



Student Ombud Office

Educating Professionals • Creating and Applying
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Memorandum

To **Members of Council**
From **Anne Simpson**
 Student Ombud
Date **January 2005**
Subject **Student Ombud Report**

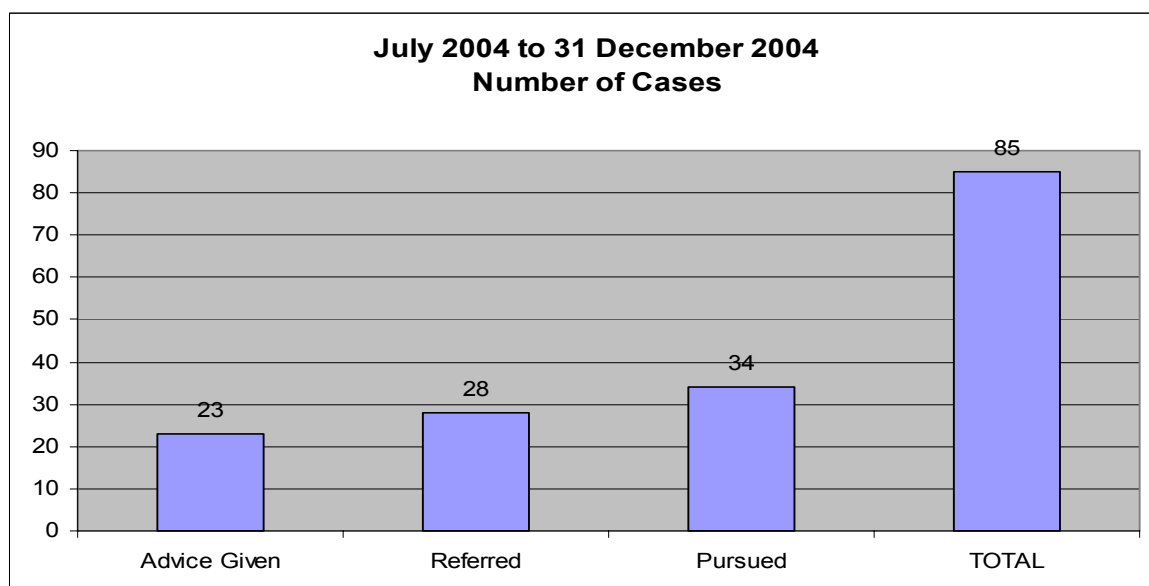
1 ENQUIRIES

1.1 Number of enquiries

A total of 85 students have approached the Office for assistance since July 2004, 38 more than in the first half of the year. In total there have been 132 queries from staff and students for the year 2004.

Tables 1 illustrates the distribution of enquires which are categorised in terms of whether the Office has offered advice to the student, referred the student on to the person or unit which can deal with their problem, or whether the complaint was pursued on behalf of the student. Thirty four instances of students requesting help were followed up by the Office. Some problems were resolved quite speedily, whereas others required significant investigation and negotiation.

Table 1



1.2 Comparison with 2003

The total number of queries for 2004 is slightly less than that for 2003:

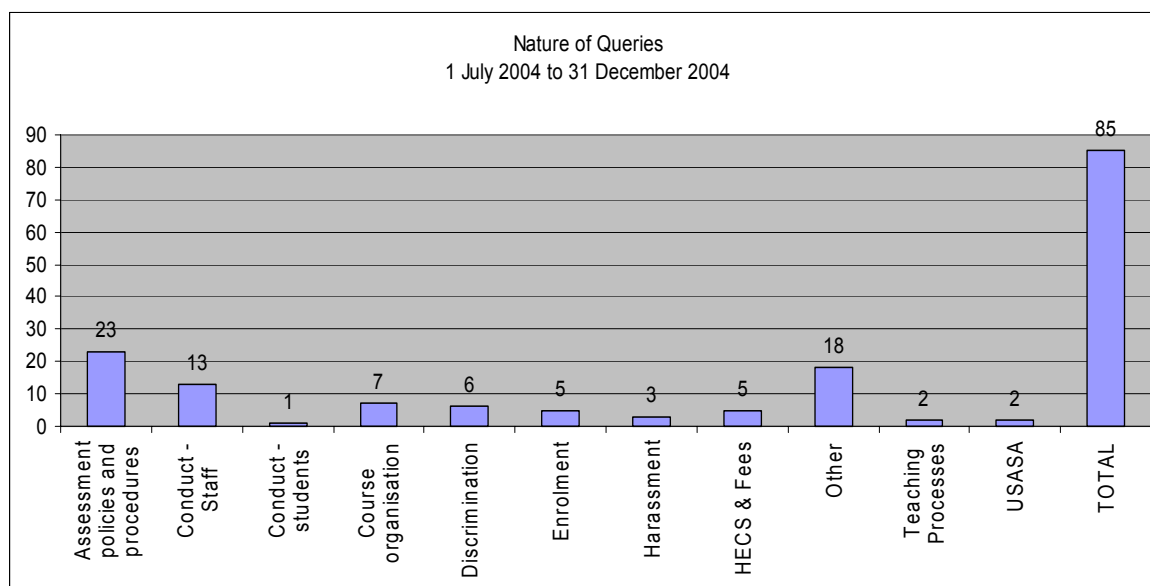
134 in 2004, compared to 146 for 2003

Both figures still fall within the range of 2-3 per week over the year which is similar to other services of this nature. Consequently in spite of quiet periods during the year (not consistent from year to year) it seems that this turnover might well be expected to continue.

1.3 Category of Enquiry

Table 2 below indicates the broad nature of the issues of concern for students.

Table 2



The 'Other' category includes complaints/requests for assistance related to student housing, parking, computer barns, field placements, misleading advice, facilities, SATAC procedures, appeal procedures and graduations.

1.4 Source of Enquiry

For 2004, domestic students accounted for 111 queries and International students for 23. The approaches from International students comprise approximately 17% of the total. This is slightly more than their representation in the University (13%). This is not unreasonable given that these students probably have more concerns and have less access other forms of support in the community.

There was one complaint from a Transnational student, but this number may increase as information regarding the Student Ombud Service is gradually disseminated to these students (see 5.2 below).

1.5 External Bodies

As was the case last year, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the complaints investigated have been taken up by any external body such as The State Ombudsman, The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission or the Community Mediation Services. This again suggests that the students who have approached the office for assistance in the resolution of their grievances have been satisfied that they have had a fair hearing. There was one case which had been with the State Ombudsman for approximately two years for which a report has been received. The report did not find that the University had behaved improperly in any regard or that the student had been disadvantaged in any way.

1.5 Alleged Unlawful Discrimination and Sexual Harassment cases

Unlawful Discrimination

There were six complaints of alleged unlawful discrimination which were investigated.

Of these incidents, one was anonymous (and could not be pursued), two were a result of a misunderstanding, two were not substantiated, and the sixth, which was a matter between two Indian students, was satisfactorily resolved through mediation.

Sexual Harassment

There were three cases of alleged sexual harassment.

Of these, one case involved the abuse of IT by another student, and the offending student was appropriately cautioned. A second allegation was not pursued because the student dropped the complaint, and the third involved an overseas PhD student who was engaged as an hourly paid tutor. This allegation was substantiated and Human Resources have undertaken an intensive training program for the tutor

2 ISSUES ARISING FROM INVESTIGATIONS

There have been a number of complaints which, in the process of investigation, have revealed implications for other students, or were indicative of broader issues which needed to be addressed. In such instances recommendations have been made to relevant staff members in Schools, Divisions or Units.

Examples of these more systemic issues include :

- attempting to build more flexibility into programs to assist International students to be able to more acceptably meet student visa requirements
- ensuring that specialization courses advertised to International students are available at times when students can enroll in them
- providing more details and guidelines for courses identified as 'Self directed study'
- reminding some academic staff of the academic profile of students undertaking bridging programs.

3 AMENDMENT TO OMBUD PROTOCOLS

The Ombud protocols have been amended to include the following:

Outcome of an investigation

Once a recommendation has been made by the Student Ombud and accepted by the relevant University authority, then the Ombud shall have no further responsibility for actions taken as a result of that recommendation. The Student Ombud may not be called upon to appear before any University boards of discipline, appeals committees, grievance committees or any inquiry.

4 AUQA REPORT

The Student Ombud was interviewed as part of a group by the panel which expressed an appreciation of the University's initiative in establishing the role.

The report noted that :

A Student Ombud office was designed in 2002 in consultation with students and began operation in August 2002. The Panel heard positive comments about this independent office.

5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

5.1 Academic Staff

The Ombud has continued to attend School Board meetings throughout the year, and has addressed all but three. These are scheduled for the first half of 2005.

Perhaps as a result of this activity, there has been an increase in queries from staff members about staff/student relationships and responsibilities, and requests for guidance in handling student issues.

5.2 Transnational Students

After extensive consultation with staff, it has been agreed that information will go into the program guides of the Division of Business and Enterprise for transnational students, advising them of the role of the Student Ombud. The plan is to move cautiously in this direction and gauge the nature and extent of the response before further advertising the role. To this end the BUE initiative will serve as a pilot and other Divisions will be included on the basis of recommendations arising from this trial.

5.3 Equity Contacts

A second training workshop was held in conjunction with Human Resources on November 12 for Equity Contacts. This was an opportunity to share experiences, gain advice and undertake some role playing. A number of the Student Advisory Officers also attended, and the occasion was a valuable opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities.

5.4 Outside Bodies

The Ombud continues to maintain regular communication with the Equal Opportunity Commission and with the staff in the State Ombudsman's Office. Contact is also maintained with the Community Mediation Services which is the University's nominated free service for

Overseas students who require assistance with grievances that the Student Ombud or the State Ombudsman's Office are unable to provide.

The Office has been able to handle complaints speedily, with a fast turn around rarely longer than a week. There is no back log of cases.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council note the Student Ombud Report for 2005.

Anne Simpson
Student Ombud