



ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 2022

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INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania (Office) focused more on the research quality, i.e. on upholding the values and principles of academic ethics in scientific activities and promoting changes in academic ethics. To achieve these objectives, the Office published an analytical review on the doctoral education evaluation in terms of academic ethics, conducted the second edition of the Responsible Research Barometer 2022, published a template form for a research data management plan and organised meetings with various stakeholders. The Office has fostered an open and constructive dialogue on academic ethics in cooperation with the academic community.

As in previous years, the Office encouraged the academic community to adhere to good (generally accepted) research practice (standards of academic ethics) and continued to disseminate the results of its activities and provide international leadership in the European Network of Research Integrity Offices. It has also been given a prominent role in the Council of Europe Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education. The expertise of the Office has thus gained further international recognition.

In the reporting year, a new version of the Regulations of the Office was approved, in line with the provisions of the Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania and other legal acts. The amendments to this document clearly: separate the functions of the Office and the Ombudsperson; establish a clear procedure for the examination of complaints and the adoption of a decision in the event of the Ombudsperson's resignation; establish a provision promoting transparency with regard to the granting of a lump sum bonus to the Ombudsperson for overtime work, work on rest days and public holidays, etc. The amendments to the Regulations of the Office are in line with the current wording of other legal acts and bring the Office closer to international practice in the field of academic ethics.

This Annual Report on the activities of the Office presents the main results of the Office's activities for 2022, as well as the Office's short-term priorities, which have been partially updated in light of the Office's performance.

Loreta Tauginienė
Ombudswoman for Academic Ethics and Procedures

ABBREVIATIONS AND PAAIŠKINIMAI

Complaint – complaints, reports and investigations initiated by the Ombudsperson

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ENRIO – European Network of Research Integrity Offices

ETINED – Council of Europe Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education

Government Programme – Eighteenth Government Programme of the Republic of Lithuania

LRHE – Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania

Office – Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania

Office employees – civil servants, career civil servants and employment contract staff

Ombudsperson – Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures

Plan for the implementation of the provisions of the Government Programme – Plan for the implementation of the provisions of the 18th Government Programme of the Republic of Lithuania

RCL – Research Council of Lithuania

RHEI – Research and higher education institution

RPE – Research and publication ethics

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Summary

2022 performance indicators (achieved values)

	2020	2021	2022
<i>Education in academic ethics and procedures</i>			
Number of analytical studies by the Office	4	2	3
Number of thematic guidelines of the Office	4	1	1
Number of consultations (e.g., frequently asked questions, referrals)	57	58	54
Number of events on academic ethics for the academic community	15	19	20
Number of participants in academic ethics events	531*	1135	1037
Number of downloads of Office's documents (e.g., decisions, guidelines, analytical studies)	757	1325	823**
Number of newsletter subscribers	42	224	611
<i>Involvement in legislation on academic ethics and procedures</i>			
Number of proposals for national documents related to research and higher education quality assurance in the field of academic ethics and procedures	11	6	6
<i>Office representation</i>			
Number of invited talks held at events	2	8	4
<i>Creating the conditions for the development of the competences of the Office employees</i>			
Average number of hours of training and qualification improvement per employee (hours/employee)	34	42	32

* Only the number of members of the academic community is indicated.

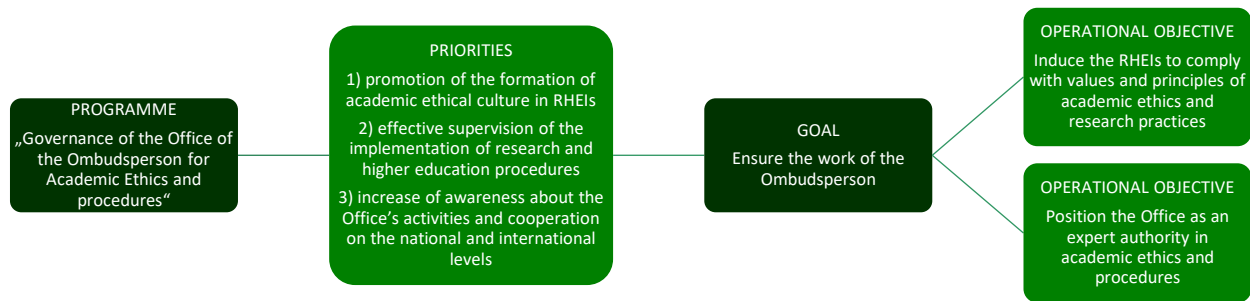
** Due to technical problems, this indicator is based on July–December data.

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

The *mission* of 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 RHEIs; 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 "Governance of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania"* (Figure 1). This long-term programme aims to fulfil the *Office's strategic goal* of ensuring the work of the Ombudsperson in considering complaints, initiating investigations into a possible violation of academic ethics and procedures related to the implementation of the provisions of academic ethics, supervising compliance with the provisions of academic ethics and procedures related to the implementation of the provisions of academic ethics, investigating administrative offences, and preventing unethical behaviour. To achieve this goal, *two operational objectives are foreseen for the ongoing activities*: 1) to induce the RHEIs to comply with values and principles of academic ethics and research practices; and 2) to position the Office as an expert authority in academic ethics and procedures. The appropriateness of the first operational objective of the ongoing activity (to induce the RHEIs to comply with values and principles of academic ethics and research practices) is consistent with the implementation of the initiative "An environment conducive to excellence in higher education", which is part of the Government Programme's project "Modern, efficient and mission-oriented management of higher education" – to raise the requirements so that the need in academic ethics would be in line with international standards (sub-point 56.3). The relevance of the second operational objective of the ongoing activity (to position the Office as an expert authority in academic ethics and procedures) is in line with the public sector priority set out in the Government Programme – to increase the professionalism, flexibility, innovation, and technology implementation in the public sector, as well as to strengthen responsibility, decision-making and the ability to deal with complex challenges (point 200).

Figure 1. The Office’s long-term programme



In view of the substantial revision of the Ombudsperson’s tasks during the reporting year and the consequent amendment of the Office’s Regulations, which entered into force on 1 May 2022, the following is information on the Office’s activities in accordance with the current legislation.

The tasks of the Office’s activities are the following: 1) to promote compliance of research and higher education institutions with academic ethics and procedures related to the implementation of the provisions of academic ethics; 2) to supervise compliance of research and higher education institutions with the standards of academic ethics and procedures related to the implementation of the provisions of academic ethics; 3) to supervise the implementation of provisions of international treaties of the Republic of Lithuania, legal acts of the European Union, laws and other legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania regulating academic ethics and procedures related to the implementation of the provisions of academic ethics; 4) to cooperate with research and higher education institutions in solving the issues related to violations of academic ethics and procedures related to the implementation of the provisions of academic ethics; 5) to ensure effective and confidential investigation into possible violations of academic ethics and procedures related to the implementation of the provisions of academic ethics; 6) to contribute to the quality of higher education and research by nurturing the universally recognised values in this field, principles and research practices ensuring the dissemination of research and science (art), transparency of higher education and related activities, fairness, justice, responsibility, equality of persons being members of the academic community, their non-discrimination, academic freedom, trust and respect; 7) to supervise the implementation of recommendations given by the Ombudsperson; 8) to organise and/or to implement preventive measures against unethical behaviour of the academic community; 9) to fulfil other tasks provided by legal acts.

Part I of the Office’s 2022 Activity Report presents the results of the Office’s activities in accordance with its Strategic Action Plan for the years 2022–2024, which has been updated as a result of the amendments to the Law on Strategic Management of the Republic of Lithuania (2022-01-01 – 2023-03-31 edition). Parts II and III of the Office’s 2022 Activity Report present the Office’s other performance results.

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

Result indicator for the year 2022

Academic community competence in the field of research and publication ethics (RPE) (coefficient) – 1,51.

Based on the results of the Responsible Research Barometer 2022¹ and in comparison to the results of the Responsible Research Barometer 2020², it can be seen that the competence of the academic community in improving their knowledge in the area of research ethics has remained largely unchanged over the past three years (1.53 in 2020, 1.50 in 2022). However, there is a decline in the competence of academia in improving their knowledge in publication ethics (1.65 in 2020, 1.52 in 2022). It should be noted that in 2022, the highest proportion of respondents (40%) indicated that they had not improved their knowledge in RPE in the last three years. In addition, in 2022, there are marked differences in the way in which knowledge has been increased (e.g. an increase in participation in virtual events and events organised by other Lithuanian institutions) compared to the previous period. This suggests that the Office's events aimed at the academic community are insufficient and that the RHEIs should also pay more attention to this (e.g. systematically organising events on different RPE topics). In the opinion of the Office, the implementation of the Government Programme Implementation Plan, Measure 1.6.7 ('Update and implement the guidelines for the development of competences of higher education teachers, focusing on the continuous development of competences of academic staff, with priority given to [...] competences in academic ethics [...]'³) could be of value to RHEIs.

In the reporting year, the coefficient value of the academic community's competence (excellence) in RPE was aimed at 1.51. The information provided shows that the target for this product indicator is fully achieved.

Table 1. 2022 product indicators (achieved values)

	2020 m.	2021 m.	2022 m.
<i>Education in academic ethics and procedures</i>			
Number of analytical studies by the Office	4	2	3

¹ Umbrasaitė, J & Ozolinčiūtė, E 2022, *Atsakingo mokslo barometras 2022*, Akademinės etikos ir procedūrų kontrolieriaus tarnyba, Vilnius, viewed 27 December 2022, <<https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Atsakingo-mokslo-barometras-2022.pdf>>.

² Ozolinčiūtė, E, Židonė, G & Tauginienė, L 2020, *Atsakingo mokslo barometras 2020*, Akademinės etikos ir procedūrų kontrolieriaus tarnyba, Vilnius, viewed 27 December 2022, <https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Atsakingo-mokslo-barometras-2020-tyrimo-ataskaita_LT_EN.pdf>.

³ Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės 2021 m. kovo 10 d. nutarimas Nr. 155 „Dėl Aštuonioliktosios Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės programos nuostatų įgyvendinimo plano patvirtinimo“.

	2020 m.	2021 m.	2022 m.
<i>Education in academic ethics and procedures</i>			
Number of thematic guidelines of the Office	4	1	1
Number of consultations (e.g., frequently asked questions, referrals)	57	58	54
Number of events on academic ethics for the academic community	15	19	20
Number of participants in academic ethics events	531*	1135	1037
Number of downloads of Office's documents (e.g., decisions, guidelines, analytical studies)	757	1325	823**
Number of newsletter subscribers	42	224	611

* Only the number of members of the academic community is indicated.

** Due to technical problems, this indicator is based on July–December data.

1.1.1. Education in academic ethics and procedures

Analytical studies

The Office has produced three analytical reviews⁴ (Table 1). The *first research report 'Monitoring the implementation of academic ethics measures in research and higher education institutions'*⁵ aimed at systematically assessing how RHEIs comply with the provisions on academic ethics as well as the implementation of academic ethics measures (e.g. how RHEIs have implemented the guidelines on academic ethics in 2021, the number of complaints of alleged breaches of academic ethics handled by the RHEIs' ethics committees). Considerable attention has been paid by RHEIs to monitoring the implementation of the Guidelines for Ethical Review adopted by the Ombudsperson at the end of 2020. RHEIs have made relatively rapid progress in implementing the guidelines, e.g. a quarter of the RHEIs surveyed indicated that they had established Institutional Review Boards in 2021, and the same proportion of RHEIs expected to have them in place by 2022. There has also been an increase in the responsiveness of RHEIs to alleged breaches of academic ethics. The number of complaints received by the RHEIs in 2021 increased by a factor of 2.1 compared to 2017. Plagiarism was the most frequently reported breach of academic ethics in 2021. This trend shows that RHEIs, some especially, are actively striving to implement research and higher education quality in line with international standards of academic ethics.

*The second research report, 'Review of Doctoral Education Evaluations 2014–2016 from an Academic Ethics Perspective'*⁶ aims to provide an overview of 'the aspects of academic ethics that

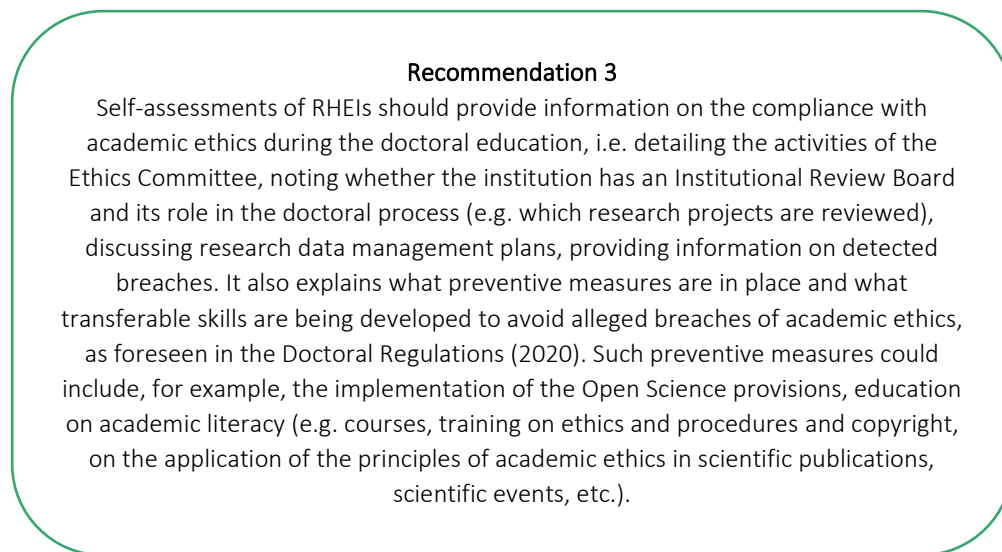
⁴ Analytical reviews are studies, research reports, etc.

⁵ Umbrasaitė, J 2022, Akademinės etikos priemonių įgyvendinimo stebėseną mokslo ir studijų institucijose, Akademinės etikos ir procedūrų kontrolieriaus tarnyba, Vilnius, viewed 27 December 2022, <https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/MSI-apklauso-ap%CB%9Bvalga_2022-1.pdf>

⁶ Ozolinčiūtė, E & Umbrasaitė, J 2022, *Mokslo doktorantūros vertinimų 2014–2016 metais apžvalga akademinės etikos požiūriu*, Akademinės etikos ir procedūrų kontrolieriaus tarnyba, Vilnius, viewed 27 December 2022, <<https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Doktoranturos-vertinimu-apzvalga-2014-2016.pdf>>.

experts have observed in the doctoral education evaluation and to make recommendations for the improvement of the doctoral education evaluation criteria from an academic ethics perspective'⁷. The results of this study show that the assessment of academic ethics in doctoral education is episodic and does not cover all potential areas of doctoral education evaluation, and therefore four recommendations were made to improve the quality of RHEIs' self-assessments (Figure 2) and the regulation of doctoral education evaluation in science and arts.

Figure 2. One of the recommendations



*The third research report 'Responsible Research Barometer 2022'*⁸ aims to provide a second overview of the experiences and situation of researchers (lecturers, scientists and other researchers working in RHEIs) and doctoral students working in Lithuanian RHEIs (universities, university colleges and research institutes) in the field of RPE. The responses of 310 participants were used to analyse the survey data.

Respondents to the survey were mostly aware of and referred to the documents produced by the Office applicable to RHEIs, such as the Recommendations on the Preparation, Adaptation and Implementation of Academic Ethics Codes by RHEIs, and the Guidelines for Ethical Review. Respondents considered that the pursuit of knowledge in the field of RPE is mandatory for every researcher. As the results of this survey show, participation in virtual events and events organised by other Lithuanian institutions in the field of RPE has increased over the last three years. Around one-third of the respondents indicated that a lack of knowledge in the field of RPE had motivated

⁷ Ibid, p. 2, viewed 27 December 2022.

⁸ Umbrasaitė, J & Ozolinčiūtė, E 2022, *Atsakingo mokslo barometras 2022*, Akademinės etikos ir procedūrų kontrolieriaus tarnyba, Vilnius, viewed 27 December 2022, <<https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Atsakingo-mokslo-barometras-2022.pdf>>.

them to increase their knowledge. Around one-sixth of the respondents who did not improve their knowledge in the field of RPE mentioned reasons that prevented them from doing so, e.g. RHEIs' expectation that the respondents would pay for RPE training at their own expense, and RHEIs' failure to provide them with the conditions to improve their knowledge in RPE.

The results also show that respondents have become much better at recognising unethical behaviour in research publishing over the last three years, with an observance rate of 1.00 in 2020 and 3.47 in 2022 on a scale of 0–5. Respondents indicated that they are most likely to recognise forms of unethical authorship (e.g. invented authorship, coercion authorship).

The aim was to produce two analytical studies in the reporting year. The information provided shows that the product indicator has been achieved above the target value by 50 percentage points.

Thematic guidelines

A working group set up by the Ombudsperson in 2021 developed a template form for a research data management plan, which was approved by the Ombudsperson's order of 6 June 2022 as Annex 3 to the Guidelines for Ethical Review. As one of the tools to promote academic ethics, this form aims to contribute to the research quality by upholding generally accepted values, principles, and research practice in the field of academic ethics. The working group consisted of representatives of the RCL, the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, the Lithuanian Scientific Society, the Lithuanian Junior Researchers' Union, Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference, Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian University Colleges, the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics, and the Office.

January–February 2023: The Office carried out a survey on the implementation of academic ethics measures in the RHEIs⁹, in which 50 out of 53 (94%) institutions participated. The results of this survey show that on average 74% of the RHEIs surveyed have introduced in 2022 or plan to introduce to the academic community in 2023 the guidance documents (e.g. guidelines, recommendations, other written communications) produced by the Office, and on average 35% of the RHEIs have transferred during the reporting period or plan to transfer them to their internal documents in 2023.

It is notable that more than half of the RHEIs (52%) have adopted the Recommendations on the Preparation, Adaptation and Implementation of Academic Ethics Codes by RHEIs in the internal documents of the institutions or are planning to do so in 2023 (Table 2). It should be noted that several RHEIs have consulted the Office on the adoption of these Recommendations in their internal documents. The smallest proportion of RHEIs have adopted or plan to adopt the guidelines

⁹ Liekė, B 2023, *Akademinės etikos priemonių įgyvendinimo stebėsena mokslo ir studijų institucijose*, Akademinės etikos ir procedūrų kontrolieriaus tarnyba, Vilnius, viewed 20 February 2023, <https://etikostarnyba.lt/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Akademines-etikos-stebesena_2023.pdf>.

on the recognition of bogus scientific events in their internal documents – 22%. It should be noted that the percentage of RHEIs planning to adopt the Office’s guidance documents into internal documents has been decreasing year by year, suggesting that the adoption of the Office’s guidance documents is generally consistent.

Table 2. Monitoring the implementation of prevention measures in RHEIs

Title of the prevention measure	Community awareness (e.g. planned or publicly available on the institution’s website or through internal communication)*			Transposition into the institution’s internal documents (e.g. guidelines are planned to be transposed or integrated into codes of academic ethics, etc.)*		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
Guidelines for Publication Ethics (2019)	46 (92%)	34 (77%)	40 (80%)	20 (41%)	17 (39%)	18 (36%)
Guidelines for Recognition of Fictitious Scientific Events (2019)	46 (92%)	33 (75%)	42 (84%)	12 (24%)	14 (32%)	11 (22%)
Recommendations on the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of Academic Ethics Codes by Lithuanian research and higher education institutions (2020)	34 (68%)	24 (55%)	30 (60%)	33 (66%)	32 (73%)	26 (52%)
Guidelines for Objective and Fair Evaluation of Group Works (2020)	45 (90%)	31 (70%)	37 (74%)	14 (28%)	15 (34%)	14 (28%)
Guidelines for Ensuring Academic Ethics by Remote Means (2020)	41 (82%)	30 (68%)	32 (64%)	21 (42%)	17 (39%)	15 (30%)
Guidelines for Ethical Review (2020)	44 (88%)	30 (68%)	37 (74%)	17 (34%)	24 (55%)	20 (40%)
Guidelines related to Ensuring Academic Ethics and Equal Opportunities in the Scientific Events (2021)	not applicable	34 (77%)	40 (80%)	not applicable	16 (36%)	14 (28%)
Template form for a research data management plan (2022)	not applicable	not applicable	37 (74%)	not applicable	not applicable	21 (42%)

* The table shows the number of RHEIs implementing the recommendations and guidelines: N=51 (2019), N=50 (2020), N=44 (2021) and N=50 (2022).

As mentioned above, in 2022, the Office’s list of guidance documents was supplemented by a further document, the template form of a research data management plan. The results of the survey on the implementation of academic ethics measures in RHEIs show that 18% of the RHEIs surveyed have transposed the template into their internal documents in 2022, while almost a quarter of the RHEIs surveyed (24%) plan to do so in 2023. The survey results also suggest that the adoption of the template form of a research data management plan in the middle of the reporting year has led to a significant interest by RHEIs in using it in their activities within only six months.

During the reporting year, the aim was to develop one set of thematic guidelines. The information provided shows that the target for this product indicator is fully achieved.

Consultations

In the reporting year, the Office provided 54 consultations (Table 1), of which 67% were to RHEIs and 33% to other stakeholders. Over the last three years, there has been an increase in the share of the other stakeholders' consultations (three percentage points in 2021 and nine percentage points in 2022). It should also be noted that the Office has also been approached by representatives of foreign RHEIs (e.g. UK, Australia) to conduct research in Lithuania. In addition, the Office, in accordance with the principle of good administration, provided several consultations on its own initiative.

RHEIs addressed the Office on: the assessment of a breach of academic ethics as a breach of professional duties; the determination of the period of validity of a breach of academic ethics in the context of candidacy for the governing bodies of RHEI; the choice of measures to be taken in the event of a finding of scientific dishonesty; the detection of unethical authorship in published scientific articles based on the Master theses of students; the provision of research data to a research funding organisation; the granting of permissions for the use of other's questionnaires or own previously created works, for example, in the doctoral thesis; evaluating the actions of editors-in-chief of scientific journals published by RHEIs and so forth.

Other stakeholders have contacted the Office on the application of informed consent, matriculation examination tasks, plagiarism of outsourced research results and other academic ethics issues. *13% of the consultations provided to RHEIs was related to the implementation of the Guidelines for Ethical Review.*

Compared to the number of consultations provided by the Office in 2021, the number of consultations provided in 2022 is 7% lower. Such changes may suggest that RHEIs are seeking answers to their questions on their own and are only contacting the Office on complex academic ethics issues.

The aim was to provide 60 consultations in the reporting year. The information provided shows that this product indicator is partially achieved at 90%.

Events in the field of academic ethics

The Office organised nine events of various types (e.g. conference, training, seminar) for the academic community. The Office also participated in 11 events initiated by RHEIs. During the reporting year, *the interest of research institutes in academic ethics in research conduct and dissemination was noted*, i.e. research institutes initiated 3 out of 11 events.

More than 1,000 members of the academic community took part in events organised by the Office and initiated by the RHEIs (Table 1). A total of 35 presentations were given by the Office to the academic community at the 20 events.

More than 190 people attended the annual conference of the Office 'Ethics in Academic Environment' to mark Global Ethics Day, which focused on academic ethics in research conduct. The conference *focused on research data management*, presenting various aspects of research data management (e.g. the processing of personal data for academic purposes, the storage of research data, the practice of opening research data). The conference also provided participants with an opportunity to learn more about the results of the Office's research report 'Responsible Research Barometer 2022' and UNESCO's recommendations in the field of research ethics.

Another Office's event of great interest was the seminar 'Research Data Management'. More than 70 people attended. The seminar featured presentations on research data management planning by Prof. Artūras Kaklauskas of Vilnius Gediminas Technical University and representatives of the Office. Aurinta Garbašauskaitė from UAB Visionary Analytics and Dr Eglė Jakubavičiūtė from the Nature Research Centre shared their good practice on post-research data management.

As in previous years, the Office continued its close cooperation with the RHEIs' Academic Ethics Committees, organising two meetings with them. During the meetings, the representatives of the Academic Ethics Committees discussed how to ensure the principle of confidentiality when handling with complaints about alleged breaches of academic ethics and what material should be made available to the complainant, then about the publicity of unethical behaviour as a sanctioning measure, the development of an academic ethics code and other academic ethics issues.

In the reporting year, two product indicators were sought to achieve: 15 events on academic ethics for the academic community and 1150 participants in academic ethics events. The information provided shows that the product indicator "Number of events on academic ethics for the academic community" has been achieved above the target value by 33 percentage points and the product indicator "Number of participants in academic ethics events" has been partially achieved at 90%.

Dissemination

In the reporting year, the Office's website was visited more than 142,000 times. The most visited sections of the Office's website in Lithuanian were 'Decisions', 'Contacts' and 'Complaints and Investigations', while in English the most visited sections were 'Home Page', 'Contacts' and 'About Office'.

Looking at the number of downloads of the Office's documents by visitors to the Office's website from the 'Decisions', 'Recommendations' and 'Analytical Studies' sections, it can be seen that the number of downloads was down by 38% in the reporting year, compared to the 2021

figures (Table 1). However, it should be noted that the data for this indicator for January–July were lost due to technical problems.

As in 2021, in the reporting year the Office made it possible for visitors to its website to subscribe to information on academic ethics and the activities of the Office in two ways: by subscribing to the website news, and by subscribing to the e-newsletter. The latter was launched in 2021. A total of four newsletters were published in the reporting year (one for each quarter). These have attracted a high level of interest from the academic community and other stakeholders, with a 2.7-fold increase in the number of subscribers compared to the 2021 figures (Table 1).

In the reporting year, two product indicators were sought to achieve: 1400 downloads of the Office’s documents (e.g., decisions, guidelines, analytical studies) and 280 subscribers to the Office’s newsletter. The information provided shows that the product indicator “Number of downloads of Office documents (e.g., decisions, guidelines, analytical studies)” has been partially achieved at 59% and the product indicator “Number of subscribers to the newsletter” has been achieved 2.2 times more than the target value.

1.2. THE OFFICE AS AN EXPERT BODY IN ACADEMIC ETHICS AND PROCEDURES

Result indicators for the year 2022

Proportion of initiatives (e.g., proposals) on national documents related to quality assurance in research and higher education submitted and adopted – 50%.

The Office has made 12 proposals (6 in 2021 and 6 in 2022) for national documents on quality assurance in higher education and research. In the reporting year, the Office made six proposals for the improvement of the provisions on the Doctoral Regulations. To promote social changes in research conduct and dissemination in terms of academic ethics, the Office proposed introducing a requirement for RHEIs to establish a procedure for the revocation of the doctoral degree and to allow for the revision of the doctoral thesis prior to the defence. These suggestions of the Office were not taken into account. Other suggestions made by the Office were accepted in full or in part, such as: requiring the RHEI to establish requirements for the doctoral thesis; requiring doctoral supervisors to comply with academic ethics (to be free from breaches of academic ethics and related procedures); providing for compulsory education of doctoral students on the RPE and removing the provision concerning the handling of a complaint against a failure to confer a doctoral degree by the Office. These suggestions entered into force on 1 February 2023.

In 2021, the Office has submitted 2 proposals on the draft implementation plan for the provisions of the Government Programme in the field of higher education and research, namely on improving the competence of academic staff in the field of academic ethics and on improving the competence of researchers in the field of research ethics. In its proposal, the Office pointed

out that the competences of teaching staff should also be improved in the field of academic ethics. In the light of this Office's proposal, the proposed indicator has been included in the sub-point 1.6.7 of the Implementation Plan for the Provisions of the Government Programme, approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on 10 March 2021 by Resolution No. 155 – *“Update and implement the guidelines for the improvement of competences of teaching staff at higher education institutions, focusing on continuous improvement of the competences of the academic staff, with a priority on the competences of foreign language, digital competences, academic ethics, and didactics”*. In addition, the Office made 4 proposals on the draft Law on Copyright and Related Rights of the Republic of Lithuania – on the use of a work for caricature, parody, or pastiche, for teaching and research purposes, and on the use of copyright, related rights or *sui generis* rights protected material for the extraction of texts and data for research purposes. These proposals were not addressed.

It was sought in the reported year for the proportion of initiatives (e.g., proposals) on national documents related to research and higher education quality assurance submitted and adopted would reach 50%. The information provided shows that this result indicator is fully achieved.

The part of invited talks (speeches) in international events – 50%.

In the reporting year, the Office gave four invited talks/presentations, three of which were given at international events organised by the European Molecular Biology Organisation in collaboration with the Centre for Life Sciences of Vilnius University, ENRIO in collaboration with the Catalan Research Integrity Committee, and the Quality and Qualifications Ireland. At the international events, the Office presented the measures taken in Lithuania to promote research integrity in academia and shared its experience in dealing with administrative transgressions.

In the reporting year, the target for the proportion of invited presentations (speeches) at international events was 50%. The information provided shows that this result indicator has been achieved 25 percentage points above the target.

The average time it takes to investigate complaints and carry out investigations is 270 calendar days.

Article 17(10) of the LRHE (consolidated version in force as of 1 December 2021) provides that ‘The Ombudsperson shall examine the complaint or conduct an investigation, take a decision and inform the applicant in writing not later than 30 days from the date of receipt of the complaint or the date of the initiation of the investigation. The time limit for the examination of the complaint or investigation and the adoption of the decision may be extended twice by four months each, due to the complexity of the circumstances of the complaint or investigation or due to the need to

obtain additional information while examining or investigating the complaint.’ This provision provides for a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 270 calendar days for the decision of the Ombudsperson.

In the reporting year, the Office dealt with 16 complaints and suspended one complaint due to ongoing legal proceedings (Table 3). A total of three decisions of the Ombudsperson were adopted: One complaint received in the reporting year was examined and the Ombudsperson’s decision was adopted within 147 calendar days; One Ombudsperson’s decision on a complaint received in 2021 was adopted in excess of the time limit for the examination of complaints laid down in the LRHE (as amended on 1 January 2017–30 November 2021) – the examination of the complaint took 203 calendar days, due to the need for gathering additional information and the sick leave, business trips and other reasons of the Office employees assigned to the examination of the complaint; One Ombudsperson’s decision on a complaint received in 2020 was taken after the end of the legal proceedings and exceeded the time limit (142 calendar days) set by the LRHE (1 January 2017–30 November 2021) for handling complaints.

A total of 9 out of 13 (69%) complaints received in the reporting year were rejected for the following reasons: The complaint could not be dealt with in accordance with the Ombudsperson’s competence under the LRHE (N=5); The complaint was referred to the RHEI for self-regulation (N=2); Other reasons laid down by the legislation. These complaints took on average four calendar days to process. Compared to 2021, the proportion of complaints refused remained broadly unchanged, but in the reporting year they were handled twice as quickly. It should be noted that three complaints were returned to the complainants for rectification in accordance with the statutory procedure.

Table 3. Complaints handling in 2022

Year of receipt of complaints	Complaints received			Complaints handling		
	Total	Number of handling complaints	Number of complaints suspended*	Number of complaints handled**	Number of complaints refused to be handled	Number of complaints under handling in 2022***
2020	2	2	0	1	0	1
2021	2	1	1	1	0	0
2022	13	13	0	1	9	0
Total:	17	16	1	3	9	1

* The complaint is suspended due to ongoing legal proceedings.

** The Ombudsperson’s decisions on these complaints.

*** Data of 1 January, 2023.

In the year under review, the target was to investigate complaints and carry out investigations at the initiative of the Ombudsperson within an average of 270 calendar days. The

information provided shows that this result indicator has been achieved above the target value, with an average duration of 37 calendar days for complaints and investigations.

1.2.1. Involvement in legislation on academic ethics and procedures

Table 4. 2022 product indicators (achieved indicators)

	2020	2021	2022
<i>Involvement in legislation on academic ethics and procedures</i>			
Number of proposals for national documents related to research and higher education quality assurance in the field of academic ethics and procedures	11	6	6
<i>Office representation</i>			
Number of invited presentations performed/speeches held at events	2	8	4
<i>Creating the conditions for the development of competences of the Office employees</i>			
Average number of hours of training and qualification improvement per employee (hours/employee)	34	41.6	32

Suggestions for quality assurance in the field of academic ethics and procedures

In the reporting year, the Office was involved in legislation in the field of academic ethics and procedures, submitting six suggestions within the Ombudsperson's competence under the LRHE on national documents related to the quality assurance of research and higher education (Table 4). All suggestions were submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania. Details of the suggestions are given in Section 1.2 of this report.

During the reporting year, the aim was to make 10 proposals for national documents related to research and higher education quality assurance in the field of academic ethics and procedures. The information provided shows that this result indicator has been partially achieved at 60%.

1.2.2. Office representation

Invited talks

In the reporting year, the Office delivered four invited talks (Table 4), including the one at a national event organised by Mykolas Romeris University. Information on invited talks at international events is provided in section 1.2 of this report.

In the reporting year, the aim was to perform 4 invited talks at events. The information provided shows that this result indicator has been fully achieved.

1.2.3. Conditions for the development of competences of the Office employees

Office employees' qualification improvement

All the Office employees were given the opportunity to improve their skills through self-learning, learning while doing, learning from others and/or non-formal education (Table 4). Office's employees received training in both general and specific competences: 31% of the training was dedicated to improving their specific competences and 69% to improving their general competences. 11% of trainings were conducted in English.

Office's employees have been learning how to ensure and improve the quality of the Office's internal administration, e.g., in the areas of fire safety, occupational health and safety, personnel administration, corruption prevention, protection of personal data and other areas. Office's employees have received training in specific areas such as responsible research, fraud prevention and other relevant areas to academic integrity.

In the reporting year, the target was an average of 40 hours of training and further training per staff member. The information provided shows that this result indicator has been partially achieved at 80%.

II. HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS

2.1. COMPLAINTS ABOUT ALLEGED ADMINISTRATIVE TRANSGRESSIONS

The Office is authorised to investigate administrative transgressions under Article 123 of the Code of Administrative Transgressions of the Republic of Lithuania. The Office has carried out two investigations of administrative transgressions. One resolution was issued in respect of repeated actions by the same person, resulting in a penalty (a fine of EUR 500). Another administrative transgression was opened in 2022 and will be continued in 2023, after the return of an employee of the Office from sick leave starting in June 2022.

2.2. COMPLAINTS ABOUT ALLEGATIONS OF ACADEMIC ETHICS AND PROCEDURES

In the reporting year, the Office dealt with 16 complaints and suspended one complaint due to ongoing legal proceedings (Table 3). A total of three decisions of the Ombudsperson were adopted.

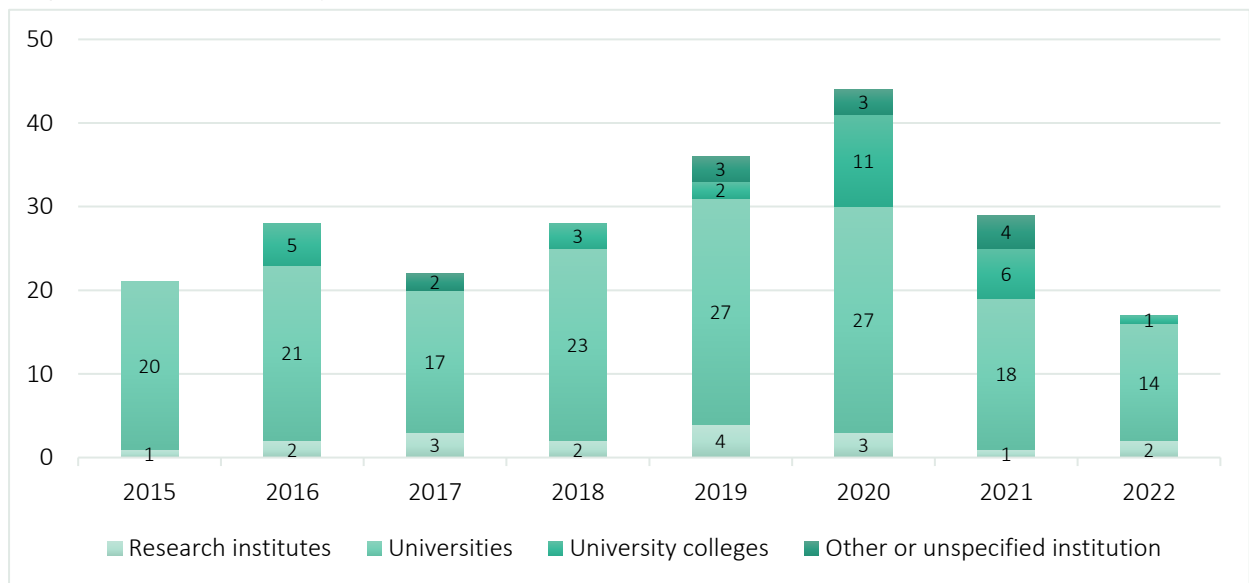
As mentioned above, 9 out of 13 (69%) complaints received in the reporting year were rejected for the following reasons: The complaint could not be dealt with in accordance with the Ombudsperson's competence under the LRHE (N=5); The complaint was referred to the RHEI for

self-regulation (N=2); Other reasons laid down by the legislation. These complaints took on average four calendar days to process. Currently, one complaint is being re-examined by the Office under a court order.

During the reporting year, other institutions referred two cases to the Office for investigation within their competence for alleged breaches of academic ethics and/or related procedures. One complaint was lodged by a member of the academic community of a foreign RHEI.

The majority of complaints investigated in the reporting year (82%) related to alleged breaches of academic ethics and/or related procedures in universities (Figure 3). Around 12% of the complaints concerned alleged breaches of academic ethics and/or related procedures in research institutes (Figure 3). Compared to the 2021 data, the share of complaints concerning alleged unethical practices in universities and research institutes increased by 20 percentage points and 9 percentage points respectively. The proportion of complaints of allegedly unethical behaviour in university colleges has declined for three consecutive years, with a decrease of 9 percentage points in the reporting year compared to 2021.

Figure 3. Number of complaints 2015–2022



In terms of the proportion of complaints that were considered by the RHEIs prior to their submission to the Ombudsperson, 67% of complaints leading to decisions were not previously considered by the RHEI during the reporting year (86% in 2019, 74% in 2020 and 64% in 2021).

In 2022, the Office participated in 31 legal proceedings, of which 17 were concluded during the reporting year (10 before the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, 6 before the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania and 1 before the Vilnius City District Court). Recent court decisions annulled, in whole or in part, three decisions of the Ombudsperson taken in 2021 on the grounds of breach of complaint handling procedures.

In the reporting year, around half of the completed legal proceedings (45%) related to the Office were initiated by the same natural person. Compared to the data of 2021, the share of legal proceedings initiated by the same person against the Office increased by 9 percentage points. In addition, the same natural person has contacted the Office on at least 30 occasions for the provision of various types of information and has questioned the Office's performance before other public authorities. Taking into consideration the principles of efficiency and proportionality of public administration laid down in Articles 3(3) and 3(10) of the Law on Public Administration and the fact that the limited human and other resources of the Office result in a considerable workload in preparing replies to the same individual for the second year in a row, a systematic assessment of all or some of the public sector resources allocated to the case in question should be considered.

III. COOPERATION

3.1. NATIONAL COOPERATION

The Office has used various means of cooperation at national level, e.g. by taking part in discussions organised by other institutions, participating in institutional evaluations, making suggestions. To find solutions for the prevention of contract cheating services in Lithuania, representatives of the Office met with the representatives of the advertising portals *skelbiu.lt* and *alio.lt*. After a constructive discussion, warnings were placed on these portals advising the authors of the advertisements of the alleged administrative liability for offering and using contract cheating services. The portals *skelbiu.lt* and *alio.lt* expressed their support for the Office's position that the offering and use of contract cheating services is a zero-tolerance activity. A dialogue has also been launched with the social network Meta (Facebook).

The Office also participated in meetings with members of the Research Conduct Ethics Commission of the RCL, representatives of the Lithuanian Bioethics Committee, and members of the Scientific Committee of the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference and discussed how to contribute to the promotion of academic ethics in the RHEIs. The Office also invited the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference and the Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian University Colleges to submit proposals for a draft European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

It should be noted that the representatives of the Office shared their expertise with the informal working group on behavioural changes in education and content consumption initiated by the Ministry of Culture and the Alliance "Baltas". The representatives of the Office made suggestions on the draft funding conditions for the programme 'Protection of Copyright and Related Rights' and on the answers to the questionnaire drawn up by the European Union Intellectual Property Office. The Office joined the working group in 2021.

It should also be noted that in the reporting year the representative of the Office participated in the working group established by the RCL to update the Guidelines on Open Access to Research Publications and Data, i.e. to assess the practice and progress achieved in the application of the Guidelines on open access practice and the dissemination of the results of RCL-funded projects and data management, to prepare an overview of the application of open access to research publications and data in Europe and in Lithuania, and to make recommendations for the improvement of the Guidelines on Open Access to Research Publications and Data.

A representative of the Office participated as a social partner in the international external evaluation of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, carried out by ENQA experts. It should also be mentioned that the Office provided information to the Centre for the Quality Assessment in Higher Education in filling in the ENQA Academic Integrity Survey questionnaire.

3.2. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Office continued its participation in international networks. As part of ENRIO, the Office worked with the members of this network on the development of the Handbook on Whistleblower Protection, as well as the suggesting to the draft European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the drafting of the joint proposals. The Ombudswoman Loreta Tauginienė was elected as a member of the ENRIO Board in the spring of 2022 (Figure 4). In autumn 2022, the ENRIO General Assembly by consensus appointed for three years Dr Oldřich Tůma (Czech Academy of Sciences) as ENRIO President and Dr Pablo Fernandez (Advisory Board of the UK Research Integrity Office) and the ombudswoman, Loreta Tauginienė, as ENRIO Vice-Presidents.

Figure 4. Participation in the ENRIO General Assembly meeting in Barcelona



Photo: Unknown author

The Office has been active in making suggestions at the Council of Europe to the draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering education fraud. The Recommendation was adopted on 13 July 2022. In addition, since autumn 2022, the Office has played an important role in ETINED, with the Ombudswoman Loreta Tauginienė becoming one of the six members of the ETINED Bureau (Figure 5). The other candidates proposed by representatives of the Council of Europe, Tomáš Foltýnek (Czech Republic), Henry Alexander Henrysson (Iceland), Luca Lantero (Italy), Adam Liwak (Malta) and Oraz Myradov (European Students' Union), were all accepted by consensus by the ETINED representatives. The main responsibility of the ETINED Bureau is to identify and propose priorities to ETINED and to report to ETINED Plenary and plan the next ETINED meetings. The first meeting of the ETINED Bureau discussed the priorities to ETINED related to the increase of awareness on honest behaviour and prevention measures as well as the need to monitor changes in the education system.

Figure 5. Participation in the sixth plenary session of ETINED in Strasbourg



From left to right: Ieva Vaiciukevičienė (Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education), Loreta Tauginienė
Photo: Vitaly Nosok

The *Global Academic Integrity Network* (GAIN) was launched in Dublin in autumn 2022. The network was initiated by the Quality and Qualifications Ireland and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (Australia). Organisations from the United Kingdom, Hungary, Zambia, and other countries, as well as UNESCO and ETINED, have been invited to join the network. The Office has also been invited to participate in the Global Academic Integrity Network (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Participation in the launch of the Global Academic Integrity Network in Dublin



Photo: Robbie Reynolds Photography

In December 2022, the representatives of the Office participated in the European Commission’s workshop on research integrity and ethics. This focused on the individual and institutional responsibilities of researchers and RHEIs in promoting research integrity, the challenges of research ethics in the use of new technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence, gene editing) and in particular, the ethical review.

During the reporting year, the Office joined two international project proposals’ partnership. One international project proposal has been submitted to the call under the European Union’s research and innovation funding programme *Horizon Europe*. This project proposal aimed at finding solutions related to ethics and integrity in the research community environment. Following an expert evaluation, the EUR 3 million project was included in the reserve list. A second international project proposal has been submitted under the European Cooperation in Science and Technology programme. This project proposal aims to develop international networking to develop and strengthen competences in genomic science-based nursing, including an in-depth study at the ethical responsibilities involved. The results of the evaluation of this project proposal will be published in 2023.

The Office, in the framework of the Erasmus+ funded project *Bridging Integrity in Higher Education, Business and Society* (project No 2020-1-SE01-KA203-077973, BRIDGE) under the action ‘Cooperation for innovation and sharing of best practices’, has, together with the project’s partners, developed guidelines for research ethics and research integrity in citizen science. These guidelines have been published in a scientific journal – Ozolinčiūtė, E., Bülow, W., Bjelobaba, S.,

Gaižauskaitė, I., Krásničan, V., Dlabolová, D. H., Umbrasaitė, J. 2022. Guidelines for Research Ethics and Research Integrity in Citizen Science. *Research Ideas and Outcomes*. 8:e97122. <https://doi.org/10.3897/rio.8.e97122>.

In May 2022, in cooperation with the BRIDGE project partners, the Office organised training on academic integrity for the Lithuanian academic community – masters students, doctoral students and their supervisors. The participants were presented with the results of the project – tools to help them plan and conduct research in a research integrity-compliant manner, e.g. checklists and guidelines for research ethics and research integrity in citizen science. In October of the reporting year, learning, teaching, training activities and multiplier event were organised in another project partner country, North Macedonia. During the event, the academic community was introduced to the Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Business Collaboration and the Guidelines for Research Ethics and Research Integrity in Citizen Science. Participants – masters students, doctoral students, and their supervisors – were involved in gamified cases related to academic ethics. The multiplier event for the academic community and the training for masters students, doctoral students and their supervisors was delivered by project partners from North Macedonia, Sweden, Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Lithuania (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Participation in the BRIDGE project learning, teaching, training activities and multiplier event in North Macedonia



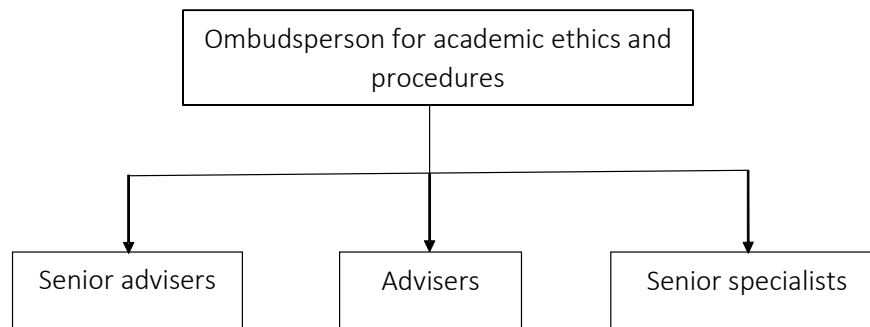
Photo: Bridge project archives

IV. OFFICE GOVERNANCE

4.1. HUMAN RESOURCES

The Office does not have any units, so all employees is directly accountable to the Ombudsperson (Figure 8). Office employees – civil servants, career civil servants and employment contract staff. The staff of the Office consists of senior advisers, advisers, and senior specialists.

Figure 8. The Office’s governance chart



The number of positions of career civil servants and staff employed under employment contracts and receiving remuneration from the State budget and State cash funds in the Office is 10. According to 31 December of the reporting year there were 7 women and 1 man working for the Office. The average age of the Office’s employees is 47 years.

All the Office employees have a university degree: 3 out of 8 staff members have a doctor degree, 5 out of 8 staff members have a Master’s degree or equivalent. The most recent university degree obtained by the Office’s employees, based on the year in which it was awarded, shows that the Office employs staff with university degrees in social sciences (e.g. law, public administration, education sciences, (business) management), biomedical sciences (e.g. biology) or physical sciences (e.g. mathematics). The most recent graduates are alumni of Vilnius University, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuanian Sports University and Mykolas Romeris University.

In the reporting year, 7 members of the staff of the Office were incentivised by means of an increase in the coefficient of the fixed part of the salary, in addition to the introduction of a variable part of the salary and the award of a bonus. The average of the coefficients of the fixed part of the salary of the Office employees was 9.0 for 2022. It should also be noted that the requests of the Office for two positions to be fully filled from 2023 onwards were taken into account.

4.2. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

State budget funds: in 2022, the State budget allocated EUR 231,000 for the programme “Governance of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania”, of which EUR 179,000 were for salaries. Unspent appropriations for salaries amount to 24%. The latter was not used due to several failed calls for the same position (e.g. no applicants, no attendance of applicants) as well as due to sick leave of an employee of the Office starting in June 2022.

In the Office, the State budget was only sufficient to cover the salaries of two positions (contract workers), each of which was 0.75 FTE. Following the requests from the Office, full-time funding for these two positions has been secured from 2023. It should also be noted that other requests from the Office were also granted, with an increase in the State budget for two positions (civil servants) for which the requirement for a university degree in Law was met.

4.3. INFORMATION RESOURCES

The efficiency of the Office’s operations was ensured by maintaining the existing information systems. In accordance with the provisions of the Description of the General Requirements for the Websites of State and Municipal Institutions and Bodies, approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No 480 of 18 April 2003 (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No 1721 of 16 December 2009), the website of the Office has been supplemented with a new section in Lithuanian – ‘Protection of Whistleblowers’.

According to the 2022 Report of the Information Society Development Committee on the Compliance of Websites of State and Municipal Institutions and Agencies with the general requirements, the website of the Office <https://etikostarnyba.lt/> complies with 93% of the requirements of the Description of General Requirements for the Websites and Mobile Applications of State and Municipal Institutions and Agencies, approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No 480 of 18 April 2003 (general provisions – 100%, structural requirements – 92%, and information requirements – 90%).

Information systems audit. A second audit and social engineering test of the information systems (document management system, accounting system ‘Steko alga’, the Office’s website and e-mail system) have been carried out. The weaknesses in the information systems identified during this audit are planned to be corrected in early 2023. Based on the results of the social engineering test, cybersecurity training for the Office employees is planned.

In 2022, preparations were underway to connect to the Common Information System for Centrally Provided Document Management. Access to this information system will allow the Office to use the allocated State budget funds more efficiently.

4.4. DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

In the reporting year, the State Language Inspectorate carried out a scheduled inspection of the Office in accordance with Articles 4, 5 and 9 of the Law on the State Language of the Republic of Lithuania. The inspection found that the Office's contracts comply with the requirements laid down in the Law on the State Language.

The New Archives of the Lithuanian State carried out an inspection to determine how the Office complies with the requirements for the management and use of documents and archives laid down in legislation. The inspection revealed several shortcomings in relation to the 2020 and 2022 Operational Orders. These deficiencies were corrected by the Office within the deadline set by the New Archives of the Lithuanian State.

V. THE OFFICE'S PRIORITIES FOR 2023 ACTIVITIES

Based on the Office's performance in 2019–2022 and amendments of RHE in force since 1 December 2021, it is foreseen to continue the implementation of the Office's 2022 Priority 1 and to narrow the implementation of the former Priorities 2 in 2023:

- 1) Implementation of measures to prevent unethical behaviour in academic community (Q1–Q4)
- 2) Improving the efficiency of the handling of cases of alleged administrative transgressions (Q1–Q4)

<https://etikostarnyba.lt/en>