

## THE CENTRAL ACADEMIC ETHICS COMMISSION OF VILNIUS UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024

The Central Academic Ethics Commission of Vilnius University (hereinafter the ‘Commission’) is an independent academic self-governance institution of Vilnius University (hereinafter the ‘University’), established in accordance with the Statute of Vilnius University and guided in its activities by the Code of Academic Ethics of Vilnius University (hereinafter the ‘Code of Academic Ethics’) approved by the Senate of Vilnius University (hereinafter the ‘Senate’) and the Commission Regulations. The Commission, within its competency, examines complaints and appeals concerning violations of academic ethics, as well as interprets its regulations and the Code of Academic Ethics, the nuances of their application and their content.

In 2024, the Commission formed in 2021 ceased its activities and the Senate established the composition of the Commission for a new three-year term of office by Resolution No. SPN-61 of 24 of September 2024 “On the Approval of the Composition of the Central Academic Ethics Commission of Vilnius University”. As in the previous term of office, the Commission is continued to be headed by Chairperson Assoc. Prof. Dr Vigita Vėbraitė (Faculty of Law), and the long-term Deputy Chair Assoc. Prof. Dr Marija Jakubauskienė was succeeded in this position by Assoc. Prof. Dr Aleksej Burov (Faculty of Philology). Other current members of the Commission are Assoc. Prof. Dr Tatjana Kochanė (Faculty of Chemistry and Geosciences), Prof. Dr Diana Ramašauskaitė (Faculty of Medicine), Assist. Prof. Dr Darius Ruželė (Faculty of Economics and Business Administration) and student representatives Eglė Gaučaitė, Ugnė Ščesnovičiūtė, and Eivinas Zableckas ([composition and contacts of the Commission](#) are published on the University’s website).

In accordance with the Commission Regulations, the main area of activity of the Commission is the resolution of disputes on academic ethics and the resolution of complaints regarding decisions made by academic ethics commissions of core academic units. In 2024, the Commission met four times and adopted five decisions on appeals or complaints received: one of them was received from the University’s academic staff, two from the University’s students, and two from external parties (other than the employees or students of the University). The Commission has been consulted on three occasions with a request to examine the dispute at first instance and on two occasions with complaints to the Commission regarding the verification of the legality and validity of decisions made by the

commissions of the core academic units. The Commission upheld one of the five complaints and appeals examined. The Commission rejected one complaint and refused to examine three complaints. The refusal to examine the received complaints and appeals was determined by different reasons: they were submitted not within the scope of competency, unfounded, and once the decision not to examine the appeal resulted from the fact that essentially analogous circumstances had already been examined in the administrative procedure and by other structures operating at the University.

The overall number of decisions taken by the Commission has remained stable compared to the past years (in 2022 and 2023 each, the Commission received and examined six complaints and appeals). The Commission has examined appeals and complaints regarding violations of ethics of communication (including in digital space), potentially unethical discussion of student learning outcomes with third parties, and the concealment of information relevant for the employee.

The survey of academic ethics commissions of the units carried out by the Commission showed that last year, the academic ethics commissions of the units also examined relatively few appeals – a total of 35 – of different types, 21 of which (60 per cent) were submitted by employees, 12 by students, and two by other persons. It should be noted that in 2024, the academic ethics commissions of five core academic units did not examine any appeals. The unit commissions addressed issues related to academic integrity, plagiarism, unethical conduct of the teaching staff during lectures or assessments, potentially unauthorised use of artificial intelligence tools, emotional violence, instigation of conflicts, and discrimination or humiliation of members of the community. The Commission upheld 22 of the 35 complaints and appeals examined. The comparison of this indicator with the number of complaints received by the Commission concerning decisions taken by the unit commissions leads to the conclusion that the appellants were generally satisfied with the decisions taken by the unit commissions and, at least in regards to reasonableness and legality, they did not consider it necessary to submit complaints on them in the vast majority of cases.

Summarising its decisions taken last year and the information received during the survey of the unit commissions, the Commission draws attention to the following key aspects of the application of the Code of Academic Ethics and the Commission Regulations relevant to future practices:

1. The issue of the legality of the use of artificial intelligence tools is becoming increasingly relevant. Although the Senate of Vilnius University approved amendments to the Code of Academic Ethics on 16 April 2024 that detail that unauthorised presenting of ideas generated by such means as one's own in the process of assessment of the learning outcomes

and unauthorised non-disclosure of the use of this type of technological means as grounds for concluding that a violation of academic ethics was committed, as well as the Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence Usage at Vilnius University on 18 June last year, the academic ethics commissions of the units face difficulties in examining the potential violations of academic ethics in this relatively new area. It should be noted that there is a lack of common practice and, partly, knowledge necessary for investigating violations of academic ethics of this type and concluding that they have been committed. The Commission intends to consider and summarise these issues during planned meetings with the academic ethics commissions of the units, but it also requires the involvement of other members of the community, experts in this area, and possibly the management bodies, in shaping the overall decision-making practice for related issues and expeditiously revising the legal regulation in this field at the University when required, or by proposing and recommending the means and solutions for solving issues related to artificial intelligence.

2. The Commission notes that the issue of competency of academic ethics commissions, its separation from the competencies of other University-based structures, remains relevant, as evidenced by a number of appeals refused to be considered as submitted outside of competency or decided to be transferred to other structures (commissions, administration). To this end, the Commission plans to speak in more detail than before in its decisions which are depersonalised and made public, and in its interpretations of academic ethics practice, which it recommends to also be followed by the academic ethics commissions of the units in their decisions. The Commission also points out that the academic ethics commissions cannot investigate on the merits those circumstances on which they have already expressed their opinion in previous decisions or which have already been examined in detail in the same aspect by other University-based commissions and structures. Re-examination of issues already examined in the same aspect in the academic ethics commissions is not allowed.

3. In examining one of the appeals, the Commission has made a detailed statement on the application of Item 7(10) of the Code of Academic Ethics (“The principles of relationships between members of the community shall be violated by other actions that demean the name of a member of the community”). The Commission noted that this provision defines the possibility of concluding that a violation of the Code of Academic Ethics has been committed in a specific situation for activities that are not specifically mentioned in the Code, but that the Commission considers to be activities that violate the principles of communication between members of the community. This means that, in order to establish a violation of Item 7(10) of the Code of Academic Ethics, it must be clearly justified and motivated, indicating which specific actions have violated the Code of Academic Ethics and basing such opinion of the commission on reasoning. In view of the

above, the Commission concluded in the specific case examined, that the contested decision did not contain a reasoning which specific actions and why were found by the academic ethics commission of the unit to be demeaning the name of a member of the community and, thus, violating academic ethics. In view of the lack of justification and motivation, the Commission decided to partly uphold the complainant's complaint and to change the contested decision of the Unit Commission by repealing its part regarding the violation of Item 7(10) of the Code of Academic Ethics. In the context of that provision, the Commission notes that the lack of reasoning and completeness of the decisions remains perhaps the main reason why decisions taken by the academic ethics commissions of the units are appealed and complaints are partially or fully upheld and calls for this aspect to be given greater attention in the preparation of decisions.

4. The Commission also notes that collegial and respectful communication and polite, ethical expression of opinion are values to be encouraged in the communication between members of the University community; therefore, each member of the community should consider and choose the most appropriate form to express their opinion freely and unconstrained but without offending other members of the community and creating conditions for the development of conflicts between them. The promotion of such communication model and values is also a responsibility of academic ethics commissions, in order to fulfil which the academic ethics commissions are offered to contribute to the dissemination of good communication practices to a larger extent, and to assess the possibilities of reconciliation and providing recommendations to the parties to the dispute when making decisions, not only to find violations of academic ethics. This aspect will also receive greater attention from the Commission in its work.

In addition to examining complaints and appeals, the Commission continued its activities related to the dissemination of good practices in academic ethics. To this end, the members of the Commission participated in the conference of representatives of the ethics commissions of universities organised by the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania in October, where they met and shared the operational realities and examples of practices of their activities with members of ethics commissions of other universities of the country. On 3 December last year, the members of the Commission met, on their own initiative, with the new Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures Reda Cimperman, took note of the surveys planned, the guidelines prepared, and other activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson, exchanged views on further cooperation, and the resolution of the most common issues in the area of academic ethics.

This year, the Commission plans to focus more on communication and cooperation with the academic ethics committees of the units and the Students' Representation of the

University, and to be more active in the prevention implementation area of academic ethics. It is planned to clearly depict in some way how one can appeal due to a potential violation of academic ethics, and how to distinguish the competencies of academic ethics commissions from other commissions. In addition, it is planned to discuss whether academic ethics should be focused on as early as during the events for student integration at the University and how to raise awareness of academic ethics among freshmen.

Detailed information on the Commission's activities, its reports, depersonalised decisions, and other useful links are made publicly available on the University's website. The [Academic Ethics](#) section of the website also contains the legal acts relevant to the Commission's activities, contacts of the academic ethics commissions of the units, and other useful information. In the nearest future, this section of the University's website is planned to also feature the bank of academic ethics practices – a concise structured information and summaries resulting from the Commission's practice on various issues of application of the provisions of the Code of Academic Ethics and the regulations of academic ethics commissions.

Chairperson of the Commission

Assoc. Prof. Dr Vígita Vèbraitè

**DETAILED METADATA**

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