



Annual report 2021

Confidential Adviser Network 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 advisers and present the reporting statistics for 2021. Next, we outline trends and notifications and make various recommendations.

In the reporting by the confidential advisers, only the number of cases reported to the confidential advisers is expressed. They do not provide any insight into the total number of cases of bullying, discrimination or harassment. In the faculties, notifications are sometimes handled internally, often by HR staff or managers. Students can also approach study advisers, student deans, and psychologists. As there is no central reporting on this, the extent of the problem is not clear.

In 2021, there were 78 (in 2020: 94) calls on the confidential adviser. In total, 136 conversations took place (2019: 190).

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

The confidential advisers report directly to the Executive Board.

2. Vision of Erasmus University Rotterdam

2.1. Task and working method of confidential advisers

The three main tasks of the confidential adviser:

1. Offering support and guidance to the notifier;
2. Identifying inappropriate behaviour and providing solicited and unsolicited advice to managers;
3. Informing and coaching staff and managers.

Offering support and guidance to the notifier

The confidential adviser listens to the notifiers and gives them the opportunity to tell their story and express their emotions. Everything remains confidential, unless a serious criminal offence is involved that places the confidential adviser in a moral dilemma.

The confidential adviser stands by the notifier but does not take over. The confidential adviser helps the notifier make an appropriate choice.

The confidential adviser supports the notifier throughout the process.

Identifying inappropriate behaviour and providing managers with solicited and unsolicited advice

The confidential adviser can advise managers about updating, refining and implementing the policy relating to inappropriate behaviour. The confidential adviser also has a signalling role to managers.

Informing and coaching staff and managers

Managers may also call on the expertise of the confidential adviser to discuss policies 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. In this way, unnecessary escalation can often be prevented, and value is added for all concerned. The confidential advisers can only do this if they are not involved in the case from their support role yet. If the confidential adviser *is* involved, the manager may be referred to a fellow confidential adviser or an external confidential adviser.

2.2 The confidential adviser network

The confidential adviser network is a pilot project. In addition to two central confidential advisers for both students and staff, there are currently five confidential advisers for students and 15 for staff.

The pilot was evaluated in January 2022. On the basis of the recommendations and advice from the evaluation report, the network will be structurally embedded in the organisation in the coming year.

As a student, you can choose which confidential adviser you want to speak with. This does not need to be the confidential adviser of the student's own faculty. The same principle applies to staff, who can choose which of the available confidential advisers for staff they want to speak with. This adviser does not need to be from the notifier's faculty or department. In practice, people usually still choose the confidential adviser from their own department or faculty.

The network meets four times a year. Besides the network meetings, there are intervision meetings, in which cases are discussed in smaller groups.

Also in 2021, the network and intervision meetings were held online.

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

There is also a small sounding board group, which is tasked with preparing the network meetings, for example.

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

The project leader/coordinator of the confidential adviser network has very regular meetings with the ombudsperson.

The two central confidential advisers are also members of the Worrying Behaviour Team, and they took part in the wider actor meetings on social safety within EUR. They participate in the National Consultation Confidential Advisers of Dutch Universities.

3. Notifications

3.1. Notifications from students

The number of students reporting inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour decreased from 48 in 2020 to 40 in 2021.

In 2021, most notifications from students concerned negative discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment.

Despite the lower number of notifications, the number of sexual harassment notifications increased.

Some notifications related to multiple problem areas.

Notifiers (students):	2021	2020	2019	2018
Male	7	8	6	7
Female	33	40	36	19
Total	40	48	42	26

Accused	2021	2020	2019	2018
Male (students)	21	20	21	17
Female (students)	6	9	6	3
Faculty/Staff	9	10	10	5
Other (well-being/perpetrator/unknown)	4	5	5	1
Total	40	48	42	26

Nature of the notification:	2021	2020	2019	2018
Negative discrimination/harassment	17	20	12	3
Bullying	9	9	2	2
Sexual harassment (including digital)	23	20	20	13
Aggression	3	3	5	3
Discrimination	6	9	5	7
Well-being	1	2	1	4
Stalking (physical/digital)	5	7	3	0

3.2. Notifications Staff

In total, 38 members of staff filed a notification in 2021, fewer than in 2020. Like in 2020, the accused were generally men, often in managerial positions. The number of notifications about negative discrimination and harassment was significantly lower. The number of notifications about labour conflicts slightly decreased.

Notifiers (staff)	2021	2020	2019	2018
Male	13	19	15	10
Female	25	27	30	30
Total	38	46	45	40

Accused	2021	2020	2019	2018
Male	20	29	26	25
Female	12	16	15	15
Organisation	3	1	4	0
Unknown	3	1	0	0
Total	38	47	45	40

Nature of the notification	2021	2020	2019	2018
Negative discrimination/harassment	15	22	34	23
Bullying	8	5	8	9
Sexual harassment	7	6	6	4
Aggression	3	3	4	4
Discrimination	5	4	3	3
Labour conflict	6	8	16	5
Integrity	4	1	0	1
Stalking (digital/physical)	2	4	2	0
Abuse of authority	2	4	4	0

3.3. Conclusions, trends

The total number of notifications at EUR increased to 78 (down from 94 in 2020). We do not really have an explanation for this decrease. The figures are comparable with those from other universities. In total, 135 interviews took place. In the large majority of cases, one meeting sufficed. People often want to report a case, but they do not want a follow-up. These are consultation or information interviews, or the notifier wants the confidential adviser to have taken cognisance of the situation. Depending on the nature of the notification, the number of interviews per case can increase.

The interviews were mostly online, also in 2021.

In 2021, students turned to a confidential adviser 40 times. The number of notifications was lower than in 2020 (48 notifications).

In 2021, too, most notifications from students concerned sexual harassment and negative discrimination/general harassment. Despite the lower number of notifications, the number of sexual harassment notifications increased.

Many cases concerned unwanted touching, comments and messages.

Fear, shame and the expectation that there is little the university can do may cause students not to file any notifications. Additionally, a large group of students have never heard about the confidential advisers or the work they do.

The number of notifications by staff about negative discrimination and harassment was lower. It was more than halved, from 34 in 2019 to 15 in 2021. Working from home seems to be a possible cause.

3.4 Recommendations

Earlier this year (2022), *Erasmus Magazine* conducted research among students into experiences with sexually transgressive behaviour. We would have preferred that the university had handled this. We also want to see more extensive investigation, in which other forms of transgressive behaviour are focused on as well, such as discrimination, harassment and bullying.

It is also important to investigate this among staff. We call for including this subject more extensively in the investigations among staff. This will provide a better indication of the nature and size of the problem than the number of notifications submitted to the confidential adviser.

The project leader of the confidential adviser network and the ombudsperson had regular meetings in 2021. Naturally, the mandate of the ombudsperson differs from that of the confidential adviser. The ombudsperson has a right to information and has investigative powers, whereas confidential advisers do not. They address the undesirable behaviour and advise the notifier. 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 combination of forces would need to be investigated.

The vacancy for ombudsperson has not been filled yet; the two confidential advisers currently deputise temporarily with respect to the first assistance rendered to notifiers. They can call in the ombudsperson of Erasmus MC if need be. It is highly desirable that the vacancy is filled very soon.

Transgressive behaviour is a hot discussion topic in society, especially after several incidents that came in for much attention in the media.

Transgressive behaviour, such as sexual and other forms of harassment, negative discrimination, unwanted touching and/or comments, bullying, stalking and discrimination, occur everywhere, also at universities. Awareness of these forms of undesirable behaviour is a step in the right direction towards a safe study and working environment.

Training and workshops for students and employees contribute to a high extent to better insight into the problem and play a supporting role in specific discussions about

various forms of undesirable behaviour, about recognising such behaviour, and about ways to address incidents.

Good cooperation between HR, the D&I team, the ombudsperson and the confidential adviser network is of great importance.

It is good to note that EUR has signed the Amnesty International manifesto against sexual violence. The signatories undertake to organise preventive activities.

At a faculty level and department level, expertise promotion and preventive training can be organised in awareness for managers, other employees and students.

This training can focus on recognising and acting on transgressive behaviour, consent workshops, bystander workshops, etc.

We recommend that these training sessions and workshops are included as standard in introduction programmes for students and during the onboarding process for new employees. With respect to employees, these could be in the form of online training with modules. Among managers there is a certain extent of lack or hesitation in taking action when transgressive behaviour is reported. Managers could benefit from training in recognising transgressive behaviour and in how to respond to it.

4 Other activities and developments

At the end of 2021, the performance of the confidential adviser network was evaluated by an external agency. The findings: 'In general, it was found that the Confidential Adviser Network is useful and necessary as part of the care structure.

The way in which the Confidential Adviser Network was set up and has operated over the past two years certainly helps create a healthy, safe and professional work and study environment and the learning capability at EUR.' And: 'The installation of the Confidential Adviser Network at EUR provides an important low-threshold entry point into the care structure.'

On the basis of the recommendations and advice from the evaluation report, the network will be structurally embedded in the organisation in the coming year.

The evaluation report has been submitted to the Executive Board and will be shared in the organisation.

The two central confidential advisers conduct annual conversations with staff from all parts of the university. The aim of these interviews is to introduce and draw attention to the work of the confidential advisers and give them the opportunity to share ideas and make suggestions. The interviews are conducted at the mutual initiative of the parties concerned. Here, too, the confidential advisers are easy to find.

In 2021, after having been specifically trained for the purpose, the two central confidential advisers were also appointed 'designated employees domestic violence'.

In addition, the two central confidential advisers are part of the EUR expertise team Worrying Behaviour (in the process of being formed). In 2021, on the initiative of the safety coordinators, the team members have taken extensive training together with the other team members.

In the next Eureka Week, there will be various activities to inform students about the confidential adviser network and its work. In consultation with the confidential adviser network and the D&I team, a bystander training is organised for the Eureka Week guides.