



ADVOCACY

Service Report January - March 2018

Introduction

The Advocacy Service reports quarterly to the University's Advocacy Service Reference Group (ASRG). The Terms of Reference of the ASRG are as follows –

The Advocacy Service Reference Group:

- Monitors and oversees the contract awarded to the current Advocacy Service Contract Holder;
- Facilitates communication between the Contract Holder and the University;
- Provides feedback to the Contract Holder;
- Ensures that feedback provided to the University via quarterly reports is considered and contributes to decision-making and policy development.

This Quarterly Service Report forms part of that reporting, and this report originally came into being as it was commissioned by the ASRG as both an accountability measure, and to ventilate student experiences of University processes within the relevant parts of the University. While the Service's Quarterly Report has always been freely available to any member of the University community on request, and is archived on the Advocacy Service Website, the circulation of the Report appears to have grown well beyond the audience for whom it was originally drafted. While the extended interest at the University is unequivocally welcomed, it does indicate a need for some introductory material in the reports, to provide appropriate context to a new audience.

Accordingly, I make the following observations:

1. The data presented in this report is drawn from the statistics recorded in the Advocacy Service Case management database. It is not drawn from, nor is it correlated with University collected service data, to which we have no access. For this reason, it is important to interpret the data and analysis as pertaining solely to activities of the Advocacy Service. The Report statistics cannot be extrapolated to provide commentary on the performance of Faculties or Schools, unless specifically indicated in the commentary.
2. The 'Trends and Issues' identified in the report are based on both service statistics, and anecdotal observations and case studies. They are provided as insights into the student experience of University processes, or as potential indicators of systemic problems with administrative decision making and procedural fairness. These issues are not intended to reflect the totality of student experience, but rather those areas where the University needs to address potentially serious issues and risks.

The Service can generate drill down or other statistics on its activities, where these may be of interest to the University community, however due to relatively few resources, such requests need to be made with plenty of notice.

Trends and Issues

During this quarter our casework was focused on the usual matters involving appeals to the Academic Board in relation to CUPC decisions, as well as disputes regarding Special Consideration determinations. However notably, there was also a significant increase of matters involving assessment disputes and selection appeals compared to the same period last year. This is discussed further below in the commentary on comparative data. The most significant trend this Quarter is the resurgence of falsified medical documentation. While this issue has never completely gone away, we did see a significant decrease over the last four years. Now it is back with a vengeance.

Desperate Measures 2 – foolishness, fraud and HPR form forgery – the revival

It was late 2013, and early 2014 when we last had cause to note a large number of academic misconduct matters involving predominantly Chinese students facing allegations of presenting fraudulent medical documentation. At the time of the first manifestation of fraudulent documentation, we determined that the majority of falsified medical documents were not created by the students themselves, but rather had been sold to the students via an online Chinese student forum YeeYi-<www.yeeyi.com>. The Service responded to the influx of cases by producing a series of videos in Mandarin and English warning students about the consequences of falsified documents, publishing information and posters in Chinese and distributing the information via student clubs and UMSU International, as well as featuring warnings on our website, and on various social media channels.

Subsequent to, and possibly partly as a result of those efforts in early 2014,¹ the Service noticed an immediate decrease in the presentation of these matters. In 2014 there were eight cases for the whole year. In 2015, there were only five cases. In 2016 we saw an increase to 15 cases. There were eight cases of academic misconduct due to fraudulent medical

¹ No doubt news of the harsh penalties also had an impact.

documentation in 2017.

Here we are again, four years- the average undergraduate lifecycle of a student- after the initial spike we are wondering- has the message finally faded as those students exposed to our message have finished up and moved on?

This quarter alone there have already been nine cases of academic misconduct due to fraudulent medical documentation across five different faculties, and so far a few weeks into the next quarter – we have seen six more – for a total of 15 cases already in 2018. This is equal to the amount of similar cases recorded for the entirety of 2016 and suggests that the Service will see an unprecedented increase in cases of this nature in 2018. Once again we have seen a common pattern, with desperate, often naïve, students offered “help” from people on Chinese student forums, some purporting to be doctors from Burwood HealthCare, and offering medical certificates online. The fake documentation services have been promoted through WeChat in most cases, although in one matter, the student reports being approached in the busy waiting area of a major clinic in the city. The fraudulent HPR forms and Medical Certificates look very similar to each other, and feature strangely childlike doctor’s signatures, usually featuring the “practitioner’s” first name only. The students generally report they had been told the certificates were being provided by a doctor, and were unaware they would be considered fraudulent.

Many of the students who have purchased these falsified documents present as immature and naïve, emotionally vulnerable, and some have documented mental health problems, including anxiety and depression. In all finalised cases of which we are aware, the penalty has been termination of enrolment, which for International students especially, is a penalty that has a deep and ongoing impact. It is also an outcome which will affect the students their families well into the future. A number of the students have expressed suicidal thoughts, and have been subject to emergency counselling assessment and regular welfare checks.

In short, the generally impetuous, obviously reckless, and always desperate decision to buy these documents has unleashed an unmitigated nightmare for these students. While no one would argue that the students are not responsible for their decisions, and that fraud is a serious and aggravated form of misconduct, the Service is concerned that the University does not regard penalising these students as the end of the problem. We are of the view that the university community needs to do as much as possible to find and stem the source of these scams, as well as addressing the reason for the demand for fraudulent medical documents.

Currently UMSU, via its WeChat social media intern, has been monitoring the forums and areas in WeChat for suspicious activity, or any of the usernames of the document scammers which we have recorded from our casework. Of course, this is a needle in the haystack exercise. We have also produced a number of warnings in Chinese, published on our own web and social media channels, as well as in the Melbourne University WeChat space. Currently *Farrago* is writing a feature article on the issue, and we continue to ask the students presenting to the Service to help us find the source of these documents. We have also been in contact with the Practice Managers of the city clinics where some students have reported being approached by scammers offering the fake documentation, to let them know about these reports.

The Service is keen to participate in a broader University response to the issues raised by this phenomenon.

Additionally, it is worth considering the University climate which creates a market for the scammers producing the falsified documents. We are concerned that the demand is increased by a context in which some students have become so desperate they will risk everything, just to get an extension for an assignment, or an opportunity to re-sit their examination. Even the basic economics of the situation make the problem clear. Where an International student will need to pay between \$70 and \$100 to see a doctor and have them complete an HPR form for Special Consideration, the online scammers will produce one for the equivalent of \$20. The market decides.

Advocacy Service Statistics

Comparative data – January - March 2018

This quarter 377 students were provided a service resulting in 1067 contacts. In the same quarter last year, the service saw 306 students which resulted in 759 contacts with the service.

Additionally, the Advocacy website received almost 6000-page views this quarter – over 1500 more than the same time last year. The most popular pages were CUPC info, misconduct and appeals.

Distribution by primary issue

The primary issue is generally identified as the university process to which the student's main concern or problem relates. Data is classified in this way because it provides a standardised and more meaningful breakdown which may be useful for tracking policy trends amongst other things.

January - March 2018

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	169	44.83%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	55	47.01%	Supervision Problems	9	33.33%
Special Consideration	45	11.94%	Special Consideration	17	14.53%	Progress- HDR	8	29.63%
Assessment Dispute	31	8.22%	Assessment Dispute	11	9.40%	Student complaint about uni staff	3	11.11%
Selection Appeal	20	5.31%	Other	5	4.27%	Other	2	7.41%
Student Admin- Enrolment problems	11	2.92%	Vocational Placement Problems	4	3.42%	Not Specified	2	7.41%
Not Specified	9	2.39%	Student Admin- Remission of Fees	3	2.56%	Special Consideration	1	3.70%
Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	9	2.39%	Not Specified	3	2.56%	Selection Appeal	1	3.70%
Other	9	2.39%	Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	2	1.71%	General Misconduct	1	3.70%
Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	9	2.39%	Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	2	1.71%			
Supervision Problems	9	2.39%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	2	1.71%			
Student complaint about uni staff	8	2.12%	Course structure/changes	2	1.71%			
Progress- HDR	8	2.12%	Incorrect Advice	2	1.71%			
Academic Misconduct- Exam	6	1.59%	Selection Appeal	2	1.71%			
General Misconduct	5	1.33%	Student Admin- Enrolment problems	2	1.71%			
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	5	1.33%	Student complaint about uni staff	2	1.71%			
Course structure/changes	5	1.33%	Academic Misconduct- Exam	1	0.85%			
Incorrect Advice	4	1.06%	Academic Misconduct- Collusion	1	0.85%			
Vocational Placement Problems	4	1.06%	General Misconduct	1	0.85%			
Student Admin- Remission of Fees	4	1.06%						
Academic Misconduct- Collusion	3	0.80%						
Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	3	0.80%						
Student Admin- Exchange	1	0.27%						

January – March 2017

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	134	43.51%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	42	48.28%	Supervision Problems	9	45.00%
Special Consideration	69	22.40%	Special Consideration	15	17.24%	Progress- HDR	5	25.00%
Academic Misconduct- Exam	14	4.55%	Academic Misconduct- Exam	4	4.60%	Student complaint about uni staff	1	5.00%
Supervision Problems	12	3.90%	Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	4	4.60%	Student Admin- Enrolment problems	1	5.00%
Assessment Dispute	11	3.57%	Student complaint about uni staff	3	3.45%	Scholarship Issues	1	5.00%
Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	10	3.25%	Admission- Selection Appeal	3	3.45%	Other	1	5.00%
Student Admin- Enrolment problems	9	2.92%	Assessment Dispute	3	3.45%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	1	5.00%
Academic Misconduct- Collusion	8	2.60%	Student Admin- Exchange	2	2.30%	Not Specified	1	5.00%
Student complaint about uni staff	7	2.27%	Student Admin- Enrolment problems	2	2.30%			
Admission- Selection Appeal	5	1.62%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	2	2.30%			
Progress- HDR	5	1.62%	Academic Misconduct- Collusion	2	2.30%			
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	4	1.30%	Quality Teaching	1	1.15%			
Not Specified	3	0.97%	Vocational Placement Problems	1	1.15%			
Student Admin- Remission of Fees	3	0.97%	Student Admin- Remission of Fees	1	1.15%			
Vocational Placement Problems	2	0.65%	Supervision Problems	1	1.15%			
Incorrect Advice	2	0.65%	Incorrect Advice	1	1.15%			
Student Admin- Exchange	2	0.65%						
Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	1	0.32%						
Bullying	1	0.32%						
Equitable Accommodation (SEAP)	1	0.32%						
Other	1	0.32%						
Quality Teaching	1	0.32%						
Scholarship Issues	1	0.32%						
Student Admin- Graduation	1	0.32%						
General Misconduct	1	0.32%						

Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

January – March 2018

Graduate	161	42.71%
Undergraduate	216	57.29%

January – March 2017

Graduate	130	42.48%
Undergraduate	176	57.52%

Distribution by International/Domestic Status

January – March 2018

Domestic	205	54.38%
International	172	45.62%

January – March 2017

Domestic	173	56.54%
International	133	43.46%

Commentary

The proportion of graduate to undergraduate students was 42.71% to 57.29% (compared with 42.48% to 57.52% for the same period last year). This very consistent figure remains roughly equivalent to the current student load data which shows graduate enrolments at around 47% of all students. During this period 54.38% domestic and 45.62% international students presented to the service, last year in the equivalent quarter we saw 56.54% domestic students to 43.46% international students.

The primary presenting issue this quarter was, as usual for this period, course unsatisfactory progress (CUPC). Our data includes all processes related to CUPC, from briefing students at risk to Academic Board Appeals. After CUPC matters, special consideration, assessment disputes and selection appeals were the next most common issues. As observed above, there were noteworthy changes in presentation patterns from the equivalent quarter in 2017. Specifically, while the proportion of CUPC related matters stayed constant at around 45% of all presentations, the proportion of students with special consideration issues was almost half of the proportion in 2017, whereas assessment disputes increased proportionately from around 3.5% of matters in 2017 more than doubling to over 8% this quarter, and selection appeals made up just over 1.5% last year, while this quarter the represented over 5% of presenting issues. To make sense of where the anomaly lies, looking further back to this quarter in 2015, CUPC remains constant at just under 45%, whereas the proportions of the other main issues look more similar to this year's data, and this was similar again in 2016. Accordingly, it appears that last year was the anomalous period, and this quarter's data represents a return to the usual trends. We have no explanation for the increased representation of assessment disputes and selection appeals this quarter, but we will watch it to see who it trends over the year.

Special Consideration matters predominantly involved early assistance with applications, with around a quarter involving internal reviews, and the balance related to formal grievances and Academic Board appeals. The reasons for applications, comprised both physical and mental health problems, and where the applications had been denied due to lateness, insufficient evidence or where no appropriate action was deemed.

Around half of the assessment disputes involved informal assessment reviews with the examiner for reasons including alleged administrative errors, problems with the conduct of assessment, allegations of bias, and problems with vocational placements. There were also a number of presentations related to formal requests to the Head of Department for re-marking on the basis of errors of academic judgement, and procedural grievances regarding conduct of assessment and administrative errors. International students were significantly overrepresented this quarter in assessment disputes, making up almost half of all presentations, another trend we will watch.

Finally, selection appeals concentrated on reviews of selection decisions by the Academic Registrar, and advice regarding potential appeals to the Academic Board on selection decisions.

As usual, the report concentrates on the top four issues for the quarter; however, further breakdowns against other primary issues and against various demographics are available on request.

Course Unsatisfactory Progress Assistance - By Stage of process

STAGE	REASON	Total
First Attendance	Failed same subject >=2	10
	Physical Health	3
	Mental Health	2
	Transition to University	1
	Program/course choice	1
		18
Second Attendance	Failed same subject >=2	5
	Health	3
	Practical/Rounds/Placement	1
	9	
Appeal	Termination of enrolment	25
	Restriction on enrolment	18
	Failed same subject >=2	13
	Physical Health	6
	Transition to University	2
	Family Responsibilities	2
	Mental Health	2
Ombudsman Victoria	Termination of enrolment	1

Course Unsatisfactory Progress – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	109	64.50%
Graduate	60	35.50%

Course Unsatisfactory Progress – by International/Domestic

Domestic	71	42.01%
International	98	57.99%

Special Consideration - By Stage of Process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Application	Mental Health	7
	Physical Health	1
	Late Application	18
	26	
Internal Review	Insufficient grounds	10
	Late Application	5
	15	
Formal Grievance	Deemed Insufficient Grounds	10
	Late Application	6
	Deemed No Appropriate Action	5
	Mental Health	2
	23	
Appeal	Late application	1
Total Special Consideration Matters		65

Special Consideration – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	27	60.00%
Graduate	18	40.00%

Special Consideration – by International/Domestic

Domestic	31	68.89%
International	14	31.11%

Assessment Disputes- By Stage of Process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Informal/assessment review with examiner	Administrative Error	2
	Conduct of Assessment	6
	Practical/Rounds/Placement	2
	Allegation of Examiner Bias	1
		11
Formal request for remark	Conduct of Assessment	2
	Allegation of Examiner Bias	1
		3
Formal Grievance	Conduct of Assessment	8
	Administrative Error	1
		9
Appeal	Conduct of Assessment	1
Total Assessment Dispute Related Matters		25

Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	15	48.39%
Undergraduate	16	51.61%

Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic

Domestic	15	48.39%
International	16	51.61%

Selection Appeals - By Stage of Process

STAGE	REASON	Total
Review Academic Registrar	Not selected (criteria not met)	5
	Not selected (eligibility disputed)	2
		14
Appeal	Not selected (eligibility disputed)	2
		2
Total Selection Matters		16

Selection Appeals – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	6	30.00%
Undergraduate	14	70.00%

Selection Appeals – by International/Domestic

Domestic	18	90.00%
International	2	10.00%

Public Advocacy and University Liaisons

The service is always keen for opportunities to speak to staff at the University to demystify our role and explain the services we provide and how we can work together to further student interests.

Staff in the Advocacy Service liaised with the University Community in the following ways over the period:

23-Feb-18	Advocacy & Legal Photo Booth for UMSU Carnival Day as part of Summer Fest	Summer Fest Carnival Day
01-Mar-18	Attendance at GSA Graduate Welcome Fair	1888 Front Lawn

The next Advocacy Service report will cover the quarter April to June 2018 and will be available in early July 2018.

Phoebe Churches

Manager, Advocacy & Legal

April 2018