



Annual Report 2019 Complaints Committee of the University of Twente

Adopted on 3 June 2020



Composition of the Complaints Committee of the University of Twente

The composition of the complaints committee of the University of Twente (hereinafter: the complaints committee) was as follows in 2019:

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

In 2019, three members were reappointed for a period of four years: Ms Bouwman-Bakker until 7 January 2023, Ms Wesseling-Lubberink until 18 March 2023 and Mr Verberne until 1 November 2023.

The (deputy) chairperson and the (deputy) members of the complaints committee participate in varying combinations in the handling of complaints, with a view to optimising the continuity, progress and quality of its work.

The secretary, Ms C.G.M. Jenniskens, also supported the complaints committee in 2019.

Complaints procedure

The Complaints Procedure of the University of Twente that took effect on 1 June 2017 applies to the working practice of the complaints committee. Effective 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.

As of 1 April 2011, the University of Twente has had an accessible and clear facility where (current, prospective and former) students and external students can submit their complaints, appeals and formal objections. The UT complaints desk is part of Student Services of the Centre for Educational Support (CES) and its duties include forwarding complaints, appeals and formal objections to the correct, competent authority. Again in 2019, the relationship between the complaints desk and the complaints committee, to the extent the committee can judge, was effective.

Complaints handling in 2019

Inflow of complaints 2019

In 2019, four complaints were submitted to the complaints committee for handling and recommendation. One complaint was submitted by an external person and the other three complaints by (former) students.

Complaint 2019-01, submitted by an external person, related to remarks made by a UT employee to a journalist, as published on the website and the paper version of the news medium concerned. The complainant accused the employee of using sexist, vulgar, hurtful and offensive language. Furthermore, the complainant asserted that the remarks made by the employee were unfounded, manipulative, irresponsible and misleading.

Complaint 2019-02 was submitted by a former student and related to the manner in which he had been treated during his Master's degree programme at UT. In 2019, the complaints committee requested that the complainant provide further details of his complaint, which had been formulated in general terms. The substance of the complaint will be handled in the course of 2020.

Complaint 2019-03 was also submitted by a former student. This complaint related to the guidance received by the complainant from a lecturer during the former student's final project. The lecturer involved, and subsequently also the former and current programme director of the Master's programme concerned, initially handled the complaint themselves in the period April to November 2019. However, they failed to address the complaint. The complaint was then submitted to the complaints desk and subsequently forwarded to the complaints committee for handling and advice. The complaints committee will handle the complaint in the course of 2020.

Complaint 2019-04 was submitted by a Master's student and related to the conduct of four lecturers of a subject taught at the programme concerned. This complaint will be handled in 2020.

The inflow of complaints in 2019 is similar to the number of complaints submitted in previous years, with the exception of 2017 which saw a sharp rise in complaints.

Issue of recommendations 2019 and complaints handling by the Executive Board

In 2019, the complaints committee was only able to issue a recommendation in respect of complaint 2019-01. In this case, the complaints committee heard both the complainant and alleged perpetrator. The complaints committee recommended that complaint 2019-01 be declared unfounded. The Executive Board decided on this complaint in line with the committee's recommendation.

Withdrawals and other affairs

As indicated above, complaints 2019-02, 2019-03 and 2019-04 will be (further) handled in 2020.

Furthermore, complaint 2017-14, which related to information provision on a unit of study and which was taken up in 2018, was terminated in 2019. This complaints procedure was deferred at the request of the complainant because the complainant first wished to enter into discussions with the programme/programme director concerned. This discussion has never taken place and neither has the complainant responded to multiple requests from the complaints committee to provide an update on the current status of his complaint. The complaints committee informed the Executive Board, complainant and alleged perpetrator of the termination of the complaints procedure in 2019.

With respect to complaint 2017-13 (discrimination on the basis of nationality when appointing student assistance), the complaints committee received no new information from HR in 2019 regarding the policy aspects of appointing non-EEA students nor on any of the technical arrangements that may need to be made. Discussions will be held in 2020 with the complainants on whether they wish to proceed with this complaint, which is still formally deferred, and if so, how.

Summary of the complaints committee's activities

Table 1 represents the activities of the complaints committee in 2019 in figures. For the sake of completeness, Table 1 also provides the figures from 2009 (from which time the current complaints committee has advised the Executive Board on submitted complaints).

Table 1: *Quantitative overview of the complaints committee's activities, 2009–2019*

	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
Inflow of complaints	4	4	14	2	1	2	4	1	7	3	4*
Issue of recommendations	1	4	8	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	3*
Withdrawal of complaints	0	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	4	2	0
After reaching an agreement	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0
Without reaching an agreement	0	2	0	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	0
Complaints procedure terminated (no recommendation/withdrawn by complainant)	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Still ongoing (handling expected next year)	4	2	4	0	0	1	2	0	4	1	1

* An inflow of 2 complaints was reported in the 2009 annual report of the complaints committee. 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. Since 2011, such complaints, also if the complaints are formulated in a single letter of complaint, have been treated as separate complaints. This is why Table 1 shows the inflow in 2009 as 4 and the issue of recommendations in that year as 3.

Other matters

The Executive Board appointed an Ombuds Officer in 2019 as part of an Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) pilot. The UT website states that the position of Ombuds Officer “complements the range of options open to personnel or students who have questions, want to make a report or inquire about current codes, regulations and procedures.” The complaints committee was not involved in preparations to decide on appointing an Ombuds Officer, other than that the chairperson and the secretary of the complaints committee were interviewed about the current complaints structure as part of an external survey into support for an Ombuds Officer. The complaints committee points out once again in this annual report that it was decided “as part of the Ombuds Officer pilot” that the Ombuds Officer should be tasked with, among other things, complaints handling. It is unclear how this task of the Ombuds Officer relates to the authority of the complaints committee to handle and advise on complaints as stipulated in the General Administrative Law Act. The discussion on this matter with the secretary of the University and the then HR director on 29 August 2019 was not able to clarify this matter sufficiently.