

IGC Fairness Advocate, Ombudsperson Office

The Office of the Ombudsperson works with the IGC community members to ensure they are treated fairly and can learn and work in a fair, equitable, and respectful environment.

The Ombudsperson Office of IGC aims to offer a safe place for members of the institute, at any level, who face any form of harassment or other interpersonal difficulties to discuss their concerns and understand their options while guaranteeing full confidentiality. It also handles cases of scientific misconduct claims which, after evaluation, can be brought to the IGC Direction. As such, the Ombudsperson Office has a central role in supporting the IGC in guaranteeing the well-being of all IGC members.

The office operates with the aim to collaborate, educate, investigate and recommend change. The office functions according to three core principles: independence, impartiality and confidentiality.

Confidentiality: all information received by the members of the Office from a person who brings forward a concern or complaint will not be shared with third parties unless the plaintiff agrees to it in writing. The fact that somebody visited the Ombudsperson is also protected information.

Impartiality: the information the Ombudsperson Office receives will be regarded with the outmost objectivity. The Ombudsperson Office is neither an advocate of the individual bringing forward the complaint nor of the institution.

Independence: the Ombudsperson Office operates independently of all other administrative structures within the institute.

Office Organisation

The office consists of at least two members, both with no direct link to the IGC. The members take office for as long as they wish. Shall a member of the office wish to step-down, a 3-months' notice should be given to the IGC's People Management Unit.

Any member of the institute can request an appointment with the Ombudsperson Office (see Members and contacts), which must be scheduled within the following two weeks from the request, at the convenience of all involved.

Formal complaints can be received by either or both, at the discretion of the plaintiff, by email and/or over an appointment held at an office outside of the IGC premises. The office members will hold meetings with the IGC direction and/or the People Management Unit as deemed necessary.

Annually, the office produces a brief report annually summarising the number of contacts in that year, persistent problems that might have been identified, and proposed solutions.

Subject matters of the Ombudsperson Office

1. Conflicts that cannot be resolved or disclosed within the IGC's institutional framework (i.e. with support from the team Head, the People Management Unit or the IGC Direction)
2. Provides the ability to address subtle forms of insensitivity and unfairness that do not rise to the level of a formal complaint but nonetheless create a disempowering work environment.

The office can identify potential systematic problems in the operation of the institute which are reported to the IGC Direction.

Interventions of the Office

The Ombudsperson office provides advice and information, acts to empower IGC members to deal directly and effectively with their concerns and suggests a possible course of action. The Ombudsperson office members do not provide mediation services.

Once a problem has been analysed, the office suggests a course of action, which is communicated to the complaining party. If individual action has not solved the issue at hand, the office can contact the People Management Unit and the IGC Direction. Together, they will decide on a course of action. If necessary, the office can advise for an internal and/or external investigation to be set up by the IGC Direction and suggest other measures directed at mitigating any systemic problem identified.

Members and contacts

Margarida Trindade, ITQB-NOVA
Pedro Magalhães, Social Sciences Institute, University of Lisbon

ombudsoffice@igc.gulbenkian.pt