Common Objectives! Different Pathways!

Higher Education Ombudsmen from around the World meet in Vienna

Higher Education Ombudsmen from around the world meet in Vienna from May 19 - 22, 2010 for the 8th ENOHE (European Network for Ombudsmen in Higher Education) annual conference, this year co-organised with the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO). The Austrian Student Ombudsman, the Austrian Ministry of Sience and Research and the Austrian National Agency for the European Community Programme Life Long Learning together with several stakeholder institutions of Austrian higher education are hosting this event.

The main goals of the conference are to get acquainted with traditional approaches and to learn about new ways of resolving disputes and dealing with complaints within academia. This is done by comparing different experiences of higher education ombudsmen in a wide variety of settings and hence acquiring better understanding of alternative approaches to the ombudsman’s role within higher education institutions.

The Vienna conference is designed as an opportunity to explore the richness of ombudsman principles internationally in different higher education settings so as to improve individual practice and gain insight into alternative approaches.

The 90 participants are coming from four different continents, from some 20 different countries with quite diverse ombudsman schemes. For the first time during an ENOHE conference there is a pre-conference workshop day offering four different workshops on „Mediating Student Complaints: Learning by Doing“, „Things I wish I had known when I started as an Ombudsman“, „Challenges to Impartiality“ and „Core Curriculum for the Development of Scientific Integrity“. Experts from the respective fields are reflecting on their topics and discuss with the participants.

The two full conference days (May 20-21) are divided into four half-days, each organized around a sub-theme and featuring plenary presentations to be followed by concurrent break out sessions and reports back to the plenary. Main themes are „Governance in Higher Education“, „European Higher Education in Times of Changes“, „Building Fair, Respectful and Supportive Environments“ and „Embracing Diversity“.

The individual sessions during the thematic time slots with speakers from 14 different countries combine contrasting approaches, best practice ideas and case-studies.

On the last evening of the conference the Secretary General of the International Ombudsman Institute Dr. Peter Kostelka is giving a keynote address during a special dinner event on the topic „Ombudsmen of the World - The World of Ombudsmen“.

Like in previous years, a conference documentation will be published in print and online.
A Message from ENOHE and ACCUO

Beware of coffee breaks. They might be the perfect moments to meet old colleagues and make new friends. But in the midst of networking and catching up on news, they can lead to the most interesting strategic decisions. From one of these coffee break sessions was born between us the idea of co-organizing a first transatlantic meeting of ombudsmen in the field of higher education.

Palais Harrach in the heart of historic Vienna is the venue for the 8th ENOHE and 1st Joint ENOHE / ACCUO annual conference. (ACCUO is an old kid on the block as this will be its... 29th conference.)

The joint conference is hosted by several stakeholders of Austrian higher education and coordinated by the Office of the Austrian Student Ombudsman and the OEAD National Agency for Life Long Learning.

We are convinced that conference participants will find it a rewarding and engaging event, providing opportunities to connect with colleagues internationally, to enhance knowledge during pre-conference workshops, to compare different experiences and to jointly develop and contrast working methods for ombudsmen in the academic sector.

The social program, including a visit to a typical Vienna tavern, an evening reception in a beautiful palais, a seated dinner in the town hall and a whole day excursion to Krems, a medieval country town and Melk, a baroque monastery, will most certainly contribute to enhance friendships and set up new partnerships.

Probably someone has the idea for just another joint event during the coming years? As you know, coffee breaks can be dangerous, and delicious coffee is one thing Vienna serves in abundance: Beware of coffee breaks!

Left:
Martine Conway, President of ACCUO

Right:
Josef Leidenfrost, Convenor of ENOHE
According to official sources, the Bologna Declaration of June 1999 has tried to reform the structures of European higher education systems over the past ten years. It has played a remarkable role in strengthening the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education.

In order to assess the achievements of common action and its contribution to enhancing the quality and the diversification of higher education in Europe, an extraordinary Ministerial Anniversary Conference was held and co-hosted by Hungary and Austria on 11-12 March 2010, in Budapest and Vienna.

On the same occasion the Second Bologna Policy Forum convened as a dialogue between the now 47 Bologna countries and countries from across the world.


Bologna is also a topic for higher education ombudsmen. After a discussion of the implementation of Bologna at the spring 2010 meeting of the higher education committee of the Austrian parliament the Austrian student ombudsman was asked to give his view on the most common Bologna related topics.

His observations include problems which Austrian students encounter with full recognition of foreign exams when returning to their home institutions. The same applies to the proper use of ECTS credit points.

Short-term changes and the decentralisation of curricula are yet two other challenges. Still another issue is the transferability of bachelor degrees into master programmes, which causes problems especially for graduates from Fachhochschule (universities of applied sciences) programmes who want to continue their studies at public universities.

www.diesan.at
During the most recent European Student Summit in Vienna in mid-March 2010, ESU, the European Student Union, presented its account of ten years of the Bologna Process in Europe. The publication is titled Bologna at the Finish Line.

Since 2003, ESU has published its Bologna With Student Eyes series. These reports measure the progress of the implementation of the Bologna Process in the participating countries, as seen through the eyes of the respective national Student Unions. These reports are considered to be an alternative to the official reports of the European governments, whose reports are telling the official versions about their implementation of the action lines that are agreed upon by the education ministers during the Bologna meeting in 1999 and its subsequent conferences in Prague, Berlin, Bergen, London, Leuven/Louvain, and Budapest/Vienna.

The documentary is part of the project "Enhancing the student contribution to the Bologna Implementation (ESCBI). The project is funded with support from the European Commission.

The report is either available through the ESU secretariat in Brussels, postal address: The European Students’ Union 20 Rue de la Sablonnière, B-1000 Bruxelles, Belgium Telephone (from outside Belgium) +32 2 502 23 62; or on line via www.esib.org/documents/publications/ESU_BAFL_publication.pdf

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About the Bologna Process

A reform process aimed at creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) The overarching aim of the Bologna Process is to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on international cooperation and academic exchange attractive to European students and staff as well as to students and staff from other parts of the world.

The envisaged European Higher Education Area shall

- facilitate mobility of students, graduates and staff;
- prepare students for their future careers and for life as active citizens in democratic societies, and support their personal development;
- offer broad access to high-quality higher education, based on democratic principles and academic freedom.

Why is it called Bologna Process, who participates? The Bologna Process is named after the Bologna Declaration, which was signed on 19 June 1999 by ministers in charge of higher education from 29 European countries. Today, 47 countries participate all party to the European Cultural Convention and committed to the goals of the European Higher Education Area.

An important characteristic of the Bologna Process is that it also involves the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES, as well as representatives of higher education institutions, students, staff, employers and quality assurance agencies.

What are the reforms all about?

- Easily readable and comparable degrees organised in a three-cycle structure (e.g. bachelor-master-doctorate): Countries are currently setting up national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with the framework of qualifications for the EHEA and define learning outcomes for each of the three cycles.
- Quality assurance in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA.
- Fair recognition of foreign degrees and other higher education qualifications in accordance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention.

Work is also undertaken in areas of broader societal relevance, such as the links between higher education, research and innovation; equitable participation and lifelong learning.
10 measures to improve implementation of the Bologna Process in Austria

Implementation of the Bologna Process is the responsibility of each participating country’s higher education institutions. However, financial support for the preparation and design of the relevant measures is not usually provided for. The regulations are diverse, sometimes even within large sized institutions with several faculties. As the number of actors involved increases discussions become more complex and dissatisfaction grows.

Therefore, in Austria, “Bologna reloaded” is an initiative of the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research to increase flexibility at all levels in implementing reforms. It will lead to a diversified view of “employability” by academic disciplines taking into account the different profiles involved. The following ten key measures will be taken during the coming months:

- a high level meeting of the minister with Austria’s six national Bologna experts to intensify cooperation with the Bologna coordinators at the institutional level
- the establishment of a task force of higher education stakeholders to further develop curricula by preparing guidelines and collecting best practice examples
- the development of qualification profiles
- the increased exchange of information between the ministry and curricular commissions at institutional levels
- a new orientation and further development of the national Bologna follow-up group
- the inclusion of Bologna aims into national quality assurance and quality development measures
- the publication of best practice models in curricula development
- the establishment of a national working group for law studies, pharmaceutical and technical studies
- the recognition of “Bologna degrees” (three-year bachelors degree) for Austrian civil service positions
- promoting mobility through the recognition of exams and degrees


Austrian Bologna Service Point: [www.oead.at/bologna](http://www.oead.at/bologna)

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One third of complaints concern lack of transparency in EU administration

The European Ombudsman, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, has called on the EU administration to become more transparent and citizen-friendly. In 2009, more than one third of complaints that led to inquiries (36%) concerned alleged lack of transparency, including refusal to release documents or information. Other types of alleged maladministration concerned late payments for EU projects, unfairness, abuse of power and discrimination.

At the presentation of his Annual Report 2009 in Brussels, Mr Diamandouros said: "The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is now legally binding and contains the citizens’ right to good administration and the right of access to documents. I will increase my efforts to ensure that these rights are taken seriously by the EU administration."

In 2009, the Ombudsman received 3,098 complaints from citizens, companies, NGOs and associations (3,406 in 2008). In almost 80% of cases, the Ombudsman was able to help the complainant by opening an inquiry into the case, transferring it to a competent body, or giving advice on where to turn. The Ombudsman opened 339 inquiries and closed 318 inquiries in 2009. In total, he handled almost 5,000 complaints and information requests.

Germany produced the greatest number of complaints (413), followed by Spain (389), Poland (235) and France (235). But relative to the size of their population, most complaints came from Luxembourg, Malta, Cyprus and Belgium.

Most of the inquiries opened in 2009 concerned the European Commission (56%), followed by the European Parliament, the European Personnel Selection Office, the Council and the Court of Justice of the EU. The Ombudsman was pleased that in more than half of the cases (56%), the institution concerned accepted a friendly solution or settled the matter. The number of cases in which critical remarks were made went down from 44 in 2008 to 35 in 2009.

The Ombudsman’s Overview 2009 contains summaries of cases, background information and statistics. It is available at: [www.ombudsman.europa.eu/activities/annualreports.faces](http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/activities/annualreports.faces)

The full Annual Report in English is available at the same web address. It will be available in all official EU languages in July 2010. Press contact: Gundi Gadesmann, Media and External Relations Officer, tel.: +32 2 284 2609
Budapest-Vienna Declaration

Budapest-Vienna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area

March 12, 2010

1. We, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the countries participating in the Bologna Process, met in Budapest and Vienna on March 11 and 12, 2010 to launch the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as envisaged in the Bologna Declaration of 1999.

2. Based on our agreed criteria for country membership, we welcome Kazakhstan as new participating country of the European Higher Education Area.

3. The Bologna Declaration in 1999 set out a vision for 2010 of an internationally competitive and attractive European Higher Education Area where higher education institutions, supported by strongly committed staff, can fulfil their diverse missions in the knowledge society; and where students benefiting from mobility with smooth and fair recognition of their qualifications, can find the best suited educational pathways.

4. Since 1999, 47 parties to the European Cultural Convention, have signed up to this vision and have made significant progress towards achieving it. In a unique partnership between public authorities, higher education institutions, students and staff, together with employers, quality assurance agencies, international organisations and European institutions, we have engaged in a series of reforms to build a European Higher Education Area based on trust, cooperation and respect for the diversity of cultures, languages, and higher education systems.

5. The Bologna Process and the resulting European Higher Education Area, being unprecedented examples of regional, cross-border cooperation in higher education, have raised considerable interest in other parts of the world and made European higher education more visible on the global map. We welcome this interest and look forward to intensifying our policy dialogue and cooperation with partners across the world.

6. We have taken note of the independent assessment and the stakeholders’ reports. We welcome their affirmation that institutions of higher education, staff and students increasingly identify with the goals of the Bologna Process. While much has been achieved in implementing the Bologna reforms, the reports also illustrate that EHEA action lines such as degree and curriculum reform, quality assurance, recognition, mobility and the social dimension are implemented to varying degrees. Recent protests in some countries, partly directed against developments and measures not related to the Bologna Process, have reminded us that some of the Bologna aims and reforms have not been properly implemented and explained. We acknowledge and will listen to the critical voices raised among staff and students. We note that adjustments and further work, involving staff and students, are necessary at European, national, and especially institutional levels to achieve the European Higher Education Area as we envisage it.

7. We, the Ministers, are committed to the full and proper implementation of the agreed objectives and the agenda for the next decade set by the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué. In close cooperation with higher education institutions, staff, students and other stakeholders, we will step up our efforts to accomplish the reforms already underway to
enable students and staff to be mobile, to improve teaching and learning in higher education institutions, to enhance graduate employability, and to provide quality higher education for all. At national level, we also strive to improve communication on and understanding of the Bologna Process among all stakeholders and society as a whole.

8. We, the Ministers, recommit to academic freedom as well as autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions as principles of the European Higher Education Area and underline the role the higher education institutions play in fostering peaceful democratic societies and strengthening social cohesion.

9. We acknowledge the key role of the academic community - institutional leaders, teachers, researchers, administrative staff and students - in making the European Higher Education Area a reality, providing the learners with the opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills and competences furthering their careers and lives as democratic citizens as well as their personal development. We recognise that a more supportive environment for the staff to fulfil their tasks, is needed. We commit ourselves to working towards a more effective inclusion of higher education staff and students in the implementation and further development of the EHEA. We fully support staff and student participation in decision-making structures at European, national and institutional levels.

10. We call upon all actors involved to facilitate an inspiring working and learning environment and to foster student-centred learning as a way of empowering the learner in all forms of education, providing the best solution for sustainable and flexible learning paths. This also requires the cooperation of teachers and researchers in international networks.

11. We, the Ministers, reaffirm that higher education is a public responsibility. We commit ourselves, notwithstanding these difficult economic times, to ensuring that higher education institutions have the necessary resources within a framework established and overseen by public authorities. We are convinced that higher education is a major driver for social and economic development and for innovation in an increasingly knowledge-driven world. We shall therefore increase our efforts on the social dimension in order to provide equal opportunities to quality education, paying particular attention to underrepresented groups.

12. We, the Ministers responsible for the European Higher Education Area, ask the Bologna Follow-up Group to propose measures to facilitate the proper and full implementation of the agreed Bologna principles and action lines across the European Higher Education Area, especially at the national and institutional levels, among others by developing additional working methods, such as peer learning, study visits and other information sharing activities. By continuously developing, enhancing and strengthening the European Higher Education Area and taking further the synergies with the European Research Area, Europe will be able to successfully face the challenges of the next decade.

13. Our next Ministerial Meeting to take stock of progress and to drive the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve agenda forward, will be hosted by Romania in Bucharest on 26-27 April 2012.
Professor Charles Farrugia is the new ombudsman for Malta’s higher education institutions, who took over his new position last fall. Having held several positions in teaching and academic governing he is dedicated to help students and academics with their rights. He is also very interested in ENOHE’s activities. Hence this article is dedicated to his office and to his background. Until new legislation is enacted shortly to align his duties more closely with those of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, his official title is University Ombudsman (UO).

The Office of the University Ombudsman (UO) is established in terms of the Education Act to investigate complaints by students and staff of the University of Malta in respect of actions taken by that University. By way of delegated authority in terms of the national Ombudsman Act, the University Ombudsman also investigates analogous complaints involving the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) as well as the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS).

Investigatory Role

In the exercise of his investigatory role, the main aim of the UO is to determine whether the administrative act complained of complies with established norms of good administration including whether complainant’s case had been processed in an appropriate manner, in line with established procedure and polices and without discrimination.

His role is not intended to determine guilt or innocence, but to promote good administration by the Institutions concerned and as a result, enhance a harmonious professional relationship between the staff, students and the administration of these Institutions. Though not officially a mediator, the UO may use this approach as a method of alternative dispute resolution.

The UO deals with complaints only after all other institutional channels or avenues available to the complainant have been exhausted. He does so once the complaint has been lodged in writing. All action by the UO will cease once a case is taken to court or to any other competent tribunal.

Which cases are dealt with?

The UO does not deal with cases that are of a purely academic nature, although he may look at academic processes and procedures. He does not deal with complaints that are frivolous or trivial or that are not made in good faith. He does not consider complaints that have been decided upon by his predecessors, or which go beyond the six-month time bar, unless significant new evidence, which had not been previously considered, is presented.

In dealing with complaints, the UO follows the procedure outlined below:

- On receiving a written complaint, he will acknowledge the complaint and confirm whether or not he will be undertaking a formal investigation.

- He will provide a copy of the complaint with any accompanying documentation to the head of the institution concerned as the respondent, who will be asked to reply in detail to the complaint.

- The UO will evaluate all the data provided and where appropriate will hold interviews with the individuals or authorities concerned.

- The UO will report on the complaint listing the finding of facts resulting from the investigation, and make recommendations if appropriate. A copy of this report will be sent to the complainant and to the Institutions concerned.

- The UO will follow-up the case to ensure that his recommendations are acted upon.

The UO will receive written complaints either in hard copy, which can be handed in the Office of the Ombudsman, in Valletta, or through electronic mail. There, a special complaint form is provided.

A complainant who is not satisfied with the report of the UO can make her/his case to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, and if still not satisfied, to the civil courts. In the fifteen months since taking office, the UO had dealt with 103 cases compared to the 19 cases per annum registered in previous years.

Who is the Ombudsman?

Professor Charles Farrugia was born at Rabat, Malta in 1941, had his primary and secondary education at St Aloysius’ College. He started his teaching career in Malta’s state schools in 1959, moving to a lectureship in teacher education in 1967. He studied Education at St. Michael’s Training College, at the Universities of London and Montreal, and at the University of London Institute of Education, from where he obtained a Ph.D. with a study on professionalism in education.
There are various support structures in place at university aimed at helping the students with problems. These structures have been in place for a number of years and information about them can be found on the University website. A student with a problem can refer to one of the structures below depending on the nature of their problem.

**Students Advisory Services (SAS)**
Students who have problems related to the course they are following can make use of the services of the SAS. The office operates in close liaison with the Admissions and Records Office and the other offices of the Registrar.

**Kunsill Studenti Universitarji (KSU)**
Each year of each course has one or more student representatives who meet with Heads of Departments to discuss problems which might arise within specific courses. If students feel for some reason that the problem cannot be dealt with by the student representatives, they can go to KSU and seek their advice. KSU members have regular meetings with the Registrar and with the Pro-Rector and work hard to help students by presenting their problems on the various boards on which they are members.

**Focal Persons**
Focal Persons are lecturers who have volunteered to discuss problems dealing with the Students’ Charter with the students concerned and help the student find a solution to his or her problem. The Focal Person can refer the problem to the Students’ Charter Committee if the problem cannot be solved at a faculty level.

**Students’ Charter Committee**
The brief of the Students’ Charter Committee is to safeguard the rights of the student and to make students more aware of their responsibilities. KSU members sit on this committee.

**ACCESS – Disability Support Unit (ADSU)**
Students experiencing problems due to physical or cognitive problems can seek help from this unit which works closely with the Access Disability Support Committee.

**Sexual Harassment Committee**
Students who are experiencing sexual harassment, be it verbal or physical can seek help form the Sexual Harassment Committee. One can obtain more information by accessing the website.

**Chaplaincy**
The chaplaincy offers the services of both lay pastoral assistants as well as priests should students be experiencing problems of a spiritual nature.

**Counselling Services**
Personal counselling is provided for students experiencing problems of a more personal nature. Appointments can be made with the Unit by phoning 2340 2235.

**Pro-Rector’s Office**
If a student has not found help from any of the above bodies, they can make an appointment with the Pro-Rector for Students and Institutional Affairs.

**University Ombudsman**
Should the student feel that he or she has not been treated fairly, they can lodge a formal complaint to the University Ombudsman, Professor Charles Farrugia. He can be contacted through Ms Marisa Zammit on 2124 6861 or email.

www.um.edu.mt/about/study/customercare
In a wide-ranging review of its mandate and operations, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), the British affiliate to ENOHE, published The Pathway Report in February 2010.

The Report, unveiled at a crowded public meeting in London by Rob Behrens, OIA Independent Adjudicator and Chief Executive, contains 28 Recommendations and 10 ‘Quick Wins’ for developing the OIA Scheme over the next five years. The Report has been widely welcomed throughout the Higher Education sector and has been unanimously adopted by the OIA Board.

The Report took fifteen months to plan, research, and draft. During the survey period, which began in autumn 2009, the OIA received 91 submissions from English and Welsh universities, 15 from students’ unions and a further 19 from key stakeholders to the "Issues and Questions Paper" including the National Union of Students and Universities UK.

There were also individual submissions from university staff members and members of the public. Additionally, a comprehensive and independent survey of complainants was commissioned from researchers in the King’s Institute for the Study of Public Policy (KISPP) at King’s College London. This was undertaken in the first half of 2009.

**Extract from the Executive Summary**

The national Scheme for adjudicating complaints against universities is underpinned by a clear legislative framework as set out in the Higher Education Act 2004. This framework and the associated OIA Scheme Rules have operated quietly and effectively in the first five years of operation.

The mandates and operations of the Scheme are highly valued by English and Welsh universities, students’ unions and the British Government and there is widespread (but not universal) acknowledgement of the Scheme’s independence and the quality and consistency of the OIA’s Formal Decisions.

Based on extensive consultation – with universities, students’ unions, complainants and sector stakeholders – a three-pronged change programme has been identified to ensure the OIA continues to develop as an independent complaints handling body, outward-facing, user-friendly, expert and cost-effective.
The Pathway Report: Recommendations for OIA’s Future

The development of the OIA. But it is already clear that the discipline of engaging in the process of consultation provides the OIA with perspectives it would not otherwise have.

The challenge ahead is to retain continuous dialogue with users and stakeholders without losing focus on either impartial decision-making or the rigours of cost control, efficiency and effectiveness. Where the annual rise in complaints shows no sign of abating yet resources are increasingly scarce and finite, and where the prospect of Judicial Review of the OIA’s Decisions is continuously present, there is no other road."

The main Recommendations are dealt with in the report under the following headings:

- Mandates and Clarity of Purpose
- Independence
- User Perspective, Accessibility and Flexibility
- Proportionality and Efficient and Effective Outcomes
- Transparency
- Quality Outcomes


Introducing the Report, Rob Behrens stated:

"Following extensive consultation with universities, students’ unions, complainants, and stakeholder groups it is clear there is widespread endorsement of the mandate of the OIA Scheme as set out in the 2004 Higher Education Act and its consequent operation. There is acknowledgement of the Scheme’s independence and effectiveness and of the high quality of its formal decisions as an alternative to costly litigation. But there is much still to be done and we have set out a programme of change to build on the success of the formative period of the Office."

First, the OIA will develop a costed strategy for communicating more effectively its role and function to remove uncertainties in user perception uncovered in the course of consultation.

Second, we will review key areas of operational practice - direct contact with users, disability policy and practice, available remedies, funding arrangements, and the handling of compliance issues. This is to ensure that we continue to learn from good practice in the areas of accessibility, proportionality, efficiency and transparency.

Third, there is support for incremental changes to the mandate, which can be delivered through amendment to the Scheme Rules without a change to the law. This includes allowing private universities to become eligible for membership of the Scheme, and this will now happen. The OIA will consult further on the possibility of Further Education Colleges offering their own Foundation Degrees becoming eligible for membership. In addition, and crucially, the OIA will also consult further about how to increase the transparency of the Scheme, including the option of publishing summaries of formal decisions in line with good practice in counterpart schemes."

Chair Ram Gidoomal commented:

"The Board is delighted that the Pathway consultation has led to such a constructive and useful set of outcomes. The Report demonstrates that as the higher education sector grapples with severe financial crisis, all parts of it - universities, students’ unions and complainants - can be confident that the OIA is listening to emerging needs and responding to them in evidence-based fashion and with rigour, independence and sensitivity."
Focusing on Quality in Higher Education

A delegation from Högskoleverket (HSV), the Swedish Agency for Higher Education, visited the Austrian Student Ombudsman in Vienna in early December 2009. The fact-finding mission focused on recent trends and next steps in Austrian higher education. The delegation was headed by Eva Westberg, director of the HSV Legal Department. HSV is Sweden’s largest organization supporting universities in carrying out their national and international activities.

Main Points of Interest

During their study visit, the Swedish colleagues met and held discussions with representatives of government authorities as well as NGOs and several stakeholder organizations. Main points of interest were quality assurance, safeguarding of individual student rights, complaint management instruments and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in higher education.

The first day started with a visit to the Ministry for Science and Research and the Office of the Austrian Student Ombudsman. Topics dealt with there were the protection of the rights of individual students; systemic deficiencies and possible or actual measures taken by responsible persons at the institutional level; and current changes within higher education legislation. Accreditation and quality assurance issues at private universities in particular were also discussed.

Visit to the Parliament

The next visit was to the Austrian Parliament. There, the Swedish delegation met with Beatrix Karl, who at the time was speaker of the People’s Party for higher education and research (she subsequently became the new Austrian Minister for Science and Research on 27 January 2010). Discussions concentrated on the student protests and proposed measures to improve the situation of mass disciplines. A fact-finding mission to the University of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschule) of the Vienna Chamber of Commerce and its ombudsman, Monika Petermandl, was the next stop on their visit. The decentralization of the position of university ombudsman was discussed with her, including the pros and cons of such a development. The last appointment of the day was a site visit to the student admissions department of the University of Vienna and to the student services centre there, the so-called “Student Point”.

Complaint Management and Quality Assurance

Day two started with a visit to the headquarters of the Austrian scholarship agency, which administers about 48,000 scholarships for Austrian students each year and has a very well developed system of electronic record-keeping and follow-up of individual complaints.

The general secretariat of the Austrian Fachhochschulrat (the accreditation body for universities of applied sciences) was the next stop, where issues such as Fachhochschulen evaluation and accreditation and the role of student issues in that process were discussed. The very last stop of the tour was a visit to the ombudsman of the Austrian Agency for the European Union’s Lifelong Learning Programme, which is the only institution of its kind in Europe so far. The office deals, as a first-level instance, with problems arising from participation in EU-funded cooperation programmes.

At the end of the visit, the Swedish delegates and the Austrian colleagues agreed to intensify their working relations and cooperate more closely, including within networks like the European University Ombudsmen Network.
Conferences and Events

**30 May - 4 June 2010, Kansas City, KS, USA:**
www.nafsa.org/annualconference/default.aspx

**21 – 24 July 2010, Singapur:**
2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapur
www.wcri2010.org/

**13 - 15 September 2010, Paris, France:**
IMHE 2010 General Conference Paris, Frankreich, ”Higher Education in a World Changed Utterly Doing More with Less”,
www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/generalconference

**15 - 18 September 2010, Nantes, France:**
22nd EAIE (European Association for International Education) Annual Conference, Nantes, Frankreich
www.eaie.nl/nantes

**20 - 24 September 2010, Mexico:**
REDDU (Red de Defensores, Procuradores y Titulares de Organismos de Defensa de los Derechos Universitarios)
20 Sept. 2010, Puebla, Mexico: Workshop on Mediation
21 Sept. 2010, Puebla, Mexico: 7th National Reunion of REDDU
22 – 24 September 2010, Mexico, D.F., Mexico: Congreso Internacional de Derechos Humanos y Universitarios

**6 - 8 October 2010 Dayton, Ohio, USA:**
USOA (United States Ombudsman Association) Conference 2010, Dayton, USA,
www.usombudsman.org/

The United States Ombudsman Association serves governmental ombudsman offices across the United States and member offices in Canada and other parts of the world. Monday, October 4 and Tuesday, October 5 will feature pre-conference workshops. More details will be posted as developed. For questions, please contact Diane Welborn, Ombudsman, at welborn@dayton-ombudsman.org.

**12 – 15 October 2010, Sydney, Australia:**
Australian International Education Conference (AIEC 2010) 2010 will mark the 14th anniversary of the AIEC which has grown into the largest international education conference in the Asia Pacific region and one of the pre-eminent international education conferences in the world.

The 2010 conference attracts over 1,300 Australian and international delegates working in higher, secondary, English language and vocational education, government and non-government agencies, the corporate sector and multilateral funding agencies.

The conference theme is Engaging for the Future. Securing the future for international education will be increasingly difficult without more effective engagement with governments, students, teaching staff, local communities, the media, Australian businesses and our international partners.

The program will have a strong public policy, advocacy and social engagement focus, with a diverse range of presenters, including many from beyond international education as such, from groups and organizations with which we should seek to ally with.

www.aiec.idp.com/program.aspx

**3 - 6 April 2011, Portland, Oregon, USA**
IOA 2011 Conference,
The International Ombudsman Association’s sixth annual conference will be held at the Hilton Portland & Executive Tower, April 3 through 6, 2011.

The annual conference is intended to help attendees increase awareness, knowledge and skills in order to become more effective catalysts for change within their organizations. Keynote and plenary speakers, workshops, presentations, and panel discussions are intended to address the conference theme. More information to come soon at
Interview With the Ombuds Blogger

Tom Kosakowski writes the "Ombuds Blog" – a website with news and information for and about organizational ombudsmen. This interview goes behind the site that has become a resource for many North American ombudsman institutions.

When and why was the Ombuds Blog set up?

I started the blog in November 2006. At the time, I was a new ombudsman and knew first hand how hard it was to find information about the field. (Like many ombudsmen at U.S. universities, I have adopted the gender neutral term of “ombuds,” knowing full well that it seems ridiculous to my international colleagues.)

At that time, the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) was less than a year, having been formed by the merger of The International Ombudsman Association, which served primarily business and government ombudsmen, and the University and College Ombuds Association. IOA’s website had little information about current events or job opportunities. In addition, there were many organizational ombudsmen who were not members of IOA, so IOA’s membership list was an incomplete directory.

When I found out how easy it is to create a weblog, I decided to compile all of the information I found. In addition to daily postings of news and job opportunities, the blog offers links to professional organizations and individual offices. When people began asking my advice for setting up an ombudsman office, I collected links to a few of the most relevant documents. I try to post at least one story a day. So far, I have posted almost 1,500 articles.

People can access the stories in several ways. The easiest way is to simply visit the site itself. The site draws about 4,000 visits a month. There is also a free subscription service through FeedBlitz that sends a daily email of the latest posts. Almost 300 people use this feature. Unfortunately, there are embedded advertisements that some find annoying. Most recently, I began using Twitter to send short updates and links to the blog posts.

Who “runs” it?

So far, this is a one-man operation. I had expected more people to send suggestions, but I only receive a few every month. I’d be happy with more submissions from readers. The Ombuds Blog runs on Google’s free blogging platform which allows me access from anywhere. I spend a couple hours a day finding stories and writing posts.

Which search categories are there?

Within the Ombuds Blog, there are a few ways to search for an article. A search box at the top of the page will search for specific terms within posts. In addition, posts are tagged with labels on a variety of topics. For example, a recent post, “Ryerson University Ombuds Reports Spike in Academic Concerns,” was tagged with Annual Reports, Education, International labels. Clinking on these labels will pull up other posts with the same labels. In addition, I try to provide links to other posts that are related.

To find material for the blog, I search several sources. Lexis/Nexis provides a daily summary of articles about ombudsmen and a weekly summary of U.S. court decisions. I also run daily searches of internet news and blog postings, and I scan a couple dozen blogs about dispute resolution, law and education.

A couple times a week, I will search ten different job boards for new job postings. And now I habitually search Twitter for tweets about ombudsmen. At times, it’s like drinking from a firehose.

How can you place stories yourself?

Writing posts for your own blog is very easy to do. Google’s Blogger is like most blogging platforms and is not any more difficult than writing email. When people submit items, I publish them nearly always. Although I mostly post stories about organizational ombudsmen, I will post material about classical ombudsmen.
or related professions. In most situations, I prefer to include a link to the original source, such as a newspaper article or press release, so that my readers can get more information. But I will post news without a link if I can be reassured of its accuracy. My email address is: tom.kosakowski@gmail.com.

Who is the man behind it?

I am currently an ombudsman at the University of California, Los Angeles. I work mostly with the faculty, staff and students at the UCLA medical center, which includes graduate schools, laboratories and a large hospital.

I established an ombudsman office at Claremont Graduate University and also served as the ombudsman for the University of California, Riverside. Before that, I was an attorney representing other attorneys, mostly in professional disciplinary cases. Before that, I was an economist. This has been my most satisfying career so far.

BOOK REVIEW:

Gareth Jones: Conducting Administrative Oversight and Ombudsman Investigations

Books on ombudsmen are rare, and books on ombudsmen in the field of higher education are even rarer, especially in Europe. It is thus a very welcome initiative that a man like Gareth Jones, currently the director of the Special Ombudsman Response Team at the Ontario Ombudsman’s Office in Canada, has decided to share insightful experiences from his daily work. He does this in his most recent book “Conducting Administrative, Oversight and Ombudsman Investigation”, published by Canada Law Book in 2009 www.ombudsman.on.ca/media/43489/jones%20brochure.pdf.

All ombudsmen, be they traditional, classical, corporate or university ombudsmen, will find issues in this volume that reflect their work situation in one way or another. The basic work flows in conducting an investigation, regardless of the area of the public or private sector in which it is carried out, is the same: planning and scheduling, examining evidence, interviewing, report-writing and making recommendations. This scheme is described by the author in interesting case studies as well as in comments and anecdotes. Jones’ book hence serves as a useful practical guide for investigation processes and advisory work at the same time.
Publications

Internationalisation of Higher Education and Development, Österreichische Forschungsstiftung für Internationale Entwicklung (ÖFSE), Vienna 2009

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Patricia Begné (coordinadora), Defensores Universitarios; REDDU, Mexico, D.F., 2009

Roberta Cava, Dealing with Difficult People; Key Porter Books Limited, Toronto 2004


Fabrice Hénard, Learning our Lesson: Review of Quality Teaching in Higher Education; OECD, Paris 2009

The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe – Key indicators on the Social Dimension and Mobility; eurostudent.eu, Eurostat, European Commission, Luxemburg 2009

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Andréé Sursock / Hanne Smidt; Trends 2010: A Decade of Change in European Higher Education; European University Association; Brussels 2010

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ENOHNE News 2010 / 1

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Lost in Transition? Defining the Role of Ombudsmen in the Developing Bologna World

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Also available via www.enohe.eu

Editor and Publisher:
Austrian Student Ombudsman / ENOHNE
A-1014 Vienna, Minoritenplatz 5, Austria
tel. +43-1-53120-5533, fax +43-1-53120-815533
enohe@bmwf.gv.at

May 2010