

# Annual Report of the Dean of Students Australian National University

2019



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## Executive Summary

This report covers the period 1 January - 31 December 2019.

### Role/s of the Office of the Dean of Students

The Office of the Dean of Students (“DoS Office” or “the Office”) is staffed by the Dean of Students, Associate Professor Miriam Gani, and the Deputy Dean of Students, Dr Peter Hendriks. The Office receives, on a confidential basis, complaints, concerns or enquiries from students about alleged acts, omissions, unreasonable or unfair conduct and broader systemic issues within the ANU. The Office operates as an independent entity within the University providing impartial, neutral advice and consideration of the matters that are brought to it, predominantly by ANU students. Both the Dean and the Deputy Dean work in the Office on a full-time basis and are available for student consultation five days a week. They are supported by an Executive Assistant who works for the Office on an 80% of full time basis.

Where possible and appropriate, the Office provides guidance, assistance, referral and support to students who have a grievance or who are challenged by a major problem that is interfering with their academic progress. The Office has a key role in assisting the resolution of issues more quickly, more cheaply and with a greater likelihood of a positive outcome for all parties than would be achieved through formal grievance procedures. Importantly, we also provide advice to staff in relation to matters of policy and practice involving students.

The Office may be a first port of call for students. However, frequently students are referred by other students, staff support services, student representatives, Academic and Residential College staff or others. The role of the Dean and Deputy Dean of Students is to listen, offer options, encourage and facilitate informal grievance resolution, provide guidance in the case of formal grievance pathways, and facilitate access to support services within the University. In particular, the Office acts in an ombuds role within the ANU in the sense that it brings an independent eye to the decisions or actions taken by University officers in cases of student grievance and recommends appropriate outcomes. It can also act as an intermediary between students and the institution where there is reluctance or apprehension about or some impediment to direct communication.

In addition to the reactive role described above, the Dean of Students’ Office contributes proactively to the University’s broader academic endeavour, in particular in relation to the formulation and consideration of policy and procedure relevant to the student experience. It does this both through a range of committee memberships and through direct liaison and discussion with key areas of the University.

### The Numbers – Individuals, contacts and grievances

During 2019, the Office offered its support to 945 individuals. Of those individuals, 37% required multiple visits to fully address the issues they were experiencing. This is an increase in the proportion recorded in 2018 (during which 33% of individuals required multiple visits to the Office). The total number of contacts (excluding incidental emails and the like) by individuals seeking assistance from the DoS Office for the 2019 period was 1756. This is the highest ever number of contacts that has been recorded over an annual reporting period. It

represents an increase of 14% on the number of contacts in 2018 (1538) and an increase of 8% over the previous highest-contact year of 2017, when the total number of contacts was 1625.

Chart 1 shows two sets of data. The first is the annual number of contacts with the DoS Office over the 11 year period 2009 to 2019; the second (recorded in this chart for the first time for 2019) is the number of issues or grievances raised with the DoS Office in the course of those contacts from the years 2015 to 2019. In relation to contacts: after a steady increase over the first six years of this period, the number of contacts more than doubled in 2015. The number has since stabilised somewhat, though at a consistently higher level than prior to 2015 and with increases over previous years recorded in 2016, 2017 and 2019. In relation to numbers of issues raised (which can indicate complex grievance situations, where students are presenting to the DoS with multiple associated concerns) the trend since 2015 is a steady increase, manifesting even when total contacts dipped somewhat in 2018. So, in 2017, the 934 individuals who contacted the Office raised 2369 issues or grievance. In 2018 the 900 individuals who contacted the DoS raised 2435 issues or grievances. In 2019, there were 945 individuals who were supported by the DoS Office in relation to 2779 issues – both the highest number of presenting individuals and the highest number of issues raised over a reporting period in the history of the Office.

### Identifiable Trends

As shown in Chart 8, a notable trend in 2019 was a continued increase (previously identified in the 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports) in the number of students presenting with grievances or issues relating to: their health (mental or physical); and academic issues (appeals, grade appeals, special consideration, late withdrawals). The trend showing a small increase in frequency of issues relating to scholarships since 2017 continued in 2019, as did concerns relating to supervision (both HDR and honours). After dropping between 2017 and 2018, the incidence of students presenting with grievances in the three categories relating to academic advice and progress; student and staff conduct (including behavioural misconduct such as bullying, harassment and social media abuse); and program or course concerns (including in relation to assessment and feedback) increased to highest-ever levels in 2019.

After dropping below 2017 levels in 2018, the incidence of grievances involving administrative matters (such as admission, enrolment, fees, and graduation requirements) increased in 2019. However, the number of administrative grievances in 2019 (235) still sits lower than the number reported in 2017 (250). Grievances relating to personal stressors (particularly financial and accommodation issues) which recorded the same number in each of 2017 and 2018 (241) fell back to 204 in 2019.

Since 2016, there have been notable yearly increases in the number of students presenting with complex circumstances either involving or impacting upon their mental health. That trend continues. In 2019, there was a further significant increase in the number of matters dealt with by the Office that involved the interaction of mental health issues with students' academic progress, supervisory relationships (both at honours and at HDR level), staff and student conduct concerns, academic misconduct and/or academic grievances (including grade or other appeals, special consideration matters, late withdrawal etc). To illustrate this trend: in 2019, 216 students (nearly 23% of all the individuals who contacted the Office) presented with

multi-faceted matters involving mental health issues. In 2018, those numbers were 166 students (18% of all individuals who contacted the DoS); in 2017, 158 students (17%); and, in 2016, 133 students (16%).

Also in keeping with the trend apparent in recent years, the number of staff members seeking advice from the Office again reached its highest point ever, with 163 individual members of staff approaching the Office to register a total of 208 contacts during 2019. Comparable numbers in the past were 125 contacts in 2018, 116 contacts in 2017 and 70 contacts in 2016. As was stated in the 2018 Annual Report, this is a welcome trend as the Dean and Deputy Dean have devoted significant time and effort into increasing the visibility and awareness of the Office amongst both academic and professional staff. They will continue to do so. This trend is especially pleasing as it indicates a proactive approach from staff in seeking advice about student issues in the abstract or at the early stages of problems arising. Of particular note, in light of the previous paragraph, is that 52 of the staff enquiries involved concerns around student mental health issues. So staff are demonstrating strong awareness of the impact on student mental health of a range of academic, interpersonal and behavioural issues and experiences. This large number of individual staff enquiries together with the number of students who raised mental health matters with the Office, means that a total of 268 of the 945 individuals who contacted the DoS in 2019 had concerns involving student mental health. This represents 28% of all individuals who sought advice or support from the Office in 2019.

#### Percentage of ANU students supported by the Office

The total number of individuals who contacted the Office in 2019 was 39.6 per 1000 students. Comparative numbers in recent years have been: 39.7 per 1000 students in 2016; 36.6 per 1000 students in 2017; and 38.4 per 1000 students in 2018. Accordingly, the percentage of the total ANU student population contacting the Office over the past four years has held relatively steady at approximately 4%.

#### Invitation to Colleges

The Dean and Deputy Dean of Students would welcome the opportunity to present detailed information relevant to individual Colleges to help inform planning for actions to improve student outcomes and student experiences.

## Previous recommendations (with updates for 2019)

The following comments and associated recommendations were made in 2018 Dean of Students' Annual Report.

1. In the 2018 report (as well as previous ones), the DoS commented that lack of timely access to or awareness of academic advice support during the first two weeks of semester when students are finalising their enrolment was an emerging issue that could lead to ongoing academic progress concerns. In 2016 significant work was undertaken by College academic advisors and staff from the (then named) Division of Student Life and the Division of Student Administration to refine the early intervention process for students deemed to be at academic risk. This initiative is now well established. Responsibility for this early intervention communication with at risk students for Semester 1 2020 currently sits with the Associate Director, Wellbeing.

This office applauds the work done in this area and the continuing efforts to make contact with such students to help ensure they receive timely and appropriate advice and support. However, as indicated in the Annual Report for 2017, we remain unable to comment upon whether this process has significantly impacted on the problem. Many of the students attending the DoS Office have comments on their transcripts noting that they have been sent an early intervention email. However, what happens after that is not always apparent from those transcripts. In 2017, a recommendation was put to the Student Administration Managers Meeting that the comment "EIAN" (indicating that early intervention meetings with an academic advisor had been attended by a student) be recorded on student transcripts as a common and consistent practice across all academic Colleges. This was, at least in part, in order to be able to monitor the potential impact of these communications and meetings on a student's academic progress. However, this recommendation has still not been taken up consistently across all academic colleges with the result that only some transcripts note whether the students took up the opportunity to meet with academic advisors whilst others are silent.

**Recommendation in 2018:** *We recommend that Colleges note such meetings so that better information can be gathered at an institutional level to help target areas for improved engagement and support to students. It is particularly important for Colleges to adopt similar practices to making such records on student transcripts, as patchy records do not allow for a clear picture to emerge.*

**[2019 update:** This remains an area of diverging practices across Colleges. In 2018, Academic Board approved a decision whereby responsibility for early intervention communication (currently with the Associate Director, Wellbeing) would align with responsibility for matters relating to academic progress, which sits with the Examinations, Graduation and Prizes Office (EGAP). This transfer of responsibility for early intervention communication to EGAP has not yet occurred. However, it will present an excellent opportunity for consistent protocols to be set up and adopted across the University. This office is available to assist as appropriate and required.]

2. In the 2018 report, we commented on a recurring theme amongst HDR students that they did not feel they had a sufficient input into aspects of their supervision. In particular, some candidates felt that matters like: frequency of and agenda-setting for meetings; preferred form of feedback; expectations in relation to how quickly work could be turned around; and supervision and learning styles were not being overtly addressed prior to them commencing their candidature. These candidates held grievances toward their supervisors that may have been avoided if clear expectations had been established at the outset of the supervisory relationship. We also noted that significant progress had been made in this area, particularly the creation and introduction of the HDR Supervision Development Framework. That framework, which encompasses supervisor development, supervisor registration, supervisor recognition and reporting components was to be introduced in 2020. Under the framework, Candidate-Supervisor Agreements would be negotiated early in a student's candidature and those agreements would be reviewed annually.

In the 2018 Annual Report, we expressed concern that that all existing HDR students receive the benefit of the new mandated Candidate-Supervisor Agreement protocol and not just new candidates. We note that, as discussed in more detail in the commentary under Chart 4 below, in 2019, lack of clear supervisory agreements continued to be a feature of the complaints brought to our office by HDR candidates.

***Recommendation in 2018:*** *We recommend that Candidate-Supervisor Agreements be instituted for existing students as well as for incoming HDR candidates.*

**[2019 update:** This recommendation was put to the HDR Committee meeting 5/2019 and received in principle agreement. HDR Committee meeting 3/2020 will consider mechanisms for ensuring that this occurs.]

3. In the 2018 report, we commented that students (and teaching staff) were continuing to experience problems associated with the holding of formal deferred and supplementary exams in Week 1 of the following semester. This is particularly so when exams that, for the main cohort, took place in early November of Semester 2 are not scheduled for the deferred or supplementary cohort until late February the following year. Students report significant stress associated with having assessment hanging over their heads over the long summer period as well as some disruption to the new semester's learning as a result of the current timing of these examinations.

***Recommendation in 2018:*** *Whilst we are aware of the constraints and pressures on the Examinations, Graduation and Prizes Office (EGAP) as a result of the timing of graduation ceremonies, and of a variety of other complicating factors, we recommend that consideration be given to holding deferred and supplementary exams close to the end of the relevant semester. Students are required to be available to attend campus during the exam period and so holding deferred exams at the very end of the exam period may be an option. Alternatively, we recommend that consideration be given to holding deferred and supplementary exams in N or O week of the following semester.*

**[2019 update:** Issues related to the timetabling of deferred and supplementary exams were the subject of extensive discussion by Senior Administration Managers and Associate Deans Education in 2019 and led to the formation of a small working group.



Recognising the logistical and other complexities involved, the working group commenced consultation with various areas of the University, including experts in Access & Inclusion. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic may give further impetus to this ongoing work as it has required flexibility and lateral thinking both in relation to formal exams being administered online and in relation to the creation of alternative forms of major assessment. We look forward to this work continuing and offer our support to the working group, should they require it.]

4. In a series of Annual Reports, this office has commented that it believed the disestablishment of the International Student Office (ISO) in 2013 had adversely impacted the ANU's international student cohort. The Office made repeated recommendations, in those reports, for the re-establishment of the ISO or a re-envisioning of how the ANU supports the international student cohort.

**[2019 update:** This office notes the important steps taken by the Division of Student Administration and Academic Services (DSAAS) in providing services to international students at ANU. Those steps include enhanced diversity training for DSAAS staff and an emphasis on relevant foreign language skills when recruiting. The DoS Office recognises that, whilst emphasis in previous reports has been on re-establishment of a dedicated ISO, supporting international students is a whole of University concern. We would welcome the opportunity to work with DSAAS, the Wellbeing team, academic and residential colleges, and international students and their representatives to consider how best this cohort of students can be supported in the future.]

## New recommendations for 2019

1. In addition to the timetabling issues for Supplementary Exams referred to in 3. of the "Previous recommendations" section above, this office believes that a broader consideration of the Supplementary Exam regime needs to occur. A particular concern relates to students who fail one or two courses in their final semester of studies by a margin that does not allow them to qualify for a supplementary exam. In 2019, a number of international students presented to the DoS Office who had failed a final course in their degree with a result between 35% and 42%. In each of their cases, the courses that they had failed were compulsory and were only offered once a year (for example, only in second semester). As a result, the courses could not be re-taken until more than six months later and could not be substituted by another course. In some cases, internal College policy precluded these students from undertaking an equivalent course cross-institutionally the immediately following semester. This scenario caused huge stress for the students who presented to us. Particular stressors were the financial and logistical implications of foregoing (sometimes already settled) employment opportunities, returning to Australia after a period of not studying; and, in at least one case, uprooting family.

**Recommendation:** *We recommend that an appropriate Committee (probably AQAC – the Academic Quality Assurance Committee) examine the role and purpose of Supplementary Exams, and, particularly, consider the introduction of "final semester*

*supplementary assessment” where a student in the last semester of their degree achieves a final result of less than the normal 45% requirement that would allow them to qualify for a supplementary exam. Consideration should also be given to whether an alternative form of assessment, taken shortly after the final exam, may be an appropriate method for judging basic competence in a course for the purposes of awarding a conceded pass (50PS), without compromising the high educational standards of the ANU.*

2. In the section “Areas of Concern – Compliance Matters” below, we discuss in detail instances where we believe that fair outcomes were not achieved for particular students who appealed their final course results. Formal complaint and appeal work is undertaken in various areas of the University but is potentially most difficult to perform in small schools where teaching staff are close-knit or where appeals are infrequent. More than once, in 2019, this office was contacted by Directors or Heads of School seeking advice about how to apply particular policies and procedures when dealing with student complaints and appeals. Whilst such contact is welcome, it also points to gaps that need to be addressed.

***Recommendation:*** *We recommend that ASQO consider how to provide scaffolding and training for Associate Deans, Heads of School and Directors in relation to the formal complaint and appeal work that they may need to undertake. This office is ready and able to support this work in any way appropriate.*

3. An issue that has been observed by this office (and which is closely related to 2. immediately above) involves templates or form letters being used by different areas of the University when interacting with students that either are not up to date (for example, in terms of internal references to the most recent versions of University policies or rules) or are not sufficiently tailored to provide the bespoke outcomes required by a particularly complex case. Careful attention to these forms of communication can significantly reduce anxiety for students and unnecessary work for staff as a common response to even minor mistakes in letters or emails to students is the launching of an appeal against the decision that has been communicated.

***Recommendation:*** *We recommend that all Colleges and schools undertake an audit of templates and form letters/emails that they use when dealing with student complaints and appeals to ensure their currency. We also recommend that dealing with complex appeals be a key aspect of any training and scaffolding provided to Associate Deans, Heads of School and Directors under Recommendation 2 above.*

4. We discuss in detail in the section “Areas of Concern – Compliance Matters” an example of an internal College policy that precludes students from seeking to undertake cross-institutional study when they have failed a compulsory course. This is just one example that came to our attention in 2019 where practices and policies have been instituted in schools or Colleges that are stricter than policies for the whole ANU.

***Recommendation:*** *We recommend that each College conduct an audit of internal policies and seek input from ASQO as to whether they are more severe than broad*

*ANU policies and, further, whether that severity has tipped over into non-compliance. If compliant but stricter than other areas of the University, we recommend a consistent process whereby the rationale and impact of those policies are interrogated by the relevant College Education Committee with a view to considering their modification to ensure greater consistency across the University.*

5. There were a number of occasions when this office observed that work done or advice offered by academic college Associate Deans (Education) was not taken on board or adequately responded to by schools within those academic colleges. This office notes that both knowledge of University support structures and their roles and compliance with University policy and procedure around teaching and learning tend to be more problematic in more detached schools or units, where the College's ADE may not be well-appreciated as a source of both important information and clear authority.

***Recommendation:*** *We recommend that Colleges establish a means for both better communication with more distant/separated schools and greater accountability of those schools to ADEs in relation to matters of compliance with ANU policy and procedure. The institution of consistent procedures across all schools and units within Colleges to ensure compliance with policies and procedures associated with the Coursework Awards Rule and Assessment Rule should be a priority. This recommendation may require intervention and leadership from College Deans.*

6. We engage in an extensive discussion, in the section "Areas of Concern – Late Withdrawal" below, of our concerns for students who are caught in a cycle of breaching academic progress requirements and/or repeatedly seeking late withdrawal from courses when pre-existing health or mental health issues flare or exacerbate towards the end of the semester. This discussion takes place within a broader context: how the University does and should handle the intersection between supportive pastoral care and flexibility in the face of student ill-health, on the one hand, and a student's genuine lack of academic progression over a significant period of time, on the other. Where does program leave on medical grounds or termination of HDR studies sit within this context? When is it appropriate for the University to consider invoking the Medical Leave Rules 2013? At what point and on what basis does the University intervene and who coordinates that intervention? As the situation currently stands, there are no clear answers to these questions.

***Recommendation:*** *That the University consider adopting an "Academic Progress Management" model that replicates the Case Management model already in operation (see the description in "Understanding the Role of the Dean of Students – Our Responsive Role") and co-ordinated out of this office. The Academic Progress Management Group would bring together relevant decision-makers to determine appropriate action in relation to individual students whose studies have stalled due to the kinds of situations set out above. Core members of the Group could include the Dean and Deputy Dean of Students, the Registrar, the Head of ANU Counselling, Senior Counsel from the ANU Legal Office, the Associate Director, Wellbeing, the Manager (Access & Inclusion), relevant Associate Deans and other senior staff as required.*

## Overview

The ANU was the first Australian University to establish a Dean of Students' Office. It did so in 1965 and the Office commenced operation on 1 January 1966. The nature and role of the Office has evolved since this time. Demands on the Office increased gradually and then jumped significantly in 2015. The case load of the Office reached an all-time high in 2019.

### Understanding the Dean of Students' Role

Currently, the Dean of Students' Office plays a multi-faceted role within the ANU. The focus of the work of the Office is primarily reactive, in the sense that we consider and respond to the particular concerns and complaints that are brought to us by students (and sometimes staff). In this context, the Office operates independently and impartially to:

1. provide confidential guidance, assistance and support to students who have a grievance or who are challenged by a major problem that is interfering with their academic progress;
2. provide information about and facilitate student access to support services provided by the University;
3. provide policy and procedural advice to students and staff members in relation to grievances and the handling of complaints;
4. consider whether particular decisions affecting students have been made in accordance with policy, procedure and principles of fairness and recommend appropriate action or remediation to academic and administrative areas;
5. act, where appropriate, as an intermediary between students and the institution with the aim of promoting fair outcomes (noting that the Office does not "advocate" for students but rather "advocates for fairness");
6. co-ordinate and chair the Case Management Group.

In its responsive role, the Office performs an important function in maintaining successful, widespread informal grievance resolution processes within the University. As a result of the Office's work in this area, there are low numbers of complaints going through formal grievance pathways – with the result that quicker, cheaper and more positive experiences and outcomes are likely to be achieved for all parties.

In addition, the Office has a clear proactive function and focus. This aspect of our role includes:

7. observing and reporting on trends and systemic problems in various fora and contexts;
8. liaising with key players in the Academic and Residential Colleges and student support areas on general matters and trends with the aim of improving the student experience; and
9. contributing to the making of policy and procedure – including through the Committee structures of the University.

Finally, the DoS Office has specified roles under various ANU policies and procedures. These are detailed below.

## Our Responsive Role

The DoS Office confidentially receives complaints, concerns or enquiries about alleged acts, omissions, unreasonable or unfair conduct and broader systemic problems within the scope of student experience at ANU. The Office operates as an independent entity within the institution, providing impartial consideration of the issues brought to it.

We aim to provide high quality, client-focused services for preventing, managing, and resolving issues that are impeding students' progress and, through active participation in informal grievance resolution, assisting students to develop the ability to prevent, manage, and resolve future issues.

The role of the Office is to listen, offer options, encourage and facilitate informal grievance resolution, provide guidance in the case of formal grievance pathways, and provide advice or facilitate access to the range of support services within the University including academic, administrative and wellbeing services.

Conflict in a large institution is inevitable and it can be very expensive for the University if internal and external formal grievance processes are regularly deployed to deal with that conflict. The processes of formal grievance through the multiple steps within the University, further steps external to the University and, potentially, legal challenge can involve many University employees and many hours of staff time. The range of issues that the Dean of Students routinely sees (which could escalate through such processes) include behaviour of staff or students; academic assessment; policies and procedures; conflict arising through poor communication; mismatched cultural expectations; perceived discriminatory practices or insensitivities; harassment and bullying.

The areas for conflict raised with the DoS Office have a common thread of perceptions of unfairness. Frequently the student believes they have been treated unfairly by the institution or by one or more individuals within the University. The issue becomes a battle in the mind of the student and, sometimes, in the minds of affected staff. Bringing the issue to the DoS Office gives us an opportunity to listen, guide and, if appropriate, to act to help the student address the issue informally or to assist by liaising directly with the area of concern.

Our goal is to bring an independent eye to the complaint and to facilitate a fair outcome. We check whether correct process was followed, whether the process was transparent, the decision was impartially made, the outcome reasonable and the principles of natural justice observed. We provide policy and procedural advice to staff members involved in handling complaints, thereby helping to ensure compliance with the Student Complaint Resolution Policy and Procedure as well as other relevant Rules, policies and procedures.

Not all students attending the DoS Office have a grievance with staff or processes of the University. Beyond the student ombudsperson role of considering grievances, the Office also has a role in assisting students who experience a major life event or situation that profoundly impacts their ability to progress with their studies. These situations include sexual harassment or assault, domestic violence, clinical depression and anxiety, self-harm, serious financial difficulty, family stress, disability, cultural difference and mental illness.

The Office may not be the first stop for these students (they have often been referred to us by others), nor is it the final destination. Our office works closely with staff in ANU Counselling,

Access & Inclusion, residential halls, and academic Colleges to help support and assist such students in the most efficient and streamlined way possible. Referrals are made from these areas to the Office so that we can facilitate academic interventions or other arrangements. These arrangements include assisting with applications for Special Consideration or Late Withdrawal, or negotiating alternative class arrangements (in the case of sexual harassment, sexual assault or domestic violence). Similarly, the DoS Office refers students to ANU support services for their professional assistance as well as to ANUSA and PARSA services as appropriate.

In recent years the DoS Office has raised the Office profile with staff and has increasingly acted as a resource and source of advice to staff who encounter difficult student situations. This builds on the Office's role of chairing meetings of the Case Management Group, the team tasked with evaluating and determining action in some cases of disruptive or dangerous behaviours by students or in some critical incident situations. Core members of the Case Management Group in 2019 included the Dean and Deputy Dean of Students, the Registrar (Student Administration), the Director, Residential Experience, Head of ANU Counselling, Senior Counsel from the ANU Legal Office, the Head of Security, the Manager (Access & Inclusion) and other relevant senior staff depending upon the specific circumstances of the case.

### Our Proactive Role

The nature of the DoS Office and the volume of students that we see both contribute to our capacity to discern areas of emerging or ongoing student concern, potential trouble-spots where policies and procedures may be having unintended consequences or are not being fully observed and various other student experience trends. It is a crucial aspect of our proactive role to report on these trends and problems (either directly to the areas concerned or through the University's committee structures) and, where possible and appropriate, to be part of their resolution.

The DoS Office holds informal meetings with College Associate Deans (Education), Associate Deans (Student Experience), Sub Deans and Associate Deans (HDR) several times a year to help share and disseminate best practice in implementing University policies and procedures, particularly as they relate to improving the student experience and to managing difficult student situations. These informal meetings also serve as a forum for key academic College staff to raise matters of collective concern and to consider, with DoS input, how greater consistency of approach can be taken across the University.

In addition, the Office liaises directly with Associate Deans and other College and residential hall staff in relation to general matters and trends that are becoming apparent through student contacts and complaints in order to alert them and, if appropriate, workshop a solution or way forward.

Finally, the Office contributes to the development of new policies and procedures relevant to the student experience. Most commonly, this role occurs through ex-officio service on various University-wide Committees (see the list of Committee memberships below). However, the Office also provides suggestions and feedback on policy and procedure matters directly to the Academic Standards and Quality Office (ASQO) and liaises frequently with ASQO staff.

## Committee Membership

The Dean of Students has ex-officio membership on the following Boards and Committees of the University:

- Academic Board
- Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC)
- ANU IDEA Oversight Committee (and the following working groups established by that Committee):
  - Healthy University Working Group
  - Respectful Relationships Working Group
- Higher Degree Research Committee

In late 2018, the Dean of Students was appointed as permanent Chair of the University Medals Committee and has served in that capacity throughout 2019.

In addition to the above, the Dean of Students sits on the Undergraduate Accommodation Bursary Panel and the Deputy Dean of Students sits on the SEEF Grants Panel. The Dean of Students, Miriam Gani, is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. The Deputy Dean of Students, Peter Hendriks, holds Fellow status at Toad Hall.

## Specific Roles designated by ANU Policy and Procedure

### *Student Complaint Resolution*

The Dean of Students has a central role under the ANU's Student Complaint Resolution Policy and Procedure. In particular, clause 12 of the Student Complaint Resolution Policy states:

The Dean of Students acts as a neutral intermediary between students and the University. The Dean assists students to determine whether a complaint or grievance is reasonable, clarify the best way to address the complaint within the University, and, where appropriate, helps a student to resolve a complaint informally. Consultations with the Dean of Students are entirely confidential, do not constitute instigation of a formal complaint, and no action is taken unless a student agrees it should be taken.

### *Scholarships (Coursework)*

The DoS is responsible for making decisions in relation to all operational matters involving coursework scholarship holders under the Scholarships (Coursework) Policy and Procedure. This includes the monitoring of the academic progress of scholarship holders each semester. Clause 5 of the Scholarships (Coursework) Procedure states:

The University Scholarships Committee delegates operational decision making with respect to scholarship holders including the review of the academic performance of scholarship recipients (under clause 34) to the Dean of Students.

## Notable Achievements in 2019

In September 2019, Dr Peter Hendriks, the Deputy Dean of Students, and Paula Newitt, the former Dean of Students, organised and ran the 2019 iteration of the Australasian Deans of

Students, Ombuds, Complaints Managers and Student Advocates conference at the ANU. We were able to attract two inspiring and very relevant plenary speakers in Mr Michael Conaty from the Office of the NSW Ombudsman, and Dr Terry O'Connell, Director, Real Justice Australia, speaking respectively on handling difficult grievances and on having restorative conversations.

The conference was very well attended and was in fact over-subscribed. In the end, over the course of two and one half days one hundred and twenty colleagues from thirty nine Australian and two New Zealand universities attended as well as representatives from Universities Australia and industry partners.

The 2019 conference also gave birth to a more formal network of Deans of Students and Student Ombuds, with the idea of providing space for the sharing of ideas and the planning of conferences across the sector as well as formalising existing links with similar international organisations such as the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education and the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds.

### Looking forward

The load on the DoS Office continues to grow and the demands placed on this office in 2019 were very high. Chart 1 below shows that accelerated growth in the load carried by the DoS Office is evident from 2014, with a slowing of that rate in 2017 and a small dip in 2018. The Chart also shows that, in 2019: the number of individuals assisted by this office; the number of separate contacts made with us by those individuals; and the number of issues raised by those individuals all reached their highest point in our history.

Overall, there has been an increase of 500% in the number of individuals contacting the DoS Office in the ten year period from 2010 to 2019. Staff full time equivalent (FTE) grew modestly from 0.8 to 2 FTE over this period. Since October 2018, there have been 2 FTE staff providing advice in our office.

This office works closely with a number of other student support areas of the University. We have observed a common experience of increased workload felt by ANU Counselling, the Access & Inclusion Office, the Respectful Relationships Unit and other health and wellbeing services at the ANU. Particular pressures on support services have flowed, at least in part, from the increase in the number of residential students on campus in recent years. By definition, for residential students the campus is their home as well as their place of study. The issues, challenges and traumas that these students experience can occur at any time of the day or night and University student support services often step in after immediate incident management has taken place in residential halls. Large numbers of students on campus mean that University support services become even more central to student wellbeing and success as other support systems (such as families, friends, well-established family supports - like family doctors etc) are no longer readily available to students.

A particular concern is that the work done by these student support areas is often hidden to the broader ANU community. For example, in 2019, 2218 students were registered with the ANU's Access & Inclusion Office (A & I). Of those registered, 1202 students were issued with an Education Access Plan (or EAP) whereby reasonable adjustments that will minimise the impact of a student's health conditions or disability are recommended to academic colleges.



These numbers mean that, in 2019, 9.3% of the total student population of the ANU (23 809 students) was provided with advice and support by the Access & Inclusion Office (A & I) and 5% of the student population was supported by the creation and implementation of an EAP. Notwithstanding serious workload pressures, A & I have worked with Associate Deans (Education) across the academic colleges to improve and streamline EAPs to ensure that they provide greater specificity of options and are thereby better tailored for application by academic staff.

This office acknowledges and applauds the often unseen work done by student support services at the ANU. We note, here, that the need for the provision to the student experience area of significant support and resources, allocated and applied carefully and efficiently, cannot be underestimated by the University.

### Reflections on 2019: Positives v Areas of Concern

Below we touch on areas where progress was made and positive outcomes were achieved in 2019. We also consider matters that need ongoing or greater attention.

#### Positives

Liaising with other areas of the University is a core function of this office, sometimes on general matters relating to policy, procedure and broad approaches to student matters and sometimes in relation to specific student concerns. We would like to acknowledge, here, the responsiveness and professionalism that marks the vast majority of those interactions. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the history of good mutual support between ANU Counselling and the Dean of Students' Office, which operates to the great benefit of our students. A similar relationship of support and respect has quickly developed with the Respectful Relationships Unit, whose work we both support and admire. We have also developed good lines of communication with PARSA and ANUSA student assistance officers where that communication is both authorised and appropriate.

The Examinations, Graduations and Prizes Office (EGAP) and the officers charged with assessing late withdrawals have done excellent work in very difficult areas and have demonstrated repeatedly their focus on delivering fair outcomes. In particular, the late withdrawal team, which is required to work within the difficult constraints of legislation, has demonstrated a preparedness to contact students in cases of insufficient information and to advise students of what they need to do to improve their applications.

Other staff in Colleges, particularly student administrators, academic advisors and College Associate Deans are extremely helpful to our office, responding quickly to address student grievances that we bring to their attention. We particularly appreciate the efforts that academic colleges have made to welcome us at their Education Committee meetings; to invite us to be part of their induction of new academics and tutors (so that we can introduce ourselves and explain our role to new staff members); and to invite us to help with the training of honours students in relation to appropriate behaviour. Similar invitations from residential colleges to assist with the induction of Community Coordinators and Senior Residents are also very much appreciated.

Our office also highly values our capacity to make contributions to University Committees. In 2019, the DoS Office provided input to a range of senior governance committees of the University, making recommendations for amendments to policies and procedures as informed by matters raised with it by students and staff.

In recent years, the DoS Office has witnessed a change in the detail of enquiry and grievance brought to the Office. As commented upon in both the 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports, there has been a marked improvement over this period in both the communication of information to students about standard administrative and degree requirements (such as enrolment, program leave, graduation, degree requirements) and the processes students need to follow in relation to such requirements. Information is communicated clearly and there is easy accessibility online. Processes such as eForms on ISIS run smoothly. Students understand where to find eForms and how to use them. As a result, we no longer deal with general enquiries in these areas to any significant degree. Grievances recorded in the “administration” category (see Chart 8 below) tend to be in relation to particular decisions that have been made in these areas rather than the processes or information that students are asked to navigate.

In the 2018 Annual Report, we stated that we were anticipating that the numbers of contacts with the Office would stabilise at around the 2017 to 2018 levels. We also speculated that any stabilisation would be, at least in part, due to the significant improvements in administrative processes and communication initiatives undertaken by the Division of Student Services and Administration (DSAAS) over the past several years. Whilst the anticipated stabilisation has not occurred across all grievance categories, nevertheless concerns in relation to administrative procedures (as opposed to decisions) have indeed steadied.

### Areas of Concern

There were a number of issues that emerged or exacerbated in 2019 that we would like to comment upon. Some of these are dealt with in detail where statistical trends are discussed below. Others are better characterised as recurring themes or concerns rather than trends. These, we believe, warrant both discussion here and attention for the future.

#### *The Communication of Different but Complementary Roles*

Whilst we have strong working relationships with other student support areas we believe that there is not necessarily a good understanding of the different functions of those areas amongst the student (and perhaps even the staff) population. In particular, there appears to be confusion about how our missions and expertise differ and also how our areas complement each other’s work. That confusion can sometimes lead to student frustration when delay results from them approaching one service and then being referred on to another.

For example, we have commented, in recent years, about the stretched resources in ANU Counselling, the Health Centre (now the National Health Co-op) and the Access & Inclusion Office having the effect that students who need the support of those services first seeking assistance from the DoS Office. This pattern continued to play out in 2019. Approaching our office as a starting point sometimes simply resulted from students finding out that we were in a position to give them an earlier appointment than other services. Typically, students in this situation were already highly distressed and had experienced very significant problems with their academic progress by the time they sought our help. Their academic failure was often associated with their inability to cope with their studies due to mental illness, health issues or

other associated factors. We do not provide counselling, medical support or specialised assistance to accommodate disability. What we do provide is advice about the processes available to students in relation to problems with their academic progress. In many cases students sought our help in responding to an invitation to “show cause” as to why they should not be excluded from the University. Sometimes, their first approach was after the exclusion had already been confirmed because they did not respond to the “show cause” letter. Amongst other advice and action, we often assisted with applications for Late Withdrawal - the latter frequently turned to as a last resort to save students from exclusion. Those applications were only sometimes successful.

### *Late Withdrawal*

An area of ongoing concern for this office relates to the late withdrawal applications. The data shows a significant increase in the number of students seeking assistance with late withdrawal applications between 2018 (128 students) and 2019 (186 students). This most recent jump in numbers follows a major increase in requests for assistance with late withdrawal applications between 2016 and 2017 (80 student requests in 2016 and 134 in 2017). As mentioned in the “positives” section above, whilst the information provided online to guide students with their applications is extremely clear and concise, nevertheless, students who were unwell or were facing exclusion often sought assistance from our office with this process. We should also note that even students who had been through the late withdrawal application process before often still needed help with their current applications.

We assisted by providing guidance on their application requirements and by providing feedback on their draft application statements prior to submission. The guidance we provided was no different to the information provided online. However, it is clear these vulnerable students actually need a person to walk them through these steps in what was frequently a very high stakes process for them. Many of these students presented with debilitating depression or anxiety, either as a pre-existing condition prior to enrolment or developed while a student at the University. Given the revision of practice, one on one appointments and clear guidance provided by DSAAS to students about this process, it is hard to see how this situation can be further addressed.

An issue that this office was raised with the DSAAS in the area of late withdrawals in 2019 is our overarching concern about the intersection between longstanding student mental health issues and late withdrawals. It is not in a student’s best interests to repeatedly start a new semester only to seek a late withdrawal towards the end of that semester due to a re-emergence or exacerbation of a mental health condition. Importantly, such repeated situations will be increasingly unlikely to meet the exceptional or unexpected circumstances requirement that sits at the heart of the granting of late withdrawal. Additionally, continued lack of progress in an academic program can contribute to anxiety, stress and depression. As a result, we are concerned that students not default to relying on the making of late withdrawal applications when other decisions (such as seeking program leave in order to address mental health issues) would be more in their interests. We appreciate the receptiveness of DSAAS to our expressed concerns and their undertaking to monitor this situation and work with our office in seeking alternative solutions and interventions over the coming year.

### *Behavioural Conduct/Misconduct*

Another area of concern for 2019 was a significant increase in the number of grievances brought to our office concerning behavioural conduct, misconduct and bullying by staff or

students. At 260 grievances, this category of complaint reached an all-time high number in 2019. Numbers in previous years were 204 complaints in 2018, 225 in 2017 and 115 in 2016. We regard this jump in numbers between 2018 and 2019 as a significant matter of concern for a variety of reasons. Cases in this category often consume significant resources within the DoS Office and are often difficult and complex matters requiring multiple contacts with the student and others. They may involve situations where trust has been breached and significant psychological, social and/or physical harm may have been done. In 2019, cases in this category included allegations of bullying of HDR students by their supervisors or other research group members, concerns about aggressive conduct by staff members, major behavioural issues involving individual students, cases of harassment and stalking, and allegations of sexual harassment or sexual assault. The most complex cases involved misconduct or behavioural issues alongside mental health issues.

As can be seen from the grievance number above, such complex cases are increasingly a feature of our workload. This trend is expected to continue. We are hopeful that the work done by the RRU as well as the introduction of a Student Code of Conduct (which was approved through the required Committee processes in May 2020) will provide greater guidance and clarity to students about the conduct that is expected of them by the University. We will re-inforce the importance of the Student Code of Conduct in our work with students going forward.

We note that grievances in this category included 93 complaints of varying severity about staff conduct. This highlights the importance of the current work being done to update the existing Staff Code of Conduct. We hope that this important work will be completed very soon.

### *Compliance Matters*

There are a significant number of rules, policies, procedures and guidelines that govern teaching and learning at the ANU, some of which are relatively new. Under the Staff Code of Conduct, it is an obligation for all staff to be aware of and respect these instruments of University governance. A significant aspect of the work of the Office involves students complaining that policies and procedures have not been observed.

During the course of 2019, for example, the Office was approached by a number of coursework students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) with the same broad grievances in relation to a variety of different courses where convenors were not following ANU policy and procedure, particularly in relation to assessment. These complaints usually emerged in one of two contexts:

- the convenor had made changes to assessment regimes in breach of the requirements in the Student Assessment (Coursework) Procedure that those regimes be settled before 10% of the course has elapsed (clause 2) or, if, after that date, that they seek approval for the change from the College Associate Dean (Education) (clause 5); or
- the convenor had not met their obligations when providing information to students in relation to their assessment tasks. Most frequently, this involved failure to provide assessment criteria for each assessment task (required by clause 4 of the Student Assessment (Coursework) Policy) and linked learning outcomes for

specific assessment tasks (required by the Class Summary Procedure, clause 9).

The significance of such breaches, in addition to being poor practice pedagogically, is that failure to comply with teaching and learning policy and procedure can constitute grounds for students to appeal against their course results after those final results have been published (see Assessment Rule 2016, rule 12). Such appeals are both stressful, particularly for students, and very time consuming to deal with for Convenors and Associate Deans (Education). In 2019, this office was of the view that some of the outcomes of those appeals were not fair to students.

It is the responsibility of Colleges to ensure that academic staff members produce compliant course and assessment documents. We fully appreciate that the workload associated with this, each teaching period, is great. However, the benefits of ensuring compliance at the beginning of a teaching period are likely not only to be better learning outcomes for students but are also to be seen in a low number of appeals at the end of a teaching period. This aspect of ensuring compliance needs to be both acknowledged by College and School leaders and properly resourced by them.

We note, here, that some Colleges have done excellent work in relation to ensuring staff members are well prepared for working within teaching and learning policies and procedures. The former ADE in CAP has run sessions for existing academics and new tutors that deal with a variety of matters, including adherence to ANU policies and procedures. We very much encourage such initiatives. We are also working with ASQO to ensure that support materials and templates produced by the University promote easy compliance as much as this is possible.

#### *Management of Programs*

There were a number of complaints received by the Office in 2019 in relation to the impacts on students of the dis-establishment of an online postgraduate coursework program. We acknowledge the very difficult circumstances in which this decision was made but note the potential for reputational damage inherent in these kinds of decisions. We urge that serious thought and planning go into both the establishment of new programs and to the implications and management of their dis-establishment.

#### *Resistance to Informal Complaint Resolution*

As explained in the “Specific Roles designated by ANU Policy and Procedure” section of this Report (above), the Office has a role in assisting students to informally resolve a complaint against a fellow student, staff member or group. We do this through a variety of means, including mediation (either with all parties present or serially with each individual involved), restorative practices (which the Dean and Deputy Dean received additional training in during 2019 and early 2020) or negotiation. Informal resolution is one of two options available to students when they have a complaint. The other option, formal resolution, involves the instigator making a written complaint. Where the complaint alleges that a staff member has breached some aspect of the Code of Conduct it usually goes to their immediate supervisor. In serious cases, it goes directly to ANU Human Resources (HR). Where the complaint is against a student, it goes to the Registrar, for formal inquiry and resolution under the Discipline Rule 2018.

There is always the option, under ANU policy, for a student to make a formal complaint. However, we frequently judge the more appropriate course to be for students to seek informal complaint resolution, at least initially. Informal resolution often leads to a better outcome for all parties and paves the way for improved understanding and communication between them (as well as better future practice where grievances in relation to staff are involved). A noticeable trend in 2019 has been an increase in the number of students who have resisted informal resolution measures, despite our very strong advice that a formal complaint is neither a suitable nor a justifiable option in the circumstances. This situation tends to occur when a student feels a sense of outrage at their experience and is seeking retributive justice. The dogged pursuit of a formal complaint in these circumstances creates a significant amount of work for various areas of the University to very little end. Complaints management is another area where a lot of difficult and detailed, but hidden, work occurs at the ANU with serious resourcing pressures being experienced, particularly by DSAAS, as a result.

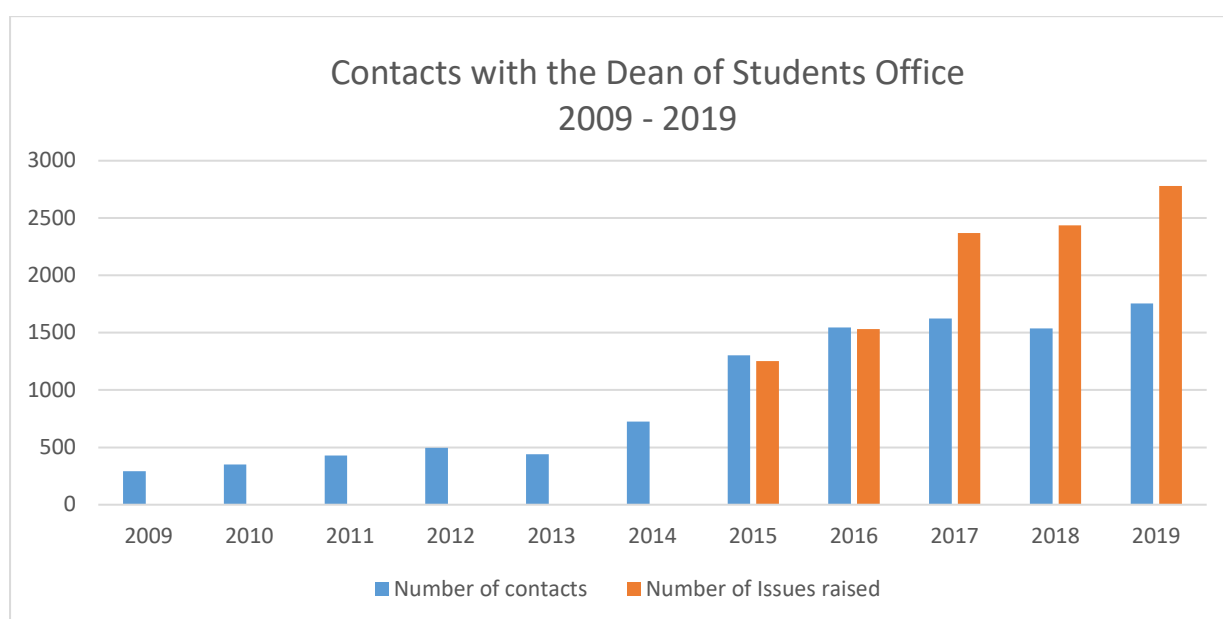
Similar problems arise where students become intent on lodging procedural appeals against academic decisions despite our clear advice that all relevant procedures have been followed and that there is no sound basis for arguing a breach has occurred. This misuse of appeal grounds again creates unnecessary work for hard-pressed areas of the University.

## The Numbers – an overview

In 2019 the DoS Office provided independent, impartial, confidential advice and support to 945 individuals over the course of 1756 “contacts”. The term “contacts” represents interactions where substantive advice, information or dispute resolution activities were provided (and so, excludes incidental emails and routine phone calls). Student contacts were primarily via in-person appointments but also via email, phone or on-line meeting platforms. The Office also acted as a resource to staff who sought in-person, email or phone advice in relation to policy matters or when they encountered difficult student situations. Dispute resolution activities involving staff occurred in groups or on a one-on-one basis, in person or via phone.

The chart below records the number of contacts with the DoS Office from 2009 to 2019 as well as the number of grievances or issues raised in the course of those contacts for the years 2015 to 2019. Where an issue is raised by the same individual over multiple contacts that issue is only counted once in the “Number of Issues raised” data set out below. So where there are multiple visits by the same individual and the same single issue is repeatedly raised, the total number of visits are shown below (in the blue column and associated data) but the issue is recorded only once (in the orange column and associated data in the table below). Data in this table includes repeat visits rather than simply providing a head count of individual students. **Note that all subsequent charts in this report relate to individuals (head count).**

**Chart 1**



Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>No. Visits</b>	293	351	430	495	441	724	1303	1547	1624	1538	1756
<b>No. Issues</b>							1254	1533	2369	2435	2779

In 2019, 945 individuals made 1756 contacts with the DoS Office during which they raised 2779 issues or grievances. This number represents approximately 4% of the total ANU student population (39.6 students per 1000 students) and compares with 38.4 students per 1000 students in 2018.

Of the total number of individuals who contacted the Office in the reporting year, 354 (33%), did so over multiple visits - approximately the same percentage as in 2018 (296 individuals or 32.8%). This is still a slight decrease from the percentage in 2017 (36%) but significantly ahead of the percentage of individuals requiring multiple contacts in 2016 (27%). Multiple visits can indicate various associated concerns held by students as well as ongoing or entrenched problems. There is clear evidence that situations brought to the Office over the period 2015 to 2018 have increased in their complexity but have stabilised somewhat in 2019. Whereas the 934 individuals who contacted the Office in 2017 raised 2369 issues or grievances in the course of 1624 contacts, in 2018, a fewer number of individuals (900) raised a higher number of issues or grievances (2435) over fewer contacts (1538). In 2019, a total of 945 individuals raised 2779 issues with the Office in the course of 1756 contacts. This represents the highest number of: individuals seeking assistance from the DoS Office; contacts with the Office made by those individuals; and issues raised during those contacts than in any other reporting year. The number of contacts represents an increase of 14% on the number of contacts in 2018 and an increase of 8% over the previous highest-contact year (2017). The number of matters raised, compared to the number of visits has increased from a ratio of approximately 1:1 in 2016 to 1:1.46 in 2017, 1:1.58 in both 2018 and 2019.

The closest international comparison to the work of the ANU DoS Office is the work undertaken by Student Ombudspersons in Canadian Universities. The Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) reports an annual caseload of approximately 1% of the total student population in Canadian Universities. Due, in part, to a lack of consistency across Australian Universities in relation to the roles played by Deans of Students, there are no comparable data currently available for the Australian university sector.

## Grievance Categories

The DoS Office records interactions with individuals by reference to the categories and sub-categories of grievance or issue that are raised. The consistency of these categories is maintained over time, in order to ensure comparability of data across multiple years. However, sub-categories are reviewed at the end of each year and may be tweaked in order to ensure that they accurately reflect and capture student concerns. No changes were made to the category of issue form between 2018 and 2019. The categories and sub-categories of grievance that are recorded by the DoS Office in 2019 were as follows:

### **1. Academic Grievances**

Appeal; Grade appeal; Exams – academic; Exams – administrative; Late withdrawal; Special Consideration/Extensions/Deferred Exams.

### **2. Disability, Health, Mental Health**



### **3. Academic Advice and Progress**

Academic Advice; Academic Progress; Academic Progress – Probation; Academic Progress – Suspension; Academic Progress – Exclusion; Graduate Studies advice; Overseas Exchange.

### **4. Administration**

Administrative issue; Admission; Enrolment; Fees; Graduation; Timetabling; Program transfer.

### **5. Pastoral Care, Financial, Accommodation**

Accommodation; Financial; Pastoral Care; Personal; Time Management.

### **6. Behavioural Conduct/Misconduct**

Bullying - staff of student; Bullying - student of staff; Bullying - student of student; Campus Security; Conduct – Staff; Conduct – Student; Stalking; Harassment; Social Media – Facebook/Stalkerspace etc, Case Management Meeting.

### **7. Teaching Quality, Program Concerns**

Program concerns; Teaching quality; Online course sites; Fieldwork; Feedback re assessment; Assessment requirements.

### **8. Other**

Details of any matter outside of the other categories.

### **9. Scholarships (Academic Progress Requirements)**

Scholarship; Scholarship – Encouragement; Scholarship – Probation; Scholarship – Suspension; Scholarship – Show Cause.

### **10. Supervisory concerns**

Supervision – HDR; Supervision – Hons.

### **11. Academic misconduct**

### **12. Sexual Harassment; Sexual Assault**

Sexual assault, Sexual harassment; Historic disclosure.

### **13. Staff seeking advice**

Regarding: Undergraduate; postgraduate; or higher degree research students.

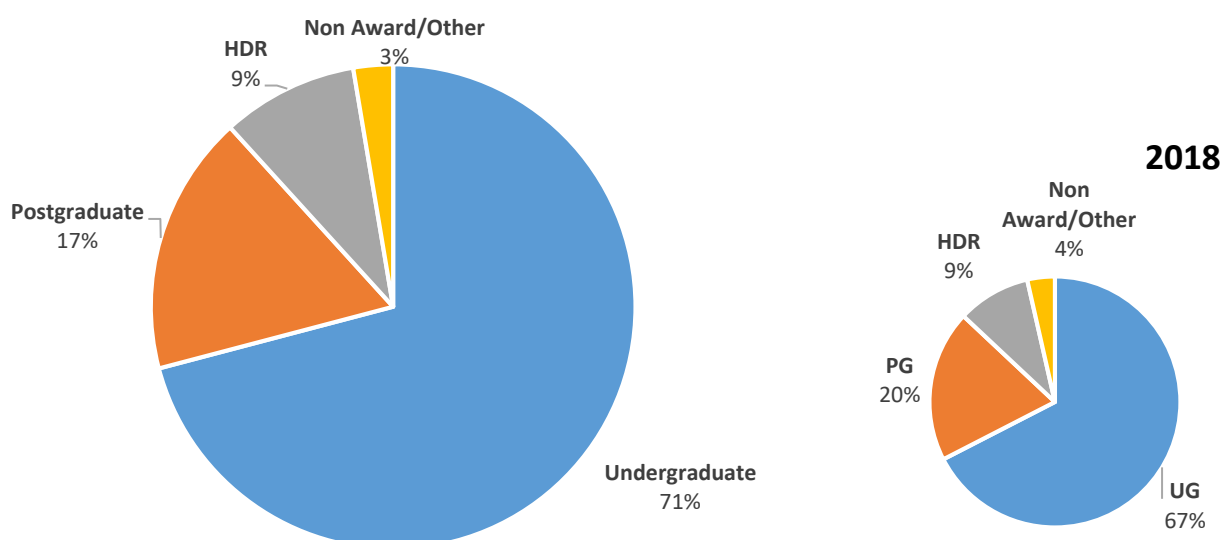
## Summary of Contacts with the Dean of Students' Office 2019

### Individuals by Student Career

Chart 2 below shows a percentage summary of individuals who were assisted by the DoS Office by student career (Undergraduate, Postgraduate, HDR and Non Award) in 2019. The 2019 percentage summary of individuals is compared, via a second pie chart, with those who were assisted by the Office in 2018. Data in the table below the charts set out the number of individuals who were assisted by the Office, by reference to their student career, for each of the years 2018 and 2019 along with the percentage of the total number of DoS-assisted students falling into each student career group for 2019. The final column sets out the percentage of students in each career cohort across the whole of the University population for the year 2019.

**Chart 2**

### Individuals in Grievance Cohort by Student Career 2019



Student Career	No. Students 2019	No. Students 2018	% in grievance cohort 2019	% in ANU cohort 2019
Undergraduate	670	607	71	56
Postgraduate	164	176	17	33
HDR	86	85	9	11
Non Award/Other	25	32	3	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>900</b>		

**Note that Chart 2 (above) and all subsequent charts in this report relate to individuals (head count) as opposed to total numbers of interactions or contacts with the Office by those individuals (shown in Chart 1).**

The spread of individuals who were assisted by the DoS Office in 2019 across student career cohorts remained relatively consistent with 2018, with slight amplifications of the trends commented on in last year's report. In 2019, undergraduate students presented to the DoS Office at a higher rate than their proportion in the total ANU student population (71% to 56%). This is a further increase in undergraduate representation on the previous year. In 2018, the comparable percentages were 67% and 55% respectively. As in previous years, the undergraduate cohort presented predominantly in relation to: appeals (particularly appeals against results), special consideration, late withdrawal, academic advice and academic progress. The prevalence of students seeking advice around modifying a course outcome or result (grade appeal, special consideration or late withdrawal) continued to increase (following the trend apparent since 2015). It should be noted that this trend was not confined to the undergraduate cohort but applied also to postgraduate coursework students.

Postgraduate coursework students continued to be significantly underrepresented amongst the 945 individuals who sought assistance from the DoS Office. Postgraduate coursework students represented 17% of individuals contacting the DoS Office as opposed to 33% of the total student population of the ANU. Again, this continues, and indeed amplifies, the pattern of underrepresentation commented on in last year's DoS Annual Report. In 2018, postgraduate students represented 20% of individuals assisted by the DoS Office whilst comprising 34% of the student population. However, the actual number of postgraduate students presenting with a difficulty was similar to the number in 2017 (164 as opposed to 167). The Office is aware that it will need to continue to work on improving its visibility amongst this cohort to address this underrepresentation.

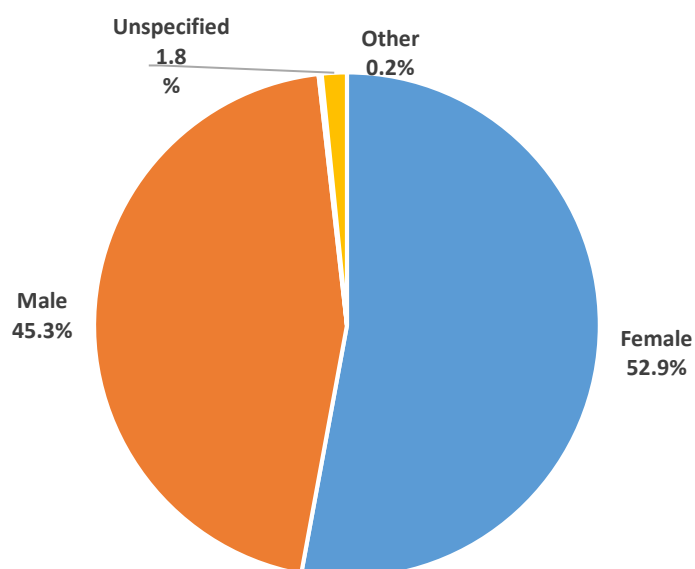
The proportion of individuals presenting to the DoS Office in 2019 who were HDR students was the same proportion as in 2018 (9% of the total grievance cohort). This remains slightly down on the proportion reported in 2017 (11%). However, the number of HDR students in the grievance cohort remains broadly proportionate to the percentage of HDR students in the whole of University cohort: 11%.

## Individuals by Gender

Chart 3 below shows a percentage summary of individuals who were assisted by the DoS Office in 2019 by reference to gender (to one percentage point). Data in the table below the charts set out the number of individuals assisted by the Office by recorded gender for each of 2018 and 2019 along with the percentage of students in the DoS contact cohort by gender for 2019. The final column sets out the percentage of students in gender cohorts across the whole of the University population for 2019.

**Chart 3**

### Individuals in Grievance Cohort by Gender 2019



Gender	No. Students 2019	No. Students 2018	% in grievance cohort 2019	% in ANU cohort 2019
Female	500	520	52.9	52.5
Male	428	373	45.3	47.5
Other	2	1	0.2	0.1
Unspecified	15	6	1.8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>900</b>		

Before 2017, gender did not appear to be a significant factor influencing the overall reporting of issues to the DoS Office. The data in 2016 showed a small over-representation of female students but this trend became more marked in 2017 (where there was a ratio of 58% to 42% females to males presenting to the DoS Office). The trend held steady in 2018 with 57.8% of students presenting at the DoS Office being female (as compared to 53% of the overall ANU student cohort - identical to that in 2017) and 41.5% being male (as compared to 47% of the

overall student cohort - again, identical to 2017). In 2019, there was a significant shift back towards the pre-2017 position. In this reporting year, 52.9% of students reporting grievances to the DoS Office were female (almost exactly the same as the proportion of female students in the whole of ANU cohort – 52.5%) and 45.3% were male (only 2.2% lower than the representation of males in the ANU student cohort). The 1.8% of students whose gender is recorded as unspecified, were mainly email enquiries from prospective students, whose gender was not identifiable from their correspondence.

Gender differences continue to be apparent in specific grievance categories (see Chart 8 below) and in specific career cohorts of students, although there have been some slowing of previously identified trends between 2018 and 2019. In 2018, 64 female HDR students (or 75% of the total DoS HDR cohort) presented to the DoS as compared with 21 males (or 25% of the DoS HDR cohort). By contrast the gender breakdown for male and female HDR students in the whole ANU cohort in 2018 was 50:50. The comparable numbers for 2019 were 53 females (62%) and 29 male (34%) HDR students presenting to the DoS (approximately 4% were unknown), with an overall ANU HDR cohort of 49.5% female and 50.5% male.

Amongst the HDR cohort that contacted the DoS Office, 23 female students presented with supervision grievances and 19 with grievances relating to what they considered to be poor or inappropriate conduct by other students or members of staff. This compared with 15 male students with complaints relating to supervision and 10 relating to student or staff conduct.

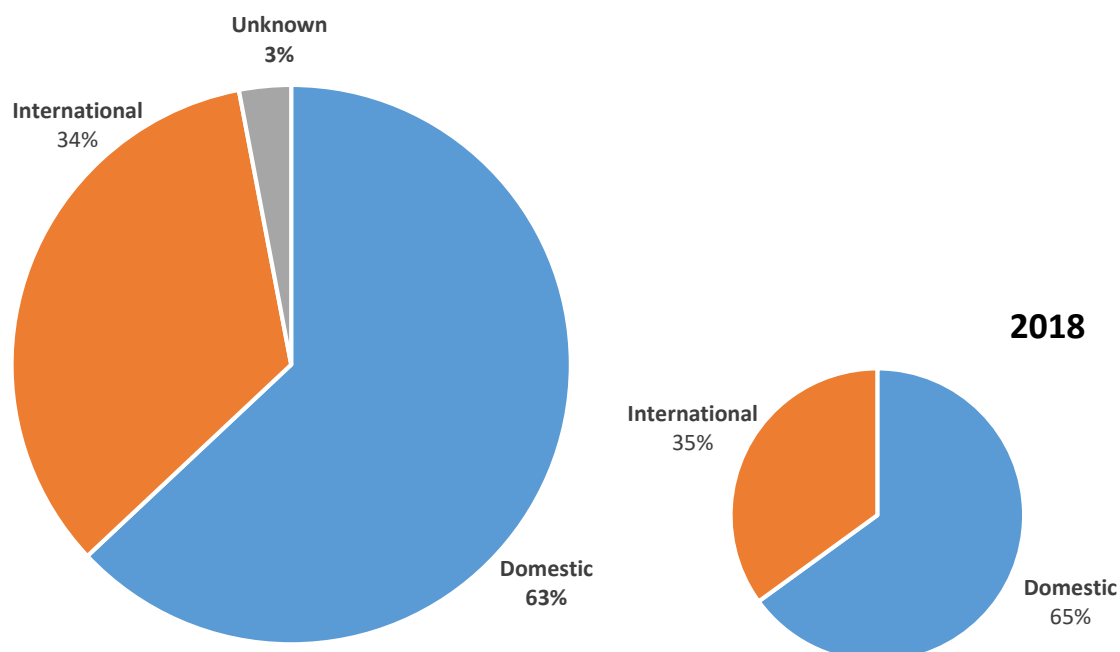
Other grievance categories where a gender bias was apparent in 2019 largely replicated the observations made in the 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports: reports of sexual harassment or sexual assault (a strong over-representation of female students); undergraduate students reporting interpersonal conduct issues with other students (an over-representation of male students); and students in all career cohorts seeking academic advice (an under-representation of male students). Prior to 2018, there had been a clear pattern of male international students being underrepresented in relation to the raising of mental health issues during interactions with the DoS Office. The cultural factors potentially re-enforcing this underrepresentation have also been commented upon in previous Annual Reports. In 2018, we reported an increase in the numbers of male international students reporting mental health issues impacting their studies, albeit reluctantly in some cases. This increase did not continue in the 2019 reporting year, and male international students were again under-represented in relation to this grievance category, though to a lesser extent than pre-2018.

## Individuals by Residency

Chart 4 shows a percentage summary of the individuals assisted by the DoS Office by reference to their status as domestic or international students. The 2019 chart can be compared to the second pie chart, which shows a percentage summary of the residential status of individuals assisted by the Office in 2018. Data in the table below the charts set out the number of individuals assisted by the Office by residency for each of 2018 and 2019 along with the percentage of students in the DoS grievance cohort by residency for 2018. The final column sets out the percentage of students in international and domestic cohorts across the whole of the University population for 2019.

**Chart 4**

### Individuals in Grievance Cohort by Residency Status 2019



Residency Status	No. Students 2019	No. Students 2018	% in grievance cohort 2019	% in ANU cohort 2019
Domestic	596	588	63	62
International	322	312	34	38
Unknown	27	0	3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>900</b>		

There was a steady increase in the number of international students seeking assistance from the DoS Office between the years 2016 and 2018. The percentage of the grievance cohort represented by this group increased from 27% in 2016, to 32% in 2017 and to 35% in 2018. The 2018 cohort representation across the whole University was 37%. In 2019, the percentage of international students in the cohort that presented to the DoS Office with grievances reduced by one percent to 34%. The whole of University International student cohort in 2019 was 38%. The numbers represent an underrepresentation of 4% in the DoS grievance cohort in 2019, compared with an underrepresentation of 2% in 2018. Whilst the decrease is small, it will be closely monitored by the Office. The previous trend towards equal representation of International students between the DoS grievance and ANU cohorts was a very welcome one and coincided with efforts to raise the profile of the Dean of Students' Office and the assistance it provides. Those efforts on awareness-raising, particularly with student leaders, will again be a focus of attention for 2020.

For every year between 2014 and 2017, Annual Reports of this office have commented that international students disproportionately presented with severe academic progress issues at a late stage, rather than accessing assistance from the DoS when they first experience academic problems. These late-presenters typically contact the Office only as a result of having been excluded from their programs following the invitation to show cause to the Academic Progress Committee. Students at this late stage of the process attend our office after receiving written advice of their exclusion, with the advice letter telling them that they should seek assistance from the DoS Office if they are considering a procedural appeal of the exclusion. It is highly unlikely that we will find a basis for a procedural appeal and we can offer little assistance other than to investigate if there are grounds for the student making a late withdrawal application.

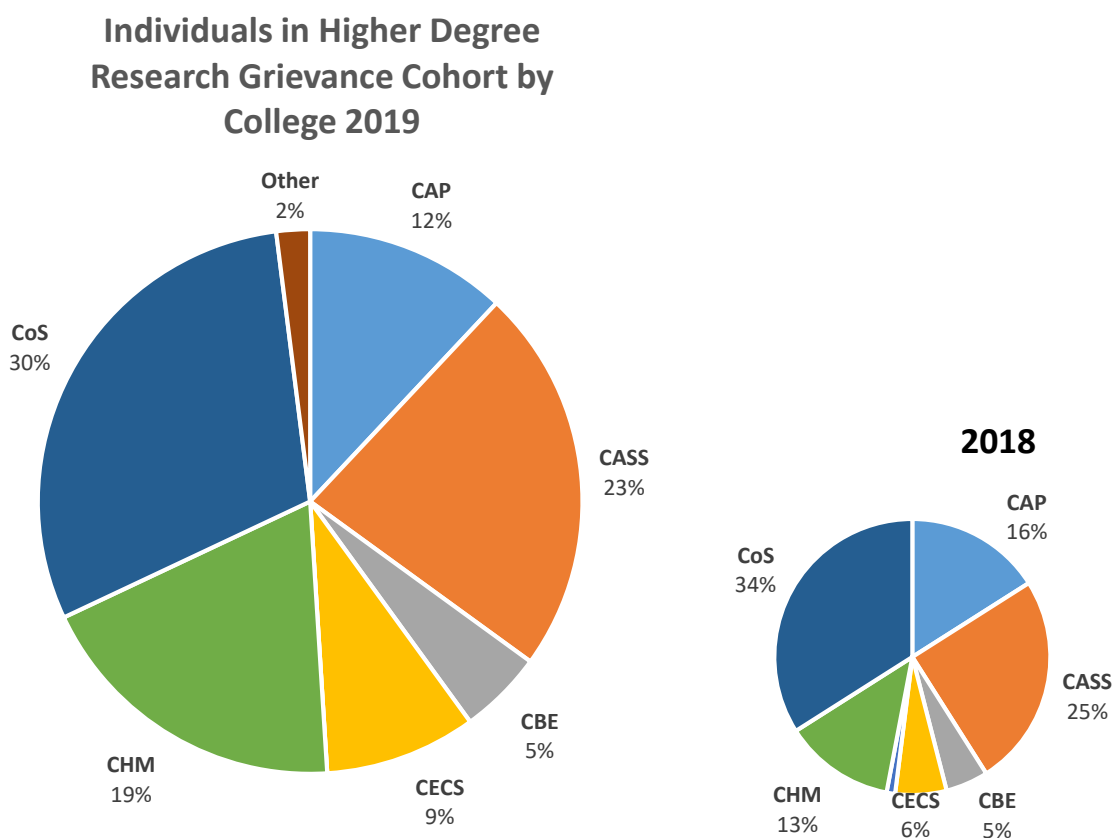
However, in 2018, the figures showed no clear difference between the international student cohort in regards to grievances relating to exclusion and the domestic student cohort. In 2018, 37 domestic undergraduate students (or 6.3% of the total domestic DoS grievance cohort) and 18 international undergraduate students (or 5.7% of the total international DoS grievance cohort) presented to the Office following exclusions from their program. The figures for 2019 demonstrate a return to the pre-2018 position where international students are disproportionately presented to the Office after they had been excluded from their programs of study. In that year 42 domestic coursework students (or 7% of the total domestic DoS grievance cohort) and 34% of international coursework students (or 10.5% of the total international DoS grievance cohort) accessed the DoS Office following exclusion for breaches of academic progress requirements. Given the small underrepresentation of international students in the DoS grievance cohort overall, the late presentation of this cohort in disproportionate numbers in relation to serious academic progress issues is very concerning. It is also worrying that a proportion of domestic coursework students are unlikely to seek or take up offers for early intervention support from this office or their academic Colleges. This is despite proactive strategies to identify and contact students at risk of breaching Academic Progress requirements being deployed by both the Division of Student Life and academic Colleges. Whilst these strategies are designed to promote students experiencing difficulties with their studies seeking a variety of academic and other supports, there is a significant reluctance on the part of some students to do so.

## Individuals by Student Career and by College

### Higher Degree Research Students

Chart 5 shows a percentage summary of the individual HDR students who were assisted by the DoS Office by reference to the academic Colleges in which they were pursuing their research studies. The 2019 chart can be compared to the second pie chart, which shows a percentage summary of individual HDR students who were assisted by the Office across academic Colleges in 2018. Data in the table below the charts set out the number of individual HDR students who were assisted by the Office by academic College for each of 2018 and 2019 along with the percentage of the total DoS HDR grievance cohort from each academic College for 2019. The final column sets out the percentage of the total University population of HDR students hosted in each academic College for 2019.

**Chart 5**





College	No. Students 2019	No. Students 2018	% in grievance cohort 2019	% in ANU cohort 2019*
CASS	20	21	23	20
CAP	10	14	12	16
CBE	4	4	5	6
CECS	8	5	9	11.5
CoL	0	1	0	2
CHM	16	11	19	14
CoS	26	29	30	30
Other	2	0	2	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>85</b>		

\* Percentages have been rounded to the nearest 0.5%.

CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CHM: College of Health and Medicine; CoS: College of Science; Other: Centres not affiliated with a particular College.

The number of higher degree research (HDR) students who were assisted by our office in 2019 was almost the same as in 2018 (86 as opposed to 85). It is notable that the percentage of the total ANU HDR cohort receiving support or advice from the DoS Office has remained broadly consistent over the past four years (3.3% of the total HDR cohort in both 2019 and 2018, 3.6% in 2017 and 3.4% in 2016). As was the case in previous years, the complexity of the case management with which the Office was involved in 2019 was very high: 44 of the 86 HDR candidates supported by the Office required multiple visits, with 12 students each being supported by in excess of 5 contacts/appointments during the reporting period. The four students requiring the highest number of appointments or contacts were: two with eight; one with nine; and one with 11.

As has been the case in previous years, a significant majority of grievances presented by HDR candidates involved supervision issues and/or lack of academic progress. There was an increase in the proportion of HDR students who presented with these forms of grievance in 2019 with 66% of the grievance cohort (57 out of 86) raising such concerns. The equivalent number in 2018 was 51 out of a total HDR cohort of 85 (60%). The trend for students to present earlier in their candidature, commented on in both the 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports, continued in 2019. Early presentation is welcomed by this office as it allows time for remedial intervention and the possible salvaging of students' candidature. Also as previously noted, innovations over the past several years (such as stronger induction processes and Thesis Boot Camp) were appreciated by HDR students presenting to the DoS Office as positive developments. The Office also started to see the positive effects of the institution of the Graduate Research Office (which commenced operations in February 2019) as a source of information, support and coordination for the HDR cohort. We are hoping that the significant

changes to supervision requirements and practices across the University under the Higher Degree Research (HDR) Supervision Development Framework and associated developments will see significant reduction in the number of students presenting with supervision grievances going forward.

As has been remarked upon in previous reports, this cohort of students continues to present to our office with very high levels of stress. Untangling and addressing the multiple factors that are contributing to this stress can require significant time, multiple visits and a variety of approaches. Where students are prepared to be identified, case management can include working with Associate Deans (HDR) in Colleges as well as liaising and sometimes mediating with HDR Convenors, HDR Chairs, supervisors and panel members and, sometimes also College professional staff. Case management is most complex when there has been a breakdown of the supervisory relationship. This can mean that support from our office is required over many weeks and months to re-negotiate the relationship, to re-build student confidence and to ensure that academic progress is made.

It is highly problematic, therefore, that the majority of HDR students that we assisted were not prepared to be identified to their Colleges due to their concerns that any complaint that they make may adversely affect their studies. The perception that they could potentially be unfairly treated by supervisors or schools if they raise issues or “make a fuss” speaks to a recurring theme in our discussions with this cohort: the candidate’s sense of their lack of power in an unequal relationship.

The nature of our support and advice with the HDR cohort is to focus on academic progress when working with the student. This often involves helping the student to develop project and time management skills as well as providing them with support and strategies aimed at improving the quality of their relationship with their supervisors. We refer students to support services such as ANU Counselling and the Academic Skills Centre, where appropriate, and can mediate between the student and their supervisor and/or liaise with HDR Convenors where students are happy to be identified. The aim is to help the student to become productive as well as to support the rejuvenation of their working relationship with their supervisor. This process can address the original grievance with which the HDR student presented.

It is important to note that some cases dealt with by this office involve students who are suffering significant mental illness. That illness can either exist prior to their enrolment in their HDR program or can develop in the course of their candidature. In such cases, the stress experienced by both students and staff is substantial. In 2019, 16% of HDR candidates assisted by the DoS Office were experiencing significant health or mental health issues.

Another area of concern in relation to this cohort (which sometimes overlapped with grievances in relation to supervisory practices or the management of labs) were the number of grievances involving inappropriate or poor conduct by staff or fellow students. Six HDR students (four of whom were female) claimed their supervisor or another staff member bullied them – a significant increase on the one claim made in 2018 and also an increase on the three cases reported in 2017. In addition, 19 grievances involved complaints about the conduct of staff and its impact on student well-being and progress. This is another significant increase over the numbers previously reported: in 2018, ten HDR students made such complaints, whilst the number in 2017 was nine. As reported in 2018, the conduct complained of was characterised as either harassment or insistent, harrying behaviour (sometimes associated

with requiring work that students saw as outside of or peripheral to their own research) or, conversely, student neglect. In the latter case, students saw themselves as a low priority for supervisors who were too busy to give them their attention. Also as in previous years, some complaints involved problems associated with the delegation of supervision to post-doctoral fellows. In 2019, there were two complaints of bullying by another student and four grievances in relation to lesser forms of poor conduct by fellow students (often in the laboratory environment). In comparison, there were nine complaints of poor conduct by fellow students (and none in relation to bullying by other students) in 2018.

A recurring theme was the lack of clear and agreed expectations of how the supervisory relationship would work and a lack of overt recognition of the need to negotiate supervision and learning styles in the interests of both parties. Many students complained that feedback on their work was either not consistently given or not in a useful form. This type of complaint has been commented on in previous Annual Reports. Once again, the Office applauds the hard work done in this area by the Higher Degree Research Committee in developing the HDR Supervision Development Framework and, in particular, the adoption of the recommendation from the 2018 DoS Annual Report that Candidate-Supervisor Agreements be instituted for existing students as well as for incoming HDR candidates. Whilst it may take some time for the effects of these changes to play out in terms of the case management load of this office, we continue to believe that the introduction of consistent, rigorous supervision practices across the University will minimise supervision-related grievances and enhance the experience of the entire HDR student cohort.

The prevalence of HDR student complaints is broadly aligned with the numbers of HDR students in each College. However, as has been the case in the past, there is some over-representation in CASS (3%) and under-representation in CAP (4%) and CECS (2.5%). After over-representation in 2018, the proportion of CoS HDR students in the DoS HDR grievance cohort was entirely aligned with the proportion of HDR students in the College (30%). On the other hand, there was an increase in both the number and proportion of HDR candidates from CHM who presented to the DoS Office in 2019. The data show that more than two-thirds of the CHM students in the grievance cohort were female and that their predominant concern was in relation to supervision or staff conduct. Whilst the total numbers are small, the Office believes that this development warrants noting.

A welcome development in 2019 was an increase in the number of staff who contacted the Office in relation to HDR matters. Some of these will be discussed in the new section of the report below which is devoted to staff seeking DoS advice. We continue to encourage staff to consider the DoS Office as a general resource and, in the HDR context, a particular source of advice in relation to managing difficult supervision situations.

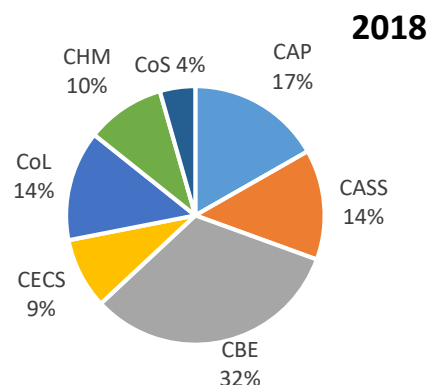
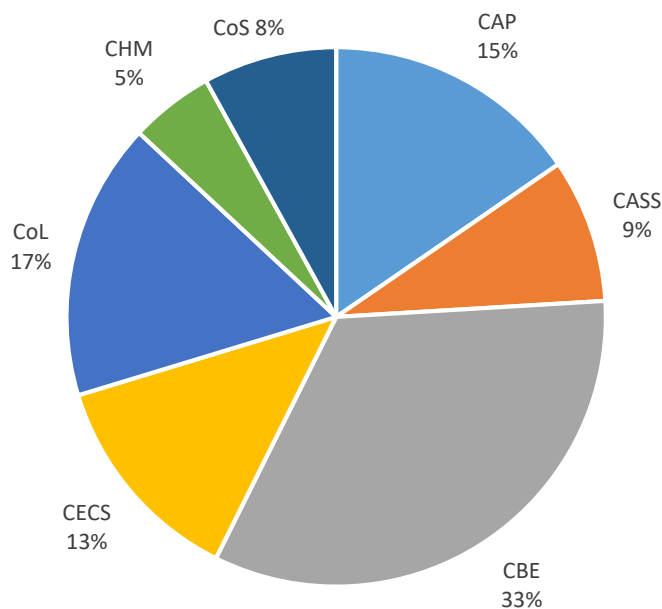
As always, we welcome opportunities to provide more detailed information specific to individual Colleges at the request of HDR Convenors.

## Postgraduate Coursework Students

Chart 6 shows a percentage summary of the individual postgraduate coursework students who were assisted by the DoS Office by reference to the academic Colleges in which they were enrolled. The 2019 chart can be compared to the second pie chart, which shows a percentage summary of individual postgraduate coursework students who were assisted by the Office across academic Colleges in 2018. Data in the table below the charts set out the number of individual postgraduate coursework students assisted by the Office by academic College for each of 2018 and 2019 along with the percentage of the total DoS postgraduate coursework grievance cohort that was enrolled in each academic College for 2019. The final column sets out the percentage of the total University population of postgraduate coursework students enrolled in each academic College for 2019.

**Chart 6**

**Individuals in Postgraduate Coursework Grievance Cohort by College 2019**



College	No. Students 2019	No. Students 2018	% in grievance cohort 2019	% in ANU cohort 2019
CASS	14	24	9	6
CAP	25	30	15	13
CBE	54	58	33	38
CECS	21	15	13	9
CoL	28	24	17	23
CHM	9	17	5	6
CoS	13	8	8	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>176</b>		

Note: Percentages have been rounded up.

CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CHM: College of Health and Medicine; CoS: College of Science.

After a small increase in the numbers of postgraduate coursework students assisted by this office between 2017 and 2018 (176 compared with 167 individuals), the number fell to slightly below 2017 levels in 2019 (164). Despite these small modifications year to year, postgraduate coursework students are consistently under-represented as a cohort that seeks the advice and support of this office (see the commentary accompanying Chart 2 above).

Given this under-representation, it is important to note that, of the 161 individuals in the cohort whose gender and residency were recorded, only 57 of them were domestic students whilst 104 (or 64.6%) were international students. We acknowledge that postgraduate coursework students across the University in 2019 were predominantly international (59.7%). However, the data indicate that this is the only student career in the DoS grievance cohort where international students are significantly overrepresented. Grievances within the international postgraduate coursework cohort centred around academic progress and advice, grade appeals and financial or fee related issues. This is another sub-group of students where high levels of stress were apparent, not just in relation to academic studies but also in relation to adjustment to University in Australia and financial pressures. A small number of this sub-group of students, studying in CECS, felt that they were not sufficiently prepared for their chosen programs by their undergraduate studies and should have either received bridging preparation or been warned that they were not well equipped for some of the courses they needed to undertake as part of their masters program. This highlights the need for careful consideration of “cognate” backgrounds and pre-requisites when setting admission requirements where students from diverse undergraduate backgrounds are applicants to masters programs.

The data indicate that by comparison with the distribution of all ANU postgraduate coursework students across academic Colleges, a disproportionate number of students present to this office from CECS (+4%), CoS (+4%) and CASS (+3%). There has been a decrease in the number of CAP students in the DoS grievance cohort, although they remain slightly overrepresented when compared with whole of ANU distribution (+2%). In 2019, there was an increase in the number of students from CECS seeking our assistance and a slight increase

in complaints from students studying in the ANU College of Law as compared with 2018. However, the ANU CoL remains significantly underrepresented by reference to the whole of ANU distribution of this cohort across Colleges (-6%). CBE is also underrepresented (-5%).

Once again, we are happy to provide Colleges with more detailed de-identified information to assist in identifying key issues for their action.

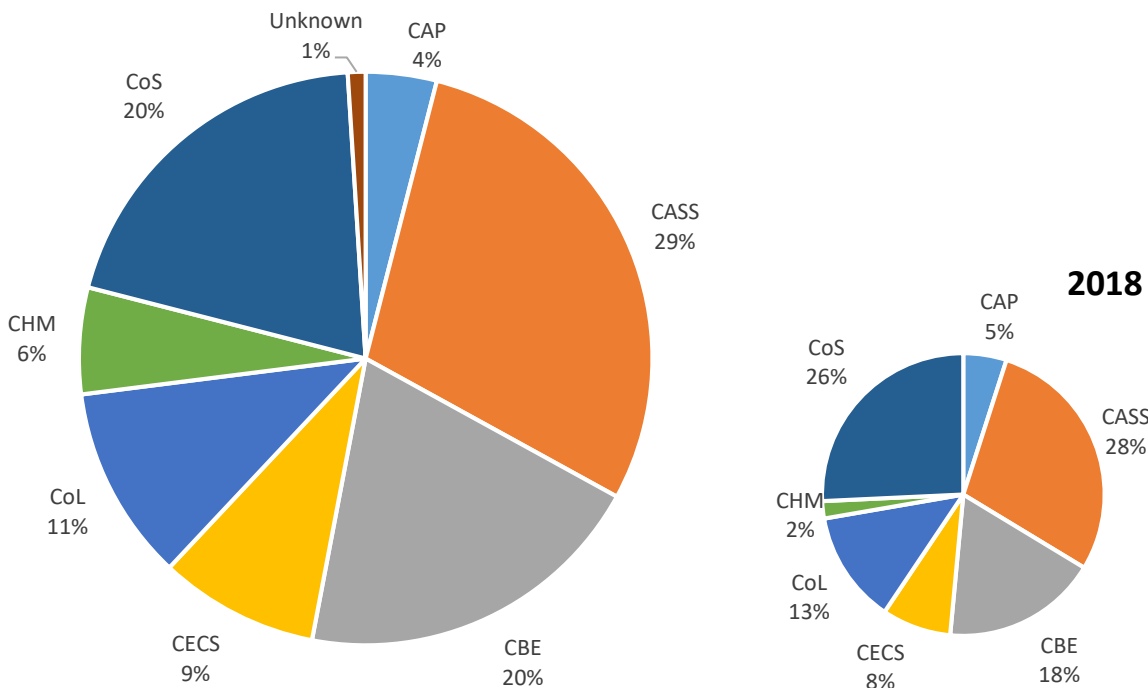
### Undergraduate Students

Chart 7 shows a percentage summary of the individual undergraduate students who were assisted by the DoS Office by reference to the academic Colleges in which they were enrolled. Where students are enrolled in double degrees, they are recorded against both Colleges in which they are studying. The 2019 chart can be compared to the second pie chart, which shows a percentage summary of individual undergraduate students who contacted the Office across academic Colleges in 2018. Data in the table below the charts sets out the number of individual undergraduate students who contacted the Office by reference to their academic Colleges in 201 and 2018 as well as the percentage of the total DoS undergraduate grievance cohort that was enrolled in each academic College for 2019. The final column sets out the percentage of the total University population of undergraduate students enrolled in each academic College for 2019 (again, remembering that double degree students are recorded as enrolled in two Colleges).

**Chart 7**

#### Individuals in Undergraduate Grievance Cohort by College 2019\*

\*double degree students counted toward both Colleges



College	No. Students* 2019	No. Students* 2018	% in grievance cohort 2019	% in ANU cohort 2019
CASS	268	264	29	31
CAP	34	41	4	6
CBE	184	144	20	20
CECS	84	67	9	12
CoL	98	103	11	10
CHM	59	15	6	5
CoS	186	210	20	16
Unknown	6	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>919</b>	<b>844</b>		

\* Double degree students are counted against both Colleges leading to double counting of some individuals.

CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CBE: College of Business & Economics; CECS: College of Engineering & Computer Science; CoL: ANU College of Law; CHM: College of Health and Medicine; CoS: College of Science.

Due to the double counting of students in double degrees, the actual number of individuals in the undergraduate cohort represented by the total of 919 in the table above is 670. This is an increase on the number of individuals in the undergraduate cohort who were assisted by the Office in 2018 when the numbers were 844 and 639 respectively.

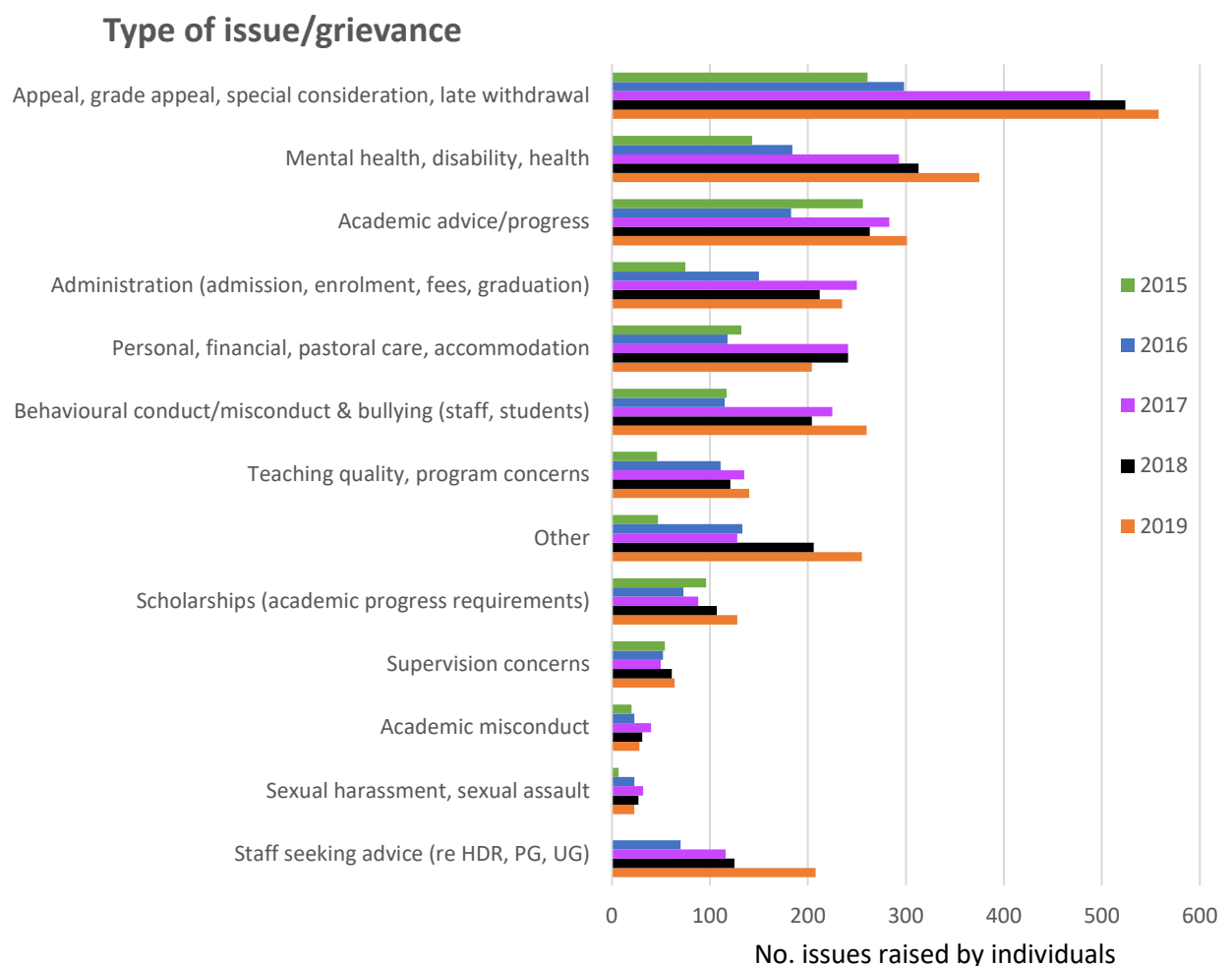
Whilst DoS contacts show a broadly representative spread across the Colleges, it is hard to draw conclusions about over or underrepresentation of each College in the grievance cohort when compared to the whole of ANU undergraduate cohort. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the numbers in the table above do not show the College about which a double degree student may have a grievance (if the grievance relates to a College at all), they simply record the Colleges in which a student is enrolled. Second, because of the flexible nature of many bachelor degree programs at the ANU, a student enrolled in a particular degree program may take individual courses from outside of the Colleges that administer their degrees. So, it may be possible for a course in a third College to actually be the source of a complaint. For example, a student undertaking a flexible double degree in Science and Arts, could take a computing course (run by CECS) as part of their program.

The undergraduate grievance cohort is more likely than other student career cohorts to approach the DoS with issues relating to the grievance categories of academic advice and progress; academic grievances (especially late withdrawals, special consideration/extension/deferred exams, and grade appeals) and teaching quality and program concerns. Further detail can be provided to individual Colleges on request.

## Distribution of Grievances

Chart 8 provides a comparison of the number of issues raised by individuals by reference to the type of issue or grievance with which they presented to the DoS for the years 2015 to 2019. A single contact with our office may raise multiple issues. Where the same grievance is raised by the same individual in multiple contacts (or where a particular set of grievances require multiple visits) that grievance/set is only counted once for the purposes of this chart. The data below the graph sets out the number of issues raised across the listed categories for each of 2018 and 2019.

**Chart 8**





Type of Issue/Grievance	2019	2018
Appeal, Grade Appeal, special consideration, late withdrawal	558	524
Mental health, disability, health	375	313
Academic advice and progress	301	263
Administration (administration, admission, enrolment, fees, program transfer, graduation)	235	212
Personal, financial, pastoral care, accommodation	204	241
Behavioural Conduct/Misconduct & Bullying (staff, students)	260	204
Teaching quality, program concerns, assessment requirements	140	121
Other	255	206
Scholarships (academic progress requirements)	128	107
Supervision concerns	64	61
Academic misconduct	28	31
Sexual harassment, sexual assault	23	27
Staff seeking advice (HDR, PG, UG)	208	125

### General Comments

Issues or situations dealt with by this office commonly involve:

1. Grievances that relate to academic progress, grades, special consideration and late withdrawal. These are particularly prevalent amongst the undergraduate cohort who sometimes complain that they do not have adequate access to College-based academic advisors and/or student administrators. Students with grievances in this category often report issues of perceived lack of fairness, frequently associated with what they see as the rigid application of rules without consideration of context or the student's particular circumstances.
2. Students struggling to make good academic progress and life choices as a result of significant mental illness, new health or mental health diagnoses or previously unrecognised disability.
3. Personal issues that consequently impact on academic progress. Parental expectations and requirements for some international students in particular can determine the focus of study rather than a student's aptitude and discipline interest. Financial difficulties experienced by

both domestic and international students can lead to students undertaking substantial hours of paid employment which in turn can impact on academic progress. Academic advice, options for financial support, consideration of program leave and pastoral care are key components of advice and encouragement to this group of students.

4. HDR students who are highly stressed when they present to this office and need someone just to listen to them in the first instance. Discussions about time management, project management and thesis structure and expectations frequently follow. These students sometimes work in comparative isolation and are frequently in need of substantial encouragement, positive feedback and practical approaches to enabling progress with their studies and enabling productive communication with their supervisor.

5. Critical incidents and follow-up evaluation and action. The Dean of Students is a member of and normally chairs the Case Management Team. This team is tasked with evaluating and determining action for critical incidents and cases of disruptive or dangerous behaviours involving students. The Office participated in 12 case management processes in 2019. These are recorded as part of the “Behavioural Conduct/Misconduct” category in the table and chart above.

6. Complex interrelationships of grievances. As will be dealt with in further detail below, the mental health impacts on (or consequences of) poor academic progress, problematic supervisory relationships or behavioural issues relating to the presenting student or others are recurring situations that we see in the DoS Office. However, these are not the only interconnected issues that present to us. Matters that are frequently seen in combination or escalations from specific and isolated grievances to more general and systemic ones include:

- academic progress concerns triggering attempts to remediate via late withdrawal or grade appeals;
- matters involving grade appeals or perceived injustices in relation to special consideration or extension applications escalating to complaints about teaching quality or program concerns; and
- incidents of academic misconduct linking back to personal or financial pressures, poor time management or other non-academic stressors.

## Grievance Trends

### Upward Trends

As in previous years, the highest incidence of issues that were raised with the DoS Office in 2019 in a single grievance category were “academic grievances”, including the contesting of grades (grade appeals) or removal of fail grades (through late withdrawal). The 2019 figures show a further increase over the record high figures recorded consecutively in 2017 and 2018 in relation to the academic grievance category.

Matters in the category of “disability/health/mental health” were the second most frequently raised with the Office (as was the case in 2018). However, there was a marked increase in this category over the 2018 figures (375 presentations in 2019 compared to 313 in 2018). Students presenting to the Office in relation to this category of grievance were frequently also reporting issues relating to academic progress and/or grievances concerning grades.

We have noted, in previous reports and in the commentary above, that mental illness in particular is a major factor in a range of grievances and situations brought to our office. The increase in the number of students seen by the DoS Office whose studies were being impacted by mental health issues continued to manifest in 2019. In this reporting year, 216 students (that is, almost 23% of all individuals who contacted our office) presented with complicated matters that involved mental health issues. By comparison, in 2018, 18% of the students (a total of 166 individuals) who contacted the DoS Office reported that they were experiencing a mental illness that was impacting their academic progress; in 2017, 158 students (17%); and in 2016 133 students (16%).

The DoS Office continues to work closely with ANU Counselling Centre staff to support these students. As noted in previous annual reports, the nature of these conditions means that many students do not have supporting documentation to cover the possibly extended period when they were clearly affected but had not yet recognised their condition or sought treatment. This kind of documentation is important when University staff assess student applications for extensions, deferred assessments and late withdrawals and this office continues to be concerned that these students may find it hard to meet the documentation requirements for such accommodations by the University when they are most needed. A different complicating factor is that a certain number of students find, on a repeated basis, that they are unable to complete their semester of study due to mental health matters re-surfacing towards the end of semester. Students who are repeatedly triggered by their studies risk falling foul of the requirement, for approval of late withdrawal, that the event or illness upon which they are relying in their application is a “special circumstance”.<sup>1</sup> It becomes increasingly difficult to meet this hurdle when there is a pattern of late withdrawal applications on the same mental health grounds.

The two categories discussed above (academic grievances and disability/health/mental health) now stand at all-time high levels of incidence.

In addition to these two high-incidence categories, there were six other categories that showed increases to their highest ever recorded levels in 2019. Continuing the trend since 2017, small increases were recorded in the incidence of contacts associated with scholarships. There was also a small increase in the incidence of students raising concerns around supervision. After dropping back from 2017 levels in 2018, notable increases in incidence were recorded in relation to the seeking of academic advice; and concerns about academic progress; grievances involving behavioural misconduct. The “other” category also showed a marked increase in incidence. In addition, there was a further significant (and welcome) increase in staff seeking advice from this office. This last development is discussed in detail in a separate section below entitled “Spotlight on: Staff Seeking Advice”.

Of particular concern, in the list above, was the increase in grievances relating to poor behaviour. Sub-categories of this grievance category include: bullying by staff of a student, bullying by a student of a staff member, bullying by a student of a fellow student, poor conduct by a staff member or a student, harassment, stalking, misuse of social media; and case management meetings. This trend is discussed in detail in the section “Progress v Problems” above.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (Cth) s 36-21, which defines the term “special circumstances”.

The further increase in the “Other” category (which we commented upon in last year’s report) is, at least in part, indicative of a broader range of issues being brought to this office than in the past. We monitored this development closely throughout 2019 and decided to introduce new categories for the recording of grievances in 2020 to reflect some of the recurring grievances that were recorded in the “Other” category in 2018 and 2019. These will be discussed in the 2020 Annual Report.

Increases in the other categories of grievance mentioned above reflect the complexity or interplay of issues impacting individual students. In particular, as in 2017 and 2018, there was an increased number of students presenting to our office who were making poor academic progress, were experiencing poor mental health (commonly depression and/or anxiety), and were also experiencing one or more financial, personal or “other” issue. As previously noted, there was a continued association of HDR and other supervision grievances with issues relating to student mental health. Students in this complex category were also often accessing other University support services, including ANU Counselling, Access & Inclusion and, sometimes, Academic Skills.

As in previous years, a portion of the “complex” issue cohort exhibited very demanding behaviour that impacted on other students as well as a wide range of staff across the University (going well beyond the support services mentioned above). Staff affected included residential college staff and senior residents, College student administrators and academic advisors, security staff, academic staff, the DoS Office, ANUSA and PARSA staff and student representatives.

#### No Clear Trends

After dropping below 2017 levels in 2018, grievances involving administrative matters (admission, enrolment, fees and graduation requirements) increased in 2019 from 212 to 235. They still remain below the number of such grievances recorded in 2017 (250). There were 140 times that concerns in relation to the quality of programs, teaching, assessment and feedback were raised with the Office. This is an increase of 19 from 2018 but only five from 2017 when 135 such grievances were reported. This category remains a relatively low-incidence one, with the 2019 complaint number of 235 representing 5% of the total grievances brought to the Office.

#### Downward Trends

The category involving matters relating to personal/financial/accommodation circumstances remained the same in 2018 after a big increase in 2017. In 2019, the number of grievances in this category reduced somewhat, although it remained significantly higher than the 2016 level. Within this category, however, there were some notable variations between 2017 and 2019, with an increase in broad pastoral care contacts and a significant decrease in those relating to accommodation and finances. In relation to this grievance category, 63% of matters involved the Office providing broad pastoral care support (129 of 204 grievances raised) with accommodation and financial grievances making up the remaining 37% of matters.

The incidence of grievances relating to academic misconduct matters remained low in 2019 and continued its slight downward trajectory since 2017. Only 28 students contacted the Office in relation to this category.

The contacts listed under grievance category 12 (Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault) show that there were 23 students who disclosed incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault to the DoS Office in 2019. This was a further decrease on the numbers recorded in 2017 (32) and 2018 (27). This category includes historic disclosures (i.e. incidents that took place before a person was enrolled at the ANU). Historic disclosures accounted for two of the incidents disclosed to the DoS. In 2018, there were three historic disclosures.

This office believes that the slight reduction in the number of students seeking the support of the DoS is largely because of the work achieved in this area by the Respectful Relationships Unit (RRU). We applaud the work of the RRU in taking a leadership role to support students in relation to disclosures. The disclosure processes put in place by the RRU and its work across campus in promoting respect and culture change have all significantly enhanced the University's response in this very important area. We work closely with RRU staff and often students are referred between our areas as well as to ANU Counselling and other support areas. We look forward to continuing to work in this way with RRU staff.

### Spotlight on: Staff Seeking Advice

In 2019, 163 members of ANU staff contacted the Office to seek advice or receive assistance in relation to difficult situations involving students. This number does not include ANU staff to whom the Office provides regular advice and assistance on a broad range of matters involving students, ANU policy and associated matters as part of its ongoing liaison with key ANU personnel (including College Associate Deans (Education), Directors of Student Learning, Associate Deans (HDR), Sub Deans, School Directors, ASQO, Heads of Residential Halls, staff in the Respectful Relationships Unit etc). This number (163) also excludes situations where the Office initiated contact with staff in various areas of the University in the context of following up on or enquiring about grievances or concerns brought to its attention by students.

As was the case in 2018, the number of individual staff members who sought advice or assistance in 2019 represented the highest number of such contacts with this office in any year. The number in 2018 was 125 and in 2017 was 116. The Office continues to welcome these contacts and is seeking to foster an even greater role in the provision of advice to staff across the University.

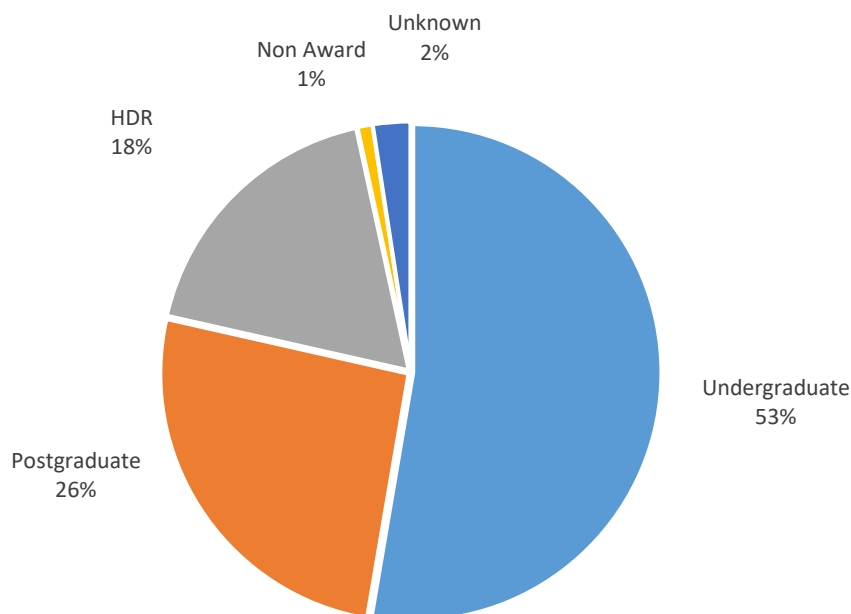
The Office categorises situations where staff seek advice in relation to a particular student or situation (including where the student is anonymous to the Office) by reference to both student career (ie via the categories 'staff seeking advice – HDR, PG, UG, Non-Award or Unknown') and the type of concern or issue that is being raised by the staff member. Note, that the list of grievance categories used by the Office is set out on pages 17-18 of this report.

Staff Contacts by Student Career

Chart 9 below shows a percentage summary of the incidents of staff members contacting the DoS Office under the category ‘staff seeking advice’ in 2019 by reference to the career of the student involved - Undergraduate, Postgraduate, HDR, Non Award and Unknown. Data in the table below the chart sets out the number of individual staff members who contacted the Office “seeking advice” by reference to each cohort of students for the year 2019, the percentage of students in each cohort across the whole of the University population for the year 2019 and the number of staff who contacted the Office for more general advice (where no student career cohort was raised as relevant).

Chart 9

**'Staff Seeking Advice' Contacts by Student Career 2019**



<b>Student Career</b>	<b>No. incidents of 'staff seeking advice'</b>	<b>No. students involved</b>	<b>% of students in ANU Cohort</b>	<b>No. staff involved</b>
Undergraduate	109	85	56	75
Postgraduate	55	32	33	40
HDR	37	27	11	32
Non Award	2	2	0.3	2
Unknown	5	5	N/A	4
Staff assistance provided in other context*	N/A	N/A	N/A	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>151</b>		<b>187**</b>

\* This refers to assistance provided to staff outside of the official "staff seeking advice" category – eg. in the context of broader policy enquiries, issues not related to a particular student matter.

\*\* This number exceeds the total number of 163 as there is double counting of individual staff who seek advice in relation to specific students across multiple careers.

In 2019, there were 208 incidents of 'staff seeking advice' on matters involving a particular student situation (including where the student was kept anonymous by the staff member involved). In addition, the Office provided assistance to 34 members of staff in relation to matters that were not associated with particular student circumstances or cohorts or that were best characterised as involving broader issues of student related policy or procedure.

The pie chart 9 indicates that advice sought by staff in relation to each cohort reflects the relative proportions of students in the respective cohorts across the ANU. More detailed analysis of relative percentages reveal that advice sought in relation to undergraduate students is slightly under represented (53% as against 56% of the total ANU cohort), advice in relation to postgraduate students is more markedly under represented (26%, as against 33% ANU wide) and advice in relation to HDR students is over-represented (18% of advice sought contacts as opposed to HDR students representing 11% of the total ANU wide cohort). When compared with the DoS contact data in Chart 5 above, there is an even greater disparity between the percentage of 'staff seeking advice' contacts relating to HDR students (18%) and the DoS contacts associated with the HDR cohort in the general contact data (9%). This may indicate the high levels of complexity inherent in engaging in supervisory relationships over a period of several years and the need for the provision of support not only for HDR students

but also for their supervisors, panel chairs and the Associate Deans and Directors of HDR who are charged with managing HDR matters in their Colleges and Schools.

### Grievance Categories Associated with Staff Advice

Chart 10 shows the number of times particular concerns or issues were raised by staff in their contacts with this office. These are shown by reference to the range of grievance categories and sub-categories against which all interactions with the Office are recorded.

**Chart 10**



Advice sought by staff in 2019 was predominantly related to the novel situations that are covered by the “Other” grievance category, issues associated with student behaviour, and issues involving academic progress. These matters were often associated with or raised in conjunction with concerns relating to students’ health, disability or mental health. Fifty-two of the staff enquiries to the Office involved concerns in relation to student mental health. This level of awareness of and sensitivity to the mental health impacts on students of academic progress and other stressful matters amongst staff is to be applauded.

Chart 10 will become a basis for comparison across different years in subsequent reports.



## Conclusion

As always, the Dean and Deputy Dean welcome opportunities to talk about any or all aspects of the Annual Report with relevant areas of the University. We are committed to engaging in reflective practice so that we can continually improve upon how we discharge our roles within the University. We are equally dedicated to continuing to act in an independent, unbiased manner so as to contribute to an enhanced university experience for everyone at the ANU.



Dean of Students  
Associate Professor Miriam Gani



Deputy Dean of Students  
Dr Peter Hendriks