



ADVOCACY

Service Report May - August 2025



Introduction

The Advocacy Service Report was originally commissioned by the University's *Advocacy Service Reference Group* – a group set up to oversee the service contract via which the Service was funded between 2012 and 2017. The Service Report was originally an accountability measure under the funding contract, but it also served to ventilate student experiences of various processes within the relevant parts of the University. Over time, the circulation of the Report grew to include a cross section of the University Community, establishing strong communication channels for feedback and issues management between relevant stakeholders. We hope to continue to expand and consolidate these channels and invite interested University staff to contact the Service directly to collaborate on responses to the issues identified in the Report.

Data and 'Anecdota'

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.

The 'Trends and Issues' identified in the report are based on primarily 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.

A quick note on what the various process categories include.

Misconduct	Covers breaches of university rules, regulations and policies, including academic Integrity breaches (e.g., plagiarism, collusion, Gen AI misuse) and general misconduct (e.g., harassment and sexual misconduct, disruptive behaviour, and protest activities).
Special Consideration	a request made by a student for adjustments to assessment or academic requirements due to short-term, serious, and unforeseen circumstances that impact their ability to complete or perform in assessments. Additionally, we currently include ongoing adjustments under this category as the casework frequently overlaps.
"Show Cause / Course Academic Progress (CAPC)	Involves students who are not meeting academic progress requirements and must "Show cause" why they should not be excluded by submitting a formal explanation and supporting evidence.
Assessment and Grades	Concerns related to marking errors, problems with the conduct of assessment, feedback on assessment, and requests for re-marking or review of grades.
Remission of Fees	Requests to have course fees refunded or waived primarily due to withdrawal after census date due to illness or hardship. Increasingly this area overlaps with special consideration as the Student Equity and Disability Services (SEDS) seek to remove assessment of late withdrawal (after final date to withdraw) requests from their responsibility and pass it to the Fees Team.
Student Support Services	Includes issues or feedback about Counselling and Psychological Support Services, the University health Service, SEDS, Fees, Academic Skills Unit, and Stop 1.
The standard of services by the university	Covers general service quality, such as administrative support from IT services, LMS, Library access, and other campus facilities.
The Quality of Teaching	Concerns about effectiveness of teaching and learning, engagement and accessibility of academic staff, subject delivery methods, and the use of learning technologies.
RHD Supervision	Relates to Research Higher Degree (RHD) students and includes supervisor availability and support, access to resources or labs, supervisor feedback frequency and quality, and research guidance.
Advanced Standing or credit	Involves recognition of prior learning, transfer credits from other institutions, and disputes over credit allocation.
Selection Appeal	Used when a student believes they were unfairly denied admission or selection into a course or program.
RHD Progress	RHD students facing university concerns about milestone reviews, delays in research or thesis progress.
Vocational Placement problems	Issues with internship or placement arrangements.
Course structure or changes	Concerns about changes to course content or delivery, prerequisite changes, and course availability.
Scholarship issues	Includes delays in payment, eligibility disputes, and revocations of scholarships.
Student Complaint about another student	Covers primarily interpersonal issues such as bullying or harassment, or other breaches of university policy by students

Trends and Issues

Further Special Consideration: Policy Interpretation and Implementation

During this reporting period, the Advocacy Service has continued to grapple with the University's interpretation and application of the *Assessment and Results Policy* provisions on further special consideration (clauses 4.144 and 4.145, formerly 4.142 and 4.143). In particular, ongoing uncertainty surrounds whether the current policy allows for what is often described as "special on special" assessment — that is, a further attempt at an assessment task where special consideration has already been granted once.

The Advocacy Service's interpretation of the policy is that it does not permit a further assessment attempt. The policy provides that applications "relating to a particular assessment task for which special consideration has already been granted are only considered in exceptional circumstances and, in those cases, only once." Where a student is unable to complete the originally granted special assessment, the policy allows for *either* late withdrawal from the subject or for the original mark to stand. On its face, this suggests that only one special assessment is permitted, with late withdrawal being the prescribed outcome where that assessment is also affected by exceptional circumstances and/or cannot be completed.

Despite wording that is arguably unambiguous, the Advocacy Service has observed considerable inconsistencies in how these provisions are interpreted and applied across the central Special Considerations Team, Faculties, and within the Student Appeals area. In some cases, advice provided by Academic Services has appeared to suggest a more flexible approach, including the possibility of further assessment attempts in exceptional circumstances. As a result, students may receive different outcomes depending on which Faculty or team considers their application — or even which individual staff member assesses it. For students navigating an already stressful process, this unpredictability can make the system feel arbitrary and unfair.

A recent appeal illustrates how this inconsistency plays out in practice. A student sought approval for a second special exam rather than accepting the late withdrawal option they had been offered. They argued that withdrawal would significantly disrupt their study plan and course progression, and that these impacts constituted exceptional circumstances warranting a discretionary outcome. A request that would be consistent with a number of outcomes we have seen over recent times.

However, the appeal was ultimately disallowed. The Student Appeals team determined that "the outcome of late subject withdrawal accords with the provisions outlined in section 4.143(a)" of the Policy. In effect, this decision confirmed that the policy permits only one special exam, with late withdrawal being the appropriate outcome where a student cannot complete that assessment. This outcome aligns with the Advocacy Service's interpretation of the policy but clearly lies in conflict with alternative advice provided elsewhere within the University.

The Advocacy Service absolutely supports a framework that allows for further assessment attempts in exceptional circumstances. However, we maintain that the current policy clearly does not provide for this, a position reinforced by the appeal outcome outlined above. More broadly, we note that rigid application of policy should never fetter administrative discretion; and regardless of policy, there will always be cases where individual circumstances justify outcomes outside standard provisions. The present difficulty appears to arise not from the exercise of discretion itself, but from genuine uncertainty and inconsistency about what the policy is intended to allow.

Recommendations

The University should urgently:

1. Clarify the policy interpretation in writing to all relevant stakeholders, including the Special Consideration team, Faculty student administration staff, and the Student Appeals team;
2. Update published student-facing advice and information to accurately reflect this interpretation; and
3. Provide guidance on assessing "exceptional circumstances" in these cases to support consistent decision-making.

Academic Misconduct Penalties: Unworkable Outcomes and Unintended Consequences

A troubling case this period has highlighted systemic issues in the coordination between Faculty misconduct processes, subject enrolment systems, and the practical implementation of penalties; with particularly onerous consequences for international students.

A student was found to have breached exam rules across three subjects and received a penalty requiring them to be re-enrolled in those subjects with a mark of zero for the exams. On face value, this is a proportionate and commonly applied penalty. However, the implementation of this penalty created an impossible situation for the student.

Despite the Faculty processing the re-enrolment, two of the three subject coordinators advised the student it was too late to join their classes. By Week 5 of semester, group work had progressed and multiple assessments had already been submitted. The coordinators recommended the student withdraw from both subjects.

The student was thus left in a position where they had been penalised with mandatory re-enrolment in subjects they were not permitted to actually attend.

The Advocacy Service had previously raised concerns about the conduct of this student's misconduct hearing. The same Faculty Academic Integrity Officer was scheduled to hear all three allegations, raising questions about compliance with sections 5.46, 5.61(e) and 5.62(b) of the Student Academic Integrity Policy, which require decision-makers to be impartial and not take into account prior findings when determining whether or not to uphold an allegation.

Additionally, the student was encouraged to waive the 10-business-day notice period for their hearing, with the Faculty suggesting this would allow for enrolment adjustments pending the outcome. However, the last date to self-enrol in subjects had in fact already passed, meaning even an expedited hearing could not have enabled the student to add new subjects. The effect was that the student proceeded to a hearing without adequate time to prepare a written submission, based on an erroneous rationale.

For this international student, the consequences were onerous. Their student visa was due to expire within days of the hearing, and their Certificate of Enrolment was tied to completing their degree by semester's end. When the penalty could not be practically implemented, the student was forced to apply for a Reduced Study Load, extend their degree by an additional semester, and obtain a new CoE and visa.

This outcome — an additional semester of study, with associated costs and visa complications — was not the penalty imposed by the Faculty. It was an unintended consequence of a penalty that could not be implemented as designed.

This case illustrates several systemic concerns:

1. **Disconnect between misconduct outcomes and academic operations:** Faculties appear to be issuing re-enrolment penalties without confirming that re-enrolment is actually viable. Subject coordinators are not consulted before penalties requiring late-semester entry are imposed.
2. **Timing of hearings and enrolment deadlines:** Students may be pressured to expedite hearings based on enrolment considerations that are no longer relevant, compromising their ability to adequately prepare and respond to allegations.
3. **Failure to consider cumulative impact:** When determining penalties, decision-makers are not adequately considering the practical consequences for students - particularly international students whose visa status is directly tied to their enrolment and course progression.
4. **Lack of coordination across university functions:** In this case, the faculty misconduct team, subject coordinators, Stop 1, and Academic Support Office each provided advice within their respective domains, but no single point of coordination existed to resolve the incompatible outcomes.

Recommendations

The Advocacy Service recommends that:

1. Before imposing penalties requiring re-enrolment, Faculties must confirm with relevant subject coordinators that the student can practically participate in the subject at the point in semester when the penalty takes effect;
2. Where re-enrolment penalties cannot be implemented as intended, Faculties proactively work with students to identify alternative outcomes rather than leaving students to navigate the consequences alone;
3. For international students, visa and enrolment implications should be explicitly considered as part of the penalty determination process; and
4. Students should not be encouraged to waive procedural timeframes unless there is a genuine and current benefit to doing so.

Major Increase in Service Demand

The Service has experienced significant pressure due increased demand in the second half year so far. The following statistics illustrate the full extent of this increase:

January to June		July to August	
Total cases	514	Total cases	491
Graduate Coursework	51%	Graduate Coursework	36%
RHD	5%	RHD	3%
Undergraduate	44%	Undergraduate	61%
Referred from the University	27%	Referred from the University	28%

<p>Main issues: CAPC, Assessment Disputes, Fee Remission, Special Consideration, Academic Misconduct and General Misconduct</p>	<p>Main issues: Academic Misconduct, General misconduct, CAPC, Special Consideration and Fee Remission</p>
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Commentary:

In the first two months (July-August) the Service has had almost as many contacts as we did in the *first full six months* of the year – with a large upswing in undergraduate students. Over a quarter of referrals to the Service were from the University, including Stop 1.

Given the increase, the service is reviewing our service deliver model for any further possible efficiencies to try to ensure we remain responsive and able to assist students as quickly as possible. However, we hope that UMSU will receive a greater proportion of funding in the next SSAF round so we can increase resources in the service to meet the increasing demand.

Bouquets and brickbats

Our Service reports generally contain a fair bit of critique around university interactions with students, although we do try to make a note of positives and successful collaborations that bring fairer outcomes when they occur. In this context, it seems only reasonable to include feedback the Advocacy Service receives from our service users. Students are sent a link to our exit survey at the completion of our casework service, and many take the opportunity to provide feedback. The results from this reporting period are below. Notably, of those who completed the exit survey, over 80% were referred by the University.

Overall, how satisfied were you with the service you received?

Very Satisfied	86%
Satisfied	14%

Would you use our service in the future?

Definitely	86%
Probably	14%

How satisfied were you with how quickly we responded?

Very Satisfied	71%
Satisfied	29%

How satisfied were you with our knowledge and expertise

Very Satisfied	100%
-	-

How satisfied were you with accessibility and inclusiveness

Very Satisfied	100%
-	-

How satisfied were you with how well we explained things

Very Satisfied	100%
-	-

How satisfied were you with our sensitivity and understanding

Very Satisfied	100%
-	-

Would you recommend our service to other students?

Definitely	100%
-	-

How did you hear about our service?

A notice or email from the university	27%
University Staff member	27%
Stop 1	27%
Word of Mouth	13%
Social media	7%

Any specific ideas on how we could improve our service?

- Eloise was outstanding. Her feedback was clear, specific, and actionable, and she handled a time-sensitive case with empathy and precision.
- No suggestions as my Advocate was outstanding.
- Really perfect!
- Ms. Alanna Smith is a diligent, compassionate, and thoughtful advocate who has provided full support to my case. She managed to consider all possible outcomes for students in need of help and was able to respond to them with absolute details. During the hearing, it was rather considerate and brave of her to urge the academic board to consider the trauma I have been enduring due to the incorrect advice given by the University. The overall experience of cooperating with her was undoubtedly brilliant. She has been a game-changer.

Advocacy Service Statistics

May - August 2025

Primary Issue

Special Consideration	142	22.90%
Academic Misconduct	122	19.68%
Assessment Dispute	80	12.90%
Show Cause / Course Academic Progress (CAPC)	63	10.16%
Fee Remission	53	8.55%
Enrolment	22	3.55%
Complaint	21	3.39%
Grievance	16	2.58%
Placement Problems	15	2.42%
General Misconduct	11	1.77%
Selection Dispute	11	1.77%
Late Withdrawal	9	1.45%
Supervision	9	1.45%
Credit/Advanced Standing	7	1.13%
Graduation	5	0.81%
SEDS- Equitable Adjustments	5	0.81%
Exchange	5	0.81%
Scholarship	5	0.81%
Disallowed Appeal	3	0.48%
NSO Referral	3	0.48%
Fitness To Practice/Study	3	0.48%
Readmission	3	0.48%
Progress RHD	3	0.48%
Incorrect Advice	2	0.32%
Visa Issues	1	0.16%
Leave of Absence	1	0.16%

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Primary Issue

Misconduct	236	37.88%
Special Consideration	148	23.76%
Assessment and Grades	107	17.17%
Show Cause / Course Academic Progress (CAPC)	76	12.20%
The standard of services received	16	2.57%
Student Support Services	14	2.25%
The Quality of Teaching	11	1.77%
The Nature of Teaching or Assessment	9	1.44%
RHD Supervision	4	0.64%
Computer and IT Infrastructure	2	0.32%

May - August 2025

Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

Undergraduate	338	54.52%
Graduate Coursework	271	43.71%
RHD	11	1.77%

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Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

Undergraduate	336	54.11%
Graduate Coursework	254	40.90%
RHD	20	3.22%
Not Applicable	11	1.77%

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Primary issue by study type

Process	Graduate Coursework	RHD	Undergraduate
Placement Problems	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Graduation	80.00%	0.00%	20.00%
Fitness To Practice/Study	75.00%	0.00%	25.00%
Complaint	70.00%	0.00%	30.00%
Grievance	56.67%	3.33%	40.00%
Enrolment	52.17%	0.00%	47.83%
Late Withdrawal	50.00%	0.00%	50.00%
NSO Referral	50.00%	0.00%	50.00%
Incorrect Advice	50.00%	0.00%	50.00%
Academic Misconduct	44.94%	0.00%	55.06%
Special Consideration	43.04%	0.00%	56.96%
Credit/Advanced Standing	42.86%	0.00%	57.14%
Exchange	40.00%	0.00%	60.00%
Scholarship	40.00%	0.00%	60.00%
Fee Remission	37.93%	0.00%	62.07%
SEDS- Equitable Adjustments	33.33%	0.00%	66.67%
Supervision	30.00%	60.00%	10.00%
Show Cause / Academic Progress	28.17%	5.63%	66.20%
Selection Dispute	20.00%	0.00%	80.00%
Disallowed Appeal	20.00%	0.00%	80.00%
General Misconduct	18.18%	0.00%	81.82%
Readmission	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Visa Issues	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Leave of Absence	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Progress RHD	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%

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Primary issue by study type

Process	Graduate Coursework	RHD	Undergraduate
Misconduct	39.41%	0.00%	60.59%
Special Consideration	37.84%	6.08%	56.08%
Assessment and Grades	43.93%	0.93%	55.14%
Show Cause / Course Academic Progress (CAPC)	30.26%	0.00%	69.74%
The standard of services received	37.50%	6.25%	56.25%
Student Support Services	50.00%	0.00%	50.00%
The Quality of Teaching	63.64%	0.00%	36.36%
The Nature of Teaching or Assessment	55.56%	0.00%	44.44%
RHD Supervision	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Computer and IT Infrastructure	50.00%	0.00%	50.00%

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Distribution by International/Domestic Status

Domestic	277	44.68%
International	332	53.55%
Not Specified	11	1.77%

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Distribution by International/Domestic Status

Domestic	291	46.71%
International	312	50.08%
Not Specified	20	3.21%

Students Identifying as Living with a Disability

Anxiety	15	2.42%
ADHD	12	1.94%
Autism/ASD	11	1.77%
Depression	11	1.77%

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Primary issue by international or domestic status

Process	Domestic	International
Selection Dispute	80.00%	20.00%
Credit/Advanced Standing	80.00%	20.00%
Graduation	66.67%	33.33%
SEDS- Equitable Adjustments	66.67%	33.33%
Exchange	66.67%	33.33%
Grievance	64.29%	35.71%
Fitness To Practice/Study	60.00%	40.00%
Special Consideration	56.83%	43.17%
General Misconduct	53.85%	46.15%
Incorrect Advice	50.00%	50.00%
Assessment Dispute	46.34%	53.66%
Enrolment	46.15%	53.85%
Show Cause / Course Academic Progress (CAPC)	45.90%	54.10%
Fee Remission	42.31%	57.69%
Complaint	42.11%	57.89%
Scholarship	40.00%	60.00%
NSO Referral	40.00%	60.00%
Late Withdrawal	38.46%	61.54%
Academic Misconduct	36.64%	63.36%
Progress RHD	33.33%	66.67%
Placement Problems	27.78%	72.22%
Supervision	27.27%	72.73%
Disallowed Appeal	20.00%	80.00%
Readmission	0.00%	100.00%
Visa Issues	0.00%	100.00%
Leave of Absence	0.00%	100.00%

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Primary issue by international or domestic status

Process	Domestic	International
Misconduct	42.80%	57.20%
Special Consideration	49.32%	50.68%
Assessment and Grades	50.47%	49.53%
Show Cause / Course Academic Progress (CAPC)	53.95%	46.05%
The standard of services received	50.00%	50.00%
Student Support Services	42.86%	57.14%
The Quality of Teaching	54.55%	45.45%
The Nature of Teaching or Assessment	100.00%	0.00%
RHD Supervision	25.00%	75.00%
Computer and IT Infrastructure	50.00%	50.00%

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Cases By Faculty

Science	164	26.45%
Arts	112	18.06%
FBE	82	13.23%
FEIT	70	11.29%
MDHS	66	10.65%
ABP	35	5.65%
MGSE	32	5.16%
MLS	29	4.68%
MSD	9	1.45%
VCA	7	1.13%
FVAS	6	0.97%
FFAM	5	0.81%
MBS	3	0.48%

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Cases By Faculty

Arts	197	31.62%
Science	128	20.55%
FBE	75	12.04%
MDHS	67	10.75%
FEIT	55	8.83%
APB	40	6.42%
Education	26	4.17%
MLS	20	3.21%
VCA	11	1.77%
MBS	4	0.64%

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Process by Faculty

	Academic Misconduct	Assessment Dispute	Special Consideration
Science	36.87%	25.96%	37.17%
Arts	28.98%	37.11%	33.91%
FBE	35.05%	39.18%	25.77%
FEIT	35.99%	33.12%	30.89%
ABP	45.59%	25.96%	28.45%
MDHS	24.09%	46.05%	29.86%
MLS	23.37%	36.54%	40.09%
MSD	62.19%	24.38%	13.43%
MBS	55.97%	44.03%	0.00%
FFAM	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
FVAS	53.57%	0.00%	46.43%
MGSE	0.00%	28.80%	71.20%
VCA	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%

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Process by Faculty

	Assessment and Grades	Misconduct	Special Consideration
Arts	30.27%	52.29%	17.43%
FBE	54.95%	22.11%	22.95%
Science	25.09%	23.69%	51.21%
MDHS	44.73%	28.45%	26.82%
FEIT	17.85%	34.46%	47.69%
MLS	39.67%	7.28%	53.04%
ABP	19.80%	25.04%	55.16%
Education	30.63%	35.26%	34.11%
VCA	53.94%	31.05%	15.01%
MBS	81.14%	18.86%	0.00%

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Preferred method of contact with Service

Email	48.47%
In Person	25.76%
Phone	13.90%
Zoom	11.86%

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Preferred method of contact with Service

Email	45.63%
In Person	24.27%
Phone	19.42%
Zoom	10.68%

Commentary

During this period, 620 students were provided a service. Undergraduates comprised 54.52% of cases, with graduate coursework students making up 43.71% and Research Higher Degree candidates accounting for just under 2%. International students were significantly over-represented at 53.55% of casework, around 19 percentage points higher than their share of overall enrolment, while domestic students made up the remaining 44.68%.

Approximately 8% of presenting students identified as living with a disability, with 68% of those students reporting mental health conditions including anxiety disorders, ADHD, Autism/ASD, and depression.

The top four primary presenting issues accounted for over 65% of all cases, reflecting concentrated pressure points in university processes. Special consideration matters represented nearly one in four cases (22.90%), academic misconduct almost one in five (19.68%), assessment disputes over one in eight (12.90%), and academic progress concerns one in ten (10.16%).

Many primary issues appeared in combination with others, indicating complex casework requiring engagement with multiple university processes.

The four most represented faculties comprised almost 70% of all casework: Science (26.45%), Arts (18.06%), FBE (13.23%), and FEIT (11.29%). Science was over-represented in both academic misconduct and special consideration cases, accounting for 30% of each category despite representing 26% of overall casework. Arts over-indexed on assessment disputes at 21%, while FBE showed elevated rates of misconduct (16%) and assessment disputes (18%).

Nearly half of presenting students (48.47%) requested assistance via email, around a quarter (25.76%) asked for in-person appointments, and the remainder were assisted via phone (13.90%) or Zoom (11.86%).

Public Advocacy Activities

In the period covered by this report, the Service produced the following submissions:

[Senate Submission: Quality of Governance at Australian HE Providers- March 2025](#)

[Feedback on TEQSA's Regulatory Expectations: Students Grievances & Complaints Mechanisms- March 2025](#)

[Feedback on TEQSA's Regulatory Expectations: Managing External Actors- March 2025](#)

The next Advocacy Service report will cover the period September to December 2025 and will be available in mid-February 2026.

Paul Lewis-Hornsby

Team Leader, Advocacy Service

September 2025