

Prague, 30 January 2024

Combined first and second report on activities of the DAMU Ombudsman (May 2022 – December 2023)

Introductory word by the DAMU Ombudsman

Dear readers,

let me present the most “dramatic” ombudsman annual report in the Czech Republic to you.

The following text summarises approximately one and a half years of my intensive work as ombudsman at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. In it, you will learn how many complaints I have considered, what recommendations I have formulated and/or what awareness-raising or educational courses I have organised in order to improve the quality of studies and fairness of employment at our faculty.

When reading the report, it is good to remember that as DAMU’s ombudsman, I really do not adopt any decisions. I cannot change study programmes, replace poor-quality teachers or hire new ones, build a new tract with new rehearsal rooms for actors or raise salaries of our amazing staff. The main strength of my position is that I am essentially powerless. I must always use evidence, arguments and values to convince others. That is why, I am delighted that we have been able to build a relationship of trust and that you have sent more than thirty suggestions or concerns in the past period. Almost 400 people have attended the awareness-raising and educational events. I appreciate that very much.

My main task is to deal with concerns raised by individuals, to advise people in difficulties, to map the faculty environment and if I find misconduct or ambiguity, I try to get people in decision-making positions to take specific actions or to correct it. My job is not the big cases you read about on a daily basis on the news server; instead, I attend to the small, discrete and rather low-key work of meeting, consulting, negotiating and bringing up more complex issues that require humility, an open mind and the necessary time to be resolved. If I mention successful projects in the report, it is always to the credit of many other people, from students to rank and file, heads of departments to faculty management. Even though I stand somewhat outside the official structure of the faculty, I see nurturing a fair and safe environment as a shared effort by all of us.

I know the times we live in are hectic and many of you may not have the capacity to read the whole report. Therefore, let me draw your attention to the section that contains a number of my systemic recommendations. As I am writing the report at a time when I do not know whether I will be re-elected as DAMU Ombudsman, please view my suggestions for all the measures as a path that DAMU can follow for some time even without me and will certainly achieve its stated objective of being an environment that respects the uniqueness of every human being, abides by legal and ethical rules and strives consistently for fair study and working conditions.

Finally, I would like to thank my former and current secretary, Ing. Ilona Legová and MgA. Mgr. Simona Kysilková Šnajperková, for their outstanding co-operation. Without them, I would not have been able to accomplish this mission.

Wishing you inspirational reading

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SUMMARY

A COUPLE OF FIGURES

I have received a total of **32 concerns**. I have dealt with 31 of them.

I have organised **32** awareness-raising and educational events.

I present **32** systemic recommendations.

A total of 389 students and employees participated in the educational and awareness-raising events.

I represented DAMU at **9** professional events and I gave **3** media interviews.

I have formulated **22 systemic recommendations** to ensure equal treatment during studies (10 of which concern students with specific needs).

Furthermore, I have proposed **10 measures** to improve working conditions of staff.

I have worked a total of **732** hours for DAMU. On average, I have worked 10 hours per week for DAMU.

What achievements have resulted from my work at DAMU?

- Listen to and support individuals in more challenging life situations and in dealing with ethical dilemmas
- Launch the system of support for students with specific needs,
- Provide professional support to staff in communicating with students with psychological issues
- Facilitate a discussion between students and the school management on the results of the survey titled "Does DAMU have a problem?"
- Extend psychological support for students and introduce the same support for staff (3 free-of-charge consultations per year)
- Launch the first ever self-development group
- Encourage a discussion on the use of the Great Hall
- Maintain an individual approach to the use of teleworking for non-academic staff
- Provide group supervision for teachers at two departments
- Train managers and staff in the prevention of gender-based violence
- Start work on a crisis communication plan
- Boost the resilience of first-year students through courses on common ethical fundamentals (secure social environment, well-being, feedback)
- Set up the School Ombuds Platform (SOP) that will professionalise the work of all ombudspersons and increase the protection of the rights of people at Czech universities
- Liaise DAMU with experts and professionals outside the theatre world on current topics (mental health, conflict resolution, feedback, team leadership, foreign students' issues).

What remains to be achieved?

- Involve sufficiently representative numbers of respondents from DAMU in the research on prevalence of gender-based violence at universities
- Draft an analysis on student workload during the semester and academic failure
- Set up a group of peer support at the faculty
- Organise pilot courses to reinforce teachers' pedagogical competencies
- Organise a panel discussion on decent remuneration at art universities.

Concerns received by the DAMU Ombudsman at a glance

Total

32 suggestions or concerns

11 concerns in 2022

21 concerns in 2023

Students

17 concerns

Staff

15 concerns

Individuals submitting concerns by gender¹

31 women

10 men

Number of closed concerns (as at 31 January 2024)

31

In total, I have received 32 concerns. Some concerns have been signed by more than one person (a total of 41). The first two concerns have been delivered to me in June 2022. The remainder were received between October 2022 and December 2023. The majority of concerns have always been delivered in the last quarter of the calendar year. A slightly larger proportion of concerns came from students (17). Among those who made a concern, women predominated clearly (31). With a few exceptions, no concern could be resolved at the first meeting but they required a longer period of time for consideration or repeated consultations. I have closed a total of 31 cases as at the date of this report. I am still considering one case. I have formulated recommendations to specific departments or DAMU management on an ongoing basis. Some recommendations are systemic in nature and I address them in a separate section of the report. I have incorporated the findings from concerns delivered in 2022 into the plan of activities for 2023 (in particular, awareness-raising and educational events). I have taken the findings from 2023 into account in planning activities for 2024.

¹ More people have been signed under certain concerns. This is why, their sum does not add up to 32 (the total number of concerns).

When considering concerns, I followed the Dean's Decree No. 1/2022 appointing the DAMU Ombudsman/woman.

Concerns in greater detail²

Summary of students' concerns

Students have approached me in situations where they wanted to talk in a confidential setting about the conduct of certain teachers. They also came to seek advice on whether certain behaviour could be considered unethical and how it could be addressed. Some of their concerns concerned the conditions and organisation of studies and how they should best communicate with teachers in certain situations. Several cases concerned gender-based violence and specific needs arising from the health condition of the person filing the concern. I have been contacted by 5 students whose mother tongue is not Czech or Slovak.

I have addressed the concerns with respect and respected the students' wish to preserve their anonymity. I have also inferred systemic issues from the concerns and have called on the school management or the relevant departments to address them. In only three cases did students choose to step out of anonymity and ask me to address the concern through a facilitated meeting and direct communication with the person in charge.

For the sake of illustration, I am listing the topics of each concern without giving details so as not to violate the confidentiality of the communication:

- Transparency and equality in the use of funds for final projects
- Difficult communication with supervisor of the final qualification work
- Reasons for not completing the doctoral studies
- Organisation of the state final examination in view of the specific needs of the person filing the concern
- Unclear procedure when setting the exam dates
- Inappropriate behaviour of a teacher (3 concerns) or other school staff (1 concern)
- Racism outside school with effects upon mental health of the person filing the concern
- Termination of studies following an unsuccessful year-end final work (*klausura*)
- Inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature by a fellow student
- Dissatisfaction with the overall organisation of studies
- Assessment of the seriousness of reasons for interruption of studies
- Unpleasant environment at the department (gossiping about absent persons, inappropriate remarks regarding appearance, etc.)
- Support in promoting human rights issues to academic bodies
- Inappropriate behaviour on the part of staff of a third-party service provider.

For the cases listed below, I have obtained the consent from persons to whom the case relates with an anonymised account of the case and the outcome.

Concern/Complaint No. 4/2023

The student failed to defend his year-end final work. He disagreed with the reasons provided by the board. I facilitated a meeting between the management of the department and the student at which both parties had the opportunity to discuss the matter. Subsequently, the dean decided on termination of studies. However, since the decision failed to address the main arguments of the student, I recommended that the student file an appeal. The Rector overturned the Dean's decision and stopped the termination proceedings. The student can return to his studies. On the basis of this

² In the text, I deliberately use the generic masculine "the person filing the complaint" anyone who made the concern (the only exception is the case of sexual harassment). I do not mention the department or section involved in any case.

case, I strive that all teachers should assign the tasks for year-end final work in writing. Also, the case has helped the faculty to open up the topic of students with psychological difficulties and the possibility of teachers responding adequately to their needs.

Concern/Complaint No. 17/2023

The student experienced unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature (catcalling) from the staff of construction contractor in the school elevator. I have met with the student and contacted the school management subsequently. The management requested the contractor to ensure that its staff should comply with the ban on harassment and that they should refrain from unethical conduct at the premises of the faculty. No similar incident reoccurred. I have recommended the faculty that it should include a condition in their contracts that the staff of the contractor must comply with the ban on inappropriate behaviour (including harassment) and that it should be trained in this respect.

Concerns from the staff

Concerns from the staff concerned inappropriate behaviour of colleagues from the same or other departments and, in several cases, also of supervisors (suspicion of bossing). One concern concerned indecent remuneration, the extent of teleworking or the offer of alcohol to students at an official school event. Ethical dilemmas relating to supervising the qualification theses, finding external spaces for teaching or spending money on smaller-scale contracts also appeared. In one case, the person who filed the concern stepped out of anonymity and, therefore, I was able to lead a facilitated meeting at which an agreement was reached. In the second case, the employee complained about the actions of a colleague who had rejected the complaint. I have drafted a report which I forwarded with a proposal for action to the faculty Dean.

Similarly to students, I provide a summary of the topics I was approached with by the staff:

- Indecent remuneration
- Suspected bossing (3 concerns)
- Offering alcohol to students at an official school event
- Inappropriate behaviour of a colleague (4 concerns)
- Discontinuation in work co-operation
- Extent of teleworking for non-academic staff
- Conflict of interest in supervising a qualification thesis
- Spending money on smaller-scale contracts
- Looking for premises with third parties for safe teaching
- Dissatisfaction with faculty management.

Concern/Complaint No. 6/2023

The department informed the teacher shortly before the start of the semester that it would not offer his course to students. However, the teacher planned the course and reserved his capacity for it. He also noted the unexpected reduction of income. I have facilitated a meeting between the department management and the teacher. The management explained that they were trying to reduce the number of optional subjects to avoid overloading students. At the end of the meeting, the department management offered a form of compensation which the teacher accepted, and the case was resolved amicably.

Systemic recommendations for DAMU

Based on my numerous observations and mapping of the situation at the school, I have formulated **32 systemic recommendations** that can lead to gradual improvement of the quality of studies and work at DAMU in terms of safety, equality and fairness.

I am ready to explain each recommendation. Inherently, recommendations are addressed primarily to people in decision-making positions. However, they can also be used by members of the Academic Senate, AMU trade unions or student initiatives and associations in negotiations with school management.

A/ Rights and obligations of students

1/ Study conditions

To: DAMU management

- Start negotiations with the Rector's Office of AMU and other faculties to change the Attendance and Examination Regulations so that
 - A) teachers are obliged to enter the exam dates from their subjects in the information system so that students would know them at least three weeks before the end of each semester; and
 - B) students are offered one replacement exam date in core obligatory subject.

To: Vice-dean for Student and Pedagogical Affairs and Artistic Activity, heads of departments

- Encourage teachers to assign tasks to students for the "final year-end work" (*klauzury*) in writing.
- Continue discussions on revision of study plans and present interim results at existing DAMU forums.

2/ Protecting students from gender-based violence

To: DAMU management

- Amend the Disciplinary Code to allow the part of the hearing where the facts of the offence are established to be closed to the public and to ensure consistent protection of persons offering their testimonies from being identified by third parties and against secondary victimisation.
- Provide education to members of the Disciplinary Committee in the prevention and resolution of gender-based violence in academic settings.
- Enshrine in the internal regulations of DAMU a procedure to prevent the employee (perpetrator of undesirable conduct) from carrying out work or its part (e.g. teaching) for the period of time necessary to resolve the case of gender-based violence or other unethical conduct allegedly committed by the employee.
- Include in the contractual relationships between the faculty and providers of services, works and other performance a specific provision that the staff of contractual partners shall refrain

from any conduct that violates the law and good morals (in particular, harassment, gender-based violence, violation of privacy, physical integrity of students or staff) and stipulate a contractual sanction for its breach.

3/ First-year students of Bachelor's and non-follow-up Master's degree programmes, including students in English-language study programmes

To: Heads of individual departments

- Meet regularly with students during the first and second semesters to map their needs and take appropriate action based on the outcomes from the meetings.

4/ Students with special needs

To: DAMU management, heads of departments

- Declare that mental health of students and staff is key to DAMU and its sustainable development.
- Monitor impacts of Methodical Guidance of Vice-rector's Methodological Instruction No. 2/2023 and if deficiencies are found in practice, request immediate amendment thereto.
- Provide consistent support to teachers and other DAMU staff using peer-sharing strategies.³
- Provide sensitive response to emergencies (for example, death of a student, taking of a student to hospital directly from the classroom) and provide rapid psychological support to reflect upon an event that is challenging from human point of view.
- Enable students to attend group psychological counselling sessions and share various mental health topics (stress, professional or personal relationships, boundary setting, self-assessment, etc.)
- Develop crisis scenarios and procedures within the framework of risk predictability – what to do if a student has a panic attack, what to do if a student is dangerous to his/her environment, what to do if an intoxicated student with psychosis, a suicidal student arrives for class, students with psychological issues abroad, student hospitalised at a psychiatric clinic and his/her family member (parent) calls.
- Set up a relaxation room at DAMU for students and teachers during bad weather (a “sanctuary”).
- Organise regular educational seminars for students and staff – working with emotions, handling crises and procedures, supporting others in crisis, self-care, etc.
- Organise a destigmatisation campaign – information about mental illnesses, how they develop and when, how recovery works, ideally through social media, using people from the arts community who have experienced mental illness.

³ It's not just students who have problems. It is also necessary to start working with the staff and caring for them so that they have the resources to help students. According to research prepared by the Faculty of Education of the Charles University, peer sharing techniques are an effective way to prevent burnout syndrome, allowing teachers to learn from one another and work through their own emotions. For more information, please look here: https://pages.pedf.cuni.cz/vyzkumvyhoreni/files/2021/06/TEKOS_METODIKA_final-1.pdf.

- Allocate funds for these activities and earmark these funds when preparing the budget of the Faculty.

5/ Subjects of common ethical fundamentals

To: Vice-dean for Pedagogical and Study Affairs and Artistic Activities, heads of departments, guarantors of study programmes

- Transform pilot workshops on ethics, social safety, prevention of gender-based violence, well-being and psychological readiness for studies, accepting and providing feedback and incorporate them into the study time schedule so that they become a natural part of the educational process at DAMU.
- Improve students' and teachers' awareness about the goals, content, assessment and benefits of common ethical fundamentals subjects in their artistic production.
- Allocate funds to common ethical fundamentals subjects.

6/ Project-based student networking

To: Vice-dean for Pedagogical and Study Affairs and Artistic Activities, heads of departments guarantors of study programmes

- Enable students from different departments to join in artistic creation while attending mandatory optional subjects and expand these opportunities for mutual enrichment gradually.

B/ Rights and obligations of staff members

1/ Measures affecting all employees

To: DAMU management

- Strive on a continuous basis to improve the financial and salary conditions of staff. Communicate the gradual steps to improve the situation implemented by DAMU or AMU management gradually in a better way.
- Harmonise the procedure for extraordinary bonuses across DAMU to ensure equal pay.
- Pay regular visits to departments and institutes and talk about their current needs.
- Launch communication with AMU Rector's Office and other faculties in order to set up a university-wide or faculty HR department (education, personal objectives, needs mapping, cultivation of the work environment).
- Prepare information material for staff going on maternity or parental leave.

2/ Non-academic staff

To: Dean and DAMU secretary

- Consider operating conditions at individual sections at DAMU in line with Article 8 (4) of Rector's Decree No. 20/2023 and, where possible, allow teleworking for at least 1 day per week while respecting the individual needs of specific staff groups (e.g. minor children or ageing parents' carers, staff with disabilities, commuters from more distant places, etc.).
- Map educational needs in soft skills and offer on-going training.

3/ Teachers

To: DAMU management along with heads of departments

- Open a discussion about fair job position setting based on the amount of work done.
- Develop and implement a multi-year educational plan for mandatory strengthening of pedagogical competencies pursuant to Section 230 of the Labour Code (qualification deepening) and make use of courses in pedagogical skill development programmes of other universities.
- Network teachers from individual departments in a targeted manner on selected projects, educational events or through peer-sharing activities.

Educational and awareness-raising activities organised by the DAMU Ombudsman

Total number of events: **32**

Total number of participants: **410**

Number of students: **242**

Number of employees: **147**

Others (ombudspersons, spokespersons): **21**

Only two educational events were organised in 2022. The remaining 30 courses or events were held in line with the 2023 Ombudsman Activity Plan and the 2023/2024 Academic Year Schedule in 2023. I have used the funds from the Centralised Development Programme (CDP) of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to finance all courses and workshops. Below, please find an overview of just a few of them.

Providing feedback

Lecturer: Petr Sucháček

Providing a dignified and constructive feedback was a theme that came up in many of my conversations with students and staff of DAMU. That is why, I have invited Petr Sucháček, a lecturer from NVC Brno, to lead workshops on this topic at our school. The first two workshops were designed for teachers from all departments at DAMU (each department has the opportunity to send two persons to attend). The participants practiced several skills: being motivated to give feedback, being aware of the importance of balanced (positive) and non-threatening feedback, being able to formulate feedback well, and knowing how to receive feedback. They have also focused on subjects' assessment. Since October 2023, the workshop was offered successfully also to second and first-year students of all Czech study programmes.

Respect all the way up* to academia

Lecturers: Markéta Brabcová, Lucie Ingrová

During the workshop, managers and staff have discussed what can be considered bullying or sexual harassment and violence – both by university teachers and students. They talked about what to do if they witness problematic behaviour, how to deal with victims of these pathologies and who to contact for help. They tried out model situations, learned practical information from the Czech Republic and abroad and shared their attitudes and opinions.

Wellbeing and psychological readiness for studies

Lecturers: Eva Dittingerová, Helena Kosková

Taking care of one's own mental health is important for people who are involved in theatre making in various forms. In order to equip first-year students with the tools and skills to examine the quality of their own lives, I have invited Eva Dittingerová and Helena Kosková, lecturers, to facilitate workshops on well-being at the departments. The student participants have explored what is the source of their satisfaction and what makes them uncomfortable, what they can influence themselves and where their sphere of control ends. They took away tips and tricks to use when they

wish to change something. They have also received a guidebook to explore their own well-being with.

Strengthening conflict-resolving and work-under-stress competencies

Lecturers: Dana Potočková and Jitka Jilemická

Actors: Sabina Valová and Martin Hlubocký

A clear outcome from two group discussions with non-academic DAMU staff I led in spring 2023 was that the members of staff would like to have a training in soft skills, which relate to competencies allowing them to deal with conflict situations and stress they encounter in their jobs. Also, they have made it clear that they wanted the workshop to be designed as much as possible as a hands-on experience with practice of specific situations. Both lecturers agreed to prepare a tailored workshop. During the workshop, they introduced the basic types of conflicts and the reasons why they occur in practice. In a safe environment, the participants practiced how they can resolve specific conflicts from the DAMU environment and how to work with their own stress. At the end of the workshop, basic relaxation techniques were introduced to help relieve stress and tension that we may encounter at work and in our personal lives.

Being a foreigner in the Czech Republic. Intercultural conflicts

Lecturers: Dana Moree and Kateřina Losová

English programme students have shared their experience from living in the Czech Republic. During the workshop, they have tried to find effective strategies to respond and to seek to integrate such experience in theoretical concepts that help to explain and understand intercultural conflicts. In the second part, they have focused on the main legal aspects related to the stay of foreigners in the Czech Republic, especially in relation to residency permits, rights and obligations of foreign students, work-related matters and others. They have also discussed where to they can seek assistance in various situations.

Efficient management of work meetings

Lecturer: Regina Kubcová Foffová

Meeting management has its own rules and if we follow them, we run a better chance of having efficient meetings and of all participants taking away understandable conclusions from them and of no-one finding them a waste of their time. At the workshop, the participating managers have shown how they can make work meetings an important communication link and contribute to improving mutual understanding, satisfaction and performance of the people they work with.

A short selection of other activities

Work meetings and participation in professional, educational and other events, interviews, articles, networking and representing DAMU in the Czech Republic and abroad

2022

- A meeting with representatives of the “You must (need not) endure that!” initiative, 1 June 2022
- An interview for the [Zlomvaz](#) festival magazine, June 2022
- Orientation days for first-year students at DAMU, changes to the Ethical Culture section of the Study Guide, 4 and 5 October 2022
- Participation in the round table organised by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports titled “How to make our universities safer?”, 4 October 2022
- Participation in the workshop titled “Boundaries between Counselling, Clinical Therapy and Practice”, 7 October 2022, AMU, Centralised Development Programme
- A meeting with members of the AMU Ethics Committee, 22 November 2022
- Participation in the workshop titled “Working with Emotions in Counselling”, 9 November 2022, University of Ostrava, Centralised Development Programme
- Participation in the seminar titled “Psychology of Artistic Personality and Art Education”, 14 November 2022, HAMU
- Presentation at the Debate for Puppets on the topic “Do you want to feel accepted?”, 19 November 2022, DISK DAMU
- Attendance at the Unisafe international conference, 24 and 25 November 2022
- Introductory word for Divadelní noviny, 11 December 2022 (No. 21/2022)

2023

- Organising and moderating a Colloquium of the School Ombuds Platform titled “Professional Identity and Principles of the Work of Ombudspersons”, 27 January 2023, Prague
- Attendance at the international conference titled “Transformation - How do we change theatre schools?” at the “Change in European Schools” panel, Warsaw, 22 March 2023

- Participation in the discussion after the performance of the Theatre of the Oppressed dealing with “Manipulation, Sexism and Predatory Behaviour of Teachers in Secondary Schools”, directed by: Barbara Herz, A Studio Rubín, 17 June 2023
- An interview for EDUin “Ombudsmen and Ombudswomen at Universities – Powers, Case Studies, Obstacles in the System”, 20 June 2023
- Participation in a group interview to make recommendations for UK “Ombudspersons and Persons in a Similar Position”, Centralised Development Programme, August 2023
- A working meeting with the head of the AMU Movement Centre, 19 September 2023 (together with the FAMU Ombudswoman)
- Orientation days for first-year students at DAMU, 27 September and 9 October 2023, 5 workshops titled “Ethics and Safe Environment”
- An interview for Seznam Zprávy: Compensation for victims of abusive behaviour at school? The issue is not resolved completely, says lawyer, 15 October 2023
- A working meeting with representatives of the AMU and FAMU trade unions, 6 November 2023 (together with the FAMU Ombudswoman)
- Participation in a discussion titled Healthy Art Making: Mental Health Care for Artists, Prague, 6 November 2023
- A lecture titled “Abuse of Power from a Gender Perspective – the Example of Universities”, Masaryk University in Brno, Faculty of Social Studies, 23 November 2022
- Shooting an educational video for the University of Ostrava, “You do not have to!-You can!- There is always a way out!“, 27 November 2023