



# **ADVOCACY**

Service Report July-September 2017

## 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 the growing 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.
3. 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.

## Programmes and Events this Quarter

### Annual User Survey

The Advocacy Service conducts an annual survey of student users of the service and every two years we conduct a similar survey of key university staff who have direct dealings with the service.

This year both the Staff and student surveys were conducted during the month of August. An invitation to complete the online survey was sent via email to just over 110 students who had indicated they were happy to be contacted for this purpose, and the staff survey was sent to 31 staff who were identified as having close working relationships with the Service. Reports on the findings are attached at **Appendix 1 & 2** to this report.

## Advocacy Service Statistics

### Comparative data – July - September 2017

Casework in this quarter relates primarily to appeals to the Academic Board in relation to both CUPC decisions and Special Consideration determinations. This quarter 601 students were provided a service resulting in 1278 contacts. In the same quarter last year, the service saw 597 students which resulted in 1384 contacts with the service. A large volume of these matters concerned assessment and course unsatisfactory progress as will be seen below. The slight reduction in follow up contacts, despite a modest increase in casework, may be reflective of the new service delivery model implemented in the previous quarter, which seeks to create a more streamlined and efficient service – aimed at resolving issues at the earliest possible point.

The Advocacy website received over 7100 page views this quarter. More than 1300 of these were on the CUPC page. Other popular pages included information on academic misconduct, special consideration and assessment disputes.

## 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.

### July - September 2017

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	325	54.08%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	100	47.39%	Progress- HDR	11	39.29%
Special Consideration	76	12.65%	Special Consideration	18	8.53%	Supervision Problems	5	17.86%
Academic Misconduct- Exam	43	7.15%	Academic Misconduct- Exam	15	7.11%	Other	4	14.29%
Assessment Dispute	34	5.66%	Assessment Dispute	12	5.69%	Intellectual Property Dispute	3	10.71%
Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	19	3.16%	Progress- HDR	9	4.27%	Not Specified	2	7.14%
Other general type complaints not related to policy	14	2.33%	Other	7	3.32%	Student complaint about uni staff	1	3.57%
Not Specified	12	2.00%	Academic Misconduct- Collusion	6	2.84%	Course structure/changes	1	3.57%
Student Admin- Enrolment problems	9	1.50%	Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	6	2.84%			
Student complaint about uni staff	9	1.50%	Not Specified	5	2.37%			
Progress- HDR	9	1.50%	Student Admin- Remission of Fees	4	1.90%			
Academic Misconduct- Collusion	7	1.16%	Student complaint about uni staff	4	1.90%			
Student Admin- Remission of Fees	6	1.00%	Supervision Problems	4	1.90%			
Course structure/changes	6	1.00%	Course structure/changes	4	1.90%			
General Misconduct	5	0.83%	Student Admin- Enrolment problems	3	1.42%			
Supervision Problems	4	0.67%	Intellectual Property Dispute	3	1.42%			
Admission- Selection Appeal	3	0.50%	General Misconduct	2	0.95%			
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	3	0.50%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	2	0.95%			
Incorrect Advice	3	0.50%	Equitable Accommodation (SC Rego)	2	0.95%			
Intellectual Property Dispute	3	0.50%	Scholarship Issues	2	0.95%			
Equitable Accommodation (Special Consideration Registration)	3	0.50%	Cross-institutional enrolment denied	1	0.47%			
Scholarship Issues	2	0.33%	Vocational Placement Problems	1	0.47%			
Cross-institutional enrolment denied	1	0.17%	Incorrect Advice	1	0.47%			
Discrimination	1	0.17%						
Bullying	1	0.17%						
Vocational Placement Problems	1	0.17%						
Sexual Harassment	1	0.17%						
Student Admin- Graduation	1	0.17%						

## July - September 2016

All Students			Graduate Coursework students			RHD students		
Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	315	52.76%	Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee	79	46.20%	Progress- HDR	13	43.33%
Special Consideration	94	15.75%	Special Consideration	32	18.71%	Supervision Problems	7	23.33%
Assessment Dispute	51	8.54%	Assessment Dispute	17	9.94%	Other	3	10.00%
Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	24	4.02%	Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	8	4.68%	Student Admin- Enrolment problems	2	6.67%
Student Admin- Enrolment problems	17	2.85%	Student Admin- Enrolment problems	7	4.09%	Academic Misconduct- Plagiarism	2	6.67%
Progress- HDR	11	1.84%	Vocational Placement Problems	5	2.92%	Student complaint about uni staff	1	3.33%
Academic Misconduct- Collusion	10	1.68%	Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	5	2.92%	General Misconduct	1	3.33%
Other	10	1.68%	Student complaint about uni staff	4	2.34%	Assessment Dispute	1	3.33%
Student complaint about uni staff	9	1.51%	Equitable Accommodation (SEAP)	3	1.75%			
Supervision Problems	8	1.34%	Advance Standing Credit/RPL	2	1.17%			
Academic Misconduct- Falsified docs	6	1.01%	Other	2	1.17%			
Not Specified	6	1.01%	Student Admin- Remission of Fees	2	1.17%			
Admission- Selection Appeal	6	1.01%	Student Admin- Exchange	1	0.58%			
Equitable Accommodation (SEAP)	5	0.84%	Course structure/changes	1	0.58%			
Vocational Placement Problems	5	0.84%	Student Admin- Graduation	1	0.58%			
Course structure/changes	4	0.67%	Supervision Problems	1	0.58%			
Advance Standing Credit/RPL	3	0.50%	Research Ethics	1	0.58%			
General Misconduct	3	0.50%						
Discrimination	2	0.34%						
Student Admin- Graduation	2	0.34%						
Student Admin- Remission of Fees	2	0.34%						
Bullying	1	0.17%						
Research Ethics	1	0.17%						
Student Admin- Exchange	1	0.17%						
Incorrect Advice	1	0.17%						

### Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

July- September 2017

Graduate	211	35.11%
Undergraduate	390	64.89%

July- September 2016

Graduate	214	35.85%
Undergraduate	383	64.15%

## Distribution by International/Domestic Status

July- September 2017

Domestic	380	63.23%
International	221	36.77%

July- September 2016

Domestic	393	65.83%
International	204	34.17%

## Commentary

The proportion of graduate to undergraduate students was 35.11% to 64.89% (compared with 35.85% to 64.15% for the same period last year). This figure has remained static within a couple of percent from quarter to quarter since 2015.

This quarter there were 63.23% domestic and 36.77% international students presenting to the service, this compares closely with the same quarter last year where the breakdown was 65.83% domestic students to 34.17% which continues to align very closely with the proportion of domestic to international students enrolled at the University.

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, Exam related Academic Misconduct, and Assessment disputes were the next most common issues. Special Consideration issues were centred on assistance with applications, internal reviews, grievances and Academic Board appeals, for reasons including 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. Exam Misconduct matters spanned from educative responses to Academic Board Appeals and related to breaches of exam rule, and specifically the possession of unauthorised materials. Assessment Disputes spanned informal reviews with the examiner to formal grievances, and centred on issues with conduct of assessment, allegations of bias, and administrative error. 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
At Risk	Failed same subject >=2	42
		<b>42</b>
First Attendance	Physical Health	76
	Failed same subject >=2	13
	Practical/Rounds/Placement	6
	Mental Health	3
	Family Responsibilities	3
	Language Difficulties	1
	Course/Program Choice	1
	<b>103</b>	
Second Attendance	Failed same subject >=2	18
	Health	12
	Financial Hardship	8
	Language Difficulties	8
	Transition to Uni	1
	<b>47</b>	
Third Attendance	Transition to Uni	2
		2
Fourth Plus Attendance	Language Difficulties	1
		<b>1</b>
Appeal	Termination of enrolment	83
	Restriction on enrolment	47
	<b>130</b>	
Total CUPC related matters		<b>325</b>

Course Unsatisfactory Progress – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	233	73.97%
Graduate	82	26.03%

Course Unsatisfactory Progress – by International/Domestic

Domestic	188	59.68%
International	127	40.32%

**Special Consideration - By Stage of Process**

STAGE	REASON	Total
Application	Mental Health	1
	Physical Health	1
	Late Application	10
		<b>12</b>
Internal Review	Insufficient grounds	11
	Late Application	12
		<b>23</b>
Formal Grievance	Deemed Insufficient Grounds	18
	Late Application	13
	Deemed No Appropriate Action	5
		<b>36</b>
Appeal	Late application	5
Total Special Consideration Matters		<b>76</b>

Special Consideration – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Undergraduate	58	76.32%
Graduate	18	23.68%

Special Consideration – by International/Domestic

Domestic	54	71.05%
International	22	28.95%

**Academic Misconduct – Exam - By Stage of Process**

STAGE	REASON	Total
Informal/Educative Meeting	Breach of Exam Rules	3
		<b>3</b>
Committee Meeting	Breach of Exam Rules	12
	Unauthorised Materials	19
		<b>31</b>
Appeal	Breach of Exam Rules	3
	Unauthorised Materials	6
		<b>9</b>
Total Exam Misconduct Matters		<b>43</b>

Academic Misconduct - Exam – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	28	65.12%
Undergraduate	15	34.88%

Academic Misconduct - Exam – by International/Domestic

Domestic	21	48.84%
International	22	51.16%

**Assessment Disputes - By Stage of Process**

STAGE	REASON	Total
Informal/assessment review with examiner	Administrative Error	8
	Conduct of Assessment	12
		<b>20</b>
Formal request for remark	Allegation of Examiner Bias	1
	Conduct of Assessment	7
		<b>8</b>
Formal Grievance	Administrative Error	1
	Conduct of Assessment	4
		<b>5</b>
Total Exam Assessment Dispute related Matters		<b>34</b>

Assessment Disputes – by Graduate/Undergraduate

Graduate	22	64.71%
Undergraduate	12	35.29%

Assessment Disputes – by International/Domestic

Domestic	24	70.59%
International	10	29.41%

**Liaisons and involvement with the University Community**

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:

09-Aug-17	Meeting with Sam Parkin and Michael Mustica from Academic Progress to discuss round 2 CUPC meetings and Peer Support Program.	Level 1, Stop 1.
11-Aug-17	Presentation at UMSU Intl Elected Incoming OB Induction 2017 (second induction).	Training Room 1, Union House.

The next Advocacy Service report will cover the quarter October to December 2017 and will be available in January 2017.

Phoebe Churches  
**Manager, Advocacy & Legal**  
**November 2017**

**Appendix 1-** UMSU Advocacy Service User Survey 2017  
**Appendix 2-** UMSU Advocacy Service Staff Survey 2017

Encl.../

## Advocacy Service User Survey 2017

### Background

The Advocacy Service User Survey was first established in 2008. After the tender for Advocacy Services at the University was awarded to the UMSU Advocacy Service in 2012, the survey was updated to comply specifically with Schedule 1 of the Agreement, requiring the Service to demonstrate by way of independently verifiable annual survey of users that it has delivered the required services to appropriate standard. Services were to be graded on a 5 point scale with the operator achieving an aggregate score of 3.5 or greater, and not less than 3 for any specific question. Although the Advocacy Service no longer operates subject to this Agreement, we have elected to continue it in its current form to provide longitudinal comparative data.

### Methodology

The survey is distributed as an online survey to students who have had contact with the service over a 12-month period culminating in the commencement of the survey. Students indicate on their contact form when they use the advocacy service whether they are happy to be contacted for this purpose. Only those students who have opted in in this way are invited to complete the survey. Although more than 200 students had opted in, the survey was only successfully sent to 110 students, due to a higher than usual number of those students contacted no longer having their university email address – due to completion or discontinuation of their studies.

To encourage responses, the Service offers the chance to win one of two \$50 Officeworks vouchers or one of 4 double student movie passes for completing the survey.

### Executive Summary

The Survey was open for 4 weeks between 1<sup>st</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017. There were 35 responses received of 110 invitations – a 32% return rate.

Firstly, we note that the survey demonstrates the service has exceeded the benchmarks specified in the Service Agreement. The overall aggregate score was 4.34 and the lowest score for a specific question was 3.58.

22% of respondents had contact with Michelle Almiron, 18% with Donna Markwell, and 15% with both Alanna Smith, and Paul Hornsby; indicating a good representative spread of feedback on the experience of each member of staff.

Just over 42% of respondents had contact with the Service in a face-to-face or phone appointment, and 38% had contact with us via email or via our web form. Only 7% of respondents made contact through our drop-in clinic, newly established this year. These figures represent our continuing efforts to triage our contact with students efficiently, providing advice primarily via email for the very high proportion of students who want feedback on their written submissions for the course unsatisfactory progress committee, and offering specific drop-in times for those who prefer face to face contact.

Overall satisfaction with the service was at 92% in this survey which is the same as last year, and remains significantly higher than the 2014 and 2015 survey averages (82% and 72% respectively).

The lowest aggregate score was in response to the question ‘the advocate made appropriate referrals to other service providers.’ The agreement rate for this question was reasonably good at 75%, however the responses scored a lower than usual aggregate score due to two respondents strongly disagreeing that the referrals were appropriate. Unfortunately, there was no qualitative information which correlated with these responses, so it is hard to know exactly what went so wrong for these respondents. Nevertheless, we will conduct a thorough review of our referral processes to ensure we make appropriate warm referrals wherever possible, and that we do not send service users into a referral roundabout.

In terms of approval ratings, the only question where the approval rate was under 75% was “the outcome of my case was clearly explained by the advocate”. This question attracted a score of only 53% agreement, with a number of neutral responses and two respondents disagreeing, one strongly.

The trend over the previous two years of direct referrals from the University overtaking self-referral from the website has reversed again this year, with more respondents self-referring than being referred by university notice or staff. This is followed by word of mouth and other departments of UMSU. For the first time since the survey’s inception, no respondents had found us via printed materials or advertising, such as brochures and posters.

With respect to the demographics of the respondents, the balance between graduate and undergraduate respondents which remained static at 60% to 40% over four years, is almost exactly 50:50 this year. In 2014 20% of respondents were from other campuses, including Burnley and Southbank. Last year the majority (94%) of respondents were Parkville based. This year all respondents were from the Parkville campus. Almost two thirds of respondents were domestic students.

### Commentary

This year the consistently lower aggregate scores of the same two questions have improved dramatically – that is in relation to the website, and to the persuasiveness of the advocates’ arguments. We hope this is reflective of significant redevelopment of the website, including significantly more self-help materials which students can use to begin to resolve their issues at the earliest point. It is also likely that improvements with respect to persuasiveness of arguments reflects the increasing skill of advocates as the team becomes more experienced.

This year there are two areas indicating attention: the experience of our referral process, and a need to ensure casework outcomes are clearly explained to students. With respect to referral processes- while warm referrals both internal and external to the University are our preferred method, this is not always practical during peak periods of demand. We need to look at how we can ensure that we are referring appropriately and effectively. This could be achieved with better post-case follow up. Several of the qualitative comments



regarding respondent satisfaction suggest that more robust follow-up of students is desirable. It may be that we have come to rely too heavily on self-reporting of outcomes, and need to check in more proactively with service users prior to closing files. The qualitative feedback does not assist us to understand how respondents were dissatisfied with our explanations of casework outcomes, but it may be that better post-resolution follow-up would assist with this area as well. One possible problem may be that some students believe the Service will receive outcomes to their matters directly, and should be contacting them to alert them and explain. This is rarely the case however, as the University generally contacts students directly with outcomes or resolutions, and the Service relies on students to communicate these outcomes to us. As part of our improvements to follow-up processes, we will make sure that we communicate to students clearly that they will generally need to recontact the Service with their outcome, especially if they want clarification about it.

Overall however, the qualitative responses indicate the respondents shared generally positive interactions with the Service. As previously, we have opted to include these responses in full at the end of this report, rather than thematically, as many respondents took the time to provide specific detail. It is also significant that across the whole survey no more than two respondents have indicated disagreement or dissatisfaction. On the qualitative feedback, it appears that service users who were dissatisfied were unhappy because, in one situation there was a lack of follow up to see how the student was travelling after their case was resolved, in another the respondent appeared to be disappointed at the self-help/empowerment focus of the service, and one respondent expressed a preference for face to face assistance, rather than email advice, although the assistance provided nevertheless led to a satisfactory resolution.

Ultimately we are mindful that there is always room for improvement, and we must deal patiently and sensitively with people who are often vulnerable and highly stressed by their situation. We appreciate the opportunity to better understand service users' needs and preferences.

## FINDINGS

### OUR STAFF

1. Which staff of the Advocacy service have you dealt with?		
Michelle Almiron	12	22%
Donna Markwell	10	18%
Alanna Smith	8	15%
Paul Hornsby	8	15%
Phoebe Churches	7	13%
Can't remember	6	10%
Nadia Streistermanis	4	2%

\*Respondents could choose more than one staff member.

2. Please write briefly the issue for which you sought assistance:		
CUPC/Show Cause	17	31%
academic misconduct hearing	13	24%
Special consideration/Equitable adjustments	12	22%
Enrolment problem	3	6%
Supervision	3	6%
Complaint/Grievance	2	4%
Assessment dispute	2	4%
Advanced standing/credit	1	2%
Other administrative	1	2%

### 3. What was your main method of consultation with the advocate?

Face-to-face appointments	23	42%
E-mail/Webform	21	38%
Telephone calls	7	13%
Drop-in Service	4	7%

### 4. Based on your experience dealing with our staff, please tell us your agreement with the statements below:

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	N/A	Aggregate	Agreement %				
						2017	16	15		
Assistance was provided in a reasonable time.	1	0	0	8	22	4	4.61	<b>97</b>	94	88
The advocate was present at the designated time of our appointments.	0	0	0	6	17	12	4.74	<b>100</b>	98	89
The advocate clearly described university processes relating to my issue.	1	1	1	8	16	8	4.37	<b>89</b>	98	91
The advocate took my wishes into account, and guided me on the best strategy to achieve my desired outcome.	0	0	2	7	21	5	4.63	<b>93</b>	96	90
The advocate followed through with what s/he said they would do to assist.	0	1	2	9	16	7	4.43	<b>89</b>	94	90
I was kept informed of any action the advocate took in relation to my circumstance.	0	0	0	8	14	13	4.64	<b>100</b>	89	83
The advocate made or helped make persuasive written submissions in relation to my circumstances.	1	1	0	9	14	10	4.36	<b>92</b>	93	87
The advocate made persuasive arguments in meetings or hearings on my behalf.	0	0	2	4	4	25	4.20	<b>80</b>	86	53
Outcome of my case was clearly explained by the advocate.	1	1	5	2	6	19	3.73	<b>53</b>	91	74
The advocate made appropriate referrals to other service providers.	2	1	0	6	3	23	3.58	<b>75</b>	74	69
I am satisfied overall with the assistance given by the advocate.	1	2	0	8	24	0	4.49	<b>91</b>	96	88

THE ADVOCACY SERVICE

1. How did you first find out about the Advocacy Service?*		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Website	37%	13
Referral from a University Student Service / Stop 1	26%	9
Referral from academic staff	26%	9
Referral from someone who has used the service	6%	2
Referral from another Student Union department	3%	2
Other	3%	1

\*Respondents could choose more than one.

2. Based on your experience dealing with our advocate(s), please tell us your agreement with the statements below:										
Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Neither	Strongly agree	N/A	Aggregate	Agreement %				
						2017 16 15				
The Advocacy Service staff were helpful when I made my initial enquiry.	0	0	1	10	15	9	4.54	<b>96</b>	93	90
I found information on the Advocacy Service website useful.	0	0	1	14	5	15	4.20	<b>95</b>	92	79

**A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF**

1. Please indicate the type of degree you were undertaking when the above issue occurred:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Undergraduate	49%	17
Graduate coursework	34%	12
PhD	14%	5
Graduate research	3%	1

2. Which campus were you mostly studying in when the above issue occurred?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Parkville	100%	35

### 3. Were you enrolled as an international student when the above issue occurred?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	40%	14
No	60%	21

## Comments

### Please tell us the reason why you are satisfied/not satisfied with the assistance you received:

- Because I am still expecting the results in my case. The case is still pending.
- I was having concerns about a staff member not meeting his obligations as a thesis supervisor. She gave unhelpful advice - she advised I needed to go to him and ask more from him. This was misguided advice - it shouldn't be my responsibility to do this. I was really surprised that she told me I had to ask this for myself, when a service like this should be here to do these things for students.
- Michelle was with me throughout the period that I needed her assistance, guidance and advice and she's really a nice person. Friendly and helpful. I really appreciate her advice in order to solve the problem that I had to encounter.
- Help was timely delivered.
- Email respond was reasonable efficient, and giving appropriate guide to my concern or inquiry.
- Really helpful and understanding on my circumstance.
- Encouraging, supportive and I felt I had an ally and someone who had my back whilst dealing with the university bureaucracy.
- The advocate was supportive, encouraging and provided relevant advice and information during a challenging and stressful time. It was great to have someone on my side enabling me to state my case.
- The advocate was completely unhelpful and appeared to have little to no understanding of what I was trying to communicate or the university policies/procedures relating to my issue.
- She tried her best to explain my circumstances and help me to convince the board. It was much better than if I had to do it alone.
- Michelle helped me in many ways. She puts her best efforts to get the desirable outcome. Also - I directly contacted her many times to seek more advice and she was very kind and supportive.
- Overall I got a response in a reasonable time and I got the information I needed in the response. Thanks for providing the information so that there is no unexpected surprise during the whole process.
- I found the assistance provided reassuring, and was given good advice to help prepare for the meeting.
- Dealing with complex and ambiguous set of University policies on intellectual property rights of students. I am very grateful to the student union in providing this sort of support and for the thoughtful and well-informed approach to the issue. I believe many future students will also benefit from this developing area of expertise.
- Michelle was very supportive and is probably the single reason I am still plugging away at this ridiculous PhD in this MADHOUSE University.
- The assistance was in a timely matter and personalised.
- The corrections made were detailed and professional.
- Staff were very friendly, empathetic and resourceful towards my case. My outcome was successful thanks to their assistance.
- I am very happy that on top of getting the guidance I so desperately needed during this difficult time, I was able to find a friend in Donna, someone I could trust to help me through the long and weary process.
- Advocate was very professional, helpful and able to resolve the problem exceptionally fast.
- I had a connection with Michelle, and she was fantastic. She stated what I had done and how this was an issue, but she was also upfront and real with the outcomes so I could prepare myself for all situations. I felt somewhat comfortable doing all that I could before I had my misconduct hearing.
- I am very happy with the assistance provided by Donna. I was in a strange circumstance, with lots of medical evidence backing my claim, however no one in my department or in the special considerations department was willing to listen. Thanks to Donna, I presented this information in a coherent manner and gain a supplemental examination which I have passed. As a result, my visa was not cancelled, and I was able to continue with my course.

**If you have any general comments about or suggestions for the advocate, please write them here:**

- All the best – you guys are great!
- Thank you for all the help.
- Very disappointing experience.
- My only comment is I didn't receive a follow up to ask about the outcome of my case. However I understand it may have been a busy time and this wouldn't be a priority.
- I understand how busy the advocate team was especially during the winter break but maybe a follow-up phone call or a check in with an impromptu phone call or email would have been a nice touch. I was extremely stressed, nervous and an emotional wreck and although Michelle was there supporting me, maybe having another communication angle to check in with people would be greatly appreciated.
- The advice I was given was concise and clear via email. However I would have liked to have the option of a further meeting so I could explain my personal situation and get even more advice.
- The drop in service was fast and very efficient. It was great to get such expert advice so easily.
- I had to email a lot of times as my case unfolded. I couldn't believe how quick and responsive the replies were. I felt supported, and like someone out there really cared.
- I do understand that it's difficult to see every student a lot of times, or when they just come by and the general advice I was emailed was very helpful in guiding my advice.
- I think this service is amazing how it can help so many students but still feel personal and really effect a good outcome. When I drop in I see so many student waiting but they all get some help and seem very happy.

## Student Union Advocacy Service Evaluation 2017 (STAFF)

### Background

This survey is conducted by the Service every two years by way of an online invitation based instrument. Key stakeholders in the University Community are identified by their position and their contact or likely contact with the Advocacy Service. The survey provides a snapshot of the way the Service at large and its staff individually, are perceived by staff at the University.

This year has presented a challenge as many staff who have had long term relationships with the Service are no longer in those roles or have moved to new positions within the University.

Results may disclose service or skill gaps or areas which require further relationship building. In many cases the results are evidence that the collegial, procedure-centric focus adopted by the Advocacy Service in recent years is operating effectively within the University community.

### Executive Summary

The Survey was open for one month between 1<sup>st</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017. There were 18 responses of 31 invitations – a 57% response rate, which is a good sample according to research benchmarking, an average return rate for external email based surveys of this type is between 10-15%.<sup>1</sup>

There was a relatively even spread of contact with staff. The majority of respondents had primary contact with Donna Markwell (25%). 23% of respondents had contact with Phoebe Churches, and 20% with Paul Hornsby. As these are the three longest serving staff in the Service, this is not unexpected.

The circumstances under which respondents had contact with the Advocacy Service included situations where:

- the respondent was on a committee where the advocate accompanied and made arguments on behalf of a student;
- the advocate communicated with the respondent in relation to a case;
- the respondent was an observer in a case involving the advocate; the respondent
- supplied administrative information about a case to the advocate;
- the respondent referred a case to the advocate (or vice versa) and liaised with them on its progress; or

In the course of:

- informally resolving a grievance or dispute;
- a Faculty or School based misconduct committee hearing; or
- a Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee meeting.

The responses to this survey were overwhelmingly positive.

83% of respondents strongly agreed that the advocate displayed a good grasp of statutes and regulations or policies and procedures in their arguments on behalf of a student. Recommendations made by the advocate were regarded as accurate by 100% of the respondents to whom it applied, and 94% of respondents agreed that e-mails and phone messages were promptly returned by the advocate they had dealings with – with one respondent clearly disappointed in this area.

In answer to the question 'overall, I am assured by the Advocacy Service's ability to provide effective advocacy to students', 11% of respondents agreed and 89% strongly agreed – with an aggregate score of 4.89.

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<sup>1</sup> Data Analysis Australia.

## FINDINGS - OUR STAFF

### 1. Which staff of the Advocacy service have you dealt with?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Donna Markwell	25%	11
Phoebe Churches	23%	10
Paul Hornsby	20%	9
Nadia Streistermanis	14%	6
Michelle Almiron	7%	3
Alanna Smith	7%	3
Don't remember	5%	2

\*Respondents could select more than one staff member.

### 2. In which circumstance(s) have you worked with our staff?\*

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Directly opposite in a case (e.g. advocate accompanied and made arguments on behalf of a student and I was on the committee).	16%	6
I referred a case to the advocate (or vice versa) and liaised with them on its progress.	14%	5
In the context of a Course Unsatisfactory Progress Committee meeting.	14%	5
In the course of informally resolving a grievance or dispute.	14%	5
I referred a case to the advocate (or vice versa) and liaised with them on its progress.	11%	4
I supplied administrative information about a case to the advocate.	11%	4
In the context of a Faculty or School based misconduct committee hearing.	8%	3
Indirectly in a case (e.g. advocate communicated with me in relation to a case but did not accompany the student at the hearing).	5%	2
Committee representation.	3%	1
I supplied administrative information about a case to the advocate.	3%	1
Indirectly in a case (e.g. advocate communicated with me in relation to a case but did not accompany the student at the hearing).	3%	1

\*Respondents could select more than one option.

**3. Based on your experience dealing with our advocate(s), please tell us your agreement with the statements below:**

Answer Options	Strongly disagree		Neither		Strongly agree	N/A	Aggregate	Response Count
The advocate(s) displayed a good grasp of statutes and regulations or policies and procedures in their arguments on behalf of a student.	0	0	0	3	12	3	4.80	18
Recommendations given by the advocate(s) to me or students I deal with have been accurate.	0	0	0	6	10	2	4.63	18
My e-mails and phone messages were promptly returned by the advocate(s).	1	0	0	3	10	4	4.77	18
The advocate(s) appropriately referred cases to me or my service.	0	0	0	2	7	9	4.78	18
The advocate(s) can be relied on to follow through with whatever action they said they would do to assist.	0	0	0	6	10	2	4.63	18
Overall, I am assured by the Advocacy Service's ability to provide effective advocacy to students.	0	0	0	2	16	0	4.89	18

**4. Please provide any general comment or suggestion you have for the advocate(s) and/or the Advocacy Service**

- From the feedback we hear from students, it seems the demand for the service has been overwhelming, and more resources would be beneficial so Advocacy can continue doing good work.
- I have only really dealt with Nadia, who has been absolutely wonderful. Heaps of expertise, totally knows the ropes and fantastic manner/style. But all of Advocacy generally are a pleasure to work with.
- I deeply respect the work of the Student Union Advocacy Service and their ongoing commitment to empowering students to manage and resolve their own circumstances. Their advice and knowledge of University policy is very accurate and up-to-date, and the staff display a unique combination of collegiality, high interpersonal skill and willingness to engage in frank, open conversation for the benefit of all. You should all be congratulated on your efforts, and I look forward to working with you throughout 2017 and beyond.
- My interactions with all of the staff in Advocacy has always been very positive, helpful, supportive and I feel that me and my team have a very good working relationship with everyone in Advocacy.
- I have found the Advocacy Service is very professional, and while being good advocates to the students, they are also realistic in the ensuring that students are well informed so as to manage their expectations.
- I have found working with the Advocacy Service to be a very positive experience ( I was President of Academic Board). Not only are they knowledgeable, but they also have a strong sense of justice which is greatly appreciated by the academics hearing the appeals. I am also always confident that they have thoroughly done their homework.
- The Quarterly reports are very insightful and I hope that student interests can be taken more into account as a result. More power to independent voices.
- Have always been very helpful and efficient when I call.



5. Which of these best describes your work area in the University?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Academic / Student services	50%	11
Administration of Academic Board Appeals	14%	3
Administration of university governance committees	14%	3
Academic chair/member of misconduct and CUPC committees	5%	1
Faculty management or administration	5%	1
General Information Services	5%	1
Student Association	5%	1
Academic Board Appeal Committee Faculty academic representative	5%	1