

“Managing Conflict and Effective Dispute Resolution in Higher Education” - Information on a new Certificate Programme

Virtueller Austausch der Österr. Ombudsstelle für Studierende
15. Jänner 2026

Managing conflict and effective dispute resolution in higher education

Certificate Program



- 24 ECTS
- 2 semesters, part-time
- Blended learning (predominantly online, one week face-to-face)
- Duration: October 2026 – June 2027
- Location: Krems, Austria
- Tuition: EUR 4200.-
- Expert-led modules and courses: internationally renowned and experienced teaching staff

Aim and Target Group of the CP

- **Aim:** professionalization of conflict and complaint management at HEI, also: providing professional development for ombudspersons;
- **Target group:** individuals dealing with (student) complaints and conflict on campus (in student counseling, academic units/leadership positions, diversity management, etc) as well as explicitly designated ombudspersons in HE
- Heterogeneity of backgrounds and levels of experience essential for achieving program learning outcomes
- Pilot developed in cooperation with ENOHE and co-funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research

Initial Needs Analysis (1)

- **Need for leadership and change management** skills for ombuds in HE: how to translate conflict into institutional change

*“Regarding personal skills and attributes, half of respondents thought ‘**being an effective manager of change**’ was the most difficult to deliver in their organisation”*

Source: IOI (2021): [The Art of the Ombudsman](#).
Leadership through international crisis.

- **Advocacy:** „speaking truth to power“

- ★ Challenging intermediary position;

★ *“(…) being an Ombudsman is a **lonely** and very difficult job. **Sharing support and difficulties with other Ombuds** is vital to helping one another through challenging times. Seeking to be popular is a big mistake. Instead, Ombuds can play a key role in leadership by **demonstrating empathy and compassion** to service users, and by **‘speaking truth to power’ to those in authority in challenging times.**”*

Needs Analysis (2): ombuds' professional role and profile

- **Stress management**, coping strategies, **resilience**, self-care and wellbeing in view of often personally demanding cases and situations of „clients“.

*“Finally, there was an **essential need to manage stress and to be resilient**. Most Ombudsman respondents see stress as part and parcel of being an Ombudsman. The emerging consensus is that it can't be eliminated. The degree of stress is determined by a number of factors such as the nature and range of issues investigated, which **can involve distressing accounts of violence, abuse or bereavement**.” [...]*

★ **Empathy** as essential skill

***Empathy with complainants** and disadvantaged groups was **found to be challenging** for a quarter of respondents. Displaying empathy with complainants and disadvantaged groups was **seen as essential** “because they are considered the weaker party and they have no hand in this”.*

MODULE 1: Higher education governance and the legal framework for ombuds work

- Course 1a. The organizational structure and governance of higher education
- Course 1b. Legal and Ethical Aspects of Ombuds Work

MODULE 2: Communication and negotiation in higher education

- Course 2a. Communication in higher education
- Course 2b. Negotiation Lab

MODULE 3: Conflict resolution and ADR techniques in higher education

- Course 3a. Conflict resolution in higher education
- Course 3b. Applying ADR Techniques in Higher Education

MODULE 4: Reflective Practice

- Course 4a. Self-care and stress management in ombuds practice
- Course 4b. Case-based individual project and peer-learning/peer-feedback

MODULE 1: Higher education governance and the legal framework for ombuds work

Module 1 provides a foundational understanding of governance structures and legal frameworks relevant to ombudspersons in higher education and others working in similar areas. Participants will analyze **organizational and stakeholder dynamics** within higher education institutions and the larger European Higher Education Area and develop the competencies to address legal and ethical challenges in their work, with particular **focus on confidentiality, privacy, whistleblowing, and non-discrimination**.

- Course 1a. The organizational structure and governance of higher education
- Course 1b. Legal and Ethical Aspects of Ombuds Work

MODULE 2: Communication and negotiation in higher education

Module 2 develops **communication and negotiation skills** tailored to the university context, enabling participants to navigate difficult conversations and stakeholder dynamics. The module emphasizes **empathetic listening, strategic dialogue, and interest-based negotiation approaches**. It is designed for those managing complex interactions and aiming to build trust in institutional environments.

- Course 2a. Communication in higher education
- Course 2b. Negotiation Lab

MODULE 3: Conflict resolution and ADR techniques in higher education

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This module focuses specifically on **dispute settling** and conflict resolution in the context of higher education. Learners will **analyze conflict sources**, understand **conflict management systems** and recognise cultural and contextual differences. The module provides learners with concrete ADR techniques they can apply in their work; participants will learn how to support stakeholders effectively and how to promote institutional learning.

- Course 3a. Conflict resolution in higher education
- Course 3b. Applying ADR Techniques in Higher Education

MODULE 4: Reflective Practice



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Participants will develop strategies for stress management and self-care while enhancing their own resilience and empathy. Leveraging peer-learning and collaboration, the module emphasizes the importance of peer-support net-works in sustaining professional effectiveness in high-pressure environments. Through interactive workshops and case-based group work, participants will analyze complex real-world challenges from their own backgrounds, reflect on critical incidents, and develop collective solutions to systemic and interpersonal issues in higher education

- Course 4a. Self-care and stress management in ombuds practice
- Course 4b. Case-based individual project and peer-learning/peer-feedback

Admission requirements

- A completed university degree (minimum of a **Bachelor's degree**),

OR

- A **general university entrance qualification** and **at least one year of relevant professional experience** in dealing with (student) complaints and/or conflict management within higher education institutions,

OR

- A **minimum of two years of relevant professional experience** as an ombudsperson or in a comparable role involving conflict and complaint management in higher education settings.

Timeline

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2026										Start: Wed, October 6		
										Intro and Course 1a	Course 1b	Course 3a

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2027												
	Course 3a	Course 3b	Course 4a	Course 4b (prep) Course 2a	Face-to-face week 17-21 May Course 2b, 2a and 4b	ENOHE conference						

■ on site visit ■ online session

Course 1a: The organisational structure and governance of higher education
 Course 2a: Communication in higher education
 Course 3a: Conflict resolution in higher education
 Course 4a: Self-care and stress management

Course 1b: Legal and Ethical Aspects
 Course 2b: Negotiation Lab
 Course 3b: Applying ADR Techniques in Higher Education
 Course 4b: Case Lab & Peer Collaboration

Errors, changes and omissions excepted.
 Last updated: December 2025

For EU institutions: travel and accommodation costs may be covered through **Erasmus+ staff training** (higher education) funds

Questions?



More information can be found on our website:

