in the role of secretary in 2020. She stepped down on 15 November 2020 and since then her work for the complaints committee has been taken over by Ms V. Trifunovic.

Complaints procedure

The complaints procedure of the University of Twente, which took effect on 1 June 2017, applies to the working practice of the complaints committee. From 31 December 2019, the complaints procedure was amended following the coming into effect of the Public Servants (Standardisation of Legal Status) Act on 1 January 2020. This amendment has no consequences for the working practice of the complaints committee. With effect from 25 January 2021, the complaints procedure was amended with respect to the provision regarding the deputy chairperson of the complaints committee. This amendment also has no consequences for the working practice of the complaints committee.

On 1 April 2011, the University of Twente instituted a clear and accessible system that enables current, prospective, former and external students to submit their complaints, appeals and formal objections. The University of Twente complaints desk is part of the Centre for Educational Support's Student Services department. Its duties include forwarding complaints, appeals and formal objections to the correct, competent authority. In 2020, the contact and communication between the complaints desk and the complaints committee was smooth and effective.

Complaints handling in 2020

On 1 January 2020, three complaints dating back to 2019 were still being processed.

New complaints started in 2020

In 2020, five complaints were submitted to the complaints committee for handling and recommendations. Three complaints were filed by a student or former student, one by an external person and one by an employee.

Complaint 2020-01 was filed by a student and related to a lecturer's working practices. The lecturer did not respond to the student's emails requesting approval for a modified portfolio of subjects.

Complaint 2020-02 was filed by a former student and concerned both a lecturer's supervision of her master's thesis and her request for a second opinion on the assessment of her master's thesis. The complaints committee accepted the first part of the complaint for handling. The second part of the complaint was accepted for handling by the examination board concerned.

Complaint 2020-03 was filed by an external person and concerned the posting of an article on U-Today, the University of Twente's independent news website. The complainant argues that U-Today should not have posted the article in question on the website.

Complaint 2020-04 was filed by a member of staff and concerned the conduct of a professor. The complainant argues that the professor's conduct in a number of situations merited an official complaint. This conduct includes discrimination, intimidation, bullying, belittling, and applying psychological pressure. The complainant argues that in showing such behaviour, the professor has violated the University of Twente's Code of Conduct.

Complaint 2020-05 was filed by a former student and related to the way they were treated by an education coordinator/student adviser and the programme director. The complainant states that for three years she has not received a proper answer to her question of whether she was entitled to a grade II secondary school teaching qualification through the educational module. This complaint will be handled in 2021.

The number of new complaints filed in 2020 is comparable to previous years.

Issue of recommendations 2020 and complaints handling by the Executive Board

Complaints from 2019

On 1 January 2020, three complaints from 2019 had not yet been completed or brought to an end. One of these was subsequently withdrawn by the complainant. In 2020, the complaints committee issued a recommendation in respect of two complaints.

Complaint 2019-02, which concerned the treatment of a former student during his master's degree at the University of Twente, was handled in 2020. As the complainant had formulated the complaint in rather general terms, the complaints committee decided to divide it into three sub-complaints, each concerning the conduct of a specific employee of the educational programme concerned. The complaints committee recommended that all three sub-complaints should be declared unfounded. The Executive Board's decision on this complaint was in line with the committee's recommendation.

Complaint 2019-03, also filed by a former student, concerned a lecturer's supervision of the complainant during their final project and was also handled in 2020. The complaint was filed at least 2.5 years after the alleged conduct and no evidently excusable reasons were found for exceeding the complaints deadline. The complaints committee therefore recommended

that the complaint should be declared inadmissible. The Executive Board's decision on this complaint was in line with the committee's recommendation.

Complaints from 2020

The complaints committee considered five complaints in 2020. Two of these were subsequently withdrawn by the complainants and the handling of one complaint will continue in 2021. In 2020, the complaints committee issued a recommendation to the Executive Board in respect of two complaints.

Complaint 2020-03, which concerned the posting of an article on U-Today, was handled in 2020. As the complainant's interest or the seriousness of the conduct was obviously insufficient, the complaints committee recommended that the complaint should not be considered and otherwise should be declared inadmissible. The Executive Board's decision on this complaint was in line with the committee's recommendation.

Complaint 2020-04, which concerned the conduct of a professor, was also handled in 2020. The complaints committee recommended that the complaint should be declared unfounded. The Executive Board's decision on this complaint was in line with the committee's recommendation.

Total complaints processed in 2020

The complaints committee considered a total of eight complaints in 2020. Three of these were subsequently withdrawn by the complainants, four were handled and resulted in a recommendation to the Executive Board, and one complaint will be completed in 2021.

Withdrawal of complaints

In 2020, three complaints were subsequently withdrawn by the complainants.

Complaint 2019-04, which concerned the treatment of a master's student by four lecturers on one course of the student's degree programme, was also dealt with in 2020. This complaint was first maintained and later withdrawn by the complainant. No settlement was reached, but the complainant decided for other reasons not to pursue the complaint. In 2020, the complaints committee informed the Executive Board, the complainant and the alleged perpetrators that the complaints procedure had been terminated.

Complaint 2020-01 and Complaint 2020-02 were subsequently withdrawn by their respective complainants. A settlement was reached in the first case, but not in the second. In that case, the complainant decided not to pursue the complaint procedure on other grounds.

Summary of the complaints committee's activities

Table 1 represents the 2020 activities of the complaints committee in figures. For the sake of completeness, Table 1 also provides the figures since 2009, the year in which the complaints committee in its current form began to advise the Executive Board on complaints submitted.

Table 1: Quantitative overview of the complaints committee's activities, 2009–2020

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
New complaints started	5	4	4	14**	2	1	2	4	1	7	3	4*
Issue of recommendations	4	1	4	8	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	3*
Withdrawal of complaints	3	0	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	4	2	0
After reaching a settlement	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0
Without reaching a settlement	2	0	2	0	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	0
Complaints procedure terminated (no recommendation/not withdrawn by complainant)	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Still ongoing (handling expected the following year)	1	4	2	4	0	0	1	2	0	4	1	1

* Two new complaints were reported in the complaints committee's 2009 annual report. The complaint of one student related to the (various) conduct of three staff members. The complaints committee issued a recommendation in 2009 with regard to each of these three various complaints. From 2011 onwards, complaints of this kind have been treated separately, even if they are formulated in a single letter of complaint. This is why Table 1 shows the number of new complaints in 2009 as 4 and the issue of recommendations in that year as 3.

** The number of new complaints filed in 2017 is considerably higher than in previous years. For further explanation, reference is made to

<https://www.utwente.nl/uc/fa5381daa0102345f6c00e42ca702f61034ce3bf7ace200/klachtencommissie-jaarverslag-2017.pdf>.

Other matters

The Executive Board appointed an Ombuds Officer in mid-October 2019 as part of a pilot project initiated by the Association of Universities of the Netherlands (VSNU). With regard to this pilot, the complaints committee asked for clarity on the division and/or convergence of tasks between the complaints committee and the Ombuds Officer. It was insufficiently clear to the committee how the remit of the Ombuds Officer relates to the competence of the complaints committee as regards handling and advising on complaints, pursuant to the General Administrative Law Act. In the committee's view, the work of the Ombuds Officer and that of the complaints committee appear to overlap. However, the complaints committee has no way of checking this in practical terms, because it only has insight into the cases it receives.

At the complaints committee's annual meeting with the Executive Board, held on 10 November 2020, the Secretary of the University explained the role of the Ombuds Officer in more detail. The 2019-2020 UT Ombuds Officer's annual report and the VSNU's evaluation of the position of University Ombuds Officer were sent to the chair of the complaints committee to provide further information. Since then, the current secretary and the chair of the complaints committee have held introductory talks with the Ombuds Officer. At this meeting, the main uncertainties regarding a possible overlap of activities were discussed. Based on this discussion, the complaints committee is confident that it will continue to receive the complaints it is supposed to deal with.

The committee has also drawn attention to the flowchart for reports and complaints drawn up by the VSNU. This sector-level flowchart indicates who students and staff can contact if they wish to file a complaint or make a report. The complaints committee notes that the national chart still needs to be adapted to the specific situation at the University of Twente. The University of Twente has now made flowcharts, these 'integrity signposts' can be found via <https://www.utwente.nl/en/organisation/about/integrity/toolbox/>. More information about House of Integrity can be found at <https://www.utwente.nl/en/organisation/about/integrity/>.