



University of
South Australia

2017 Student Ombud's Report

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Introduction

The Student Ombud'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 Student Ombud is effectively the last internal resort for students to approach when all other avenues have been exhausted.

The Office of Student Ombud was first established in 2002 and this is the 16th annual report from this office. Dr Geoff Page held the position of Student Ombud since the beginning of 2014, and retired at the end of 2017. Mr Franco Parrella was appointed as the new Student Ombud for the University on 2 January 2018. Mr Parrella was previously the Associate Director, Employee Relations. He comes to the role with a strong reputation and demonstrated experience in alternative dispute resolution having worked for the Attorney General's Department as both a Conciliator and Manager at the South Australian Equal Opportunity.

Since the beginning of 2018, the Office of Student Ombud is now open five days per week however as most students prefer to make contact via phone or email, the Student Ombud also monitors enquiries received outside office opening hours to ensure service provision to the University community is maintained.

As per University protocols, the Student Ombud 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 Ombud can also play an important role in addressing these matters at an early stage and, where possible, refers these cases to local areas before they become a major issue. The role of the Student Ombud does not advocate for an individual student, but rather it provides a specialist dispute resolution service which aims to resolve a 'presenting' problem while ensuring that University processes are interpreted and implemented fairly and improved where necessary.

The purpose of the Office of Student Ombud is to provide students with an independent and confidential avenue to pursue their enquiries and/or complaints when they have been unable to receive a satisfactory resolution of their issue. The Office of Student Ombud 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 Ombud are requests for help in resolving a situation where a student continues to be dissatisfied when seeking a reasonable or timely response from an area of the University.

The Student Ombud in effect acts as the *Advocate for Fairness* not the individual student nor the University. In that regard, the role has both a responsive and proactive component. That is, to respond to enquiries and manage complaints while also identifying key trends, reporting on any systemic barriers that negatively impact upon its students and making recommendations for improvements. It that regard some have described the role as the University's '*internal moral compass*' as it 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 Ombud's protocol. While this report outlines a summary of activities for the 2017 period, some priority areas for 2018 are also highlighted.

2017 Activities

This section summarises 2017 activities undertaken by the Office of the Student Ombud 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 117 students contacted the Student Ombud's Office in 2017.

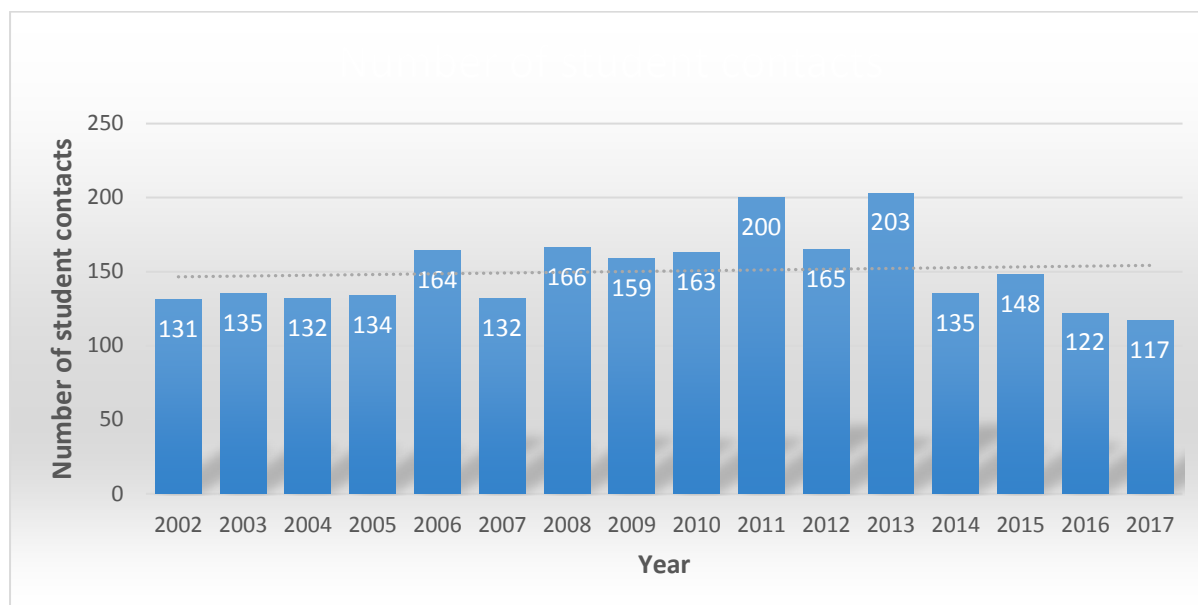


Figure 1: Number of student contacts in 2017

The time taken to resolve and close the reported cases varied, based on the complexity and number of stakeholders involved in a situation. Out of the 117 contacts, 79% (n=93) of enquiries/issues were resolved in less than 30 days; 9% (n=10) within 31-60 days; 1% (n=1) within 61-90 days; 3% (n=4) in more than 90 days; and 8% (n=9) are still 'Open'.

Many students contact the Student Ombud 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; or discuss whether the Student Ombud thinks they have a genuine case to pursue. In 2017, out of 117 closed cases, 49% (n=52) student enquiries were advised and referred in this way. In 50% (n=56) of cases, student concerns were followed up, or pursued, by the Student Ombud to seek clarification and more information to resolve the problem. As at the end of 2017, nine cases remained 'Open' for further investigation by the Student Ombud.

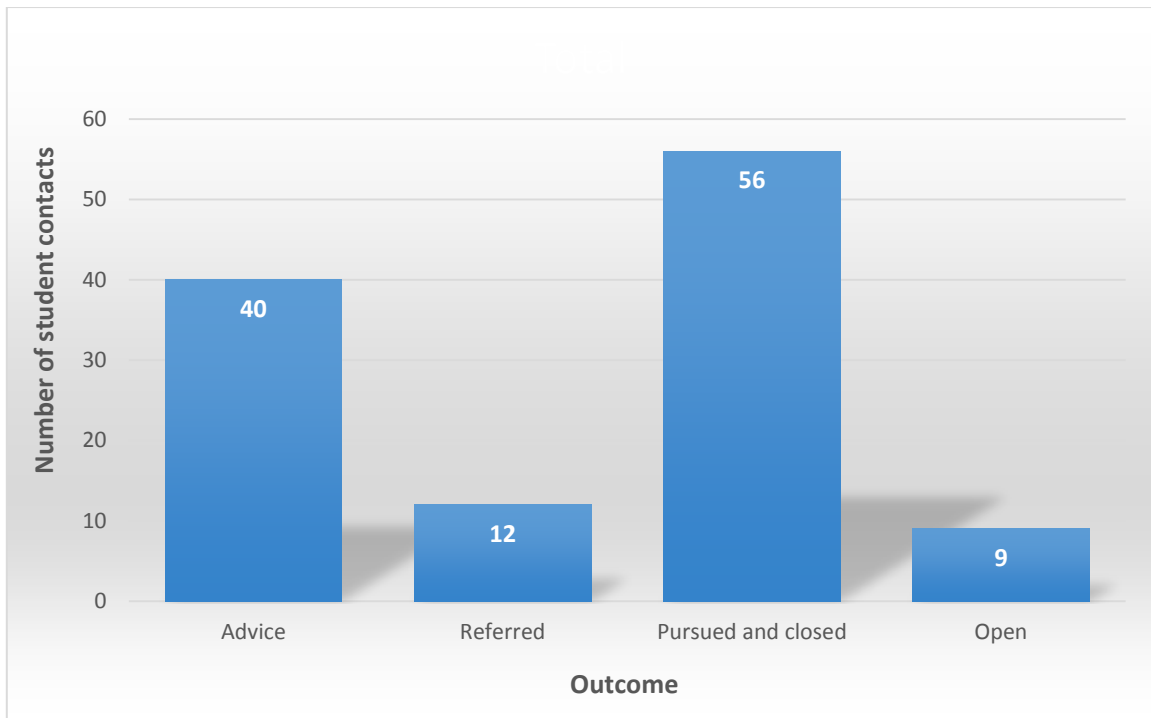


Figure 2: Outcome of student contacts in 2017

Not all the complaints received investigated were assessed as having substance. 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 ‘having 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.

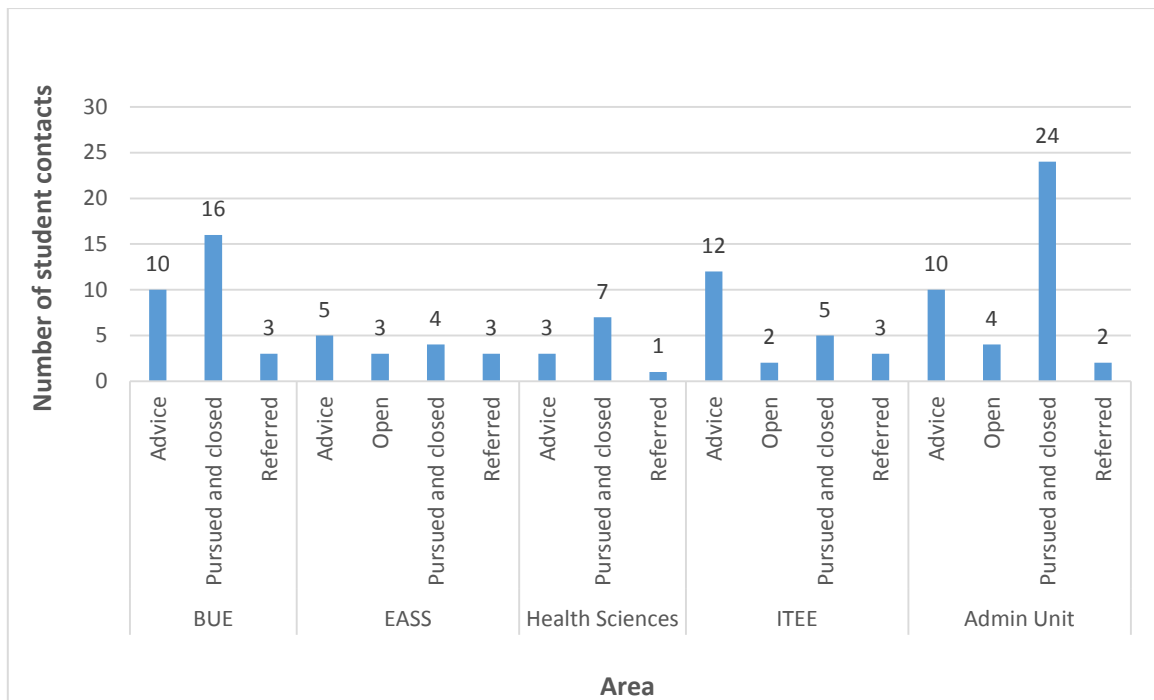


Figure 3: Outcome of student contacts by Unit or Division

(b) Type of students contacting the office

The demographic details of the 117 students, can be broken down as follows:

- 64 undergraduates, 26 postgraduates, 4 research, 9 OUA and 14 'other' enrolment types (including Foundation Studies and partner institution enrolments).
- 90 domestic and 27 international students.
- 65 male students and 52 female students.

(c) Category of problem or complaint

The 117 student cases that were either Advised, pursued (and closed) or Referred by the Student Ombud are broadly grouped into the following categories:

Academic Administration: this category refers to situations when a student's query is about administrative matters relating to their Division or School and comprised 46% (n=54) of total contacts in 2017.

Central Administration: this category refers to situations when a student's query is about matters relating to central administration and comprised 34% (n=40) of total contacts in 2017.

Student Query: this category refers to situations when students contact the Student Ombud to seek general advice on how to navigate a situation and comprised 7% (n=8) of total contacts in 2017.

Student to Student: this category refers to situations when a student's query/complaint relates to another student and comprised 1% (n=1) of total contacts in 2017.

Teaching and Learning: this category refers to situations when a student's query relates to their assessment results and comprised 12% (n=14) of total contacts in 2017.

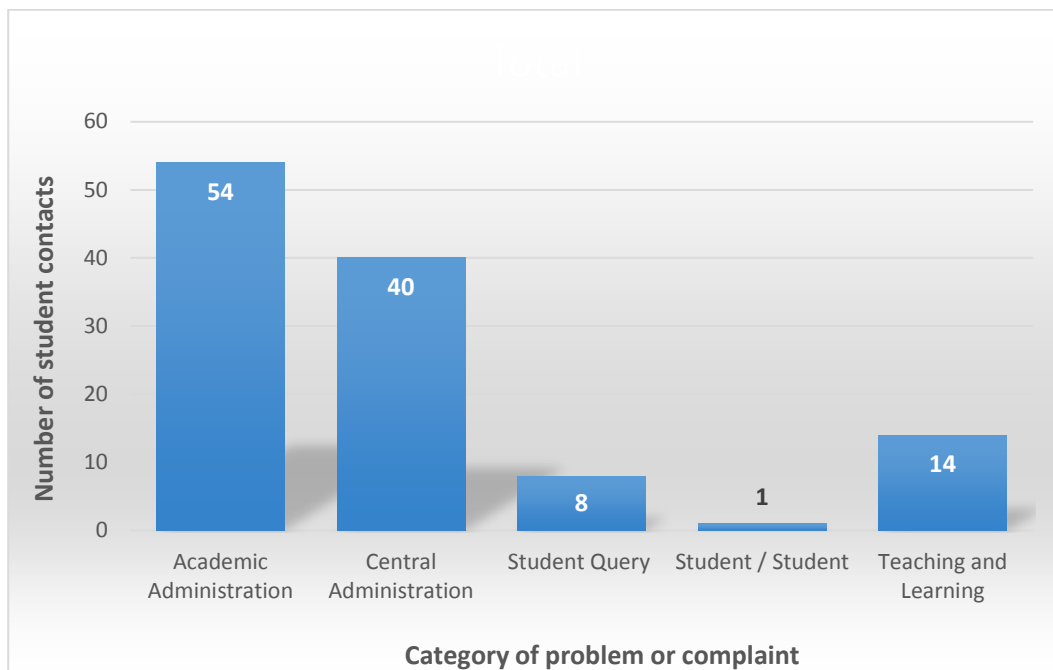


Figure 4: Category of problems or complaints reported

Ombud Advisory Group

The Ombud Advisory Group was established to assist with resolving more complicated issues involving multiple stakeholders across the University. The Group was intended to act as a sounding board for the Student Ombud and to provide an avenue to seek advice based on members' area of expertise. The Advisory Group did not meet in 2017 as the group was convened by the Student Ombud on a needs basis. The Ombud Advisory Group is comprised of the following staff members:

Dr Geoff Page (until 31/12/17)	Student Ombud
Dr Penny Moore	Director: Council Services
Mr Allan Tabor (or nominee)	Director: Student and Academic Services
Ms Jane Booth (or nominee)	Executive Director: People, Talent and Culture
Mr Brendan Hughes	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

Records Management

The University's Customer Relationship Management System (Sorella) has now been used throughout 2016 and 2017 to record details of student contacts. The information entered into Sorella is used to prepare this report. While Sorella does provide a central storage area for Student Ombud's Office matters further system adjustments will be required to enhance the efficiency of recording and retrieving information for reporting purposes. Discussions have already commenced with ISTS to discuss potential adjustments and improvements.

Focus Areas for 2018

The following activities have been identified as key priorities for the new Student Ombud in 2018.

- Working closely with key stakeholders
- Attending to existing and new matters brought to the Student Ombud office attention
- Review and redesign of Student Ombud website
- Improving the *Sorella* reporting system
- Identifying key education and training needs (for students and staff)
- Re-convening the Ombud Advisory Group to review purpose and scope

Summary

The total number of student contacts in 2017 equates to 1 contact for approximately every 265 students, with most of the complaints falling under the Academic Administration and Central Administration categories. All complaints that required intervention 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 nine matters remained active as at the end of 2017.

The focus of the Student Ombud has historically been on obtaining a resolution to a problem that both the student and university can work with, rather than focussing on and trying to lay blame. University staff continue to strive 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 throughout their engagements.