

Guidelines for confidants

Purpose of faculty-level confidants

- Confidants should be available not only to intermediate staff members, but to supervisors, superiors and professors as well.
- Individuals seeking advice should be able to address any questions or uncertainties they may have about their academic career, their supervisory relationship or their employment to a contact point representative.
- A specifically tailored, low-threshold advisory service that addresses a range of issues and needs, that provides a fact-based systematic overview of various aspects and, if necessary, refers individuals to other advisory services is essential for intermediate staff members.

Key criteria for the operation of contact points

- **Low-threshold access:** The services must be visibly displayed and published, including details on purpose as well as contact information and several contact persons, ideally in combination with additional information about the respective faculty for early-career researchers (e.g., good practice papers relevant for both doctorate and postdoc levels). For ease of access, contact may be established via e-mail and/or a dedicated form. Advice seekers should be free to choose which member of the contact point they wish to consult.
- The **remit** of the contact point must be clearly defined; it is imperative to delineate the boundaries with other contact points and advisory services, particularly with the university-wide Ombuds Office. Ideally, the information provided will include a link to the university's ["Advisory Service Guide"](#).
- **Contact points have no supervisory function of their own** and are not a substitute for the dual-control principle of supervision (i.e., secondary supervision of doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers; no mentoring). However, they will provide information to doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers and supervisors in the event of uncertainties concerning the implementation of an agreement or a regulation that could not be resolved within the existing supervisory structure. Referencing faculty-specific good practice papers is also helpful in this regard, as they outline the standards for the support and supervision of doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers
- Contact points have neither an executive nor a mediatory role. They are designed to support advice seekers with **information** and through facilitating networking. Contact points also help ensure that uncertainties and conflicts are addressed early and, where necessary, referred to the appropriate advisory service.
- **Confidentiality** must be guaranteed and no conflicts of interest may arise. Consequently, it is essential to restrict the remit to the provision of information, excluding any direct intervention in the event of a conflict. No information may be disclosed to third parties without the explicit consent of the person seeking advice. Information shall only be obtained by a contact point upon consultation and anonymized, unless the advice seeker explicitly requests the disclosure of their identity.
- In principle confidants should have several contact persons available (at least two). When considering the profile of individuals for the contact point role, care must be taken to ensure that the mandate is clearly defined, as outlined above. Additional work responsibilities must not be implicitly expected (protection is especially pivotal for individuals in a **qualification phase**). Furthermore, individuals who assume this task should have long-term contracts to ensure continuity, as frequent changes can lead to inefficiencies and knowledge attrition. Generally speaking, the University Executive Board does not stipulate which individuals within a faculty should take on a contact point role. However, when individuals in early-career stages take on contact point duties, there is a risk that their position will be compromised by conflicts of interest and professional dependencies – unless the responsibilities of the contact point are clearly separated from active conflict intervention.

- **Quality assurance:** Contact points are advised to provide their Faculty Council with a short anonymized annual report, stating the number and nature of the cases handled. However, contact points are not subject to any further reporting or disclosure to other individuals or entities. It is important to periodically check if there is sufficient awareness of the existence of the contact point within a faculty (e.g., using channels such as the supervisors and the Dean's Office). Moving forward, the Vice-Rectorate for International and Academic Careers will appropriately inform and connect individuals performing contact point duties regarding key aspects and new developments in employment and supervision; it will do so on a regular basis.