



**OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON FOR ACADEMIC ETHICS AND  
PROCEDURES OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA**

**ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 2020**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures (the Office) dedicated the year 2020 to the evaluation of the evidence-based situation of academic ethics in the country and appropriate decisions. More efforts were focused on the ethics of research and publication in order to promote the *research quality* and *open science*. In this direction, contextual surveys were carried out, thematic recommendations and guidelines were prepared, various meetings with the academic community and other stakeholders were organised, best practices were shared, and active involvement in international discussions was taken up.

To encourage research and higher education institutions to create an integrated and effective ethics infrastructure, the Office encouraged to look at academic ethics from the perspective of international standards and good practices, to initiate positive changes in the environment of research and higher education (academic) and to resolve for *long-term persevering solidarity* by strengthening intellectual leadership as well as open and constructive dialogue in the field of academic ethics.

This annual report presents the Office's performance results of 2020 and the closest directions of activities that are intended to be complied with consistently in order to increase consciousness of the academic community about the importance of academic ethics for academic activities.

Loreta Tauginienė,  
Ombudswoman for Academic Ethics and Procedures

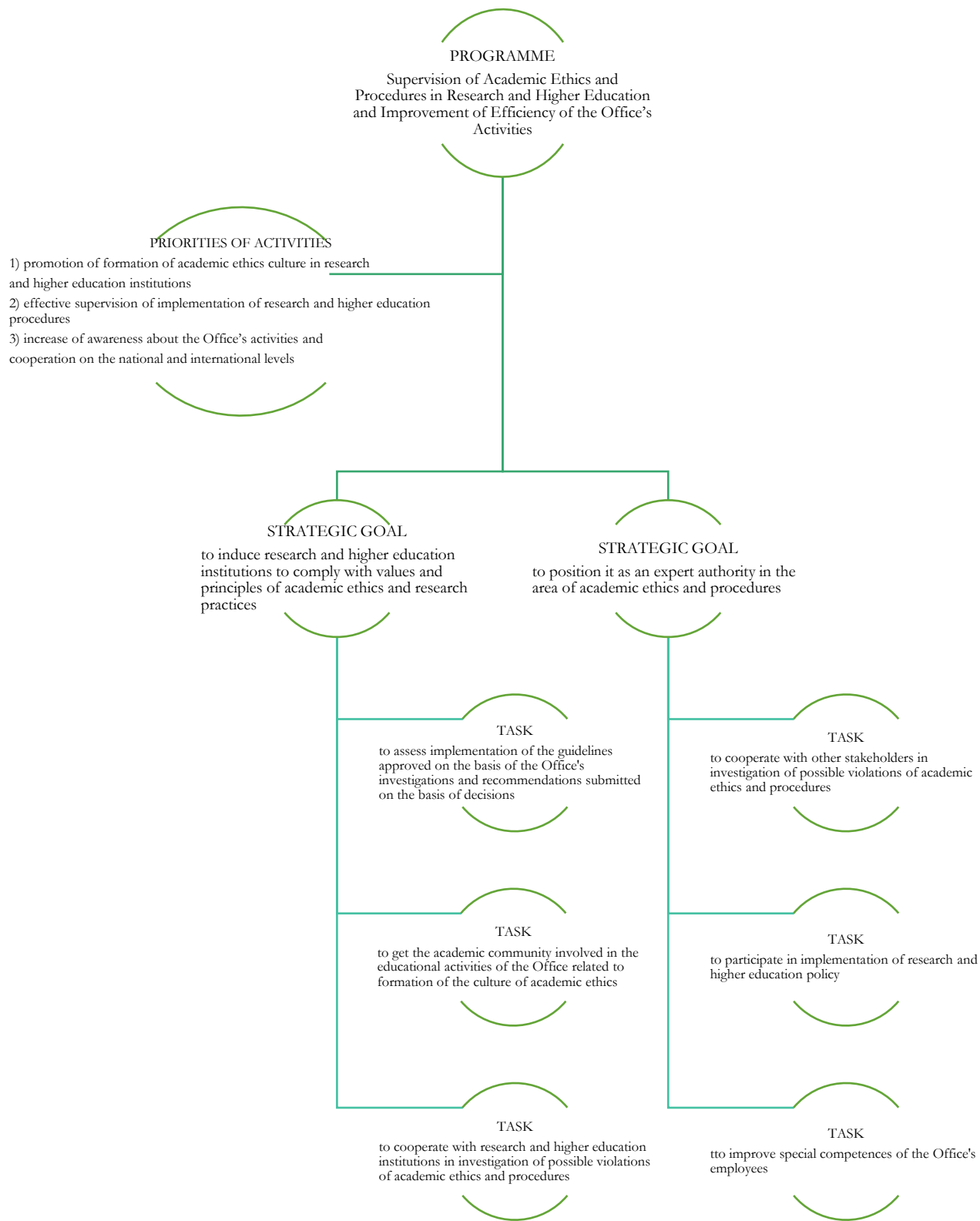
## I. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LONG-TERM PROGRAMME OF THE OFFICE

The *mission* of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania (the Office) is to implement the research and higher education policy by safeguarding compliance with values and principles of academic ethics and research practices in the application of national and international practices.

The Office is implementing three priorities of activities: 1) promotion of the formation of academic ethical culture in research and higher education institutions (the RHEI); 2) effective supervision of the implementation of research and higher education procedures; and 3) increase of awareness about the Office's activities and cooperation on the national and international levels. These three priorities of activities are implemented through the *Long-Term Programme of the Office "Supervision of Academic Ethics and Procedures in Research and Higher Education and Improvement of Efficiency of the Office's Activities"* (Figure 1). The purpose of the first part of this long-term programme (*Supervision of Academic Ethics and Procedures in Research and Higher Education*) is to implement one of the strategic goals of the Office – to induce the RHEI to comply with values and principles of academic ethics and research practices. Its expedience is comparable to the change in the higher education sector endeavoured at by the Seventeenth Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania – application of ethical principles in the studying process (subclauses 125.4 and 143.3), and to the attempt to satisfy the needs of society and the State – to strengthen the quality of education and research (subclause 128.9). The purpose of the second part of this long-term programme (*Improvement of Efficiency of the Office's Activities*) is to implement one of the strategic goals of the Office – to position it as an expert authority in the area of academic ethics and procedures. Its expedience is comparable to the commitment provided in the Seventeenth Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania to increase the efficiency of services provided in the public sector (subclause 195.12) and with an aim to substantiate the efficiency of civil service by professionalism and quality and to induce transparency of civil service (clauses 259, 262, 290 and subclause 285.5).

The tasks of the Ombudsperson's activities are the following: 1) to induce the RHEIs to comply with academic ethics and procedures; 2) to supervise and control, how the RHEIs comply with codes of academic ethics; 3) to cooperate with the RHEIs while solving problems related to violations of academic ethics and procedures; 4) to safeguard effective and confidential investigation of violations of academic ethics and procedures; 5) to supervise and control implementation of international agreements of the Republic of Lithuania, legal acts of the European Union, laws and other legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania that govern academic ethics and procedures; and 6) to contribute to quality of research and higher education while fostering principles of academic responsibility and ethical research practices, and applying preventive measures of plagiarism, unlawful copying or other unlawful use of results of intellectual property created by other persons, falsification, fabrication or manipulation of scientific research data.

Figure 1: The long-term Programme of the Office.



## 1.1. INDUCEMENT OF RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS TO COMPLY WITH VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC ETHICS AND RESEARCH PRACTICES

### *Implementation of values and principles of academic ethics and research practices in research and higher education institutions*

The Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures (the Ombudsperson) passed 23 decisions in 2020, where and on the basis of which 7 recommendations for measures were submitted in order to remove violations of academic ethics and procedures and their causes (e.g., RHEI internal documents were improved, corrective actions of scientific publications were performed). 6 (86 percent) of 7 recommendations were implemented in full. At the time of the preparation of this annual report, no information was submitted to the Office on the implementation of 1 recommendation.

The Office prepared four documents of recommendatory character for the academic community, two of which are related to the incentive of academic ethics in the study process, and the other two are associated with the development of key elements of the ethics infrastructure in the academic environment. The following Guidelines were developed for the incentive of academic ethics in the study process: *Guidelines for objective and fair evaluation of group works*<sup>1</sup> aimed at ensuring objective and fair evaluation of group works of students and *Guidelines for ensuring academic ethics by remote means*<sup>2</sup>, aimed at helping to ensure compliance with academic ethics when organising studies remotely. The guidelines are based on the results of national applied research (e.g. research “Academic Integrity Index 2019”, “Remote Education Challenges for Academic Ethics during the COVID-19 Pandemic”) and international research results, international and Lithuanian academic community’s experience and insights.

In order to promote the emergence of key elements of the ethics infrastructure in the academic environment and to prepare guidelines promoting changes in the system of research and higher education, the Office has published the *Guidelines for Ethical Review*<sup>3</sup>, intended for the academic community. These guidelines explain how to assess compliance with research ethics by ensuring compliance with the principles of academic integrity of research in respect of particular research and to protect the interests of research subjects (persons) and animals used in research. The guidelines were prepared based on the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA), revised 2018 edition), guidelines

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<sup>1</sup> Kapočiūtė, K 2020, ‘Guidelines for objective and fair evaluation of group works’, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures, Vilnius, online access on 29 December 2020, <[https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Gaires\\_Objektyvus-ir-saziningas-vertinimas.pdf](https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Gaires_Objektyvus-ir-saziningas-vertinimas.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> Ozolinčiūtė, E 2020, ‘Guidelines for ensuring academic ethics by remote means’, the Office of Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures, Vilnius, online access on 29 December 2020, <[https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Gaires\\_Akademines-etikos-uztikrinimas-organizuojant-studijas-nuotoliniu-budu.pdf](https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Gaires_Akademines-etikos-uztikrinimas-organizuojant-studijas-nuotoliniu-budu.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> The Guidelines were approved by Order No V-60 of the Ombudsperson of 10 December 2020, online access on 29 December 2020, <<https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Atitikties-mokslini%C5%B3-tyrim%C5%B3-etikai-vertinimo-gair%C4%97s.pdf>>.

of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019), Dutch Code of Ethics for Research involving Human Participants (2018), Norwegian Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology issued by the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (2016), the general ethical principles of the best European universities and policies for research involving people and the use of personal data, Helsinki declaration, etc. The above-mentioned documents are considered to be one of the most advanced provisions revealing the good practices in issues dealing with academic ethics in research not only in a European but also in a global context. Also, in order to integrate experience accumulated by Lithuania in this field, the Office's *Recommendations on the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of Academic Ethics Codes* by Research and Higher Education Institutions (version 2020), the Guidelines for Publication Ethics prepared by the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference and the Guidelines on Open Access to Scientific Publications and Data prepared by the Research Council of Lithuania have been taken into account. In preparing these guidelines, the Office invited stakeholders to submit proposals on the improvement of the draft guidelines and received suggestions from the Lithuanian Bioethics Committee, the Research Council of Lithuania, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children Rights, the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics, the State Data Protection Inspectorate and the State Food and Veterinary Service.

A working group comprising the representatives of Research Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Students' Union, Vilnius University Students' Union, the Lithuanian Junior Researchers' Union, the Lithuanian Business Confederation, the Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian University Colleges and the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference who, together with representatives of the Office, updated the *Recommendations on the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of Academic Ethics Codes by Research and Higher Education Institutions*<sup>4</sup>. The purpose of these recommendations was to assist the RHEIs in developing comprehensive, relevant, universal, and advanced codes of academic ethics that meet the international requirements of academic ethics, as well as to encourage the RHEIs to periodically review, update and appropriately apply them.

In January 2021, the Office conducted a survey on the implementation of academic ethics measures at RHEIs, involving 50 out of 57 (88 %) RHEIs. The results of this survey show that on average 85 % of the surveyed RHEIs introduced in 2020 or plan to introduce their academic community in 2021 to the recommendations and guidelines published by the Office. On average, twice a lesser part of them (41%) transposed or plan to transpose the recommendations and guidelines published by the Office during the assessment period (Table 1).

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<sup>4</sup> The recommendations were approved by the Order No V-38 of the Ombudsperson of 25 August 2020, online access on 29 December 2020, <<https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/V-38.pdf>>.

Table 1: Implementation of recommendations and guidelines prepared by the Office.

<b>Title of recommendations, guidelines</b>	Introduction to the community (e.g. publicly available on the institution's website or via internal information means) <b>2019 &gt; 2020</b>	Transfer to the institution's internal documents (e.g. planned to be implemented, integration into codes of academic ethics, etc.) <b>2019 &gt; 2020</b>
Guidelines for Publication Ethics (2019)	9* (18 %) > 46 (92 %)	6 (12 %) > 20 (41 %)
Guidelines for Recognition of Fictitious Scientific Events (2019)	9 (18 %) > 46 (94 %)	3 (6 %) > 12 (24 %)
Recommendations on the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of Academic Ethics Codes by Lithuanian research and higher education institutions (2020)	34 (68 %)	33 (66 %)
Guidelines for Objective and Fair Evaluation of Group Works (2020)	45 (90 %)	14 (28 %)
Guidelines for Ensuring Academic Ethics by Remote Means (2020)	41 (82 %)	21 (42 %)
Guidelines for Ethical Review (2020)	44 (88 %)	22 (44 %)

\* The table presents data on the number of RHEIs implementing the recommendations and guidelines: N=51 (2019) and N=50 (2020).

In 2020, compared to 2019, the number of RHEIs that introduced their communities to the Guidelines for Publication Ethics and Guidelines for Recognition of Fictitious Scientific Events increased 5 times. Meanwhile, during the comparative period, the Guidelines for Publication Ethics and Guidelines for Recognition of Fictitious Scientific Events were transferred or are planned to be transferred by RHEIs 3.4 times and 4 times more, respectively. One RHEI indicated that it had no need to follow the said guidelines due to the nature of its activities.

It was the Guidelines for an Objective and Fair Evaluation of Group Works that received the most attention of the RHEIs, which were introduced to the academic community by 48 % of surveyed RHEIs in 2020. Among other guidelines, which received the most attention from RHEIs, which the academic community was introduced to in 2020, were the Guidelines for Ensuring Academic Ethics by Remote Means (46 %). Recommendations on the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of Academic Ethics Codes by Lithuanian research and higher education institutions lead among the most ones transferred to RHEI internal documents in 2020 (24 %). In 2021, the RHEIs will focus their efforts on the transfer of Guidelines for Ethical Review (44 %) and Recommendations on the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of Academic Ethics Codes by Lithuanian research and higher education institutions (42 %). The latter two guidelines



are fundamental in the system of research and higher education of Lithuania in order to encourage RHEIs to develop an ethics infrastructure in line with international standards and trends.

The preparation of the guidelines related to ensuring academic ethics and equal opportunities in the scientific events organised in Lithuania was also started in the reporting year. To prepare these guidelines, the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures and the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson formed a joint working group comprising the representatives of the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics, Lithuanian Junior Researchers' Union, Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian University Colleges, Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference and the Office.

**It was sought to implement 65 % of values and principles of academic ethics and research practices in research and higher education institutions in the reporting year. According to the review of the implementation of the recommendations provided in the decisions and related letters from the Office, the achieved value of this strategic goal exceeded the intended indicator value by 21 percentage points, a total of 86 %.**

#### *Monitoring of systemic problems of academic ethics and procedures*

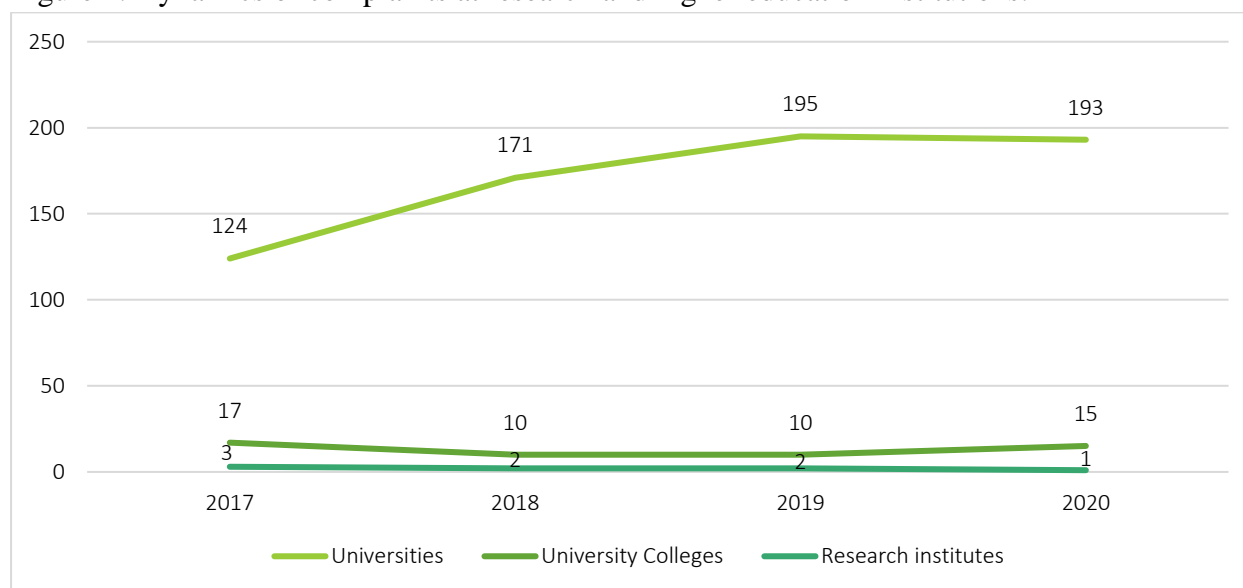
4 analytical studies/reports related to systemic problems of academic ethics and procedures were prepared in 2020. First analytical study *Monitoring of the implementation of academic ethics measures in research and higher education institutions*<sup>5</sup> is intended to systematically assess the situation of violations in the field of academic ethics and procedures at RHEIs. 50 out of 57 (88 %) RHEIs participated in the survey. The previous results of this survey provided in the report on the activities of the Ombudsperson for 2019 are presented by comparing them with the results of the same survey in 2020. The monitoring of the implementation of the 2020 academic ethics measures showed that the number of complaints received at universities and research institutes remained constant compared to 2019 (Figure 2). The number of complaints received at university colleges increased by 1.5 times over the reference period.

Over the period 2017–2020, RHEIs received 736 complaints, 79 % of which related to student behaviour and 15 % behaviour by academic staff (Table 2). 94 % of complaints about student behaviour were submitted at universities. It can be presupposed that the system of intolerance of unethical behaviour is developing faster in universities than in university colleges. Research institutes, meanwhile, generally hardly receive any complaints about student behaviour: this may be due to the fact that only doctoral students, who are both postgraduate students and researchers, study there.

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<sup>5</sup> Židonė, G 2020, 'Monitoring of the implementation of academic ethics measures in research and study institutions', the Office of Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures, Vilnius, online access on 30 December 2020, d., <[https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Apklausos-apzvalga-2020-02-10\\_final.pdd](https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Apklausos-apzvalga-2020-02-10_final.pdd)>.

Figure 2: Dynamics of complaints at research and higher education institutions.



Over the past four-year period, the RHEIs have received 2 times more complaints about the behaviour of academic staff than the behaviour of administrative staff (Table 2). However, more complaints about the behaviour of administrative staff (90 %) than the behaviour of academic staff (80 %) are submitted at universities. Meanwhile, the number of complaints in university colleges about the behaviour of academic staff (15 %) is almost 2 times higher than regarding the behaviour of administrative staff (8 %).

Table 2: Dynamics of complaints about the behaviour of groups of members of the academic community.

	Students			Academic staff			Administrative staff		
	U	K	I	U	K	I	U	K	I
<b>2017</b>	103	9	1	9	6	1	12	2	1
<b>2018</b>	132	9	0	25	1	1	13	0	0
<b>2019</b>	150	8	0	25	2	2	15	0	0
<b>2020</b>	161	6	0	27	7	1	5	2	0
<b>Total:</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>579</b>			<b>107</b>			<b>50</b>		

U – universities; K – university colleges; I – research institutes.

Assessing the proportion of unsubstantiated complaints received by RHEIs in 2020, compared to the data of 2019, a slight increase in the number of complaints in universities (in 2019:

11 %; in 2020: 13 %) and an almost 3-fold increase in university colleges (in 2019: 10 %; in 2020: 27 %) is observed. In January 2021, the number of complaints under consideration was 1.5 times lower compared to January 2020, 14 and 21 complaints, respectively.

In 2020, violations of academic ethics such as plagiarism (28 cases), copying (10 cases), and submission of contract-cheated works<sup>6</sup> (5 cases) were most commonly identified at RHEIs. These violations were also dominant in 2019: plagiarism (70 cases), copying (54 cases) and submission of contract-cheated works (5 cases). It should be assumed that in 2020 the cases of copying were found to be significantly lower due to the organisation of distant studies during the pandemic, and plagiarism cases – due to the need to redistribute time resources, giving priority to the preparation of distance sessions and passing for a course (although 15 RHEIs were granted by the Office to access the text-matching programme).

The second report *Changes in the Regulation of Activities of the Academic Ethics Committees of Lithuanian research and higher education institutions*<sup>7</sup> were aimed at assessing the comprehensiveness of the regulation of the activities of the RHEI Commissions for Academic Ethics and the conditions for the implementation of the principles of transparency and objectivity. To achieve the aim of the research, the strategies applied by RHEI for implementing the Recommendations for the Adoption, Implementation, and Supervision of Academic Ethics Codes of Research and Higher Education Institutions approved by Order No V-16 of the Ombudsperson of 31 March 2015 (the Recommendations) from the standpoint of the activities of the Academic Ethics Commissions were analysed. The dominant RHEI adaptation model to comply with the Recommendations was also clarified. 39 RHEIs participated in the survey, which submitted 102 documents (e.g. activity regulations, codes of academic ethics, etc.), of which 98 documents were selected for data analysis. The research results show that after reviewing the activity documents of the RHEI Academic Ethics Commissions published after 2015, a larger part of RHEIs is characterised by conformist and innovative behaviour. The strategy of conformist behaviour is characterised by the pursuit of societal goals by socially accepted measures, i.e., the provisions of the activities of the RHEI Academic Ethics Commissions are fully or partially in line with the Recommendations. Meanwhile, the strategy for innovative behaviour is characterised by different measures and ways for the pursuit of goals, i.e., own ways of achieving the desired result are discovered.

Third report *Responsible Research Barometer 2020*<sup>8</sup> allowed assessing in more detail the situation of academic ethics in Lithuania. The results of this study complemented the results of the study “Academic Integrity Index” carried out every two years by the Lithuanian Students’ Union

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<sup>6</sup> Submission of contract-cheated work complies with Paragraph 1 of Article 123 of the Code of Administrative Transgressions of the Republic of Lithuania.

<sup>7</sup> Ozolinčiūtė, E 2020, ‘Changes in the Regulation of Activities of the Academic Ethics Committees of Lithuanian Research and Higher Education Institutions’, Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures, Vilnius, online access on 30 December 2020, <[https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/MSI-etikos-komitetu-veikla\\_tyrimo-ataskaita.pdf](https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/MSI-etikos-komitetu-veikla_tyrimo-ataskaita.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> Ozolinčiūtė, E, Židonė, G, & Tauginienė, L 2020, ‘Responsible Science Barometer 2020’, the Office of Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures, Vilnius, online access on 30 December 2020, <[https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Atsakingo-mokslo-barometras-2020-tyrimo-ataskaita\\_LT\\_EN.pdf](https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Atsakingo-mokslo-barometras-2020-tyrimo-ataskaita_LT_EN.pdf)>.

on the practice of implementation of academic integrity in higher education institutions. The purpose of the Office's study was to review the current practice of research performance and publication of their results from the perspective of academic ethics in Lithuanian RHEIs – universities, university colleges and research institutes. The aim of this study was also to find out how much attention the Lithuanian academic community devotes to education about the ethics of research and publication (ERP), how the ethical sensitivity of the academic community is manifested, what violations of ERP are noticed in the academic environment and how they are solved. The survey involved doctoral students and researchers (lecturers, scientists and other researchers working at RHEIs) (N=384).

The results of the survey show that although 4 out of 10 respondents are *well-aware* of the Recommendations; however, one in two respondents is not well aware of the provisions relating to the ERP. According to slightly more than half of the respondents, their institutions do not implement the ERP provisions in their activities. Also, more than one in three respondents have *never* deepened their knowledge in the field of ERP over the last three years. More than two-thirds of the respondents who deepened their knowledge in the field of ERP were looking for information on the topic of ERP on their own.

When assessing the nature of ERP violations observed in their academic environment, respondents identified the following types of plagiarism *among the most commonly (very often and often) observed ERP violations*: slicing (13 %), multimedia plagiarism (10 %) and self-plagiarism (9 %), unethical types of authorship – gift or guest authorship (25 %) and mutual admiration authorship (21 %) as well as other types of ERP violations: conducting research without ethical approval and HARKing (13 % each).

The assessment of ERP violation practice reveals that one in three respondents faces unfair conduct in the academic community, but only one in four of those who faced the ERP violation took appropriate action against them. RHEI behaviour in respect of the applicants could be more effective, i.e. in addressing sensitive internal problems of academic ethics, specific actions and solutions should be directed towards measures to prevent unethical behaviour. The confidence of the academic community in the decisions of their institution is important not only to reduce cases of unethical behaviour but also to ensure the research quality and ERP. It should also be noted that the ethical position of the academic community is more focused not on individual moral norms but on those that are acceptable in society (likely, RHEIs as well).

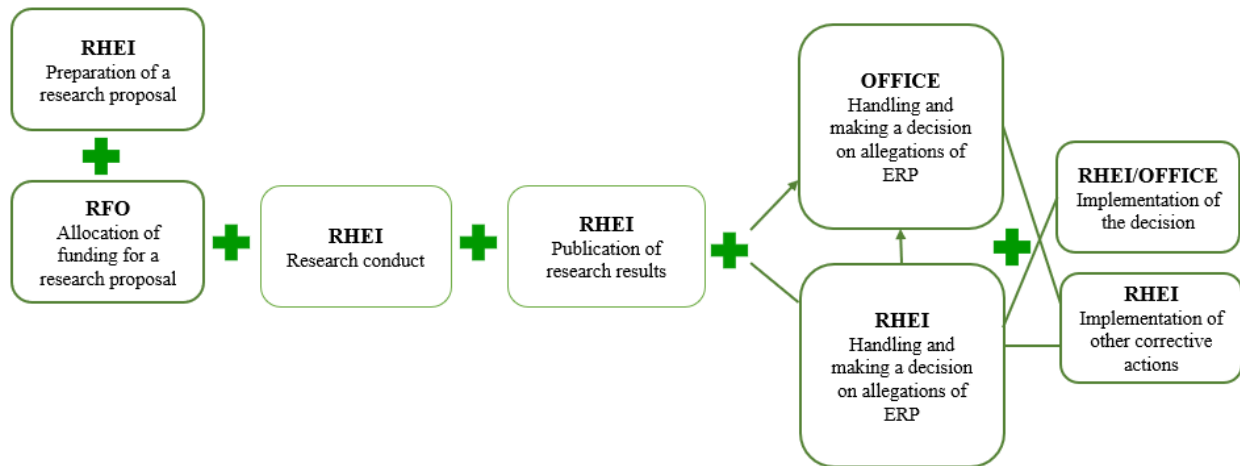
The fourth study concerns *The monetary value of the ERP violations following the revocation of a scientific publication*<sup>9</sup>. The purpose of this study was to understand the extent of financial losses of the ERP violations and other consequences related thereto. With regard to the availability of data, only the following groups of expenses were analysed by the Office, namely the research conduct and publication of research results (Figure 3).

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<sup>9</sup> Tauginienė, L 2020, 'The monetary value of the ERP violations following the revocation of a scientific publication'', the Office of Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures, Vilnius, online access on 1 February 2021, <<https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Moksliniu-tyrimu-ir-publikavimo-etikos-pazeidimu-pinigine-verte.pdf>>.

Data were collected on 372 projects of the researcher teams implemented between 2014 and 2019. Having evaluated the completeness and accuracy of the data on each project of the researcher teams, 141 projects of researcher teams were selected for data analysis. The latter published 629 scientific works: scientific articles, books (e.g. monographs, scientific studies) or parts thereof.

Figure 3: The groups of expenses related to the ERP violation.



\*RFO is a research funding organisation.

The results of this study allow only a hypothetical assessment of what initial financial losses may be incurred when a scientific publication is revoked due to ERP violations. *The average monetary value of one scientific publication, covering all the expenses related to the research conduct and publication of its results, may range from EUR 16 thousand to EUR 98 thousand from state budget funds*, which may be named as a significant risk of investment in the research that may be caused by an unethical scientific research and/or published research results in violation of the publication ethics. There is no doubt that the real financial loss resulting from the revocation of the scientific publication due to the ERP violations would be significantly higher when assessing other effects of the revocation of scientific publications: changes in academic careers (e.g. reduced level of scientific productivity, cessation of scientific activity), derivative financial losses (e.g. damage to human health – induction of disease or death through a treatment method published in scientific publications), etc.

In order to ensure the monitoring of systemic problems in academic ethics and procedures and in response to the RHEI's need to use text-matching programmes, the Office extended access to the software "PlagScan" to 4 higher education institutions (5 users) – 2 universities and 2 university colleges, in order to safeguard academic integrity in the processes of higher education and research.

**The reference year sought to monitor 5 systemic problems of academic ethics and procedures, which were revealed in 3 analytical studies and 2 thematic guidelines. Analytical**

**studies and recommendations and guidelines show that this strategic goal has been achieved beyond the target value of 8, i.e. 4 analytical studies and 4 thematic guidelines were published.**

10 products are planned for the implementation of the Office’s strategic goal – to induce the RHEIs to comply with values and principles of academic ethics and research practices (Table 3).

Table3: Implementation of the tasks of the first strategic goal.

Task > product	Planned for 2020	Achieved in 2020	Achievement level	Notes
<b>To assess implementation of the guidelines approved on the basis of the Office's investigations and recommendations submitted on the basis of decisions</b>				
Number of analytical studies of the Office	3	4	133 %	
Number of the Office's thematical guidelines	2	4	150 %	
<b>To get the academic community involved in the educational activities of the Office related to formation of the culture of academic ethics</b>				
Number of open-access useful links entered in the Office's website	20	35	175 %	
Number of events to publicize the Office's activities intended for academic community	6	6	100 %	
Number of participants in the events to publicize the Office's activities	200	130	65 %	The pandemic caused the delay of the adaptation in the country to the organisation of the Office's publicity events remotely.
Number of downloaded documents of the Office (e.g., decisions, guidelines, analytical studies)	550	757	138 %	The total number of downloads of the Office's documents is indicated.
Number of newsletters	4	0	0 %	The Office provides for a position of public relations specialist, to which the recruitment process did not take place due to a lack of funds.
Number of subscribers for newsletters	30	42	140 %	
<b>To cooperate with research and higher education institutions in investigation of possible violations of academic ethics and procedures</b>				

Task > product	Planned for 2020	Achieved in 2020	Achievement level	Notes
Number of invitations to the Office's employees to get involved into self-regulation processes of research and higher education institutions	4	2	50 %	
Number of consultations (e.g., frequently asked questions, inquiries)	10	57	570 % or 5.7 times	

**Publicity of activities.** In 2020, the State Patent Bureau of the Republic of Lithuania registered the Office's trademark – a logo, which will be valid until 2029. It aims to emphasise the exclusivity and priorities of the Office's activities.

The Office organised independently 6 events for the academic community – 1 conference and 5 meetings. One of the most important events of the Office was the conference “*Ethics in the Academic Environment*” dedicated commemorating the Global Ethics Day and discuss one of the most sensitive issues of academic ethics (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Moments of the conference “Ethics in the Academic Environment”.



Photos from the Office's archive

In 2020, its main topic was ethics in scientific activities: The representatives of the Office presented guidelines and studies in this area, representatives of the Lithuanian Bioethics Committee shared guidelines on ethics of biomedical and other scientific research related to human health. The latter presentation is important to the researchers conducting interdisciplinary research and such research not regulated by the Law on Ethics of Biomedical Research of the Republic of Lithuania. The conference was attended by over 60 members of the academic community.

In order to cooperate more intensively with the RHEI academic ethics committees, it is a tradition of the Office to arrange meetings with them twice a year. During the meetings, international trends in academic ethics are shared and an opportunity to consult and share institutional experience is provided.

The events independently organised by the Office include 2 training for the target groups – research supervisors of doctoral students on ethical leadership and members of RHEI academic ethics committees on the practice of investigating research violations. The training was led by Dr Nicole Foeger, the Head of the Administrative Office of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity, and by Armin Schmolmueller, an expert from the Administrative Office of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity.

For the first time, the Office joined the science festival “Researchers’ Night”, which invited doctoral students from various fields of science. Participants from 6 RHEIs saw the etude “Winds of Changes” which staged common academic ethical errors and patterns of behaviour triggering various dilemmas in the everyday life of today’s researchers. Participants hypothetically modelled how their institutions would behave in discussion cases, identified the problems of scientific leadership, provided suggestions on how flawed behavioural practices could be changed by the constructive practice where academically fair culture is implemented.

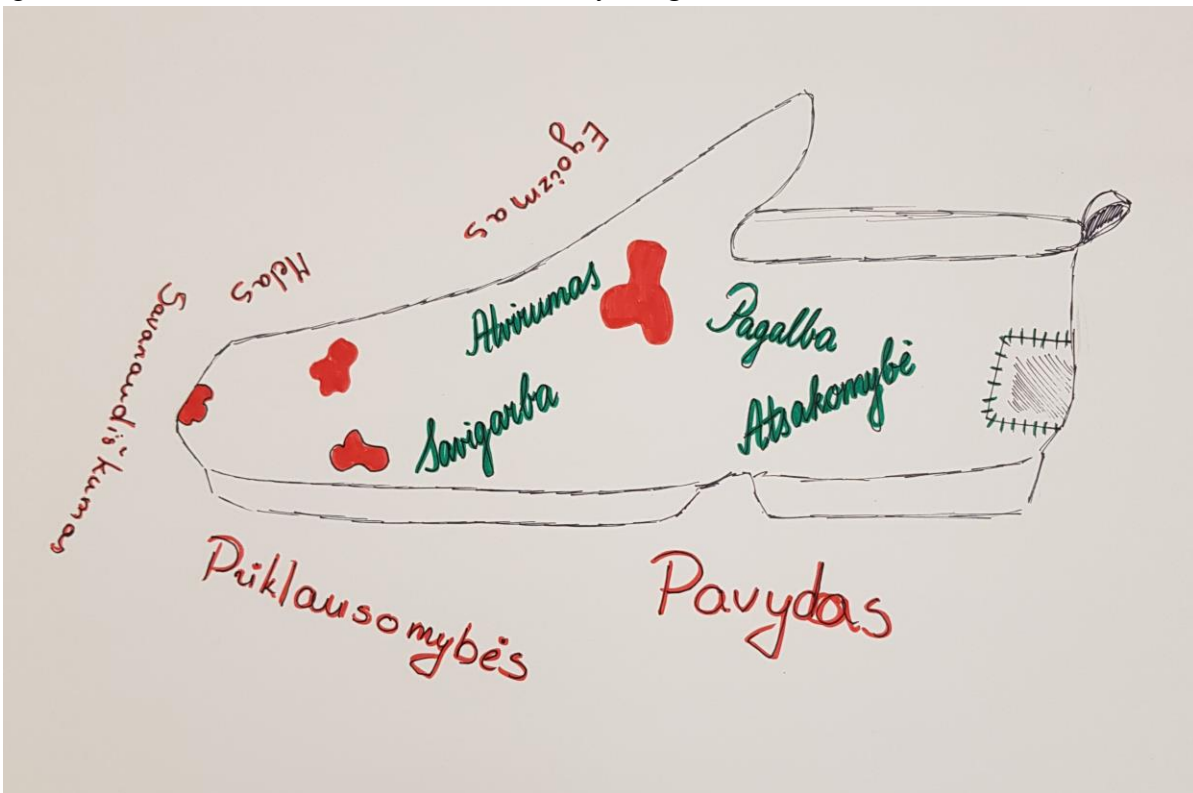
The Office contributed to the science festival “Spaceship Earth” for the second time by organising a series of seminars “Try the garment of conscience on” on the pre-university level for pupils above 15 years old. Representatives of three gymnasiums from Šiauliai, Vilnius and Kaunas district – more than 100 students and over 20 teachers participated in these seminars. Representatives of the Office introduced the pupils to the basic ethical norms and citation and quotation rules. The pupils shared their thoughts on what is a “garment of conscience” for them (Figure 5). The teachers went deeper into the formation of values at school and their transformation in the academic community; became acquainted with the forms of unethical behaviour (e.g. plagiarism, inappropriate use of images) and sanctions imposed by higher education institutions for dishonest behaviour of students. This cycle of seminars was aimed at explaining in more detail the formation of literacy habits at the pre-university level, i.e. when pupils begin to be given various written assignments in gymnasiums and their consequences. The attention was given to the fact that the reasons for poor literacy skills need to be considered as early as possible.

Three invited persons read their presentations during the reference year, 2 of which in international events organised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the European University Association together with OpenAIRE and the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. These events discussed ethics in open science, the citizen science and distance studies.

Also, 7 presentations for members of the academic community were read with the view of strengthening knowledge in the field of academic ethics and cooperation with RHEIs – in meetings with 5 universities and 1 university college and in the information event of the Research Council of Lithuania. The staff of the Office also presented the study of the Office to the international academic community: 2 presentations were made at the annual conference of the European Network for Academic Integrity.



Figure 5: The moment of the seminar series “Try the garment of conscience on”.



Photos from the Office’s archive

Summarising the involvement of the Office in the aforementioned events in 2020, it should be noted that the aspects of academic ethics were presented to over 530 members of the academic community and over 120 members of the pre-university level community.

**Project-based activities.** The Office has implemented one international project under the COST programme *Citizen Science to Promote Creativity, Scientific Literacy, and Innovation Throughout Europe* (CA15212, <https://www.cs-eu.net/>) and the implementation of another project – *Mobilising Data, Policies and Experts in Scientific Collections*, (CA17106, <https://www.mobilise-action.eu>) is continued under the said programme. The executors of the latter project organised training on the challenges of the creation of databases of natural science collections with the help of the citizen science, where ethical issues were also raised. The participation of representatives of the Office in this project helps to expand competencies for the digitisation, collection, processing, and publication of data and to contribute to the promotion of open science, of which research ethics is an integral part. Attention should be drawn to the fact that Lithuania, as well as other EU member states, is encouraged to contribute more actively to the implementation of the O3 (Open to the World, Open Innovation, Open Access) provisions. In terms of content, the said provisions not only encourage access to data for all stakeholders and enable them to develop innovations on the basis of that data but also presuppose greater public openness through the implementation of the principles of responsibility and fairness, i.e. ensuring the ERP.

In autumn of 2020, the Office launched the Erasmus+ funded international project *Bridging Integrity in Higher Education, Business and Society* (the Bridge), whose partners are RHEIs from Sweden, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, North Macedonia and Lithuania. This project endeavours to create cross-sectoral solidity of integrity by deepening the understanding of integrity in higher education, business and society and providing the appropriate skills to act in accordance with the values of academic ethics.

In the Bridge project, the Office will make the most significant contribution to the ethical challenges of research in the field of citizen science. The citizen science is of participatory nature, as the scientist gives citizens the opportunity to engage in research not as a participant, but as a co-researcher. The citizen science is open access to innovation, aiming at the fellowship of the academic community and society. On the basis of project results, guidelines and other open educational resources will be created, as well as training for masters and doctoral students will be provided. The project is coordinated by Uppsala University (Sweden).

The Office is supported under the *Nordic-Baltic Mobility and Networking Programme for Public Administration* – three employees plan to have two short-term working visits in 2021. The staff of the Office will participate in the inter-institutional exchange of knowledge and experience: they will take interest in how to form and implement the provisions on the research integrity at the national level, will get acquainted with good practices in promoting the research integrity and delve into practices of dealing with possible violations of academic ethics. The staff of the Office will pursue this knowledge and experience at Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK and the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees. The knowledge and experience gained will enable the Office to improve complaint handling procedures and to improve the consultation of the academic community.

## 1.2. OFFICE AS AN EXPERT AUTHORITY IN THE AREA OF ACADEMIC ETHICS AND PROCEDURES

In order to achieve the Office’s strategical goal – to position it as an expert authority in the area of academic ethics and procedures – 6 products were planned (Table 4).

Table 4. Implementation of the tasks of the second strategical goal.

Task > product	Planned for 2020	Achieved in 2020	Achievement level	Notes about achievement level
<b>To cooperate with other stakeholders in investigation of possible violations of academic ethics and procedures</b>				
Number of cooperation agreements and memberships	3	6	200 %	
Number of inquiries regarding possible violations of academic ethics and/or procedures	40	33	83 %	

<b>Task &gt; product</b>	<b>Planned for 2020</b>	<b>Achieved in 2020</b>	<b>Achievement level</b>	<b>Notes about achievement level</b>
Amount of written information provided by the stakeholders of publication process (e.g., presentation of full-text publication, expert conclusion, consultation)	7	6	86 %	
<b>To participate in implementation of research and higher education policy</b>				
Proportion of submitted and accepted initiatives (e.g., proposals) regarding national documents related to safeguarding of quality of science and studies (percent)	30 %	0 %	0 %	
Number of press releases prepared by the Office, interviews, and public speeches	12	4	33 %	
<b>To improve special competences of the Office's employees</b>				
Number of training and upskilling hours per employee (hours/employee)	65	34	52 %	

**Membership and cooperation.** On 25 November 2020, the Office became a co-founder of the European Network of Research Integrity Offices (ENRIO) and the Ombudsperson became a member of ENRIO Transitional Board. Other co-founders include representatives from Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Spain, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Norway, France, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Finland. Currently, the network unites 40 institutions from 25 countries. This network aims to share good practices and knowledge of expertise in the promotion of research integrity in Europe.

This membership is important for the Office because it opens wider opportunities to learn the practice of handling research misconduct by other European sister-institutions and to improve own policy and preventive measures of unethical behaviour in academic environment. The membership of the Office in ENRIO creates conditions to improve effectiveness of the Office's activities and to react timely to international trends.

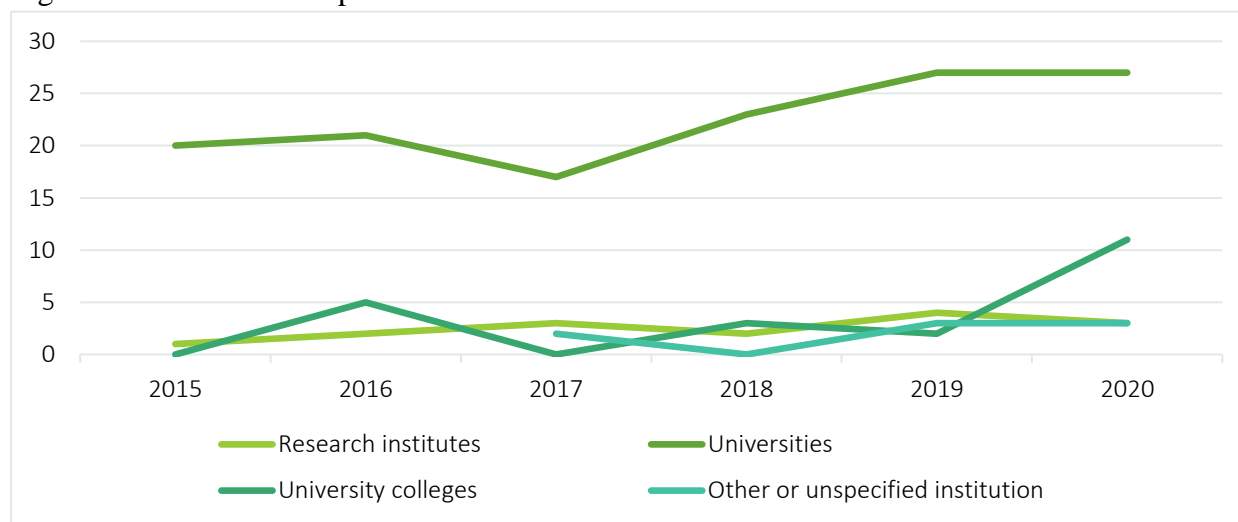
Also, the representatives of the Office continue to be involved in the Council of Europe Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED) at the expense of the Office. Lithuania is represented at ETINED by the employee of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education as the first representative and an employee of the Office as the second representative.

During the reporting year, the cooperation was developed more at the national level – proposals were submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania with the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on improving the Description of Requirements for General Study Implementation, the co-operation with the Research Council of Lithuania on data sharing in the course of the Office’s study, a working group was set up with the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania on the preparation of general recommendations for the academic community. The Office also presented proposals to the Lithuanian Bioethics Committee on the draft Recommendations related to the compliance with ethical principles in carrying out non-biomedical research the object of which is human health.

The Office authorised to investigate the administrative transgressions specified in Article 123 of the Code of Administrative Transgressions of the Republic of Lithuania cooperated with specialists of the Police Department of the Republic of Lithuania who consulted the staff of the Office on the use of the Register of Administrative Transgressions and on the issues related to executing the investigation of administrative transgressions.

**Inquiries about possible violations of academic ethics and/or procedures.** In the reporting year, the Office considered 52 cases, 44 of which received in 2020: 25 complaints and 11 reports were submitted, 2 investigations were launched on the initiative of the Ombudsperson (complaints), 6 cases of other institutions about possible violations of academic ethics and/or procedures or administrative transgressions were forwarded to the Office (Figure 6). The majority of complaints (61 percent) were related to possible violations of academic ethics and/or procedures at universities. The number of the latter complaints decreased by 21 percentage points compared to the year 2019.

Figure 6: Number of complaints in 2015–2020.



The Ombudsperson rejected 9 complaints on the reason of limits of his competence and lack of new circumstances, 4 complaints were forwarded for self-regulation of RHEIs and 3 complaints

were forwarded to another institution according to the competence (e.g., the Chief Official Ethics Commission, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania, the Police Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Heraldry Commission). The Ombudsperson determined violations of academic ethics (plagiarism) in conducting scientific research and publishing its results as well as violations of procedures due to the organisation of a public competition for pedagogical positions.

In consideration of the part of complaints examined by the RHEIs before referral to the Ombudsperson, it is evident that in the reporting year, 74 percent of complaints, on the basis whereof the decisions were made, had not been considered before (in 2019, such complaints accounted for 86 percent). It can be assumed that in 2020 the confidence in the academic ethics committees operating in the RHEIs increased by 12 percentage points compared to the data of 2019. Besides, there is a tendency that applicants increasingly address the Office on research activities-related issues.

In 2020, technical barriers to joining the Register of Administrative Transgressions and registering administrative transgressions were removed. The Office investigated administrative transgressions in three cases in accordance with Article 123 of the Code of Administrative Transgressions, two resolutions were made: in one case refusing to initiate administrative transgression proceedings when the act committed did not show signs of an administrative transgression, in the other case, an administrative penalty, a warning, was imposed.

**Participation in implementation of the research and higher education policy.** In the reporting year, the Office made 9 suggestions concerning the improvement of the Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania and together with the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education – 2 suggestions regarding the improvement of the Description of General Study Implementation Requirements. The former suggestions have not been considered during the reporting year and the latter ones are under consideration.

**International input.** The Office participated in discussions and meetings of the UNESCO and Research Council of Lithuania on the Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers adopted by UNESCO in 2017. The Office has contributed, within its remit, to the review of progress on the implementation of the said recommendations in the preparation of a national report on the implementation of these recommendations.

The Office also presented 2 suggestions to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania on the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science project.

**Improvement of special competences of the Office's employees.** Two public officers raised their competence in the field of academic ethics, one of them remotely abroad. Also, one civil servant and four employees hired under an employment contract were improving their special competencies in the course of 9 events held in Lithuania and abroad.

Six employees – three public officers and three employees hired under an employment contract – improved their competencies additionally in the course of 9 events/training to ensure and improve the internal administration of the Office in the areas of fire safety, occupational safety and health, personnel administration, administrative and clerical language, document management system and other areas.

One partially employed employee hired under an employment contract was not raising his competencies.

### *Increase of effectiveness of the Office's work*

It is stated in Paragraph 10 of Article 17 of the Law on Research and Higher Education that “the ombudsperson shall examine the complaint (report) or carry out an investigation, make a decision and notify the applicant in writing thereof not later than in 30 days after receipt of the complaint (report) or the start of the investigation. The term for examination of the complaint (report), investigation or decision-making may be extended up to 3 months after receipt of the complaint (report) or the start of the investigation if circumstances of the complaint (report) or investigation are complex or if additional information is received in the course of the investigation.” This provision gives at least 30 and not more than 92 calendar days for the ombudsperson to make a decision. In 2019, this provision would be implemented in 173 calendar days on average. Thus, in 2020, it was endeavoured at making the ombudsperson's decision within the period not exceeding 160 calendar days.

In the reporting year, 13 of 23 (57 %) decisions of the Ombudsperson were made within the term set in the Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania – within the period of 39–72 calendar days. Two decisions of the Ombudsperson were taken within more than 200 calendar days and seven decisions of the Ombudsperson were taken within 100 calendar days. The average duration of the Ombudsperson's decision-making was 96 calendar days, but the average length of proceedings was 64 calendar days<sup>10</sup>.

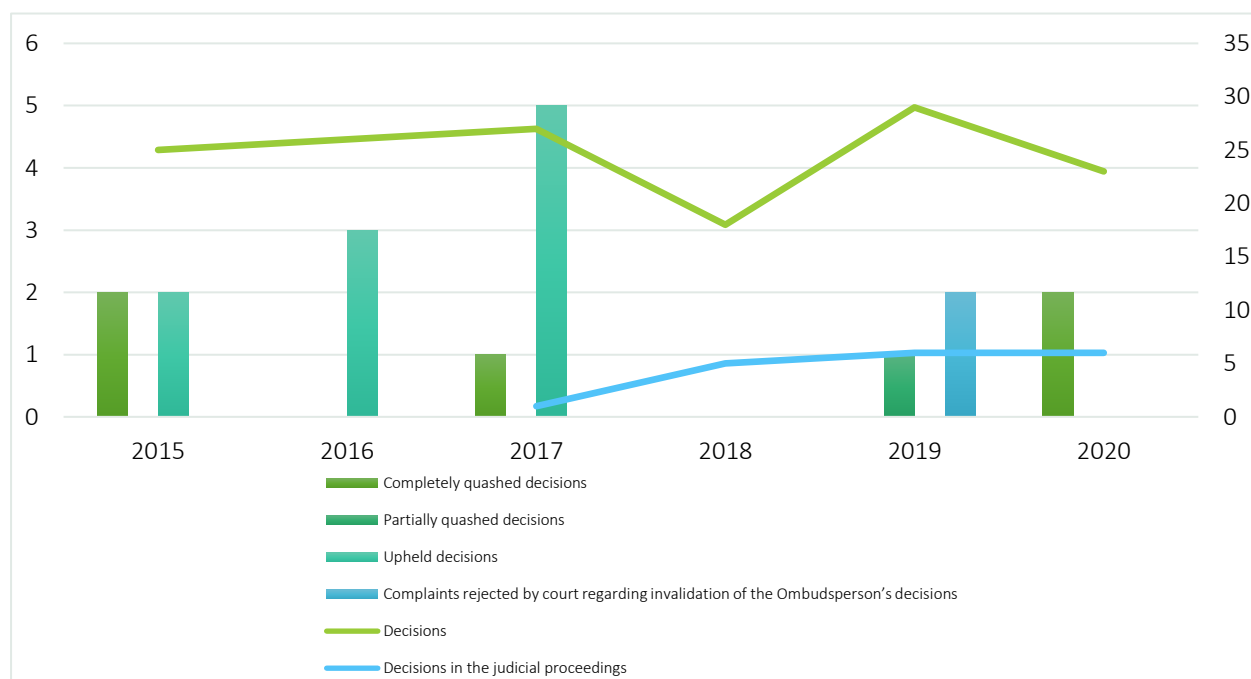
The decision making by the ombudsperson required more time than indicated in the legal acts because of the following reasons: 1) complexity of the examined case (e.g. information collected from foreign publishers to investigate a possible violation of research ethics, foreign experts hired); 2) safeguarding of the term for submission of information by RHEI and other stakeholders set in the Rules of Examination of Applications and Complaints and Servicing of Persons in Public Administration Bodies approved by Resolution No 875 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 22 August 2007 – 20 workdays; 3) avoidance to provide or non-provision of data by persons related to the complaint under consideration; 4) determination of contacts of the parties of the complaint to communicate in order to evaluate objectively the circumstances in question (e.g., written inquiry to the Centre of Registers; failure to determine contacts; sending of the Office's letters by post).

Appeals have been filed with the court against three decisions of the Ombudsperson made in 2020, one of which was annulled. In total, two decisions of the Ombudsperson were repealed during the reference year. In 2020, no court rulings were adopted on six cases (Figure 7). In the reporting year, 13 complaints were submitted to the Court against the Office's actions, of which 12 were examined. 8 out of the 12 court rulings adopted in 2020 are not due to the annulment of the decisions of the Ombudsperson.

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<sup>10</sup> Complaints included and refused to be examined and forwarded.

Figure 7: Results of the judicial proceedings of the Office’s decisions in 2015–2019.



By its ruling of 3 December 2020, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania recognised that the Ombudsperson was granted the right to oblige to revoke a decision on the award of a higher education qualification in accordance with Subparagraph 2 of Paragraph 11 of Article 17 of the Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania is not in conflict with the Constitution. In its ruling, the Constitutional Court stressed that the activities of the Ombudsperson are aimed at contributing to the improvement of standards of academic ethics and at the same time – to the quality of higher education<sup>11</sup>. The Constitutional Court also noted that the state’s obligation, arising from Paragraph 4 of Article 40 of the Constitution, to assure quality in higher education presupposes, among others, the monitoring of the observance of the standards of academic ethics and procedures, and under Paragraph 3 of Article 40 and Paragraph 1 of Article 42 of the Constitution, the autonomy guaranteed to higher education institutions does not create preconditions for disregarding academic ethics and procedures in executing research and higher education activities.

**It was endeavoured at making the Ombudsperson’s decision in 160 calendar days in the reporting year. According to the review provided in this annual report, it is evident that this strategic goal was achieved beyond the target value of 96 calendar days (160 percent).**

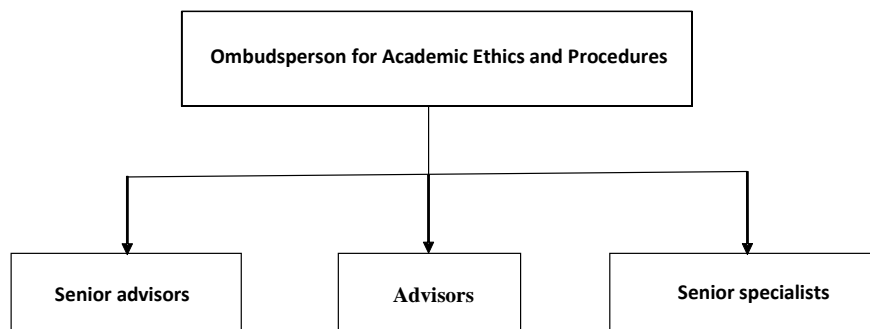
<sup>11</sup> Ruling No KT199-N16/2020 of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania of 3 December 2020 "On the Compliance of Subparagraph 2 of Paragraph 11 of Article 17 of the Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania with the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania", online access on 1 February 2021, <<https://www.lrkt.lt/lt/teismo-aktai/paieska/135/ta2267/content>>.

## II. MANAGEMENT OF THE OFFICE

### 2.1. HUMAN RESOURCES

No subdivisions or working groups were established in the Office, so all the employees are directly subordinate to the Ombudsperson (Figure 8). Civil servants and employees working under employment contracts are employed in the Service. The staff of the Office consists of senior advisers and senior specialists.

Figure 8: Management Scheme of the Office.



As of 1 January 2020, the Board of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania established the number of positions of civil servants and employees of the Office working under employment contracts and receiving remuneration from the state budget and state monetary funds – 10. No funding has been allocated for the new 2 positions.

The Office was searching for two employees to work as a senior specialist in the reporting year. The competition for the same positions was announced several times. The selection of one employee took place after the announcement of the third competition.

All the employees of the Office have higher education: 2 employees have a doctoral degree, 4 – qualification of the Master or equivalent degree, and 3 – qualification of the Bachelor or equivalent degree. 4 employees have completed more than one higher education. The employees with education in the area of social sciences make a majority of the Office's employees. The higher education qualification varies from law, political sciences, sociology, management to information science and mathematics. According to their last education, the employees are alumni of the following universities: Vilnius University, Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vytautas Magnus University (including the former Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences) and Mykolas Romeris University.



The average age of the Office's employees is 44 years. One official, 2 public officers and 6 employees hired under an employment contract (8 women and 1 man) were employed in the Office on the 31st of December of the reporting year.

4 out of 8 employees have been given an opportunity to work part-time remotely and during the quarantine period, all employees worked remotely or partially remotely. Most of the employees worked according to individual time schedules. In the reference year, 8 the Office's employees have been encouraged by acknowledgment, lump sum, or bonus.

In order to ensure a favourable social atmosphere and taking into account the recommendations of the State Labour Inspectorate under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, the evaluation of psychosocial risks and stress at work was conducted by interviewing employees of the Office anonymously. The results of the survey show that a low risk of psychological pressure and violence and intimidation at work have been identified at the Office. Employees have the opportunity to plan their work themselves, make decisions and assume responsibility; they feel that they have contributed to the end result, and their work is organised properly. An action plan for improving the working environment has been drawn up.

At the workplace, a book-sharing and donation library was established on the initiative of the employees, which can be supplemented and used not only by the employees of the Office, but also by visiting guests. Also, sorting of paper, plastic and glass waste was started at the initiative of employees. In this way, the Office starts to implement the basics of the environmental system and ecological awareness.

One student performed internship in the Office in the reporting year from Kazimieras Simonavičius University, who studies law (student of integral studies). Besides, one volunteer from the Vilnius Žvėrynas Progymnasium helped to coordinate smooth registration of participants to the event organised by the Office.

## 2.2. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

**Funds of the State budget.** 222 thousand euros from the State budget were allocated to the Office's programme "Supervision of Academic Ethics and Procedures in Research and Higher Education and Improvement of Efficiency of the Office's Activities" in 2020. 171 thousand euros were meant for salaries. The Office used 94 percent of the funds of the State budget according to the aforementioned programme. Unused funds for salaries amount to 7 percent. The latter funds were not used due to failure of several competitions for the same position – there were no candidates.

**Foreign funds.** The Bridge project received EUR 374 247.00, of which 12 percent was allocated to the Office. This project ensures at least a 0.5 full-time monthly salary until August 2023. Also, the Office was allocated approximately EUR 5 thousand under the Nordic-Baltic Mobility and Networking Programme for Public Administration, 40 percent of which will consist of the Office's funds. Two missions were financed from the COST programme's projects.

**Financial audit.** Audited set of the Office's financial statements for the year 2019. The audit report indicates that no material errors and inaccuracies as well as omissions or ambiguous disclosures in the audited financial statements have been observed.

### 2.3. INFORMATION RESOURCES

The effectiveness of the Office's activities was increased by continuing the introduction of new information systems. The Office started using the document management system, which enabled the preparation, management, and storage of electronic documents, signing internal documents by e-signature and sending them via the E. Delivery Information System. Since 2019, the information system of the Lithuanian Academic Electronic Library eLABa is still inaccessible to the Office due to uncertain reasons.

The website of the Office [www.etikostarnyba.lt](http://www.etikostarnyba.lt) is more functional and according to the report on the conformity of websites of State and municipal institutions and agencies to the general requirements, presented by the Information Society Development Committee, fully complies with the Description of the General Requirements for the Websites and Mobile Applications of State and Municipal Institutions and Agencies approved by Resolution No 480 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 18 April 2003.

**Audit of information systems.** The audit of information systems (document management system, bookkeeping accounting system "Steko alga", the Office's website and e-mail system) was performed for the first time. The findings of the audit report indicate that the recovery of information systems from backups has taken place faster than the requirements set out in the Office's internal documents, the restoration of the operation of the document management system proceeded according to the Operational Continuity Management Plan and the Office has sufficient competence to restore the operation of the information systems within the time limits set. The audit report also presents recommendations for improvements in processes, such as arranging information systems in order of priority, complementing the activity continuity plan with certain provisions, etc.

### III. PRIORITIES OF THE OFFICE'S ACTIVITIES FOR YEAR 2021

It is planned to continue consistent implementation of the priorities of the Office's activities of 2021:

- 1) Organisation of preventive measures of unethical behaviour of the academic community (quarter I–IV);
- 2) Improvement of the effectiveness of investigation of possible violations of academic ethics and procedures (quarter I–IV);
- 3) Strengthening of cooperation with the academic community, services and institutions, international organisations, and academic networks (quarter I–IV);

4) Strengthening of the spread of the Office's activities on the national and international levels (quarter I–IV);

5) Improvement of qualifications of the Office's employees and improvement of the working environment (quarter I–IV).