

REPORT OF STUDENT OMBUD ACTIVITIES: 2016 AND 2017

Southern Cross University's [Complaints Framework](#) ensures that students have the right to raise concerns or make a formal complaint if they are dissatisfied with the processes or services of the University.

Students are encouraged, if appropriate, to try to resolve their complaint informally. Many complaints can be sorted out directly with the work unit and / or a staff member familiar with the issue. However, if this is not successful, students can then lodge a formal written complaint with the Complaints Assistance Officer (complaints@scu.edu.au). If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of their formal complaint, they can then lodge a request for internal review by the Student Ombud (via ombud@scu.edu.au). Matters can also be resolved during the complaints process itself.

Students may also want to contact the Student Advocacy Service, which is available for confidential advice and assistance.

Student Ombuds are appointed by, and are responsible to, the Vice Chancellor. Southern Cross University's current Student Ombud is Professor Bill Boyd; other people may be appointed to act as Student Ombud for specific matters. In all cases, the Student Ombud is an impartial investigator and avoids any real or perceived conflicts of interest.

Student Ombuds consider whether students have received fair and equitable treatment and whether proper processes have been followed. While they are not permitted to encroach on academic judgements, they may investigate the processes and policies surrounding those judgements.

As part of the investigation, Student Ombuds are entitled to have access to all relevant documents and can interview staff or students. The Student Ombud's report is provided to the Vice Chancellor for determination and may include recommendations for improvement to SCU's processes and practices.

2016 ACTIVITIES

During 2016, a total of twenty matters were registered or redirected through ombud@scu.edu.au. Of these matters, the Vice Chancellor formally referred two complaints to a Student Ombud for investigation and report back to him; another two related complaints were considered directly by the Vice Chancellor.

One complaint related to the processes and supervision for a Higher Degree Research candidature, with further issues raised about the complaint investigation process. Following a Student Ombud investigation, the Vice Chancellor's determination supported the University's earlier decisions but he did agree that some of the processes the subject of the initial complaint needed reviewing.

The second complaint related to a student undertaking Masters' level studies, who raised concerns about their learning experience. Following a Student Ombud investigation, the Vice Chancellor confirmed that the original complaints was dealt with appropriately and the student's claims were not accepted.

The two matters considered directly by the Vice Chancellor related to a similar set of concerns about learning and assessment practices at a School. The Vice Chancellor accepted that there was validity in the students' complaints: an apology was offered, and administrative action taken to remove the relevant grade from the students' academic record and the fee reversed.

2017 ACTIVITIES

During 2017, a total of twenty matters were registered through ombud@scu.edu.au, with no formal Student Ombud investigations being undertaken. In relation to one complaint, the Vice Chancellor determined not to appoint a Student Ombud on the grounds that the relevant decision complained of was clearly made in line with University policy.

Another matter involved the Student Ombud providing advice in relation to a scholarship payment, as part of a broader set of appeals within the University (although no formal Student Ombud investigation was undertaken). As at 31 December 2017, this matter is ongoing.

One complaint was dealt with outside the formal Student Ombud process. In this case, the student copied in details of the complaint to the relevant Head of School who took direct action with support of the Student Ombud, acknowledging some poor treatment and deficiencies in School processes and offering an apology to the affected student.

One new Student Ombud matter was lodged late December for consideration in early January 2018.