

Annual Report of the Dean of Students Australian National University

2020



Office of the Dean of Students
Ground Floor
Peter Baume Building, Building 42A
Australian National University
Acton ACT 2601 Australia
T: +61 2 6125 4184
E: Dean.Students@anu.edu.au

Table of Contents

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	1
2020	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
Role/s of the Office of the Dean of Students	4
The Numbers – Individuals, contacts and grievances	4
Overview of Trends	5
Percentage of ANU students supported by the Office	8
Invitation to Colleges	8
PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS (WITH UPDATES FOR 2020)	9
Dean of Students’ Annual Report 2019 AQAC: Implementation Plan	9
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020	11
OVERVIEW	12
Understanding the Dean of Students’ Role	12
Our Responsive Role	13
Our Proactive Role	14
Committee Membership	15
Specific Roles designated by ANU Policy and Procedure	15
Student Complaint Resolution	15
Scholarships (Coursework)	15
Notable Achievements in 2020	16
Impacts of COVID-19 on the Work of the Office	16
Looking forward	18
Reflections on 2020: Positives v Areas of Concern	18
Positives	18
Areas of Concern	20
Behavioural Conduct/Misconduct	20
Compliance Matters	20
Resistance to Informal Complaint Resolution	21
	2
Dean of Students Annual Report 2020	

THE NUMBERS – AN OVERVIEW	22
Multiple Contacts	23
GRIEVANCE CATEGORIES	24
SUMMARY OF CONTACTS WITH THE DEAN OF STUDENTS’ OFFICE 2020	26
Individuals by Student Career	26
Individuals by Gender	29
Individuals by Residency	31
INDIVIDUALS BY STUDENT CAREER AND BY COLLEGE	34
Higher Degree Research Students	34
HDR Grievances	36
Prevalence by College	38
Postgraduate Coursework Students	40
Postgraduate Coursework Grievances	42
Prevalence by College	42
Undergraduate Students	44
Undergraduate Grievances	46
Prevalence by College	47
DISTRIBUTION OF GRIEVANCES	48
General Comments	49
Grievance Trends	51
Most Recorded Grievances	51
Upward Trend	52
No Clear Trends	52
Final Comments on Grievances and Trends	54
Staff Seeking Advice	55
Staff Contacts by Student Career	55
Grievance Categories Associated with Staff Advice	58
CONCLUSION	59

Executive Summary

This report covers the period 1 January - 31 December 2020.

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 a quasi 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 fair and 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 2020, the Office offered its support to 774 individuals. Of those individuals, 32% required multiple visits to fully address the issues they were experiencing. This is a return to the proportion of multiple visits recorded in 2018 (during which 33% of individuals required multiple visits to the Office) following an increase to 37% in 2019. The total number of contacts (excluding incidental emails and phone calls) by individuals seeking assistance from the DoS Office for the 2020 period was 1477. This was, again, a return to levels similar to those

experienced by the Office in 2018 (1538) after the highest ever number of contacts was recorded in 2019 (1756).

[Chart 1](#), on page 23 of this Report, shows two sets of data. The first is the annual number of contacts with the DoS Office over the 11 year period 2010 to 2020; the second is the number of issues or grievances raised with the DoS Office in the course of those contacts from the years 2015 to 2020. This second set of data was recorded for the first time in the Dean of Students' Office Annual Report for 2019. In relation to contacts: after a steady increase over the first five 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. The data indicates a lower number of contacts with the Office for 2020 than in the past several years and likely reflects the impacts of COVID-19 on the normal work of the Office. These impacts will be discussed in detail in multiple other areas of the Report.

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 over the previous five years has been an increase from a ratio of approximately 1:1 (ie one issue raised per contact) in both 2015 and 2016, to a ratio of 1.45:1 in 2017, and 1.58:1 in each of 2018 and 2019. This trend held more or less steady in 2020 with a ratio of 1.51:1 issues raised to total contacts with the Office. The complexity of issues indicator appears to manifest even in the years when total contacts have dipped somewhat (in both 2018 and 2020). [Chart 1](#) and the accompanying table shows that in 2017, the 934 individuals who contacted the Office raised 2369 issues or grievances. 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. This was both the highest number of presenting individuals and the highest number of issues raised over a reporting period in the history of the Office. In 2020, 774 individuals contacted the DoS Office in relation to 2300 issues or grievances.

Overview of Trends

Analysis of the 2020 data suggests that several previously identified trends have been either impacted or disrupted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ANU student population. This makes the identification of clear trends emerging in 2020 very difficult. A further impact of the pandemic was a reduction in the total number of individuals accessing the Office in 2020. Accordingly, the discussion of trends in this report will bring a new focus to the proportion of grievances in each category (by reference to total contacts) in 2020 as compared to previous years. This focus is designed to provide a more meaningful picture of any discernible trends, than would be apparent on the raw numbers alone.

As shown in [Chart 9](#), there have been previously identifiable trends since 2017 showing an increase in the number of students presenting with grievances in relation to: their mental or physical health; and academic issues (appeals, grade appeals, special consideration, late withdrawals). Both these categories of grievance saw a numerical reduction in 2020, but remained significant as a proportion of the total number of grievances dealt with by the Office. Data in relation to these categories of grievance for 2020 show that:

- **academic issues** were the most common matters raised with this Office (17% of total grievances received by the DoS). In 2019 this category accounted for 20% of total issues raised;
- **health related issues** represented 11% of total grievances compared to 13% in both 2018 and 2019.

In 2020 (and for the first time) the second highest category of grievance overall was the “**other**” category (14% of all grievances). The “other” category is utilised in our record keeping (and is accompanied by extensive notes) only when it is not part of our normal grievance template. The high number of “other” grievances, we believe, demonstrates the novel situations facing students in 2020 due to the impacts of COVID-19.

Observations in relation to categories of grievance where a previously identified upward trend continued in 2020 (either on raw numbers or as a proportion of grievances) include the following.

- Issues relating to **scholarships**. This category recorded both a rise in raw numbers and an increase as a percentage of total issues dealt with by the Office (from 3% in 2019 to 7% in 2020);
- Complaints relating to **staff or student conduct** ((including behavioural misconduct such as bullying, harassment and social media abuse). These dropped slightly numerically (260 in 2019 – the highest number ever recorded – to 243 in 2020). However, the 2020 number represented the highest ever proportion of total grievances handled by the Office (10.5% as opposed to 9% in 2019);
- “**Staff seeking advice**”. These reached a peak in 2019, with 163 individual members of staff approaching the Office to register a total of 208 contacts. In 2020, 175 separate contacts with the Office, involving 130 different staff members, were recorded in this category with a further 50 staff members seeking other forms of assistance from the Office. The total number of 180 staff members seeking advice or assistance from the DoS in 2020 represents a high level of service provided to ANU staff members with the proportion of issues in the “staff seeking advice” category reaching 8% in 2020, in comparison to 7.5% of total issues raised with the Office in 2019.

Observations in relation to categories of grievance where a previously identified upward trend was reversed in 2020 (either on raw numbers or as a proportion of grievances) include the following.

- Concerns about **supervision**. These dropped to almost zero in relation to honours supervision in 2020. This meant that the modest increase in the number of supervision concerns raised between 2017 and 2019 was reversed in 2020 with the number of supervision issues raised dropping from 64 in 2019 to 47 in 2020. However, this remained an area of significant concern for the HDR cohort and the frequency with which this issue was raised was proportionally comparable to the total number of grievances in 2019 (2.3% in 2019 and 2.1% in 2020);

- Grievances involving **academic advice** and **academic progress**. These were at highest-ever levels in 2019 but dropped significantly in 2020. They represented 8% of the total grievances dealt with by the Office in 2020 (181 issues/grievances), compared to 11% in 2019 (301);
- Issues relating to **program** or course **concerns** (including in relation to **assessment** and **feedback**). These fell to their lowest number in the last five years and from 5% of total grievances raised in 2019 to 4% in 2020.

Observations in relation to categories of grievance where no clear trend has been (or is currently) discernible include the following.

- Grievances involving **administrative matters** (such as admission, enrolment, fees, and graduation requirements). Whilst administrative grievances dropped to below 2018 levels in 2020, the 203 administrative grievances recorded in 2020 represented an increase in the proportion of grievances in this category from 2019 (9% of total DoS matters in 2020 and 8% in 2019). However, there has been no clear trend in relation to this category of grievance in recent years.
- Grievances in the category of **personal, financial** and **accommodation issue**. These had decreased in 2019 from high levels in 2017 and 2018. The number of grievances in this category fell further in 2020 from 204 to 171. However, this number represented a slight increase in the proportion of total grievances recorded in this category between 2019 and 2020 from 7% to 7.5%

There are three particular areas of concern that are highlighted by the 2020 data.

1. Numbers of students presenting with complex circumstances either involving or impacting upon their **mental health** remain high. Since 2016 there has been an increase in the number of matters dealt with by the Office that involve the interaction of mental health issues with students' academic progress, supervisory relationships (primarily 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%). In 2020, 147 students reported mental health issues alongside another category of grievance. This means that the proportion of the total DoS grievance cohort reporting mental health issues was 19%, the second highest proportion of any year.

Importantly, there was also a significant number of staff enquiries relating to student mental health issues in 2020: 45. This large number of staff enquiries together with the number of students who themselves raised mental health matters with the Office, means that a total of 192 of the 774 individuals who contacted the DoS in 2020 had concerns involving student mental health. This represents 25% of all individuals who sought advice or support from the Office in 2020. In 2019 that proportion was 28%.

2. There was an increase in 2020 in the number of **academic misconduct** issues with which students presented to the Office. Whilst the number is relatively small (at 39), it represents a significant jump from the previous year (28) and may point to both the increasing ease of access to electronic tools for plagiarism and cheating and the temptation posed by that access where significant pressures (including financial and mental health) are being experienced by students.
3. Despite increased and innovative efforts in relation to education, prevention and response, (particularly by the Respectful Relationships Unit (RRU) and the Residential Experience Directorate) significant numbers of students (exclusively female and predominantly undergraduate in 2020) continue to present with grievances relating to **sexual assault** or **harassment**. In 2020, this Office assisted 22 individuals in relation to SASH grievances, working alongside multiple other support areas of the University, including the RRU, ANU Counselling and the Student Wellbeing Team. The distress caused by such incidents impacts not only the survivor but friendship groups and residential and campus communities. In 2020, the Office also provided support and advice to a range of affected parties, including alleged perpetrators and senior residents in residential halls, who are often the first responders to incidents of SASH.

Percentage of ANU students supported by the Office

The total number of individuals who contacted the Office in 2020 was 31.6 per 1000 students. Comparative numbers in recent years have been: 39.7 per 1000 students in 2016; 36.6 per 1000 students in 2017; 38.4 per 1000 students in 2018; and 39.6 per 1000 students in 2019. Accordingly, at approximately 3.2% the percentage of the total ANU student population contacting the Office in 2020 was below what has been a relatively steady rate over the previous four years of approximately 4%. Possible reasons for this are considered elsewhere in this Report.

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 experiences and outcomes.

Previous recommendations (with updates for 2020)

The following recommendations were made in the 2019 Dean of Students' Annual Report. These were all discussed and accepted by the Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC) and Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC). The recommendations for AQAC were incorporated into an Implementation Plan with progress updated at each subsequent AQAC meeting. However, progress against the plan has been significantly affected by competing urgent priorities in response to the pandemic. Where progress has been made, it is set out below (as at July 2021).

Dean of Students' Annual Report 2019 AQAC: Implementation Plan

Recommendation 1. 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.

AQAC 4/2020 (Item 11) agreed that:

The issues raised affecting students in the area of supplementary exams be considered by the working group currently reviewing supplementary exams; and that the working group include the Dean of Students and a staff member from the Examinations, Graduates and Prizes Office.

Progress on this recommendation has been good. The working group has completed this task and will report back to AQAC.

Recommendation 2: 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.

Recommendation 3(a): 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.

Recommendation 3(b): 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.

Recommendation 4: 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.

Recommendation 5: 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.

With respect to **Recommendations 2-5**, AQAC 4/2020 (Item 11) agreed that:

ASQO would work with Colleges to review compliance with:

- assessment policies and procedures;
- the appeals process (including late withdrawals);
- student complaints policies and procedures and specifically the College templates and form letters/emails that are used when dealing with student complaints and appeals; and
- the accreditation policy and procedure.

ASQO would also work with the Dean of Students to identify where training/support needs to be provided to Colleges/Schools.

Progress on these recommendations has been overtaken by competing priorities for ASQO.

Recommendation 6: 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

Action on this recommendation was referred by ASQO to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Digital) and has been overtaken by competing priorities.

Recommendations for 2020

Given the upheaval of 2020 and 2021, this Report is making only two new recommendations for 2020. This will allow the stalled work on the 2019 recommendations to be prioritised as the University adapts to “COVID normal” operation. The below recommendations, which have already been brought to the attention of the HDR Committee (see the discussion in [HDR Grievances](#) below), relate to authorship and intellectual property matters.

Authorship: It is a basic matter of academic integrity that all “authors” should be acknowledged. Different academic disciplines have different practices in relation to what constitutes “authorship” as well as different protocols and approaches to the sequence in which authors are listed in recognition of their varying contributions to an article or chapter. However, the University recognises via the Guideline on Conduct of Research and the Authorship Dispute Procedure that the hallmarks of authorship are “based on substantial contributions in a combination of: conception and design of the project; analysis and interpretation of research data; drafting significant parts of the work or critically revising it so as to contribute to the interpretation”. A particular issue in relation to authorship may arise where an honours or other thesis has been assessed as the sole work of a student for the purposes of the awarding of a degree but is then published in substantially the same form with the supervisor as primary author.

Recommendation 1: That an audit be conducted of the divergent practices in relation to attribution in the different academic disciplines in the University against the principles of authorship attribution set out in the ANU’s Guideline on Conduct of Research and Authorship Dispute procedure with a view to ensuring greater visibility of and compliance with the ANU’s principles around authorship attribution.

Intellectual Property: The concept of intellectual property is sometimes misunderstood even in a tertiary institution. There are “moral rights” under Copyright Law that attach to the intellectual input of, for example, supervisors when assisting HDR candidates to get a project under way. The content of those moral rights is proper acknowledgement in any subsequent piece of work that is published, including the possibility of co-authorship if the hallmarks of authorship are present. However, under the ANU’s Policy on Intellectual Property, the University does not assert any intellectual property rights over work produced by a student (other than in exceptional circumstances). In regards to academic staff, there is no intellectual property in an “idea” that has not yet been converted into something that has been published, copyrighted or patented. Further, under the Policy, unless education materials or scholarly work is involved, any intellectual property that does exist is the University’s not the individuals. In particular, where no work has yet been completed or published, assertions of intellectual property rights should not be made by supervisors to students. This can sometimes occur when HDR candidates are seeking to make changes to their supervision panel. Assertions of intellectual property in these circumstances can be a subtle form of bullying.¹

Recommendation 2: That the Legal Office or another relevant ANU area create training around intellectual property that is delivered to HDR Convenors, to academic staff who supervise honours and HDR students and to the research students themselves. Further, that HDR Convenors ensure that all candidates in their Schools know about the existence of and roles of the University’s Research Integrity Advisors.

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 and reduced somewhat in the context of COVID-19 in 2020.

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 2020 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 production of an Annual Report is also a key component of our proactive role, in that it provides an evidence-based distillation of the issues and trends observed for the year in review that can be accessed by the entire University community.

The DoS Office normally 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. These informal group meetings were disrupted by COVID-19 in 2020 and necessitated greater engagement by the Office with office holders individually (in accordance with the paragraph directly below).

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 (which normally meets at the end of each semester) and has served in that capacity since. The impact of COVID-19 in 2020 meant that the University Medals Committee held its meetings for both Semesters in December 2020. These were chaired by the Deputy Dean of Students, in the Dean's absence.

In addition to the above, the Dean of Students normally 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 2020

In early March 2020, both the Dean and Deputy Dean attended three days of training in Restorative Practices, conducted by external experts, Dr David Moore and Dr Alikki Vernon. The insights and skills obtained in this training led to their involvement in an ANU Restorative Practices pilot (instigated by former Interim Pro-Vice Chancellor (University Experience), Professor Tony Foley) for selected residential halls. It also led to engagement with a broader community of practice in restorative practices both within ANU and across other Australian Universities (notably the University of Newcastle and the University of Western Australia).

Building on their training, both Deans also conducted restorative practice circles (in residential and/or academic settings of the University) in 2020. Restorative circles were made available to parties to unresolved disputes as an alternative to other forms of resolution practices (including more conventional negotiation methods).

There was no formal annual conference of Deans of Students and Student Ombuds in 2020, due to the pandemic. However, the Deans continued to engage in professional development and networking through involvement in an online community of practice with their counterparts around Australia.

Impacts of COVID-19 on the Work of the Office

The student contact load on the DoS Office fell in 2020. However, the staff contact load remained high – the second highest number of contacts involving the greatest number of individual staff members that has been recorded in DoS Annual Reports. These developments largely reflect the impacts of COVID-19 on the Office in 2020.

In the third week of Semester 1 2020, a one week teaching pause was announced for what would otherwise have been Week 4 of classes, to allow staff to re-configure their courses for remote delivery in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Australia. The teaching break week (beginning Monday 24 March 2020) coincided with the decision of the ACT Government to shut down non-essential services in the ACT and the closing of the ANU Campus. The first month after closure saw few direct approaches by students to the Office. During the teaching pause, many interstate students returned home. Online teaching resumed for only one week, (during which students were adjusting to new forms of learning and delivery) before students immediately went into a two week mid-semester break.

This early lockdown period was a very busy one for the Office in terms of re-working our service delivery model (noting that Dean of Students' appointments with students have traditionally been face to face and record keeping has been paper-based) and our support of broader student interests. That support included: liaising with student associations and other areas of the University (including the Coursework Scholarships Office) in relation to promoting flexibility for students facing unprecedented impacts on their learning; and working within committees that were formulating student support measures. This included two Special Academic Board Meetings in April 2020. In early April, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), Professor Grady Venville announced a range of measures that would be taken to ameliorate the impacts of the pandemic on students' academic studies and progress. Those measures that required formal approval by Academic Board, received that approval at a

Special Board meeting held on 20 April 2020. The range of measures relating to coursework students included:

- the extension of census date from 31 March to 8 May 2020;
- the removal for 2020 of the WN grade (so that students who withdrew from courses after the end of Week 9 of classes would receive a WD grade and not a fail grade);
- the introduction of an opt-in system for students to convert final results in their courses from numeric and performance level grades (Pass, Credit, Distinction etc) to Course Requirement Satisfied and Not Completed Fail (CRS/NCN) grades where GPA would not be affected if a CRS was obtained. This was later amended (to students' advantage) to allow them to opt in to a CRS/CRN (Course Requirement Not Satisfied) grade system with neither the CRS or the CRN grade counting towards calculation of GPA and not being viewed as a fail in the context of a student's expected academic performance under the Academic Progress Rule 2019;
- exemption from late fee charges for Semester 1, 2020; and
- greater flexibility in terms of documentation that needed to be produced when applying for special consideration when unwell.

Similar adjustments were later made in respect of Second semester and all were well communicated to students by the University. The effect of excluding CRS/CRN results from GPA calculations flowed on to Academic Progress requirements for the retention of scholarships, also. These were also well communicated to scholarship holders.

In relation to HDR students, important accommodations were also made by the University. These included the COVID-19 Extension Scholarship (available to PhD candidates between 3 and 3.5 years of the commencement of their candidature and MPhil candidates between 1.5 and 2 years) and the COVID-19 Onshore Program Extension Fee Support.¹ In addition, new grants were made available (SURF) and more money was given to accommodation bursaries for ANUSA and PARSA to disperse.

In general, the responsiveness of the University to student needs was welcomed and applauded.

There was a clear lull in student contacts in the wake of the Canberra lockdown commencing on 25 March 2020 as staff and students adjusted to the day to day implications of lockdown and remote learning. This lull continued through the periods that would normally be busy for the Office, including census date and Week 9 of semester, as students no longer needed advice around whether and/or how to drop courses, due to the COVID-19 accommodations put in place by the University. During this period, the Office stepped up its level of support to other areas of the University (including staff who were trying to make adjustments to forms of delivery and responding to students' needs in a new environment).

¹ See <https://www.anu.edu.au/covid-19-advice/how-were-responding-to-covid-19/research-including-hdr/hdr-candidates> for further details of ANU support measures for HDR candidates.

The lower than normal student demand continued for the rest of the year. This was due, in part, to the extension of the accommodations introduced in April into Second Semester. In addition, there was a fall in the number of students physically on campus and, accordingly, fewer on-campus critical incidents. A corollary of those lower numbers of students in Canberra is the availability of mechanisms of support for them in their home towns and states, including local counselling and health supports. Student reliance on their local or home-based supports is a typical pattern found in those universities which have a lower proportion of on-campus students. The ongoing academic accommodation measures put in place for students also meant that there were only small numbers who felt that they needed to complain to our Office about what they perceived as unfair treatment or institutional coldness. In Semester Two, there was also a reduction in the number of students who were subject to the academic progress processes of the University (as a result of the effects of the CRS/CRN grading system in Semester 1). During this period, however, staff demand continued to remain high.

Looking forward

The impacts of the pandemic have been profound across the University and they affected the work of our Office in a variety of ways (as described in the previous section of this report). Whilst raw numbers dropped, the demands on the Office remained high and, often time-critical. Those demands often involved working with students and staff who were, themselves, under significant pressure.

The Office continues to work closely with a number of other student support areas of the University: ANU Counselling, the Access & Inclusion Office, the Respectful Relationships Unit and other health and wellbeing services at the ANU. Our common experience emphasised the underlying stressors felt by the entire University community in 2020. These sometimes played out in tearful or, conversely, terse or angry approaches by those who we were supporting.

One of our particular concerns continues to be that the work done by the University's student support areas is often hidden to the broader ANU community. 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 2020: Positives v Areas of Concern

Below we touch on areas where progress was made and positive outcomes were achieved in 2020. 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 2020, 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 relation to policy and compliance work, we particularly appreciate the high quality of service and output provided by the Academic Standards and Quality Office (ASQO) and very much value our easy working relationship with members of ASQO 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 previous Annual Reports, there has been a marked improvement over the past several years 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 9](#) 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.

The challenges of COVID-19 made nimble responses to novel problems and the speedy and accurate dissemination of new information even more important in 2020. The rigour of decision-making alongside the high standard of communication achieved under these circumstances was, in our view, remarkable.

Areas of Concern

The majority of areas of concern for this Office are dealt with in detail where statistical trends are discussed below. Recurring themes, already examined in the 2019 Annual Report, but still of concern in 2020 are briefly revisited below.

Behavioural Conduct/Misconduct

Once again, in 2020, there were a large number of complaints in this category. The numbers are discussed in detail in a variety of sections below (including [HDR Grievances](#), [Undergraduate Grievances](#) and [Most Recorded Grievances](#)). 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 2020, cases in this category included allegations of bullying of HDR students by their supervisors, concerns about aggressive conduct towards students 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, some of which were being dealt with under the University's Discipline Rule.

We note that we frequently refer to the new Student Code of Conduct in relation to behavioural matters and seek to ensure familiarity with it amongst the students with whom we work. We also note the updated version of the Staff Code of Conduct, to which we also frequently refer. It is concerning, in this regard, that grievances in the behavioural category included 80 complaints of varying severity about staff conduct made by students to this Office.

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.

As in previous years, in 2020, the Office continued to be approached by 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 were predominantly in relation to assessment tasks and, most frequently, involved failure to provide assessment criteria for each assessment task (required by clause 4 of the Student Assessment (Coursework) Policy) or to link learning outcomes for specific assessment tasks (required by the Class Summary Procedure, clause 9). Other complaints involved lack of specificity around assessment criteria or amendments to criteria that were late and/or poorly communicated to students.

It has been an ongoing concern of this Office to aid compliance by contributing to improving the specificity, definitions and clarity of Policy and Procedure in this area. We have done this, primarily, through membership of AQAC and contribution to its work. In 2021, we have also been working with ASQO to ensure that support materials and templates produced by the University promote easy compliance as much as this is possible. We hope to see the fruits of that work in 2022 and beyond.

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 (in which the Dean and Deputy Dean received additional training in 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 there is a serious complaint against a student, it goes to the Registrar, for formal inquiry and resolution under the Discipline Rule.

There is always the option, under ANU policy, for a student to elect 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 aspect of our work with students in 2019, which continued to manifest in 2020, was the resistance of a section of complainants to undertaking informal resolution measures, despite our advice that a formal complaint was 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. We see greater emphasis on restorative practices as a potential way forward to reduce this burden.

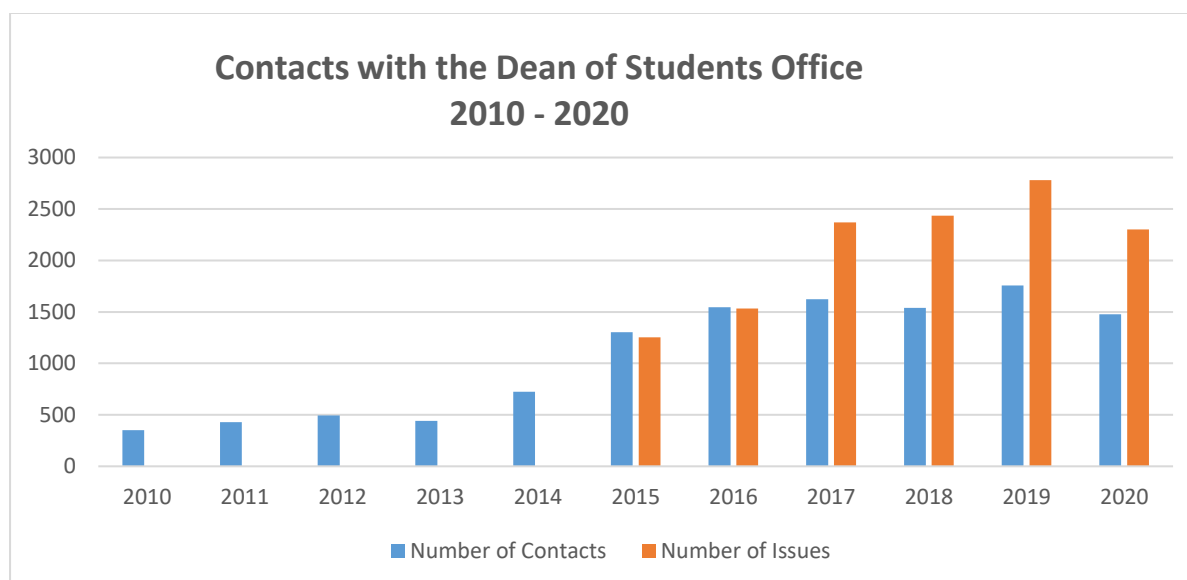
Similar problems arise where students become intent on lodging procedural appeals against academic decisions despite our clear advice that all relevant procedures have been followed and that there is no sound basis for arguing a breach has occurred. This misuse of appeal grounds again creates unnecessary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

The Numbers – an overview

In 2020 the DoS Office provided independent, impartial, confidential advice and support to 774 individuals over the course of 1477 “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 until late March 2020 but also via email and phone. When the Office moved off-campus on 25 March 2020, in-person appointments were replaced by Zoom and the number of contacts via email and phone increased. The Office also acted as a resource to staff who sought online (Zoom or Microsoft Teams), email or phone advice on policy or student management issues, particularly in light of changed teaching/learning arrangements. Dispute resolution activities involving staff occurred mainly online or by phone.

The chart below records the number of contacts with the DoS Office from 2010 to 2020 as well as the number of grievances or issues raised in the course of those contacts for the years 2015 to 2020. 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.

Chart 1



Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. of Contacts	351	430	495	441	724	1303	1547	1624	1538	1756	1477
No. of Issues						1254	1533	2369	2435	2779	2300

In 2020, 774 individuals made 1477 contacts with the DoS Office during which they raised 2300 issues or grievances. This number represents approximately 3.2% of the total ANU student population (31.6 per 1000 students) and compares with 39.6 students per 1000 students in 2019 and approximately 4% of the ANU student population since 2016.

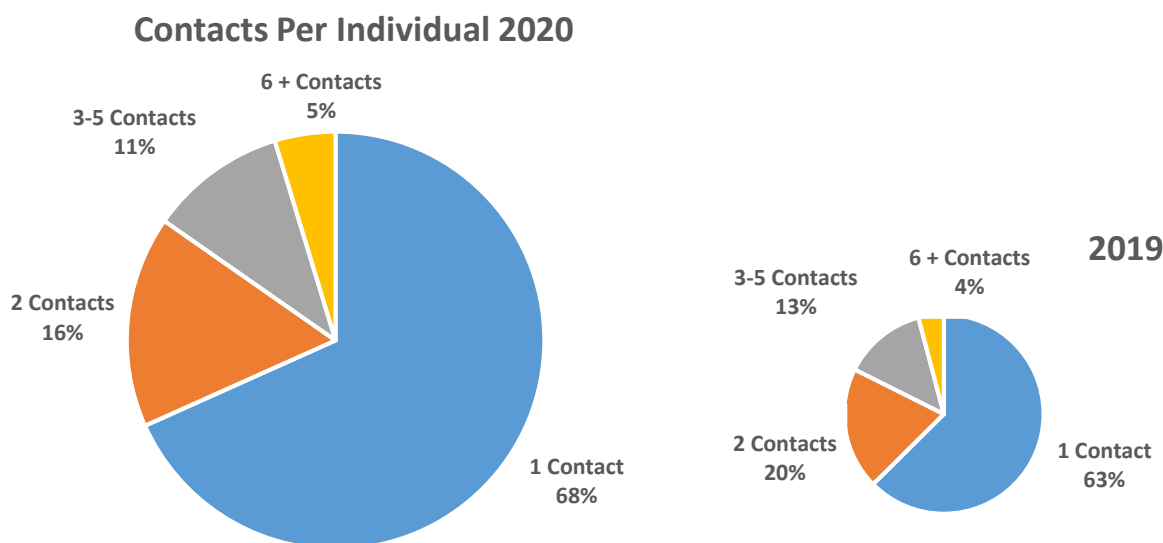
Multiple Contacts

Of the total number of individuals who contacted the Office in the reporting year, 246 (32%) did so over multiple visits - approximately the same percentage as in both 2019 (354 individuals or 33%) and 2018 (296 individuals or 32.8%). This is a slight decrease from the percentage in 2017 (36%) but significantly ahead of the percentage of individuals requiring multiple contacts in 2016 (27%).

Chart 2 sets out the percentage of individuals who were assisted by the Office over single, two, three to five or more than six contacts or visits and compares them to the equivalent 2019 percentages.

Note that Chart 2 (below) 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).

Chart 2



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 increased in their complexity but stabilised somewhat in 2018 and 2019.

Given the unique circumstances of 2020, it is hard to draw clear conclusions about whether the reporting year numbers and percentages are further evidence of stabilisation. 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) and in 2019, a total of 945 individuals raised 2779 issues with the Office in the course of 1756 contacts. The 2019 numbers represented 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 2020 numbers represent a reduction in the number of contacts of 16% from the all-time high in 2019. However, the number of matters raised, compared to the number of visits continues to show the higher level of complexity of cases that has been in evidence since 2018. That ratio increased from approximately 1:1 in 2016 to 1:1.46 in 2017 and 1:1.58 in both 2018 and 2019. It has held more or less steady at 1:1.56 in 2020.

The closest international comparison to the work of the ANU DoS Office is the work undertaken by Student Ombudspersons in Canadian and some US Universities. The Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) consistently reports an annual caseload of approximately 1-2% of the total student population of Canadian Universities. A rise to 2.1% of student population in the 2018-2019 report of the Ombudsperson at Western Ontario University was regarded as a spike.² A scan of Annual Reports in North America indicates that many Universities also saw a reduction in the utilisation rates of their Ombuds Offices during periods where students were undertaking remote study. For example, the University of Pennsylvania noted “an 18% reduction from 2019-2020 [of contacts] after a steady increase over the last decade.”³ The University of British Columbia Ombuds reported a 9.5% decrease in contacts in 2020 from their highest number in 2018.⁴

Due, in part, to a lack of consistency in relation to the roles played by Deans of Students and of reporting protocols across Australian Universities, 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 current student concerns. Two changes were made to the category of issue form between 2019 and 2020 to remove low-frequency issues and add ones that had become more frequently raised. So, in the Behavioural Conduct category: Campus Security was replaced by Advice – Lodging Grievance/Complaint Resolution. In the Teaching Quality category: Fieldwork was replaced by Course Concerns.

The categories and sub-categories of grievance that are recorded by the DoS Office in 2020 (and which will appear in bold in commentary in this report) were therefore as follows:

² https://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/reports/Ombuds_AR2019_dec16.pdf, p 1.

³ <https://almanac.upenn.edu/articles/2020-2021-report-of-the-office-of-the-ombuds>.

⁴ <https://ombudsoffice-2016.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/10/AnnualReportFinal2020OmbudsOffice.pdf>, p 12.

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; Conduct – Staff; Conduct – Student; Stalking; Harassment; Social Media – Facebook/Stalkerspace etc, Case Management Meeting; Advice – Lodging Grievance/Complaint Resolution.

7. Teaching Quality, Program Concerns

Program concerns; Teaching quality; Online course sites; Course Concerns; 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

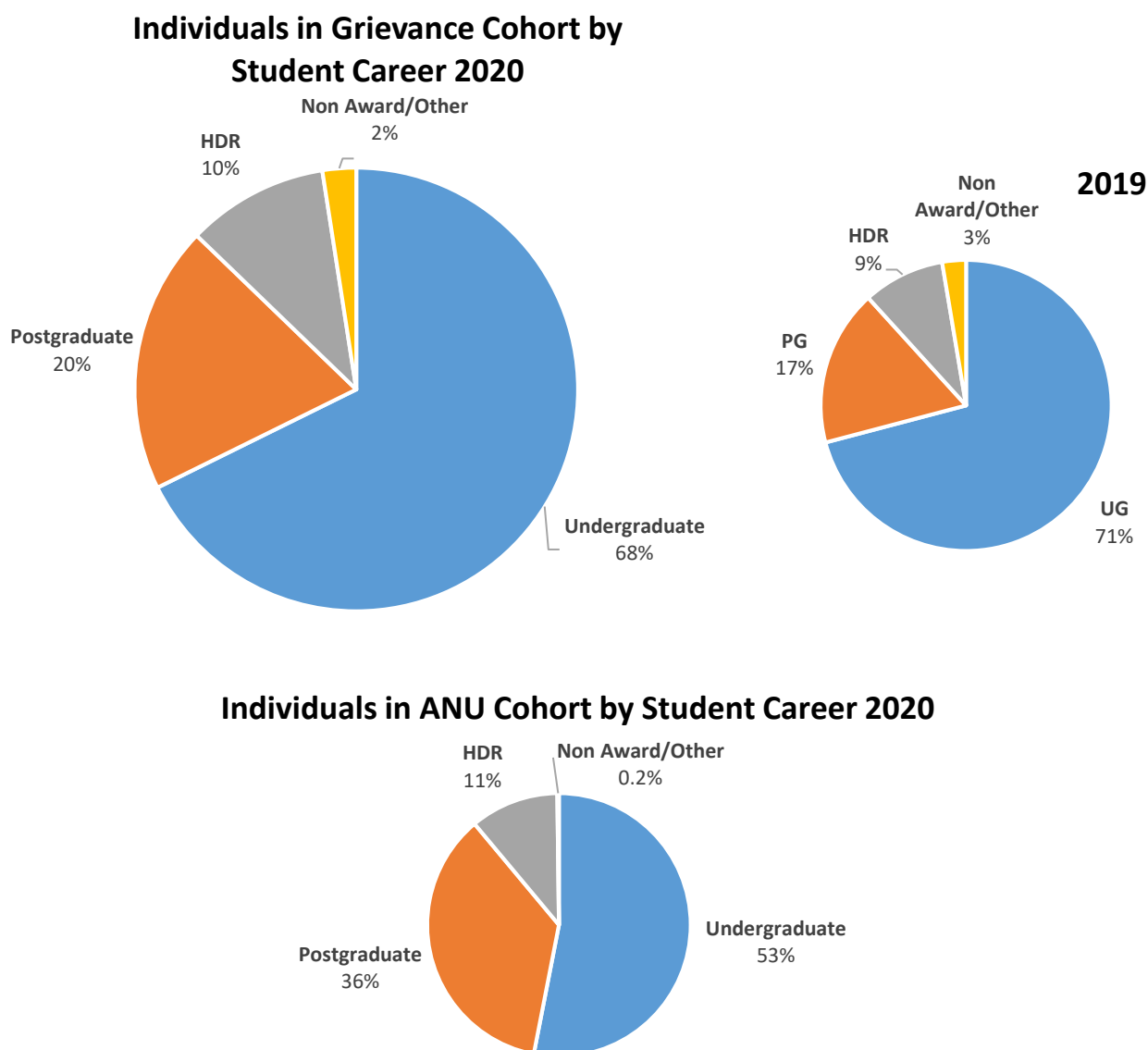
Regarding: Undergraduate; postgraduate; or higher degree research students.

Summary of Contacts with the Dean of Students' Office 2020

Individuals by Student Career

Chart 3 below shows a percentage summary of individuals who were assisted by the DoS Office by student career (Undergraduate, Postgraduate, HDR and Non Award) in 2020. The 2020 percentage summary of individuals is compared, via a second pie chart, with those who were assisted by the Office in 2019 and, via a third pie chart to the percentage of students in each cohort across the ANU. 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 2020 and 2019 along with the percentage of the total number of DoS-assisted students falling into each student career group for 2020. The final column sets out the percentage of students in each career cohort across the whole of the University population for the year 2020.

Chart 3



Student Career	No. Students 2020	No. Students 2019	% in grievance cohort 2020	% in ANU cohort 2020
Undergraduate	524	670	68	53
Postgraduate	151	164	20	36
HDR	80	86	10	11
Non Award/Other	19	25	2	0.3
Total	774	945		

The spread of individuals who were assisted by the DoS Office across student career cohorts has remained broadly consistent over the past several years, particularly in terms of an over-representation of undergraduate students in the DoS grievance cohort and an underrepresentation of postgraduate students. The spread of representation remained broadly in line with past years in 2020, with some variations, as explained below.

In 2020, as in 2019, **undergraduate students** presented to the DoS Office at a higher rate than their proportion in the total ANU student population: 68% to 56%. In 2019, the equivalent percentages were 71% to 56%. The 2020 numbers are very close to the undergraduate representation in 2018, when the comparable percentages were 67% and 55% respectively. As in previous years, the undergraduate cohort presented predominantly in relation to academic advice, progress and grievances. In descending order of frequency these included: late withdrawals, special consideration, academic advice and progress, and appeals (particularly appeals against results). Demonstrating the unique manner in which the pandemic was affecting undergraduate students (who would normally be engaged in face to face study on campus), there were high numbers of grievances in the “other” category for this cohort in 2020 (198 or 61% of all “other” grievances). In addition, a majority of the scholarship category grievances involved undergraduate students.

The most notable departure from previous undergraduate trends was that the prevalence of students seeking advice around modifying a course outcome or result (grade appeal, special consideration or late withdrawal) did not increase, as it has been doing since 2015. Indeed, in the undergraduate cohort, 226 individuals sought this kind of advice (by comparison with 198 in the “other” category). This is largely attributable to the compassionate adjustments put in place for students in both semesters due to COVID: delayed census dates; CRS/CRN results that did not affect GPA, academic or scholarship progress requirements; the suspension of the WN grade (which normally applies when a student withdraws from a course after the exam period has begun). This range of accommodations, along with the relaxation of timeframes, meant that the impacts of lower than normal numerical grades and their long-term effects on GPA could be mitigated by students without seeking to appeal a result or even to apply for late withdrawal from a course that they had failed. Indeed, since late withdrawal can be applied for up to 12 months after a course has been taken, much of the assistance that the Office provided in respect of late withdrawals in 2020 related to 2019 enrolments. These

observations apply equally to postgraduate coursework students for whom the same accommodations were made.

Postgraduate coursework students continued to be notably underrepresented amongst the 774 individuals who sought assistance from the DoS Office, although to a lesser extent than in 2019. There were 151 postgraduate coursework students in the DoS grievance cohort, representing 20% of individuals assisted by the Office as opposed to 33% of the total student population of the ANU in 2020. In 2019, 164 of the 945 (or 17%) of the DoS grievance cohort were postgraduate coursework students compared to 33% of the total ANU student population. This reduced level of underrepresentation, as in other areas commented on in this Report, represents a return to 2018 levels. In 2018, postgraduate students represented 20% of individuals assisted by the DoS Office whilst comprising 34% of the student population. The Office is aware that it will need to continue to work on improving its visibility amongst this cohort to address ongoing levels of underrepresentation.

The proportion of individuals presenting to the DoS Office in 2020 who were **HDR students** increased from 9% of the grievance cohort in both 2018 and 2019 to 10% in 2020. This remains slightly down on the proportion reported in 2017 (11%). However, the number of HDR students in the grievance cohort in 2020 is only six below the total number of HDR students assisted in 2019. The proportion of HDR students in the DoS cohort is closer to the proportion of HDR students in the whole of University cohort than it has been since 2017. The proportion of students at the ANU who are HDR candidates has remained consistently at 11% over this period.

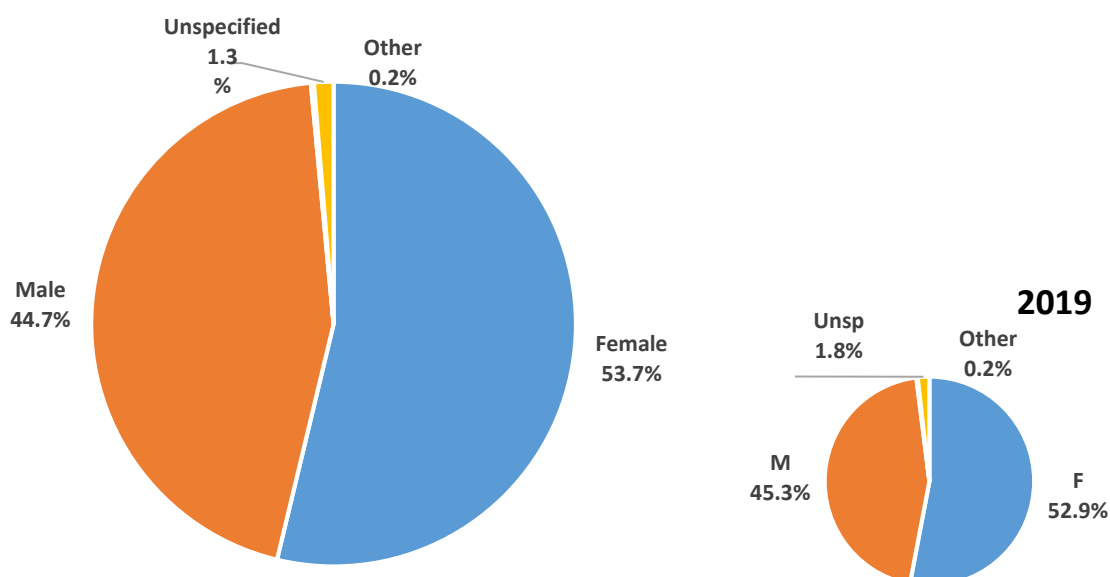
As has consistently been the case for some years, there was an over-representation of students in the DoS grievance cohort in the **Non-Award/Other student** category in 2020. This group reliably accounts for approximately 2% of the DoS grievance cohort (2.5% in 2019 and 2% in 2020) whilst representing only 0.2% of the ANU total student cohort. This is largely due to the Office's practice of placing prospective or current students who are not clearly identifiable as being part of the named student cohorts already discussed into the "Other" category of student.

Individuals by Gender

Chart 4 below shows a percentage summary of individuals who were assisted by the DoS Office in 2020 by reference to gender (to one percentage point), with a second pie chart showing the same data for 2019. Data in the table below the chart set out the number of individuals assisted by the Office by recorded gender for each of 2019 and 2020 along with the percentage of students in the DoS contact cohort by gender for 2020. The final column sets out the percentage of students in gender cohorts across the whole of the University population for 2020.

Chart 4

Individuals in Grievance Cohort by Gender 2020



Gender	No. Students 2020	No. Students 2019	% in grievance cohort 2020	% in ANU cohort 2020
Female	416	500	53.7	52.5
Male	346	428	44.7	47.5
Other	2	2	0.2	0.1
Unspecified	10	15	1.3	0
Total	774	945		

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 with broad alignment between the DoS grievance cohort and the ANU student cohort. This appears to have continued in **2020**. In this reporting year, 53.7% of students reporting grievances to the DoS Office were **female** (as opposed to 52.5% in the whole of ANU cohort) and 44.7% were **male** (2.8% lower than the representation of males in the ANU student cohort). Two students identified as non-binary. The 1.3% 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 9](#) below) and in specific career cohorts of students, although there have been some modifications to previously identified trends between 2018 and 2019. One has been a noticeable reduction in the overrepresentation of female HDR students in the DoS grievance cohort since 2018. Whilst ANU HDR numbers have remained relatively stable (50:50 in 2018, 49.5% female to 50.5% male in 2019, and 49% female to 51% male in 2020), the DoS grievance cohort has not. 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). The comparable numbers for 2019 were 53 females (62%) and 29 male (34%) HDR students presenting to the DoS (approximately 4% were unknown), and in **2020** the numbers were 46 (or 58%) **female** and 33 (or 41%) **male HDR** students with one unknown.

The grievances of **female HDR** students in relation to **supervisory relationships** and **behavioural** issues increased in **2020**, as did the disparity in the number of grievances brought to the DoS in these areas by reference to gender. In 2019, 23 female students presented with supervision grievances and 19 with grievances relating to what they considered to be poor or inappropriate student or staff conduct (though, not rising to the level of bullying). This compared with 15 male students with complaints relating to supervision and 10 relating to student or staff conduct. In **2020**, there were 26 **female HDR** students who brought **supervision** grievances to the attention of the DoS and 22 **behavioural/conduct** grievances. The equivalent number of **male HDR** students with grievances in each category in 2020 were 12 and 12 respectively. In 2020, four **female HDR** students reported that they were **bullied by staff** (none reported **student bullying**) whilst one male HDR student reported **bullying by a staff member** and one stated that they had been **bullied by a fellow student**.

Other grievance categories where a gender bias was apparent in 2020 largely continue to demonstrate the observations made in the 2017, 2018 and 2019 Annual Reports: grievances in relation to **sexual harassment or sexual assault** (exclusively **female** students in **2020**); **undergraduate** students reporting interpersonal behavioural/conduct issues involving other students (an over-representation of **male** students of 38:16); and students in all career cohorts seeking timely academic advice (an under-representation of **male** students of 17:48).

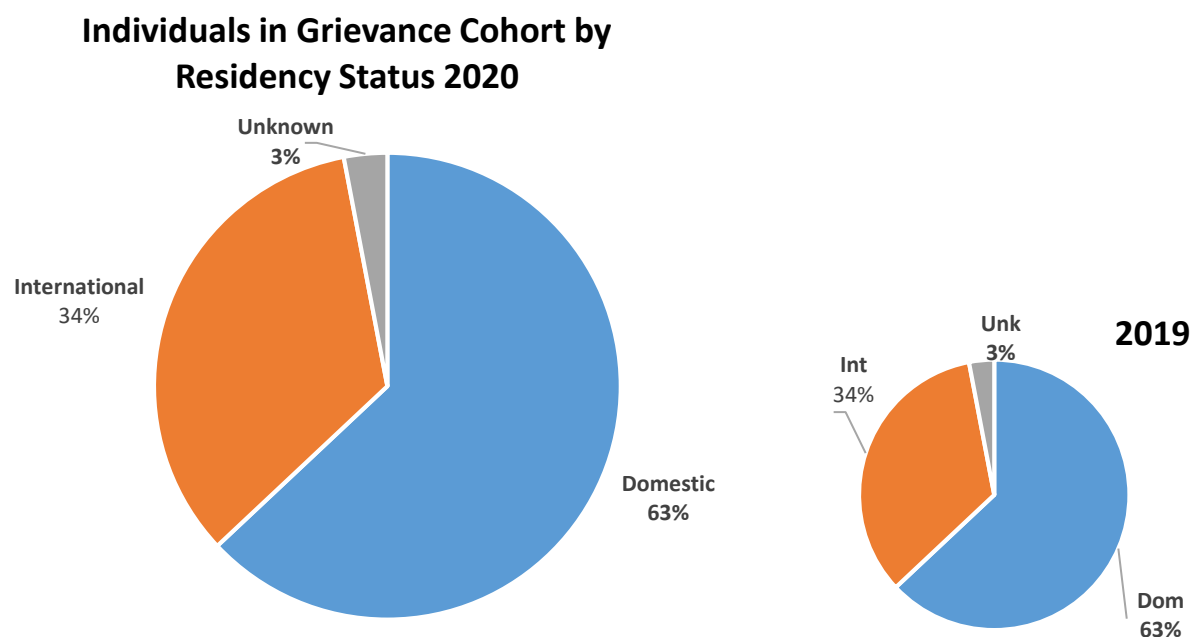
Mental health related grievances were reported at an approximately 4% higher rate by **female** students than **male** across the whole of the DoS grievance cohort. Prior to 2018, there had been a clear pattern of male international students being under-represented in relation to the raising of mental health issues during interactions with the DoS Office. 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 trend then reversed in 2019. However, in **2020**, we saw a complete turnaround in relation to this measure, with **male**

international students raising **mental health**-related issues at an approximately 3% higher rate than their **female** counterparts. Of the 127 **male international** students assisted by the Office, 31 (or 24%) reported that they were experiencing mental health issues, in contrast to 28 of the 136 (or 21%) of **female international** students in the DoS cohort.

Individuals by Residency

Chart 5 shows a percentage summary of the individuals assisted by the DoS Office by reference to their status as domestic or international students. The 2020 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 2020. Data in the table below the charts set out the number of individuals assisted by the Office by residency for each of 2020 and 2019 along with the percentage of students in the DoS grievance cohort by residency for 2020. The final column sets out the percentage of students in international and domestic cohorts across the whole of the University population for 2020.

Chart 5



Residency Status	No. Students 2020	No. Students 2019	% in grievance cohort 2020	% in ANU cohort 2020
Domestic	491	596	63	64
International	264	322	34	36
Unknown	19	27	3	
Total	774	945		

The most noteworthy aspects of the chart above are that:

- the proportions of **domestic** and **international** students in the DoS grievance cohort in **2020** are precisely the same as in 2019; and
- those proportions reflect, to within one to two percentage points, the proportions of domestic and international students across the whole University.

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%, whilst the whole of University International student cohort in 2019 was 38%. The numbers represent an under-representation of 4% in the DoS grievance cohort in 2019, compared with an under-representation of 2% in 2018.

The pandemic impacted the total number of international students at the ANU, with a reduction from 38% in 2019 to 36% in **2020**. In the meantime, the DoS grievance cohort remained at 34% international students. Whilst it is hard to predict how quickly the international student enrolments at the ANU will rebound, we are hoping that these 2020 numbers put us back on track in trending towards equal representation of international students between the DoS grievance and ANU cohorts.

There are few clear trend indicators that can be extracted from the 2020 numbers. This is partially due to the effect of the generous accommodations made for students by the University in response to the pandemic (see the section entitled [Impacts of COVID-19 on the Work of the Office](#) above), particularly, the decision that CRN fail grades would not affect a student's GPA or academic progress requirements. A further impact on trends that have previously been commented on in this section of the Annual Report was the introduction in December 2019 of the new Academic Progress Rule 2019. The academic progress requirements previously in place were relaxed somewhat by the new Rule. In addition, an important decision was made in relation to students who breached their academic progress requirements as a result of Semester 2 2019 courses (which came up for consideration in the first quarter of 2020). That decision was to apply whichever of the two Rules (the previous or the new Rule) that most favoured each student in their particular circumstances when assessing whether or not they should be excluded from the University as a result of an academic progress breach. This approach, in conjunction with the opt-in system for CRS/CRN grading, available for Semester 1 and Semester 2 2020 results (with a CRN having no academic progress impact) meant that the numbers of students who were subject to exclusion in 2020 was markedly lower than in normal academic years.

The flow-on effect for the Office was a clear reduction in the number of students seeking our support and advice for academic progress related matters, particularly those involving exclusion from the University. More striking, though, was the complete reversal of a previously identified trend whereby international students have been particularly reluctant to seek early support in relation to their academic progress.

For every year between 2014 and 2017, our Annual Reports 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 in regards to grievances relating to exclusion between the international student cohort 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 demonstrated a return to the pre-2018 position where international students 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 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.

In **2020**, largely for the reasons explained above, the numbers of **excluded** students in the DoS grievance cohort were very low overall: just 18 (or 2.3% of the DoS cohort). In addition, only four students presented to us in relation to academic progress **probation** and only one in relation to **suspension**. Unlike in previous years, the **excluded** students were overwhelmingly **domestic** (14 of the 18) with only four **international** coursework students being recorded in this grievance category. The **probationary** students were 3:1 **domestic** to **international** coursework students.

Importantly, here, the few students we did see were predominantly seeking “last-ditch” help in relation to their academic progress breaches – at the show cause stage to argue that the decision to exclude should be reversed – and not after their first failed course or at the probation stage. It is always concerning when students do not seek or take up offers for early intervention support from our office or from their academic Colleges. This is despite proactive strategies to identify and contact students at risk of breaching Academic Progress requirements being deployed, particularly by academic Colleges. Whilst these strategies are designed to promote students experiencing difficulties with their studies seeking a variety of academic and other supports, we continue to observe a significant reluctance on the part of some students to do so.

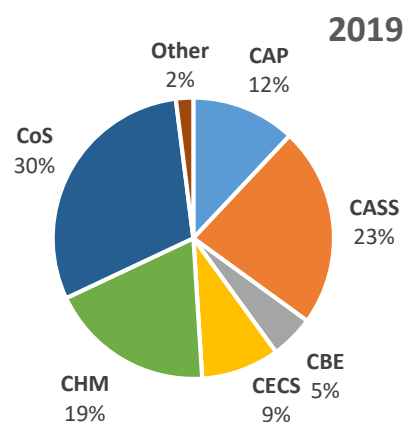
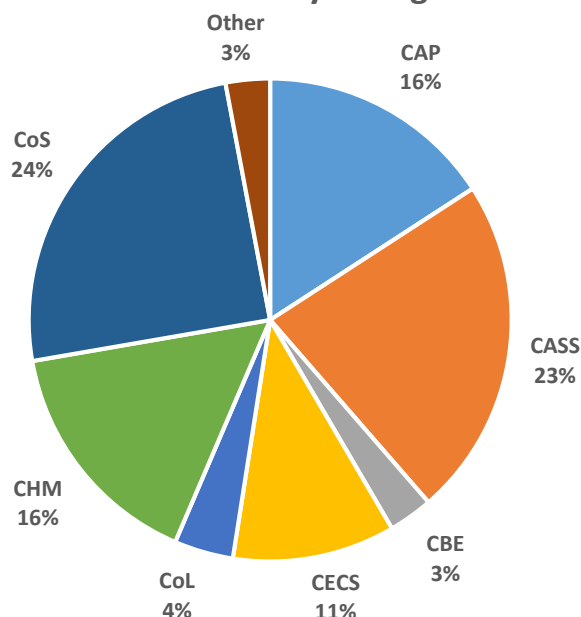
Individuals by Student Career and by College

Higher Degree Research Students

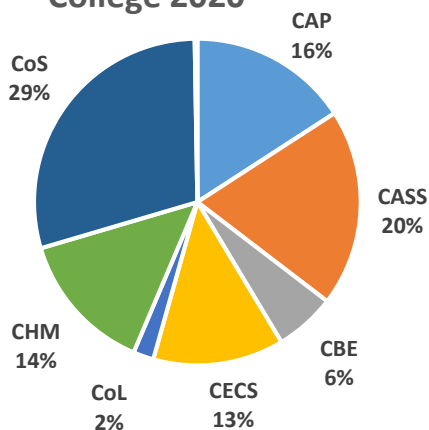
Chart 6 shows a percentage summary of the individual HDR students who were assisted by the DoS Office by reference to the academic Colleges in which they were pursuing their research studies. The 2020 chart can be compared to the second pie chart, which shows a percentage summary of individual HDR students who were assisted by the Office across academic Colleges in 2019 and the third pie chart, which shows the percentage of the total ANU HDR cohort in each College in 2020. 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 2020 and 2019 along with the percentage of the total DoS HDR grievance cohort from each academic College for 2020. The final column sets out the percentage of the total University population of HDR students hosted in each academic College for 2020.

Chart 6

Individuals in Higher Degree Research Grievance Cohort by College 2020



Individuals in ANU Higher Degree Research Cohort by College 2020



College	No. Students 2020	No. Students 2019	% in grievance cohort 2020	% in ANU cohort 2020
CAP	13	10	16	16
CASS	18	20	23	20
CBE	2	4	3	6
CECS	9	8	11	13
CoL	3	0	4	2
CHM	13	16	16	14
CoS	20	26	25	29
Other	2	2	3	<0.3
Total	80	86		

CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; 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.

Despite the noticeable drop in overall numbers in the DoS grievance cohort, the number of higher degree research (HDR) students who were assisted by our office in 2020 remained relatively steady at 80 (only slightly below the numbers in 2018 (85) and 2019 (86)). Despite a slight dip in 2020, 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 five years (3% of the total HDR cohort in 2020, 3.3% in both 2019 and 2018, 3.6% in 2017 and 3.4% in 2016).

As has been observed for several years, in 2020 the complexity of cases managed by the Office for this cohort of students was very high, with 39 of the 80 HDR candidates supported by the Office requiring multiple visits. This represents nearly 49% of HDR candidates in the HDR grievance cohort. In contrast, the average rate of multiple visits across the whole DoS grievance cohort was 32%: see [Chart 2](#). The multiple contacts data for this cohort also show that:

- 12 HDR candidates (or 15% of the HDR grievance cohort) were each supported by the Office through six or more contacts/appointments in 2020 (the same number as in 2019); and
- the four highest users of the DoS in the entire grievance cohort in 2020 were all HDR candidates: one each having 31, 25, 24 and 21 contacts/appointments with the Office. (The four highest users from this cohort in 2019 were: two with eight; one with nine; and one with 11 contacts). The particular issues faced by these four students were multi-faceted (involving between seven and ten grievance categories); inter-related; of long-standing; and were significantly impacting their mental health or wellbeing.

HDR Grievances

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**. The proportion of HDR students who presented with these forms of grievance in 2020 was exactly the same as in 2019: 66%. In **2020**, the numbers were 53 out of 80, in comparison to 57 out of 86 students in 2019. The equivalent number in 2018 was 51 out of a total HDR cohort of 85 (or 60%).

Supervision grievances often spring from what an HDR candidate perceives as a relationship of unequal power between themselves and their supervisor (discussed further below). That sense of power imbalance may play out in a variety of areas associated with their candidature. In 2020, the Office saw several grievances around **authorship** and assertions of **intellectual property** by supervisors for the first time. We saw these as sufficiently pressing to be brought to the attention of the HDR Committee 1/2021 rather than later in the year via this Report. The recommendations made to the Committee as set out [above](#) were approved and adopted.

The trend for students to present earlier in their candidature, commented on in Annual Reports since 2017, was not as apparent in 2020. 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) continue to be applauded by HDR students presenting to the DoS Office. These were delivered in adapted ways during the pandemic, and were both highly successful and sincerely appreciated by students. The Office also continued to see the positive impacts on students of the Graduate Research Office (GRO) which commenced operations in February 2019, as a source of information, support and coordination for the HDR cohort.

We are still hoping to see the flow-on effects of significant changes to supervision requirements and practices across the University under the Higher Degree Research (HDR) Supervision Development Framework and associated developments. Our hope has been that greater emphasis on structure and the capacity for negotiation around supervision agreements would see significant reduction in the number of students presenting with supervision grievances. Whilst the new framework is in its early days, the number and gravity of supervision grievances still handled by this Office demonstrate both that there is an imperative for the framework to succeed and that its anticipated impact has not yet been realised.

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.

As we have commented upon before, it is highly problematic 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 progress. Some expressed a concern

that retaliation might occur even after they had graduated, as negative commentary on a PhD graduate by former supervisors or their colleagues who are experts in their field could impact career prospects well into the future. Overall, we continued to see significant concerns raised about power imbalances in the supervisor/supervisee relationship and fear of the repercussions of “making a fuss” about problematic supervision or other related issues.

Where **academic progress** is the core issue, the nature of our support 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 significantly with their mental health. Mental health issues 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 2020, 26 of the 80 HDR candidates assisted by the DoS Office reported experiencing **mental health** issues and seven reported other issues involving their **health**. This represents 32.5% and 8.75% of the HDR grievance cohort respectively. This was double the proportion of HDR candidates who reported to us that they were experiencing mental issues in 2019 (16%). It was also significantly above the whole of grievance cohort percentage of 19% and underlines the high levels of distress experienced by the HDR cohort. Eleven HDR candidates (both male and female) sought **pastoral care** assistance from the DoS Office in addition to other areas of the University.

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**. Five HDR students (four of whom were female) claimed their supervisor or another **staff** member **bullied** them – one fewer than in 2019 but a significant increase on the one claim made in 2018 and also an increase on the three cases reported in 2017. In addition, 22 grievances involved complaints about the **conduct of staff** and its impact on both the candidate’s well-being and their academic progress. This represents a further increase over numbers previously reported in this category of grievance: 19 in 2019, 10 in 2018, and nine in 2017. Conduct of concern was most often described as either harassment or as unreasonable, badgering behaviour. Some candidates alleged that supervisors were requiring them to take time away from their own research projects to undertake the supervisor’s research with a frequency that impeded their progress. At the other end of the spectrum, though more rarely, HDR candidates alleged supervisory neglect: that they were left to languish without meaningful input or guidance because their supervisors were too busy with their own research and teaching.

In 2020, there was one complaint of **bullying by another student** (compared to two in 2019) and 12 grievances in relation to lesser forms of poor **conduct by fellow students** (sometimes in the laboratory environment). In addition, four female HDR candidates recorded grievances

relating to **harassment** or **stalking**. In comparison, there were four complaints of poor conduct by fellow students in 2019 and nine (and none in relation to bullying by other students) in 2018.

As with other student career cohorts, HDR candidates were greatly assisted by the accommodations put in place by the University in response to the pandemic. These included the COVID-19 Extension Scholarship (available to PhD candidates between 3 and 3.5 years of the commencement of their candidature and MPhil candidates between 1.5 and 2 years) and the COVID-19 Onshore Program Extension Fee Support.⁵ This meant that HDR candidates largely presented with similar grievances to those brought to the Office in previous years. Exceptions to this were:

- an increase in students presenting with **financial** issues (10, in 2020);
- seven students seeking advice about **extensions** to their candidature (including three experiencing administrative or other issues around the COVID-19 extension, and four with concerns around not qualifying for the extension);
- two students with concerns around **quarantine** or **self-isolation** (including on return from fieldwork);
- two students seeking advice about **special consideration** to reflect how they had been affected by COVID-19;
- a complaint about delays in the **examination** of a thesis, which may have been attributable to the impacts of the pandemic; and
- a number of grievances associated with not being able to access areas of the campus (including labs) during lockdown.

It should not be underestimated, though, how much the ongoing uncertainty and pressures associated with the pandemic contributed to the high levels of stress felt by this cohort.

Prevalence by College

In 2020, the **prevalence of HDR student complaints** was broadly aligned with the numbers of HDR students in each **College**. There was some over-representation in the College of Arts and Social Sciences (**CASS**): with the same percentage of the HDR cohort (23%) and level of over-representation as in 2019 (3%). Also over-represented were:

- ANU College of Law (**CoL**): after no Law contacts in 2019, there were 4 in 2020, resulting in a 2% over-representation as against the proportion of ANU HDR students in the ANU College of Law;
- College of Health and Medicine (**CHM**): a reduction from 19% to 13% of the HDR grievance cohort between 2019 and 2020 but still an over-representation of 2%;
- Non-affiliated Centres (**Other**): 3% of the DoS HDR grievance cohort but less than 0.3% of the ANU HDR cohort;

Colleges that were under-represented in 2020 were:

- College of Engineering and Computer Sciences (**CECS**): an increase as against the 2019 numbers but still an under-representation of 2%;

⁵ See <https://www.anu.edu.au/covid-19-advice/how-were-responding-to-covid-19/research-including-hdr/hdr-candidates> for further details of ANU support measures for HDR candidates.

- College of Science (**CoS**): a significant decrease from 2019 and an under-representation of 5%;
- College of Business and Economics (**CBE**): a decrease from 2019 and an under-representation of 3%.

The College of Asia and the Pacific (**CAP**) registered an increase from 12% of the 2019 HDR grievance cohort to 16% of the 2020 HDR grievance cohort, a percentage that was on par with the proportion of ANU HDR candidates supervised by CAP academic staff.

Pulling together data on **gender** and **College** affiliation, the group identifiable as the highest HDR users of the Office in 2020 were female candidates pursuing non-STEM HDR studies. These accounted for 33% of individuals who sought assistance from the DoS in the HDR cohort whilst representing 23% of the total HDR cohort at ANU. This contrasts to 2019 where the group who were the highest HDR users were female candidates working in the joint Colleges of Science (31% of the HDR DoS cohort as against 23% of the total HDR cohort at ANU).

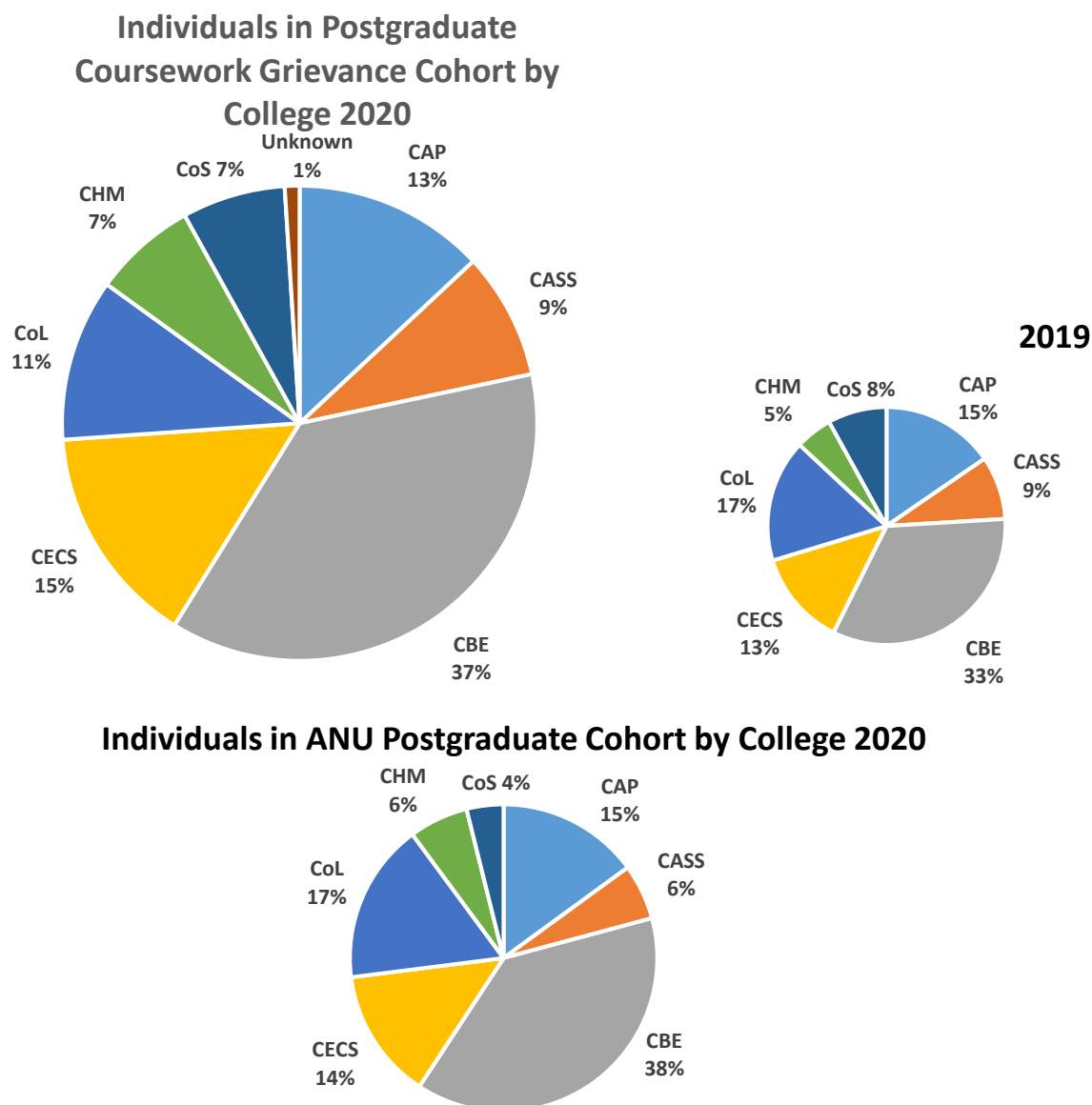
Finally, we note that there was sustained demand on the DoS Office in 2020 from HDR supervisors. We continue to encourage staff to consider the DoS Office as a general resource and, in the HDR context, a particular source of advice in relation to managing difficult supervision situations.

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

Postgraduate Coursework Students

Chart 7 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 2020 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 2019 and the third pie chart, which shows the percentage of the total ANU postgraduate coursework student cohort in each College in 2020. 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 2020 and 2019 along with the percentage of the total DoS postgraduate coursework grievance cohort that was enrolled in each academic College for 2020. The final column sets out the percentage of the total University population of postgraduate coursework students enrolled in each academic College for 2020.

Chart 7



College	No. Students 2020	No. Students 2019	% in grievance cohort 2020	% in ANU cohort 2020
CAP	20	25	13	15
CASS	14	14	9	6
CBE	56	54	37	38
CECS	22	21	15	14
CoL	17	28	11	17
CHM	12	9	7	6
CoS	11	13	7	4
Unknown	1	0	1	0
Total	153*	164		

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

* Two students were enrolled in two Colleges. Total number of postgraduate students seen: 151.

CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; 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). In **2020**, the total number of **postgraduate coursework students** assisted by the Office was 151. This represents a small fall in raw numbers but an increase in the proportion of the DoS grievance cohort in this career cohort from 17% in 2019 to almost 20% in 2020. This is the equal highest proportion of the DoS grievance cohort of the past four years with 2018. Despite these small adjustments 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 3](#) above). In 2020, 20% of the DoS grievance cohort were postgraduate coursework students, whilst this career cohort constituted 36% of total student numbers across the ANU.

Given this under-representation, it is important to note that, of the 147 individuals in the cohort whose gender and residency were both recorded, only 54 (or 36.7%) of them were domestic students whilst 93 (or 63.3%) were international students. This continues the trend previously recorded in relation to this cohort. For example, in 2019, of 161 individuals, 57 of 161 postgraduate coursework students were domestic and 104 (or 64.6%) were international.

In normal years, postgraduate coursework students across the University are predominantly international (in 2019, the proportion was 60%). In 2020, impacted by the border closure, the total number of international postgraduate coursework students decreased (4922 of a total of 8776) with the result that they represented 56% of the total postgraduate coursework population of the ANU. Even taking this into account, however, the data for 2020 indicates an increased over-representation of international students in the postgraduate coursework grievance cohort from the previous year. Notably, this is the only student career in the DoS grievance cohort where international students are significantly over-represented.

Whilst grievances raised with us were often very serious (see the discussion below), this cohort of students did not tend to present with as many interconnected issues as was apparent in the HDR cohort. Of the total 151 postgraduate coursework students in the DoS grievance cohort, 44 (or 29%) required multiple visits/contacts. This is below the average rate of multiple visits across the whole DoS grievance cohort: 32%. The number of issues raised by each individual was predominantly two or three matters and multiple contacts were primarily two or three contacts/visits. However, a number of postgraduate coursework students presented with as many as seven or eight inter-related issues. One required 18 contacts with the Office, another 11, and eight were seen/assisted on five or six occasions.

Postgraduate Coursework Grievances

Grievances within the postgraduate coursework cohort centred on the following:

- **appeals** or **grade appeals** (48 instances);
- **academic progress** and **advice** (24);
- a variety of **administrative issues** (34);
- **program, course** and **teaching quality** concerns (32);
- **financial** issues (sometimes associated with accommodation concerns) (24);
- **academic misconduct** (10);
- **fee** related issues (10); and
- **scholarships** (14).

The “**other**” category of grievance was recorded 54 times, in relation to this cohort. These were predominantly COVID-19 related grievances or inquiries, including the operation of the CRS/CRN grading system; the impact of travel bans; the difficulties involved in remote learning; and concerns over visas. Advice about **program leave** was sought where particular students saw the barriers to learning during the pandemic as too great to allow them to continue. This cohort also raised issues around remission or reduction of fees in association with their dissatisfaction with being unable to travel to Australia or with the impacts of remote learning on their studies. Students sometimes expressed significant frustration that the University was not considering fee remission, particularly where COVID-19 had disastrously impacted family finances.

This was another sub-group of students where high levels of stress were apparent, particularly in relation to the repercussions of the pandemic on their lives and their capacity to engage with and sustain their studies. **Disability, health** or **mental health** impacts were reported by 41 students (27% of postgraduate coursework students assisted by the Office) and 11 sought our **pastoral care** support.

Prevalence by College

The data indicate that by comparison with the distribution of all ANU postgraduate coursework students across academic Colleges, there was an over-representation of students from **CoS**: +3% (down from +4% in 2019); and **CASS**: +3% (the same as in 2019). Both **CHM** and **CECS** saw an increase in their proportion of postgraduate coursework students in the DoS grievance cohort between 2019 and 2020 but both Colleges are only slightly over-represented when compared to the distribution of all ANU students in this career cohort across the Colleges in 2020. The relevant comparisons are:

- **CHM** increased from 5% of the postgraduate coursework student DoS grievance cohort in 2019 to 7% in 2020, but remained only slightly over-represented at +1%;
- **CECS** increased from 13% of the postgraduate coursework student DoS grievance cohort in 2019 to 15% in 2020 (with notable numbers of grievances in relation to **grade** and other **appeals**). However CECS also remained only slightly over-represented at +1%.

There has been a decrease in the number of **CAP** students in the DoS grievance cohort, since 2019 (15% to 13% in 2020) which has resulted in this College being under-represented for the first time in several years (CAP was +2% in 2019). As in 2019, the ANU **CoL** remains significantly under-represented by reference to the whole of ANU distribution of this cohort across Colleges (-6%). **CBE**'s representation increased from 33% in 2019 to 37% in 2020 but remains slightly under-represented (-1%).

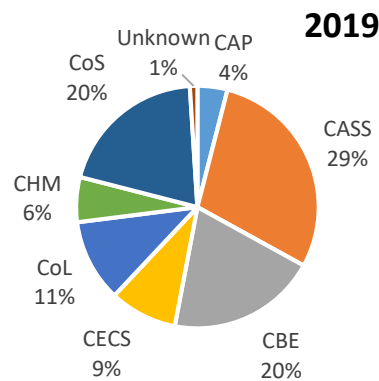
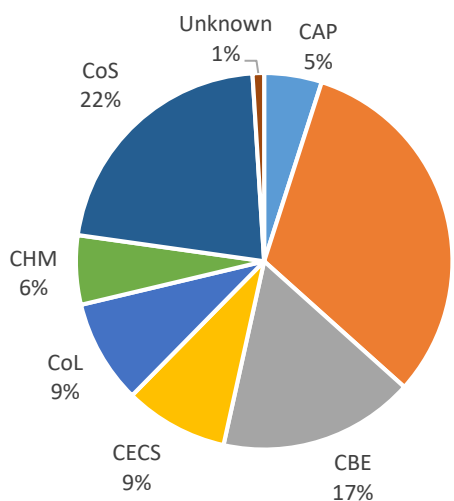
Once again, we are happy to provide Colleges with more detailed de-identified information to assist in identifying key issues for their action.

Undergraduate Students

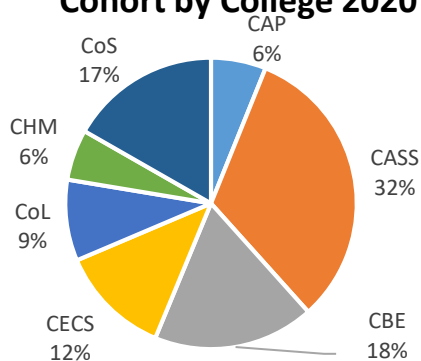
Chart 8 shows a percentage summary of the individual undergraduate students who were assisted by the DoS Office by reference to the academic Colleges in which they were enrolled. **Where students are enrolled in double degrees, they are recorded against both Colleges in which they are studying.** The 2020 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 2019 and the third pie chart, which shows the percentage of the total ANU undergraduate student cohort in each College in 2020. Data in the table below the pie charts set out the number of individual undergraduate students who contacted the Office by reference to their academic Colleges in 2020 and 2019 as well as the percentage of the total DoS undergraduate grievance cohort that was enrolled in each academic College for 2020. The final column sets out the percentage of the total University population of undergraduate students enrolled in each academic College for 2020 (again, remembering that double degree students are recorded as enrolled in two Colleges).

Chart 8

Individuals in Undergraduate Grievance Cohort by College 2020*



Individuals in ANU Undergraduate Cohort by College 2020*



College	No. Students* 2020	No. Students* 2019	% in grievance cohort 2020	% in ANU cohort 2020
CAP	32	34	5	6
CASS	223	268	32	31
CBE	120	184	17	20
CECS	66	84	9	12
CoL	62	98	9	10
CHM	44	59	6	5
CoS	155	186	22	16
Unknown	5	6	1	0
Total	707	919		

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

CAP: College of Asia & the Pacific; CASS: College of Arts & Social Sciences; 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 flexible double degrees, the actual number of individuals in the undergraduate cohort represented by the total of 707 in the table above is 524. This again is a reduction in raw numbers from 2019 when the total of 919 in the second column of the table above represented 670 individual undergraduate students; and 2018, when the numbers were 844 and 639 respectively. The percentage of the total population of undergraduate students at the ANU receiving support or advice from the DoS in 2020 was 4% (524 of a total cohort of 12 990). In 2019, during which the highest ever student demand was felt by this Office, the equivalent numbers were 5% of the total undergraduate population (670 of 13 335).

Undergraduate students did continue to make up the majority of the DoS grievance cohort in 2020, although to a lesser extent than in previous years. They constituted 68% of the individual students assisted by the Office, whilst representing 56% of the total ANU student population. On the other hand, undergraduate students required slightly lower numbers of multiple visits than other student career cohorts. Of the 524 individuals, a significant majority required only one contact with the DoS in order to resolve their matter of concern: 159 individuals required multiple visits (or 30%). In contrast, the average rate of multiple visits across the whole DoS grievance cohort was 32%: see [Chart 2](#). Where multiple contacts were required, the majority involved two (82 individuals) or three (26 individuals) visits/contacts rather than more. An analysis of the multiple contacts data for this cohort also shows that:

- 28 undergraduate students (only 5.3% of the undergraduate grievance cohort) were each supported by the Office through six or more contacts/appointments in 2020; and

- five undergraduate students required 10 or more visits: two requiring 10 contacts, and one each requiring 11, 13 and 16 contacts with the Office.

Broadly, this demonstrated a lower level of complexity in the matters brought to the DoS by this cohort. However, as the data above demonstrate, a number of undergraduate students faced very testing intertwined issues that were seriously impacting their studies and experience of university life and that required support from various areas of the University.

Undergraduate Grievances

Typically, grievances raised by the undergraduate cohort are more likely than other cohorts to relate to academic advice and progress; academic grievances (especially late withdrawals, special consideration/extension/deferred exams, and grade appeals); behavioural and conduct issues; teaching quality; and program and course concerns. This remained the case in 2020 (although attention is drawn to the section above: [“Impacts of COVID-19 on the Work of the Office”](#)). As explained in that portion of the report, significant adjustments around census dates, delayed dates for withdrawal without academic penalty, the capacity to opt into CRS/CRN grades so that GPA was not affected etc led to many fewer inquiries about academic progress grievances (including late withdrawal) than would normally be the case.

Grievances recorded in 2020 included:

- **scholarships** (135).
- general inappropriate **conduct** (predominantly in relation to other students, but also in relation to staff) (92)
- **academic progress and advice** (115);
- **appeals or grade appeals** (84 instances);
- a variety of **administrative issues**, including in relation to **program transfer, fees, admission and enrolment** (109);
- **program, course and teaching quality** concerns (61);
- **financial** issues (sometimes associated with accommodation concerns) (42); and
- **harassment** (20), **stalking** (5) and **social media** misuse (14)

The “**other**” category of grievance was recorded 205 times, in relation to this cohort. Issues raised under “other” were broad ranging but included a large number of COVID-19 related grievances or inquiries, including the operation of the CRS/CRN grading system; confusion over withdrawal dates; the impact of international and inter-state travel bans; course decisions associated with remote learning; course cancellations; and, in relation to international undergraduate students, dissatisfaction over the failure of the ANU to reduce fees for students who were unable to come to Australia to study in person. There was also some strong opposition to particular forms of exam adjustments put in place as a result of the pandemic from this group of students. This was most notably around the use of Proctorio as a remote invigilation system for online exams.

The following observations are also important in relation to this group.

- There was an increase in **academic misconduct** inquiries (25) from previous years (partially as a result of increased numbers of breaches being detected in online exams through various electronic methods);

- This cohort reported the highest levels of **sexual assault** and **sexual harassment** as well as other forms of critical incident. Students were particularly vulnerable in on-campus residential settings and were often engaging with multiple forms of support (from the Respectful Relationships Unit, ANUSA, ANU Counselling, Heads of Hall and Senior Residents in their residential halls and other wellbeing services) in relation to their experience.
- As with other student career cohorts commented on in this Report, there were also high levels of distress apparent amongst the undergraduate cohort. **Disability, health or mental health** impacts were reported by 168 students (32% of the undergraduate students assisted by the Office) and 31 sought our **pastoral care** support.

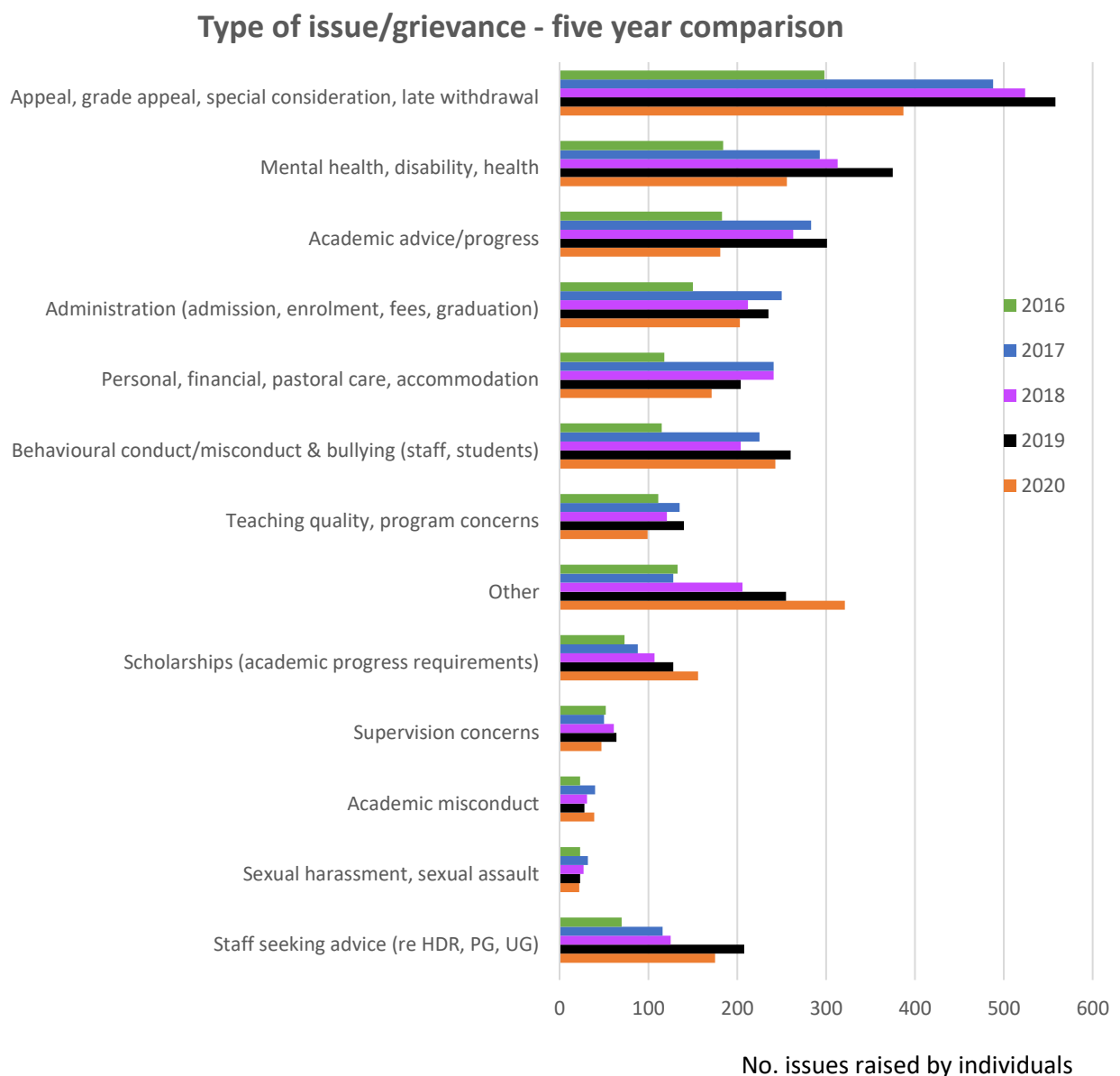
Prevalence by College

Contacts with DoS contacts by undergraduate students show a broadly representative spread across the Colleges. However, it is particularly difficult to draw conclusions about over- or under-representation of each College in the DoS 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 (run out of CoS and CASS respectively), could take a computing course (run by CECS) as part of their program.

Distribution of Grievances

Chart 9 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 across five years from 2016 to 2020. As explained at length above, a single contact with the 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 set out the number of issues raised across the listed categories for each of 2020 and 2019.

Chart 9



Type of Issue/Grievance	2020	2019
Appeal, Grade Appeal, special consideration, late withdrawal	387	558
Mental health, disability, health	256	375
Academic advice and progress	181	301
Administration (administration, admission, enrolment, fees, program transfer, graduation)	203	235
Personal, financial, pastoral care, accommodation	171	204
Behavioural Conduct/Misconduct & Bullying (staff, students)	243	260
Teaching quality, program concerns, assessment requirements	99	140
Other	321	255
Scholarships (academic progress requirements)	156	128
Supervision concerns	47	64
Academic misconduct	39	28
Sexual harassment, sexual assault	22	23
Staff seeking advice (HDR, PG, UG)	175	208

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. The reduction in grievances in this category in 2020 has been commented on in various sections of this Annual Report. We believe it reflects the accommodations afforded to coursework students in response to the pandemic, particularly: the availability of CRS/CRN grades on an opt-in basis, with neutral effect of GPA for the purposes of both academic progress requirements and scholarships; delayed census dates and extended periods for withdrawal without academic penalty; and the removal of WN grades for 2020. We have also commented on the decision made to apply the more advantageous of the old and new Academic Progress Rules when making exclusion decisions in Semester 1 2020.

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. High levels of distress were observed in 2020 as students dealt with the uncertainties around periods of lockdown, border restrictions, the impacts of social isolation, and the pressures on their friends and families.

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. In 2020, significant economic distress was felt by domestic and, particularly, international students as a consequence of the pandemic.

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 often follow. These students sometimes work in comparative isolation and are frequently in need of substantial encouragement, positive feedback and practical approaches to enabling both progress with their studies and productive communication with their supervisor. Extra levels of isolation and frustrations around access to the University were felt by this cohort in 2020.

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 seven case management processes in 2020. These are recorded as part of the "Behavioural Conduct/Misconduct" category in the table and chart above.

6. Complex interrelationships of grievances. As is discussed elsewhere, 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 inter-connected 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. In 2020, these incidents increased in number as some students engaged in risky practices around contract cheating (especially via Chegg and similar sites, during exams).

Grievance Trends

For the reasons set out elsewhere in this report, in examining the 2020 data, it is hard to identify genuine grievance trends, as opposed to what may be temporary and explicable reactions to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. As explained elsewhere, due to reduced numbers of student presentations in 2020, the discussion of trends in this report will take into account both raw numbers and the proportion of grievances in each category of grievance (by reference to total contacts) in 2020. This will bring greater context to the discussion of any trends than would be possible by focussing on the numbers alone.

Most Recorded Grievances

As in previous years, the highest incidence of issues that were raised with the DoS Office in 2020 in a single grievance category were “**academic grievances**”, including the contesting of grades (grade appeals) or removal of fail grades (through late withdrawal). These represented 17% of total grievances received by the Office (a total of 387). However, the numbers in this category show a distinct drop from the record high figures recorded in 2019 in relation to the academic grievance category, and also as a proportion of total grievances (20% in 2019).

For the first time ever, matters in the “**other**” category of grievance were the second most frequently raised by students seeking our assistance and advice (321 or 14% of all grievances). This, we believe, is a strong indicator of the varied and unique nature of the grievances with which students presented in 2020, largely as a result of the pandemic. The category is utilised in our record keeping (and is accompanied by extensive notes) only when it is not part of our normal grievance template. It is typically used when we are dealing with a unique or new type of problem in any given year.

Matters in the category of “**disability/health/mental health**” were the third most frequently raised with the Office (in 2019 and 2018, they were the second most frequently raised). The figures for 2020 were 256 presentations (compared to 375 presentations in 2019 and 313 in 2018). Whilst this is a reduction in raw numbers, this represented 19% of the total grievance cohort in 2020, as opposed to 23% in 2019 and 18% in 2018. Students presenting to the Office in relation to this category of grievance often did so in conjunction with matters relating to academic progress, academic misconduct and/or grievances concerning grades.

A worrying observation, on the 2020 numbers, is that complaints in the “**behavioural or misconduct**” category were the fourth most commonly raised by students in the DoS grievance cohort. This category includes problematic conduct by staff and students and includes behavioural misconduct such as bullying, harassment and social media abuse). Whilst this category of grievance dropped slightly in numerical terms between the all-time high number in 2019 (260 presentations) and 2020 (243 presentations) nevertheless, this represents the highest ever proportion of total grievances handled by the Office (10.5% as opposed to 9% in 2019). This may reflect the underlying levels of stress felt by members of the ANU community in 2020, as complaints included those about “rudeness”, “disrespect” or “abruptness” on the part of both staff and students.

Upward Trend

The trend showing an increase in the frequency of issues relating to **scholarships** since 2017 continued in 2020. It also increased as a percentage of total issues dealt with by the Office from 3% in 2019 to 7% in 2020. Concerns raised by individuals about supervision were almost exclusively in the HDR rather than honours context in 2020. The trend had been a modest increase in the number of supervision concerns raised each year between 2017 and 2019. This trend was reversed in 2020 with the number of supervision issues raised dropping from 64 in 2019 to 47 in 2020. However, the frequency with which this issue was raised remained proportionally comparable to the total number of grievances received by the Office in the relevant year: 2.3% of total grievances in 2019 and 2.1% in 2020.

No Clear Trends

As a result of the disruption of the pandemic, most of the discussion of grievance trends in this section of the Annual Report will take place under this heading and by reference to previously identifiable trends that may have continued, halted or reversed.

One category of grievance where a previously identified upward trend appeared to continue in 2020 (either on raw numbers or as a proportion of grievances) was “**staff seeking advice**”. This category reached a peak in 2019, with 163 individual members of staff approaching the Office to register a total of 208 contacts. In 2020, 175 separate contacts with the Office, involving 130 different staff members, were recorded. In addition, a further 50 staff members sought other forms of assistance from the Office. As a result, we recorded a high level of demand on the Office from staff with 180 different staff members seeking advice or assistance from the DoS in 2020. Proportionally, the “staff seeking advice” category represented 8% of all recorded grievances in 2020 in comparison to 7.5% of total issues raised with the Office in 2019.

As can be seen in the discussion below, there were several categories of grievance where a previously identified upward trend was reversed in 2020 (either on raw numbers or as a proportion of grievances).

- **Supervision:** The major change to the 2019 numbers in this category, was in relation to honours supervision, about which we received only one grievance in 2020. This meant that the modest increase in the number of supervision concerns raised between 2017 and 2019 was reversed in 2020 with the number of supervision issues raised dropping from 64 in 2019 to 47 in 2020. We note elsewhere in this report, however, that supervision remained an area of significant concern for the HDR student cohort. We also note that the frequency with which this issue was raised was proportionally comparable to the total number of grievances in 2019 (2.3% in 2019 and 2.1% in 2020).
- **Academic Advice and Academic Progress:** After dropping in 2017 and 2018, the incidence of students presenting with grievances in this category increased to its highest-ever level in 2019. However, the number of concerns raised in 2020 fell back to 2016 numerical levels. They constituted 8% of the total grievances dealt with by the Office in 2020 (181 issues/grievances), compared to 11% in 2019 (301). As is discussed elsewhere, we attribute this reduction to the range of accommodations made by the University in response to the pandemic.

- **Program and Course Concerns (including assessment and feedback):** This was another category of complaint that reached its highest ever level in 2019. There was a clear reversal of this trend in 2020, though, with the number of concerns raised in relation to programs and courses falling to the lowest number recorded in the last five years. Proportionately, this category of grievance fell from 5% of total grievances raised in 2019 to 4% in 2020. As with the previous dot point, we see this significantly reduced number as reflecting the suite of accommodations made for coursework students to ameliorate the effects of COVID-19.

In relation to categories of grievance where there has been no clear trend previously discernible or where a trend cannot be identified for 2020, we make the following comments.

- The incidence of grievances involving **administrative matters** (such as **admission, enrolment, fees, and graduation** requirements) dropped to below 2018 levels in 2020 (212 grievances in 2018 and 203 in 2020). However, there has been no clear trend in relation to this category of grievance in recent years with 2019 and 2017 numbers being 235 and 250 respectively. The 203 administrative grievances recorded in 2020 represented an increase in the proportion of grievances in this category from 2019 (9% of total DoS matters in 2020 and 8% in 2019).
- Grievances in the category of **personal, financial and accommodation issues** decreased in 2019 from high levels in 2017 and 2018. The number of grievances in this category fell further in 2020 from 204 to 171. However, this number represented a slight increase in the proportion of total grievances recorded in this category between 2019 and 2020 from 7% to 7.5%

Of particular concern to this Office were several grievance categories in which previously discernible downward trends were either halted or reversed.

- **Academic Misconduct:** The incidence of grievances relating to academic misconduct matters had been on a slight downward trajectory since 2017. However, in 2020, there was an increase in the number of academic misconduct issues with which students presented to the Office. Whilst the number remained relatively small (at 39), it nevertheless represented a significant jump from the 28 incidents recorded in 2019. The higher number may point to both the increasing ease of access to electronic tools for plagiarism and cheating and the temptation posed by that access where significant pressures (including financial and mental health) are being experienced by students.
- **Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment:** In 2019, the contacts listed under grievance category 12 (Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault) showed that there were 23 students who disclosed incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault to the DoS Office. This was a further decrease on the numbers recorded in 2017 (32) and 2018 (27). In 2020, the number was almost the same as in 2019 (22) but due to the overall reduction in the DoS cohort in 2020, represented a higher proportion of total grievances than the previous year (2.4% in 2019 and 2.9% in 2020). This category includes historic disclosures (i.e. incidents that took place before a person was enrolled at the ANU). Historic disclosures accounted for four of the incidents disclosed to the DoS in 2020, in 2019 that number was two and in

2018, there were three historic disclosures. In 2020, all 22 students presenting with grievances in this category were female and most were in the undergraduate student cohort.

It is particularly concerning that these numbers were seen during a period where significantly fewer students were living on campus, due to state lockdowns and closed borders. Despite increased and innovative efforts in relation to education, prevention and response, (particularly by the Respectful Relationships Unit (RRU) and the Residential Experience Directorate) in 2020, this Office assisted 22 individuals in relation to SASH grievances, working alongside multiple other support areas of the University, including the RRU, ANU Counselling and the Student Wellbeing Team. The distress caused by such incidents impacts not only the survivor but friendship groups and residential and campus communities. In 2020, the Office also provided support and advice to a range of affected parties, including alleged perpetrators and senior residents in residential halls, who are often the first responders to incidents of SASH.

Final Comments on Grievances and Trends

We have commented, in previous reports as well as in the text above, that since 2016, there have been notable yearly increases in the number of students presenting with complex circumstances that require multiple visits to address and unravel. The trend in terms of increasing complexity of student circumstances continued in 2020. Students in this complex category were often accessing other University support services alongside the DoS Office, 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 (in addition to those listed above) across the University. Staff affected included residential college staff and senior residents, College student administrators and academic advisors, security staff, academic staff, ANUSA and PARSA staff and student representatives.

We have also commented in past reports on how mental illness, in particular, is a major complicating factor in a range of the grievances and situations brought to our Office. In 2019, we documented a 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 (primarily 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). Despite overall lower student numbers in 2020, the pervasiveness of mental health issues reported by the DoS grievance remained striking, with the proportion of the total DoS grievance cohort reporting mental health issues standing at the second highest proportion of any year, at 19%. In 2019, that proportion was 23%.

The DoS Office continues to work closely with ANU Counselling Centre and Wellbeing Team staff to support these students. As noted in previous Annual Reports, mental health conditions sometimes result in students not having supporting documentation to cover periods when they were unwell but had not yet recognised or sought treatment for their condition. One of the important accommodations provided by the University due to the pandemic was to require less stringent forms of evidence to support student applications for extensions and deferred assessments. This was a significant relief to many students within the DoS grievance cohort.

Staff Seeking Advice

The incidence of contacts in the category “staff seeking advice” reached a peak in 2019, with 163 individual members of staff approaching the Office to register a total of 208 contacts. Comparable numbers in the past were 125 contacts in 2018, 116 contacts in 2017 and 70 contacts in 2016. In 2020, 175 separate contacts with the Office, involving 130 different staff members, were recorded in the “staff seeking advice” category with a further 50 staff members seeking other forms of assistance from the Office. This represents a total number of 180 staff members seeking advice or assistance from the DoS in 2020. 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 (180) 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 has been stated in previous Annual Reports, the DoS continues to welcome the increased reliance on the Office by ANU academic and professional staff. This is particularly the case when that reliance demonstrates a proactive approach by staff in seeking advice about student issues in the abstract or at the early stages of problems arising.

As in 2020, a significant number of staff enquiries involved concerns around student mental health issues. Of the 175 total contacts, 45 (or 26%) involved staff seeking advice where they held concerns about a particular student’s mental health. This continues to demonstrate that staff have a strong awareness of the impact on student mental health of a range of academic, interpersonal and behavioural issues and experiences.

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 in the section [Grievance Categories](#) above.

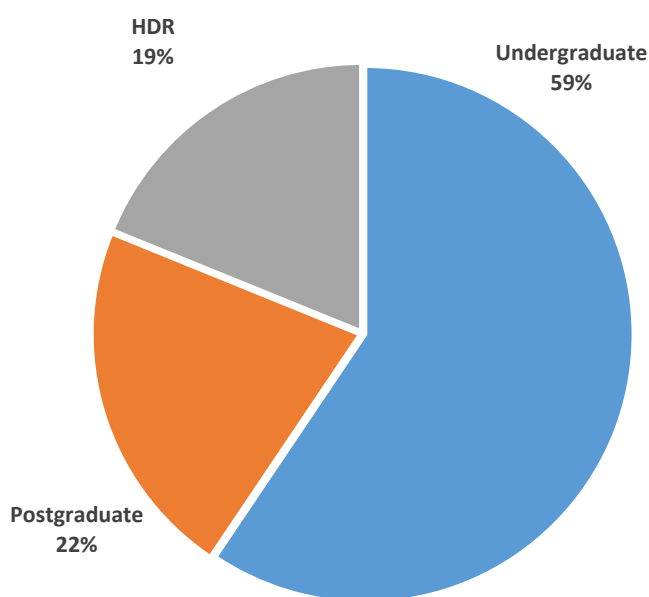
Staff Contacts by Student Career

Chart 10 below shows a percentage summary of the incidents of staff members contacting the DoS Office under the category ‘staff seeking advice’ in 2020 by reference to the career of the student involved - Undergraduate, Postgraduate, HDR, Non Award and Unknown. This can be compared to the second pie chart containing the same data from 2019, the third pie chart showing the DoS grievance cohort by student career for 2020 and the fourth pie chart showing ANU students in each student cohort in 2020. Data in the table below the charts set out the number of individual staff members who contacted the Office “seeking advice” by reference to each cohort of students each of the years 2020 and 2019, the percentage of students in each cohort across the whole of the University population for the years 2020 and 2019 and the

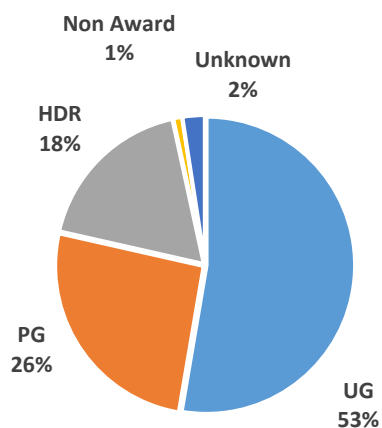
number of staff who contacted the Office for more general advice (where no student career cohort was raised as relevant) for each of the two years.

Chart 10

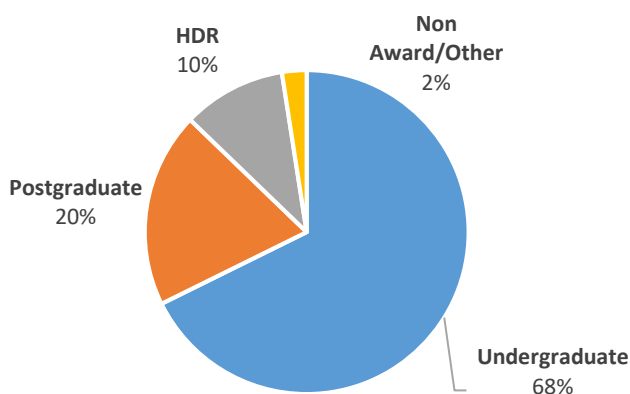
Staff Advice Contacts by Student Career 2020



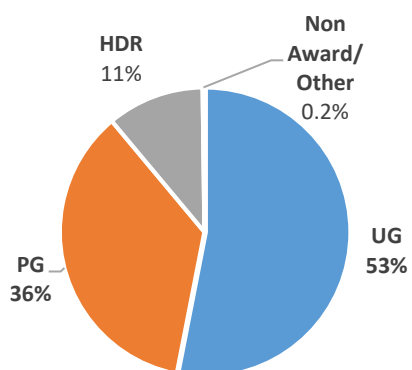
2019



DoS Grievance Cohort by Student Career 2020



ANU Cohort by Student Career 2020



Student Career	No. incidents of 'staff seeking advice'		No. students involved		% of studs in DoS cohort 2020	% of studs in ANU cohort 2020	No. staff involved	
	2020	2019	2020	2019			2020	2019
Undergraduate	104	109	69	85	68	53	71	75
Postgraduate	38	55	31	32	20	36	33	40
HDR	33	37	19	27	10	11	26	32
Non Award	0	2	0	2	2	0.2	0	2
Unknown	0	5	0	5	N/A	N/A	0	4
Staff assistance provided in other context*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	50	34
Total	175	208	119	151			180**	187**

* 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 includes staff more than once where they seek advice in relation to specific students across multiple careers.

In 2020, there were 175 incidents of 'staff seeking advice' on matters involving a particular student situation or issue (including where the student was kept anonymous by the staff member involved). This compares to 208 incidents in 2019. In addition, the Office provided assistance to 50 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 equivalent number in 2019 was 34).

The pie charts in Chart 10 indicate that in relation to advice sought by staff for each student cohort:

- there was an over-representation of undergraduate students (59% as against 53% of the total ANU cohort). However, the over-representation was less pronounced than the over-representation of this student career group in the total DoS grievance cohort;

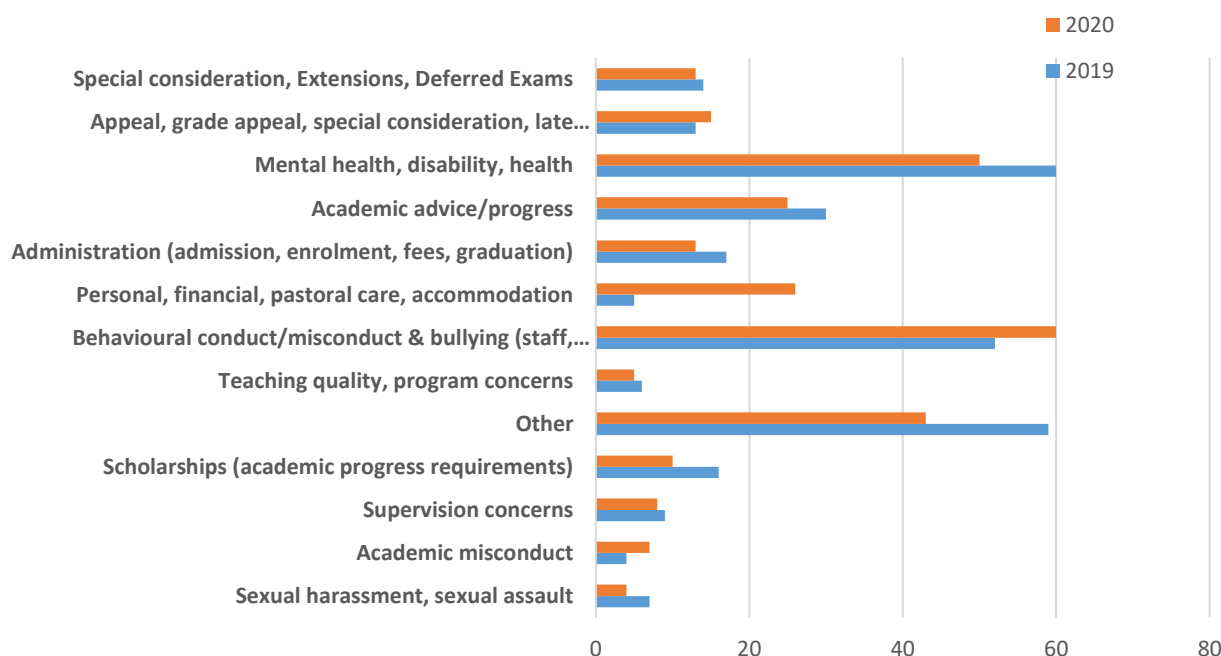
- an under-representation in relation to postgraduate students (22%, as against 36% ANU wide), but with a DoS grievance cohort for this student career of 20%;
- advice in relation to HDR students was up on the previous year and significantly over-represented (19% of advice sought contacts as opposed to HDR students representing 11% of the total ANU wide cohort and 10% of the DoS grievance cohort). 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 11 shows the number of times particular concerns or issues were raised by staff in their contacts with this office in each of 2019 and 2020. These are shown by reference to the range of grievance categories and sub-categories against which all interactions with the Office are recorded.

Chart 11

Associated Grievance Categories re 'Staff Seeking Advice'



Advice sought by staff in 2020 was predominantly in relation to behavioural issues relating to students. This mirrors the concerns expressed, in particular by HDR candidates, in relation to

what they perceived as problematic behaviour by their supervisors and points to the difficulties sometimes experienced in supervisory relationships that have been commented upon elsewhere in this report. Also as previously commented on, these matters (and those in the novel “other” category) were often raised in conjunction with concerns over students’ health, disability or mental health. Fifty of the staff enquiries to the Office involved concerns in relation to student health and continues to demonstrate staff awareness of and sensitivity to the health impacts on students of academic progress and other stressful matters.

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