



# **ADVOCACY**

Service Report September - December 2025

**UMSU**  
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE  
STUDENT UNION

## 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 'Anecdotal'

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.

<b>Misconduct</b>	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).
<b>Special Consideration</b>	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.
<b>"Show Cause / Course Academic Progress (CAPC)</b>	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.
<b>Assessment and Grades</b>	Concerns related to marking errors, problems with the conduct of assessment, feedback on assessment, and requests for re-marking or review of grades.
<b>Remission of Fees</b>	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.
<b>Student Support Services</b>	Includes issues or feedback about Counselling and Psychological Support Services, the University health Service, SEDS, Fees, Academic Skills Unit, and Stop 1.
<b>The standard of services by the university</b>	Covers general service quality, such as administrative support from IT services, LMS, Library access, and other campus facilities.
<b>The Quality of Teaching</b>	Concerns about effectiveness of teaching and learning, engagement and accessibility of academic staff, subject delivery methods, and the use of learning technologies.
<b>RHD Supervision</b>	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.
<b>Advanced Standing or credit</b>	Involves recognition of prior learning, transfer credits from other institutions, and disputes over credit allocation.
<b>Selection Appeal</b>	Used when a student believes they were unfairly denied admission or selection into a course or program.
<b>RHD Progress</b>	RHD students facing university concerns about milestone reviews, delays in research or thesis progress.
<b>Vocational Placement problems</b>	Issues with internship or placement arrangements.
<b>Course structure or changes</b>	Concerns about changes to course content or delivery, prerequisite changes, and course availability.
<b>Scholarship issues</b>	Includes delays in payment, eligibility disputes, and revocations of scholarships.
<b>Student Complaint about another student</b>	Covers primarily interpersonal issues such as bullying or harassment, or other breaches of university policy by students

## Trends and Issues

### Can't Hide the Wooden Spoon Under Your QILT

The 2024 QILT Student Experience Survey results landed in September 2025 and once again delivered a message the University really should stop ignoring: Melbourne Uni now ranks *last* in Australia for overall undergraduate student satisfaction.

Overall satisfaction fell by more than five percentage points, with students reporting declines across teaching quality, support and services, and learning resources. Graduate coursework students also joined the downward trend.

At the Advocacy Service, we're hearing the same story from students but in more detail. This reporting period, we assisted 548 students, a 54% increase on the same period last year. And the issues students bring to us mirror the QILT findings: inconsistent administrative decisions, policies and local practice favouring administrative expedience over fairness, hard-to-navigate systems, and a calcifying sense that the University isn't being honest when it says that 'students are at the heart of everything it does'.

Nearly 30% of our casework was related to special consideration applications which affect vulnerable students facing barriers to academic success, and almost 20% involved assessment disputes, where students felt their concerns weren't being addressed through normal channels. Meanwhile, staff were reassured that *internal surveys: the End of Subject Survey* and the *University Survey of Student Experience* - show the highest satisfaction ratings in four years. The elephant in the room is that internal surveys focus on individual subjects whereas QILT captures students' overall experience of the institution.

So, as it turns out, you can enjoy your Tuesday lecture and still feel lost, unsupported, or unheard when navigating special consideration processes, or challenging unfair administrative decisions. This is exactly what students tell us. Many genuinely like their subjects, but when something goes wrong - a misconduct allegation, a denied application for special consideration, an academic judgement they feel is manifestly unfair, then they encounter systems that feel opaque, inconsistent, and occasionally actively unhelpful.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor's communication regarding the QILT results notes that campus disruptions and broader global events may have affected student experiences, however in a generalised climate of increased activism, other universities have faced similar challenges without receiving a comparable shellacking. Rather than blame shifting, it would be refreshing to see some real reflection on whether institutional policies, processes, and decisions might be playing a role in poor student experience. The increased move into traditionally student led wellbeing initiatives (such as the Campus Canteen and Orientation events) does not address the harder questions about how core university systems impact on students.

The DVC has identified important priorities: improving teaching quality, strengthening student services, increasing academic engagement, and focusing on specific subjects and programs. We would add to this shopping list the poor state of administrative systems and decision-making processes - students don't only encounter the University in lecture theatres - they experience it in forms, portals, policies, administrative decisions, and appeals.

### Double Trouble – In More Ways Than One

Integrity breaches are not confined to students; the University commits them regularly with impunity. A recent academic misconduct case evidences a pattern of procedural shortcuts, policy breaches, and administrative 'creativity' that we have found deeply concerning.

A student sat two open-book exams in May and June 2025. The following month, they received a single allegation notice covering both subjects, accusing them of using generative AI. Rather than treating each subject separately, as required by the *Student Academic Integrity Policy*, the University bundled both allegations together, heard them at once, and issued a combined outcome. Possibly efficient, but fair or compliant it ain't.

Policy requires each allegation to be assessed independently, on its own merits. Combining matters guarantees decision-makers are aware of multiple allegations while judging each one, introducing precisely the kind of cumulative bias the Policy is designed to prevent.

Then came the penalty. The student was ordered to resit both exams under invigilation. But with a twist: even if they scored above 50%, the Board of Examiners would later decide whether their final mark would be capped at 50% or recorded as earned. This condition appears nowhere in university policy or regulation. It has no published criteria. No guidance. No transparency. We view this as an invented penalty.

Disciplinary frameworks exist for a reason: outcomes should be predictable, consistent, and grounded in clear rules. When Faculties start making things up on the fly, students are left guessing how their performance will be judged—and whether the goalposts might move again. The allegations themselves rested largely on perceived similarities to AI-generated text, focusing on tone and formatting. The student explained that any overlap reflected their own study practices and note-taking methods.

That explanation received little weight, although the exams were both open-book and students were explicitly allowed to use their own notes. After receiving the outcome, the student felt compelled to complete the resits before their appeal window had even closed. While technically voluntary, students in this position rarely feel they have a choice. They have since lodged an appeal, however more than 25 University business days later, they're still waiting....

Policy says appeals should begin assessment within 10 days and be finalised as soon as reasonably practicable. Instead, the student remains in uncertainty, unsure which marks will stand, how resits will be treated, or what their final results will be.

If the University wants students to take academic integrity seriously, it must hold itself to the same standard. That means following its own policies, applying penalties that actually exist, giving students clear guidance, protecting appeal rights, and resolving matters promptly.

### **Recommendations**

This case evidences the need for:

1. Strict compliance with the requirement that each allegation be heard independently, with separate notices, separate hearings, and separate outcomes.
2. Penalties that are drawn only from those authorised by the enabling regulations, with no ad hoc conditions imposed without authority.
3. Clear guidance to students on examination expectations, particularly in open-book formats where the boundaries of permitted preparation may be ambiguous.
4. Protection of students' appeal rights, including clear advice that penalties may be suspended pending appeal, and
5. Timely resolution of appeals, with genuine adherence to the Policy timeframes.

## 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. Of those who completed the exit survey, about 63% were referred by the University.

If we look at the almost doubling of demand on the Service over the same time last year, some of the slippage in satisfaction is explained. For example, this period, 8 % of respondents were unsatisfied with the time it took for us to respond to their enquiry.

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

Very Satisfied	83%
Satisfied	17%

### Would you use our service in the future?

Definitely	100%
-	-

### How satisfied were you with how quickly we responded?

Very Satisfied	67%
Satisfied	25%
Unsatisfied	8%

### How satisfied were you with our knowledge and expertise

Very Satisfied	83%
Neutral	17%

### How satisfied were you with accessibility and inclusiveness

Very Satisfied	92%
Satisfied	8%

### How satisfied were you with how well we explained things

Very Satisfied	83%
Satisfied	17%

### How satisfied were you with our sensitivity and understanding

Very Satisfied	83%
Satisfied	17%

### Would you recommend our service to other students?

Definitely	100%
-	-

### How did you hear about our service?

A notice or email from the university	25%
Word of Mouth	25%
Stop 1	25%
Social media	13%
University Staff member	13%

### Any specific ideas on how we could improve our service?

- I have no recommendations to make but would really like to highlight just how good Alanna Smith was. It made a world of difference to know that someone was always available to answer questions and provide humane support at a minutes notice. Ms Smith worked tirelessly to help out and weigh in with expert advice in every step of the process. She allowed me not only to obtain more time to provide necessary document or to have a say in important decisions but also to feel confident that I was providing the right information, the right way and at the right time and that was not going in the process alone. She helped me stand up to the university staff and not fall for their attempts at intimidation, making it a fair process and not a one-way ordeal.
- I really appreciate the support offered by the Advocacy. However, I found the process of being automatically bonded to a specific advocate after allocation a bit limiting. It would be great if there were more flexibility to consult or change advocates when needed, especially if the case evolves or if communication styles differ.
- I found Eloise's assistance in drafting my formal grievance application invaluable. She carefully read through my case and provided informed feedback on my draft. I similarly appreciated the opportunity to meet with her to discuss my situation and my draft.
- The current system works. I appreciate how practical and strategic the advice Anna gave me. Although I knew from the very start that I had a very slim chance of succeeding with my matter, Anna still patiently guided me. She provided me with very useful critique on my letters, as well as pointers on how I can improve them. Anna was my greatest support system throughout the process. I am just very grateful for her and for the UMSU Advocacy service. I would also like to thank Nadia who was my support person during my hearing. Her practical inputs at the start and at the end were invaluable.
- The advocacy team has made a tremendous impact in my student life. Thank you very much.
- I am very grateful for the assistance and support I received from Alanna who is very knowledgeable, generous with her time and a clear communicator. The one area for improvement would be to offer a functioning phone number (the one provided by stop 1 is disconnected). It took a long time before I was able to speak with someone.

## Advocacy Service Statistics

September - December 2025

Assessment Dispute	100	18.25%
Special Consideration	62	11.31%
Aca Misconduct- AI	50	9.12%
Special Consideration- Grievance	49	8.94%
Fee Remission- Initial Application	39	7.12%
Aca Misconduct- Appeal	25	4.56%
Aca Misconduct- Exam	23	4.20%
Special Consideration- Review	22	4.01%
CAPC (Coursework)- Appeal	21	3.83%
Special Consideration- Appeal	17	3.10%
Aca Misconduct- Plagiarism	12	2.19%
Placement Problems	12	2.19%
SEDS- Equitable Adjustments	10	1.82%
Academic Misconduct- Academic fraud	9	1.64%
Aca Misconduct- Other	8	1.46%
Selection Dispute- Review	8	1.46%
Enrolment	7	1.28%
Selection Dispute- Appeal	7	1.28%
Fee Remission- Internal Appeal	7	1.28%
Supervision	6	1.09%
Graduation	4	0.73%
Aca Misconduct- Collusion	4	0.73%
Progress RHD	4	0.73%
Gen Misc- First Hearing	4	0.73%
Late Withdrawal	4	0.73%
Disallowed Appeal	3	0.55%
Aca Misconduct- Falsified Docs	3	0.55%
Fitness To Prac- First Hearing	3	0.55%
Grievance- Subject Quality	3	0.55%
CAPC (Graduate Research)- CAPC Hearing	3	0.55%
Credit/Advanced Standing	3	0.55%
Gen Misc- Appeal	3	0.55%
Admission	2	0.36%
Aca Misconduct- Contract cheating	2	0.36%
Grievance- General	2	0.36%
Scholarship	2	0.36%
CAPC (Coursework)- At Risk	1	0.18%
Exchange	1	0.18%
Fitness To Practise - Appeal	1	0.18%
Gen Misc- Investigation	1	0.18%
Grievance- Incorrect Advice	1	0.18%

## Primary Issue

### September - December 2024

#### Primary Issue

Misconduct	109	30.70%
Assessment and Grades	83	23.38%
Special Consideration	70	19.72%
Show Cause / Course Academic Progress (CAPC)	39	10.99%
Not Sure	38	10.70%
Student Support Services	6	1.69%
The standard of services received	6	1.69%
The Nature of Teaching or Assessment	2	0.56%
Computer and IT Infrastructure	1	0.28%
RHD Supervision	1	0.28%

### September - December 2025

#### Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

Undergraduate	193	55.21%
Graduate Coursework	148	40.35%
RHD	7	2.32%
Not Applicable	7	2.12%

### September - December 2024

#### Distribution by graduate/undergraduate status

Undergraduate	193	54.37%
Graduate Coursework	148	41.69%
Not Applicable	7	1.97%
RHD	7	1.97%

### September - December 2025

#### Distribution by International/Domestic Status

Domestic	167	47.04%
International	188	52.96%

### September - December 2024

#### Distribution by International/Domestic Status

Domestic	167	47.04%
International	188	52.96%

### Students Identifying as Living with a Disability

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

### September- December 2025 Cases By Faculty

Science	123	23.75%
Arts	93	17.95%
MDHS	90	17.37%
FBE	79	15.25%
FEIT	40	7.72%
ABP	28	5.41%
MLS	20	3.86%
MGSE	18	3.47%
MBS	7	1.35%
VCA	7	1.35%
MSD	6	1.16%
FVAS	4	0.77%
FFAM	3	0.58%

### Cases By Faculty September- December 2024

Science	83	23.31%
Arts	75	21.07%
FBE	49	13.76%
MDHS	49	13.76%
FEIT	41	11.52%
ABP	22	6.18%
Education	15	4.21%
VCA	11	3.09%
MLS	6	1.69%
MBS	5	1.40%

## September - December 2025

### Preferred method of contact with Service

Email	34.62%
In Person	26.92%
Phone	19.23%
Drop in	19.23%
Live Chat	3.85%

## September - December 2024

### Preferred method of contact with Service

Email	50.99%
In Person	20.28%
Zoom	14.65%
Phone	14.08%

## Commentary

This period 548 students were provided a service, this is a substantial increase over the same period last year when the Service assisted 355 students. This continues a trend we identified in the last Service report where we reported that, in the first two months of Semester 2 (July-August) the Service had almost as many contacts as in the *first full six months* of the 2025 – with a large upswing in undergraduate students. Notably, over a quarter of referrals to the Service were from the University, including Stop 1. That notwithstanding, our hope that UMSU would receive a greater proportion of funding in the next SSAF round so we could increase resources in the service to meet the increasing demand did not bear fruit. In fact UMSU has experienced a cut to funding in real terms for 2026, which is very disappointing and shortsighted given the obvious work the service does to materially improve student experience at the University.

The proportion of graduate to undergraduate students was 40.35% to 55.21% with 2.32% being higher degree by research students. During this period 47.04% domestic and 52.96% international students presented to the service. In this period, 49 students (approximately 9%) identified as living with a disability.

The primary presenting issues overall this period were matters related to special consideration – representing approximately 29% of all presentations – followed by misconduct-related matters at around 26%, and assessment disputes at just under 19%. Academic progress (CAPC) matters accounted for approximately 5% of presentations, while fee remission issues made up around 8%.

Most students requiring assistance came from the faculties of Science (23.75%), Arts (17.95%), MDHS (17.37%), and FBE (15.25%). FEIT accounted for 7.72% of presentations, with the remaining faculties making up smaller proportions.

Regarding misconduct-related matters, the most significant category was AI-related academic misconduct at 9.06%, followed by misconduct appeals (4.53%) and exam-related misconduct (4.19%). This reflects the ongoing challenges students face in navigating academic integrity requirements, particularly in relation to generative AI tools.

About 9% of service users during this period identified as having a disability they wished to tell us about. Anxiety was the most commonly identified condition (2.42%), followed by ADHD (1.94%), and Autism/ASD and Depression (both at 1.77%).

Contact preferences showed a shift this period, with email remaining the most popular method at 34.62%, but with notable increases in in-person appointments (26.92%) and a more even split between phone (19.23%) and drop-in consultations (19.23%). Live chat accounted for 3.85% of contacts, representing a new channel for student engagement.

## Public Advocacy Activities

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

[Response to the Modernising and Strengthening TEQSAs Powers Consultation Paper- October 2025](#)

[Response to Attorney General's Disability Discrimination Act 1992 Review Issues Paper- November 2025](#)

[Response to the 2025 Review of the Disability Standards for Education Discussion Paper- November 2025](#)

The next Advocacy Service report will cover the period January to April 2026 and will be available in mid-June 2026.

Paul Lewis-Hornsby

Team Leader, Advocacy Service

February 2026