

Organizational structure involved in research ethics

Research ethics resources kit

October 2015



Universitat Oberta
de Catalunya

Organizational structure

The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya includes a number of different individuals and entities whose common purpose is to ensure compliance with current legislation and regulations on ethical principles in research and innovation, and to provide deontological support to researchers.

- *Síndic de Greuges*
- Ethics Board
- Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation

Síndic de Greuges

Pursuant to the Organizational and Operational Regulations of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), the Board of Trustees of the Fundació per a la Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, at the proposal of the president, will appoint a *Síndic de Greuges* (Ombudsman or Ombudswoman) of the University. This person's function will be to uphold the rights and duties of all members of the University and he or she will act independently from all other bodies and areas of the University.

The functions of the *Síndic de Greuges* are the following:

- > Uphold the rights and freedoms of all members of the UOC's university community against any action or situation of discrimination, powerlessness or arbitrariness, and guarantee observance of all the provisions of the UOC's Organizational and Operational Regulations and any other regulation enacted by the University.
- > Assist and defend in the matters submitted to him or her or in those in which he or she decides to act *ex officio*. He or she also has reporting functions with respect to the University's functioning in order to improve the University's quality in all areas. In order to perform this latter function, the *Síndic de Greuges* may attend the meetings of the University's collegiate bodies as a non-voting participant.

In his or her actions, the *Síndic* will seek at all times to uphold the University's quality in all areas, and in particular, the University's values as a place of knowledge creation and exchange and education, acting as guarantor of these values and protecting them from actions originating from inside or outside of the organization that may have detrimental effects.

The *Síndic* may issue reports on a specific subject, at his or her own initiative or at the request of the University's Board of Trustees or Governing Council.

In his or her decisions, the *Síndic* may make warnings, recommendations and suggestions to the University's authorities or staff concerning their legal duties but may not, in any circumstance, amend or override acts or decisions.

Within the framework of the UOC's Organizational and Operational Regulations, the *Síndic* may perform his or her duties independently of the different University authorities, acting with autonomy, objectivity and impartiality.

In the event of conflicts arising related with research ethics, the *Síndic de Greuges* will be informed by the Office of the Vice President of Research about the outcome of the possible preliminary examinations and the possible final results of formal investigations.

Research Ethics Board

This Board, formed by the University's Governing Council, acts in the service of the academic community and research staff with the goal of guaranteeing respect for people's dignity in the research projects carried out at the University. To achieve this goal, the Board must contribute to the performance of quality scientific research that meets the ethical standards expressed in international agreements and declarations and also the currently valid legislation on this subject.

The Ethics Board's duties are given by the Research and Doctoral Committee, and it is chaired by the Vice President for Strategic Planning and Research.

The Board receives queries from the university community on research ethics-related issues and drafts and disseminates information on specific topics or particularly controversial issues. It also mediates in consultations and plays a role in addressing irregular behaviour in research activity. The Board acts independently in the service of researchers to improve the quality of research and contribute to preserving its integrity.

The Board handles the research ethics aspects of the administrative processes involved in executing research projects and publishing the results. It assesses the various procedures in progress, determines whether the assessment is favourable or not and gives a final decision.

The Board is responsible for validating the research and safekeeping protocols.

The Board will act independently, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality of the personal data and ensuring impartiality and fairness in its decisions.

Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation

The Office of the Vice President chairs the Ethics Board and proposes and coordinates research ethics-related actions.

In cases of sponsored research or research funding contracts, the Office of the Vice President may ask for necessary information prior to commencement of the research in order to avoid possible conflicts.

It also takes part in handling irregular behaviour in research activity through the Ethics Board. In settling these conflicts, it is this Office that submits the resolution report to the Executive Management Committee, describing the measures taken and the results of the investigation on the irregular behaviour. Lastly, at the request of the Office of the President, it can notify the final decision regarding the conflict to the people concerned and will ensure that the measures stipulated in the decision are implemented.