

UoC

**Annual Report of
the Sindicatura
de Greuges
(Ombuds Office)**

Academic year 2021/2022

Universitat Oberta
de Catalunya

Annual Report of the Sindicatura de Greuges (Ombuds Office)

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01

Introduction



Dra. Teresa Sancho

This report of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya's (UOC) Sindicatura de Greuges (ombuds office) publicizes and renders accounts for the activities carried out by the *síndic de greuges* (ombuds officer) during the academic year 2021/2022.

The UOC community has been growing constantly in recent years. The increase in the number of enquiries and complaints to the Sindicatura de Greuges is probably due to this, the impact of the pandemic on our lives, and the community's greater awareness of what we do.

This report sets out various indicators showing the work carried out by the Sindicatura de Greuges. These indicators, including the number of complaints and enquiries, the types of complainant, the number of decisions and the various recommendations made by the Sindicatura de Greuges, as well as the institution's actions, provide a detailed picture of the work carried out during the academic year 2021/2022. The report also shows its evolution compared to previous years.

The data presented in this report can be summarized as follows: a total of 355 enquiries were received during academic year 2021/2022, an increase of 2.9% from the previous year and 90% since academic year 2018/2019. This has resulted in the opening of 99 procedures, leading to the same number of decisions (99) as well as 3 recommendations to the university's governing bodies.

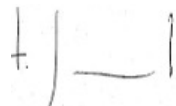
The Sindicatura de Greuges found in favour of the complainant(s) in 16.2% of cases, up from the previous year's 10.9%.

The Sindicatura de Greuges kept to its institutional agenda, with active involvement in the Spanish Conference of University Ombuds Officers (CEDU), where the *síndic de greuges* has held the position of secretary for the last two years. It also took part in the 13th *Fòrum Vives* Meeting of University Ombuds Officers, represented by the *síndic de greuges* and Professor Teresa Sancho. The Sindicatura de Greuges also attended the CEDU held in Alcalá de Henares.

This academic year was the last in which Dr Agustí Cerrillo held the post of síndic de greuges at the UOC, with the invaluable help of Teresa Girona, the office's administrative manager.

Since joining the Sindicatura de Greuges in April 2022, and with Dr Cerrillo's guidance, I have gradually familiarized myself with its problems, actions and procedures. His excellent training was key to my development in the role as the university's new síndica de greuges (ombuds officer). I am deeply grateful to him for this.

Finally, we would also like to thank the university's programme directors and teaching and administrative staff for their active involvement in the resolution of complaints and the implementation of our recommendations. We would also like to expressly thank the university's governing bodies for their support throughout academic year 2021/2022.



Dr. Teresa Sancho Vinuesa

Síndica de greuges of the UOC



The UOC's Sindicatura de Greuges

The Sindicatura de Greuges of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya is responsible for defending the rights and freedoms of all members of the UOC community in the face of any action or situation that is discriminatory, arbitrary or against which they have no protection, ensuring compliance with all the provisions of the Fundació per a la Universitat Oberta de Catalunya's statutes and the regulations implementing them and making every effort to maintain standards in all areas.

Professor Agustí Cerrillo served his final year as the UOC's síndic de greuges (2015-2022)

As stipulated in Article 44 of the UOC's Organizational and Operational Regulations, the síndic de greuges of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya is appointed by the Foundation's Board of Trustees on the recommendation of the president.

The work of the UOC's Sindicatura de Greuges is governed by the provisions of the UOC's Organizational and Operational Regulations and the Regulations of the UOC's Sindicatura de Greuges approved on 1 September 2008 and amended by the Executive Board on 10 February 2020.

Actions

In academic year 2021/2022, the UOC's Sindicatura de Greuges received 355 enquiries or complaints in total. This is 10 more than the previous year, and they were all admitted for processing. The Sindicatura de Greuges issued decisions on 28% of these.



The solution to disputes lies in dialogue. The Sindicatura de Greuges represents the power of goodwill.

Ángel Gabilondo, Ombudsman of Spain

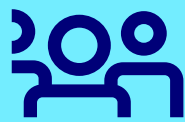
The number of complaints has risen 270% in the last six years. A high percentage of these have been admitted for processing and referred to other university services. The percentage of enquiries and complaints resolved by the Sindicatura de Greuges has oscillated between 47% and 28%. The last two academic years have seen a substantial number of enquiries compared to previous years, leading to around 100 decisions. The “Figures for the Sindicatura de Greuges” section sets out all the complaints received in detail.

04

Profile of complainants and types of complaint

One way to analyse the work of the Sindicatura de Greuges is to weigh up the complaints received against the total number of students, on the understanding that the community includes enrolled students and teaching, research and management staff. This academic year, the ratio of enquiries admitted for processing per 1,000 students was 4.3, based on the UOC having 81,941 students enrolled in academic year 2021/2022, 5,704 fewer than in the previous year.

This ratio is slightly higher than that of the previous year (2020/2021), which stood at 3.9 complaints per 1,000 students. The sustained upward trend in the number of complaints made to the Sindicatura de Greuges during the academic year has therefore become steeper.



In just one academic year, the UOC has gone from 3.9 to 4.3 complaints per 1,000 students

Naturally, almost all enquiries were from students, who form the largest group in the UOC community. It is worth mentioning that the UOC's Sindicatura de Greuges defends the rights and freedoms of all members of the university community equally.

In contrast, only two enquiries from candidates to teaching and research staff positions at the university were received.

Most enquiries (72.7% of all complaints) were from students studying for bachelor's degrees. The highest number of complaints came from the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences (37.4%), the Faculty of Law and Political Science (23.2%) and the Faculty of Economics and Business (18.2%), with the other faculties following at much lower rates, as shown in the tables provided at the end of this report.

Profile of complainants and types of complaint

As to types of enquiries and complaints, as in the previous academic year, the majority related to assessment (a total of 103, accounting for 29.0%). These were followed by complaints about admission to the university and enrolment (a total of 49, accounting for 13.8%). The group in third position was formed by complaints about teaching and certificates (35, 9.6%), followed by those relating to prior studies assessment (32, 9.0%) and matters relating to the Accounting and Finance department (30, 8.5%).

Within assessment-related complaints, those relating to final assessment formed the largest group, rising from 43 to 67 in just one year, followed by those relating to cases of suspected copying or plagiarism, which fell from 37 to 27. The number of complaints for other assessment-related situations was much lower.

It is worth noting that this year there was a collective complaint from the Faculty of Law and Political Science that was resolved within the faculty itself.

Decisions

The 355 matters admitted for processing led to 99 procedures being opened by the síndic de greuges; of these he took up and resolved 89 directly (10 fewer than in academic year 2020/2021). In those cases, the síndic de greuges issued an appropriate decision, on several occasions including recommendations for the specific case at hand or to the university in general.



**In academic year 2021/2022,
the Sindicatura de Greuges ruled
in favour of the complainant in
16.2% of cases**

As provided in the Regulations of the Sindicatura de Greuges, the remaining cases (256) had not exhausted all the options for the resolution of complaints provided for by the UOC and were therefore forwarded to the university's services which, at the officer's request, resolved the situation directly.

Recommendations

In academic year 2021/2022, the *síndic de greuges* made three recommendations to the university staff or authorities in connection with the complaints received. This means that 3.0% of decisions issued directly by the *síndic de greuges* included a recommendation to the university.

In addition to these general recommendations, recommendations were also made in response to the various complaints received.



All three recommendations were for the Academic Services department

Giving effect to the recommendations made in academic year 2021/2022 entails updating internal protocols and the information on courses available on the website and ensuring that the Academic Services department upholds the rights and duties of UOC students. As at the date of closing of this report, the implementation of all three recommendations has been confirmed.

Details of the three recommendations can be found below.

First recommendation: updating the information on assessment models in course teaching plans

(Made in April 2022 and carried out in February 2023)

In relation to a complaint made to the UOC's *Sindicatura de Greuges* by three bachelor's degree students in relation to a change to the assessment model made at the time of enrolment in a one-semester course.

As to the provisions of Article 9.3 of Royal Decree 822/2021 of 28 September 2021:

“Under the regulations in place at each university, the course plan for each course in the programme of study of an official bachelor’s or master’s degree will cover its theoretical and practical academic activities and the system for assessing the planned learning.” Students must be able to access these course plans before the start of the official enrolment period, as provided in the academic regulations for the school or university.

Although information on each course is available on the UOC portal, linked to the programme of study in the campus and in each course-specific classroom (which can only be accessed by enrolled students once teaching has begun), when the general assessment model for the following semester was changed, the section providing specific details of the assessment model in terms of the number of assignments to be delivered and the type of test to be taken was not updated, which meant that the two sections contained inconsistent information. In order to deal with this situation in an appropriate manner, protect students’ rights and ensure the quality of the university, the UOC’s *síndic de greuges* deemed it appropriate to make the following recommendations to the university’s Academic Services department:

1 To take the necessary steps to ensure that the information provided to students before they enrol is accurate and complete and up to date for the semester for which they want to enrol, rather than for the semester in progress at the time of enrolment. This is in order to avoid errors or confusion.

In order to give effect to this recommendation, the university’s Academic Services department has carried out two actions to improve the course information process (including the assessment model) before enrolment:

1. Changes to the information section for each course according to Portal/Campus/Classroom: Previously, the

course plan for each course was included in different sections in the portal and the campus. Now they contain the same information, and specific details of the model, with the weightings given to grades and a concrete explanation of the continuous and final assessments, are provided only in the classrooms (after teaching has started).

2. To set the dates by which course-specific information for the following semester must be updated: A mass copy of the course information for the following semester is made every semester before opening up enrolment for a course. The aim is to ensure that all the information is available in the course plan so that students can check it and be fully informed when they enrol.

Second recommendation: recognition of courses taken

(Made in March 2022 and applied in February 2023)

In relation to a complaint from an undergraduate student about the lack of recognition of courses appearing as transferred in their academic transcript due to a lack of documentation, and in order to preserve students' rights – in particular the right to be assessed for their contributions of previous studies and prior professional experience – and guarantee the university's quality, the UOC's *síndic de greuges* has made the following recommendations to the Academic Services department:

1 To update the current regulations, protocols or criteria, to design the necessary set of steps to be followed, and to carry out the necessary technological updates to automate the process for the recognition of transferred courses when, based on the documentation provided, the university has enough information to ensure the consistency, from an academic and training point of view, of the student's knowledge, skills and competencies that define the courses to be recognized with respect to those

of the programme of study for the qualification that the student wants to obtain.

2 To consider, as a transitional measure, the feasibility of recognizing transferred courses included in the academic transcript provided by the applicant. To the extent that the recognition process for these courses cannot be automated using currently available applications, it is advisable to establish the minimum information required for recognition and the cases in which this can be done with the available resources, set a schedule for both the transitional phase and the final update, and inform the student concerned.

In applications to assess previously undertaken studies, the UOC has not traditionally assessed courses appearing as transferred in students' academic transcripts.

The assessment only took account of the courses forming part of the study record corresponding to the academic transcript, whether they had been studied at the UOC itself or recognized in relation to other courses.

Although these courses do not count towards obtaining a degree, they have been taken and passed as part of the student's university studies. As sufficient and suitable information for the assessment of previous studies can be included in a student's academic transcript, such previous studies can be taken into account even if they do not count towards the degree. In such cases, in accordance with the recommendations issued by the Sindicatura de Greuges and in order to protect students' rights and guarantee the university's quality, the Academic Services department has not modified the regulations, but it has updated the internal protocols and criteria in force and laid down a set of steps for assessing the recognition of courses provided by students in their academic transcripts if they include the necessary information.

In view of the technological difficulties involved in automating the handling of such cases and resolving them as a whole, as well as due to the low number of academic transcripts with reported transferred courses, the university will deal with those cases in which the recognition application contains an express request to take transferred courses into account.

The reason for this is to ensure that each specific case is comprehensively analysed in order to ensure that those courses are not used to obtain a degree after the academic transcript has been issued.

This check must be carried out in order to ensure compliance with Article 10.8 of Royal Decree 822/2021 of 28 September 2021:

“Transferring academic credits means including all credits obtained in previous official courses in a student’s academic transcript and the Diploma Supplement, regardless of the university at which they were taken, provided that they have not already been used towards an official university degree.”

Third recommendation: rules on continuation

(Made in April 2022 and carried out in academic year 2022/2023)

The *síndic de greuges* made a recommendation to the Academic Services department following a complaint by a student claiming that she had not been informed of the need to apply to continue in the programme and whose application to do so was approved after the deadline.

In view of the fact that:

1

The university’s academic regulations state that students have a total of four exam sittings to pass each course in an official programme and, if all these are exhausted without

the student having passed the course, they must apply to continue in the programme, stating their reasons, the director of the programme will consider the case and make a decision in relation to the request.

2

This information is available on the UOC's virtual campus and e-services portal.

3

Although it is public information, students are not notified when the fourth sitting has been exhausted without them having successfully passed the course. This means that, if they wish to continue in the programme, they must make a formal application as provided above. Students may thus be unaware of the seriousness of the situation and may end up in an unfortunate situation.

In order to guarantee students' right to receive information from the UOC about academic and administrative matters concerning them, as recognized in the UOC's regulations on rights and responsibilities, and in order to prevent unwanted situations and ensure that students carry out the procedures required at any given time within the stipulated deadlines, the following recommendation is made:

1

If the fourth exam sitting in a course has been exhausted, affected students should receive an automatic notification informing them of this and telling them what they need to do to apply to continue in the programme. They should also be told that the decision will be made by the director of the programme.

Starting with the current semester (2022-1), the database of grades is checked after the end of the semester in order to identify non-compliant students.

Once a list has been obtained, affected students are sent a text message explaining the status of their academic record and the procedures available to them and the applicable deadlines if they wish to continue studying at the UOC. This notification is planned for the most appropriate dates for future semesters.

Institutional activity

The institutional work carried out by the Sindicatura de Greuges in academic year 2021/2022 was notable. Below is a summary of the work carried out by it in that period.

In academic year 2022/2023, two years after his appointment, Professor Agustí Cerrillo, the UOC's síndic de greuges, stepped down from his position as secretary of the Spanish Conference of University Ombudsman (CEDU).



Professor Agustí Cerrillo has served as secretary of the CEDU for the last two years

The 13th Fòrum Vives Meeting of University Ombuds Officers of the Vives Network was held on 7 and 8 July at the University of Lleida. In addition to Professor Agustí Cerrillo, it was attended by Professor Teresa Sancho, who succeeded him in his post in September. The new UOC síndic de greuges was presented to the Vives Network at this event.

On 26 and 27 May 2022, Teresa Girona, administrative manager of the Sindicatura de Greuges, attended the Technical Conference of the CEDU held in Alcalá de Henares, representing the Sindicatura de Greuges.

The UOC's Sindicatura de Greuges is a member of various Catalan, Spanish and international networks and associations of university ombuds officers:



Ombuds officers group within the Vives Network of Universities



Spanish Conference of University Ombuds Officers (CEDU), as part of its Executive Committee.



Mexican Network of University Ombuds Officers (REDDU)



Ibero-American Network of University Ombuds Officers (RIddU)



Figures for the Sindicatura de Greuges

This section contains various tables showing the main actions carried out by the UOC's Sindicatura de Greuges.

Number of complaints

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2012-2022
Complaints received	131	185	187	270	345	355
Accepted	106	173	154	260	343	355
(% of complaints received)	80.9%	93.5%	82.4%	96.3%	99.4%	100%
Forwarded to other services	51	85	92	171	233	256
(% of complaints accepted)	48.1%	49.1%	59.7%	66.8%	67.9%	72.1%
Settled by the <i>sindic de greuges</i>	55	88	62	89	110	99
(% of complaints accepted)	51.9%	50.9%	40.3%	34.2%	32.1%	27.9%

Complaints by faculty

	Students	Complaints resolved	Percentage (complaints / total no. of students)	Percentage (complaints / total no. of complaints)
Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences	16,412	37	0.22%	37.4%
Faculty of Economics and Business	15,508	18	0.11%	18.2%
Faculty of Computer Science, Multimedia and Telecommunications	12,099	3	0.02%	3.0%
Faculty of Law and Political Science	12,244	23	0.19%	23.2%
Faculty of Information and Communication Sciences	6,702	6	0.09%	6.1%
Faculty of Arts and Humanities	6,067	7	0.11%	7.1%
Faculty of Health Sciences	2,269	4	0.17%	4.0%
Doctoral School	324	0	0%	0%
Total	71,625	99		100%



Figures for the Sindicatura de Greuges

Types of complaint

	Students	Complaints resolved	Percentage (complaints / total no. of students)	Percentage (complaints / total no. of complaints)
EHEA bachelor's degrees	48,516	72	0.15%	72.7%
Master's degrees and postgraduate courses	26,199	25	0.1%	25.3%
Centre for Modern Languages	5,465	1	0.0%	1.0%
Open programmes	575	1	0.2%	1.0%
Doctoral programmes	324	0	0.0%	0.0%
Open courses	862	0	0.0%	0.0%
Total	81,941	99		100%

By type of complaint:

Academic	Prior studies assessment	166
	Curriculum adaptation	2
	Assessment	45
	Teaching	6
	Internships	3
	Administration	Admission and enrolment
Others		1
Guidance		1
Grants		3
Economic management		10
Examination day procedure		6
Issue of certificates		3
Complaints resolved before starting any procedures or in which the sindic de greuges was merely CCed		16
Forwarded to deans or department directors		5
Forwarded to the Legal Office		3
Forwarded to the help service		61
Awaiting an answer from the help service		76
Help service review		91
Others		4
Total		256



Figures for the Sindicatura de Greuges

Complaints resolved

Complaints resolved in the complainant's favour	16	16.16%
Ruled against the complainant	83	83.84%
Total	99	100%

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**A global, innovative
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