

Welcome to Enohe's Conference 2019.

*Don't stifle
Their voices.
They need them to defend themselves.
They need them
To wield words.
Only thus
Will you understand
Why they were born into this world.*

(Gabriel Aresti, Gizonaren ahoa)

Universities fulfil the objective of contributing to social development by training professionals to a high cultural, scientific and technological level.

Such training must be deeply respectful of the rights and freedoms of each member of the university community, because universities also constitute a fundamental element in the construction of personal identity and self-realisation.

As the jurist Dionisio Llamazares says in his book, *The Right to Freedom of Conscience*, life is a journey of self-discovery (personal, of others —those with whom we live— and the other —our surroundings) in which sooner rather than later, humans “come face to face with the mystery and miracle of their freedom” and realise that their reactions to their own future and the actions of “others” and “the other” are not automatic: “humans not only have the privilege being free, but are also condemned to be free”.

In other words, humans discover that try as they might, they cannot evade their freedom.

The educational system in general and universities in particular are responsible for nothing less than helping individuals wield their freedom, accompanying them in the process of training and self-realisation that will enable them to make decisions, to choose successively between the several alternatives that present themselves, and thus map their particular path through life.

Each member of the university community attends in order to make better use of their freedom and express their freedom more fully with the “others” and “the other”.

This is what we perceive when students, insofar as we acquire a highly specialised education that will determine the rest of our existence.

I believe this is the same for services and administration staff, insofar as all their jobs affect their personal development both within the institution (training opportunities, promotion, participation in educational activity and the generation of knowledge) and in their social life.

This is my perception today as a member of the Teaching and Research Staff, insofar as my position enables me to research, learn, propose answers to questions in my field of knowledge and transmit knowledge and results to students and society.

The University Ombuds service is tasked with guaranteeing and promoting rights and freedoms.

This was established in Organic Law 6/2001, of 21 December, on Universities, which stated that the task of the university ombuds was to improve university quality, guarantee students' rights and ensure that all actions on the part of university services and bodies respect the rights and freedoms of teaching staff, students and administrative and services staff [art. 46, h) additional disposition 14]. It is also reflected in the Statute of the University of León when describing the nature of this role (art. 212), and is clear from the functions detailed in most Spanish university statutes and regulations concerning the ombuds:

- 1) To receive complaints or claims from any member of the university community.
- 2) To mediate and facilitate the resolution of disagreements and confrontations that may arise between various sectors of the university community.
- 3) To provide effective defence of the interests and rights of sectors and individual members of the university community at the University of León.
- 4) To make suggestions or recommendations to university service managers or directors of the university in relation to measures to adopt to eliminate any deficiencies identified.

All of this must be carried out with absolute transparency, presenting an annual report of actions taken during the corresponding period of office to the University Senate, the university parliament.

I am proud to say that the Ombuds Service at the University of León:

- Is the oldest in Spain.
- Actively participates in the governing bodies of the University Ombudspersons State Conference (European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education) and, in particular, in the Autonomic Commission of Castile and León through the current Ombuds.
- Sponsored the creation of a transnational Latin American body (RidDU)
- Actively participates in the direction of the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education through the previous incumbent, Marta Elena Alonso de la Varga.

In 2019, the University of León will celebrate its 40th anniversary, having previously formed part of the multi-centennial University of Oviedo.

It is an honour for us to invite you to commemorate this with us.

Castile and León is a popular destination for overseas tourists, and welcomed 8,000,000 visitors in 2017, 10 per cent of whom chose to visit León. At the same time, León is one of the most popular destinations for domestic tourism.

It is a key point on the Saint James' Way, was founded in Roman times (of which it retains many vestiges), and is the capital of a kingdom that has been recognised as the birthplace of Europe's oldest parliament. León is also well known for its architectural jewels such as the Cathedral or the Royal Pantheon, for its landscapes declared Human Heritage (the Médulas) and also for its accent on the culture of the present and the future (the MUSAC museum of contemporary art).

León has good transport connections with the rest of Spain, being less than two hours by train from Madrid and little more than one hour by plane from Barcelona.

We invite you to commemorate with us the enormous value of the institution of the University Ombuds, and celebrate with us this ENOHE meeting.

Our home is your home. We are entirely at your disposal.