



**University of
South Australia**

2016 Student Ombudsman's Report

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Introduction

The Student Ombudsman's Office at the University of South Australia recognises that students have the right to raise concerns or make a formal complaint if they are dissatisfied with the processes or services of the University.

The Office of Student Ombudsman was first established in 2002 and this is the 15th annual report from this office. Dr Geoff Page has held the position of Student Ombudsman since the beginning of 2014, and works on a 0.6 FTE arrangement in this role. The Ombudsman's Office is physically open for approximately 20 hours per week but, as most students prefer to make contact via phone or email, the Ombudsman picks up cases outside office opening hours ensuring that the service provision to the University community is maintained.

As per University protocols, the Student Ombudsman has the authority to investigate complaints where either proper procedure has not been adhered to, or where despite following established procedures, the student is still dissatisfied with the outcome. The Student Ombudsman plays an important role in addressing these time consuming matters at an early stage, and where possible channels these cases to local areas before they become a major issue. The role of the Student Ombudsman does not exist to advocate for an individual student, but rather it adds value to the University by providing a specialist area which aims to ensure that University processes are implemented fairly and improved where necessary.

The purpose of the Ombudsman's Office is to provide students with an independent and confidential avenue to pursue their complaints when they have been unable to receive a satisfactory solution to their issue. The Student Ombudsman's Office has also played an important role in advising students on how, and with whom, to pursue their complaint or concern in accordance with University policies. Most of the issues handled by the Student Ombudsman are not complaints of unfair treatment, but rather requests for help in resolving a situation where a student continues to be dissatisfied (despite multiple requests) when seeking a reasonable or timely response. Therefore the Student Ombudsman's Office contributes to the overall quality and experience of students whilst they study at UniSA.

This report provides an annual activity update to University Council, as required under the Student Ombudsman's protocol.

2016 Activities

This section summarises 2016 activities undertaken by the Office of the Student Ombudsman and includes detail about the number of student contacts, the type of students contacting the office and the category of complaint or problem.

(a) Number of student contacts

A total of 122 students made contact with the Student Ombudsman's Office in 2016.

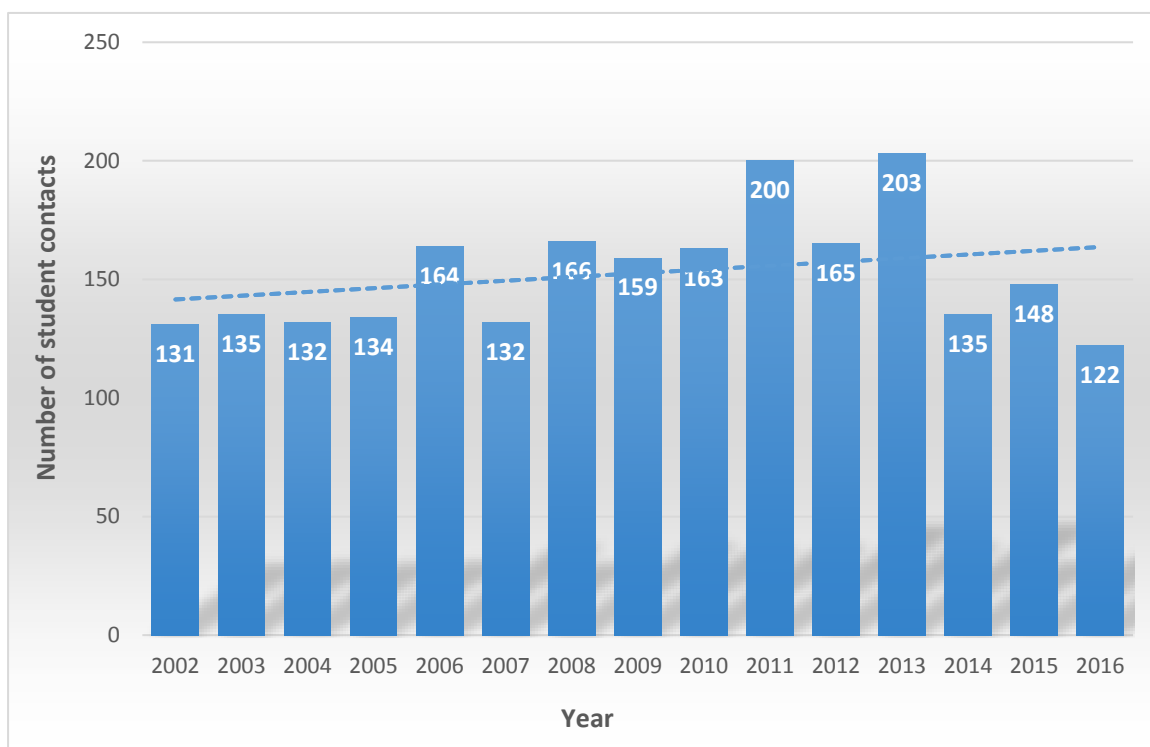


Figure 1: Number of student contacts in 2016

The time taken to resolve and close the reported cases varied, based on the complexity and number of stakeholders involved in a particular situation. Out of the 122 contacts, 76% (n=93) of enquiries/issues were resolved in less than 30 days; 11% (n=13) within 31-60 days; 5% (n=6) within 61-90 days; 2% (n=3) in more than 90 days; and 6% (n=7) are still 'Open'.

Many students make contact with the Ombudsman's Office simply to seek advice on matters such as how to approach their problem; whom they should talk to; how they can obtain assistance; what form they need; whether the Student Ombudsman thinks they have a genuine case etc. In 2016, out of 122 closed cases, 40% (n=49) student enquiries were advised and referred this way. In 54% (n=66) of cases, student concerns were followed up, or pursued, by the Student Ombudsman to seek clarification and more information in an attempt to resolve the problem. The remaining 6% (n=7) of cases are currently 'Open' and are being actively pursued by the Student Ombudsman.

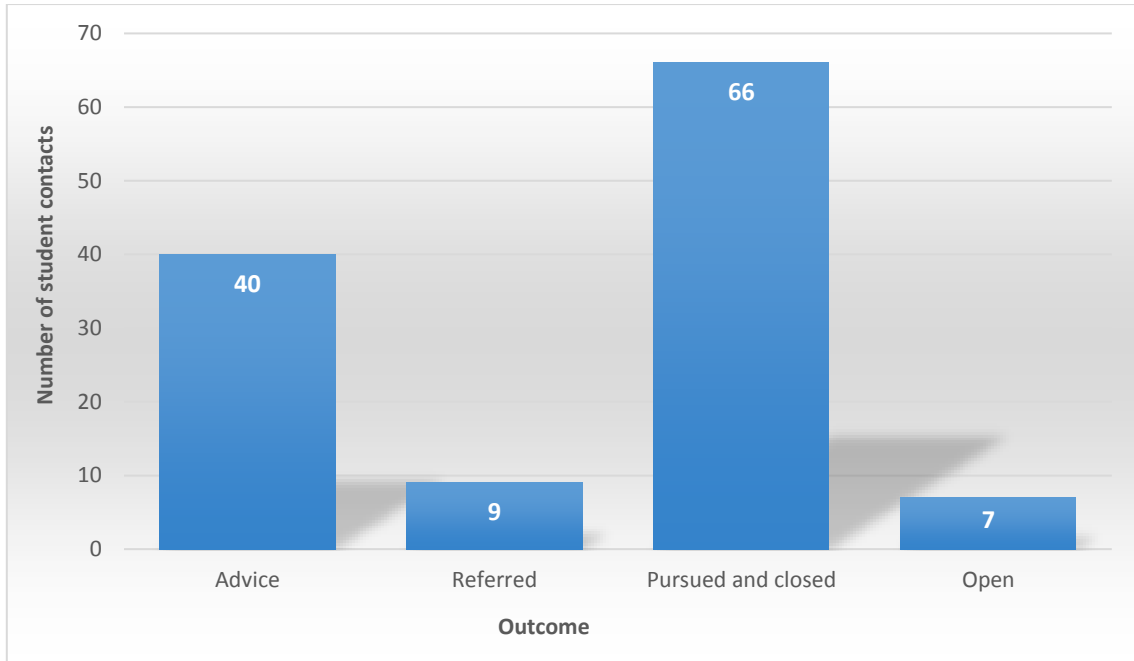


Figure 2: Outcome of student contacts in 2016

It is important to emphasise that not all the complaints investigated were justified. Some complaints were pursued and dismissed as unfounded, or the ‘problem’ laid in part on both sides. The common outcome was a compromise reached through negotiation on the issue. Consequently, it is not easy to categorise such complaints as either ‘has substance’ or ‘unfounded’ as most of these sit somewhere in between. **Figure 3** (below) indicates the Unit or Division to which students’ queries or concerns relate and provides a breakdown of the outcomes for each of these areas.

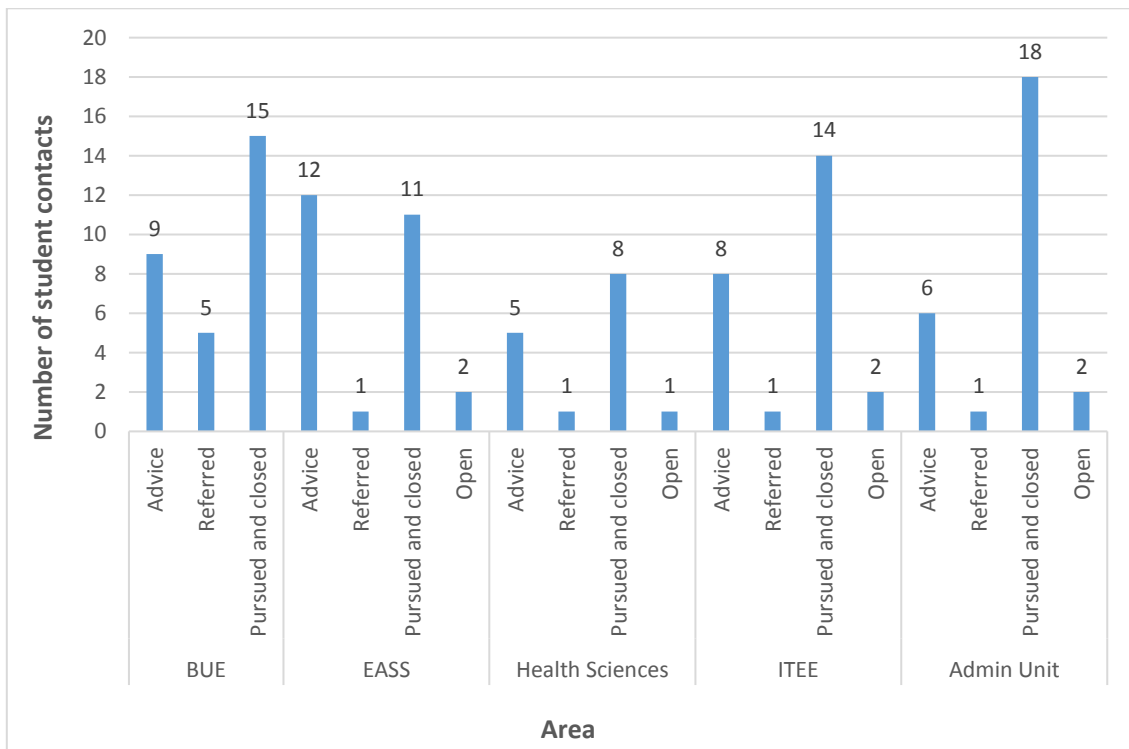


Figure 3: Outcome of student contacts by Unit or Division

(b) Type of students contacting the office

The demographic details of the 122 students, can be broken down as follows:

- 59 undergraduate, 35 postgraduate, 7 research, 12 OUA and 9 'other' enrolment types (including Foundation Studies and partner institution enrolments).
- 102 domestic and 20 international students.
- 64 male students and 58 female students.

(c) Category of problem or complaint

The 122 student cases that were either Advised, Pursued (and closed) or Referred by the Ombudsman are broadly grouped into the following categories:

Academic Administration: this category refers to situations when a student's query is in regard to administrative matters relating to their Division or School and comprised 29% (n=35) of total contacts in 2016.

Central Administration: this category refers to situations when a student's query is in regard to matters relating to central administration and comprised 30% (n=36) of total contacts in 2016.

Student Query: this category refers to situations when students contact the Student Ombudsman's Office to seek general advice on how to navigate a situation and comprised 13% (n=16) of total contacts in 2016.

Student to Student: this category refers to situations when a student's query/complaint relates to another student and comprised 5% (n=6) of total contacts in 2016.

Teaching and Learning: this category refers to situations when a student's query relates to their assessment results and comprised 23% (n=28) of total contacts in 2016.

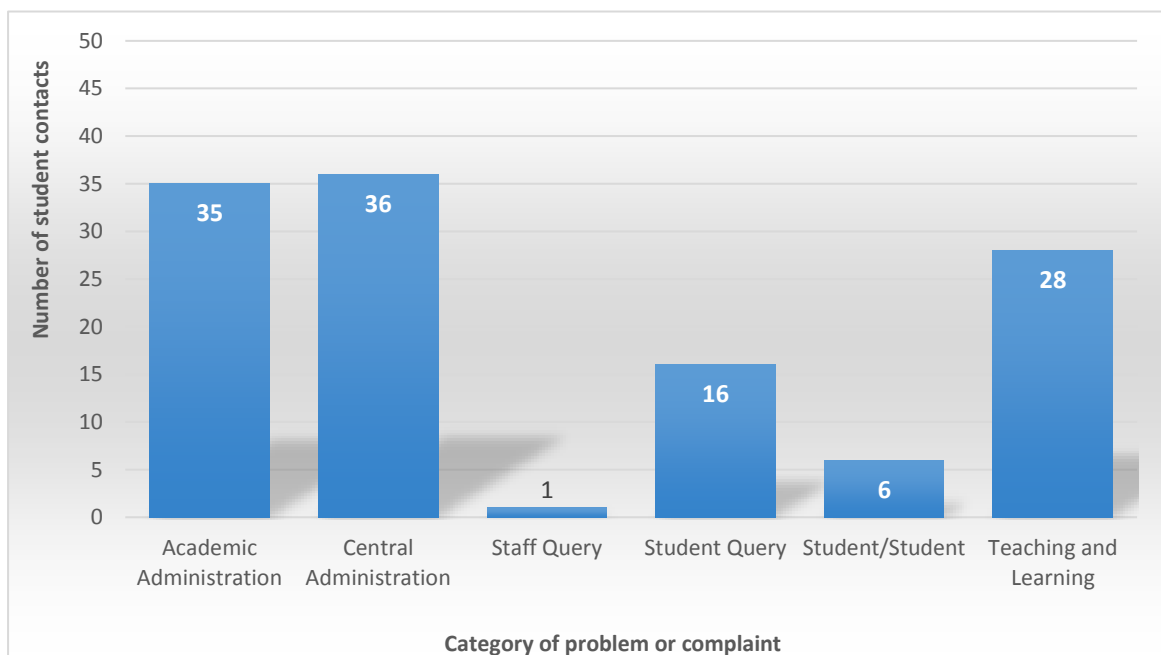


Figure 4: Category of problems or complaints reported

The overall distribution of student complaints within these categories is relatively consistent with previous years, although the number of problems/complaints under Academic Administration (n=35) and Central Administration (n=36) surpass the number of Teaching and Learning (n=28) issues for the first time since 2010.

Ombudsman Advisory Group

The Ombudsman Advisory Group was established to assist with resolving more complicated issues involving multiple stakeholders across the University. The Group also acts as a sounding board for the Student Ombudsman and provides an avenue to seek advice based on members' area of expertise. The Ombudsman consults the Group as needed, and in 2016 the Ombudsman Advisory Group comprised the following staff members:

Dr Geoff Page	Student Ombudsman
Dr Penny Moore	Director: Council Services
Mr Allan Tabor (or nominee)	Director: Student and Academic Services
Ms Ruth Blenkiron (or nominee)	Director: Human Resources
Ms Anne-Marie Parsons	(Previous) Director: Student Engagement Unit
Professor Pat Buckley	Dean: Graduate Studies
Mr Luis Gardezabal	USASA Student Advisory Officer

The UniSA Student Association (USASA) Student Advocates also undertake a tremendously important role in supporting students and, where appropriate, cases are referred to a USASA Student Advocate to provide advice and assist students with such things as appeals, procedures, and attendance at meetings with staff. USASA continued to provide valuable feedback throughout the year, on behalf of our students, which was used to improve the quality of the service provided.

Administrative Matters

The University's Customer Relationship Management System (Sorella) was fully implemented and utilised throughout 2016 to record details of student contacts. The information entered into Sorella was used to prepare this report, and through this process some minor system adjustments were made that will further enhance the efficiency of recording and retrieving information for reporting purposes. Discussions will be held with ISTS in early 2017 to discuss potential adjustments.

The Student Engagement and Equity Portfolio undertook a project in 2016 to establish a more effective process for communicating the complaints procedures at UniSA and to make it easier for students to engage in this process. Following extensive consultation, a new [Student Feedback and Complaints website](#) was developed for students to clearly outline the complaints procedures and include the appropriate contact point for each complaint. The website includes a mechanism for providing feedback on a range of student, administration and facilities services and also lists the support services and resources available to students wishing to make a complaint. The website and the resources embedded within it will be evaluated mid-2017 and the required changes will be incorporated to ensure its effectiveness.

Summary

The total number of student contacts in 2016 equates to 1 contact for approximately every 260 students, with the majority of complaints falling under the Academic Administration and Central Administration categories. All genuine complaints were resolved through consultation and discussion with staff and students. A small number of cases could not be pursued as they related to former students or graduates and were mainly linked to social media interactions.

The focus of the Student Ombudsman has been on obtaining a solution that both the student and university can work with, rather than focussing on and trying to confirm who created the situation. University staff have also strived to accommodate the needs of our diverse student body on academic, administrative and pastoral matters and have maintained positive and productive relationships with the Office of the Student Ombudsman throughout their engagements.

The University has also developed a Student Feedback and Complaints website that consolidates online resources, lists the support services available to them, and summarises the process for providing feedback or making a complaint at UniSA. It is envisaged that the development of this resource will channel students' enquiries and/or concerns to the most appropriate point of contact which may further lead to a reduced number of formal complaints across the University.