

# **Ombudsperson Matters**

## **1) What is an ombudsperson?**

An ombudsperson is a neutral and confidential contact person for all members of the university who wish to be supported in conflicts arising within the university life. It is the job of the ombudsperson to be available as a confidential advisor for students and employees in cases where there is suspicion of a violation of the principles of good scientific and healthy workplace practice. The ombudsperson also helps you address work-related problems and conflicts, and can be contacted to mediate disputes with colleagues and superiors.

## **2) What concerns can I address to an ombudsperson?**

Conflicts and persistent difficulties can arise in the relationship between early-career researchers and their supervisors. When such issues remain unresolved, they can become a significant source of stress, negatively affecting scientific creativity, productivity, and overall motivation for research. The ombudspersons provide an independent point of contact in these situations. Early-career researchers may approach an ombudsperson with any problems, tensions, or disputes related to their supervisory relationship as well as their professional relationships with colleagues. The ombudsperson will work with you toward viable solutions.

## **3) At what level of escalation can the ombudsperson provide mediation?**

- The ombudsperson should be contacted for informal, easily accessible solutions i.e., for offering a conversation with the aim of clarification, dialogue and mediation.
- Contacting an ombudsperson should **not** be seen as a "level of failure"; on the contrary, contacting an ombudsperson for early stage intervention before issues escalate is actively encouraged.

Seeking confidential advice or mediation from an ombudsperson will **not** lead to any disadvantages or repercussions with regard to your work, supervision, or evaluation.

## 4) How does the process work?

Contact an ombudsperson of your choice directly. You may choose someone within or outside your faculty. If your department has an ombudsperson, you can approach them; however, if you feel you want greater distance—e.g., to minimise any potential conflicts of interest—consider selecting an ombudsperson from another department or faculty. Together with you, the ombudsperson will agree on a way forward, which may involve a confidential individual consultation or, **if you wish**, mediation between you and the other party to the conflict. The procedure is always conducted in consultation with you. Ombudspersons can only make recommendations to the conflict parties towards a resolution, but cannot issue binding instructions. The ombudspersons treat all concerns, consultations, and discussions **confidentially**.

## 5) When can I expect my issue to be resolved?

There is no fixed deadline for ombuds procedures. Straightforward requests for advice or clarification can often be addressed in one or a few conversations. However, cases with deeper issues that involve several parties, complex facts, or suspected research misconduct/conflicts usually take longer and may extend over a number of months. In severe cases, they may provide you with resources and inform you about the process to escalate the issue as they deem fit. The contacted ombudsperson should discuss possible next steps with you and, if possible, give you an individual time estimate, but a binding resolution date cannot be guaranteed.

## 6) Whom can I contact?

**University of Cologne:** You can contact an ombudsperson listed [here](#). You can also contact the ombudspersons appointed by the [rectorate](#) for matters pertaining to illnesses, disabilities, antisemitism, and any other cases of discrimination. The physics institutes of the University of Cologne also have a team of ombudspersons that you can access [here](#).

**University of Bonn:** You can contact the Ombudsoffice for early-career researchers [here](#)

**Max Planck Institute of Radio Astronomy, Bonn:** The contact node for ombudsman office for MPIfR is [here](#)

**Forschungszentrum Jülich:** Contacts for trusted persons can be found [here](#)