



Annual Report 2020

Confidential counsellors for staff and students

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1. Introduction

In this report, we take a brief look at the tasks, working method and activities of the confidential counsellors and present the reporting statistics in 2020. We then outline trends and reporting and make various recommendations.

The reports of the confidential counsellors only express the number of cases reported to the confidential counsellors. They do not provide insight into the total number of cases of undesirable conduct, such as bullying, discrimination or harassment. Within the organisational units, reports are sometimes handled internally without the mediation of the confidential counsellor, but with the aid of another actor, often HR employees or managers. Students can also approach study advisors, student deans and psychologists. These contacts are not reported centrally, so the extent of the problem is not clear.

In 2020, there were 94 (in 2019: 87) calls on the confidential counsellor. In total, 136 conversations took place (2019): 190).

The confidential counsellors perform these tasks alongside their own work. The network is coordinated by Martin Blok, who also works as student counsellor at the Institute of Social Studies.

The confidential counsellors report directly to the Executive Board.

2. Vision of Erasmus University Rotterdam

2.1. Task and working method of confidential counsellors

The three main tasks of the confidential counsellor are as follows:

1. support and guide the complainant;
2. identify inappropriate behaviour and provide solicited and unsolicited advice to managers;
3. inform and coach staff/students and managers.

Support and guide complainant

The confidential counsellor listens to the complainant and gives them the opportunity to tell their story and express their emotions. Everything remains confidential, unless a serious criminal offence is involved that causes a moral dilemma for the confidential counsellor. In acute cases, the confidential counsellor is also required to make a report.

In principle, the confidential counsellor supports the person making the report but does not take over the report from the complainant. The confidential counsellor shares ideas on potential solutions but cannot, for example, call the perpetrator to account. One of the solutions may be to submit a formal complaint to the Committee on Undesirable Behaviour and Misconduct. The confidential counsellor can support the reporter in making this complaint. Ultimately, therefore, the confidential counsellor helps reporters to make an appropriate choice of their own and supports them throughout this process.

Identify inappropriate behaviour and provide managers with solicited and unsolicited advice

The confidential counsellor can advise managers about updating, refining and implementing the policy relating to inappropriate behaviour. The confidential counsellor also has a signalling role to managers. The confidential counsellor may, for example, open talks with a management team.

Inform and coach staff and managers

Managers may also call on the expertise of the confidential counsellor to discuss policy or a case of inappropriate behaviour they are dealing with or a trend observed by a manager. This involves sharing ideas about the planned policy or listing the advantages and disadvantages of possible 'solutions' for a case. This often prevents unnecessary escalation and adds value for all concerned. The confidential counsellor can only do this when they are not involved in this case from their support role. If the confidential counsellor is involved, the manager may be referred to a colleague or external confidential counsellor.

2.2 The network of confidential counsellors

The confidential counsellors' network is a pilot project. At present, there are two central (for students and staff) and 20 decentral confidential counsellors, for both students (5) and staff (15). As a student, you can make your own choice about which confidential counsellor you wish to speak to. This need not be the confidential counsellor of your own faculty. The same principle applies for staff members. You can choose from among all the available confidential counsellors for employees. In practice, people still usually prove to choose the confidential counsellor from their own department or faculty. The two central confidential counsellors receive the most reports.

The network meets 4 times a year. Besides the network meetings, there are also intervision meetings, which discuss cases in smaller groups. There is also a small sounding board group, which is tasked with preparing the network meetings, for example.

Due to the coronavirus measures, the network and intervision meetings were held online in 2020.

The confidential counsellors in the network ensure that they are known in their faculty or department. They can provide solicited and unsolicited advice on policy and unsafe situations.

If desired, confidential counsellors can consult each other about cases if they have consent from the complainant. All confidential counsellors in the network have followed a training course in order to be able to play this role effectively.

The project leader/coordinator of the confidential counsellors network has very regular meetings with the ombudsperson and takes part in the actors' meetings on social safety.

The two central confidential counsellors participate in the National Consultation Confidential Counsellors of Dutch Universities.

3. Reports

3.1. Reports from students

The number of students reporting inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour has increased in recent years, from 18 reports in 2017 to 48 in 2020. As in earlier years, most reports from students in 2020 concerned negative discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment.

Some reports related to several problem areas.

Complainants (students):	2020	2019	2018	2017
Male	8	6	7	4
Female	40	36	19	14
Total	48	42	26	18

Accused	2020	2019	2018	2017
Male (students)	20	21	17	12
Female (students)	9	6	3	1
Faculty/Staff	10	10	5	2
Other (welfare/perpetrator/unknown)	5	5	1	x
Total	44	42	26	15

Nature of the report:	2020	2019	2018	2017
Negative treatment /harassment	20	12	3	4
Bullying	9	2	2	3
Sexual harassment (including digital)	20	20	13	12
Aggression	3	5	3	4
Discrimination	9	5	7	1
Welfare	2	1	4	0
Stalking (physical/digital)	7	3	x	x

3.2. Reports Staff

In total, 46 members of staff have made reports, roughly the same number as in 2019. As in 2019, the accused were mainly men, often in managerial positions. The number of reports about negative discrimination and harassment was significantly lower.

There were also fewer reports of labour conflicts compared with 2019 (8 in 2020 and 16 in 2019). Some reports related to several problem areas.

Complainants (staff)	2020	2019	2018	2017
male	19	15	10	3
female	27	30	30	20
Total	46	45	40	23

Accused	2020	2019	2018	2017
Male	29	26	25	16
Female	16	15	15	7
Organisation	1	4	0	0
Unknown	1	0	0	0
Total	47	45	40	23

Nature of the report	2020	2019	2018	2017
Negative treatment/harassment	22	34	23	10
Bullying	5	8	9	1
Sexual harassment	6	6	4	4
Aggression	3	4	4	2
Discrimination	4	3	3	2
Labour conflict	8	16	5	9
Integrity	1	0	1	0
Stalking (digital/physical)	4	2	x	x
Abuse of power	4	4	x	x

3.3. Conclusions, trends

The total number of reports at EUR increased to 94 (was 87). This is striking, as lectures were given online and staff primarily worked from home. The number of reports was therefore expected to be lower.

The total number of meetings held fell from 190 to 136. In the majority of cases, one meeting was enough. This appears to indicate that the reports concerned less complex issues. The meetings were often held online. This, too, may have influenced any continuation of the meetings.

Students appeared to have had no difficulty in finding their way to the confidential counsellors in 2020. The number of reports was roughly as high as in 2019. By far the majority of reports from students concerned sexual harassment and negative treatment/general harassment. Of the reports within these categories, most concerned unwanted touching, comments and messages. An increasing number of reports concern inappropriate behaviour via social media.

A few cases concerned serious sexual aggression. Most cases concerned off-campus incidents, in the student halls or at the student associations.

Studies by I&O research commissioned by Amnesty International (2021) into rape among students (how they deal with this and what their views of this are) show that many students are not aware of what the university can do for them, where they can make reports, etc.

Fear, shame and a low pattern of expectations of what the university can do may lead students not to make reports. This is unlikely to be very different at the EUR. Further research is needed in order to gain a clear view.

At the Institute of Social Studies, good experience was gained with 'peer counsellors'; students who, after a brief training programme, are available to provide initial reception for fellow students, for those who have faced unwanted inappropriate behaviour. If necessary, they make referrals to one of the confidential counsellors. They can also support students who want to make a complaint to the confidential counsellor.

EUR staff made fewer reports of negative treatment and harassment in 2020 than in 2019. The number of reports concerning labour conflicts was also significantly lower. This could be related to working from home and the distance from the work. In the reports concerning harassment or negative treatment, a number of staff members stated that they did not feel they were being heard by their managers or by the organisation.

"The arrival of more confidential counsellors may have lowered the threshold to report an issue. However, in the conversations we conducted, we noted that there is still a fear of reporting an issue. We can therefore assume that there are still many people who do not report issues for that reason.

That fear can be driven by uncertainty about the procedure. What happens with a report when it becomes a formal complaint? Is the procedure secure?

It is difficult to submit a complaint against your manager because of the relationship of dependence. In many cases involving a complaint about the behaviour of a manager, people are worried about their own career."

(Annual Report, Network of Confidential Counsellors, 2019)

Nothing appears to have changed in this regard since 2019. We regularly hear that people perceive procedures as unsafe and that communication on the progress of cases is inadequate.

3.4 Recommendations

The recommendations made in the 2019 Annual Report are maintained:

“As described earlier, the number of reports of inappropriate behaviour does not reveal the extent of the problem. For staff, the satisfaction survey gives an indication. Nothing is known about the actual number of incidents in which students are the victim of inappropriate behaviour. The increase in the number of reports would suggest that the problem is greater than we see. We therefore call for a survey among students that addresses all areas of inappropriate behaviour, as described in this annual report. This should include special attention for international students.”
(Annual Report, Network of Confidential Counsellors, 2019)

The coordinators of the confidential counsellors' network and the ombudsperson hold regular meetings. Naturally, the mandate of the ombudsperson differs from that of the confidential counsellor. The ombudsperson has a right to information and investigative powers, while confidential counsellors do not. They address the undesirable behaviour. However, there are similarities in the field of signalling problem areas and there is good cooperation. Mutual referrals are also made if necessary. Any potential bundling of forces would need to be investigated. The various actors are increasingly making contacts with each other.

In 2021, for example, a disturbing-behaviour team was formed, consisting of the safety coordinators, a psychologist, an HR representative, a Legal Affairs representative, a student dean, the ombudsperson and the two central confidential counsellors. The members of this team have followed an extensive training programme on identifying and dealing with disturbing behaviour. The status of the expertise team is not yet entirely clear, but the members are able to work together well.

It is extremely important that the discussion concerning all forms of undesirable behaviour is continued and is conducted in public. Fortunately, the majority of the staff and students relate to each other in a pleasant manner.

The EUR is not yet free of sexual and other forms of harassment, negative discrimination, unwanted touching and/or comments, bullying, stalking and discrimination.

If it has never happened to you, it is easy to close your eyes to it. Awareness of these forms of undesirable behaviour is a step in the right direction towards a safe study and working environment.

Good cooperation between HR, the D&I team, the ombudsperson and the network of confidential counsellors is of great importance. We have in mind here the organisation of these days devoted to the different forms of undesirable behaviour.

At the faculty level too, activities could be undertaken in the field of awareness; We ask all confidential counsellors in the network to publicise the training opportunities for managers in their faculty concerning recognition of inappropriate behaviour on the work floor (and among themselves). In the 2019 Annual Report, we called for the standard inclusion of such training programmes in the existing supply of training in relation to promotion of expertise.

As mentioned earlier, we regularly receive signs of feelings of insecurity after a report has been pursued in the form of a complaint, or the complaint has since been submitted to the Committee on Undesirable Behaviour and Misconduct, or to a manager, or a dean, etc. People often hear nothing for a long period or, in their own words, are not kept sufficiently informed. The care and after-care for victims of undesirable behaviour is extremely important for their sense of security within the

organisation. The lack of information on the handling of a complaint makes the complainant feel that the organisation has not taken them seriously. Timely and regular feedback to the complainant on the further process following a complaint can alleviate feelings of insecurity about the process.

4. *Other activities and developments*

At the end of 2021, the performance of the network of confidential counsellors will be evaluated. This process has now been started by HR.

The two central confidential counsellors conduct annual conversations with staff from all parts of Erasmus University Rotterdam. The aim of these conversations is to introduce and draw attention to the work of the confidential counsellors and give them the opportunity to share ideas and make suggestions. In the past year, there have been fewer conversations due to the Covid-19 measures. We hope the frequency will pick up again during the coming academic year.